

Time, Baroque Codes and Canonization¹

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The Modern Equation between Roots and Options

Roots and options are two of the most basic references of social action. Roots are references that operate by backward linkages; options are references that operate by forward linkages. Social actions may be said to be root-oriented or option-oriented. The specificity of Western modernity resides in the equation between roots and options. Such an equation confers a dual character on modern thought: on the one hand, it is a thought about roots, on the other, a thought about options. The thought about roots concerns all that is profound, permanent, singular, and unique, all that provides reassurance and consistency; the thought about options concerns all that is variable, ephemeral, replaceable, and indeterminate from the viewpoint of roots. The two major differences between roots and options are scale and time. Roots are large-scale entities; options are small-scale entities. Because of this difference of scale, roots are unique while options are multiple.

Roots and options are also distinguished according to time. Societies, like social interactions, are built upon a multiplicity of social times, and differ according to the specific combinations and hierarchies of social times that they privilege. Drawing freely on Gurvitch's (1969, p. 340) typology of social times, I want to understand roots in terms of a combination of a) long duration time and time *au ralenti*; b) cyclical time, the time that *danse sur place*; c) belated time (*temps en retard sur lui même*), time whose unfolding keeps itself in wait. Options, on the other hand, are characterized by a combination of a) accelerated time (*temps an avance sur lui même*), the time of contingency and discontinuity; b) explosive time, the time without past or present and only with future. In a continuum between glacial time and instantaneous time, modern roots tend to cluster around glacial time, while modern options tend to cluster around instantaneous time. If in roots the tempo tends to be slow, in options it tends to be fast. The root/option duality is a founding and constituting duality, that is to say, it is not subjected to the play it itself institutes between roots and options. In other words, one does not have the option not to think in terms of roots and options.

In this equation of roots and options, modern society views medieval society and distinguishes itself from it. In medieval society the primacy

of roots – whether religion, theology or tradition – is total. Medieval society evolves according to a logic of roots. Its opposite, modern society sees itself as dynamic evolving according to a logic of options. The equation may have emerged in the Lutheran Reformation. Here it became possible, starting from the same root – the Bible of Western Christianity – to create an option vis-à-vis the Church of Rome. By becoming optional, religion as root loses in intensity, if not in status as well. In the self-same historical process through which religion goes from roots to options, science goes the opposite way, from options to roots. Giambattista Vico's (1961) 'new science' is a decisive landmark in the transition that started with Descartes and would be completed in the nineteenth century. Unlike religion, science is a root that originates in the future, it is an option which, by radicalizing itself, turns into a root, thereby creating a wide field of possibilities.

This shifting of stances between roots and options reaches its peak with the Enlightenment. In a large cultural field, which includes science and politics, religion and art, roots clearly presume to be the radicalized other of options. Thus reason, turned into the ultimate root of individual and collective life, has no other foundation but the creation of options. This is what distinguishes it, as a root, from the roots of the *ancien régime* (religion and tradition). It is a root which, by radicalizing itself, makes possible a wide range of options. In the event, options are not infinite. This is evident in the other great root of Enlightenment: the social contract and the general will sustaining it. The social contract is the founding metaphor of a radical option – the option to leave the state of nature and inaugurate the civil society – which itself turns into a root that makes everything possible, except to go back to the state of nature. The contractuality of roots is irreversible, such being the limit of the reversibility of options. That is why, in Rousseau (1973, p. 174), the general will cannot be challenged by the free men it creates. Rousseau says in the *Social Contract*: 'whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be compelled to do so by the whole body. This means nothing less than that he will be forced to be free'.

From the nineteenth century onwards, the mirror play of roots and options consolidates and becomes the *idéologie savante* of the social sciences. The twin exemplars are Marx and Freud. In Marx, the base is the root and the superstructure the options. In Freud (and in Jung) the unconscious is the deep root that grounds both the options of the ego and their neurotic limitation. In a world that had long lost its 'deep past' (the root of religion) science becomes in both the communist revolution and the revolution of subjectivity the only root capable of sustaining a new beginning. On that basis, good options are the options legitimated by science. This is what grounds, in Marx, the distinction between reality and ideology; and in Freud, the distinction between reality and fantasy. In this distinction also resides the possibility of modern critical theory.

Thus Horkheimer (1972, p. 208): 'Reason cannot become transparent to itself as long as men act as members of an organism which lacks reason'. In our century, sociology and the social sciences have subscribed to the new roots/options equation, converted into the master model of social intelligibility: structure and agency in sociology and anthropology; the *longue durée* and *l'événement* in history; *langue* and *parole* in linguistics.

In the political field, the nation-state and positive law turn into the roots that create the wide range of options in the market and civil society. In order to function as a root, law must be autonomous, which means it must be scientific: the juridical root, as a radicalized option, consecrated by codification and positivism (Santos, 1995, p. 55-109). The liberal state, in its turn, constituted itself as a root by imagining homogeneous nationality and national culture. The state becomes, then, the guardian of a root (ethnicity, language, culture) that does not exist beyond the state.

Entering a Post-Equation Era

The modern equation of roots and options, on the basis of which we have learned how to think social change, is undergoing destabilization that seems to be irreversible. This has three main forms: turbulence of scales; explosion of roots and options; interchangeability of roots and options. As regards *turbulence of scales*, the root/option equation rests on the stabilised difference between large-scale roots and small-scale options. Today this is thrown into confusion. Urban violence is in this paradigmatic. When a street kid is looking for shelter to spend the night and is for that reason murdered by a policeman, or when a person who, approached in the street by a beggar, refuses to give money and is for that reason murdered by the beggar, what happens is an unpredictable explosion of the scale of the conflict: a seemingly trivial phenomenon seemingly without consequences is equated with another one – now dramatic and with fatal consequences.

Bifurcation occurs in unstable systems whenever a minimal change can bring about qualitative changes in an unpredictable and chaotic way (Prigogine, 1980). This sudden explosion of scales creates a tremendous turbulence and leaves the system in a state of irreversible vulnerability. The turbulence of our time is of this kind: its vulnerability affecting forms of subjectivity and sociability, from labour to sexual life, from citizenship to the ecosystem. This state of bifurcation reverberates upon the root/option equation, rendering chaotic and reversible the scale difference between roots and options. The social contract itself is shaken by turbulence. The contractualization of modernity's political is being destabilized. The social contract is a root-contract based on the commonly shared option of abandoning the state of nature. Two

hundred years later, we are faced with structural unemployment, the return of supremacist ideologies, the increase of social and economic inequalities between and inside the world's countries. We seem to be opting to exclude from the social contract a large percentage of the population, forcing it to go back to the state of nature. The deradicalization of the social contract as a master political root implies that the social contract can no longer sustain the range of options it once purported to sustain. As the scale of the root shrinks, the suppression of options that goes with it appears justified as if sustained by an alternative root (the state of nature). Thus the moderate option of the welfare state in advanced capitalist societies appears today to be an extremist position, as extremist and utopian as the socialist option it sought to replace.

The second manifestation of the destabilization of the equation of roots and options is the *explosion of roots and options alike*. 'Globalization' has given rise to a seemingly infinite multiplicity of options. The range of possibilities has expanded tremendously, as legitimated by the very forces that make possible such expansion, be it technology, market economy, the global culture of advertising and consumerism, or democracy. Options appear limitless. And yet, we live in a time of localisms and territorializations of identities and singularities, genealogies and memories. In sum, the time we live in is also a time of limitless multiplication of *roots*.

The explosion of roots and options does not occur merely by means of the endless multiplication of both. It also occurs in the process of searching for particularly deep and strong roots capable of sustaining particularly dramatic and radical options. Though the range of possibilities may be drastically reduced the remaining options are dramatic and full of consequences. The two most telling examples of this explosion through intensification of roots and options are fundamentalism and DNA research. Fundamentalism is an extreme form of identity politics. Indeed Eurocentric universalism may be seen as an extreme form of identity politics. This hegemonic fundamentalism is signalled by its capacity to designate other forms of identity politics as fundamentalism. Neo-liberal fundamentalism is particularly intense. The 'market economy' has become the new social contract: the universal economic base or root which forces the majority of countries into dramatic and radical options. Here for many countries, the option is between the chaos of exclusion and the chaos of inclusion.

DNA research, in the human genome project, signifies culturally the transformation of the body into the ultimate root whence sprout the dramatic options of genetic engineering. The booming neurosciences and brain research also convert the body into the ultimate root. We began the century with the socialist and the subjective revolutions. We are closing it with the body revolution. The centrality then assumed by class and the

psyche is now being assumed by the body, itself now converted, like enlightened reason before, into the root of all options.

There is a new *interchangeability of roots and options*. We live in a time of unmasking and deconstruction. Today we see that many of the roots in which we have been mirroring ourselves were but disguised options or perhaps rather underexposed options. We see this in the option of primatology (Haraway, 1989), in the sexist and racist option of the welfare state (Gordon, 1990). We see this in the option, denounced by Martin Bernal (1987), to eliminate the African roots of Black Athena so as to intensify its purity as the root of European culture, and the in option to whiten the Black Atlantic so as to hide the syncretisms of modernity (Gilroy, 1993). We realize that the roots of our sociability and intelligibility are, in fact, optional, and address the hegemonic idea of the future that gave them meaning, rather than the past which, after all, only existed to function as the anticipated mirror of the future. In sociology, in general, the explosion of roots and options in recent times has taken the form of the proliferation of revisionisms concerning the founders of the discipline (Collins, 1994).

The interchangeability of roots and options has become constitutive of our life trajectories and histories. Consider, for example, debates on adoption and the negotiation of motherhood (Yngvesson, 1996). The wall of secrecy that for many years separated the birth mother (root) from the adoptive mother (option) has been questioned by the 'open adoption' policy. The interdependence of birth and adoptive mothers gives the adopted child the possibility to opt between biological and socially-constructed genetic roots or even to opt to keep both of them as a kind of bounded root life contingency. In the new constellation of meaning, roots and options are no longer qualitatively distinct entities. Roots are the continuation of options in a different scale and intensity; and the same goes for options. The outcome of this circularity is that the right to roots and the right to options are reciprocally translatable.

The mirror play of roots and options reaches its climax in cyberspace. On the Internet, identities are doubly imagined, as flights of imagination and as sheer images. People are free to create roots at their pleasure and then reproduce their options ad infinitum. The same image can be seen as a root without options or as an option without roots. It no longer makes sense to think in terms of the root-option equation. The distinction between backward and forward linkages that sustained the equation becomes a matter of clicking. Actually, we come to realize that the equation only makes sense in a conceptual, *logocentric* culture which speculates on social and territorial matrices (space and time), subjecting them to criteria of authenticity defined in terms of scale and perspective. As we move on to an *imagocentric* culture, space and time are replaced by instances of velocity, matrices are replaced by 'mediatrices', and authenticity discourse becomes incomprehensible gibberish. There is no

depth but the succession of screens. All that is below or behind, is also above and in front. Here Deleuze's (1968) 'rhizome' gains a new up-to-datedness. For media philosophers Mark Taylor and Esa Saarinen (Taylor and Saarinen, 1994, p. 9), 'the imaginary register transforms roots into rhizomes. A rhizomic culture is neither rooted nor unrooted. One can never be sure where rhizomes will break new ground'.

Transitions and Baroque Codes²

The trivialization of roots-options distinction entails the trivialization of both. In this lies our difficulty today in thinking social transformation. The *pathos* of the roots-options distinction is constitutive of our way of thinking social change. The more intense the pathos, the more easily the present evaporates into an ephemeral moment between the past and the future. The most eloquent version of such pathos is the Communist Manifesto. In the absence of this pathos, the present tends to be eternalized, devouring both past and future. Such is our present condition. We live in a time of repetition. The acceleration of repetition provokes a feeling of vertigo and stagnation at the same time. Because of its acceleration and mediatic treatment, repetition ends up subjecting even those groups that assert themselves by the pathos of roots. It is as easy and irrelevant to yield to the retrospective illusion of projecting the future into the past, as to yield to the prospective illusion of projecting the past into the future. The eternal present renders the two illusions equivalent, and neutralizes both. Thus, our condition takes on a Kafkaesque dimension: what exists can be explained neither by the past nor by the future. It exists only in a chaotic web of indefiniteness and contingency. While modernity deprived the past of its capacity for irruption and revelation, handing it on to the future (Benjamin 1968, pp. 253-64), the Kafkaesque present deprives the future of this capacity. What irrupts in this present is erratic, arbitrary, fortuitous, and absurd.

Because we are in a period of transition, this condition cannot be accepted as a normal state of affairs. It is either confronted as a dangerously deceiving condition or understood as a borderland of relatively unmapped opportunities and uninsurable risks. The strategy of confrontation and denunciation is premised upon the continuing validity of the dualism of scales (large/small) and the dualism of times (times of roots/times of options) that underlies the modern equation of roots and options. The collapse of these dualisms gives way to new servitudes and compulsions which, by virtue of the subsequent hiatus of codification, may easily present themselves as new auroras of liberty. Thus, the explosion of roots that has been the outcome, whether intended or not, of identity politics, does not merely trivialise roots. It brings along the risk of ghettoization and refeudalization – the

proliferation of differences which, because they are incommensurate, render coalitions impossible and lead ultimately to indifference. The explosion of roots provokes a rootlessness that creates choices at the same time that it blocks their effective exercise. On the other hand, the explosion of options, far from doing away with the determinism of roots, brings about a new, perhaps more cruel, determinism: the compulsion of choice, of which the market is the utmost symbol and reality (Wood, 1996, p. 252).

Is our condition indeed a question of transition or borderland? To presume so presupposes that the dualist codes that sustained the modern equation of roots and options have been finally sublated. The present hiatus that seems like a gap or absence of codification, is actually a fertile field where new synthetic codes are emerging. At issue are baroque codes in which scales and times mix, and in which underexposed options act like roots and overexposed roots act like options. What is most striking and original about these codes is that, though intrinsically provisional and easily discardable, they have, while they last, great consistency. They are, therefore, as intensely mobilizing as convincingly replaceable. The hiatuses, or gaps, among codes render sequences among them inapprehensible as such. Therefore, sequences have no consequences as consequences have no sequence. The experience of risk is thus much more intense. Since the causes are apprehensible only as consequences, there is no insurance against this kind of risk.

These post-dualist baroque codes are discursive formations that operate by intensification and *mestizaje*. There is intensification whenever a given social or cultural reference is exposed beyond its limits – whether through overexposure or underexposure – to the point of losing its ‘natural’ quality (e.g., a root turning into an option or vice-versa). There is *mestizaje* whenever two or more autonomous social or cultural references mix together or interpenetrate to such an extent and in such a way that the new references emerging therefrom, however autonomous they may appear to be, bear witness to their mixed heritage (Santos, 1995, pp. 499-506).

Mestizaje is of two kinds: *mestizaje* resulting from overexposure and *mestizaje* resulting from underexposure. *Mestizaje* resulting from overexposure concerns constellations of roots and options that proliferate in a chaotic manner, changing places in an irregular and unpredictable way. This kind of *mestizaje* occurs in many of the struggles conventionally termed new social movements: feminist and ecological struggles, the struggles of the indigenous peoples, struggles for human rights, and so on. *Mestizaje* resulting from underexposure concerns constellations of roots and options that concentrate on exemplary, ideally unique reproductions, whereby options become so intensified as to become roots.

Mestizaje resulting from overexposure is proper to baroque codes in which roots are subjected to the logic of options. There are roots only because there are options. Risk, a dominant presence in all baroque codes, is, in this type of code, confronted by creativity of action, by appealing to autonomy, self-reflexivity, individuation, extra-institutionality. In baroque codes that operate through overexposure, *mestizaje* preside over the social processes of creative dispersal and networking. The most consistent example of a baroque code bearing the form of overexposure is Beck's (1995) concept of subpolitics. At the antipodes of Foucault, Beck starts from the idea that the institutions of industrial modernity have created subjects they can no longer control. Science and law, the two megaroots of industrial modernity, have created such a wide hiatus between the individual and the State that the political options brought about by modern institutions have become a vast void. Politics needs, therefore, to be reinvented as subpolitics, that is to say, by proceeding to politicize what industrial modernity considered nonpolitical. Feminist and ecological struggles are the examples privileged by Beck to illustrate the new synthetic codes capable of sublating such dualisms as public/private, expert/lay person, political/economic and of shaping society from below by means of reflective rule altering.

The second type of baroque code is constituted by *mestizaje* resulting from underexposure. In this case, options conform to the logic of roots, that is to say, there are options only because there are roots. Here, risk is confronted not by the creativity of action but rather by the sustainability of action, by appealing to options that are intense or shared enough to allow for the sustained reproduction of an increasingly wider range of options. This kind of baroque code presides over *canonization* processes. By 'canonization' processes I here mean processes of particular intensification of references, whether they appear as backward or forward linkages. Intensification can either be produced by strict imitation (or reproduction), as in the musical canon, or by extreme difficulty, if not impossibility, of imitation, as is the case of Christian canonization. Intensification, whatever its process, confers to the object of intensification a particular exemplarity, strangeness, value, and soundness, which make it adequate to function as condition or ground for multiple exercises of choice, whether permitted or forbidden. Ideally, the process of intensification is consummated when the choice of the object of intensification foregoes justification as choice to become, itself, justification for other choices. The baroque codes that operate by means of underexposure *mestizaje* and preside over the canonization processes are perhaps the most intriguing and complex and therefore require more detailed reflection.

Baroque Codes and Processes of Canonization

Amongst many canonization processes under way in this period of transition, I distinguish three: the literary canon, the common heritage of humankind, and the world cultural and natural heritage.

The literary canon

By literary canon is meant the set of literary works that, at a given historical moment, the dominant or hegemonic intellectuals and institutions consider to be most representative, of greater value and authority in a given official culture. Thus Harold Bloom (1994) proffers twenty-six major authors (novelists, poets, dramatists) that he institutes as the Western canon. The role that the church played in the constitution of the biblical canon, has been played by the school and university as far as the literary or, in general, the artistic canon goes (Guillory 1995, p. 239). In the literary canon, baroque codes of underexposure *mestizaje* operate: the works chosen to integrate the canon are the ones that stop being exposed to the logic of options and become the foundation or root of the literary field. The intensification process that these works undergo endows them with the cultural capital necessary to allow them to display the exemplarity, the uniqueness, and inimitability that sets them apart.

As a baroque code, the literary canon is a synthetic code, a code that is also structurally ambivalent since, to subject options to a logic of roots – as befits underexposure *mestizaje* – it must begin by opting among several alternatives so as to deny, at a later stage, the status of root to every alternative that has not been chosen. Thus Bloom (1994, pp. 2-3) asserts with not a little irony: ‘the choice of authors here is not so arbitrary as it may seem. They have been selected for both their sublimity and their representative nature’. He continues, after asking rhetorically what makes a particular author or work canonical: ‘The answer [is] strangeness, a mode of originality that either cannot be assimilated or that so assimilates us that we cease to see it as strange’. The literary canon is particularly contested in the Anglo-Saxon world. The positions become extreme between those who defend the canon such as they find it, investing it with the function of guaranteeing the national and cultural identity and stability, and those who attack it by questioning precisely the (elitist, partial) conception of identity that it imposes. The discussion of the process of canon formation and reproduction (Kamuf, 1997) in itself sheds light on the historical nature of the canon and its volatility, as well as on the social forces and institutions that shape it one way or the other. Equally important is to note the canon's capacity for resistance, the ease with which it creates solidity and imposes itself as authority, routine or mere inertia. The

intensity of the debate, in its institutional, political, and mediatic repercussions, is easily appropriated by the intensification process at the basis of underexposure *mestizaje*. The very debate about options and their alternatives intensifies the submission of options to the logic of roots. Up to a certain point, canonization feeds on decanonization.

The Biblical canon, the texts that together are considered to be the Holy Scripture in the Judeo-Christian tradition, was formed very early on and kept quite consistently; even deviations from it have shown remarkable persistence. 'Given the character of the Church as an institution to which one either does or does not belong, the process of canonical selection in this context must take the form of a rigorously final process of inclusion or exclusion (on dogmatic grounds). Every would-be scriptural text is included or excluded once and for all' (Guillory 1995, p. 237). In the literary canon, things are different by virtue of the different institutional practices of churches and schools. Even in the ecclesiastical field there are differences. While the Biblical canon reveals great stability, canonical law, though far more stable than the secular law of the states, has undergone some changes in the course of the centuries. These changes are due in part to the internal heterogeneity of the different normative elements that constitute the canonical law: divine law, natural law, regulatory positive law.

Unlike the literary canon, the historical canon does not so much concern texts and authors, as rather events and contexts. Though in some countries less visible than the literary canon, the historical canon also exists and consists of the foundational narrative of the nation-state, as well as of such historical events as are considered to have the utmost importance and, for that reason are said to be canonical. In the past decades the historical canon in some countries has been under the same kind of turbulence that has affected the literary canon in the Anglo-Saxon cultural world. Suffice it to mention the controversies generated by the historical revisionism of François Furet (1978) on the French Revolution or Renzo de Felice (1977) on Italian fascism.

The Common Heritage of Humankind

The *common heritage of humankind* is a doctrine in international law and international relations. The concept was formulated for the first time in 1967 by Malta's Ambassador to the United Nations, Arvid Pardo, in relation to UN negotiations on the international regulation of the oceans and the deep seabed. Pardo's purpose was:

to provide a solid basis for future worldwide cooperation ... through the acceptance by the international community of a new principle of international law ... that the seabed and ocean floor and their subsoil have a special status as a 'common heritage of mankind' and as such should be reserved exclusively for peaceful purposes and administered

by an international authority for the benefit of all peoples. (Pardo, 1968, p. 225)

Since then, the concept of common heritage has been applied to other 'common areas' such as the moon, outer space and Antarctica. The idea is similar to the idea of the social contract: the construction of commonly shared ground upon which differences and divisions can flourish without compromising the sustainability of social life. However, contrary to the social contract, and as befits a baroque code, common heritage is not a once-and-for-all choice but rather an ongoing process of selection. Whatever becomes heritage has always been there. The instant of nomination creates the eternity of the nominated. The nominated are those natural entities that belong to humankind in its entirety. All people are, therefore, entitled to have a say and a share in the management and allocation of their resources. Common heritage, as J.M. Pureza (1993) notes, involves 1) nonappropriation; 2) management by all peoples; 3) international sharing of the benefits obtained from the exploitation of natural resources; 4) peaceful use, including freedom of scientific research for the benefit of all peoples; 5) conservation for future generations.

Although formulated by international lawyers, the concept of common heritage transcends law, inasmuch as both its object and subject of regulation transcend states. Humankind emerges, indeed, as a subject of international law, entitled to its own heritage and the autonomous prerogative to manage the spaces and resources included in the global commons. Common heritage is a baroque code operating through underexposure *mestizaje*. The natural resources of common heritage undergo a process of intensification converting them into the foundation of the survival of life on earth. As with the literary canon, the options are so intensified that whatever is selected becomes exempt from the game of roots and options. As long as the selection is sustained, it becomes a root without options. The exemplarity, uniqueness, and precious value of the resources that constitute the common heritage is sustained via the insistence that life on earth depends upon them for its existence.

Like the literary canon, the doctrine of the common heritage of humankind has been contested. However, unlike in the literary canon, canonization of common heritage has been attacked by hegemonic groups, especially the US. Instead counterhegemonic groups, such as peace and ecological movements, as well as Third World countries, are the ones engaged in the struggle for the doctrine's canonization. The common heritage of humankind clashes with the interests of some states, particularly those with the technological and financial means for ocean floor exploration (Kimball, 1983, p. 16). The Law of the Sea Convention, signed in Montego Bay on December 10, 1982 is exemplary. Though the Sea Convention was originally signed by 159 states, it took twelve years

to be ratified by sixty states, the number of ratifications needed to bring the Convention into force. The implementation of the Convention started in November 1994. Due to US pressure to correct some of its 'imperfections', the Convention will be implemented with an annex agreement, neutralizing its most innovative features. One of the most revealing characteristics of the common heritage of humankind is its baroque openendedness, the capacity to extend the process of intensification to other areas or resources, thus converting them in further roots of life on earth.

Canonization of common heritage has been extended into outer space, in for example the Moon Treaty of 1979, which became international law in 1984. Article XI of the Treaty states that the moon and its natural resources are a common heritage of humankind. Article VI states that 'the exploration of the moon shall be the province of all mankind and shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interest of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic and scientific development'. Like the Law of the Sea Convention, it was established in the face of anti-canonization struggles of hegemonic powers. Neither the United States nor the former Soviet Union, China, Japan and the United Kingdom are signatories and thus not legally obliged by the treaty. As regards the already established literary and historical canons, struggles aim at historicizing, relativizing, and decanonizing it. As regards common heritage, the process of canonization itself is the object of contestation. Baroque codes often exist in anticipation of the reality they aspire to.

World Cultural and Natural Heritage

The third process of canonization I will address is the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. As established by the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972 (ratified by 152 countries as of December 1997), monuments, groups of buildings, sites, and natural formations that meet certain criteria and tests of authenticity will be considered as being of 'outstanding universal value' and accordingly nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List. Such value may be established from a variety of points of view: history, art, science, aesthetics, anthropology, conservation or natural beauty. As in the other processes of canonization the World Cultural and Natural Heritage operates by means of an exceptional intensification of the selected objects, endowing them with such aura of exemplarity, uniqueness, and irreplaceability that they acquire the foundational status of quality of life on earth. For that reason, in the terms of the Convention itself, their deterioration or disappearance would be 'a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of

all nations of the world'. This intensification process can be seen clearly in the criteria defined and applied by the World Heritage Committee.³

- i. represent a masterpiece of human creative genius; or

- ii. exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or landscape design; or

- iii. bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared; or

- iv. be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history; or

- v. be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change; or

- vi. be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (the Committee considers that this criterion should justify inclusion in the list only in exceptional circumstances and in conjunction with other criteria, cultural or natural)

As regards the natural heritage, the natural sites or formations (whether physical, biological, geological or physiographic) should:

- i. be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life; significant or on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features; or

- ii. be outstanding examples representing significant or on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants or animals; or

iii. contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance; or

iv. contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation [.]

In December 1997, 134 cities in 58 countries had been declared world heritage. Since 1993 they have been part of the Organization of World Heritage Cities whose main objective is to foster cooperation, solidarity, and mutual support among the cities so that they can preserve 'the privileged position' invested upon them.⁴ In December 1997 the World Heritage List consisted of 552 properties in 112 countries, of which 418 were cultural, 114 natural, and 20 mixed.

As a canonization process, the World Cultural and Natural Heritage has some similarities with the common heritage of humankind. In both cases, the aim is to define systems of protection and special juridical statuses for resources that are considered to be of exceptional importance for the sustainability and quality of life on earth. However, in contrast with that of the common heritage of humankind (or indeed of literary works), the canonization of the world cultural and natural heritage has been relatively little contested. Since 1978 the World Heritage Committee has been steadily including new sites in the List, approximately 35 new sites per year in the 1990s alone.

Unlike the literary canon, the World Cultural and Natural Heritage is a positive-sum game. The inclusion of a site in the cultural or natural canon does not directly imply the exclusion of an alternative site, especially when the sites are located in different countries. On the other hand, while the literary canon up to a point feeds itself upon the forces that contest it, in Cultural and Natural Heritage the limits of canonization reside in the forces that promote it: a virtually infinite canonization of sites might bring about the perverse effect of decanonizing (i.e., trivializing) already listed ones. Baroque codes operating through underexposure depend on the production of scarcity: intensification demands rarefaction. Unlike the common heritage of humankind, the Cultural and Natural Heritage does not question the ownership, whether public or private, of the canonized site or formation. The 1972 Convention states that acknowledgement of the universal value of a given site demonstrates 'the importance, for all the peoples of the world, of safeguarding this unique and irreplaceable property, to whatever people it may belong'.

The Times of the Baroque Codes

In the previous section I analyzed two types of baroque codes: ones operating through overexposure *mestizaje* and presiding over the processes of creative dispersal and networking; and codes operating through underexposure *mestizaje* and presiding over the processes of canonization. Both types of codes are synthetic in aspiration. The different kinds of *mestizaje* they produce between roots and options bear witness to the fact that the dualism of roots and options is still present in them, even if only as a ruin, a memory or a discomfort. They are, therefore, ambivalent codes, an ambivalence that is reflected in the social times they privilege. These times are themselves ambivalent, irregular, unrhythmical.

There are, it would seem, three distinct temporalities of today's baroque codes (Gurvitch 1969, pp. 341-43). First, there is the *trompe-l'oeil* time which, though apparently a long duration, conceals an enormous capacity for irruption, of bringing about emergencies and abrupt, unexpected crises. Second, there is the time of irregular beat between the emergence and disappearance of rhythms, a time of enigmatic duration and intervals between series of duration. This is the time of uncertainty, contingency, and discontinuity. Finally, there is the alternating time between belatedness and forwardness, a time of discontinuities between anachronisms and anticipations, a time of struggle between past and future fighting for space in the present. The present is thus evanescent in this temporality.

Each of these times occur in both types of baroque codes, in different combinations. Each of these times has a specific ambivalence resulting from its combining, in a failed synthesis, the elements of a given dualism. This may be a dualism between duration and explosion, between the irregularity of the emergence or the irregularity of the disappearance of the rhythm; or between anticipation and anachronism. The way this ambivalence presents itself may vary according to the slower or faster rhythm that shapes the changes or oscillations. Tempos such as *largo*, *lento*, *adagio*, *andante* and *moderato* tend to prevail in baroque codes of underexposure and their processes of canonization. *Allegro*, *presto* and *prestissimo* tend to prevail in baroque codes of overexposure and their processes of creative dispersal and networking.

Conclusion

The equation of roots and options is of crucial importance to understand processes of social identity and transformation in Western modernity. In this essay, after having analyzed the equation, I have tried to identify the factors that have lately contributed to destructure this equation. This

destructuring has been so pronounced that the equation may be suffering from a terminal crisis, and we are, accordingly, in an emergent post-equation era. In this period twin processes can be detected. On the one hand, socio-cultural phenomena until now considered as optional forward linkages are so underexposed that they become roots; on the other hand, phenomena until now considered as foundational backward linkages are so overexposed that they become optional. Both the processes of underexposure and overexposure involve mixing, interpenetrating, cross-fertilizing and cross-undermining references up until now unambiguously claimed either as roots or options. It is this *mestizaje* of references that translates itself into what I have been calling baroque codes: discursive formations and formulations of socio-cultural identity and change in which the dualism of roots and options is present only as ruin or memory. These codes aspire to synthesis without reaching it: they are ambivalent, complex, relatively chaotic and contestable. These codes, just like the older equation of roots and options evolve in various types of socio-temporal constellations.

Because of their mixed character, their voracious adaptability and their irregular durations and rhythms, baroque codes are congenial to globalization, to both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic globalizations. Baroque codes offer a common ground of ambiguity, a common ground of bounded incoherence and self-contradictoriness in which conflicting interests and social groups can use to their advantage the relative blurring of the distinction between transgression and conformity, between changing and enforcing rules. The relative strength of the different interests dictate the direction of globalization. The outcomes, however, are indeterminable and always reversible.

Notes

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2. By "codes" I mean discursive formations and formulations that function as common language and shared rules in struggles concerning identity and social transformation.
3. These data can be looked up on the Web. See UNESCO, World Heritage Committee, on <<http://www.unesco.org:80//whc/criteria.htm>>.
4. See the statutes of the Organization of World Heritage Cities adopted in Fez on September 8, 1993. Other institutions concerning the world heritage are the International Center for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Properties (ICCROM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the World Conservation Union.

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