PREFACE TO THE 2012 EDITION

I dedicate these pages to the memory of
Orlando Fals Borda, Julie Graham, and
Smitu Kothari, dear friends and comrades
in the search for alternative worlds.

It has been over fifteen years since this book was first published. My hopes and intentions for writing it have not changed; on the contrary, they have grown stronger in the intervening years. The critical analysis of development is as timely and relevant today as it was then. In many parts of the world, "development" continues to be a main social and cultural force to contend with. Significant political battles are waged in its name, and the lives of many and the quality of people's livelihoods are still at stake in such battles. And scores of professionals—although perhaps fewer in number in 2010 as compared with 1995, particularly in the United States—find a living in the development world and actively debate the issue in boardrooms and project staff meetings in both donor and recipient countries. Last but not least, and again with a somewhat decreased enthusiasm in the United States, academics—anthropologists among them—writing doctoral dissertations and presenting conference papers on this or that aspect of development are still plentiful. Above all, the political impetus that moved me to write about "the invention of development" and to imagine a "postdevelopment era" in the late 1980s and early 1990s is still very much there: the fact that, as I see it, development continues to play a role in strategies of cultural and social domination, even if academics might have a more nuanced view today of how these strategies operate, including of how people appropriate development for their own ends. Of course, my own views on the subject have changed in important respects, as I will discuss in some detail in the pages that follow.

Part I of this chapter analyzes the most significant transformations in social life at the global level that have direct bearing on development. These include changes at the level of political economy as well as the emergence of new actors and arenas of action. Part II raises the question of the relevance of the notion of "postdevelopment." Is this notion, initially proposed in the early 1990s, still useful, or even valid, to convey both the decentering of development and a reorientation of imaginaries and practices toward new possibilities concerning Asia, Africa, and Latin America? If not, can it be reformulated? Should it? How? This part reviews succinctly the main trends in critical development studies of the past fifteen years, including novel ethnographic, political economy, and poststructuralist approaches. Part III introduces the idea of "discourses of transition." Stemming from the combined crises of food, energy, climate, and poverty, these transition discourses—particularly prominent in the areas of ecology, culture, and spirituality—can be seen as markers for postdevelopment, or as challenges to modernity more generally. Part IV looks briefly at some concrete proposals currently in vogue

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in Latin America that can be seen as contributing to transition practices and discourses, such as unprecedented struggles around the rights of nature and the definition of development in terms of the *Buen Vivir* (integral and collective well-being). These trends are seen as linked to ontological issues and as potentially enacting the idea of moving toward a "pluriverse," in the sense of creating the conditions for the coexistence of multiple interconnected worlds. This section introduces the idea of moving from the world as universe to the world as pluriverse. The conclusion argues for the development of a field of transition and pluriversal studies anchored on a view of the Earth as an always emergent living whole. Rather than one based on so-called globalization, this field would foster the discovery and imagining of forms of "planetarization," in which humans and other living beings can exist on the planet in a mutually enhancing way.

I. Important World Transformations

The world has changed immensely since the mid-1990s. From a development studies perspective, as I see it, the three most salient factors in this transformation have been, first, the tremendous role taken on by China—and, to a lesser extent, India—in the global economy; second, the realignments in global geopolitics that came in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City on September 11, 2001, and the subsequent invasion of Iraq in March, 2003; and, third, the end of the so-called Washington Consensus, that is, the set of ideas and institutional practices that has seemingly ruled the world economy since the 1970s, most commonly known as neoliberalism. The dismantling of really-existing socialism and of centrally planned economies could be cited as a fourth factor given that, although it started in the 1980s, it became irreversible in the 1990s. These factors are deeply interrelated and are far from constituting an historical sequence. First, development studies emerged within China as a scholarly field, along with concerns inherent to the economic liberalization followed by the country since the late 1970s, such as rapidly growing inequality, environmental destruction, and rural exclusion, marginalization, and poverty (see, e.g., Long, Jingzhong, and Yihuan 2010).[1] China's influence in Asia, Africa, and Latin America has grown in parallel with its economic might, having a particularly pronounced effect on African development (Sahle 2010). While some see the Chinese economic reforms—though orchestrated by the State—as in tandem with neoliberal ideology of the Washington Consensus type, others believe the actual situation is characterized by a complex mix of economic forms, only some of which can be characterized as liberal or neoliberal (Nonini 2008; Yang 1999).

Second, the emergence of a new geopolitical formation after 9/11/01 is relatively undisputed. Of key importance to this issue from a development studies perspective is what international political economy scholars have called the securitization of development, that is, the conflation of notions of security from the war on terrorism and human security frameworks in development in ways that undermine and limit the latter's potential, including in the Millennium Development Goals (Sahle 2010). Third, the end of the Washington Consensus has been most noticeably reflected in the "turn to the Left" in Latin America, that is, the wave of

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Left governments that swept away more than a majority of the regions' countries since 1998, all democratically elected on the explicit rejection of the neoliberal dogma of previous decades. This trend, and its implication for critical development studies, will also be reviewed at some length in the pages that follow.[2] Finally, the demise of really-existing socialism has had an ambiguous effect on development debates. Whereas on the one hand this demise has shown that the socialist model shared many of the premises of conventional capitalist development, hence giving support to the idea of postdevelopment, on the other it has contributed to cementing the sense that "there is no alternative" and hence to weakening the debate on alternatives to development.

There have been, of course, many other important changes in the world economy, geopolitics, and global consciousness since the early 1990s, some of which have become more visible in the intervening years. The explosion of connectivity enabled by digital information and communication technologies—firmly established as a scholarly theme by Castells's trilogy on the "information society," published in the second half of the 1990s (see especially Castells 1996)—has become a mandated reference point for much development work, despite the fact that the majority of the world's peoples still lack access to such goods and services (see, e.g., Harcourt 1999). Of tremendous importance to the creation of a global consciousness has been the environmental crisis, finally brought to the limelight in national and world debates by the conferences on global climate change and scientific convergence around the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). As I will discuss below, the ecological crisis alone, if not taken seriously, has the potential to destabilize any and all presently existing development frameworks. The economic crisis that started in 2007 and caused the collapse of financial institutions and the housing bubble and the downturn in stock markets, largely in the North, had important global consequences in terms of slowing down economic activity, credit availability, and international trade. Many countries in the Global South saw a significant increase in poverty and unemployment and a resulting decline in economic growth (those countries in Latin America with progressive governments being a partial exception). Whereas for some critics the crisis spelled out the end of the financialization of capital,[3] institutions like the World Bank have engaged in debates to rethink globalization after the crisis, largely based on conventional strategies to boost export competitiveness, particularly for the case of Africa.[4] It is clear that the main international lending institutions do not have any new ideas for dealing with development issues after this crisis. The increase in religious fundamentalisms in many world regions, including the United States, should also be cited as among the most salient transformations; in some countries it involves resistance to post-9/11 policies and the rejection of Western-style modernity.

Chapter 5 of *Encountering Development,* originally published in 1995, deals substantially with peasants, women, and the environment. Much has changed since then regarding these three topics, and today there are other actors who were not given sufficient attention in the book, notably indigenous peoples and other ethnic groups, such as Afro-descendent populations. Even if peasants have ceased to be as central to development as they were in previous decades, there has recently been a rebirth of peasant and agrarian studies that include novel

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conceptualizations of rurality (e.g., avoiding the dichotomies rural/urban, traditional/modern); peasant identities (allowing for the influence of, say, transnational migrations, gender, and ethnicity); previously unstudied or understudied issues such as transgenic crops, conservation, and food sovereignty; and peasant social movements, well beyond the 1960s image of peasants as radical revolutionary subjects.[5] From being a special topic in development, as in the Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) discourses discussed in chapter 5, women have come to occupy a central place as subjects, objects, and conceptualizers of development. Even if most development work targeted toward women's groups continues to focus on important yet mainstream agendas such as empowerment within the economy, the intersection of women, gender, and development has been a rich site for critical debate and new ideas in development over the past decade.[6] The environmental arena has perhaps seen the most momentous changes in development, and some of these will be addressed below. Suffice it to say for now that development has become a central preoccupation in political ecology (e.g., Biersack and Greenberg 2006; Escobar 2008a) and vice versa—that is, that environmental questions have become ever more central to development, so that the study of "nature in the Global South" (Greenough and Tsing 2003) has come of age.

The visibility of indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities as development subjects, objects, and conceptualizers has also increased dramatically. These actors are at the cutting edge of critical development work in important ways, for instance, in terms of denouncing the irrationality of development and the incompatibility of many development projects with indigenous worldviews (e.g., Mander and Tauli-Corpuz 2006; Blaser, Feit, and McRae 2004), or of pointing at the limitations of Euro-modernity from indigenous perspectives (Blaser 2010). Questions of development, identity, territory, and autonomy have become important for the case of indigenous peoples (e.g., de la Cadena and Starn 2007; Blaser et al. 2010) and Afro-descendent groups, particularly in Latin America (Escobar 2008a, Oslender 2008, Asher 2009, French 2009). The experience of indigenous women in Latin America is providing the basis for a "decolonial feminism," in which critiques of the ethnocentrism of modernist feminist discourses are joined with analyses of patriarchal forms of exclusion harbored within appeals to tradition or cultural difference (e.g., Hernández 2008; Suárez Navaz and Hernández 2008; Hernández 2009; Lugones 2010; Bidaseca 2010; Escobar 2010a; see also Radcliffe, Laurie, and Andolina 2009 for a related feminist perspective on indigenous movements and development in the Andes).

An aspect of the transformation in the conditions of development over the past fifteen years, often unacknowledged although of utmost importance, is that the very categories and uses of knowledge—what and whose knowledge counts in development and for what purposes—have been subjected to increasing pressures from many sides. This affects social theory in general in that the cohort of those interested in the production of new theories has expanded well beyond the usual suspects in the (largely Northern) academies. Today a growing number of researchers, activists, and intellectuals outside of the academy are heeding the urge to provide alternative understandings of the world, including of development. In this sense, the complex conversations that are beginning to happen among many kinds of knowledge producers

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worldwide are in and of themselves a hopeful condition of development theory at present. This urge involves the need to transform not only the places and contents of theory, but its very form (Mignolo 2000; Osterweil 2005; Escobar 2008a). This trend is particularly acute in the field of social movement studies (and, as we shall see, in transition studies), where activists' own research and knowledge production are becoming central to understanding what movements are, why they mobilize, and what kinds of worlds they wish to bring forth. A number of emphases are emerging from anthropological and geographical approaches, including the blurring of the boundary between academic and activist worlds and knowledges, and a series of concepts and domains of inquiry such as network ethnography, mapping of knowledges, ethnography of identities and activist-figured worlds, activist, partisan, or militant research, and so forth.[7] Scholars in development studies have been somewhat attuned to the knowledge produced by project beneficiaries, although largely in the guise of "local knowledge"; however, they have yet to incorporate these newer insights significantly into their theory making and the design of interventions.

There is one final aspect of importance in the book I would like to mention before moving on: the relevance of the economic discourse to the entire development enterprise. This issue, to which chapter 3 is devoted, was barely mentioned in the many reviews of the book published between 1996 and the early 2000s; in fact, it was almost completely ignored. I see this absence of commentary less as a sign of the irrelevance of the subject matter than as an indication of the naturalized hegemony of a certain economic conception of the world—what in chapter 5 I call "tales of growth and capital," inherited by development economics from classical political economy, and elsewhere as "the Western Economy"—a coherent ensemble of systems of production, power, and signification that make up one of the most fundamental pillars of modernity (Escobar 2005). It might well be the case that development economics is nearly dead, and that neoliberal economics has been shaken to the core by the financial crisis, but the economic imaginary in terms of individuals transacting in markets, production, growth, capital, progress, scarcity, and consumption goes on unhindered. This most naturalized discourse undermines many, if not most, of the current proposals for sustainability and for moving to a post-carbon age. The denaturalization of the economy is an area of active critical work, for instance, in the imagination of diverse economies and social and solidarity economies beyond the capitalistic one or proposals for *decroissance* (de-growth). Moreover, it can be discerned that at the grassroots level, as Esteva provocatively put it, "those marginalized by the economic society in the development era are increasingly dedicated to marginalizing the economy" (2009, 20).[8]

II. Assessing Postdevelopment

The idea of postdevelopment, with which the 1995 edition of this book ended (see also Escobar 1992; Rahnema and Bawtree 1997), proved to be controversial, and it is important to assess its validity at present. Generally speaking, "postdevelopment" arose from a poststructuralist and postcolonial critique, that is, an analysis of development as a set of

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discourses and practices that had profound impact on how Asia, Africa, and Latin America came to be seen as "underdeveloped" and treated as such. In this context, postdevelopment was meant to designate at least three interrelated things: first, the need to decenter development; that is, to displace it from its centrality in representations and discussions about conditions in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. A corollary of this first goal was to open up the discursive space to other ways of describing those conditions, less mediated by the premises and experiences of "development." Second, in displacing development's centrality from the discursive imaginary, postdevelopment suggested that it was indeed possible to think about the end of development. In other words, it identified alternatives *to* development, rather than development alternatives, as a concrete possibility. Third, postdevelopment emphasized the importance of transforming the "political economy of truth," that is, development's order of expert knowledge and power. To this end, it proposed that the more useful ideas about alternatives could be gleaned from the knowledge and practices of social movements.

Are these assertions still valid today? We have already seen how certain world transformations have made talk of postdevelopment ambiguous. On the one hand, the consolidation of neoliberalism in many of the world's regions in the 1990s made the need for critiques more pressing, as did the growing awareness of the social and ecological costs of China's "market socialism" and of India's decision to open to world markets. On the other hand, however, the demise of socialism in Eastern Europe and, paradoxically, the coming to power of progressive regimes in South America conveyed the sense that the need for development was greater than ever. To question development in this context becomes uncomfortable, although as we will see some social movements are doing exactly that, summoning the notion of postdevelopment in their critiques. Suffice it to say for now that the current state of things, despite the ambiguities noted, still makes valid the critiques of development and the idea of imagining a postdevelopment era. It is important to ask, nevertheless, whether the idea is valid as it was enunciated in the early 1990s, or whether it needs reformulation. I will try to give an answer to this question at the end of this section and once again at the end of Part IV. Let me examine briefly for now some responses to postdevelopment.

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Responses to Postdevelopment

In its most succinct formulation, postdevelopment was meant to convey the sense of an era in which development would no longer be a central organizing principle of social life. This did not mean that postdevelopment was seen as a new historical period to which its proponents believed we had arrived, even if many critics saw it in this light. Be that as it may, a rich debate ensued that, paradoxically, contributed to cementing a "postdevelopment" position by lumping together a handful of authors and books that the critics saw as sharing, broadly, the same perspective.[9] The analysis and forms of advocacy associated with postdevelopment became the object of poignant critiques and rebuttal in the second half of the 1990s. There were three main objections to the postdevelopment proposal: First, with their focus on

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discourse, the postdevelopment proponents overlooked poverty and capitalism, which are the real problems of development. Second, they presented an essentialized view of development, while in reality there are vast differences among development strategies and institutions, and they failed to notice the contestation of development on the ground. Third, they romanticized local traditions and movements, ignoring that the local is also embedded in power relations. Predictably, proponents of postdevelopment responded to their critics, in turn, by suggesting that the critiques, although sensible and useful in many ways, were themselves problematic.

To the first set of critiques, poststructuralist postdevelopment proponents responded by saying that this argument amounts to a naïve defense of the real. In other words, critics of postdevelopment argued that because of their focus on discourse and culture, the poststructuralists failed to see the reality of poverty, capitalism, and the like. For the poststructuralists, this argument had limited validity, because it rested on the (Marxist or liberal) assumption that discourse is not material, failing to see that modernity and capitalism are simultaneously systems of discourse and practice. The second criticism was problematic to postdevelopment authors on epistemological grounds. The critics of postdevelopment said something like: "You (postdevelopment advocates) represented development as homogenous while it is actually diverse. Development is heterogeneous, contested, impure, hybrid." In response, the postdevelopment theorists acknowledged the validity of this criticism; however, they pointed out that their project was a different one—that of analyzing the overall discursive fact, not how that fact might have been contested and hybridized on the ground. They saw themselves less as "trying to get it right," under the mandate of an epistemological realism that poststructuralism complicates, than as political intellectuals constructing an object of critique for debate and action. Finally, the critics of postdevelopment chastised its proponents by saying that they romanticize the local and the grassroots. For the poststructuralists and cultural critics, this commentary was a reflection of the chronic realism of many scholars that invariably labels as romantic any radical critique of the West or any defense of the local. In addition, poststructuralist authors pointed out that the realist notion of social change fails to unpack its own views of the material, livelihood, needs, and the like (Escobar 2000, 2007; Zai 2007; McGregor 2009).

As the first decade of the new century unfolded, the panorama of development theory gave way to a wide array of positions and interparadigmatic dialogue and convergences (Simon 2007). This could be seen as a positive result of the sometimes acrimonious debates of the 1990s. There is a greater willingness on the part of many authors to constructively adopt elements from various trends and paradigms. This is particularly the case around a series of questions, including the contestation of development, a new rapprochement between political economy and cultural analysis on questions of development and the economy, the examination of the relation between development and modernity, and new ethnographic approaches to development policy and practice (below). These trends are producing a new understanding of how development works and how it is transformed.

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The New Ethnography of Development

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Recent ethnographic approaches to the study of development projects have received particular attention in development debates. These approaches suggest that ethnographic research could be used to shed new understanding on how policy works, and that this understanding could be utilized to link constructively social policy, academic politics, and the aspirations of the poor. As the leading advocate of this approach put it,

> Here anthropology's business is to focus on the social relations underpinning thought work; to show how development's traveling rationalities are never free from social contexts, how they begin in social relations, in institutions and expert communities, travel with undisclosed baggage, get unraveled as they are unpacked into other social/institutional worlds—perhaps through the interest of local collaborators, official counterparts, or brokers—and are recolonized by politics in ways that generate complex and unintended effects. (Mosse 2008, 120, 121)

These investigations entail a sort of hyperethnography that allows the ethnographer to see the entire development network, investigating in depth the main sites with their respective actors, cultural backgrounds, and practical appropriation of the interventions by local groups. The result, it is argued, should give theorists and practitioners a more nuanced account of how development operates as a multiscale process that is constantly transformed and contested. The hope is that, given the reality of development, the critical ethnographer could illuminate the conditions for more successful projects, perhaps even a more effective popular appropriation of the projects.[10]

By examining more fully the actor-networks that make up development projects, this trend has contributed to de-essentializing development and hence, indirectly, to theorizing postdevelopment. In doing so, however, these approaches have solved some problems but created new puzzles. Question of agency have become both pointed and muddled (given that everything has agency, including objects such as texts, how does one differentiate among various kinds of agency?); similarly with the proliferation of connectivity (everything is connected to everything, yet how are things variously or differently connected? What kinds of connections are politically powerful, or compromised?); issues of difference, in addition, are often bracketed, in the sense that there is no clear account of what happens to what is genuinely emergent, or to those experiences that cannot be read with the categories of the present, including those of the modern social sciences.[11] In the absence of dealing with these questions effectively, it seems to me, some of the positions taken by the recent ethnographies of development and the state run the risk of falling into what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) has called a "hermeneutics of cynicism," since nothing that any actor does can ever amount to a significant challenge to what exists or produce a significantly different thought. Moreover, it has been argued, these works bracket serious commitments to poor people's desires and aspirations for development (de Vries 2008). It is indeed the case that the ethnographies of development have done much to bring into visibility the transnational expert communities whose training, interests, tastes, and economic and political goals coincide enough to keep the development actor-networks going, and often well oiled. Yet this awareness needs to be coupled with a renewed urge for a critique of the fact that "at each stage, specialists in new fields are called in to create their own roles in the story of the global application of expertise" (Lohmann 2006, 150). These transnationalized middle-class experts, from both the Global

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North and the Global South, disseminate a normalized rationality and common sense with significant cultural and political consequences.

There are other lines of response to the new ethnographies arising from political economy and poststructuralist perspectives. A shared feature of these works is a clearer emphasis on power and domination than that found in many of the network approaches. By blending critical management and postdevelopment studies, for instance, a group of authors argues that the applications of management ideas in development deploy new policy practices, as the ethnography trend just examined rightly underscores, but that this does not mean that these practices operate less as instruments of domination (Dar and Cooke 2008). A related view finds that the shift in aid discourse toward "good governance," "partnership," and "ownership" not only gives expression "to the deep-seated will to civilize, it reaffirms sacred values of the aid domain: modernity, rationality and political neutrality" (Gould 2005, 69). To paraphrase: scratch at a management scheme, and you'll find a power and cultural struggle, even if couched in terms of rational action. As Rojas and Kindornay concluded in their analysis of the politics of governing development,

> Under the development global design, an inability to improve has necessitated the constant repackaging of prescriptions and governing techniques in an attempt to salvage mainstream policies and practices. Despite critiques from below and over 50 years of minor successes and numerous failures, mainstream development continues to be formulated through new and renewed language and practice; new paradigms and fads emerge, however, development still ultimately embodies a global imaginary of modernization. (forthcoming, 13)

Drawing on postcolonial theory, Sinha (2008) locates development schemes within transnational regimes in ascension, for the case of India, since the early twentieth century, linking together bourgeois ethicopolitical projects, state power, and modern rationality into a complex geoculture of development in which subalternity itself is also redefined. This view resonates with Bebbington's (2004) claim that development regimes, including NGOs, should be seen as contributing to the creation of uneven geographies of poverty and livelihoods. One of the most eloquent proofs of such uneven geography is the case of the wholesale dismantling of an ancient system of irrigation and rice cultivation in Bali in the name of modern development, starting with the 1960s Green Revolution. Conducted from the perspective of complex adaptive systems, this ethnographic investigation constitutes a compelling proof of the near-destruction of a system that had achieved a functional "perfect order" through centuries of self-organization. This destruction resulted in a profound social and environmental crisis for an entire population (Lansing 2006). Studies such as this one contribute to showing the limitations of the hyperethnographies of development discussed above.

Although network approaches diversify questions of agency, their drawback is often the impossibility to imagine radical practical implications. This risk is held at bay by works that carry out the research from the perspective of, and often in collaboration with, particular constituencies. These approaches might be seen as more conventional in the truth games of the academy, but this does not mean that the analyses are less nuanced; on the contrary, they gain in depth and political positioning. In examining the local redefinitions of development by indigenous groups in Southwest Colombia, for instance, Gow (2008) argues that such groups

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produce a sort of "counter-development" through which, say, planning and education and health projects are redeployed toward a distinct cultural and political project in an attempt to create an indigenous modernity where the concerns for cultural difference—and the autonomy to change culture—are coupled with those of social justice. Arce and Long (2000) have also usefully outlined a project of pluralizing modernity by focusing on the counter-work performed on development by local groups. Counter-work may de-essentialize Western products of their superior power, or contribute to empowering a group's self-definition, even as it changes. Counter-work and counterdevelopment can thus be seen as leading to forms of alternative development, but also as fostering postdevelopment outlooks. This does not mean denying the desires and hopes for development and modernity that many people worldwide have adopted as a result of their encounter with development and modernity. As de Vries (2007) has pointed out, these desires are real, even if banalized and rendered ever more elusive by development projects. They are ignored by most critiques, poststructuralist included, and need to be tackled head-on in any critical development studies approach (de Vries 2007; see also Gow 2008).

One way out of this apparent impasse is to investigate the ways in which, say, indigenous peoples stand "in the way of development"—how they craft "life projects" that respond as much to modern/global processes as to long-standing place-based cultural logics. While life projects may strategically incorporate opportunities offered by development, they thwart development's universalizing pretensions and may contribute to non-hegemonic struggles (Blaser 2004). This dynamic is found at play in the field of energy development in some Native nations in North America, where communities steer their way between conventional and emergent technologies in ways that involve important rethinking of the cultural politics of energy development (Powell 2010). Again, these works do not posit a straightforward position vis-à-vis development. Ascertaining what locals mean by "development" is always a complex question. This question is tackled by Medeiros (2005) within the Latin American framework of the coloniality of power and knowledge. Local expressions of the desire for development, as Medeiros shows in her ethnographic analysis of rural development projects in the Bolivian highlands funded by the German Development Agency (GTZ), need to be seen against the background of the complex history of several hundred years of discrimination, including the experience of promises made and never fulfilled since independence. In the absence of this analysis, and despite good intentions, development projects often end up reproducing old power/knowledge asymmetries. As Medeiros shows, indigenous peasants have their own situated understanding of development, which articulates their historical experience of modernity and coloniality. The local notion of development includes the acquisition of those tools of dominant knowledge systems that might empower them to implement a viable future. Local talk about development is not only about development per se, but about history and culture—about the State, citizenship, difference, knowledge, and exploitation. It is about the communities' positions within the modern colonial world system.[12] These dynamics are often revealed in works located at the intersection of transnational development networks and social movement struggles, particularly in the contemporary Andes where issues of history, culture, justice, and difference, and the never-too-simple interconnections among them all, are

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heightened (e.g., Andolina, Laurie, and Radcliffe 2009).

What, then, can we say about the notion of postdevelopment after this perhaps too hasty and partial review of academic trends? A satisfactory answer to this question will have to await this chapter's final section. There are a few issues that can be highlighted for now, however, concerning the notion's usefulness at present. I believe that the notion's core is still valid—that is, the need to decenter development as a social descriptor, the questioning of development's knowledge practices, and postdevelopment's embedded critique of the ideas of growth, progress, and modernity. However, these contents have been qualified and enriched by academic debates over the past fifteen years. The ethnographies of development have produced a more detailed view of how the development apparatus operates. Works focusing on novel actors (e.g., indigenous peoples, the environment) have thrust into relief how these actors challenge developmentalist truth regimes. To the overall fact of domination that the discursive critique of the 1990s emphasized, political economy and poststructuralist analyses have added a more complex understanding of how domination works through particular practices of capitalism and the State.

That said, one of the main implications of postdevelopment remains seemingly intractable: the notion of alternatives *to* development. Not only does the development project go on, it seems to have become stronger since the mid-1990s. As Gustavo Esteva, one of the most lucid and persistent critics of development, put it in his most recent analysis, "development failed as a socio-economic endeavor, but the development discourse still contaminates social reality. The word remains at the center of a powerful but fragile semantic constellation" (2009, 1). Yet a series of crises, discourses, and concrete cultural-political challenges would seem to play in favor of keeping the imaginary of alternatives to development alive. To this possibility I dedicate the rest of this chapter.

III. Discourses of Transition: Emerging Trends

Arguments about the need for a profound, epochal transition are a sign of the times; they reflect the depth of the contemporary crises. To be sure, talk of crisis and transitions have a long genealogy in the West, whether in the guise of "civilizational crisis," transitions to and from capitalism, apocalyptic visions of the end of the world, sudden religious or technological transformations, or science fiction narratives. This is not the place to analyze this genealogy;[13] however, it seems to me that it is possible to argue that "transition discourses" (TDs) are emerging today with particular richness, diversity, and intensity to the point that a veritable field of "transition studies" can be posited as an emergent scholarly-political domain. Transition studies and transition activism have come of age. Notably, as even a cursory mapping of TDs would suggest, those writing on the subject are not limited to the academy; in fact, the most visionary TD thinkers are located outside of it, even if in most cases they engage with critical currents in the academy. TDs are emerging from a multiplicity of sites, principally social movements worldwide, from some civil society NGOs, from some emerging scientific paradigms, and from intellectuals with significant connections to environmental and cultural

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struggles. TDs are prominent in several fields, including those of culture, ecology, religion and spirituality, alternative science (e.g., living systems and complexity), political economy, and new digital and biological technologies. Only the first three will be touched upon in what follows. But first a general observation about the concept of transition is in order.

As Mezzadra has pointed out recently, "the problem of transition re-emerges in each historical moment when the conditions of translation have to be established anew" (2007, 4). What he means by translation is the process by which different, often contrasting, cultural-historical experiences are rendered mutually intelligible and commensurable; this has happened in recent history through the imposition of the cultural codes of capitalist modernity on an increasingly global scale. This process, as he goes on to suggest, is no longer acceptable; rather, a new type of heterolingual translation, in which new commonalties are built precisely out of incommensurable differences, is needed. As I will argue here, there are some radical differences in the current wave of TDs when compared with those of the most recent past. Two of these differences, underscored by Santos (2007), are that the transition/translation process cannot be led by a general theory; in fact, the only general theory possible, as he puts it to the dismay of much Left theorizing, is the impossibility of any general theory. The second, and related, aspect is that today more clearly than ever translation involves complex epistemological processes—intercultural and interepistemic—that require in turn a type of cognitive justice that has not been recognized. A third element insinuates itself, and this is that transition/translation entails multiple ontologies; in other words, when radically envisioned, transition involves moving from the modern understanding of the world as universe to the world as "pluriverse" (without pre-existing universals) or, as I shall put it below, from a paradigm of "globalization" to one of "planetarization." If the former privileges economic and cultural integration and homogenization under a set of (Eurocentric) universal principles, the latter advocates for communicability among a multiplicity of cultural worlds on the grounds of shared ecological and political understandings (Santos 2007). Succinctly, transition towards the pluriverse calls for an expanded concept of translation that involves ontological and epistemic dimensions.

A hallmark of contemporary TDs is the fact that they posit a radical cultural and institutional transformation—indeed, *a transition to an altogether different world*. This is variously conceptualized in terms of a paradigm shift (e.g., the Great Transition Initiative (GTI); see Raskin et al. 2002), a change of civilizational model (e.g., Shiva, 2008; Latin American indigenous movements, see below), the emergence of a new order, a quantum shift (Laszlo 2008), the rise of a new, holistic culture, or even the coming of an entirely new era beyond the modern dualist (e.g., Macy 2007; Goodwin 2007), reductionist (e.g., Kauffman 2008), and economic (e.g., Schafer 2008) age. This change is often seen as impending or as already happening, although most TDs warn that the results are by no means guaranteed. Let us listen to a few statements on the transition:

> The global transition has begun—a planetary society will take shape over the coming decades. But its outcome is in question. . . . Depending on how environmental and social conflicts are resolved, global development can branch into dramatically different pathways. On the dark side, it is all too easy to envision a dismal future of impoverished people, cultures and nature. Indeed, to many, this ominous possibility seems the most likely. But it is *not* inevitable. Humanity has

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> the power to foresee, to choose and to act. While it may seem improbable, a transition to a future of enriched lives, human solidarity and a healthy planet is possible. (Raskin et al. 2002, ix)

> Life on our planet is in trouble. It is hard to go anywhere without being confronted by the wounding of our world, the tearing of the very fabric of life. . . . Our planet is sending us signals of distress that are so continual now they seem almost normal. . . . These are warning signals that we live in a world that can end, at least as a home of conscious life. This is not to say that it *will* end, but it *can* end. That very possibility changes everything for us. . . . This is happening now in ways that converge to bring into question the very foundation and direction of our civilization. A global revolution is occurring. . . . Many are calling it the Great Turning. (Macy 2007, 17, 140)

> If we accept the death of our own human bodily form, we can perhaps begin to accept the eventual death of our own civilization. . . . Global warming is an early symptom of the death of our current civilization. . . . We can slow this process by stopping [overconsumption] and being mindful, but the only way to do this is to accept the eventual death of this civilization. (Hanh 2008, 57)

Although what these authors mean by civilization is not necessarily the same, these statements broadly refer to the cultural model that has prevailed in the West over the past centuries: its "industrial growth" model (Macy), a way of life centered on consumption (Hanh), with its reigning ideologies of materialism, market capitalism, and progress (GTI). And whereas it is striking to find a revered Buddhist teacher (Thich Nhat Hanh) calling on us to meditate on the death of the current civilization, even many of the most secular visions emphasize a deep transformation of values. Indeed, the most imaginative TDs link together aspects of reality that have remained separate in previous imaginings of social transformation: ontological, cultural, politicoeconomic, ecological, and spiritual. These are brought together by a profound concern with human suffering and with the fate of life itself. By "life" I mean the unending ensemble of forms and entities that make up the pluriverse—from the biophysical to the human to the supernatural—and the processes by which they come into being. This clearly goes beyond a concern with nature, even if most TDs are traversed by ecological issues; it could not be otherwise, given that they are triggered by, and respond to, the interrelated crises of energy, food, climate, and poverty.

Common to many transitions discourses, and perhaps best exemplified by the GTI, is that humanity is at a branching point and entering a planetary phase of civilization as a result of the accelerating expansion of the modern era of the past few decades; a global system is taking shape with fundamental differences from previous historical phases. The character of the transition will depend on which worldview prevails. The key is to anticipate unfolding crises, envision alternative futures, and make appropriate choices. The GTI distinguishes among three worldviews or mindsets: evolutionary, catastrophic, and transformational, with their corresponding global scenarios: conventional worlds, barbarization, and the Great Transition (GT).[14] Only the latter promises lasting solutions to the sustainability challenges, but it requires fundamental changes in values as well as novel socioeconomic and institutional arrangements. The GT paradigm redefines progress in terms of nonmaterial human fulfillment. It highlights interconnectedness and envisions a dematerialized production, the decoupling of well-being from consumption, and the cultivation of new values (e.g., solidarity, ethics, community, meaning). It seeks to bring about an era of renewable energy, and so forth. The GT involves, above all, a values-led shift toward an alternative global vision, one that replaces "industrial

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capitalism" with a "civilizing globalization."

Thomas Berry's notion of The Great Work—a transition "from the period when humans were a disruptive force on the planet Earth to the period when humans become present to the planet in a manner that is mutually enhancing" (1999, 11)—has been influential in TDs. Berry calls the new era Ecozoic.[15] For Berry, "the deepest cause of the present devastation is found in the mode of consciousness that has established a radical discontinuity between the humans and other modes of being and the bestowal of all rights on the humans" (4). The radical discontinuity between the human and the nonhuman domains is at the basis of many of the critiques. Along with the idea of a separate self (the "individual" of liberal theory, separate from community), this discontinuity is seen as the most central feature of modern ontology. The bridging of these two divides is posited as crucial to healing society and the planet by secular and religious visions alike—whether it is through the notions of interconnectedness and interdependencies of ecology, the idea of interbeing and dependent co-arising of all beings of Buddhism, or the frameworks based on self-organization and complexity for which what matters is the understanding of co-emergent systems of relations. To the abovementioned divides a third one is often added, that between the human and spiritual domains, or between faith and reason, as it is explained, tellingly, by some systems and complexity scientists (e.g., Laszlo 2008; Kauffman 2008). In emphasizing a view of the Earth as a living system where all beings are deeply interconnected, Macy (2007; Macy and Brown 1998) speaks of a cognitive and spiritual revolution that involves the disappearance of the modern self and its replacement with an ecological, nondualist self that reconnects with all beings and recovers a sense of evolutionary time, effaced by the linear time of capitalist modernity; only in this way can we re-learn to be "in league with the beings of the future" (Macy 2007, 191), "heal our fragmented culture" (Goodwin 2007), and move forward along transition paths.

Many TDs are keyed in to the need to move to post-carbon or post–fossil fuel economies. Vandana Shiva has brought this point home with special insight and force (see especially 2005, 2008). For Shiva, the key to the transition "from oil to soil"—from a mechanical-industrial paradigm centered on globalized markets to a people- and planet-centered one, which she calls "Earth democracy"—lies in strategies of relocalization, that is, the construction of decentralized, biodiversity-based organic food and energy systems that operate on the basis of grassroots democracy, place-based knowledge, local economies, and the preservation of soils and ecological integrity. TDs of this kind exhibit an acute consciousness of the rights of communities to their territories and resources, of the tremendously uneven patterns of global consumption, environmental impact, and structures of exploitation maintained by capitalism, and of the concomitant need for social and environmental justice. This is why their insistence on "the imperative that we change the way we live" if we want to "move beyond oil" is coupled with a view of the "need to reinvent society, technology, and economy" (Shiva 2008, 1). In other words, critiques of capitalism, cultural change (sometimes including spirituality), and ecology are systematically connected to each other in the various diagnoses of the problem and possible ways forward (see also, e.g., Sachs and Santarius 2007; Korten 2006; Santos 2007; Hathaway and Boff 2009; Mooney, ETC Group, and What Next Project 2006; Schafer

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2008). The proposed “ecology of transformation” (Hathaway and Boff 2009) is seen as the route to counteract the ravages of global capitalism and for constructing sustainable communities. In Hathaway and Boff’s vision, the main components of the strategy are ecological justice, biological and cultural diversity, bioregionalism, rootedness in place, self-reliance and openness, participatory democracy, and cooperative self-organization. This ecology supposes a “cosmology of liberation” that is attuned to a kind of spirituality appropriate to an Ecozoic era.

One of the most concrete proposals for a transition to a post–fossil fuel society that responds adequately to peak oil and climate change is the transition approach devised for towns and communities to engage in their own transition discourses, scenarios, and practices—what is referred to as the “transition town initiative” (TTI; see Hopkins 2008; Chamberlin 2009). This compelling vision includes both the outline of a long-term post-peak oil scenario and a primer for towns and communities to move along the transition timeline. Once again, the relocalization of food, energy, and decision-making are crucial elements of the TTI. The TTI also contemplates the reinvigoration of communities so that they become more localized and self-reliant, creating lower energy infrastructures (“energy descent” or “powerdown”), and, very importantly, developing tools and processes for rebuilding the resilience of ecosystems and communities eroded by centuries of delocalized, expert-driven economic and political systems. Resilience is actually the Transition approach’s alternative to conventional notions of sustainability; it requires seeding communities with diversity, increasing reliance on social and ecological self-organization, strengthening the capability to produce locally what can be produced locally, and so forth. As currently stated, however, the TTI is closer to alternative development than to alternatives to development. There is thus an important bridge that needs to be built between the TTI vision and postdevelopment.[16]

Taken together, these works could be said to envision a transition ecology; this can be considered a subfield of the broader field of transition studies with which this section started. This transition ecology posits a profound cultural, economic, scientific, and political transformation of dominant institutions and practices—a tall order indeed. In emphasizing relocalization and the rebuilding of local communities, it goes directly against most globalization discourses and forces; it bets on the fact that “small” is not only possible but perhaps inevitable (e.g., Hopkins 2008, 68–77; Estill 2008). By making visible the damaging effects of the cultural institutions of the individual and the market, the transition ecology directs our attention to the need to reconstruct identity and economy, often in tandem with those communities in which the regimes of the individual and the market have not yet taken a complete hold on socionatural life. They advocate for a diverse economy that has a strong basis on communities, even if of course not bound to the local (Gibson-Graham 2006). The focus of many TDs on spirituality is a reminder of the systemic exclusion of this important area from our secular academies. In emphasizing the continuity between nature and culture, finally, TDs bring to the fore one of the crucial imperatives of our time: the need to reconnect with each other and with the nonhuman world. This latter is also a call for the ascendancy of the pluriverse, as we shall see in the next section.[17]

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IV. AMÉRICA LATINA: TOWARD A PLURIVERSE?

Some Latin American movement and intellectual debates adumbrate feasible steps for moving away from the "civilizational model" of modernization and globalized development.[18] In gathering after gathering of indigenous peoples, Afro-descendants, women, and peasants, the crisis of the Western *modelo civilizatorio* is invoked as the single most important cause of the current global/energy/climate and poverty crisis. A shift to a new cultural and economic paradigm is recognized both as needed and as actively under construction. [19] Although the emphasis on a transition at the level of the entire model of society is strongest among some indigenous movements, it is also found, for instance, in agro-ecological networks for which only a shift toward localized, agro-ecological food production systems can lead us out of the climate and food crises; the agro-ecological proposals resonate with Shiva's and are echoed partially by the global network Via Campesina, centered on food sovereignty based on peasant-based agriculture. The meaning of transition and postdevelopment can be ascertained clearly in the most recent debates on the definition of development and the rights of nature taking place in countries like Ecuador and Bolivia; a new wave of movements and struggles in these countries and elsewhere in the continent are taking place that can be interpreted in terms of two interrelated processes, namely, the activation of relational ontologies and a redefinition of political autonomy. While these trends are contradictory and deeply contested, they point toward the relevance of postdevelopment and make tangible the notion of postliberal social orders.

The Ecuadorian and Bolivian constitutions, issued in 2008, have garnered well-deserved international attention because of their pioneering treatments of development and, in the Ecuadorian case, of the rights of nature. It should be emphasized that these constitutions are the result of complex social, cultural and political struggles that became acute over the past decade. The constitutions introduced a novel notion of development centered on the concept of *sumak kawsay* (in Quechua), *suma qamaña* (in Aymara), and *buen vivir* (in Spanish), or "living well." As Alberto Acosta, one of the foremost architects of the Ecuadorian constitution states, the *sumak kawsay* entails a conceptual rupture with the conceptions of development of the previous six decades. More than a constitutional declaration, "the *Buen Vivir* constitutes an opportunity to construct collectively a new development regime" (2009, 6). Although a number of sources are cited as the basis for this conception—including critical analyses of development and postdevelopment, as well as feminist, ecological, and human development frameworks—the larger share of the credit goes to indigenous organizations. For Catherine Walsh, "the integral vision and the basic condition of the Buen Vivir have been at the basis of the cosmovisions, life philosophies and practices of the peoples of *Abya Yala* and the descendants of the African diaspora for centuries; they are now re-apprehended as guides for the re-founding of the Bolivian and Ecuadorian state and society" (2009, 5). It can indeed be said that *sumak kawsay* and *suma qamaña* stem "from the social periphery of the global periphery," as Spanish development critic José María Tortosa put it (cited in Acosta 2010). For Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2010), the Buen Vivir constitutes a new horizon of

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historical meaning, emerging from the long history of indigenous resistance against the Eurocentric modern/colonial world system.

Very succinctly, and following Acosta,[20] the Buen Vivir (BV) grew out of several decades of indigenous struggles as they articulated with manifold social change agendas by peasants, Afro-descendants, environmentalists, students, women, and youth. Crystallized in ninety-nine articles of the 2008 Ecuadorian constitution (out of 444), the BV "presents itself as an opportunity for the collective construction of a new form of living" (Acosta 2010, 7). Rather than as an isolated intervention, the BV should be seen in the context of a panoply of pioneering constitutional innovations, including the rethinking of the State in terms of plurinationality—and of society in terms of interculturality, an expanded and integral notion of rights (including rights to nature, below), and a reformed development model, the goal of which is precisely the realization of BV. All of these innovations, in addition, should be seen as multicultural and multi-epistemic and in terms of deeply negotiated and often contradictory political construction processes. It is clear, however, that the BV constitutes a challenge to long-standing notions of development.

Indigenous ontologies or "cosmovisions" do not entail a linear notion of development, nor a state of "underdevelopment" to be overcome, neither are they based on "scarcity" or the primacy of material goods. Echoing these tenets, the BV purports to introduce a different philosophy of life into the vision of society. This makes possible an ethics of development that subordinates economic objectives to ecological criteria, human dignity, and social justice. Development as Buen Vivir seeks to articulate economics, environment, society, and culture in new ways, calling for mixed social and solidarity economies; it introduces issues of social and intergenerational justice as spaces for development principles; acknowledges cultural and gender differences, positioning interculturality as a guiding principle; and enables new political-economic emphases, such as food sovereignty, the control of natural resources, and a human right to water. It would be a mistake, however, to see the BV as a purely Andean cultural-political project, a point that Acosta (2010) adamantly argues. As already mentioned, the BV is also influenced by critical currents within Western thought; conversely, it aims to influence global debates. That said, there is ample recognition that indigenous and Afro-descendent knowledges have been subjected to long-standing processes of marginalization, or what in some current Latin American perspectives is referred to as "coloniality." The BV, in this way, seeks to reverse the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being that has characterized the modern/colonial world system since the Conquest (Quijano 2010). In some debates in the Andean countries, this is referred to as "epistemic decolonization."

Many of the arguments about the BV can also be made regarding another prominent idea of the Constitution, that of the rights of nature; in fact, the two aspects are closely interrelated. For Uruguayan social ecologist Eduardo Gudynas (2009a, 2009b), the rights of nature, or the *Pachamama*, recognized in the new Ecuadorian constitution, represent an unprecedented "bio-centric turn" away from the anthropocentrism of modernity. For Gudynas, this move resonates as much with the cosmovisions of ethnic groups as with the principles of ecology. To endow nature with rights means to shift from a conception of nature as object to be exploited to one in

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which nature is seen as subject; indeed, in this conception the idea of rights of nature is intimately linked with humans' right to exist. This aspect of the Constitution seeks to counteract head-on a chief ontological assumption of the modern/colonial capitalist system, which is at the basis of the systematic destruction of biophysical existence, namely, the separation between humans and nonhumans. It also implies an expanded ecological notion of the self which, unlike the liberal notion, sees the self as deeply interconnected with all other living beings and, ultimately, with the planet as a whole. For Gudynas, this amounts to a sort of "meta-ecological citizenship," a plural kind of citizenship involving cultural and ecological dimensions and which requires of both environmental justice and ecological justice for the protection of people and nature, respectively.[21] In this way, the biocentric turn in the Constitution represents a concrete example of the civilizational transformation imagined by the transition discourses discussed earlier.

The recognition of the rights of nature is closely related to the last aspect of the Latin American transformations I want to discuss, albeit all too briefly; this is the notion and practice of relationality.[22] There is an interesting convergence among certain philosophical, biological, and indigenous peoples' narratives in asserting that life entails the creation of form (difference, morphogenesis) out of the dynamics of matter and energy.[23] In these views, the world is a pluriverse, ceaselessly in movement, an ever-changing web of interrelations involving humans and non-humans. It is important to point out, however, that the pluriverse gives rise to partial coherence and stability of given practices and structures through processes that have a lot do with meanings and power; in this way it can be seen in terms of a multiplicity of worlds. With the modern ontology, as has already been suggested, certain constructs and practices became prominent. These ontological assumptions include the primacy of humans over nonhumans (the separation of nature and culture) and of some humans over others (the colonial divide between the West/modern and the Rest/nonmodern); the separation of the autonomous individual from the community; the belief in objective knowledge, reason, and science as the only valid modes of knowing; and the cultural construction of "the economy" as an independent realm of social life, with "the market" as a self-regulating entity. The worlds and knowledges constructed on the basis of these ontological commitments became a "universe." This universe has acquired certain coherence in socionatural forms such as capitalism, the State, the individual, industrial agriculture, macrodevelopment projects, and so forth.[24]

It is precisely this set of assumptions that discussions about BV and rights of nature unsettle. Although I cannot discuss this point here at length, the unsettling of modern constructs points to the existence of nonliberal or post liberal social orders;[25] these are worlds that go beyond the foundational liberal notions of the individual, private property, and representative democracy. Stated in anthropological and philosophical terms, these nonliberal worlds are place-based and can be characterized as instances of relational worldviews or ontologies. Relational ontologies are those that eschew the divisions between nature and culture, between individual and community, and between us and them that are central to the modern ontology. This is to say that some of the struggles in Ecuador and Bolivia (and in other parts of the continent, including

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struggles for autonomy in Chiapas and Oaxaca, as well as indigenous and Afro struggles and some peasant struggles in Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, and other countries) can be read as *ontological struggles;* they have the potential to denaturalize the hegemonic dualisms on which the liberal order is founded (Blaser 2010; de la Cadena 2010; Escobar 2010a; Povinelli 2001). The universal and homolingual thrust of modernity dictates that it should attempt to tame those different worlds, that is, to efface the pluriverse. Bringing the pluriverse into visibility by focusing on ontological conflicts—that is, conflicts that arise from the unequal encounter between worlds, as in so many conflicts involving resource exploitation today—can be said to constitute a particular field of study, which Blaser refers to as political ontology (Blaser 2010).[26]

The emergence of relational ontologies challenges the epistemic foundation of modern politics. The identification of nature with the *Pachamama,* and the fact that it is endowed with "rights," goes beyond environmental political correctness, given that the Pachamama cannot be easily fitted into the philosophical structure of a modern constitution, within which nature is seen as an inert object for humans to appropriate. Its inclusion in the Constitution thus contributes to disrupt the modern political and epistemic space because it occurs outside such space (de la Cadena 2010). Something similar can be said of the notion of Buen Vivir. Both notions are based on ontological assumptions in which all beings exist always in relation and never as "objects" or individuals. At stake in many cultural-political mobilizations in Latin America at present, in this way, is the political activation of relational ontologies; these mobilizations thus refer to *a different way of imagining life,* to another mode of existence (Quijano 2010). They point toward the pluriverse; in the successful formula of the Zapatista, the pluriverse can be described as "a world where many worlds fit." More abstractly perhaps, the pluriverse signals struggles for bringing about "worlds and knowledges otherwise"—that is, worlds and knowledges constructed on the basis of different ontological commitments, epistemic configurations, and practices of being, knowing, and doing.

The notions of nonliberal and noncapitalist practices are actively being developed in Latin America, particularly in relation to both rural and urban forms of popular mobilization in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Southwest Colombia.[27] These are not just theoretical notions but the outcome of grounded political analyses, particularly in terms of the development of forms of *autonomía* that involve nonstate forms of power stemming from communal cultural, economic, and political practices (Esteva 1997, 2005, 2006; Patzi 2004; Mamani 2005, 2006; Zibechi 2006; Gutiérrez 2008). In some cases, such as the Zapatista communities of Chiapas or the indigenous communities in Oaxaca, contemporary autonomous forms of communal government are seen as rooted in several centuries of indigenous resistance. In other cases, such as the Aymara urban communities of El Alto, Bolivia, what takes place is a creative reconstitution of communal logics on the basis of novel forms of territoriality. Yet most cases of autonomous organization involve certain key practices, such as communal assemblies, the rotation of obligations, and horizontal, dispersed forms of power. In communal forms, power does not operate on the basis of liberal representation, but relies on alternative forms of social organization. *Autonomía* is thus both a cultural and a political

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process. It involves autonomous forms of existence and autonomous political organizing and decision making. As the Zapatistas are prone to put it, autonomy's aim is not so much to take power and change the world but to create a new one. Autonomy can be described in terms of radical democracy, cultural self-determination, and self-governance.

Emerging from this interpretation is a fundamental question, that of "*being able to stabilize in time* a mode of regulation outside of, *against and beyond* the social order imposed by capitalist production and the liberal state" (Gutiérrez 2008, 46). This proposal implies three basic points: the steady decentering and displacement of the capitalist economy with the concomitant expansion of diverse forms of economy, including communal and noncapitalist forms; the decentering of representative democracy and the setting into place of direct, autonomous, and communal forms of democracy; and the establishment of mechanisms of epistemic and cultural pluralism (interculturality) among various ontologies and cultural worlds. From a poststructuralist perspective, it is thus possible to speak of the emergence of postliberal and postcapitalist forms of social organization. It is important to make clear once again what the "post" means. Postdevelopment signaled the possibility of visualizing an era in which development ceases to be a central organizing principle of social life; even more, it visualized such a displacement as happening in the present. The same is true for postliberalism, as a space/time under construction when social life is no longer so thoroughly determined by the constructs of economy, individual, instrumental rationality, private property, and so forth. "Postcapitalist" similarly means looking at the economy as made up of a diversity of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and noncapitalist practices (Gibson-Graham 2006). The "post," succinctly, means a decentering of capitalism in the definition of the economy, of liberalism in the definition of society, and of state forms of power as the defining matrix of social organization. This does not mean that capitalism, liberalism, and state forms cease to exist; *it means that their discursive and social centrality have been displaced somewhat*, so that the range of existing social experiences that are considered valid and credible alternatives to what exist is significantly enlarged (Santos 2007).

As proponents of the BV and the rights of nature emphasize, these notions should be seen as processes under construction rather than as finished concepts. This is more so the case when considering that the bulk of the policies of the progressive governments at present undermine the very conditions for their realization. Despite their break with many of the main tenets of neoliberal economic models, most of these governments maintain development strategies based on the export of natural resources, such as agricultural and mineral commodities, including oil and gas, but also new rubrics such as soy in Argentina and Brazil. The main difference in these government policies lies in that revenues are appropriated somewhat differently, with particular emphasis on poverty reduction through redistributive policies. But the neo-extractivist orientation of the model poses a tremendous challenge and is the main source of tension between states and civil society sectors (Gudynas 2010a). This model affects greatly the possibilities for the implementation of the rights of nature, as the neo-extractivism of the progressive governments not only tolerates but coexists easily with environmental destruction (Gudynas 2010b). It is also clear, however, that the concepts of Buen Vivir and rights of nature

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have succeeded in placing the question of development on the agenda again with particular acuity; this has in turn implied broaching the issue of a transition to a postextractivist society head on. In Ecuador and Bolivia in particular, postextractivism and postdevelopment thus bring together the state, NGOs, social movements, and intellectuals into a crucial and intense debate. There is the sense of an impasse created by the tense coexistence of progressive yet economistic and developmentalist policies at the level of the State, on the one hand, and the ability of movements to problematize such policies from below—a sort of "promiscuous mixture" of capitalist hegemony and movement counterpowers, of radical demands for change and the reconstitution of ruling (Colectivo Situaciones 2009). How this dynamic plays out in each country cannot be decided in advance, and will be of significance beyond the region given the worldwide intensification of extractivism by global colonial capitalism—an ever-more-cynical and destructive global recolonization, as critical readings of the movie *Avatar* made clear.

To return one final time to the question with which this chapter started: Is the notion of postdevelopment still useful to convey both the decentering of development and the reorientation of practice? It is true that postdevelopment has come to have many different, and often disparate, meanings. This is why I attempted to characterize it again carefully at the beginning of these notes. It is also important to acknowledge the existence of other domains of inquiry and social life that could be seen as related to, or as advancing, post-development.[28] At the same time, it is possible to identify areas in which postdevelopment analyses continue to be directly useful, including the following: the emergence of new spaces such as the Buen Vivir to reconceptualize social reality and so to decenter development; changes in the conditions for the production of knowledge about development (development's "political economy of truth"), resulting in a pluralization of knowledges, including those of social movement activists; and a renewed questioning of key tenets of Eurocentric modernity—from linear progress and standard economic value to the liberal individual and nature as inert—thus strengthening nonanthropocentric and noneconomistic approaches. Postdevelopment continues to be useful in the articulation of critiques of existing tendencies (e.g., neo-extractivism), to decenter debates and orient inquiry toward noneconomistic possibilities, and to maintain alive the imaginaries of beyond development and alternatives *to* development (e.g., postextractivism and cultural and ecological transitions). It is of course the case that many of these critical areas concerning globalization, nature, and the economy have also emerged in response to other social, intellectual, and political processes, and not necessarily in relation to development per se. To this extent, it would be more appropriate to suggest that postdevelopment remains an apt concept to contribute to articulating many of the crucial questions of the day.

More than a development alternative, the Buen Vivir constitutes an alternative to development, and to this extent it can be seen as moving along "the road to postdevelopment" (Acosta 2010). At their best, it can be said that the rising concepts and struggles around the Buen Vivir and the rights of nature, emerging under the guise of *autonomía*, constitute a postdualist theory and practice—that is, a practice of interbeing. As such they are key elements in designs for the pluriverse. They involve relational forms of being, doing, and knowing. In

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this way, the trends reviewed in this section are squarely situated within the scope of transition discourses. This enables a certain radicalization of the discussion of postdevelopment. This is a discussion to which all critical voices can contribute, whether in the Global South or the Global North.

CONCLUSION: THE END OF GLOBALIZATION (AS WE KNEW IT)

In their book *The End of Capitalism (As We Knew It),* feminist geographers J. K. Gibson-Graham (1996) called on us to imagine a moment when the domain of the economy is not so seemingly naturally and completely occupied by capitalism. The tendency for capitalism to occupy the economy, they argue, is at least partly an artifact of the discourses and habits of thought fostered by academic theories of political economy in fields such as development and globalization studies. In other words, our theories themselves endow capitalism with so much dominance and ability to "penetrate" that it becomes impossible for us to see the range of economic difference that actually inhabits social life. In liberating the economy from capitalocentrism, they aim to retheorize it as diverse, and to turn such diversity into a rallying point for struggles for noncapitalist subjectivities and alternative constructions of the world.

It seems to me that something similar has happened with globalization discourses of all kinds. In these discourses, whether mainstream or Left, an alleged "global space" is seen as naturally and fully occupied by forms of socionatural life that are in fact an extension of Western-style modernity. No matter how qualified, globalization in these discourses always amounts to a deepening and a universalization of capitalist modernity. There is something terribly wrong with this imaginary, if we are to take seriously the transition discourses and notions of Buen Vivir and rights of nature, let alone if we are to confront the ever worsening ecological crisis. To paraphrase again, scratch a globalization discourse and you will find *homo oeconomicus* at large, alleged "individuals" striving to become miniature capitalist clones (e.g., microfinance, modernizing rural development); assumptions of linear rationality as the default mode of thinking of those wanting to "make it" in a "competitive world"; a view of nature as resource to be extracted at any cost; or even groups and movements struggling from the inside to recapture the modern project for emancipatory purposes. As I put it back in 1995, echoing the work of Canadian feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith (see chapter 4 of this book, pp. 107–9), these discourses reflect a view of the world as seen by those who rule it—a world from above. They deploy pervasive apparatuses of power that organize people's perceptions and experiences.

It bears repeating that this view of globalization as universal, fully economized, delocalized, multicultural (yet with modern cultures as the preeminent model), where (affluent) "individuals" are endowed with "rights" and nations have to accept the dictates of the same global rationality or risk becoming "failed states," is increasingly made possible by the immense power of corporations and maintained within manageable levels of dis/order by military might. The underside of globalization, in this way, is none other than global coloniality. From these very global conditions, however, responses and forms of creativity and

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resistance are emerging and making increasingly visible the poverty, perniciousness, and destructiveness of this imaginary.

As Blaser (2010) put it, the present moment can be seen as one of intense struggle between two visions of globality: globality defined as modernity writ large, or globality as a pluriverse—or, as I put it earlier, between the world as universe and the world as pluriverse.[29] Rather than in terms of globalization, the latter possibility might be more appropriately described as a process of planetarization articulated around a vision of the Earth as a living whole that is always emerging out of the manifold biophysical, human, and spiritual elements and relations that make up the pluriverse, from the biosphere and the mechanosphere to the noosphere. Many of the features envisioned in the transition discourses—from strategies of relocalization to the rise of an ecological civilization—will find a more auspicious home in this notion. We need to stop burdening the Earth with the dualisms of the past centuries and acknowledge the radical interrelatedness, openness, and plurality that inhabit it. To accomplish this goal, we need to start thinking about human practice in terms of ontological design, or the design of worlds and knowledges otherwise. One of the principles of ontological design is that of building on already existing diversity, or of seeding designs with diversity; this is a principle for the pluriverse. Design would no longer involve taming the world for (some) human purposes, but, to restate Berry's evocative dictum, building worlds in which humans and the Earth can coexist in mutually enhancing manners (1999, 11). More politically, "in this way the defense of human life, and conditions for life on the planet, may become the new horizon of meaning of the struggles of resistance by the majority of the world's people" (Quijano 2010, 7).

Going well beyond critique, a nascent field of pluriversal studies would—and already does, as I tried to show in the last two sections—discover the forms adopted by the multiple worlds that make up the pluriverse, without trying to reduce them to manifestations of known principles. Pluriversal studies will focus on those processes that can no longer be easily accommodated in the epistemic table of the modern social sciences. This is why pluriversal studies cannot be defined in opposition to globalization studies, nor as its complement, but needs to be outlined as an altogether different intellectual and political project. No single notion of the world, the human, civilization, the future, or even the natural can fully occupy the space of pluriversal studies. Even if partly building on the critical traditions of the modern natural, human and social sciences, pluriversal studies will travel its own paths as it discovers worlds and knowledges that the sciences have effaced or only gleaned obliquely. For critical development studies to be attuned to this project, it would require of a more significant transformation than that enabled by postdevelopment.

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NOTES

1. A PhD program in development studies was started at the Chinese Agricultural University in Beijing in 2004. While it is still the only such program, "there are many other PhD programs in other universities, where some of the students might do thesis research on development studies, even development anthropology, in Sun Yat-Sen University, for instance. Now there are about thirty universities in China that have BSc programs in development studies, although most of them are very practical and professionally oriented (similar to the professionalization processes you described in your book, as China is taking the path of modernization development)" (e-mail message from Professor Ye Jingzhong, the Chinese Agricultural University, August 8, 2010).

2. The end of the Washington Consensus and the emergence of a "post-Washington consensus" has been analyzed perhaps most famously in the United States by Joseph Stiglitz (2006). For the genesis of neoliberalism in Latin America and elsewhere, see the excellent account by Naomi Klein (2007).

3. The idea that the crisis entailed the end of the monopoly of financial capital has been discussed by Marxist critics in particular; see, e.g., Bellamy Foster and Magdoff (2008) and Panitch and Gindin (2008).

4. See, for instance, the report of a teleconference linking five countries—Ghana, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia, and the United States—sponsored by the World Bank Institute on March 29, 2010, the second in a series of distance "development debates" organized by the Bank around the topic of "Rethinking Globalization After the Crisis." Retrieved from http://wbi.worldbank.org/wbi/stories/experts-and-policymakers-trade-tips-boost-export-competitiveness-africa.

5. It would be impossible to do justice to the scholarly literature on peasant studies here. The journal *Development* has devoted a number of issues to food and agriculture over the past decade. Philip McMichael (2006, 2008) has usefully mapped some of the new agendas that place peasant discourses on agriculture and food at the center of conceptualizations of political, economic, and ecological transformations. It is noteworthy that the *Journal of Peasant Studies,* an icon of Marxist analyses on peasants and "the agrarian question" since the early 1970s, recently restructured itself to reflect some of the emerging agendas. See the special issue on "Critical Perspectives on Rural Politics and Development," vol. 36, no. 1 (2009), and the excellent book by Wendy Wolford (2010) for new approaches to rural social movements. See also the influential texts of the international network of peasant organizations and movements Vía Campesina (www.viacampesina.org), and Desmerais (2007) for a study on this network.

6. Again, the literature here is rich and beyond the scope of this preface. See Bhavnani, Foran, and Kurian (2003) and Harcourt and Escobar (2005) for some recent approaches. Body politics in development (see Harcourt 2010 for an excellent summary and compelling framework) is one prominent topic that was previously disregarded or given partial attention. Radcliffe, Laurie, and Andolina (2009) have usefully analyzed the gendered consequences of development and how they intersect with transnationalized indigenous movements in ways that might be both empowering and disempowering.

7. The work of the Social Movements Working Group at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (www.unc.edu/smwg/), over the past five years has been largely focused on this idea. See the special issue of *Anthropological Quarterly,* vol. 81, no. 1 (2006), collectively produced by the group. The idea that social movements should be seen as knowledge producers is also at the core of a few other research groups in the United States and the United Kingdom, including at the University of Texas at Austin (Anthropology), Cornell (Development Sociology; e.g., McMichael 2010), as well as in Latin America. The team organized by Xochitl Leyva at CIESAS in San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico, has produced several volumes based on this contention (see, e.g., Leyva, Burguete, and Speed 2008). Sonia E. Álvarez and her colleagues at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, have been leading a project with teams in the United States and Latin America partially

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focused on collaborative knowledge production. The well-known Colectivo Situaciones in Buenos Aires has been producing work on this basis for a decade. A brief introduction to the literature on this trend is found in Escobar (2008a) and Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell (2006).

8. I will not be able to discuss here the interesting movement around the idea of "decroissance," pioneered by Serge Latouche (e.g., 2009) in France, Joan Martínez Alier (2009) and Jordi Pigem (2009) in Catalunya, and others in southern Europe and Latin America. There is a degree of heterogeneity in these proposals, depending on whether the impetus is more political or economic, or whether it is applied to high-income countries (Europe) or lower income ones, such as Latin America (e-mail correspondence with Joan Martínez Alier and Eduardo Gudynas, January 2011). The most relevant aspects of this movement for our purposes is that the various proposals share a critique of overconsumption and of growth as the basis of the economy and, hence, a need to change the logic of development toward less production and less consumption in line with the ecological limits of the planet. In the 1970s, the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation conducted a very interesting exercise based on bringing overdeveloped countries such as Sweden and underdeveloped ones such as Tanzania into a single framework, as part of their project "What Now" and their overall notion of "another development." This could be seen as a predecessor of de-growth theories. See also the Foundation's What Next? project (2006–2009) for an excellent example of critical and alternative thinking in development (http://www.dhf.uu.se/). The Network of Objectors to Growth for Postdevelopment was created in some connection to the What Next? project (www.apres-developpement.org). The debates on the economy in Latin America are particularly active in the field of social and solidarity economies pioneered by José Luis Coraggio and Franz Hinkelamert, among others; see, for instance, the special issue of *América Latina en Movimiento*, vol. 430 (2008), edited by Coraggio, http://www.alainet.org/publica/430.phtml.

9. These authors typically included the collective authors represented in *The Development Dictionary* (Sachs 1992) and *The Postdevelopment Reader* (Rahnema and Bawtree 1997), Shiva (e.g., 2004), Ferguson (1990), and Rist (1997). Some critics, of course, differentiated among these various authors. For a full discussion and list of references, see Escobar 2000, 2007; see also the comprehensive accounts by Zai (2007), Simon (2007), and McGregor (2009). What follows is an extremely summarized account of the debates.

10. See especially Mosse (2005); Mosse and Lewis (2005); and Li (2007).

11. Elsewhere (Escobar 2008b) I analyze these problems in terms of four problematic moves found in much of the social science literature that emphasizes a dispersed approach to social life, such as actor-network theory: radical agentivity, radical connectivity, radical contextuality, and radical historicity.

12. As Medeiros (2005) concludes, the problem development agencies need to address is thus not that local people are outside modernity, but the specific ways in which they have been produced by modernity—that is, the coloniality of power and the colonial difference. It is local people's historical experience of modernity that informs their vision, their suspicions, and their hopes.

13. This section will have a full development in a short book in progress, tentatively entitled *The End of Globalization (As We Knew It): Designs for the Pluriverse*. The book will also include a framework for ontological design.

14. Briefly, the "conventional worlds" scenario relies on either market forces (global markets driving global development) or policy reform (comprehensive government and international action for poverty reduction and environmental sustainability), or a combination of both. These scenarios might achieve some moderation of current trends, yet they cannot muster the political will to make their avowed goals feasible. Similarly, the second scenario, "barbarization," has two variants: "breakdown" (institutional collapse) and "fortress world" (global apartheid with the vast majority of the world outside). GTI writings include ideas about how to work toward the transition through concrete institutional and cultural changes. The GTI is based on the influential analysis of branch points and scenario building by Argentinean ecologist Gilberto Gallopín; it is currently housed at the Tellus Institute directed by Paul Raskin. See Raskin et al. (2002), and the project's website, Great Transition Initiative: http://www.gtinitiative.org/. Many of these visions are based on a framework of interacting complex socionatural systems from the community to the planetary level. Whereas the more conventional scenarios imply a clear teleology, GTI-type scenarios are actually built on nonlinear dynamical principles as part of the transition concept. This includes the concepts of bifurcation and macroshifts (see, e.g., Goodwin 2007; Laszlo 2008). It should be said that despite their global character, most TDs still take the Western modern experience as point of reference and driver for change. While this makes sense given modern hegemonies, critical TDs need to incorporate more explicitly experiences and dynamics from socionatures in the Global South.

15. See Greene (2003) and the work of the Center for Ecozoic Studies in Chapel Hill, directed by Herman Greene, http://www.ecozoicstudies.org/.

16. The transition approach is a remarkable concept and set of tools. Initiated in the town of Totnes, Devon, United Kingdom (also home to Schumacher College), it has spread rapidly. Over 100 communities worldwide are engaged in transition plans inspired by the Handbook. The primer for transition initiatives is detailed and feasible. See also the related website, http://transitionculture.org/.

17. I will not discuss here further what could be called "the politics of the transition," which is left implicit in many of the

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TDs. This politics can be fruitfully theorized from Left and academic approaches (e.g., autonomist anticapitalist imaginaries, Deleuzian/Guattarian postcapitalist politics, Foucauldian and feminist biopolitical and post-humanist analyses, Latin American *autonomía*, critical geography; etc.), but these will need to meet the epistemic and ontological challenges of non-Eurocentric and biocentric transition discourses. In my view, Santos's (2007) sociology of absences and of emergences provides one of the most useful overall frameworks for thinking about the politics of transition/translation.

18. For a lengthy treatment of the Latin American transformations during the past decade, including the argument made here, and full set of references, see Escobar (2010a).

19. See issue no. 453 of *América Latina en Movimiento* (March 2010) devoted to "Alternativas civilizatiorias," http://alainet.org/publica/453.phtml. A forum on "Perspectives on the "Crisis of Civilization" as the Focus of Movements" was held at the World Social Forum in Dakar (February 6–11, 2011), coordinated by Roberto Espinoza, Janet Conway, Jai Sen, and Carlos Torres. It included participants from several continents.

20. For presentation and analysis of the notions of Buen Vivir, the rights of nature, and plurinationality, see the useful short volumes by Acosta and Martínez (2009a, 2009b, 2009c), Acosta (2010), and Gudynas (2009a, 2009b).

21. In both Gudynas and Macy, this transformed notion of the self is based on Arne Naess's deep ecology framework and its pioneering view of the ecological self.

22. See Escobar 2010b for a full discussion of the literature on relationality in geography, anthropology, and ecology.

23. In some indigenous narratives, the creation of form is seen as the passage from "indistinction" to "distinction" (see, e.g., Blaser 2010 for the case of the Yshiro of Paraguay).

24. This is a very incomplete statement on what is a complex debate involving four positions on modernity: (a) modernity as a universal process of European origin (intra-Euro/American discourses); (b) alternative modernities (locally specific variations of the same universal modernity); (c) multiple modernities, that is, modernity as multiplicity without a single origin or cultural home (Grossberg 2010); and (d) modernity/coloniality, which points out the inextricable entanglement of modernity with the colonial classification of peoples into hierarchies, and the possibility of "alternatives to modernity" or transmodernity. See Escobar 2008a, chapter 4, for a fuller treatment.

25. See Escobar 2010a for a full discussion with particular reference to Bolivia and, particularly, to the work of Aymara and other Latin American intellectuals on the subject.

26. The ontological conflicts involved in neo-extractivist economies are the subject of an ongoing collaborative research project by Mario Blaser, Marisol de la Cadena, and myself. The project's general goal is that of theorizing the pluriverse as a space of ontological-political practices.

27. Some of the main texts include Esteva (1997, 2005, 2006), Gutiérrez (2008), Mamani (2005, 2006), Zibechi (2006), and Patzi (2004).

28. In our discussion on the current status of postdevelopment (April 2010), Gudynas and I identified several main areas or currents related to postdevelopment. These included, besides BV and biocentrism, debates on dematerialization and de-growth, multiple forms of valuation, territoriality, new ways of conceiving rurality, decoloniality, care, and sprituality, and relational ontologies. Clearly, I have only touched upon a few of these in this preface.

29. It might be argued that "the world as pluriverse" is an oxymoron. I am trying to maintain a tension between monist epistemologies or metaphysical monism, such as those of computer scientist Brian Cantwell Smith (1996) and ecological anthropologists such as Alf Hornborg (1996), and those positions that posit the coexistence of different—and at least partly incommensurable—worlds.

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