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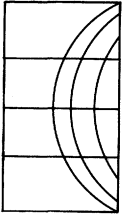
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Boaventura de Sousa Santos

The Fall of the *Angelus Novus*: Beyond the Modern Game of Roots and Options

Introduction

In 1841, Charles Fourier launched an attack against social scientists – whom he called 'the philosophers of the uncertain sciences' – for systematically neglecting the fundamental problems of the sciences with which they dealt. When dealing with industrial economy, says Fourier,

> . . . they forget to study the associations of people that are the basis of the economy itself . . . dealing with administration, they fail to consider the means of accomplishing the administrative unity of the globe, without which empires will never have permanent order or guaranty of future . . . dealing with morals, they forget to recognize and demand the rights of women, whose oppression undermines the basis of justice . . . dealing with human rights, they forget to recognize the right to work, which is actually not possible in the present society but without which all the other rights are useless. (Fourier, 1967: 86, 129)

Fourier's conclusion is that social scientists have the 'odd property', the 'étourderie méthodique', of neglecting precisely the fundamental problems, the primordial questions. More than 150 years later, the reasons and examples invoked by Fourier are still so convincing that it seems appropriate to ask if the situation has since changed significantly at all. Are the social sciences today better equipped to deal with the fundamental problems or, on the contrary, are they still forgetting them systematically? And if such forgetting still goes on, what should be done in the next few decades to put an end to it?

I start by identifying the problem which is, in my view, the most fundamental of all the problems confronting us at the end of our century. It is the problem of the collapse of social emancipation into social regulation. The

paradigm of modernity postulates a dialectical tension between social regulation and social emancipation according to which each crisis of social regulation would presumably lead to new forms of social emancipation which would in turn give rise to more progressive forms of social regulation, and so on.[1] Emancipation is thus conceived of as the other of regulation, the emancipatory will and energy being the driving force of historical development. The cognitive-instrumental rationality of science and technology was gradually entrusted with providing the tools for the social engineering called for by this theory of history. Sociology and the social sciences developed as part and parcel of this historical project. At the end of our century it is not difficult to conclude that, as social experience, the relationship between regulation and emancipation has never in fact been a dialectical tension. More often than not, emancipatory projects and energies have led to forms of social regulation that, no matter how new, could hardly be conceived of as more progressive than the previously existing ones. Nowadays, if it is at all legitimate to speak of the exhaustion of the paradigm of modernity, it is in the sense that, in spite of the generalized crisis of current forms of social regulation, no new emancipatory projects are emerging, let alone the energy to fight for them. Rather than being the other of social regulation, social emancipation has become its double. As the collapse of emancipation into regulation becomes the mega common sense at the end of the 20th century, social regulation does not have to be effective in order to flourish; it flourishes simply because individuals and groups find it increasingly difficult to know and desire how to know and to desire beyond regulation.

    In my view, our fundamental problem is how to reinvent emancipation as the other of regulation in such a way that the degenerative conflation of both is unlikely to occur. In light of the social experience of the last 200 years this means that we are facing a modern problem which cannot be solved in modern terms. In this sense, we may see ourselves entering a period of paradigmatic transition. Because science and hence the social sciences as we know them are part and parcel of the project of modernity, they are much more part of the problem that we are facing than part of the solution we are looking for. At the most, they may help us to elucidate and bring analytical precision to the different dimensions of our problem. However, short of an epistemological transformation, they will be of little help to solve it. The paradigmatic transition must therefore be understood both in epistemological and in societal terms.[2] The call is not just for a new epistemology and a new politics but for a new relationship between epistemology and politics. Moreover, as Cassirer has clearly shown, both for the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, a new epistemology always goes together with or entails a new subjectivity, and thus a new psychology (Cassirer, 1960, 1963). The call is therefore also for a new relationship between epistemology and subjectivity.

The challenge confronting us is thus a double one: on the one hand, the need to reinvent an emancipatory map which, unlike Escher's drawings, will not turn gradually and insidiously into one more of the same map of regulation; on the other hand, the need to reinvent an individual and collective subjectivity capable of the use of and the will to use such a map.

This challenge questions sociology and the social sciences in general in fundamental ways. In order to help us face this challenge, the social sciences must undergo radical change. In this article I address one dimension of such change: the theory of history that underlies social scientific knowledge and the hegemonic forms of sociability the latter has contributed to consolidate. The idea of progress lies at the core of the theory of history of modernity. The meaning of social experience, which before depended on its linkage to the past, had to be sought for in a new linkage between present experience and expectations about the future. Such linkage was provided by the idea of progress. As Koselleck argues, 'progress is the first genuinely historical concept which reduces the temporal difference between experience and expectation to a single concept' (Koselleck, 1985: 282). The idea of progress applies both to scientific and societal development, and grounds both a universalistic conception of truth and a universalistic conception of ethics. Modern emancipation is unthinkable without the idea of progress and the idea of universalism. The discredit of both these ideas at the end of the 20th century is at the core of our current difficulty in conceptualizing emancipation, let alone in investing emancipatory projects with social and political credibility. Indeed, in the last two decades, contingency and relativism have often been advanced as evidence of the impossibility of emancipation. Contingency and relativism stem from the most powerful critique of the modern theory of history, Nietzsche's notion of the eternal recurrence of the same. However, as I try to show in the following, after two centuries of the hegemony of the idea of progress, historical repetition or circularity cannot but involve a certain kind of regression, liable therefore to melancholy and denial and hence to social and political withdrawal; in other words, to a will to power on the verge of 'degenerating' into a will to powerlessness.

In this article I present the prolegomenon of a social scientific contribution to the construction of an emancipatory project free both from the idea of progress and the idea of universalism.

The Past in a Cage

We live in a time without fulgurations, a time of repetition. The grain of truth of the theory of the end of history is that it is the possible maximum consciousness of an international bourgeoisie that has finally seen time transformed into the automatic and infinite repetition of its own domination.

Long term thus collapses into short term, and the latter, which has always been the time-frame of capitalism, finally allows the bourgeoisie to produce a theory of history that is truly bourgeois – namely, the theory of the end of history. That this theory is not at all credible in no way interferes with its success as the spontaneous ideology of the victors. The other side of the end of history is the slogan of the celebration of the present, so well favoured by the surrender versions of postmodern thought.

The notion of repetition is what allows the present to spread back into the past and forward into the future, thereby cannibalizing them both. Are we facing a new situation? Up until now, the bourgeoisie had not been capable of elaborating a theory exclusively according to its own interests. The bourgeoisie had always seen itself as struggling against strong adversaries, first the dominant classes of the *ancien régime*, later the working classes. The outcome of this struggle was in the future and, for that reason, the future could not be seen as a mere repetition of the past. This future-oriented movement was given several names, such as revolution, progress, evolution. Since the outcome of the struggle was not predetermined, the revolution could be both bourgeois and working class, progress could be seen both as the apotheosis of capitalism and its supersession, evolutionism could be claimed both by Herbert Spencer and Karl Marx. Common to the various theories of history was the devaluation of the past and the hypertrophy of the future. The past was seen as past, hence, as incapable of irrupting into the present. By the same token, the power of revelation and fulguration was wholly transposed into the future.

Such was the background against which social transformation, the rationalization of individual and collective life and social emancipation were then thought. To the extent that the victory of the bourgeoisie was being constructed, the space of the present as repetition kept expanding, but such expansion never reached the idea of the future as progress. The crisis of the idea of revolution in the 1920s resulted in the strengthening of reform as a model of social transformation and emancipation, a model which was based on the coexistence of repetition and amelioration, and whose most accomplished political form was to be the welfare state.

The difficulty we acknowledge today in thinking social transformation and emancipation resides in the fact that the theory of history that has brought us this far has gone bankrupt as a consequence of the erosion of all the assumptions that once gave it credibility. The bourgeoisie feels that its historical victory has been accomplished, and the accomplished victor is only interested in the repetition of the present. Indeed, the future as progress may well turn out to be a dangerous threat. Paradoxically, in these circumstances, the most conservative consciousness is the one most interested in retrieving the idea of progress, but only because it refuses to accept the fact that the victory is final. It therefore construes external enemies that are as powerful

as they are incomprehensible and seem like a kind of external *ancien régime*. Such is the case of Samuel Huntington (1993) and the threat he sees in non-western civilizations, Islam in particular.

On the other hand, those utterly defeated in this historical process – the workers and the Third World – put even fewer stakes in the idea of the future as progress, for that is precisely where their defeat was generated. Even the softer version of the future, the repetition/amelioration model typical of reformism (which, in any case, was only available to a small fraction of the defeated in the so-called developed world) seems today untenable, albeit still desirable, given the apparently irreversible erosion of the welfare state. If the repetition of the present is intolerable, the idea of its closure is even more intolerable. Repetition and controlled regression suddenly seem the lesser evil. But if, on the one hand, the future appears meaningless, on the other, the past remains as unavailable as ever. The capacity for fulguration, for irruption, for explosion, for revelation, or, as Walter Benjamin would say, the messianic capacity, was entirely conferred on the future by western modernity (Benjamin, 1968: 255). Disenabling the future in no way enables the past. We no longer know how to envision the past in an enabling way. I believe we cannot go back to thinking social transformation and emancipation without reinventing the past. Such a reinvention I attempt try in the following sections.

The Parable of the *Angelus Novus*

I begin with Walter Benjamin's allegory of history. It reads like this:

> A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 1968: 257)

Impotent, the angel of history contemplates the pile of wreckage and suffering at his feet. He would like to stay and grow roots on the catastrophe so as to awaken the dead and summon the defeated; but his will has been expropriated by the power that forces him to opt for the future against which his back is turned. Surplus of lucidity matched by deficit of efficacy. What the angel knows best and could transform has become strange, and he yields instead to what he does not know. Roots do not hold, options are blind. Thus, the past is a report, never a resource – never a power capable of irrupting at

a moment of danger in favour of the defeated. This much Benjamin says in another of his theses on the philosophy of history: 'To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" ' ('the way it really was' is Ranke's motto for a scientific history). 'It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger' (Benjamin, 1968: 255). The past's capacity for redemption lies in this possibility of emerging unexpectedly at a moment of danger as a source of non-conformity.

According to Benjamin, the non-conformity of the living would not exist without the non-conformity of the dead, for 'even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins'. And Benjamin adds, 'this enemy has not ceased to be victorious' (Benjamin, 1968: 255). Tragic it is, then, that the angel of history has deprived the past of its capacity for explosion and redemption. By rendering impossible the non-conformity of the dead, he also renders impossible the non-conformity of the living.[3]

What are the consequences of this tragedy? Like Benjamin before, we, too, face a moment of danger. We must, therefore, change the position of the angel of history. And we must reinvent the past so as to return to it the capacity for explosion and redemption. To the extent that we have no other viewpoint from which to look upon the past than the stance given us by the angel, this seems like an impossible task. However, I dare to think that the end of this century grants us an opportunity to solve this dilemma, and that it is precisely the crisis currently affecting the idea of progress. The storm blowing from Paradise is still being felt, but much less intensely. The angel is still poised the same way but the power sustaining him is weakening. It may even be that his stance is merely the result of inertia and that Klee's angel has stopped being a tragic angel to become a puppet in repose. This surmise encourages me to proceed with this article. I begin by proposing a narrative of western modernity, and then go on to present the preface to a new narrative.

Roots and Options

The social construction of identity and change in western modernity is based on an equation of roots and options. Such an equation confers a dual character on modern thought: on the one hand, it is a thought about roots, on the other, a thought about options. The thought about roots concerns all that is profound, permanent, singular and unique, all that provides reassurance and consistency; the thought about options concerns all that is variable, ephemeral, replaceable and indeterminate from the viewpoint of roots. The major difference between roots and options is scale. Roots are large-scale entities. As in cartography, they cover vast symbolic territories and long historical durations but fail to map the characteristics of the field in detail and

without ambiguity. Theirs is, therefore, a map which guides as much as it misguides. On the contrary, options are small-scale entities. They cover confined territories and short durations, but do so in enough detail to allow for the assessment of the risk involved in the choice of alternative options. Because of this difference of scale, roots are unique while options are multiple, and yet the equation remains possible without being trivialized. The root/option duality is a founding and constituting duality, that is to say, it is not subjected to the play it itself institutes between roots and options. In other words, one does not have the option not to think in terms of roots and options. The efficacy of the equation lies in a double cunning. There is first the cunning of an equilibrium between the past and the future. The thought about roots presents itself as a thought about the past as opposed to the thought about the future, which the thought about options alone is supposed to be. I speak of cunning because, in fact, both the thought about roots and the thought about options are thoughts about the future. In this equation, the past remains largely underrepresented. Underrepresentation does not mean oblivion. On the contrary, it may manifest itself as 'excessive memory', to use Charles Maier's (1993: 137) expression.[4] There is underrepresentation whenever memory becomes an exercise in melancholy, which, rather than recovering the past, neutralizes its redemptive potential by substituting evocation for the struggle against failing expectations.

The second kind of cunning concerns an equilibrium between roots and options. The equation presents itself as a symmetry: equilibrium of roots and options, and equilibrium in the distribution of options. But it is not so. On the one hand, options are overwhelmingly predominant. Of course, certain historical moments or certain social groups consider roots predominant while others so consider options. But, as a matter of fact, it is always a question of options. While certain kinds of options imply the discursive primacy of roots, others imply their marginalization. The equilibrium is impossible. Depending on the historical moment or social group, roots precede options or, on the contrary, options precede roots. The play is always from roots to options and from options to roots; the only variable is the power of each term as a narrative of identity and change. On the other hand, there is no equilibrium or equity in the social distribution of options. Quite the contrary! Roots are but constellations of determinations which, as they define the field of options, also define the social groups that have access to them and those that do not.

A few examples help me to concretize this historical process. To begin with, it is in the light of this equation of roots and options that modern western society views medieval society and distinguishes itself from it. Medieval society is seen as a society in which the primacy of roots is total, whether it be religion, theology or the tradition. Medieval society is not necessarily a static society but it evolves according to a logic of roots. On the

contrary, modern society sees itself as a dynamic society which evolves according to a logic of options. The first major sign of this change in the equation is perhaps the Lutheran Reformation. With the Reformation, it became possible, starting from the same root – the Bible of western Christianity – to create an option vis-a-vis the Church of Rome. By becoming optional, religion as root loses in intensity, if not in status as well.

Seventeenth-century rationalist theories of natural law restore the root/option equation in an entirely modern way. The root is now the law of nature by exercise of reason and observation. The intensity of this root is that it supersedes God. In *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, Grotius, the best spokesperson for the new equation, states:

> What we have been saying would have a degree of validity even if we should concede that which cannot be conceded without the utmost wickedness, that there is no God, or that the affairs of men are of no concern to Him. (Grotius, 1964: 11–13)[5]

Upon this formidable root, the most disparate options are possible. For this reason, and not for those he invokes, Tuck is right when he says that Grotius's treatise 'is Janus-faced and its two mouths speak the language of both absolutism and liberty' (Tuck, 1979: 79). This is exactly what Grotius had in mind. Firmly supported by the root of the law of nature, law may well opt either for promoting hierarchy (what Grotius calls *jus rectorium*) or equality (what he calls *jus equatorium*).

In the selfsame historical process through which religion goes from roots to options, science goes the opposite way, from options to roots. Giambattista Vico's (1961) 'new science' is a decisive landmark in the transition that started with Descartes and would be completed in the 19th century. Unlike religion, science is a root that originates in the future, it is an option which, by radicalizing itself, turns into a root, thereby creating a wide field of possibilities.

This shifting of stances between roots and options reaches its peak with the Enlightenment. In a large cultural field, which includes science and politics, religion and art, roots clearly presume to be the radicalized other of options, both those they render possible and those they render impossible. This is why reason, thus turned into the ultimate root of individual and collective life, has no other foundation but the creation of options, and this is what distinguishes it, as a root, from the roots of the *ancien régime* (religion and tradition). It is an option which, by radicalizing itself, makes possible a wide range of options.

In any case, options are not infinite. This is particularly obvious concerning the other great root of Enlightenment: the social contract and the general will sustaining it. The social contract is the founding metaphor of a radical option – the option to leave the state of nature and to inaugurate the civil society – which turns into a root that makes everything possible, except to go back to the state of nature. The contractuality of roots is irreversible,

such being the limit of the reversibility of options. That is why, in Rousseau, the general will cannot be challenged by the free men it creates. Rousseau says in the *Social Contract:* 'whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he [*sic*] will be forced to be free' (Rousseau, 1973: 174).

The contractualization of roots is a long and eventful historical process. Romanticism, for example, is basically a reaction against the contractualization of roots as well as the assertion of their uniqueness and unavailability. But romantic roots are as future oriented as the roots underlying the social contract. What is at stake in both cases is opening up a field of possibilities so as to allow for the distinction between possible and impossible, legitimate and illegitimate options.

It can, therefore, be said that from the Enlightenment onwards, the root/option equation becomes the hegemonic way of thinking about social change, as well as the place of individuals and social groups in such change. One of the most eloquent manifestations of this paradigm is the travel motif as a core metaphor for the modern way of being in the world. From the real voyages of European expansion to the real or imaginary voyages of Descartes, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Voltaire or Rousseau, travel always appears as doubly symbolic: on the one hand, it is the symbol of progress and material or cultural amelioration; on the other, it is the symbol of danger, insecurity and loss. Such duplicity implies that travel contains its own opposite, that is to say, it implies the idea of a fixed point, the home (*oikos* or *domus*); travel has both a point of departure and a point of arrival. As van der Abeele says, the *oikos* functions 'as a transcendental point of reference that organizes and domesticates a given area by defining all other points in relation to itself' (van der Abeele, 1992: xviii). Similarly, Bachelard speaks of the 'original fullness of the house's being', the fact that 'a great many of our memories are housed', which leads him to suggest that psychoanalysis should be complemented by topoanalysis (Bachelard, 1969: 8).

The *oikos*, in a word, is that part of travel which does not travel so that travel may occur and make sense. The *oikos* is the root that both sustains and limits the life or knowledge options made possible by travel. Travel, in turn, strengthens the original root because the exoticism of the places it visits deepens the familiarity of the home-point of departure. The cultural relativism aimed at by the comparative stance of Enlightenment's imaginary travellers has its boundary in the assertion of the identity and, in general, of the superiority of European culture. Even if Montaigne never really travelled to America, or Montesquieu to Persia, or Rousseau to Oceania, the truth is that they all travelled to Italy in search of the roots of European culture, and that such roots were all the more revered for their sharp contrast with Italy's degradation at the time of the journey.

The travel motif excels in revealing the discriminations and inequalities

which the modern root/option equation both hides and attempts to justify at the same time. On the one hand, voyaging to exotic places was not for many a voluntary gesture, nor did it aim at deepening any cultural identity whatsoever. On the contrary, it was a forced journey aimed at destroying identity. Just think of the slave trade. On the other hand, the travel motif is phallocentric. Travelling implies, as I have suggested, the fixity of the point of departure and arrival, the home (*oikos* or *domus*). Now, the home is the woman's place. That the woman does not travel makes travel possible. As a matter of fact, this sexual division of labour as regards the travel motif is one of the most resilient *topoi* of western culture, if not of other cultures as well. In western culture, its archetype is the *Odyssey*. Domestic Penelope takes care of the home while Ulysses goes about his interminable voyaging. Penelope's long weaving wait is the right metaphor for the soundness of the point of departure and arrival which guarantees the possibility of Ulysses's aleatory journeys and adventures.

The travel motif is important in this context in that it helps to identify the sexist, racist and classist definitions of the modern equation of roots and options. The range of possibilities created by the equation is not equally available to all. Some, perhaps the majority, are excluded. For these persons, roots, far from being the possibility of new options, are the very instrument to deny them. Those same roots that grant options to men, whites and capitalists, deny them to women, blacks and workers. From the 19th century onwards, the mirror play of roots and options has been consolidated and becomes the *idéologie savante* of the social sciences. The two outstanding examples are unquestionably Marx and Freud.

In Marx, the base is the root and the superstructure the options. This is no vulgar metaphor, as some non-vulgar Marxists want us to believe. It is rather a logical principle of social intelligibility which runs through Marx's work, and indeed even through the work of many social scientists that were in disagreement with Marx. It will suffice to mention the case of Durkheim, who believed that collective consciousness is the ever threatened root in a society based on the division of social labour and on the options that such division goes on duplicating endlessly. This is also Freud's and Jung's frame of thought. The centrality of the unconscious in depth psychology resides precisely in the fact that the unconscious is the deep root that grounds both the options of the ego and their neurotic limitation. Likewise, broadly concerning cultural Freud, and Jung as analysed by Peter Homans, 'interpretation discerns the unconscious infrastructure of culture thereby freeing the interpreter from its oppressive and coercive powers' (Homans, 1995: xx).

What the communist and the introspective revolutions have in common is that they are both creative responses to the profound social and individual disorganization of a society that experiences the loss of ideals, symbols and ways of life which constitute the common heritage. Furthermore, the

future-oriented stance as regards the equation of roots and options is as strong in Marx as in Freud. If for Marx the base is the key to social transformation, for Freud or Jung it does not make any sense to study the unconscious except in the context of therapy. Likewise, both historical materialism and depth psychology wish to go back to the roots of modern society – of capitalism and western culture, respectively – in search of new and ampler options. In either case, the success of the underlying theory is measured by its becoming the foundation and instrument of change.

In a world that had long lost its 'deep past' – the root of religion – science becomes in either case the only root capable of sustaining a new beginning in western modern society. On that basis, good options are the options legitimated by science. This is what grounds, in Marx, the distinction between reality and ideology; and in Freud, the distinction between reality and fantasy. In this distinction also resides the possibility of modern critical theory. As Nietzsche says, if realities disappear, appearances vanish too. And the opposite is also true.

In our century, sociology and social sciences in general have developed as disciplines on the basis of the new roots/options equation, converted into the master model of social intelligibility: structure and agency in sociology and anthropology; the *longue dureé* and *l'événement* in history; *langue* and *parole* or deep structure and surface structure in linguistics are different versions of the same equation. Even when some theoretical currents in the different disciplines positioned themselves against this schema (phenomenological and poststructuralist currents) or looked for mediations between or sublations of the terms of the equation (Giddens's theory of structuration, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*), their analytical claims remained prey to the equation by the specific ways they distanced themselves from it.

Concerning the modern political field, the liberal political equivalent of this new equation of roots and options is the nation-state and positive law, now turned into the roots that create the wide range of options in the market and in civil society. In order to function as a root, law must be autonomous, which means it must be scientific. There was some resistance to this transformation. In Germany, for example, the historical school claimed for law the old root/option equation: law as an emanation of the *Volksgeist.* But what prevailed was the new equation: the juridical root constituted by codification and positivism. The liberal state, in its turn, constituted itself as a root by imagining homogeneous nationality and national culture. The state becomes, then, the guardian of a root that does not exist beyond the state.

The End of the Equation

We are living at a moment of danger, in Benjamin's sense. To my mind, it consists largely of the fact that the modern equation of roots and options, on the

basis of which we have learned how to think social change, is undergoing a process of profound destabilization that seems to be irreversible. Such destabilization presents itself under three main forms: turbulence of scales; explosion of roots and options; interchangeability of roots and options.

I briefly characterize each one of these forms. As regards the turbulence of scales, we must recall what I said above about the difference in scale between roots (large scale) and options (small scale). The root/option equation rests on this difference and on its stability. Today we are living in turbulent times, whose turbulence manifests itself through a chaotic confusion of scale among phenomena. Urban violence is in this paradigmatic. When a street kid is looking for shelter to spend the night and is for that reason murdered by a police officer, or when a person who, approached in the street by a beggar, refuses to give money and is for that reason murdered by the beggar, what happens is an unpredictable explosion of the scale of the conflict: a seemingly trivial phenomenon seemingly without consequences is equated with another one – now dramatic and with fatal consequences. This abrupt and unpredictable change of the scale of phenomena occurs today in all the various domains of social praxis, and that is why I dare to consider it as one of the basic features of our time.

Following Prigogine (Prigogine and Stengers, 1979; Prigogine, 1980), I believe that our societies today are characterized by bifurcation. As we know, bifurcation occurs in unstable systems whenever a minimal change can bring about qualitative changes in an unpredictable and chaotic way. This sudden scale explosion creates a tremendous turbulence and leaves the system in a state of irreversible vulnerability. I believe that the turbulence of our time is of this kind, and that in it resides the vulnerability affecting all forms of subjectivity and sociability, from labour to sexual life, from citizenship to the ecosystem. This state of bifurcation reverberates upon the root/option equation, rendering chaotic and reversible the scale difference between roots and options. The political instability of our time, from the Balkans to the former Soviet Union, from the Middle East to Africa, has largely to do with sudden scale changes, both as regards roots and options. When the Soviet Union fell apart, the roughly 25 million Russians living outside Russia in the various republics of the Union suddenly saw their identity shrinking to the status of a local identity like that of an ethnic minority. On the other hand, the Serbs of the former Yugoslavia, initially with the assistance of the western countries, sought to expand the scale of their national roots even to the extent of cannibalizing the national roots of their neighbours. These scale changes are nothing new. They had already occurred after the war during the decolonization process and with the creation of the new, so-called national, post-colonial states. What is new about these changes is precisely the fact that they took place upon the ruins of the states that had claimed to be the sole entitlement of identity roots.

The same seemingly erratic scale explosion also occurs in the realm of options. In the field of economics, the way such options are imposed as a fatality, such as those concerning structural adjustment, as well as the drastic results they produce, make the small scale expand into large scale and the short term turn into the instant long term. For the southern countries, structural adjustment, far from being an option, is a transnational root that invades and stifles the national roots, reducing them to local excrescences. On the other side, the social contract, which is the metaphor for the contractualization of the political roots of modernity, is subjected today to a great turbulence. The social contract is a root-contract based on the commonly shared option of abandoning the state of nature. Two hundred years later, we are faced with structural unemployment, the return of reactionary ideologies, the abysmal increase of social and economic inequalities among the countries of the world-system and inside each one of them. Considering the famine, poverty and disease that beleaguer the southern countries and the internal third world of the northern countries, it seems obvious that we are opting for excluding from the social contract a given and significant percentage of the population of our countries, forcing it to go back to the state of nature. But as we so act, we rest convinced that we will be able to protect ourselves from the turmoil resulting from such exclusion.

The second manifestation of the destabilization of the equation of roots and options is the explosion of roots and options alike. In point of fact, what is commonly called globalization, in relation to the consumer and media society, has given rise to a seemingly infinite multiplicity of options. The range of possibilities has expanded tremendously, as legitimated by the very forces that make possible such expansion, be it technology, market economy, the global culture of advertising and consumerism or democracy. The increase of options becomes automatically a right to the further increase of options. However, in blatant contradiction with all this, we live in a time of localisms and territorializations of identities and singularities, genealogies and memories. In sum, the time we live in is also a time of limitless multiplication of roots.

But the explosion of roots and options does not occur merely by means of the endless multiplication of both. It also occurs in the process of searching for particularly deep and strong roots capable of sustaining particularly dramatic and radical options. In this case, the range of possibilities may be drastically reduced but the remaining options are dramatic and full of consequences. The two most telling examples of this explosion of roots and options by means of the intensification of both, are fundamentalism and DNA research. Fundamentalism is usually understood as any extreme version of the politics of identity. Indeed, its most common form derives from extreme versions of Eurocentric universalism. The hegemonic character of this latter form of fundamentalism is signalled by its capacity to designate the extreme

versions of the politics of identity as the sole forms of fundamentalism. Of all fundamentalisms, neoliberal fundamentalism is, no doubt, the most intense. Now that Marxism seems to be in a deep crisis, capitalism has become truly Marxist. In the course of the last few decades, market economy, capitalism's latest pseudonym, has become the new social contract, that is to say, the universal economic base or root which forces the majority of countries into dramatic and radical options, indeed, for many countries, the option between the chaos of exclusion and the chaos of inclusion. On the other hand, DNA research, conducted within the scope of the human genome project, signifies, in cultural terms, the transformation of the body into the ultimate root whence sprout the dramatic options of genetic engineering. The boom of the neurosciences and the research on the brain for the past few years – the so-called 'brain decade' – can also be interpreted as another way of converting the body into the ultimate root. We began the century with the socialist and the introspective revolutions, and we are now closing it with the body revolution. The centrality then assumed by class and the psyche is now being assumed by the body, itself now converted, like enlightened reason before, into the root of all options.

This extensive and intensive explosion of roots and options only destabilizes the root/option equation to the extent that it interconnects with the interchangeability of roots and options. We live in a time of unmasking and deconstruction. Today we see that many of the roots in which we have been mirroring ourselves were but disguised options. In this field, major contributions have been provided by feminist theory and epistemology, critical race theory, postcolonial studies and the new historicism. By considering the West/East option of primatology as studied by Donna Haraway (1989), the sexist and racist option of the welfare state as analysed by Linda Gordon (1990, 1991), the option, denounced by Martin Bernal (1987), to eliminate the African roots of *Black Athena* so as to intensify its purity as the root of European culture, and the option to whiten the *Black Atlantic* so as to hide the syncretisms of modernity, as Paul Gilroy (1993) has shown – we realize that the roots of our sociability and intelligibility are, in fact, optional, and address the hegemonic idea of the future that gave them meaning, rather than the past which, after all, only existed to function as the anticipated mirror of the future.

However, paradoxically, as they become more and more elaborate, this unmasking and this denunciation also become trivialized. As Captain Ahab had also discovered at his own cost, behind the mask there is but another mask. Knowing that the hegemonic roots of western modernity are disguised options gives the hegemonic culture the opportunity to impose its options as roots, this time without any need for disguise and with increased arrogance. The most eloquent case may well be Harold Bloom's *Western Canon* (Bloom, 1994). Here, roots are a mere effect of the right to options. In sociology, the

explosion of roots and options in recent times has taken the form, among others, of the proliferation of revisionism concerning the founders of the discipline, their identification and contributions (Alexander, 1982a, 1982b, 1987, 1995; Giddens, 1993, 1995; Collins, 1994; Wardell and Turner, 1986; Ritzer, 1990, 1992; Cuin and Gresle, 1992; Wagner, 1992).

The interchangeability of roots and options is not exclusive of the cultural and scientific fields. It is rather taking place at all levels of sociability and everyday life. It has even become constitutive of our life trajectories and histories. The current debates on adoption and on the negotiation of motherhood are probably the best example.[6] The wall of secrecy that for many years separated the birth mother (root) from the adoptive mother (option) has been questioned by the 'open adoption' policy 'in which the birth parents meet adoptive parents, participate in the separation and placement process … [and] retain the right to continuing contact and to knowledge of the child's whereabouts and welfare' (Yngvesson, 1996: 14). The interdependence of birth and adoptive mothers gives the adopted child the possibility to opt between biological and socially constructed genetic roots or even to opt to keep both of them as a kind of bounded root life contingency.

In the new constellation of meaning, roots and options are no longer qualitatively distinct entities. Being a root or an option is just an effect of scale and intensity. Roots are the continuation of options in a different scale and intensity; and the same goes for options. The outcome of this circularity is that the right to roots and the right to options are reciprocally translatable. All in all, it is now a question of style.

The mirror play of roots and options reaches its climax in cyberspace. In the Internet, identities are doubly imagined, as flights of imagination and as sheer images. People are free to create roots at their pleasure and then reproduce their options ad infinitum. Thus, the same image can be seen as a root without options or as an option without roots. Then, it no longer makes sense to think in terms of the root/option equation. Actually, we come to realize that the equation only makes sense in a conceptual, logocentric culture which speculates on social and territorial matrices (space and time), subjecting them to criteria of authenticity. As we move on to an imagocentric culture, space and time are replaced by instances of velocity, matrices are replaced by mediatrices, and at this level the authenticity discourse becomes an incomprehensible gibberish. There is no depth but the succession of screens. All that is below or behind is also above and in front. At this stage, perhaps, Gilles Deleuze's (1968) analysis of the rhizome gains a new up-to-dateness. In point of fact, Mark Taylor and Esa Saarinen, two media philosophers, have recently stated that 'the imaginary register transforms roots into rhizomes. A rhizomic culture is neither rooted nor unrooted. One can never be sure where rhizomes will break new ground' (Taylor and Saarinen, 1994: Gaping 9).

The condition of our condition is that we are in a period of transition.

Matrices coexist with mediatrices, space and time with the instances of veloc-ity, the intelligibility of the discourse of authenticity with its unintelligibility. The root/option equation now makes sense, now makes no sense at all. Ours is a more complex situation than Nietzsche's, for, in our case, realities and appearances pile up one moment, and in the next moment they disappear. Perhaps these drastic oscillations of meaning are the ultimate cause of the trivialization of the equation of roots and options.

The trivialization of the distinction between roots and options implies the trivialization of both. In this lies our difficulty today in thinking social transformation. The truth is that the *pathos* of the distinction between roots and options is constitutive of the modern way of thinking social change. The more intense the *pathos,* the more easily the present evaporates into an ephemeral moment between the past and the future. On the contrary, in the absence of the *pathos*, the present tends to be eternalized, devouring both past and future. Such is our present condition. We live in a time of repetition. The acceleration of repetition provokes a feeling of vertigo and a feeling of stag-nation at the same time. Because of its acceleration and mediatic treatment, repetition ends up subjecting even those groups that assert themselves by the *pathos* of roots. It is as easy and irrelevant to yield to the retrospective illusion of projecting the future into the past, as to yield to the prospective illusion of projecting the past into the future. The eternal present renders the two illusions equivalent, and neutralizes both. Thus, our condition takes on a Kafkaesque dimension: what exists can be explained neither by the past nor by the future. It exists only in a chaotic web of indefinition and contingency. While modernity deprived the past of its capacity for irruption and revel-ation, handing it on to the future, the Kafkaesque present deprives the future of this capacity. What irrupts in the Kafkaesque present is erratic, arbitrary, fortuitous and, indeed, absurd.

But there are some who read the eternalization of the present as the new storm blowing from Paradise and holding the *Angelus Novus*. According to Taylor and Saarinen, in the global compu-telecommunications network of digitalized realities,

> . . . space seems to collapse into a presence that knows no absence and time seems to be condensed in a present undisturbed by past or future. If ever achieved, such enjoyment of presence in the present would be the fulfillment of the deepest and most ancient dreams of the western religio-philosophical imagination. (Taylor and Saarionen, 1994: Speed 4)

To my mind, the digital storm quivering on the wings of the angel is virtual and can be connected and disconnected at our pleasure. Our condition is, therefore, far less heroic than the storm requires. However idealistically formulated, presence, whose fruition is imagined by religion and philosophy, is the unique and unrepeatable fulguration of a substantive relation; it is the product of a permanent interrogation, be it the mystical experience,

dialectical supersession, the fulfilment of the *Geist*, *Selbstsein*, existential being or communism. On the contrary, digital presence is the fulguration of a relationship, endlessly repeatable, a permanent reply to all possible inter-rogations. It opposes history without realizing that it is historical itself. Hence, it imagines the end of history without having to imagine its own end.

A Future for the Past

It is not easy to get rid of a situation that is as convincing in its contradic-tions as in its ambiguities, a situation that is as comfortable as it is intolerable. The eternalization of the present implies the end of the permanent interro-gations Merleau-Ponty (1968: 50) talks about. The time of repetition can be conceived of as progress or its opposite. Without the *pathos* of the tension between roots and options, it is not possible to think social change, but such an impossibility loses much of its drama if social change, besides being unthinkable, is considered unnecessary. This ambiguity brings about intel-lectual appeasement, which, in turn, brings about conformity and passivity. Walter Benjamin's admonishment, though written in 1940, is still quite up to date:

> The current amazement that the things we are experiencing [Nazism] are 'still' possible in the twentieth century is *not* philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable. (Benjamin, 1968: 257)

In my view, we must start from here, from the verification that the theory of history of modernity is untenable and that, for that reason, it is necessary to replace it by another, capable of helping us to live this moment of danger with dignity and to survive it by strengthening our emancipatory energies. What we most urgently need is a new capacity for wonder and indignation, capable of grounding a new, non-conformist, destabilizing and indeed rebellious theory and practice.

Following Merleau-Ponty's suggestion, we must begin with the most open and incomplete meanings of modernity. They are the ones that ignite passion and open new spaces for human creativity and initiative (Benjamin, 1968: 45). Since the theory of history of modernity was entirely oriented towards the future, the past remained underrepresented and undercodified. The dilemma of our time is that not even the fact that the future is discredited makes it possible, within this theory, to revive the past. For the theory of history of modernity, the past has never stopped being the fatalist accumu-lation of catastrophes which the *Angelus Novus* looks upon, powerlessly and absently.

Our task consists in reinventing the past in such a way as to make it

recapture the capacity for fulguration, irruption and redemption, so clair-voyantly imagined by Benjamin. 'Historical materialism', says Benjamin, 'wishes to retain that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man [*sic*] singled out by history at a moment of danger' (Benjamin, 1968: 255). This capacity for fulguration can only flourish once the past stops being the fatalist accumulation of catastrophes only to become the preview of our non-conformity and outrage. In a modernist conception, fatalism is the other side of faith in the future. The past is thereby doubly neutralized: because only what had to happen did happen, and because whatever happened in a given moment has already been or will soon be superseded. In this constellation of retrospective and prospective illusions, nothing is learned from the past except trusting the future.

We need, therefore, to fight for another conception of the past, one in which the past becomes a fore-reason of our rage and non-conformity: in lieu of a neutralized past, the past as irretrievable loss which resulted from human initiatives that had a choice of alternatives; a past revived for us by the suffer-ing and oppression caused in the presence of other alternatives that could have avoided them. It is in the name of a similar conception of the past that Benjamin criticizes German social democracy. He says:

> Social Democracy thought fit to assign to the working class the role of the redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This training made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren. (Benjamin, 1968: 260)

Perhaps even more than in Benjamin's time, we have lost the capacity for rage and amazement vis-a-vis the grotesque realism of what is accepted only because it exists. We have lost the spirit of sacrifice. In order to retrieve them both, we need to reinvent the past as negativity, as a product of human initiative, and on that basis construct new powerful interrogations and pas-sionate stands capable of inexhaustible meanings.

We must, therefore, identify the meaning of powerful interrogations at a moment of danger like ours. Such identification occurs at two moments. The first is when efficacy is required for powerful interrogations. Resorting to a somewhat idealist expression of Merleau-Ponty (1968: 44), I suggest that, in order to be efficient, powerful interrogations must be like monograms of the spirit engraved upon things. They must irrupt by the intensity and concen-tration of the internal energy that they carry within themselves. Under the conditions of the present time, such irruption will only occur if powerful interrogations translate themselves into destabilizing images. Only destabil-izing images can give back to us our capacity for wonder and outrage. To the extent that the past stops being automatically redeemed by the future, human suffering and the exploitation and oppression that inhabit it become a merci-less commentary on the present time; they become unforgivable because they

are still taking place, whereas they could have been prevented by human ini-
tiative. Images are destabilizing only to the extent that everything depends
on us and everything could be different and better. Human initiative, then,
rather than any abstract idea of progress, is what grounds Ernst Bloch's prin-
ciple of hope. Non-conformity is the will's utopia. As Benjamin says, 'Only
that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who
is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he
[*sic*] wins' (Benjamin, 1968: 255).

Destabilizing images will be efficacious only if they are amply shared.
And thus I come to the second moment of the meaning of powerful interro-
gations, how to interrogate so that the interrogation is more shared than the
answers to it. Within western culture today, at the present moment of danger,
in order to be widely shared, I believe, powerful interrogations must address
what unites, rather than what separates us. Since one of the two kinds of
cunning of the root/option equation was to hide, under the mask of their
mutual equilibrium, the absolute primacy of options, we are left today with
many theories and practices of separation, and various degrees of separation,
at that. Since the primacy of options has manifested itself, among other
things, through the (optional) affirmation and proliferation of roots, the
explosion of particularism in the politics of identity in the last two decades
has contributed to strengthening the theories of separation in the very process
of building new theories of union. For this reason, what we lack most is
theories about uniting, a lack that is particularly serious at a moment of
danger. The lack is not serious in itself alone; its seriousness consists in its
coexisting with a plethora of theories of separation. What is truly serious is
the lack of balance between theories of separation and theories of union.

The hegemonic powers that govern consumer and information society
have been promoting theories and images appealing to a totality, whether of
the species, the world or even the universe, which stands above the divisions
that constitute it. We know that they are manipulatory theories and images
which ignore the various circumstances and aspirations of peoples, classes,
sexes, races, regions and so on, as well as the unequal relations of exploitation
and victimization that have brought together the different parts of that
pseudo-totality. However, the grain of credibility of such theories and images
consists in that they appeal, though in a manipulative way, to an imagined
community of humanity as a whole. Against theories of separation, CNN,
not globalized intellectuals, has discovered an *a posteriori* universalism which
is global and individual at one and the same time, namely, the universality of
suffering. Suffering is everywhere. It is the individuals that suffer, not the
societies.

The counter-hegemonic forces, in their turn, have been expanding the
arenas of political understanding but their coalitions and alliances have hardly
succeeded in superseding the theories of separation. They have, however,

been more successful in overcoming territorial separation than separation derived from the different forms of discrimination and oppression. Transnational coalitions have been easier to accomplish by feminist, ecologist or indigenous groups, than among all these different groups. The explanation lies in the lack of balance between theories of separation and theories of union. The latter need to be reinforced so as to make visible what is common among the various forms of discrimination and oppression: human suffering. Counter-hegemonic globalization, which I designate as cosmopolitanism, is grounded on the global and multidimensional character of human suffering. The notion of *totus orbis*, formulated by one of the founders of modern international law, Francisco de Vitoria, must today be reconstructed as counter-hegemonic globalization, that is to say, as cosmopolitanism. Respect for difference cannot prevent the communication and complicity that render possible the struggle against indifference. The moment of danger we traverse demands that we deepen communication and complicity. We must do it not in the name of an abstract *communitas* but spurred, rather, by the destabilizing image of multiform suffering, caused by human initiative, and which is as overwhelming as it is unnecessary. At this moment of danger, the theories of separation must be reformulated having in mind what unites us, and vice versa, the theories of union must be reformulated having in mind what separates us. Borders must be constructed with lots of entrances and exits. At the same time, we must bear in mind that what unites us, only unites *a posteriori*. It is not human nature, it is human initiative that unites us.

Communication and complicity must occur in an anchored way and at various levels, to allow for a dynamic equilibrium between the theories of separation and the theories of union. To each level corresponds a potential for indignation and non-conformity nourished by a destabilizing image. I suggest we distinguish four levels: epistemological, methodological, political and juridical.

Epistemological communication and complicity are grounded on the idea that there is not only one form of knowledge, but several, and that we must opt for the one that favours the creation of destabilizing images and attitudes of non-conformity before them. I argue that there is no knowledge or ignorance in general. Each form of knowledge is knowledgeable vis-a-vis a certain kind of ignorance, and vice versa, each form of ignorance is ignorant vis-a-vis a certain kind of knowledge. Each form of knowledge thus implies a trajectory from point A, designated as ignorance, to point B, designated as knowledge. Forms of knowledge are defined by the ways they characterize the two points and the trajectories connecting them. In western modernity, this trajectory is simultaneously a logical sequence and a temporal sequence. The movement from ignorance to knowledge is also the movement from the past into the future.

I maintain that the paradigm of modernity includes two principal forms

of knowledge: knowledge-as-regulation and knowledge-as-emancipation (Santos, 1995: 25). Knowledge-as-regulation consists of a trajectory between a point of ignorance designated as chaos, and a point of knowledge designated as order. Knowledge-as-emancipation consists of a trajectory between a point of ignorance designated as colonialism and a point of knowledge designated as solidarity. Even though these two forms of knowledge are equally inscribed in the paradigm of modernity, the truth of the matter is that in the last century knowledge-as-regulation won total primacy over knowledge-as-emancipation. Thus, order became the hegemonic form of knowledge, chaos the hegemonic form of ignorance. Its hegemony allowed knowledge-as-regulation to recodify knowledge-as-emancipation on its own terms. And so, what was knowledge according to this form of knowledge was turned into ignorance (solidarity was recodified as chaos) and what was ignorance was turned into knowledge (colonialism was recodified as order). Since the logical sequence from ignorance to knowledge is also the temporal sequence from the past to the future, the hegemony of knowledge-as-regulation entailed that the future, and hence social change, be conceived of as order, and colonialism as a kind of order. In a parallel fashion, the past was conceived of as chaos and solidarity as a kind of chaos. Human suffering could thus be justified in the name of the struggle of order and colonialism against chaos and solidarity. Of course, human suffering has always had its specific social recipients – workers, women, children, ethnic and sexual minorities – all of them considered dangerous precisely because they represented the chaos and solidarity that had to be fought on behalf of order and colonialism. The epistemological neutralization of the past has always been the counterpart of the social and political neutralization of the 'dangerous classes'.

In view of this situation, the epistemological orientation to make possible communication and complicity must include the revaluation of solidarity as a form of knowledge, and of chaos as a dimension of solidarity. In other words, it must include the revaluation of knowledge-as-emancipation to the detriment of knowledge-as-regulation. The destabilizing image capable of generating the necessary energy for this revaluation is *human suffering*. Human suffering conceived of as the result of all human initiative that turns solidarity into a form of ignorance, and colonialism into a form of knowledge. This conception of human suffering is premised upon the replacement of imperial notions of humanity and suffering by postimperial, multicultural ones. As long as the death of one American soldier alone may have far more serious international political consequences than the death of hundreds of thousands of East Timorese or Rwandan people, human suffering will be an easily routinized evil (if not a transaction cost) and humanitarian action an exercise in hypocrisy.

The second orientation is methodological. The theories about what unites us proposed by the consumer and information society are based on the

idea of globalization. Hegemonic globalizations are, in fact, globalized localisms – the new cultural imperialisms. Hegemonic globalization can be defined as the process by which a given local phenomenon – be it the English language, Hollywood or fast food – succeeds in extending its reach over the globe and, by doing so, develops the capacity to designate a rival social phenomenon as local. The communication and complicity allowed for by hegemonic globalization are based on an unequal exchange that cannibalizes differences instead of facilitating the dialogue among them. They are trapped in silences, manipulations and exclusions.

Against globalized localisms I offer, as methodological orientation, a *diatopical hermeneutics*.[7] I mean a hermeneutical procedure based on the idea that all cultures are incomplete, and that the *topoi* of a given culture, however strong, are as incomplete as the culture to which they belong. Strong *topoi* are the main premises of argumentation within a given culture, the premises that make possible the creation and exchange of arguments. By this function, *topoi* create an illusion of totality based on the figure of synecdoche or *pars pro toto*. That is why the incompleteness of a given culture can only be assessed on the basis of the *topoi* of another culture. Seen from another culture, the *topoi* of a given culture stop being premises of argumentation to become mere arguments.[8] The aim of diatopical hermeneutics is to maximize the awareness of the reciprocal incompleteness of cultures, by engaging in a dialogue, as it were, with one foot in one culture and the other in another; hence, its diatopical character. Diatopical hermeneutics is an exercise in reciprocity among cultures, which consists in transforming the premises of argumentation in a given culture into intelligible and credible arguments in another. Elsewhere (Santos, 1995: 337–47), by way of example, I have proposed a diatopical hermeneutics to study the *topos* of human rights in western culture and the *topos* of *dharma* in Hindu culture, as well as the *topos* of human rights and the *topos* of *umma* in Islamic culture, in the latter case in dialogue with Abdullahi Ahmed An-na'im (1990, 1992).

Raising incompleteness to the possible maximum consciousness opens up unsuspected possibilities for communication and complicity. It is, however, a difficult procedure. It is a postcolonial, postimperial and, to a certain extent, even postidentity procedure. The very reflexivity of the conditions that make it possible and necessary is one of the most demanding conditions of diatopical hermeneutics. An idealistic conception of cross-cultural dialogue will easily forget that such a dialogue is only made possible by the temporary simultaneity of two or more different contemporaneities. The partners in the dialogue are only superficially contemporaneous; indeed, they feel contemporaneous only with the historical tradition of their respective culture. This is most likely the case when the different cultures involved in the dialogue share a past of interlocked unequal exchanges. What are the possibilities for a cross-cultural dialogue when one of the cultures present has

itself been moulded by massive and long-lasting violations of human rights perpetrated in the name of the other culture? When cultures share such a past, the present they share at the moment when they start the dialogue is at best a *quid pro quo* and at worst a fraud. The cultural dilemma is the following: since in the past the dominant culture rendered unpronounceable some of the aspirations of the subordinate culture to human dignity, is it now possible to pronounce them in the cross-cultural dialogue without thereby further justifying and even reinforcing their unpronounceability?

The energy that propels diatopical hermeneutics comes from a destabilizing image which I term 'epistemicide', the murder of knowledge. Unequal exchanges among cultures have always implied the death of the knowledge of the subordinated culture, and hence the death of the social groups that possessed it. In the most extreme cases, as that of European expansion, epistemicide was one of the conditions of genocide. The loss of epistemological confidence that currently afflicts modern science has facilitated the identification of the scope and gravity of the epistemicides perpetrated by hegemonic Eurocentric modernity. The more consistent the practice of diatopical hermeneutics, the more destabilizing the image of such epistemicides.

The third orientation for a dynamic equilibrium between the theories of separation and the theories of union is political. I designate it, following Richard Falk, as humane governance. The hegemonic theories of union, beginning with market economy and liberal democracy, are creating barbaric forms of exclusion and destitution which amount to veritable practices of neofeudalism. By the same token, the counter-hegemonic theories of separation, such as those underlying many contemporary identity politics, because they lack the counterbalance of theories of union, have often amounted to fundamentalist or neotribal practices. By these two opposite, though convergent, ways we live in a time of excess of separatism and segregationism. The destabilizing image that must be constructed out of this excess is the image of a global apartheid, a world of ghettos without entrances or exits, wandering in a sea of colonialist and fascist currents. This destabilizing image constitutes the energy for the political orientation of humane governance. By humane governance I mean, after Falk, every normative criterion which 'facilitates communication across civilizational, nationalist, ethnic, class, generational, cognitive, and gender divides', but which does so with

> . . . respect and celebration of difference and an attitude of extreme skepticism toward exclusivist alarms that deny space for expression and exploration of others, as well as toward variants of universalism that ignore the uneven circumstances and aspirations of peoples, classes and regions. (Falk, 1995: 242)

In other words, humane governance is a normative project that is

> . . . constantly identifying and reestablishing the various interfaces between the specific and the general, in each and every context yet keeping its spatial and

mental borders open for entry and exit, being wary of any version of truth claim
as the foundation of extremism and political violence. (Falk, 1995: 242)

Stimulated by a destabilizing image – global apartheid – that is powerful
because it is associated with war, social inequalities and ecological catas-
trophe, the principle of humane governance has a strong oppositional poten-
tial. Perhaps more than the other two orientations, it has a Eurocentric
character by virtue of its aspiration to totality. And yet, it represents the poss-
ible maximum of centrifugal consciousness of Eurocentrism, in that it
commits itself to its victims and aims at an emancipatory totality having at its
core their suffering.

   Finally, I draw the juridical orientation for our moment of danger from
international law. I mean the doctrine of the common heritage of humankind,
no doubt the most innovative but also the most vilified substantive doctrine
of international law in the second half of the 20th century. The acknow-
ledgement of social fields, whether physical or symbolic, that are *res
communes* and can only be administered in the interest of all, is a *conditio sine
qua non* of that communication and complicity between part and whole
intended to bring about a greater balance between the theories of separation
and union. If the whole – be it the species, the world or the universe – does
not have a juridical space of its own, it will be subjected to the two basic
separation criteria of modernity: the property that grounds world capitalism
and the sovereignty that grounds the interstate system.

   The juridical monopoly held by these two criteria has destroyed or
threatened to destroy natural and cultural resources of the utmost import-
ance for the sustainability and quality of life on earth. The deep sea bed,
Antarctica, the moon and other celestial bodies, outer space, the global sphere
and biodiversity are some of the resources which, if they are not governed by
trustees of the international community on behalf of present and future
generations, will be degraded to such an extent that life on earth will become
intolerable, even inside the de luxe ghettos that make up the global apartheid.
To these resources, we must also add the cultural heritage which UNESCO
has been proposing as the common heritage of humankind. In this case,
however, it is the heritage itself, not its degradation, which, in my view, must
constitute a destabilizing image: the image of the barbaric conditions in which
the culture treasures have been produced. Therefore, the cultural heritage can
only be considered the common heritage of humankind in the sense of Walter
Benjamin's assertion that 'there is no document of civilization which is not
at the same time a document of barbarism' (Benjamin, 1968: 256).

   The destabilizing image that emerges out of the deterioration of the
resources that sustain the quality of life on earth is the parable of the tragedy
of the commons as formulated by Garrett Hardin (1968) even though the
moral we draw from it differs from that of Hardin's.[9] Since the costs of the

individual use of common goods are always inferior to its benefit, common resources, because they are exhaustible, are on the verge of a tragedy. The stronger the global ecological consciousness, the more destabilizing this image will be. It alone generates the orientation energy of the common heritage of humankind.[10]

The archetypal dimension of the common heritage of humankind is that, long before it was formulated, this idea already represented the dialectics of communication between the parts and the whole, which is at the origin of modern international law in the Iberian School of the 16th century (Pureza, 1995: 264). The distinction drawn by Francisco de Vitoria between *jus inter omnes gentes* and *totus orbis*, as well as Francisco Suarez's distinction between *jus gentium inter gentes* and *bonum commune humanitatis*, are the archetypes of matricial equilibrium between the theories of separation and the theories of union. That this equilibrium has been upset in favour of the doctrines of separation endows the common-heritage-of-humankind doctrine with a utopian nature, indeed a messianic nature, in Benjamin's sense. One needs only to list its main attributes: non-appropriation; management by all peoples; international sharing of the benefits obtained from the exploitation of natural resources; peaceful use including freedom of scientific research for the benefit of all peoples; conservation for future generations (Santos, 1995: 366). For this utopian character to develop, it is imperative that the common-heritage-of-humankind idea escape the juridical discourse and practices of international law, wherein it will always remain ensnared by the property and sovereignty principles, and become a new emancipatory juridical common sense that will encourage the action of counter-hegemonic social movements and non-governmental organizations for transnational advocacy.

Destabilizing Subjectivities

Destabilizing images are not destabilizing by essence. They merely contain a destabilizing potential, which may be concretized only to the extent that the images are captured by individual or collective subjectivities capable of understanding correctly the signs they emit, feel outraged at the messages they carry and turn their outrage into emancipatory energy. As I have already mentioned, the close relationship between knowledge and subjectivity has been amply recognized today in the great paradigmatic transitions of the Renaissance and Enlightenment (Cassirer, 1960, 1963; Toulmin, 1990). The Enlightenment is the transition that most concerns us here. The great influence exerted by Locke's concept of action and human understanding (Locke, 1956) was due to the fact that its elective affinity with the new constellation of meaning was so strong that what it said about human action was understood not as speculation but as discovery or revelation. Voltaire acknowledges this much when he writes admiringly of Locke:

> After so many random reasoners had been thus forming what might have been
> called the romance of the soul, a sage appears who has modestly presented us
> with the history of it. Mr. Locke has developed human reason to man, just as a
> skillful anatomist explains the springs and structure of the human body.
> (Voltaire, 1950: 177)

The reason for Voltaire's enthusiasm is that Locke opened up a new per-
spective which posited that the investigation of the function of experience
should precede any determination of its object, and that the exact insight into
the specific character of human understanding could not otherwise be
attained but by tracing the whole course of its development from its first ele-
ments to its highest forms. According to Locke, the origin of the critical
problem was genetic, the history of the human mind providing an adequate
explanation of it.[11]

Writing at a crucial moment of the constitution of the paradigm of
modernity, Locke asked questions and provided answers that are of little use
for us today, now that we have probably reached the last phase of the para-
digm he helped to consolidate. What can be of use to us, however, is the
archaeology of both Locke's questions and answers. Locke was able to ask
radically for a kind of subjectivity capable of creating and willing to create a
new scientific knowledge, whose infinite possibilities loomed on the horizon;
a kind of subjectivity, indeed, willing also to recognize itself in its own
creations. He saw the answer to his question in an unstable correspondence
between two extremes: a knowledge that positioned itself on the brink of an
exhilarating future could only be willed by a subjectivity that represented the
culmination of a long-ascending evolution.

Today, we too, like Locke, must raise the question of subjectivity in a
radical way, though in a radically different way. Unlike Locke, we ask about
a subjectivity that culminates no evolution, a subjectivity whose self-
reflectivity is focused on a past that never was and on the conditions that pre-
vented it from ever being. A sociology of absence is thus as important as a
sociology of presence in the social construction of the destabilizing subjec-
tivity. That dual sociology, which is still very much to be produced, is at the
core of the emancipatory will of the emergent subjectivity. Such will can be
traced to Condillac's 'uneasiness', that kind of disquietude which he con-
sidered to be the point of departure not only of our desires and wishes, but
also of our thinking and judging, willing and acting (Condillac, 1984: 288).
In a time of explosion of roots and options, and in a time as well of the inter-
changeability of roots and options, this disquietude translates itself both into
a capacity for unmasking and a capacity for meaning: on the one hand, the
unmasking of the options of power, which for so long have been concealed
by the power of options; on the other, the meaning of new possibilities
opened up by the self-reflectivity thus enhanced. The issue is, then, to de-
familiarize the canonic tradition (the sociology of presence) without stopping

there as if such defamiliarization were the only possible familiarity. In other words, the coupling of unmasking and meaning prevents the emergent subjectivity from falling into Nietzsche's extremes when he states, in *Towards a Genealogy of Morals*, that 'only what has no history is definable' (1973: 453). The destabilizing project must engage in a radical critique of the politics of the possible without yielding to an impossible politics.

Central to the social sciences knowledge engaged in this kind of project is not the distinction between structure and agency but rather the distinction between conformist action and what I propose to call action-with-clinamen. Conformist action is the routinized, reproductive, repetitive practice which reduces realism to what exists and just because it exists. For my notion of action-with-clinamen I borrow from Epicurus and Lucretius the concept of clinamen, understood as the inexplicable *quidam* that upsets the relations of cause and effect, that is to say, the swerving capacity attributed by Epicurus to Democritus's atoms. The clinamen is what makes the atoms cease to appear inert and rather be seen as invested with a power of inclination, a power, that is, of spontaneous movement (Epicurus, 1926; Lucretius, 1950).[12] Unlike what happens in revolutionary action, the creativity of action-with-clinamen is not based on a dramatic break but rather on a slight swerve or deviation whose cumulative effects render possible the complex and creative combinations among atoms, hence also among living beings and social groups.[13]

The clinamen does not refuse the past; on the contrary, it assumes and redeems the past by the way it swerves from it. Actually, the swerving is a liminal practice which occurs in the borderline of a past that did exist and a past that was not allowed to exist. By virtue of such swerving, which in itself may be imperceptible, the past's capacity for interpellation enlarges to such an extent that it becomes the fulguration Benjamin talks about – an intense *Jetztzeit* that renders possible new emancipatory practices. The occurrence of action-with-clinamen is in itself inexplicable. The role of the social sciences in this regard will be merely to identify the conditions that maximize the probability of such an occurrence and, at the same time, define the horizon of possibilities within which the swerving will 'operate'.

A destabilizing subjectivity is a subjectivity endowed with a special capacity, energy and will to act with clinamen. Bearing Bloom's use of the term in mind, we might say that a destabilizing subjectivity is a poetic subjectivity. The social construction of such a subjectivity itself must be an exercise in liminality. It must entail experimenting with eccentric or marginal forms of sociability or subjectivity in modernity. Viewed as an open field of reinvention and experimentation, the baroque is, to my mind, one such form.[14] The destabilizing subjectivity is a baroque subjectivity.

I propose a sociological and cultural reconstruction of the baroque so as to turn it into a social and cultural field capable of promoting the formation of subjectivities with capacity for and will to clinamen. Given the various

semantic contexts in which the term 'baroque' is used in contemporary discourse, I would like to be precise in my own use of it here. I am not using baroque as designating a postclassic style in art and architecture;[15] or as identifying a historical epoch, the 17th century in Europe (Maravall, 1990; Roy and Tamen, 1990); or to designate the cultural ethos of some Latin American countries (Mexico and Brazil) that evolved from the 17th century onwards (Echeverría, 1994; Pastor et al., 1993; Barrios, 1993; Coutinho, 1968, 1990; Ribeiro, 1990). I use baroque as a cultural metaphor to signify precisely a form of subjectivity and sociability. In order to describe this kind of subjectivity and sociability, however, I do resort selectively to the three senses of the concept of baroque mentioned above. Whether as an artistic style or as a historical epoch, the baroque is essentially a Latin and Mediterranean phenomenon, an eccentric form of modernity, the south of the north, so to speak. Its eccentricity derives, to a large extent, from the fact that it occurred in countries and historical moments in which the centre of power was weak and tried to hide its weakness by dramatizing conformist sociability. The weakness of power favoured the emergence of clinamen and, consequently, the slipping of conformism into subversion.

The relative lack of central power endowed the baroque with an open-ended and unfinished character that allowed for the autonomy and creativity of the margins and peripheries. Because of its eccentricity and exaggeration, the centre itself reproduced itself as if it were margin. I mean a centrifugal imagination which became stronger as we go from the internal peripheries of the European power to its external peripheries in Latin America. Both Brazil and Mexico were colonized by weak centres, Portugal and Spain respectively. Portugal was a hegemonic centre during a brief period of time, between the 15th and 16th centuries, and Spain started to decline but a century later. From the 17th century onwards, the colonies were more or less left alone, a marginalization that made possible a specific cultural and social creativity, variously wrought in many combinations, now highly codified now chaotic, now erudite now vernacular, now official now illegal. Such *mestizaje* is so deeply rooted in the social practices of these countries that it came to be considered as grounding a cultural ethos that is typically Latin American and has prevailed since the 17th century until today. I am interested in this form of baroque because, inasmuch as it is the manifestation of an extreme instance of the centre's weakness, it constituted a privileged field for the development of a centrifugal and subversive imagination, that is to say, for the development of an imagination-with-clinamen.

The reconstruction I propose here is aimed at uncovering the potential of the baroque for clinamen. I consider five main dimensions in baroque: interruption, *terribilità, sfumato, mestizaje* and feast. Interruption concerns baroque temporality, a temporality that is contemptuous of modernist evolution because the latter leads to a weak conception of the present.

Interruption, on the contrary, entails a strong conception of the present, and that is why it radicalizes contemporaneity in much the same way that Benjamin does in theses XIV–XVI with his notion of *Jetztzeit* (Benjamin, 1968: 261–2). The modern present (*Gegenwart*) is a time without autonomy, a time in transit between the past and the future, indeed, a conformist time because it is incapable of breaking with the continuum of historical becoming. On the contrary, *Jetztzeit* is a full now which allows both individuals and social groups to assume their practice as entirely their own, a unique opportunity for emancipatory transformation and an unconditional responsibility at one and the same time.[16] In Benjamin's words, 'a historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop' (Benjamin, 1968: 262). Interruption is the momentary suspension that opens up space for the probability of and will to clinamen through the creation of surprise, wonder and indignation. The 'baroque technique', argues Maravall, consists in 'suspending resolution so as to encourage it, after that provisional and transitory moment of arrest, to push further more efficiently with the help of those retained and concentrated forces' (Maravall, 1990: 445). From another angle, Wölfflin argues that the aim of the baroque style 'is not to represent a perfect state, but to suggest an incomplete process and a moment towards its completion' (Wölfflin, 1979: 67). In other words, interruption favours the emergence of clinamen by provoking wonder and novelty and impeding closure and completion.[17]

Terribilità is practised to the extreme point at which the purity of repetition becomes disarmed absurdity. *Terribilità* is how Michelangelo's contemporaries characterized his use of forms. According to Wölfflin, the reason why Michelangelo is rightly considered one of the parents of baroque is 'because he treated forms with a violence, a terrible seriousness which could only find expression in formlessness' (Wölfflin, 1979: 82). The almost imperceptible swerving that separates the action-with-clinamen from conformism can best be observed in Bernini. The 'Ecstasy of Santa Teresa' is a masterpiece of clinamen, of mysticism gliding into eroticism, of sacredness gliding into sacrilegiousness. *Terribilità* may manifest itself as exuberance and extravagance, as well as utter simplicity (as in the case of asceticism). But, at any rate, rather than relying on a repetitive image of the past, *terribilità* supplies 'a unique experience with the past' (Benjamin, 1968: 262). This experience, by its very uniqueness, is destabilizing; it is a source of turbulence and hence potential for emancipatory practices.

The capacity for and the will to clinamen is always precarious. To treat conformist forms (of action as of culture) with *terribilità* is the necessary, though not sufficient, condition for the emergence of the destabilizing subjectivity. In order not to fall into another kind of dogmatism, the exercise of *terribilità* must be embedded in a social and cultural field dominated by forms with an anti-dogmatic, movement-oriented, destabilizing sense of direction.

Two baroque forms maximize such a sense of direction: *sfumato* and *mestizaje*.

In baroque painting, *sfumato* is the blurring of outlines and colours among objects, as clouds and mountains or the sea and the sky. *Sfumato* allows baroque subjectivity to create the near and the familiar among different intelligibilities, thus making cross-cultural dialogues possible and desirable. The construction of a multicultural conception of the dignity of human community in terms of western (human rights), Hindu (*dharma*) and Islamic (*umma*) concepts mentioned above is only possible through *sfumato*. *Sfumato* promotes the proliferation of imperceptible gestures of clinamen out of which will eventually develop a radically new constellation of meaning. As the coherence of monolithic constructions disintegrates, its free-floating fragments remain open to new coherences and inventions of new cultural forms. *Sfumato* is like an interstitial magnet that attracts the fragmentary forms into new constellations and directions, appealing to their most vulnerable, unfinished, open-ended contours. *Sfumato* is, in sum, an anti-fortress militancy.

While *sfumato* operates through disintegration of forms and retrieval of fragments, *mestizaje* operates through the creation of new constellations of meaning, which are truly unrecognizable or blasphemous in light of their constitutive fragments. *Mestizaje* resides in the destruction of the logic that presides over the formation of each of its fragments, and in the construction of a new logic. Only insistence on *sfumato* makes possible the development of a *mestizaje* subjectivity, a subjectivity that excels in constructing meaning through diatopical hermeneutics.

In a desert of canons, there is always the danger that the desert may itself become canonical. In order to avert this possibility and sustain its destabilizing energy, the emergent subjectivity must maintain an attitude of ludic self-reflectivity in relation to its own practice of swerving. The baroque feast is the best antidote against the canonization of clinamen. The importance of the feast in baroque culture, both in Europe and in Latin America, is well documented (Maravall, 1990: 487). The feast turned baroque culture into the first instance of mass culture of modernity. Its ostentatious and celebratory character was used by political and ecclesiastical power to dramatize their greatness and reinforce their control over the masses. Underneath this manipulative use of the feast, however, lies the potential for emancipatory, self-reflective destabilization. Such potential resides in the following three dimensions of the baroque feast: disproportion, laughter and subversion.

The baroque feast is out of proportion: it requires an extremely large investment which, however, is consumed in an extremely fleeting moment and an extremely limited space. As Maravall says, 'abundant and expensive means are used, a considerable effort is exerted, ample preparations are made, a complicated apparatus is set up, all that only to obtain some extremely

short-lived effects, whether in the form of pleasure or surprise' (Maravall, 1990: 487). Thus, by interrupting the continuum of routinized practice and by intensifying the moment of fulguration, disproportion makes possible a strong conception of the present. Moreover, disproportion makes possible wonder, surprise and novelty. But above all, it makes possible playful distance and laughter (Maravall, 1990: 488). Because laughter is not easily codifiable, capitalist modernity declared war on mirth and so laughter was considered frivolous, improper, eccentric, if not blasphemous. It was to be admitted only in highly codified contexts of the entertainment industry. But the ostracism of laughter can also be observed among modern anti-capitalist social movements (labour parties, unions and even the new social movements), which have banned laughter and play lest they subvert the seriousness of resistance. Particularly interesting is the case of unions, whose activities at the beginning had a strong ludic and festive element (workers' celebrations) that was gradually suffocated, until at last union activity became deadly serious and deeply anti-erotic. The banishment of laughter and play is part of what Max Weber calls the *Entzäuberung* of the modern world. Their recuperation is crucial for the emergence of destabilizing subjectivities. The carnivalization of clinamen and destabilization has an important self-reflective dimension: it makes decanonization and subversion possible. A decanonizing practice which does not know how to decanonize itself falls easily into orthodoxy.

And now, finally, the third destabilizing feature of baroque feast: subversion. By carnivalizing social practices, the baroque feast displays a subversive potential that increases to the extent that the feast distances itself from the centres of power, but is always there even when the centres of power themselves are the promoters of the feast. Little wonder, then, that this subversive feature was much more noticeable in the colonies. Writing about carnival in the 1920s, the great Peruvian intellectual Marietegui asserted that, even though it had been appropriated by the bourgeoisie, carnival was indeed revolutionary, because by turning the bourgeois into a wardrobe, it became a merciless parody of power and the past (Marietegui, 1974: 127). Garcia de León also describes the subversive dimension of baroque feasts and religious processions in the Mexican port of Vera Cruz in the 17th century (De Leon, 1994). Up front marched the highest dignitaries of the viceroyalty in their full regalia – politicians, clergy and military men; at the end of the procession followed the populace, mimicking their betters in posture and attire, and thus provoking laughter and merriment among the spectators. This symmetrical inversion of the beginning and end of the procession is a cultural metaphor for the upside-down world – *el mundo al revés* – which was typical of Vera Cruz sociability at the time: *mulattas* dressed up as queens, slaves in silk garments, whores pretending to be honest women and honest women pretending to be whores, Africanized Portuguese and Indianized Spaniards. In the baroque feast such an inversion implies a highly dramatized and codified

gesture of clinamen; but the potential for destabilization is there and can be intensified through the *sfumato* between feast and daily sociability.

Interruption, *terribilità, sfumato, mestizaje* and the feast are the five dimensions of a conception of the baroque designed to promote the emergence of subjectivities that excel in clinamen – the destabilizing subjectivities. It is up to the social sciences, in conjunction with the humanities, to explore in the different fields of social life such conditions as will allow for the flourishing of the baroque dimensions here analysed.

Conclusion

We live at a moment of danger that is also a moment of transition. The future has already lost its capacity for redemption and fulguration, and the past has not yet acquired it. We are no longer capable of thinking social change in terms of the root/option equation, nor can we think it otherwise. The danger consists in the eternalization of the present and its capacity for Kafkaesque fulguration. The danger consists in that, once deprived of the tensions that have shaped our subjectivity, we rest content with simplified forms of subjectivity.

One of the most troublesome symptoms of simplified subjectivity is the fact that the theories of separation and segregation have total sway over the theories of union, communication and complicity. The irrelevance of the root/option equation resides precisely in the fact that we are separated and segregated, both by roots and by options. That is why the limited reasons we invoke for segregation – whether hegemonic or counter-hegemonic – can summon no reason for the limits of segregation.

In this article, I offered a new equilibrium between the theories of separation and the theories of union, as well as greater communication and complicity across borders. I outlined four destabilizing images: human suffering, epistemicide, global apartheid and the tragedy of the commons. All of them interpellate the past as inexcusable human initiative, so as to make it revive and fulgurate in our direction. These images are ideas riding on efficient rhetorical vehicles, that is to say, powerful and speedy vehicles, and yet cost efficient in their consumption of resources, all-terrain vehicles capable of reaching wide and heterogeneous audiences. Social ideas riding on the 'primitive' vehicles of conventional education and scientific discourse have lost their capacity for destabilization. The new constellations of destabilizing intelligibility must combine ideas, emotions, feelings of amazement and indignation, passions of inexhaustible meanings. This way they will be Merleau-Ponty's monograms of the spirit engraved on new, rebellious and non-conformist practices.

Only under these conditions will the destabilizing images generate the energy that will allow us to survive with dignity this moment of danger by

following the four orientations: knowledge-as-emancipation, diatopical hermeneutics, humane governance and the common heritage of humankind. They are orientations at the margins of Eurocentric culture, and yet still Eurocentric in their marginality. By positioning themselves alongside the victims of Eurocentrism's hegemony, they constitute themselves as oppositional and centrifugal consciousness, the possible maximum consciousness of western culture's incompleteness. They think western culture in such a way that social transformation can no longer be thought in Eurocentric terms.

The same is true of the conception of destabilizing subjectivity proposed in this article, a conception built upon an eccentric and marginal tradition of western modernity: the baroque. Consisting of five dimensions – interruption, *terribilità*, *sfumato*, *mestizaje* and feast – the sociological and cultural reconstruction of the baroque advanced here, as a challenge to the social sciences, is designed to promote a specific kind of creative action, the action-with-clinamen, the type of action in which the destabilizing images and destabilizing subjectivities flourish and converge to bring about transformative practice. This reconstruction of the baroque is in itself an act of swerving in relation to the conventional conception of the baroque.

In light of this double decentring – through destabilizing images and subjectivities – of the cultural promises that have up until now underlain social sciences, the *Angelus Novus* can no longer rest suspended of its imponderable lightness, looking upon the horrors with his back turned against that which causes them. Were that to happen, the angel's tragedy would be translated into a farce, his compelling interrogation into pathetic commentary. I believe, on the contrary, that, faced with the seductive and grotesque intensity of the destabilizing images, the angel will end up embracing them to cull from them the energy he needs to fly again, though this time, Antaeus-like, without ever letting go of the earth.

Notes

1 The positivisitic creed of order and progress is a decadent version of this dialectic.
2 Elsewhere I have dealt in great detail with the terms of this double paradigmatic transition (Santos, 1995). On the epistemological transition, see also Wallerstein (1991; Wallerstein et al., 1996). On the societal transition, see Hopkins and Wallerstein (1996).
3 For recent analyses of Walter Benjamin's theory of history, see Echeverría (1996), Steinberg (1996), Ribeiro (1995), Callinicos (1995: 150ff.), Comesaña (1993) and Fischer (1996).

4 Maier uses this expression in analysing the recent proliferation of Holocaust museums in the USA and elsewhere. He views the surfeit of memory as a sign not of historical confidence but of a retreat from transformative politics (Maier, 1993: 150).

5 Elsewhere, I deal at greater length with Grotius's theories and rationalist theories of natural law in general (Santos, 1995: 60–3).

6 A fine analysis of negotiated motherhood, interweaving scientific analysis and personal life trajectory, can be read in Yngvesson (1996).

7 For a fuller development of the concept of diatopical hermeneutics, see Santos (1995: 337–47).

8 At moments of great turbulence, the 'demotion' of *topoi* from premises of argumentation into mere arguments can be observed within a given culture. In a way, this is what is happening with the root/option equation. In this article, I have challenged this equation as a strong *topos* of Eurocentric culture, by 'demoting' it from premise of argumentation to mere argument and refuting it with other arguments.

9 A fine analysis of this parable appears in Pureza (1995: 281).

10 This is not the place to analyse this doctrine: its original formulation in 1967; the Law of the Sea Convention of 1982, in which the desire of peripheral countries for a new world economic order can be seen; the gradual misrepresentation of this doctrine until its total disintegration in the Boat Paper and Resolution 48/263 of the United Nations National Assembly on 28 July 1994. For a detailed and stringent analysis of the vicissitudes of the doctrine of the common heritage of humankind, see Pureza (1995: 381–531); see also Santos (1995: 365–73).

11 See also Cassirer (1960: 93–133).

12 The concept of clinamen was made current in literary theory by Harold Bloom. It is one the revisionary ratios Bloom proposes in *The Anxiety of Influence* to account for poetic creativity as what he calls 'poetic misprision' or 'poetic misreading': 'A poet swerves away from his precursor, by so reading his precursor's poem as to execute a *clinamen* in relation to it' (Bloom, 1973: 14).

13 As Lucretius says, the swerve is *per paucum nec plus quam minimum* (Epicurus, 1926: intro. by Frederic Manning, xxxiv).

14 Elsewhere, I analyse the potentialities of the baroque in more detail (Santos, 1995: 499–506).

15 See among others Wölfflin (1979) and Manrique (1981). For a broader view of the baroque aesthetic, see Buci-Glucksmann (1984) and Hatherly et al. (1990).

16 On Benjamin's concept of time, see Echeverría (1996: 16), Wohlfarth (1978: 148), Milfull (1996: 129), Steinberg (1996) and Eagleton (1981).

17 The concept of interruption is also creatively used in literary criticism by Maria Irene Ramalho de Sousa Santos (1983, 1994, 1996).

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