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Four Cosmopolitical Ideas for an Unworlded World

As Félix Guattari anticipated in 1989,

[t]he Earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet's surface. Alongside these upheavals, human modes of life, both individual and collective, are progressively deteriorating. (2000: 27–28)

Therefore, this is the *first* idea I would like to stress: (a) we are living in times of both ecological and social collapse.¹ According to Jörg Friedrichs (2013), one could now claim that the future is not what it used to be, and for within merely a few decades, the world will no longer be what it is now. It is, of course, possible to graduate our fears, yet, the deepest one is obvious: “From a geological point of view,” writes Elizabeth A. Povinelli “the planet began without Life, with Nonlife, out of which, somehow, came sorts of Life. These sorts evolved until one sort threatened to extinguish not only its own sort but all sorts, returning the planet to an original lifelessness” (2016: 11). But until that happens – if it happens – we will likely experience the fatal irruption of the unexpected in an ironic reversal of the (enlightened) Kantian sublime: earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts, famines, wars, etc. In short, a gradual un-worlding, a slow, yet perpetual, end of times. And in this sense “we soon will be all Amerindians” (Viveiros de Castro 2014b: 4) – or indigenous peoples of Africa or Australian aboriginals – since our condition will quite probably be the same as theirs: we will be worldless survivals in an un- worlded world.

My *second* idea is that (b) contemporary thought seems to be more or less aware of this troubling circumstance – or, at the very least, aware of the fact that we no longer live in the world as we fancied it to be. In fact, it can be said that this awareness has by now provoked not only diverse cultural narratives but also a multidimensional re-constellation of thought, both within and beyond the traditional boundaries of almost all academic disciplines. A single diagnosis and, thereby, a coherent portrayal of what we are experiencing is lacking. Yet, this is quite normal given the numerous issues that merge on the soil of today's critical

¹ See the Stockholm Resilience Centre's updated “planetary-boundaries” diagram, available at <<http://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>> (accessed 24 March 2020) and the “Slum Almanac 2015–2016” of the UN Habitat Program, available at <<https://unhabitat.org/slum-almanac-2015-2016/>> (accessed 24 March 2020).

thinking, as well as the latter's multiform, if not exactly prismatic, quality. Consequently, there are innumerable questions that haunt us. To mention a few (less with the purpose of answering to them, which would exceed the limits of this chapter than to bring the reader's attention to their interrelatedness and disquieting nature):² Can the aforementioned ecological *cum* social collapse serve as the barometer of our times or is it that today's biggest challenge comes from cybernetics instead? How should we read, for example, developments in the production of artificial intelligence that are blurring the boundary between the biological and the technological? Which must be our attitude before them? Fascination? Horror? The combination of both in a new form of existential vertigo? Lastly, how does all this affect the earth? Is it still – with all its inhabitants – instrumentally at our disposal, or has it evaporated with our dreams? Alternatively, is it possible to say that the earth is back, and that it demands from us renewed attention and care?

It is this latter question that I intend to respond in this chapter. Three random images may serve to illustrate the three options I have briefly mentioned: the image of Malian women and children with their hands full of the traditional seeds they are beginning to grow back again to counter both the effects of climate change and the biopiracy practiced by industrial-agriculture giants like Monsanto with its patents; the image of coal extraction in Rhineland in Germany; and the image of the almost-total and hardly describable disaster caused by typhoon Haiyan when it seized the Philippines in 2013.

Third idea: (c) in addition to pointing out the ontological fluctuance of our “natural” and “social” environments, the latter question may be said to condense the fluctuance of the “conceptual” environment(s) brought forth to tackle them, and thereby to summon the major primary axes of early-21st-century ontological thought – for, strangely enough, in an age in which almost everything is often taken for granted, thought still seems capable of engaging in the questioning of the real as such. My proposal is to distribute such major axes alongside three concentric circles, one per axis, as shown in the diagram below (Fig. 1). Here, Roman numbers indicate the position of each axis (core-mainstream, semi-peripheral, and peripheral), whereas Latin letters show the different trends of thought linked to each position. The continuous rectilinear lines delimit each trend's distinctive area or micro-region, while the discontinuous rectilinear lines delimit the possible subdivisions of these. The thick lines separate macro-regions

² On the importance of evoking the major questions of an epoch – provided their interconnectedness – before addressing the specific ones to be dealt with in an investigation that attempts to shed light on what may be called their shared surface of inscription, see Heidegger (1984: 300–301).

III and II and, even more strongly, II and I with decreasing degrees of “ontological” challenge and fluctuance: high in III, low in II, inappreciable in I. Also, their distribution should be read in connection to the three aforementioned questions and the “pictorial” fluctuance of reality that they evoke. Thus, in Region I, the earth is still perceived to be at our disposal; in Region II, it has dramatically vanished; whereas in Region III it announces its transfigured return.

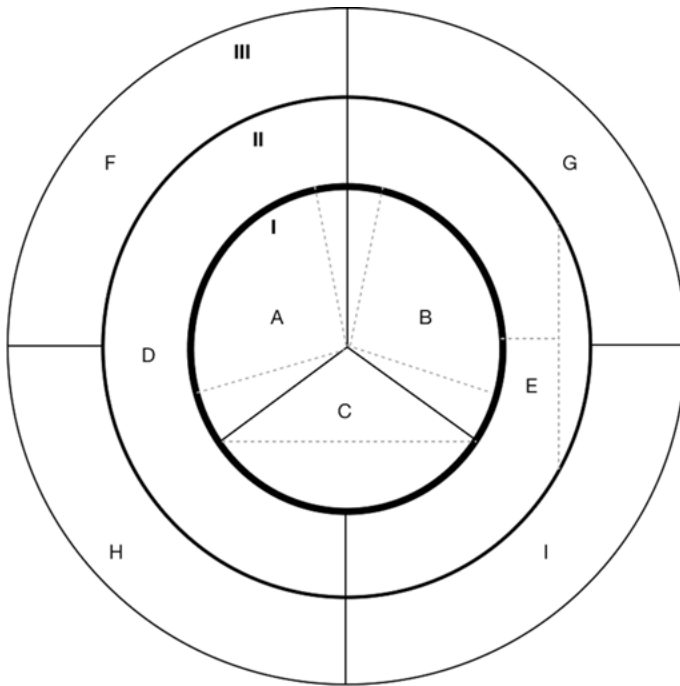


Fig. 1: The primary axes of early twenty-first-century ontological thought.

Let's now consider them separately. In addition to describing their corresponding subregions (i.e., their content), I would like to suggest a premise, a key notion, and a visual metaphor for each of them in order to draw the reader's attention to the possible reversibility of the central and peripheral regions in the future.

(1) The core of the diagram (i.e., Region I) represents today's mainstream thought world, within which three major trends of thought can be distinguished: (A) liberal, (B) socialist, and (C) environmentalist. Here, liberal means in accordance with the ideals of Enlightenment and political economy. Conversely, socialist refers to the endorsement of the former and the questing of the unrestrained character of

the latter. In both cases, adjoining areas ($A \rightarrow B$ and $A \leftarrow B$) are contemplated, signaling either moderate tendencies within each trend and/or their respective accelerationist variants. In turn, in the environmentalist area, I am willing to include all types of environmentalism (e.g., resource conservationism and preservationism)³ compatible with A and B (inside C's triangular area, but notice too A's and B's adjacent areas to C); these shallow forms of environmentalism differ from more radical variants, which, in turn, tend to reproduce the nature and culture divide characteristic of modernity (Braidotti 2013: 85). I, therefore, take the addition of C to A and B in the late twentieth century to be a stable trait of today's mainstream thought world, which explains why I have placed C inside Region I. There is an additional reason for it: since even the less-reformist variants of C have succeeded to find their place in today's thought world in their quality of adversaries of modernization, they can be said to constitute the outside of an intellectual universe to which they positionally belong – for, as Louis Althusser observed long ago:

It is impossible to leave a closed space simply by taking up a position merely outside it, either in its exterior or its profundity: so long as this outside or profundity remain its outside or profundity, they still belong to that circle, to that closed space, as its 'repetition' in its other-than-itself. (1970: 53)

One also has to consider how the two dimensions of the current cosmo-political crisis are split up into two entirely independent areas (B and C), rather than folding into a single one. It can be assumed that discourses focusing simultaneously on both dimensions belong elsewhere and not in the A, B, or C boxes, which do not present any ontological challenge to contemporary thought. Bluntly: from any of such boxes the present is differently viewed as an “unfinished project”, whose modern substrate does not need to be problematized. Such is indeed their common premise, whereas their common concept is that of a virtually endless escalation of what we already have. In turn, an apt visual metaphor among others could be in this case that of the rationally well-planned gardens of Versailles.

(2) The semi-periphery of the diagram (i.e., Region II) includes, on its part, two different areas whose connections tend to be more fluid than those between A, B, and C (their eventual intersections notwithstanding) in Region I.

First, we have Quentin Meillassoux's anti-correlationism and Ray Brassier's transcendental nihilism. Apparently, what Pascal diagnosed in the mid-seventeenth century as the eternal and frightening silence of infinite spaces, i.e., “the discovery that the world possesses a power of persistence and permanence that

³ See the classification proposed by Cramer (1998: 10–13).

is completely unaffected by our existence or inexistence”⁴ (Meillassoux 2008: 116), has gathered new momentum in the opening decades of our century. This also involves the view that “[t]here is no nature worth revering or rejoining; [. . .] no self to be re-enthroned as captain of its own fate; [. . .] no future worth working towards or hoping for”; in short, that life is “malignantly useless” (Brassier 2010: 9). In other terms, Meillassoux views the pretension to confer meaning to the world according to what it means to us as the correlationist delusion from which modern science cures us by opening our eyes to a “*glacial* world” (his own metaphor). In this world, “there is no longer any up or down, center or periphery, nor anything else that might make of it a world designed for humans” (2008: 115). Hence, for Meillassoux, the world has become pure contingency.⁵ In turn, Brassier extols the pointlessness of the world thus disenchanted: philosophers, he claims, “would do well to desist from issuing any further injunctions about the need to re-establish the meaningfulness of existence, the purposefulness of life, or mend the shattered concord between man and nature” (2007: xi); and he does so *contra* Nietzsche’s playfulness:

Nietzsche conflated truth with meaning, and concluded that since the latter is always a result of human artifice, the former is nothing but a matter of convention. However, once the truth is dismissed, all that remains is the difference between empowering and disempowering fictions, where ‘life’ is the fundamental source of empowerment and the ultimate arbiter of the difference between life-enhancing and life-depreciating fictions. [. . .] I consider myself a nihilist precisely to the extent that I refuse this Nietzschean solution.

(Brassier and Rychter 2011: n.p.)

It could be argued, therefore, that Meillassoux and Brassier view the earth as a sort of black nothingness that has taken over what we once naively fancied to be a meaningful world. From this eliminative perspective the present appears as much tainted with contingency as the future reveals itself opaque. Metaphorically speaking, it could be said that their ontological fluctuance presents irrational numbers, unlike the round, natural numbers characteristic of Region I. The earth is here viewed as a sort of black nothingness that has taken over what we once naively fancied to be a meaningful world.

⁴ Thus, against Kant’s philosophy, Meillassoux’s notion of “non-correlationism” (2007: 5). See for a critique Segovia (2021).

⁵ It is not totally clear to me how it is possible to endorse the radical contingency of the real and find support for this in modern science given the latter’s interest in studying regularities and subsequently coming out with laws, however hypothetical these may be said to be. Cf. Brassier’s (2007: 82–83, 87–88) similar argument. Notice too Meillassoux’s (2008: 128) attempt to “reconcile [in this way] thought and [the] absolute.” For a critique of the notion of contingency, see Gevorkyan and Segovia (2020a).

Secondly, we have Graham Harman's, Ian Bogost's, Levi Bryant's, and Timothy Morton's object-oriented ontologies (henceforth OOO). It is Harman who first moved in an OOO direction.⁶ Viewed from a number of scientific and philosophical reductive angles, Harman complains that an object can be several things. It can be "*nothing more than* either final microphysical facts, or [. . .] an empty figment reducible to such facts" (2011:24), as per the teachings of scientific naturalism. It can be "*nothing more than* its accessibility to humans" (24), as idealism holds. It can be "*nothing more than* a byproduct of a deeper primordial reality" or "a derivative actualization of a deeper reality" (24), from a monist perspective. It can be "the fleeting crystallization of some impulse or trajectory that can never be confined to a single moment" (24), an option that Harman identifies with Bergson. It can be "*nothing more than* its effects on other things" (24), as relationism claims. It can be "*nothing more than* its history" (24) for a genealogical approach. It can be "*nothing more than* a nickname for our habitual linking of red, sweet, cold, hard, and juicy under the single term 'apple'" (24), as Hume had it. Or it can be "*nothing more than* the grammatical superstition of traditionalist dupes, drugged by the opiate of noun/verb Western grammar" (24), as the philosophies of difference claim in turn. Who said that all these approaches have enormously complicated the objectuality of objects, making them *something more* than (simple) objects? In Harman's opinion, what they have done is exactly the opposite; due to them we have lost sight of the objects *qua* objects:

There are other possible ways of discrediting objects in philosophy, some of them not yet invented. My purpose [. . .] is to emphasize that a counter-movement is both possible and necessary [. . .]. [A]ll of these anti-object standpoints try to reduce reality to a single *radix* [...] [since] all say that a full half of reality is *nothing more than* an illusion generated by the other half. (2011: 24)

By "a full half of reality" Harman means, one may infer, the half corresponding to Object within the modern Subject/Object philosophical divide (= Subject/*Object*): if an object is nothing but a modality of some deeper reality, or the name we give to a set of converging sensory qualities, or a cumulation of effects and stories, this means that we take it to be nothing more than a subjective delusion. Therefore, by choosing any of those options, he fears that we re-enter the correlationist room, which we were supposedly in need to leave (= Subject/~~Object~~). In a nutshell: if an object is any of the aforementioned things, it ceases to be an object in the sense that we are no longer able to think it *qua* object. This, argues Harman, amounts to saying that we are unable to represent it as an

⁶ See, for a general picture, Bryant, Srnicek, and Harman (2011); Gratton (2014); Shaviro (2014); Harman (2018).

individual substance, as Aristotle would have done, and one must view Aristotle, he adds, as “the permanent ally of all brands of realism; [for] whatever the flaws of Aristotelian substance may be, lack of reality outside the human mind is not one of them” (2011: 27). Hence, Harman concludes that what seemed to be *more than* becomes *less than*, if we take Aristotle’s categorical logic as a reference. One of two things: this is either a joke or a philosophical naivety of such proportions that any further comment is unnecessary. Furthermore, Kant’s *noumenon/phe-nomenon* distinction joins Harman’s OOO through the backdoor:

We can neither be downward scientific reducers, nor can we be upward humanistic reducers. We can only be hunters of objects, and must even be non-lethal hunters, since objects can never be caught. The world is not primarily filled with electrons or human praxis but with ghostly objects withdrawing from all human and inhuman access, accessible only by allusion and seducing us by means of allure. Whatever we capture, whatever table we sit at or destroy, is not the real table. (Harman 2012: 12)

Neither science nor politics, but art, can therefore supply a valid model for philosophy (Harman 2012: 14–15). Thus, Harman does not only re-instantiate a subtle form of idealism but also the postmodern shift from ethics (whose primacy already meant the death of politics) to aesthetics, adding to it the feeling that before reality we are lost in translation. As for the objects surrounding us, they are isolated from one another: “[w]hen the things withdraw from presence,” writes Harman, “they distance themselves not only from human beings, but *from each other* as well” (2002: 2). Thereby Harman pushes Heidegger’s horizon of Being’s withdrawal to move along an altogether different – and ultimately non-Heideggerian – axis: if objects are more-than-their-being-present-to-us, Harman suggests, they must also be more- than-their-being-present-to-one-another.

Accordingly, the overall ontological view inherent in any OOO variant is summarized by Bogost in the formula: “The alien [. . .] [is] everywhere” (2012: 133). It is everywhere since we are surrounded by objects – and only by objects: objects we do not control anymore, objects we cannot exactly know anymore, and objects that place us in the uncomfortable position of being at their mercy, although they simultaneously invite us, by being there, to relate to them at the same time. The primacy of the Subject is reversed here, too. However, instead of a meaningless nothingness, like in Brassier (2007), and instead of contingency, like in Meillassoux (2008), we get the Object, now in a position of complete privilege. But then, has philosophy really moved from the aporia established by Schelling in the fourth of his 1795–1796 *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kritizismus* (1914: 23): either no Subject but an absolute Object, or else no Object but an absolute Subject? In other words: does not all of this fall into the “apparatus of capture” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 424–474) of a too-simple-

and-stereotypical ontological frame once more? For if modern philosophy turns around the Subject and its production of meaning, we merely seem to be confronted here with the black hole caused by its removal. I am tempted at this point to evoke Bataille:

Nothing is more foreign to our way of thinking than the earth in the middle of the silent universe and having neither the meaning that man [sic.] gives things, nor the meaninglessness of things as soon as we try to imagine them without a consciousness that reflects them.

(1989: 20)

Seen from this perspective, the present does not only appear to be irretrievably post-ecological, but also legitimately post-political – one could say that it amounts to a collection of photographs in lack of film; and in last analysis to an aesthetic playground at best.

This impression is reinforced when reading Morton (whose thought I would place in the upper half of section E, i.e., in continuity with OOO but as something different from it due to its idiosyncratic evolution, on which one can find more below). For clarity's sake, I shall distinguish between three periods in the development of Morton's zigzagging contribution to contemporary philosophy. (a) In 2007, Morton makes the point that there is nothing like a unified milieu within which – unlike humans, who must be placed outside of it – non-human beings dwell, nothing therefore like Nature. Thus, the title of his 2007 book is *Ecology Without Nature* (or dark ecology). Its subtitle was likewise eloquent: *Rethinking Environmentalist Aesthetics*. "Coming up with a new worldview," he wrote in its opening lines, "means dealing with how humans experience their place in the world. Aesthetics, thus, performs a crucial role for Morton, establishing ways of feeling and perceiving this place" (2007: 2); feeling and perceiving rather than thought – as if politics were interdicted, or impossible, or unnecessary, or old-fashioned. (b) In his next book, however, Morton (2013) takes another path. Morton claims that "Hyperobjects", like "the sum total of all the nuclear materials on Earth; or just the plutonium, or the uranium," as well as "long-lasting product[s] of direct human manufacture," like, for example, "Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism are directly responsible for what I call *the end of the world*" (2013: 4). And this, he goes on to say, has provoked three attitudes in us: hypocrisy, weakness, and lameness.

Hypocrisy results from the conditions of the impossibility of a metalanguage ([. . .] [of which] we are now [. . .] aware [. . .] because of the ecological emergency); *weakness* from the gap between phenomenon and thing, which the hyperobject makes disturbingly visible; and *lameness* from the fact that all entities are fragile (as a condition of possibility for their existence), and hyperobjects make this fragility conspicuous. (Morton 2007: 4)

Yet, Morton subsequently remarks, “[t]his does not mean that there is no hope for ecological politics and ethics. Far from it” (2007: 8); for this lameness must be viewed, he says, as Hölderlin’s “‘saving power’ that grows alongside the dangerous power,” as well as Heidegger’s “last god” (2007: 20), capable of saving us in a sense that it distills and encourages in us the humble “acceptance” (2007: 153) of our condition. What we therefore need is a kind of political quietism – and a dose of self-complacency to keep it in place. Nevertheless, (c) in his latest book, Morton (2017) has replaced Heidegger by Marx, minus Marx’s (modern) anthropocentrism, and discovered that what we really need is – as the subtitle reads – “solidarity with nonhuman people,” or, in other words, a communism that includes non-humans against the capitalist appropriation of indigenous lands, women’s bodies, and nonhuman beings.

However, references to the abundant and multidisciplinary scholarship on these matters are scarce. Furthermore, there cannot be found a single sign of true engagement with political activism of any kind against neocolonialism in Morton’s work, beyond a brief-but-strategically placed allusion in its opening lines to the Native Americans, who opposed the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in the US in 2016. One cannot but wonder, if this is the kind of cosmopolitics we need. For despite the premise being in this case – I would suggest – the belief that we live in times of apocalyptic perplexity, the concept that links all OOO proposals can be said to be that of a self-absorbed lameness, whose visual metaphor could be that of a typical Victorian study room, in which the only thing one can do is to sit by the fire and light up a pipe (Gevorkyan and Segovia 2020b).

On the other hand, Peter Sloterdijk (2011, 2013) develops a twofold proposal, which holds the function of a new ontological constitution to help us better relocate ourselves in the world against the prerogatives of modern anthropocentrism together with the elaboration/re-activation of collective. Moreover, it is put into service as an individual training-techniques that may help us to better adapt to such new environment and remain human. However, it is clearly not enough in this context; for if its relational ontology cannot be said to be exactly flat, it can be described, though, as being exclusively programmatic: something like a minor sequel to the Heideggerean assumption of the *Mitsein*-ness of the *Dasein* (the “being-with”- or “togetherness” of “man” in his quality of situated [*da*-] “existent” [*sein*]). In this sense, Bertrand Stiegler’s (2018) attempt to rethink the Heideggerian *Sorge* as an economy of care against the planetary entropy brought about by industrial capitalism, and his proposal to counter the latter with an organicist *cum* processual cosmology *à la* Whitehead,⁷ looks more interesting to me; yet it obviates that we

7 On the contemporary recovery of Whitehead, see Stengers (2011).

may also need, among many other things, to rethink the correlation of life and death in tragic terms (Segovia and Gevorkyan 2021). Thus, I would also place Sloterdijk and Stiegler's philosophical elaborations inside semicircle E, within the small vertical fringe on its right, whence the world represents a chance to re-situate ourselves and eventually something more.

(3) Lastly, Region III works like a cocktail container with four main components: (F) new ecologies (including general ecologies, meta-ecologies, and trans-species ecologies), (G) new philosophical materialisms (whose vitalism makes them run against the flat ontologies and dark ontologies so far examined), (H) postcolonial (or, better, de-colonial) studies (with their epistemic disobedience to, and delinking from, colonial thought, plus their focus on the uncommon and the need to produce new designs for a pluriverse), and (I) new ontological developments in anthropology (which cannot be said to merely provide a new ethnographic method). I am convinced that these four intersecting fronts form a fourfold surface and that, put together, provide the keys to the ontology we need, and to the new politics of the earth!

By the expression "new ecologies," I am thinking of Erich Hörl's (2013, 2015, 1017) "general ecology" with its stress on the ecologization of all modes of existence, attainable through the interaction of human and nonhuman actors and, more exactly, through the countercultural interplay of art, philosophy, and technology against cyber-capitalism and hyper-industrialization. Hörl also speaks of a "thousand ecologies" – a wink to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) – and traces his inspiration back to Guattari's latest works (in particular *The Three Ecologies* and *Chaosmosis*). Here, room must be created for Bruno Latour's recent meta-ecological drift (2013a, 2013b, 2015). Through a critical, oblique re-reading of James Lovelock *contra* Galileo, Latour proposes to re-assume the earth's acting capacity and *dynamics*, while avoiding transforming it into a single-acting subject, given its inherent multiplicity. Also, he proposes to explore other ways of understanding and being in the world – in continuity with Isabelle Stengers's *Cosmopolitiques* (1997). Stengers's own work moves a step further in the direction of anti-capitalist politics (cf. her collaboration with Philippe Pignarre [2011]). In turn, Donna J. Haraway's (2008) trans-species ontology re-defines humanity as a "spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies" and puts emphasis on "becoming with" as a practice of "becoming worldly" – in a way that differs from, even opposes to, the axiomatic one-world world of modern globalization. Therefore, it deserves to be mentioned at this point as well. Perceptibly, it contains something more than Derrida's (2008) human-animal alter-cogito exchange. From these intercrossing points of view, which I propose to group within a single trend (F), we are then at the crossroads of the world's

newly-redefined components, in a sort of active awakening to new explorable ways of being and thinking (onto-logy). These stress the *unity and immanence* of life against the transcendent narrative of logocentric/phallocratic extractivism as represented in Jan van der Straet's famous engraving *America Uncovered*. Here, an unclothed woman (America) welcomes her male European conqueror, who are not only carrying swords but also the symbols of faith and science. This scene is reminiscent of Francis Bacon's verbal depiction of nature as a woman-to-be-interrogated-and-conquered-by-the-new-science in order to propitiate Man's redemption from his fallen condition and full recovery of his primordial place in the world (cf. Merchant 2003: 69–72).

Another step forward in the production of the type of thought we somehow need today in consists in conceiving of a “monistic universe of intersecting affective relations that [. . .] make the world go round” (Braidotti 2013:55). This view is based on “Spinoza's central concept that matter, the world and humans are not dualistic entities structured according to principles of internal or external opposition” (Braidotti 2013: 56), and that matter itself (= reality's core) is “autopoietic” (Braidotti 2013: 60). This is a type of thought explored, among others, by Brian Massumi (2002) and Jane Bennett (2010), that fits well into the rubric “new (vital) materialism(s)” – vital against the glacial materialism of Meillassoux and Brassier, the perplexed materialism of any OOO, and Iain Hamilton Grant's (2006) and Ben Woodard's (2013) abyssal materialism.

Let's now turn to (H) post-colonial/de-colonial studies, and their current parallel emphasis on the making of *differences*. As Mario Blaser writes, the modern story – the modern worldview – has become “increasingly located in a position of ‘dominance without hegemony,’” (2013: 557) and this has rendered “visible” (2013: 554) crucial ontological differences, as well as ongoing ontological conflicts, otherwise unperceived, that is to say, silenced, repressed, denied, and suppressed. “The modern story,” he explains, “hinges upon a specific arrangement of three elements: an ontologically stark distinction between nature and culture, a dominant tendency to conceive difference (including the difference between nature and culture) in hierarchical terms, and a linear conception of time” (Blaser 2013: 554). Thus, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries – whose cosmopolitical shift has been merely expanded and eulogized in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the domain of culture was “subdivided into several ‘cultures’ as the key diacritic to establish differences among humans,” (Blaser 2013: 554) and the position of “modern culture” in relation to its “others” (i.e., in relation to “nature” and other “cultures”) was “linked to a hierarchical system mapped out against the background of linear time,” (Blaser 2013: 554) so that the two great resulting divides (between nature and culture and between moderns and nonmoderns) “were increasingly understood by moderns in terms of a story that makes modernity not

only different but also the spearhead of the evolving [univocal] history of [a single] humanity” (Blaser 2013: 554). Thereby, Blaser regards the aforementioned “two great divides” as being not only “co-emergent,” but also “cosustaining” (2013: 554). It is, however, the second one, i.e., the divide between moderns and nonmoderns, that interests me here. Pointing to the European (read: Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, and later British, German, Russian, Scandinavian, and Italian) colonization/exploitation of the “New World” as the earliest conquest-adventure that contributed to the making of the modern story, Blaser comments on this as follows:

As long as the horizon of alterity in the encounter with the New World was Christianity, the radical Otherness of the natives’ worlding was recognized as potentially threatening and the site of an open antagonism (i.e., the Indians were minions to the devil either willingly or because they had fallen prey to his lies), but as reason displaced faith in the constitution of the modern regime of truth, this antagonism was progressively muted: Indians were just ignorant, they were at an earlier stage of evolution, or, as of late, they just had another culture (which, critically, lacked the concept of culture; de la Cadena 2010). (2013: 555)

It is therefore possible to say that “[i]n its latest modality, modernity exorcizes the threatening difference of other worldings by taming them and allowing them to exist just as cultural perspectives on a singular reality” (Blaser 2013: 555). In short, as I have written elsewhere (Segovia 2018), from killing/enslaving the Others, we have moved on to suppress their too- primitive Otherness so as to make them fully human, and then we have moved on to selectively eradicate some essential aspects of their Otherness, while keeping others as culture and folklore, so as to make of them another (exotic) type of global citizen. The strategy has changed, but the logic remains the same;⁸ and it remains essentially the same, as there is no modernity without coloniality: modern/colonial form a single composite term.⁹

Countering such strategy could thus be the first move in an attempt to achieve some degree of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2009) and conceptual de-linking (Mignolo 2007) of the modern/neocolonial regime of truth. First, through the vindication of (local) “subaltern” knowledges, practices, and ways of being and living. Second, by the delineation of what Walter D. Mignolo (2000: 91–126) calls a “post-Occidental reason,” although I would prefer to use the term “thought”

⁸ A logic, by the way, performed in the name of humanism, redressed today as humanitarianism: indigenous populations should not be “left behind,” they also must be provided with “education and/or health care,” “nation- states” must veil for “all their citizens alike,” “human rights should be extensive to all,” etc. With Pierre Clastres (1994:45), one could then affirm that the ethics of humanism are the spirituality of ethnocide.

⁹ See Mignolo’s (2000) expression “modern/colonial world system.”

instead, and more precisely “thoughts” in the plural. Thirdly, through the subsequent multiplication of ontologies and their respective worldings – or the making of a pluriverse (Escobar 2018) against the “one-world world” (Law 2011) we have been trapped in.

But there is a domain (I) where the ontological differences that frame a pluriverse are, if anything, particularly evident and thereby observable: contemporary anthropology. I am especially thinking of something that was first labeled by Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell (2007) as an “ontological turn” in current anthropology, associated, among others, with the names of Philippe Descola and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (Pedersen and Martin Holbraad 2017).

In a groundbreaking and elegantly-written monograph titled *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Descola 2013), which Lévi-Strauss himself welcomed in the promotional blurb of the original French edition (Descola 2005) as “giv[ing] to anthropological reflection a new starting point,” and Marshall Sahlins as a “paradigm shift” in the “current anthropological trajectory,” (Descola 2013: xii), Descola (2013) distinguishes between four different manners there are to map, namely “nature” and “culture.” Let’s provisionally keep both terms – be it by delimiting their supposed boundaries as being external to one another or by complicating instead any attempt to trace a clear-cut divide between them. These different world-views – or rather, ontologies *au sens fort* – he calls: (a) “animism” – moving beyond Edward Burnett Tylor’s recurrent use of such term throughout the 2 vols. of his ambitious 1871 essay on *Primitive Culture* (Tylor 2016) to denote the belief in souls or spirits proper of “lower races” due to their incapability of telling “man [sic!] [. . .] [from] beast [. . .] and plants or even objects” (Harvey 2017: 8); (b) “totemism” – a term Descola takes from Lévi-Strauss (1964) by classifying it as a “classificatory” tendency to articulate the social, the natural, and the individual along reciprocal principles, albeit simultaneously conferring it a more straightforwardly ontological quality (Descola 2013: 144); (c) “analogism” – which roughly coincides with Foucault’s (1970) concept of analogy as the pre-modern *episteme* of western culture, yet, expanding it beyond such rather-narrow temporal and geographical boundaries; and (d) “naturalism” – which Descola equates with the very type of mechanistic take on the world distinctive of modern (i.e., Galilean, Cartesian, and Newtonian) science.

In the first case (a) all or most “things” are endowed with a living principle of their own (which is the reason why, e.g., many native American languages have “animated” and “unanimated” genres accompanying their nouns and verbs). This authorizes to say that what most of them share in common (their specific living principles notwithstanding) is an “interiority” or “personhood,” whereas they totally differ as to their radically different “embodiments,” to which different lived,

experienced worlds correspond in turn – cf. the parallel concepts of “perspectivism” and “multinaturalism” in Viveiros de Castro (1998; 2014a: 49–75); all of which goes far beyond the timid recovering of the term “animism” by Nurit Bird-David (1999) and Graham Harvey (2017) after A. Irving Hallowell (1960). An example of this alter-ontology is the widespread Amazonian belief that before the “ethnographic present” all differences chaotically communicated with one another so that most animals, plants, geographical features, meteorological phenomena, and celestial bodies were in their appearance as “human” as humans still are, but that they lost their human physicality due to their many ontological becomings, through which they morphed into the biological species and other beings and realities that form the present world (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2017: 63–64). According to this view, “what we call ‘environment’ is [. . .] a society of societies, an international arena, a *cosmopoliteia*” (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2017: 69; cf. Segovia 2019). Conversely, in the fourth case (*d*) what all living things have in common is their equal belonging to “nature,” with humankind representing the only (partial) exception to this rule insofar as humans have managed to develop something else: apart from nature, and in opposition to it, they also have “culture,” which makes them different and justifies their privileged position in a cosmos they attempt to conquer against all possible natural constraints and their own biological limitations. “Totemism” (*c*) differs from these two opposing ontologies (although its connections to animism are actually many) in that it establishes a full, i.e., a twofold continuity: natural and cultural. For in this case, the different human groups share their interiority, i.e., their personhood as well as their embodiment or physicality with the different animal species (one per human group), whose respective pre-cosmological archetypes are ontologically responsible for the production of the different observable ecosystems in nature. Lastly, in the fourth case (*d*) nature and culture differ from one species to another and from one reality to another, so that in rigor one can only speak of an irreducible multiplicity: the world as an infinite collection of singularities. Yet it is simultaneously possible to associate some things to others due to their similar qualities or states of being, i.e., by applying to them the principle of analogy, which thereby allows to ideally portray the world as a web of more-or-less evident or secret relations.

This is no place to complicate the virtual intersecting articulations of such ontological models (on which see Viveiros de Castro [2012] and Segovia [forthcoming b]). I would simply wish to highlight that through this multi-ontological lens anthropology proves to be about nothing shorter from “sticking one’s neck out through the looking-glass of ontological difference,” as Viveiros de Castro aptly puts it (2014b: n.p.). What Descola (2013) offers as a structural classification,

Viveiros de Castro explores by focusing on Amazonian ontology and its corresponding concept of embodiment: bodies as inscribed “perspectives” rather than self-identical and self-contained substances, and the world as a collection of perspectival embodiments among which there is recurrent transitivity, which confers to the present – to any present – a rather thin stability against a multiplicity of virtual metamorphoses and “other- becomings” – otherness thereby becoming the issue life has permanently to deal with. Thus, thanks to the ontological turn, anthropology proves to be “ready to fully assume its new mission of being the theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought” (Viveiros de Castro 2014a: 40); in the sense that its role is “not that of *explaining the world of the other*, but rather of *multiplying our world*, ‘filling it with all of those things expressed that do not exist beyond their expression’ (Deleuze)” (Viveiros de Castro 2014b: n.p.). These virtual connections between anthropology, postcoloniality, philosophy, and ecology substantiate the view of a creative circulation and reciprocation of ideas among the various areas of this third peripheral region of our map.

In this third region of our diagram – whose purpose is, like with any diagram, both to reflect thought and to generate it – the premise is therefore that we must reimagine worlds to escape the unworld we have all been enclosed in by the modern/colonial/capitalist project. The concept, neither escalation nor lameness, but transition to a pluriverse. A possible visual metaphor would be Wittgenstein’s (2009: 204) rabbit-duck drawing turned into an image of ontological univocality and equivocity at the same time – like a Möbius strip.

Fourth concluding idea: as Arturo Escobar writes, “[t]he project of ‘reworlding’ is thus necessary ontological in that it involves eliminating or redesigning not just structures, technologies, and institutions but our very ways of thinking and being.” (2018: 118). Therefore, an option cosmopolitically engaged with those (humans and non-humans alike) whose worlds have been virtually whipped off by the capitalist mega-machine (ourselves included, despite the fact that we no longer seem to remember it), would consist in reimagining the world – or, better, as many worlds as possible – otherwise, this is to say, neither in continuity with modernity (whatever its kind) nor in light of its dialectical negation(s). This latter option points to the cosmopolitics we are in need of in order to escape – even if locally, temporarily, and fragmentarily – the un-world in which we are all trapped. Everything else amounts to de-politicization – a cosmos, or its shadow, without politics. Only that, in the end, even cosmopolitics may not be enough: a poetics of dwelling may be both necessary and urgent. But mentioning it amounts to point *beyond* the diagram into the thinkable if still largely unthought (Gevorkyan and Segovia 2020c).

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