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BETWEEN SAYING AND DOING.
NATURE, HUMAN PRACTICES AND GEOGRAPHY (*)

*Roll up the streets
the cars, the houses.
Close up in a bag
all this architecture.
Let's put back in their place
the trees, the animals, poetry.*

Franco Arminio (2012, p. 91)

Abstract – Although the model of unlimited economic growth was a matter of debate at least fifty years ago, human behavior on Earth continues to be based on the priority given to the ephemeral individual needs of a minority of the global population, exacerbating social and territorial imbalances, environment and landscape degradation and cultural homologation.

Such behavior, the result of Cartesian dichotomies, superseded in theory but not in practice, poses for geography some crucial epistemological questions, as it is a discipline founded on the relationship between nature and human beings, but then more and more oriented to focus attention on man's actions, representations, and meta-narratives.

By presenting some critical reflections both on development, progress and technology, and on how some relevant thinkers have envisioned our natural environment over time, the paper aims at offering some meta-theoretical reflections. A return of geography to the centrality of nature - as a preliminary and indispensable interlocutor of human beings, both in a rational and non-rational sense - is suggested, in order to overcome the still existent dichotomy between reason and feeling, pragmatic usefulness and metaphysical reflection, and to create the preliminary condition for the pursuit of long-term goals.

From growth to growth. - There is a question that is in some ways surprising, in others a bit 'naive', which raises doubts and uncertainties in a growing number of people: the distance between saying something that gives pride of place to nature and its dynamics, and which has made this a central focus of

(*) This article takes up the topics of the paper presented at the Giornate della Geografia (Cosenza, 14-16 June 2013), extending some of its contents.

planning documents, international agreements and institutional guidelines, and a doing something that demonstrates the exact opposite.

In a way, it is the simplified version of the question that Bruno Latour (2000) addresses, when he asks himself how to fill the seemingly unbridgeable gap that separates science from politics, or rather the production of knowledge from the practical application of knowledge, or at least of some kind of knowledge. What is amazing is in fact the width of that gap, that is to say the absence of a real intention to address the issues of environmental and social justice that this gap entails (Harvey, 2000). Issues of justice that Latour, in an even more explicit way than Harvey and other scholars (cf. Braun, 2008), extends to the non-human realm, that is to say, to those entities – animals, plants, rocks or water – which cannot claim their rights, despite being an integral part of the Earth and its evolution since well before the appearance of man, indeed, irrespective of it.

In fact, we are stuck in a pattern of behavior that has proven to be unsustainable from all points of view - because it relies on endangered fossil fuels that cannot be replaced, because it produces high-entropy of energy and matter, because it cannot be extended to the entire population of the world, because it does not guarantee happiness, because it feeds on social and regional imbalances, and more (see Banini, 2010) – but we continue to pursue this course as if nothing had happened, as if the huge machine set in motion sixty years or so ago, but which has its roots in at least four centuries of history, was impossible to stop¹.

The reflections of Arnold Toynbee (1974) come to mind, when he said that civilizations fall into decline when they lack flexibility, when they lose the ability to adapt to change, to respond to the challenges that arise with creative energy. Unlike his contemporaries, the British historian spoke of moral and spiritual values that support the advance of civilization, without which the decision-making élites begin to behave in an opportunistic and parasitic way towards the masses, leading them to the final decline. Toynbee's interpretation showed that the civilizations of the past - beyond any reference to evolution - expired or were radically transformed as a result of environmental, social or cultural stresses; in any case, civilizations die from suicide, not by murder, as the well-known phrase attributed to Toynbee says².

According to Fritjof Capra (2009), contemporary society is at a turning point because of the intersection of several critical variables, three in particular: 1) the crisis of patriarchy, or the prevalence

(1) In 2012, the Earth Overshoot Day, that is to say the day when the consumption of environmental components on a global scale, for that year, exceeded the Earth's capacity to regenerate them, was reached on August 22. In other words, at that time, the Earth's population consumed what would have been the resources of an entire year. According to the calculations of the ecological footprint, overshooting has been happening since the mid-eighties of the last century (www.footprintnetwork.org).

(2) On the response of past civilizations to moments of crisis, marking their forfeiture or rebirth, and the challenges that current and future generations are being asked to handle cf. Diamond (2005).

of the masculine archetype (in his opinion at its apogee for at least 3,000 years); 2) the decline of fossil fuels (which he puts optimistically in 2300); and 3) the crisis of scientific points of reference, or rather, the methods of creating knowledge. For these and other reasons, intellectuals, scientists, prestigious research institutes, associations, movements, Nobel prize winners for peace and economics, including Amartya Sen, Paul Krugman and Joseph Stiglitz, all agree on the need for a fundamental change in human behavior on the planet, or the scenario that will occur, sooner or later, could be similar that described in so many disaster films and novels.

One of the most significant signs of the crisis we are experiencing emerges from the frequency with which economic growth is cited, with the same enthusiasm as sixty years ago, in spite of all the criticism of this post-war goal that has been made in the last sixty years³. The Europe 2020 Strategy itself no longer speaks of ‘lasting and sustainable development’, but of *intelligent, sustainable and inclusive growth* (Commissione Europea, 2010), the prevailing institutional, economic, political, decision-making dogma gives priority, once again, to the duo growth-technology, with particular emphasis on information technology, as if they too did not have a powerful environmental, as well as a social, impact. Instead, once again, the ‘triptych’ of progress-wealth-jobs is advocated, opening up an “ethically problematic spiral” (Vallega, 1990, p. 254), because “The idea of progress and the prospect of producing wealth and jobs are used as instruments of social persuasion with the aim of developing any activity, even at the cost of underestimating the relationships that they would establish with the environment” (Vallega, 1990, p. 254), in other words regardless of the logic and dynamics of nature, as well as of the local historical, cultural and landscape connotations.

Technology, or the *trivial machine* (von Foerster, 1987), is predictable, predetermined, a result of mechanistic culture, something that always behaves in the same way, something that has been created for a repetitive functioning. Completely the opposite of nature, the *non-trivial machine* par excellence, unpredictable, not predetermined, not fully understandable, not is it a coincidence that it is historically associated with the feminine universe⁴. The desire to dominate nature and to break free from the constraints it imposes, in Europe and elsewhere, has driven human behavior at least since the machines of the early Renaissance, curious expressions of genius and creativity, material entities able to generate awe and wonder, something practical, manual, useful, which would later become *technology*, a strategic

(3) Among the main contributions, in addition to the historical MIT Report (*The limits to growth*) and its re-releases to date, we recall the reflections of Kenneth Boulding, Nicholas Georgescu Roegen, Barry Commoner, Ilya Prigogine, Herman Daly, Fritjof Capra, Gregory Bateson, Enzo Tiezzi. For further information and additional references, cf. Banini (2010).

(4) The parallel between nature and the feminine universe can be found, for example, in the cosmogonic myth, common to many ancient civilizations, of the Great Mother, a primordial deity with a two-fold aspect, loving and terrible, positive and negative, therefore unpredictable, inconsistent, non-rationally understandable. Among other scholars, C.G. Jung (1981) and E. Neumann (1981) have written on her. The well-known essay by Vandana Shiva (2002) focuses on the concept of Mother Earth in terms of social and environmental justice.

framework in perpetual progress, the cutting edge of scientific knowledge, the myth of modernity, parallel reality, intelligent and often without scruples⁵.

For necessity or for virtue. – The reasons why it is difficult to translate saying into doing, in fact, are well known: it is not easy to change economic and political arrangements, or more or less known geometries of power, upon which an entire social system has been built that involves every aspect of people's lives, and which has been translated into behaviors, goals, and individual and collective expectations, gradually expanding on a global scale. A complicated weaving of democratic assertions and exclusive privileges, obtainable promises, and inevitable renunciations; narratives based on the myth of abundance and the risk of shortage. What Baudrillard has to say is remarkably up to date in this sense:

“Society's growth as a whole is a compromise between egalitarian democratic principles, which can sustain the myth of abundance and well-being, and the basic imperative of maintaining an order of privilege and domination [...] certain egalitarian, progressive, democratic processes [...] emerge in homeopathic doses, distilled from the system in terms of its survival. Equality itself in this systematic process is a dual function (secondary and derivative) of inequality. Just as is growth. The tendency towards equalization of incomes, for example (because it is mostly at this level that the egalitarian myth plays out), necessary for the internalization of growth processes, as we have seen, is accompanied tactically with the preservation of the social order, which is a structure of privilege, power and class. All this means that some symptoms of democratization as used as an alibi necessary to the vitality of the system” (Baudrillard, 1976, p. 45).

But politics and economics cannot be separated from nature, a *primitive independent variable*, as Turco calls it (1988, p. 59), as well as from social, cultural and value dynamics, of which they should be the concrete expression. Many scholars, therefore, think that a change is necessary, above all an ethical change, invoking the *principle of responsibility* of Hans Jonas (1993), rather than the *Land Ethic* of Aldo Leopold (2001) or the *ecological awareness* and the *community of planetary destiny* of Edgar Morin (2007). Those who appeal to ethics, however, generally lead to instances of coercion, or rather, to the proposition of regulatory action on the part of international institutions which should then redound on all the other institutions and thence on the citizens (see Iovino, 2004). However, the experience of sustainable development has shown that this approach is widely accepted in theory, but in practice it is generally translated into palliative measures, cosmetic cures, that remain on the surface (hence the name of *green washing*), and which reproduce, under some ‘eco’ prefix or some ‘green’ label, inequalities and injustices towards nature and human beings themselves⁶.

⁽⁵⁾ For an historical and critical examination of the relationship between machines, technology and scientific knowledge, see Rossi (2002).

⁽⁶⁾ Among the various theoretical developments of sustainable development is the Just Sustainability Paradigm, which, openly criticizing the traditional approach, focuses its attention on social justice and fairness, defining sustainability as "the

Change by necessity or virtue, then? Perhaps it is easier to opt for necessity, for example when fossil fuels are truly used up or it becomes too inconvenient to use them. Then history would repeat itself. A new era would begin thanks to a new type of energy being used, with one major difference: the earlier changes led to an increase in energy yield, or rather to the transition from a resource with higher yields than previously, whereas now it would be necessary to do exactly the opposite, because there is no way - today, and perhaps also tomorrow - to obtain the yield of fossil fuels and uranium.

So if the modern era has been built entirely on fossil fuels and nuclear power, the true postmodern change will occur when oil, coal and uranium are no longer used. Giddens (1994) is right, in this sense, when he speaks of late-modernity, or of the radicalization and universalization of modern categories, rather than of post-modernity. Or maybe modernity is really only an ideological creation, coincident with the birth of science. Perhaps really, says Bruno Latour (1995), we have never been modern, because nature is contained in everything we have created and we humans often do not remember this, because in spite of scientific and technological progress we have preserved an approach to nature based on a naive realism. "We're still in the prehistory of the human spirit, and always in the planetary iron age", Morin says, even more pithily (Morin, 2007, p. 56). Maybe when we stop using fossil fuels and uranium, we will return to sun, wind, water and fire, with gentle, non-invasive technologies, implemented at a local level. Maybe we will have no more fuel to move natural components, artifacts, people and information from one part of the world to another, at least not with the intensity and frequency we have at present. Or rather we will no longer put flows and globalization, métissages and hybridizations at the centre of our thoughts, but what we can do in places, for places, alongside nature.

Double responsibilities. - In the meantime, what can geography do? Geography has two parts to play, first because it produces and disseminates knowledge, like other disciplines; second because it produces and disseminates knowledge by focusing on the relationship between nature and human beings, that is to say, more than other disciplines.

Certainly today the environmental issue, as well as others, is treated in meta-fields that involve multiple disciplines and multiple perspectives: political ecology, cultural ecology, eco-feminism, social constructivism, critical realism, social ecology, post-structuralism, post-colonialism (cf. Proctor, 1998). In other respects, however, the traditional division of knowledge into distinct fields remains valid, and so we will continue to talk here about geography.

need to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, now and in the future, in a fair and equitable manner, whilst living within the limits of endurance of ecosystems"(Aygeman, Bullard, Evans, 2003, p. 5). The Just Sustainability Index (JSI), which is derived from the theory, attempts to measure the level of equity, justice and sustainability policies, programs, and social and economic goals, on a rating scale ranging from 0 (worst) to 3 (best).

Geography was born as a science in the second half of the nineteenth century, in fact from the very close bond between man and his environment, so close as to end up a deadly embrace, which not coincidentally lasted only a few decades. Since then, many geographers have been very careful when dealing with the environment, as if to ward off *a priori* the risk of falling into the trap of determinism, relegating nature to a discursive background, or rather without considering it as a preliminary and indispensable interlocutor in human action. Thus, geography first established affinities with history, then with economics, cybernetics, psychology, literature, art, music and other fields of knowledge; most recently there has been a revival of interest in philosophy and anthropology, two disciplines that are undergoing a profound epistemological re-examination. The focus has shifted more and more towards man and his accomplishments, and then to his representations, on the discursive practices that he has created and the metanarratives that have followed, running the risk, says Dematteis (2008), of switching from “the envy of physics”, which underlay positivist reductionism, to the “envy of semiotic”, “a typical disease of postmodernism, and in particular of that part of it which thinks that the world is reduced to signs, and thus there are no facts but only interpretations (Dematteis, 2003, p. 949).

By returning the environment to the center of geographical thinking, taking it as a central benchmark by which to measure, evaluate and propose a balanced and forward-looking relationship with nature would be desirable, therefore; because when the world is seen from an environmental viewpoint, it takes on a wholly different configuration, so that underlying paradoxes and inconsistencies emerge, but also unlimited possibilities. A good starting point is to recognize that nature is basically an idea, an image, an abstraction capable of being modified, which should not be confused with that to which the term refers, that is to say, the entirety of animals, plants, rocks, air, water and everything that constitutes the Earth (Castree, 2005, pp. 3-5 in particular). If nature – as time-space and place - is a social construct that requires fundamental concepts and a metaphysical basis to enable us to grasp its physical, biological and social complexity (Harvey, 1996, pp. 2-3), then we can construct an holistic idea of nature, a mixture of emotions and intellect, passion and rationality, which would allow us to pursue a more authentic and far-reaching course, moving from the deep, essential, original bonds that exist between humans and the natural universe. “The state of nature, at whatever scale it is considered, is the state of society. Acting on nature requires that first of all we change ourselves, and then we act on society” said Vallega (1990, p. 254) while attempting to integrate systemic theory and existentialism.

The idea, in this sense, is wide-ranging and can be followed in the intense interdisciplinary debate on complexity, considered not as a theoretical corpus that can be given a definite outline, but as a preliminary propensity towards knowledge, which definitively goes beyond mechanical, reductive and compartmentalized knowledge, and opens up to creativity, to transversal thinking, to parallel explorations, to the translation of metaphors, to the pluralism of perspectives, to “the variety of

cognitive, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual experiences of the human species” (Bocchi and Ceruti, 2007, p. XXII).

But first, a fundamental issue must be resolved that affects the entire scientific world and, in a sense, society as a whole. The reference is to the dualisms of Cartesian origin – also surpassed in words, but not in deeds - that have formalized the distinction between scientific and non-scientific, credible and non-credible, reason and feeling, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.

As recalled by Fritjof Capra (2008), Descartes conceived of nature as a perfect machine governed by exact mathematical laws, as matter without "intention, life or spirituality" (p. 53). This mechanical conception of nature became the dominant paradigm of science in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and generated a strong effect on social attitudes towards the natural environment. Until then, the organic conception of the world, which had roots in the Middle Ages, was accompanied by a value system that gave rise to environmentally friendly behavior. Capra (ibid.) quotes a significant passage by of Caroline Merchant:

The image of the Earth as a living organism and Alma Mater performed the function of a cultural limitation in restricting the actions of human beings within certain boundaries. A mother can't be easily slaughtered, neither do you dig in her bowels to look for gold, nor do you mutilate her body [...] As long as the Earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, carrying out destructive acts against her could be regarded as a breach of ethical conduct [Merchant, 1980, p. 3].

But all that disappeared with the mechanization of science, which provided “a scientific approval for the manipulation and exploitation of nature, that had become typical of Western culture” (Capra, 2008, p. 53).

In other words, it is as if before we could dominate nature, challenging its rules and its own logic, we had to detach from it emotionally, to consider it as an object, as an entity opposed to man, as a latent obstacle to the human desire for action free of any restrictions, as something always able to remind humans of the precariousness of their existence. Or maybe this has happened before, says Farinelli (2003), when the terrestrial sphere - that is, the complexity and irreducibility of the world – was reduced to paper, to a two-dimensional plane, with potentially infinite horizontal and vertical lines that allow us to think of the world as an uninterrupted expansion, as unlimited growth , “the rectification is thus the beginning of the technique” (p. 105), and finally, “the model has taken precedence over reality” (p. 73), giving us at the same time the illusion of having reassembled “the whole when it was torn to pieces” (p. 9).

Since then, the emotional, sentimental, existential dimension has been treated as something apart, on a parallel personal, intimate, lyrical track, also in geography, with the so-called ‘subjective geographies’ to be counterbalanced by political-economic approaches. A rift that has manifested itself on the social

level, in our way of perceiving and experiencing nature, places, the world. So, today we learn from the researches of environmental psychology that people, when interviewed, have great difficulty in talking about their connection with nature, their living spaces, their places of the heart, because that bond has become unconscious (Bonnes et al., 2009).

Reaching the people is the biggest challenge, because in frantic, complex, artificial and egocentric societies like ours is hard to remember that between humans and nature there is a constant interaction, although silent and invisible. Disseminating knowledge to solicit awareness then becomes essential, which means reducing the gap between science and society, to make scientific knowledge comprehensible so that it can be understood and practiced by all: “direct language, transparent, which speaks without difficulty to the imagination”, said Dardel (1986, p. 12). To this end we should open up channels of communication of geographical knowledge not only in university classrooms and schools, in conferences and congresses, forums, blogs and websites, but also by promoting activities in the territories, together with local associations, committees and initiatives. Perhaps, if this were done, impact factors and other indicators of scientific quality, designed and managed by the publishing, academic and institutional élites, sooner or later would be associated with a ‘social impact factor’, capable of measuring the accessibility and the social effects of scientific production.

Towards integration. - If the emotional, sentimental, existential separation between nature and human beings has been the source of many problems that we face today, our correct path would seem to go in the opposite direction. For this reason many scholars consider a cultural change to be necessary, a new humanism: the integration of knowledge and awareness, to create a cooperation, says Morin (2007, p. 11), between “the unconscious organizational and regulatory attitudes of nature with the organized and conscious attitudes of man”.

As geographers, however, we cannot overlook the pragmatic, operating dimension, which is translatable in practical terms, and which allows us to have dialogues with institutions, local governments, decision-makers, local authorities, or rather, with the immediate and the short term. It is better, then, to think about a geography that combines the rational dimension - made of numbers, indicators, statistics, laws, thematic maps and GIS, which are the basics for spatial and economic planning - and the non-rational dimension, related to feelings, emotions, perceptions towards nature, places, the world. A dimension that makes us interact with literature and art, film and music, and that has us face up to long-term or perhaps timeless issues, that is to say, to a margin of unpredictability and uncertainty with which, as Paolo Rossi argued (2008), we have to deal, in spite of all our scientific and technological advances.

Geography has all the numbers to pick up the threads of our fragmented knowledge and awareness, in order to launch an environmental breakthrough - but we could not call it *an environmental turn*, interrupting the sequence of “turns” postulated in recent decades (cultural turn, spatial turn, materialist turn etc.) - which would be not only disciplinary and scientific, but of social extent, taking advantage of its complexity, of its being a transverse discipline both to theoretical speculation and to political and economic priorities, to the social dimension of conflict and power and to the world of emotions, senses and feelings. The traces we need to follow already exist in the wealth of knowledge produced by geography over centuries of history. How can we forget, for example, the work of Elisée Reclus (1830-1905), a versatile blend of pragmatism and utopianism, social engagement and ascetic romance. Essential pages, those of Reclus, not only because certain revolutionary propositions have lost their politically-oriented connotations, and appear full of vibrant actuality, but also for the linguistic register that he uses, to talk about natural elements, landscapes and places in terms of viable and sensitive entities, while he describes the possible actions for flood control canals rather than preparing agricultural soil on steep slopes (see Reclus, 1984; 1999). Enthusiastic faith in human progress, that of Reclus, which in George Perkins Marsh (1801-1882) becomes a sharp criticism of destructive human actions, which disrupt the innate harmony of nature, and which leaves indelible marks, visible and invisible, in both the territory and the consciousness of human beings (cf. Marsh, 1988).

Vallega (2004), in his last books, spoke of rationalist and non-rationalist grammars that are perhaps irreconcilable. I believe he was inviting us to work on that ‘perhaps’, to challenge that ‘perhaps’, by bringing together seemingly opposing dimensions, instilling this integrated perspective into the words we speak and the pages we write, spreading *emotional intelligence* or perhaps *intelligent emotions*, it matters little. Perhaps, like the symbol of the Tao, with its two essences, the white and the black, that intersect, interpenetrate, each one having inside it a bit of the other, we can create a viewpoint that is truly holistic, a combination of the rational and non-rational, right brain and left brain, 2D space and 3D space, black/white and color, the archetypes of the masculine and the feminine, or, as Fritjof Capra would like to say (2009), the yin and the yang. For geography this means, in practice, the integration of methods and tools: data, indicators, maps, GIS, as well as stories, pictures, poems, music. Assuming that they are all just different forms of knowledge, yet still forms of knowledge, we can understand that it is their combination that makes the difference. It makes a difference because it opens up to our imagination, creativity, and alternative solutions; because it feeds what David Harvey (2000) calls *dialectical utopianism*, which can make us “both rule maker and rule breaker with reasonable impunity” (p. 205), holding the door open to the possibility of a different world. Just as Jeremy Rifkin (2009) says in one of his last books, when he focuses on a human prerogative, empathy, to reinterpret past and recent

history. Perhaps really, says Rifkin, we have become accustomed to a narrative of the world that has fueled the idea of the *homo homini lupus*, making the game of who has no interest in changing it⁷.

As an oceanic island. - Deleuze and Guattari (2002) call upon geography to return to the *consciousness of the Earth*, to the 'original intuition', the primordial, recalling Husserl, which is the basis of all experience; to return to the relationship with a primitive earth, full of geography and

not yet geographical, because there are no objects and subjects linked by a red thread, or a domination of one over the other. On the contrary, there is a fundamental, wild, native relationship between thought and the earth, between the territory and the earth, between movements of territorialization and de-territorialization, since thought originates in a situated knowledge that extends to infinity, from the condition itself, as Heidegger would say (2006), of *being-in-the-world*.

Geography knows these words, found in the pages of Elysée Reclus⁸, and especially of Eric Dardel and his idea of *geograficity*, a concrete relation that holds humans to the Earth, the mode of our existence and our destiny: "The geographic reality acts on man with an awakening of conscience", said Dardel, (1986, p. 38) "as if, before we would be aware of it, it was already there".

Finally, as if closing a circle, a return to the title of this paper. Between saying and doing, says the proverb, there is the sea, or in other words, water⁹. Perhaps it is not by coincidence that water makes up the largest part of the Earth's surface, and that the human body is also mostly made of water. Maybe there is a clue in this curious parallel: the need for water not only as a determinant of the ecosystem and the vital processes which give life to everything, but also in its symbolic terms (see Buttimer, 1986), related to movement and renewal, as well as to feelings and emotions, and even in our thoughts and the things we do¹⁰.

(⁷) Jeremy Rifkin (2009) attributes the main responsibility of this dramatic reading of human affairs to history, because it does not place as much importance on the positive, happy events, except those that put a temporary end to wars, disputes and conflicts. Even Rifkin, for this reason, looks sympathetically at space and geographical context (implicitly historical) where many 'sustainable' initiatives are taking place, with ordinary citizens as protagonists: these are small revolutions in context, in ascending logical order, conscious, responsible, with a low use of matter, energy and technology and high use of creativity, solidarity and foresight.

(⁸) "It's not just the books, it is the land itself to which I turned to have the knowledge of the earth" (Reclus, 1986, p. 45).

(⁹) What will be discussed below, if it is not yet clear, refers to the underlying message that this article wishes to communicate: the need to restore the relationship between nature and human beings at the center of the discourse of geography, incorporating both the rational, scientific, provable dimension, and the non-rational, symbolic, metaphorical dimension in the discourses themselves. A non-rational dimension that, in this case, is supplied by a proverb, a popular saying, as well as by the symbolic references (the symbolism of water) associated with scientifically measured data (the amount of water that covers the surface of the Earth; the quantity of water that constitutes the human body). It is a process that certainly does not reflect the linearity of scientific discourse, but which perhaps is a small example of the envisaged integration, as mentioned above.

(¹⁰) Perhaps it is when we observe the aquatic zone that the inadequacy of a purely intellectual attitude becomes evident, or of a knowledge, armed with reason, that renders phenomena concrete in a suitable way [...] The earth is silent, said Michelet, and the Ocean is a voice. It talks to the distant stars, it responds to their movement in its grave and solemn language. It speaks to the earth, it speaks to the shore with a mournful voice, it converses with their echoes. The space of

Perhaps it is not by coincidence that Gilles Deleuze (2007) associates geographic knowledge to the metaphor of continental islands and oceanic islands: *continental islands* as a result of disarticulation, erosion, processes of drift, as a result of a separation from a mainland, perhaps, from a consolidated, conventional, politically correct knowledge; *oceanic islands* as original, essential, authentic islands, that arise from an underwater eruption, a movement coming from below. The oceanic island, which is often a desert island, becomes then a metaphor for the meaning of human existence on Earth, of the rebirth, of the re-emergence on the surface of the deep tension between the ocean and the land, and perhaps even a metaphor of a call for the rebirth of a geography that is aware of its innovative strengths, which finds its authenticity in the relationship with nature.

“There are derived islands”, says Deleuze (ibid., p. 4-5), “but the island is also what one derived toward, and there are originary islands, but the island is also the origin, the radical and absolute origin [...]. A consciousness of the earth and ocean, such is the desert island, ready to begin the world anew”.

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ocean is like a voice that rises from the depths and quivers on the surface. The roar of the abyss, said Victor Hugo, is the effort that the world makes to speak" (Dardel, 1986, p. 27).

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