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Abstracts

Eduardo Portella
Introduction: Indications of the Knowledge Society

Is 'knowledge society' yet another empty slogan? More than ever, 'knowledge is power'. But we can hardly affirm that the society we live in is based on the vigour of knowledge. The market price placed on knowledge fails to provide it with the needed qualitative impetus. Inequities remain the blind spot of technological systems. To be sure, we are living in an information society at higher scales of exchange, with 'a great deal of information, but little knowledge'. We may indeed be restoring a sort of enlightened despotism of a technologically neo-positivistic type, a realm of experts whose 'know-how' is but another term for 'doing without knowing'. In a truly democratic sense, the knowledge society is a basic human right. Knowledge is nourished in society. Conversely, societies find in knowledge a compass for their peaceful co-existence.

Gianni Vattimo
Knowledge Society or Leisure Society?

Such is the scale of information production today that the verb 'to know' may be heretofore declined in the impersonal. A new 'subject of knowledge' - the machine – is seen as removing from homo sapiens the so far uncontested role of 'learned subject'. This calls for a rethinking of our notions of knowledge and democracy. To think of a knowledge society where every single person would be capable of knowingly taking any type of decision on community life, points to an incapacity to rethink the concept of knowledge. The fragmentation of knowledge transforms democracy into a simple possibility for each and every person to choose 'the expert' by whom he wishes to be guided. Kant had distinguished between 'knowledge' and 'thought', associating the latter with leisure. It appears today that pleasure and games may be the ultimate bulwarks of humanity. Perhaps we ought to be speaking of a leisure society rather than a knowledge society.

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Zygmunt Bauman
Educational Challenges of the Liquid-Modern Era

A liquid modernity, where the traditional certainties have become fluid and blurred, presents a major challenge for education. The world is changing so quickly that homo sapiens, learning animal par excellence, can no longer rely on strategies acquired through learning experiences, let alone those derived from traditional values or wisdom. The excess of useless information creates a glut. When saturation level is reached, accumulation ceases to be a sign of wealth and becomes undesirable. Knowledge is confined – discarded like refuse – in the infinite capacity of cyber-computers. What should we humans keep and what should we reject in this process? In times of liquid modernity, how and what should our children be taught in order to be able to develop survival strategies throughout their lives?

Homi K. Bhabha
Democracy De-realized

In times of crisis, when democracies are under threat, our lessons of justice and equality are best learnt from those who are marginalized or oppressed. There could be hope for democracy if responses to the attacks of September 11, for example, were characterized not by blind revenge but by democratic solidarity. To think of democracy in terms of non-realized ideals does not adequately challenge the failures of its promises. 'Not to respond' is often a strategic necessity for democratic discourse, which recognizes failure as part of its evolutionist and utopian narrative. The internal dialectic of the unrealized finds in the negative instance of failure a strange moral coherence. Thus it is proposed to consider democracy as something de-realized rather than unrealized. The term 'de-realized' places the democratic experience at a distance, in a context not of its making, in order to de-familiarize it and to block its natural or normative reference. The idea is to see the potential of democracy in translation or in an extraterritorial sense. Democracy's potential lies not in its failure but in its frailty.

Sergio Paulo Rouanet
Religion and Knowledge

The attacks of September 11 oblige us to revise a prevalent view of religion as harmless and incompatible with rational forms of knowledge. Three modes of knowledge coexist today: theological knowledge involves adhesion to a system of beliefs; technological and natural science knowledge is value-free and neutral with regard to beliefs; lastly, knowledge in philosophy, social and human sciences relates to values, transcends national and cultural specificities and involves freedom and reason. Is this latter form of knowledge more apt to preserve one's critical conscience than other modes of knowledge? History does not, alas, corroborate this theory. All three knowledge modes, taken separately, lack both a wider rationality which would

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enable them to legitimize their actions in light of universal criteria, and the properties of democratic debate, the only way to avoid pathologies in thought, be they of a religious or scientific nature. In a post-secular society, religions resist all forms of secularizing influences. A true secular society is, however, able to preserve the contents of religion without destroying them.

Harris Memel-Fotê
Initiation Society, Learned Society and Knowledge Society

Knowledge is a social institution, a social activity, as well as the product of that social activity. All known societies incorporate several modes of hierarchical knowledge. Three styles of knowledge co-exist in the transitional societies of the third world in general and of contemporary Africa in particular (even though in each of the latter, only one style tends to predominate). The first are initiation societies – where power is conferred on the initiated; the second are learned societies (or academies) - which handle science and technologies; and the third are industrial societies – whose enterprises apply the technologies in order to improve humankind's material and cultural condition. The initiation, learned and industrial societies were developed in a pre-modern, pre-industrial context which was monarchic, sacred, anti-democratic or endowed with a tribal democracy. A gradual opening can be seen in the passage of initiation societies (where power is the perquisite of the initiated) towards learned societies and then, later, to industrial ones. Here, the problem is knowing whether and how to bring into play a fourth style of society – cognitive society – which requires relatively advanced conditions of democracy.

Fatma Oussedik
Learning and Reason in the Muslim West: The Case of Algeria

A genealogy of the relationship between Islam and knowledge focusing on the Muslim West and, in particular, Algeria explains the current chaos within Muslim societies. The West, on its side, has difficulties understanding a cultural tradition which differs from its own. Islam did develop an aptitude for knowledge that put into play 'different intellectual modalities, among which were dialectic argument, intuition and controversy'. However, 'the accession to knowledge is shown by assent'. A long tradition of debate and controversy drew to a close and was abandoned in favour of the exercise of authoritative and absolute power. Intellectual life in the region suffered notably from the successive departures of the elite, at the end of the Ottoman Empire, at the onset of the colonial period and upon independence. Colonialism founded a new system born of different traditions and entailed the breaking up of traditional scholastic institutions. After Independence, fewer and fewer interlocutors were capable of undertaking a reasoned critique of the West. 'Mistrust with regard to the West' translated into a 'refusal even of controversy'. It is a vicious circle that can be broken only through a minimum of democracy.

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Barbara Freitag
Global Cities in Informational Societies

Modern cities have recently evolved as centres for material and intangible exchanges and this obliges us to rethink the urban scene. The passing from the industrial era to the new age of information has rendered obsolete the models envisaged by Max Weber, Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin. Basing her argument on the typology put forward by Saskia Sassen, Barbara Freitag sketches out the different profiles of contemporary cities. Urban centres are now defined by the level, scale and intensity of the exchanges to which they give rise. On the first level is the global city, nerve centre of the globalized economy (Tokyo, New York, London . . .) and capable of challenging the power of the state. On the second level are the megalopoles (Mexico, São Paulo . . .), which are only prevented from joining the ranks of the global cities because much of their population is excluded from the global economy. Next come the metropoles, cities like Paris ('19th-century capital'), which have retained a way of life global centres can no longer provide. However, most of the world's population is concentrated in the peripheral boroughs of the information society's global economy. It is for the sake of this population that attention must be paid to the transformations endured by 21st-century cities.

Liubava Moreva
Reflections on the Paradigms of Philosophizing

Among the most recent unforeseen events of this modernity, those of 11 September 2001 exposed the dark side of globalization. If science reduces the whole universe to its one logic, philosophy retains a crucial role as a process of production of meanings for the human being, a being incapable of situating himself or herself in relation to the universe except through dialogue. To the extent that no fragment of truth can be absolutized, only permanent thought can constitute a universal cognition.

Masahiro Hamashita
Knowledge from Outside: Knowledge for 'Divertissement' and Beyond

Many cultures have had knowledge imposed from outside, whether by force or for reasons of power, to the detriment of their own endogenous knowledge and the wisdom developed throughout their history. Would Japan's acquisition of Western knowledge have led but to the development of a lesser know-how, devoid of meaning or sense, or even of knowledge which it might be better to ignore? Far from benefiting from an endogenous development or a modernization respectful of beings and of their environment, the developing countries that superficially adopt this unilateral knowledge undergo a type of 'self-colonization'. Although concurring with biologist Keiko Nakamura's theory that scientific attitudes must be studied from within, Masahiro Hamashita considers that knowledge from outside allows for more solid internal reflection. He thus advocates the development of an integrated, hybrid

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knowledge, where external knowledge is mixed with internal knowledge in a spontaneous, harmonious way, as was the case with the traditional knowledge that Japan acquired from China.

Rafael Argullol
Flashes of a Century: A Breviary of Images

The 20th century bears witness to the extent to which the potential scale of destruction is proportional to the dimensions of human knowledge. Simultaneously, an ethical disarray grows prevalent within a civilization obliged to do away with the hopes and ideals of the Enlightenment. Continuous entertainment is replacing models capable of nourishing the leisure of human thought and learning. We are threatened with 'the loss of the different perspectives of human memory', which can but 'facilitate the repetition of past mistakes'.

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