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"The idea of development stands today like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Its shadow obscures our vision... The authors of this book deal neither with development as technical performance nor with development as class conflict, but with development as a particular cast of mind. For development is much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions."

-- Wolfgang Sachs

This issue of the **Reprint Mailing** is devoted to excerpts from **The Development Dictionary**:<u>A Guide to Knowledge as Power</u>(Zed Books Ltd., London.1992), edited by Wolfgang Sachs, a Fellow of The Institute for Cultural Studies, Essen, Germany. Doctor Sachs also is author of another book just published: **For Love of the Automobile:** <u>Looking Back into the</u> <u>History of Our Desires</u> (U.C. Press, Berkeley). [**The Development Dictionary** is available from Humanities Press, 165 First Ave. Atlantic Highlands, N.J. 07716, Tel: (201) 872-1441]
(Excerpts are reprinted with Doctor Sachs' permission)

The Development Dictionary

A Guide to Knowledge as Power

Introduction

Wolfgang Sachs

The last 40 years can be called the age of development. This epoch is coming to an end. The time is ripe to write its obituary.

Like a towering lighthouse guiding sailors towards the coast, 'development' stood as *the* idea which oriented emerging nations in their journey through post-war history. No matter whether democracies or dictatorships, the countries of the South proclaimed development as their primary aspiration, after they had been freed from colonial subordination. Four decades later, governments and citizens alike still have their eyes fixed on this light flashing just as far away as ever: every effort and every sacrifice is justified in reaching the goal, but the light keeps on receding into the dark.

The lighthouse of development was erected right after the Second World War. Following the breakdown of the European colonial powers, the United States found an opportunity to give worldwide dimensions to the mission their founding fathers had bequeathed to them: to be the 'beacon on the hill'. They launched the idea of development with a call to every nation to follow in their footsteps. Since then, the relations between North and South have been cast in this mould: 'development' provided the fundamental frame of reference for that mixture of generosity, bribery and oppression which has characterized the policies toward the South. For almost half a century, good neighbourliness on the planet was conceived in the light of 'development'.

Today, the lighthouse shows cracks and is starting to crumble. The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover, the historical conditions which catapulted the idea into prominence have vanished: development has become outdated. But above all, the hopes and desires which made the idea fly, are now exhausted: development has grown obsolete.

Nevertheless, the ruin stands there and still dominates the scenery like a landmark. Though doubts are mounting and uneasiness is widely felt, development talk still pervades not only official declarations but even the language of grassroots movements. It is time to dismantle this mental structure. The authors of this book consciously bid farewell to the defunct idea in order to clear our minds for fresh discoveries.

Over the years, piles of technical reports have been accumulated which show that development does not work; stacks of political studies have proven that development is unjust. The authors of this book deal neither with development as technical performance nor with development as class conflict, but with development as a particular cast of mind. For development is much more than just a socio-economic endeavour; it is a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passions. Perceptions, myths and fantasies, however, rise and fall independent of

empirical results and rational conclusions; they appear and vanish, not because they are proven right or wrong, but rather because they are pregnant with promise or become irrelevant. This book offers a critical inventory of development credos, their history and implications, in order to expose in the harsh glare of sunlight their perceptual bias, their historical inadequacy, and their imaginative sterility. It calls for apostasy from the faith in development in order to liberate the imagination for bold responses to the challenges humanity is facing before the turn of the millennium.

We propose to call the age of development that particular historical period which began on 20 January, 1949, when Harry S. Truman for the first time declared, in his inauguration speech, the Southern hemisphere as 'under-developed areas'. The label stuck and subsequently provided the cognitive base for both arrogant interventionism from the North and pathetic self-pity in the South. However, what is born at a certain point in time, can die again at a later point; the age of development is on the decline because its four founding premises have been outdated by history.

First of all, it was a matter of course for Truman that the United States — along with other industrialized nations — were at the top of the social evolutionary scale. Today, this premise of superiority has been fully and finally shattered by the ecological predicament. Granted the US may still feel it is running ahead of the other countries, but it is clear now that the race is leading towards an abyss. For more than a century, technology carried the promise of redeeming the human condition from sweat, toil and tears. Today, especially in the rich countries, it is everbody's best kept secret that this hope is nothing other than a flight of fancy.

After all, with the fruits of industrialism still scarcely distributed, we now consume in one year what it took the earth a million years to store up. Furthermore, much of the glorious productivity is fed by the gigantic through-put of fossil energy; on the one side, the earth is being excavated and permanently scarred, while on the other a continuous rain of harmful substances drizzles down — or filters up into the atmosphere. If all countries 'successfully' followed the industrial example, five or six planets would be needed to serve as mines and waste dumps. It is thus obvious that the 'advanced' societies are no model; rather they are most likely to be seen in the end as an aberration in the course of history. The arrow of progress is broken and the future has lost its brightness: what it holds in store are more threats than promises. How can one believe in development, if the sense of orientation has withered away?

Secondly, Truman launched the idea of development in order to provide a comforting vision of a world order where the US would naturally rank first. The rising influence of the Soviet Union — the first country which had industrialized outside of capitalism — forced him to come up with a vision that would engage the loyalty of the decolonizing countries in order to sustain his struggle against communism. For over 40 years, development has been a weapon in the competition between political systems. Now that the East–West confrontation has come to a halt, Truman's project of global development is bound to lose ideological steam and to remain without political fuel. And as the

3

world becomes polycentric, the scrapyard of history now awaits the category 'Third World' to be dumped, a category invented by the French in the early 1950s in order to designate the embattled territory between the two superpowers.

Nevertheless, new, albeit belated, calls for development may multiply, as the East–West division gets absorbed into the rich–poor division. In this light, however, the entire project fundamentally changes its character: prevention replaces progress as the objective of development; the redistribution of risk rather than the redistribution of wealth now dominates the international agenda. Development specialists shrug their shoulders about the long promised industrial paradise, but rush to ward off the flood of immigrants, to contain regional wars, to undercut illicit trade, and to contain environmental disasters. They are still busy identifying deficits and filling gaps, but Truman's promise of development has been turned upside down.

Thirdly, development has changed the face of the earth, but not in the way it had intended. Truman's project now appears as a blunder of planetary proportions. In 1960, the Northern countries were 20 times richer than the Southern, in 1980 46 times. Is it an exaggeration to say that the illusion of 'catching up' rivals on a world scale Montezuma's deadly illusion of receiving Cortez with open arms? Of course, most Southern countries stepped on the gas, but the North outpaced them by far. The reason is simple: in this kind of race, the rich countries will always move faster than the rest, for they are geared towards a continuous degradation of what they have to put forth: the most advanced technology. They are world champions in competitive obsolescence.

Social polarization prevails within countries as well; the stories about falling real income, misery and desperation are all too familiar. The campaign to turn traditional man into modern man has failed. The old ways have been smashed, the new ways are not viable. People are caught in the deadlock of development: the peasant who is dependent on buying seeds, yet finds no cash to do so; the mother who benefits neither from the care of her fellow women in the community nor from the assistance of a hospital; the clerk who had made it in the city, but is now laid off as a result of cost-cutting measures. They are all like refugees who have been rejected and have no place to go. Shunned by the 'advanced' sector and cut off from the old ways, they are expatriates in their own country; they are forced to get by in the no-man's-land between tradition and modernity.

Fourthly, suspicion grows that development was a misconceived enterprise from the beginning. Indeed, it is not the failure of development which has to be feared, but its success. What would a completely developed world look like? We don't know, but most certainly it would be both boring and fraught with danger. For development cannot be separated from the idea that all peoples of the planet are moving along one single track towards some state of maturity, exemplified by the nations 'running in front'. In this view, Tuaregs, Zapotecos or Rajasthanis are not seen as living diverse and non-comparable ways of human existence, but as somehow lacking in terms of what has been achieved by the advanced countries. Consequently, catching up was declared to be their historical task. From the start, development's hidden agenda was nothing else

than the Westernization of the world.

The result has been a tremendous loss of diversity. The worldwide simplification of architecture, clothing, and daily objects assaults the eye; the accompanying eclipse of variegated languages, customs and gestures is already less visible; and the standardization of desires and dreams occurs deep down in the subconscious of societies. Market, state, and science have been the great universalizing powers; admen, experts and educators have relentlessly expanded their reign. Of course, as in Montezuma's time, conquerors have often been warmly welcomed, only to unveil their victory. The mental space in which people dream and act is largely occupied today by Western imagery. The vast furrows of cultural monoculture left behind are, as in all monocultures, both barren and dangerous. They have eliminated the innumerable varieties of being human and have turned the world into a place deprived of adventure and surprise; the 'Other' has vanished with development. Moreover, the spreading monoculture has eroded viable alternatives to the industrial, growth-oriented society and dangerously crippled humankind's capacity to meet an increasingly different future with creative responses. The last 40 years have considerably impoverished the potential for cultural evolution. It is only a slight exaggeration to say that whatever potential for cultural evolution remains is there in spite of development.

Four decades after Truman's invention of underdevelopment, the historical conditions which had given rise to the developmental perspective have largely disappeared. By now development has become an amoeba-like concept, shapeless but ineradicable. Its contours are so blurred that it denotes nothing — while it spreads everywhere because it connotes the best of intentions. The term is hailed by the IMF and the Vatican alike, by revolutionaries carrying their guns as well as field experts carrying their Samsonites. Though development has no content, it does possess one function: it allows any intervention to be sanctified in the name of a higher goal. Therefore even enemies feel united under the same banner. The term creates a common ground, a ground on which right and left, elites and grassroots fight their battles.

It is our intention, as the authors of this book, to clear out of the way this self-defeating development discourse. On the one hand, we hope to disable the development professional by tearing apart the conceptual foundations of his routines; on the other hand, we would like to challenge those involved in grassroots initiatives to clarify their perspectives by discarding the crippling development talk towards which they are now leaning. Our essays on the central concepts in the development discourse intend to expose some of the unconscious structures that set boundaries on the thinking of our epoch. We believe that any imaginative effort to conceive a post-developmental era will have to overcome these constraints.

The development discourse is made up of a web of key concepts. It is impossible to talk about development without referring to concepts such as poverty, production, the notion of the state, or equality. These concepts first rose to prominence during modern Western history and only then have they been projected on the rest of the world. Each of them crystallizes a set of tacit

assumptions which reinforce the Occidental worldview. Development has so pervasively spread these assumptions that people everywhere have been caught up in a Western perception of reality. Knowledge, however, wields power by directing people's attention; it carves out and highlights a certain reality, casting into oblivion other ways of relating to the world around us. At a time when development has evidently failed as a socio-economic endeavour, it has become of paramount importance to liberate ourselves from its dominion over our minds. This book is an invitation to re-view the developmental model of reality and to recognize that we all wear not merely tinted, but tainted, glasses if we take part in the prevailing development discourse.

To facilitate this intellectual review, each chapter will dip into the archaeology of the key concept under examination and call attention to its ethnocentric and even violent nature. The chapters identify the shifting role each concept has played in the debate on development over the last 40 years. They demonstrate how each concept filters perception, highlighting certain aspects of reality while excluding others, and they show how this bias is rooted in particular civilizational attitudes adopted during the course of European history. Finally, each chapter attempts to open a window on to other, and different, ways of looking at the world and to get a glimpse of the riches and blessings which survive in non-Western cultures in spite of development. Each chapter will be of worth if, after reading it, experts and citizens alike have to blush, stutter or burst out laughing when they dare to mouth the old word.

List of Contributing Authors and Their Chapters:

Claude Alvares   (Science)
Gérald Berthoud   (Market)
Harry Cleaver   (Socialism)
Barbara Duden   (Population)
Arturo Escobar   (Planning)
Gustavo Esteva   (Development)
Marianne Gronemeyer   (Helping)
Ivan Illich   (Needs)
Serge Latouche   (Standard of Living)
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One World

Wolfgang Sachs

At present, roughly 5,100 languages are spoken around the globe. Just under 99 per cent of them are native to Asia and Africa, the Pacific and the American continents, while a mere 1 per cent find their homes in Europe. In Nigeria, for instance, more than 400 languages have been counted; in India 1,682; and even Central America, tiny as it is geographically, boasts 260.[1] A great number of these languages cling to remote places. They hide out in isolated mountain valleys, far-off islands and inaccessible deserts. Others govern entire continents and connect different peoples into a larger universe. Taken together, a multitude of linguistic worlds, large and small, covers the globe like a patchwork quilt. Yet many indicators suggest that, within a generation or two, not many more than 100 of these languages will survive.

Languages are dying out every bit as quickly as species. While, in the latter case, plants and animals disappear from the history of nature never to be seen again, with the demise of languages, entire cultures are vanishing from the history of civilization, never to be lived again. For each tongue contains its own way of perceiving man and nature, experiencing joy and sorrow, and finding meaning in the flow of events. To pray or to love, to dream or to reason, evokes different things when done in Farsi, German or Zapotec. Just as certain plants and animals are responsible for the maintenance of large ecosystems, so languages often carry subtle cultures through time. Once species disappear, ecosystems break down; once languages die out, cultures falter.

Along with languages, entire conceptions of what it means to be human have evaporated during the development decades since 1950. And yet, the death of languages is only the most dramatic signal of the worldwide evaporation of cultures. Transistor radios and 'Dallas', agricultural advisers and nurses, the regime of the clock and the laws of the market have triggered an unprecedented transformation. It is, after all, scarcely an accident that Europe, the home of literacy as well as the nation-state, has only 1 per cent of all languages left. Whichever way one looks at it, the homogenization of the world is in full swing. A global monoculture spreads like an oil slick over the entire planet.

Forty years of 'development', fashioned on the model of 'one world', have gone by. The upshot of it all, if appearances do not deceive, is a looming vision of horror — modern man all alone for ever in the world. Ideas such as 'world society', 'unified world market', or even 'global responsibility' have in the past stimulated noble minds, and are again bandied about today, albeit with a tone of much more moral pathos than even a few years ago. But their innocence in an age of cultural evaporation is now tarnished.

One Mankind

There is a brass plate at the Fairmont Hotel on Union Square, San Francisco,

to remind the passing visitor that it was here, on 4 May 1945, that a global hope was initialled. In Room 210, delegates from 46 countries agreed on the text of the United Nations Charter. Hitler's Germany was finally defeated and time was running out for Japan. The Charter promulgated those principles which were designed to usher in a new era of peace. No wars any more and no national egoisms. What counted was international understanding and the unity of mankind! After devastating conflicts, the Charter held out the prospect of universal peace, echoing the pledge of the League of Nations in 1919, but pointing far beyond a mere security system.

The Charter, in fact, conceptualized peace not just as the non-violent regulation of conflicts, but as the result of a global leap forward. Violence breaks out when progress is blocked. That was the conclusion the victorious powers drew from the past experience of economic depression and ensuing totalitarianism. Consequently, in the Preamble to the Charter, the United Nations solemnly announced the determination 'to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom . . . and to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples'.[2] The delegates in Room 210 were not timid in their vision. In their eyes, Austrians and Australians, Zulus as well as Zapotecos, shared in the same aspiration for 'social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom'. The histories of the world were seen as converging into one history, having one direction, and the UN was seen as a motor propelling less advanced countries to move ahead. The project to banish violence and war from the face of the earth was clearly linked to the vision of mankind marching forward and upward along the road of progress. Mankind, progress and peace have been the conceptual cornerstones for erecting the sprawling edifice of UN organizations. The idea that both mankind and peace realize themselves through progress/development is the expectation built into their structure. The UN's mission hinges on faith in progress.

The United Nations Charter appeals to ideas which had taken shape during the European Enlightenment. At the time of Voltaire, the all-embracing, unifying power of Christianity had faded and given way to 'humanity' as the dominant collective concept. Ever since the apostle Paul had shattered the validity of worldly distinctions in the face of God's gift of salvation, it had become thinkable to conceive of all humans as standing on the same plane. The Enlightenment secularized this heritage and turned it into a humanist creed. Neither class nor sex, neither religion nor race count before human nature, as they didn't count before God. Thus the universality of the Sonship of God was recast as the universality of human dignity. From then on, 'humanity' became the common denominator uniting all peoples, causing differences in skin colour, beliefs and social customs to decline in significance.

But 'mankind', for the Enlightenment, was not just an empirical concept meaning the inhabitants of the globe; it had a time arrow built in. 'Mankind', in effect, was something yet to come, a task to be realized as man moves along the path of progress, successively shedding the ties of authority and superstition until autonomy and reason would reign. In the perspective of the Enlightenment, neither social roots nor religious commitments mattered

much. The utopian intention aimed at a world of individuals who follow only the voice of reason. In that sense, the utopia of mankind was populated by men disembedded from their stories of the past, disconnected from the context of their places, and detached from the bonds of their communities, and united instead under the rule of science, market and the state. Hume as well as Kant saw humanity as something to be attained by spreading the universal values of civilization and drawing ever more people into the course of progress. Mankind was to be the result of becoming modern. The Enlightenment's idea of unity cannot be separated from the assumption that history moves towards the rule of universal reason. It was one of those ideas, typical of that period, which were pregnant with an infinite future.

However, the rise of humanity by no means obliterated the image of the Other in European thought. Just as Christians had their heathens, philosophers of the Enlightenment had their savages. Both figures embodied the negation of what the respective societies held as their self-images. Heathens were those outside the Kingdom of God, while savages lived outside the kingdom of civilization. But there was one crucial difference. Whereas for Christendom heathens populated geographically remote areas, for the Enlightenment savages inhabited an infant stage of history. Europe of the Enlightenment no longer felt separated from the Other spatially, but chronologically. As a matter of fact, the existence of strange peoples like the Iroquois, Asante or Bengali at the borders of (European) civilization contradicted the very idea of one mankind. But the contradiction was resolved by interpreting the multiplicity of cultures in space as a succession of stages in time. So the 'savage' was defined as one who would grow up and enter the stage of civilization. The 'savage', though he lived now, was assigned the status of a child in the biography of mankind, a child which was not yet fully mature, and was in need of guidance by a strong father.

In the Preamble to the UN Declaration, the quest for peace was closely linked to the hope for advancement of peoples around the globe. Towards the end of the 18th century the traditional notion that peace would be the fruit of justice had lost ground. It gave way to the expectation that peace would be the result of mankind reunited under the achievements of civilization. Reason and freedom would overcome prejudice and narrow-mindedness, and the age of harmony would dawn. Peace, progress and humanity were for the Enlightenment nothing less than the different faces of an eschatological future to come. The belief that mankind could be improved upon has driven political action from Voltaire right through to our own time.

The philosophy underlying the UN Declaration makes little sense without the view of history as the royal road to progress upon which all peoples converge. The conception of achieving 'one world' by stimulating progress everywhere betrays the evolutionary bias. It inevitably calls for absorbing the differences in the world into an ahistorical and delocalized universalism of European origin. The unity of the world is realized through its Westernization. By the mid 20th century the term 'underdeveloped' had taken the place of 'savages'. Economic performance had replaced reason as the measure of man. However, the arrangement of concepts remains the same — the world society

has to be achieved through the improvement of the backward. And indissolubly linking the hope for peace to this world-shaking endeavour leads to a tragic dilemma — the pursuit of peace implies the annihilation of diversity, while seeking diversity implies the outburst of violence. The dilemma is unlikely to be resolved without delinking peace from progress and progress from peace.

One Market

Today it seems almost strange, but the founding fathers of the United Nations, as well as the architects of international development policy, were inspired by the vision that the globalization of market relationships would be the guarantee of peace in the world. Prosperity, so the argument went, derives from exchange, exchange creates mutual interests, and mutual interests inhibit aggression. Instead of violence, the spirit of commerce was to reign on all sides. Instead of firepower, productive strength would be decisive in the competition between nations. The unity of the world, it was thought, could only be based on a far-reaching and closely interconnected network of economic relations. And where goods were in circulation, weapons would fall silent.

With a naivete hardly distinguishable from deception, the prophets of development polished up a utopia envisioned as long ago as the 18th century, as if time had stopped and neither capitalism nor imperialism had ever appeared on the scene. After Montesquieu, the Enlightenment had discovered commerce as a means of refining crude manners. In this view, trade would spread rational calculation and cold self-interest, precisely those attitudes which make the passion for war or the whims of tyrants appear self-destructive. Trade creates dependence and dependence tames. This is the logic which runs from Montesquieu through the UN down to the present-day integration of Eastern Europe and the USSR since the collapse of bureaucratic socialism there following the upheavals of 1989. And indeed, as the European Community and the Pax Americana after World War Two suggest, economic dominions have largely replaced military dominions. The conquest of foreign territories by bellicose states has given way to the conquest of foreign markets by profit-seeking industries. Global order, after World War Two, was conceived in terms of a unified world market.

One of the most highly praised virtues of the world market is increased interdependence. The network of interests created is supposed to knit the nations together, for better or worse. From that perspective, the Pearson Report exhorted the industrialized nations in 1969:

> There is also the appeal of enlightened and constructive self-interest. . . . The fullest possible utilization of all the world's resources, human and physical, which can be brought about only by international co-operation, helps not only those countries now economically weak, but also those strong and wealthy.[3]

Ten years later, this trust in the unifying power of mutual interest was reiterated

in the Brandt Report:

> Whoever wants a bigger slice of an international economic cake cannot seriously want it to become smaller. Developing countries cannot ignore the economic health of industrialized countries.[4]

But the ideology of mutual interests could not hide its major fallacy for long — the playing out of these interests takes place under unequal terms. The economists' doctrine of comparative advantage had it that the general well-being would increase if each nation specialized in doing things at which nature and history had made it most proficient — raw sugar from Costa Rica, for example, in exchange for pharmaceuticals from Holland. But the flaw in this reasoning is that, in the long run, the country which sells the more complex products will grow stronger and stronger, because it will be able to internalize the spin-off effects of sophisticated production. Pharmaceuticals stimulate research and a host of technologies, while sugar cane doesn't! The alleged mutual interest in free trade ends up cumulatively strengthening the one and progressively weakening the other. And when the richer country comes up with high tech innovations that render the products of the weaker country obsolete, as with natural sugar being replaced by bio-engineered substitutes, then mutual interest withers away to the point where the weaker country becomes superfluous.

Apart from its built-in tendencies to discrimination and inequality, however, the obsession with the market as the medium of unification for the whole world is rapidly pushing all countries into a tight spot. The world market, once brandished as a weapon against despotism, has itself turned into a closet dictator under whose dominion both rich and poor countries tremble. The fear of falling behind in international competition has seized governments North and South, East and West. Not to lose ground in the economic arena has become an obsession which dominates politics down to the local level. This overruling imperative drives developing countries further into self-exploitation, for the sake of boosting exports, and industrial countries further into the wasteful and destructive mania of accelerated production, for the sake of protecting their markets.

What is overrun in this hurly-burly is the space for a policy of self-determination. The categorical imperative of world market competition repeatedly thwarts attempts to organize societies creatively and differently. Mobilizing for competition means streamlining a country; diversity becomes an obstacle to be removed. Some countries cannot keep up without sacrificing even more of their land for agricultural exports, others cannot afford to drop out of the high tech race. There is scarcely a country left today that seems able to control its own destiny. In this respect the differences between countries are only relative: the United States enjoys more scope than India, but itself feels under intense pressure from Japan. For winners and losers alike, the constraints of the global market have become a nightmare.

One Planet

Since the late 1960s, another image of 'one world' has edged its way into contemporary consciousness — the globe in its physical finiteness. We share in 'humanity', we are connected by the 'world market', but we are condemned to one destiny because we are inhabitants of one planet. This is the message conveyed by the first photograph of the 'one world', taken from outer space, which has irresistibly emerged as the icon of our age. The photo shows the planet suspended in the vastness of the universe and impresses on everybody the fact that the earth is one body. Against the darkness of infinity, the circular earth offers itself as an abode, a bounded place. The sensation of being on and inside it strikes the onlooker almost instantly. The unity of the world is now documented. It can be seen everywhere. It jumps out at you from book covers, T-shirts and commercials. In the age of TV, photographs are our eyewitnesses. For the first time in history, the planet is revealed in its solitude. From now on, 'one world' means physical unity; it means 'one earth'. The unity of mankind is no longer an Enlightenment fancy or a commercial act but a biophysical fact.

However, this physical interconnectedness stands in relief against the background of proliferating dangers. From creeping desertification to impending climatic disaster, alarm signals multiply. The biosphere is under attack and threatens to cave in. Local acts such as driving a car or clearing a forest add up, when multiplied, to global imbalances. They turn beneficial cycles into vicious ones that undermine the reliability of nature. In the face of incalculable debacles, concerned voices call for a global political coherence which would match the biophysical interconnections. 'The Earth is one but the world is not. We all depend on one biosphere for sustaining our lives.' After having intoned this leitmotif, the Brundtland Report spells out the fateful new meaning of unity:

> Today the scale of our interventions in nature is increasing and the physical effects of our decisions spill across national frontiers. The growth in economic interaction between nations amplifies the wider consequences of national decisions. Economics and ecology bind us in ever-tightening networks. Today, many regions face risks of irreversible damage to the human environment that threatens the basis for human progress.[5]

The Brundtland Report, the leading document on development policy in the late 1980s, takes unity for granted, but a unity which is now the result of a threat.

Things have come a long way since the promulgation of the UN Charter — from the moral hope of a mankind united by reason and progress to the economic notion of countries weaving themselves together through commercial ties, and finally, to the spectre of unity in global self-destruction. What used to be conceived of as a historical endeavour — to accomplish the unity of mankind — now reveals itself as a menacing fate. Instead of hopeful appeals, sombre warnings provide the accompaniment. The slogan 'one world or no world' captures this experience. Seen in this light, humanity resembles a group

of individuals thrown together by chance, each dependent on the others for his own survival. No one can rock the boat without causing all of us to be united — in our collective destruction. Living on earth, the ancient formula, appears to have taken on a new meaning. There are no terrestrial wanderers any more longing for the eternal kingdom, but only passengers clinging fearfully to their vessel as it splits apart. Talk about unity has ceased to hold out promises and instead has taken on a grim connotation. As already foreshadowed by the Bomb, unity in our age has become something which may be finally consummated in catastrophe.

Amidst the wailing sirens of the rescue operations undertaken in the name of some lifeboat ethics, the pressure on peoples and countries to conform to an emergency discipline will be high. As soon as worldwide strategies are launched to prevent the boat from capsizing, things like political autonomy or cultural diversity will appear as the luxuries of yesteryear. In the face of the overriding imperative to 'secure the survival of the planet', autonomy easily becomes an anti-social value, and diversity turns into an obstacle to collective action. Can one imagine a more powerful motive for forcing the world into line than that of saving the planet? Eco-colonialism constitutes a new danger for the tapestry of cultures on the globe.

It is perfectly conceivable that, in the face of mounting pressure on land, water, forests and the atmosphere, global measures will have to be taken to trim down the intake from nature as well as the output of waste worldwide. Satellites are already prepared to monitor the consumption of resources on the planet, computer models are being devised to simulate what happens when, and a new generation of experts is in the making to survey and synchronize the manifold gestures of society. It is not the engineer, building bridges or power grids, who will be the protagonist of this new epoch, as in the old days of development, but the systems analyst.

NASA, for example, has already got its own ideas about the 'one earth':

> The goal of Earth system science is to obtain a scientific understanding of the entire Earth system on a global scale by describing how its component parts and their interactions have evolved, how they function and how they may be expected to continue to evolve on all timescales. The challenge is . . . to develop the capability to predict those changes that will occur in the next decade to century both naturally and in response to human activity.[6]

The oneness of the earth is understood according to this paradigm in system categories, its unity as the interaction of component parts, and the historical task as keeping the vital processes from destabilizing irretrievably. What links the peoples of the world together is not the rule of civilization any more or the interplay of demand and supply, but their shared dependence on biophysical life-support systems. The metaphor of spaceship earth captures nicely the gist of this thinking. Consequently, unity is not to be pursued any longer through the spread of progress or the stimulation of productivity, but through securing the necessary system requirements.

But efforts to curb soil erosion, control emissions, regulate water

consumption or save biodiversity, although done with the best of intentions, will put people's daily activities under a new kind of scrutiny. Neither collecting firewood nor opening spray cans are any longer innocent activities, and how you heat your home and the food you eat become matters of global relevance. In such a perspective, the world is perceived as a single homogeneous space, this time not constituted by reason or the fluctuation of prices, but by geophysiological macro-cycles.

The consequences, however, are not likely to differ from the effects already observed in the wake of the rise of reason and the market to world dominance — namely the slow evaporation of customs and cultures. The current changes in development language from 'people' to 'populations', 'needs' to 'requirements', and 'welfare' to 'survival' are indicative of a growing negligence towards cultures in favour of mere existence. Whatever has survived the rise of industrialism, is now in danger of being drawn into the maelstrom of its fall.

But recognizing the pitfalls of global eco-management does not solve the dilemma which will stay with us in the decades to come. Both alternatives — to think in categories of one world as well as not to think in such categories — are equally self-destructive. On the one hand, it is sacrilege in our age of cultural evaporation to apprehend the globe as a united, highly integrated world. On the other hand, a vision of the globe as a multitude of different and only loosely connected worlds cannot dispense with the idea of ecumenism in the face of lurking violence and the devastation of nature. Not surprisingly, calls for global consciousness abound. Given that local events can affect the conditions of life in remote places, these calls aim at bringing into congruence the range of our responsibility with the range of our effects. However, and here lies the dilemma, the urge for global responsibility tends to drive out the devil with Beelzebub — universalism is being invoked for salvation from the present predicament, while universalism was precisely the original sin by which the predicament was provoked.

Space Against Place

For centuries, universalism has been at war with diversity. Science, state and market have dominated this campaign, while an innumerable variety of communities with their languages, customs and cosmologies, though they have sometimes struck back and reinvigorated themselves through resistance, have been the losers. It has been an unequal clash. Not only did the protagonists often fight with unequal arms when the universalist powers employed guns and dollars but, more importantly, they were unequal in their cognitive might.

Science, state and market are based on a system of knowledge about man, society and nature that claims validity everywhere and for everybody. As a knowledge which has successfully shed all vestiges of its particular origin, place and context, it belongs nowhere and can therefore penetrate everywhere. In a certain sense, mechanistic causality, bureaucratic rationality and the law of supply and demand are rules which are cleansed of any commitment to a particular society or culture. It is because they are disembedded from broader contexts of order and meaning that they are so powerful in remodelling any

social reality according to their limited but specific logic. As a consequence, they are capable of unsettling all kinds of different cultures, each one locked in its own imagination. Since these cultures are connected to particular places with their own particular peoples, memories and cosmologies, they are vulnerable to a mental style which is not linked to any place, but rests instead on the concept of space. One way to grasp the fundamental difference between universalism and localism is to focus on the dichotomy of space and place. Universalist aspirations are generally space-centred, while localist worldviews are mainly place-centred. This distinction illuminates both the rise of universalism in the past, and the tension between universalism and diversity in the present.

In mediaeval times, when a person talked about the entire 'world', he did not evoke in his listeners the image of the planet with its many inhabitants, but instead the image of an earth overarched by several spheres or heavens in permanent revolution. The tiny earth was at the centre, yet not central. Most of the attention was concentrated on the relations between the chance-governed terrestrial realm and the immutable, eternal realm of the heavens. The mediaeval cosmos took shape around a vertical axis which linked a hierarchy of strata of different qualities. Man's view was directed upwards to grasp the vaulting architecture of the cosmos, as if attracted by the soaring arches and spires of a gothic cathedral. Though this 'world' was immense, it was nevertheless finite and had a definite shape — to look up to the heavens was like looking up to a high vault.

In early modern times, the concept of a stratified and bounded cosmos was gradually abolished in favour of a universe infinitely extended in space. The vertical axis was tilted over and laid out on a horizontal plane; what mattered now was no longer the view upwards, but the view into the distance. As the vertical dimension faltered, so the idea of qualitative differences between lower and upper layers of reality also faded away and was replaced by the conception of a homogeneous reality which could only be ordered through measurable differences in geometrical fashion. It is the horizontal plane which now dominates the imagination. The world is not seen any more as marked by boundaries and upward-rising, but as limitless and extending in circles of ever greater distance. As a result, not upward–downward movements, but geographical movements to destinations close and far, hold people's attention. 'World' now evokes the surface of the globe and not the height of the cosmos.

In other words, the abolition of the stratified cosmos has made possible the rise of 'space' to its prominent position in modern consciousness. And the rise of a space-centred perception has made it possible to conceive of 'one world'. In this perception, the world is on one level, stretching out as a two-dimensional plane where each point equals any other point; what distinguishes them is only their geometrical position. The purest case of a space-centred perception can obviously be found in cartography. On maps, the world is flattened out and places are defined by their locations in the grid of longitudinal and latitudinal lines.

However, nobody is capable of living only in 'space'; everyone lives also in 'place'. This is because being human means, all attempts to the contrary

15

notwithstanding, to be in a physical body, and the body is necessarily tied to a place. Human experience, for that reason, evolves in specific local places. Some points in space, as a result, are always more important to people than others, since they have been the scenes of individual and collective imagination and action. Having a memory, relating to others, participating in a larger story, calls for involvement, requires presence. This presence, naturally, is lived out in particular physical settings like piazzas or streets, mountains or seashores. And these locations are in turn imbued with experience past and present. They become places of density and depth. Therefore, certain places have a special 'thickness' for certain people. It is there that the ancestors walked the earth and the relevant memories are at home. It is there that one is tied into a web of social bonds and where one recognizes and is recognized by others. And it is there that people share a particular vantage point and that language, habits and outlook combine to constitute a particular style of being in the world. Consequently, thinking in terms of places means to work on the assumption that a place is not just the intersection of two lines on a map, but a concentration of meaningful human activity which gives it a distinct quality, a distinct aura.

Ever since the temples of Tenochtitlan were destroyed in Mexico and a Spanish cathedral built out of their stones, European colonialism has been busy ravaging place-centred cultures and imposing on them space-centred values. In ever new waves and on all five continents, the colonialists have been terribly inventive in robbing peoples of their gods, their institutions and their natural treasures. The establishment of universities in New Spain, the introduction of British law in India, the blackmailing of North American Indians into the fur trade, these were all instances in the history of spreading science, state and market throughout the world.

The period of development after the Second World War fits into that history. Viewed with the space-trained eyes of the West, numerous cultures appeared as backward, deficient and meaningless. The globe looked like a vast homogeneous space, waiting to be organized by universally applicable programmes and technologies. And the developmentalists did not hesitate. They went about transferring the Western model of society to countries of a great variety of cultures.

But place-centred perceptions are far from gone. On the contrary, the more universalism prevails, the more particularism thrives. Indeed, throughout the last centuries, the advance of space-centred perceptions has been both successful and unsuccessful. On the one side, universalism has gained the upper hand, but on the other, place-bound aspirations have affirmed themselves over and over again. Innumerable revolts against colonialism expressed the will of the particular to survive. Independence movements launched indigenous claims.

A similar picture has prevailed in recent decades during the development era. Nationalist demands, ethnic strife, tribal tensions abound. And not to forget: the failure of a universalist development is in large part due to people's tenacious adherence to the old ways proper to their respective places. To be sure, localist conceptions do not remain the same. They are reformulated, altered and newly invented in a continuous vortex of dialogue and antagonism.

Equally, universalist conceptions, though advancing powerfully, are constantly watered down, curtailed and adapted, to the perennial dismay of Western do-gooders. And repeatedly, from the Orientalist movement in the early 19th century to alternative travellers in our own days, dissident elites, deeply steeped in a space-intensive worldview, discover place-bound traditions and turn them into weapons against the European civilization.

Cosmopolitan Localism

Today, more than ever, universalism is under siege. To be sure, the victorious march of science, state and market has not come to a stop, but the enthusiasm of the onlookers is flagging. Few still believe that order and peace will dawn at the end of the march. The centuries-old movement of carrying the torch of reason and progress to the furthest corners of the earth is tapering off. To the degree that it continues, it is carried out more from inertia than from missionary conviction.

Utopias crystallize longings that arise from frustration with the state of society. The ambition to create larger and larger unified spaces — from nation-states to regional integration and world government — has been fuelled by frustration with chauvinism and violence. Yet that concern retreats into the background as the opposite frustration spreads — the disappointment with a world that has fallen prey to homogenization. All of a sudden, the customary association of differences with violence vanishes; differences are now something to be cherished and cultivated. Indeed, the fear that modern man will encounter nobody else but himself on the globe is about to revolutionize contemporary perceptions. The pursuit of space-centred unity is turning into the search for place-centred diversity. After all, it is only from places that variety crops up, because it is in places that people weave the present into their particular thread of history. Thus, native languages are beginning to be revaluated, traditional knowledge systems rediscovered, and local economies revitalized. And, as the popularity of the prefix 're-' indicates, the unconventional is today often launched under the guise of a renaissance. The disquieting anticipation of a world fully illuminated by the neon light of modern rationality motivates the search for the darker zones, where the special, the strange, the surprising lives. A world without the Other would be a world of stagnation. For, in culture as well as in nature, diversity holds the potential for innovation and opens the way for creative, non-linear solutions. And with these misgivings growing, the tide changes. The globe is not any longer imagined as a homogeneous space where contrasts ought to be levelled out, but as a discontinuous space where differences flourish in a multiplicity of places.

Moreover, the vision of a world integrated under the rule of reason and welfare was carried by a view of history which today is rapidly becoming ripe for the museum. The unity of mankind was a project of the future, made possible by the expectation that human action would keep the course of history always on an upward road. Progress was the guarantee of unity. In the space-centred perception, the differences on the globe would fall into oblivion because they were outshone by the bright light of progress; it was in relation to

17

that promise that they didn't matter any more. But clearly enough, if our present experience shortly before the end of the 20th century can be wrapped up in one formula, it is precisely this: that the belief in progress has crumbled, the arrow of time is broken. The future doesn't hold much promise any more; it has become a repository of fears rather than of hopes.

At this juncture, therefore, it is wide of the mark to think that the coherence of the world could be achieved by pushing ahead along a common path towards some distant promised future. Instead, coexistence has to be sought in the context of the present. Thinking unity within the horizon of the present is much more demanding for all the players involved, since the attainment of a peaceful world would then be on today's agenda and could not be postponed to a far future.

Three ideals emerge for conceiving a politics which could shoulder the responsibility of acting for a diverse but coherent world — regeneration, unilateral self-restraint and the dialogue of civilizations. Regeneration takes into account that the royal road of development has vanished since there is no longer any ideal of progress to indicate a common direction. Regeneration calls instead for actualizing the particular image of a good society which is present in each culture. As for unilateral self-restraint, this can take the place of the ideal of interdependent growth. It implies instead that each country puts its own house in order in such a way that no economic or environmental burden is pushed on to others which would constrain them in choosing their own path. And, finally, a dialogue of civilizations is imperative as the search for peaceful and sustainable coexistence puts the challenge of self-examination before each culture. A simultaneous process of confrontation and synthesis can lead to coherence, while avoiding the pitfalls of homogeneity.

Though universalism has exhausted its utopian energies, any new localism will have a window on to the world at large. The opposite of the dominion of universal rules is not egoism, but a higher capacity for self-observation. People are seldom residents of only one mental space. They have the ability to change their point of view and to look with the other's eye at themselves. In fact, people often hold multiple loyalities at one and the same time. In many instances they combine rootedness in a place with affiliation to a larger community. An inhabitant of mediaeval Cologne knew how to be a member of the Christian Church; a villager in Rajasthan was aware of Bharat, Mother India; and Croatian peasants as well as the citizens of Cracow were part of the Habsburg empire.

In a similar vein, the one world may be thought of in terms of a meta-nation instead of in terms of a super-nation. It constitutes the horizon within which places live out their density and depth. In this perspective, 'one world' is not a design for more global planning, but an ever present regulative idea for local action. Cosmopolitan localism seeks to amplify the richness of a place while keeping in mind the rights of a multi-faceted world. It cherishes a particular place, yet at the same time knows about the relativity of all places. It results from a broken globalism as well as a broken localism. Maybe Tzvetan Todorov wanted to illustrate such an attitude when he used a phrase of the 12th century Hugh of St. Victor: 'The man who finds his country sweet is only a raw

beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole world is like a foreign country is perfect'.[7]

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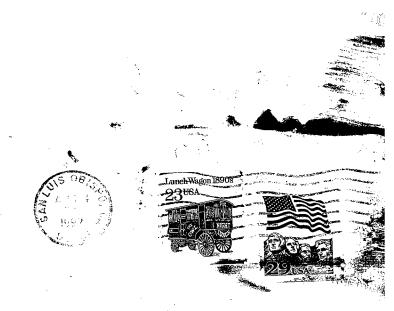
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