**Arturo Escobar**  
**Who is Arturo Escobar?**  
Activist researcher from Cali, focused on territorial struggles against extraction, post-capitalist transitions, ontological design, the making and unmaking of the world, and the post-development era (including how Europe underdeveloped Africa). He has worked with Afro-descendant and feminist communities in Colombia, particularly in remaking and restoring life, and exploring other possibilities.

Escobar was born in Manizales, Colombia. He studied chemical engineering and biochemistry in Cali, Colombia, as well as food science and nutrition. In 1981/82, he briefly worked for the government in National Planning in Bogotá, Colombia, but soon focused on his PhD at the University of California, Berkeley, in Development Philosophy, Policy, and Planning. He mainly taught in the U.S. on development theory and social change, post-development, political ontology, and recently on ontological design. His anthropological approach is based on post-structuralist theories (e.g., Foucault's discourse analysis) and subaltern studies (e.g., Dipesh Chakrabarty).  
Escobar believes that development planning was not only problematic because it failed but also because it set the terms for how people in poor countries could live, even when it succeeded.  
See also Harry S. Truman's official representation of his administration's foreign policy (1945-53), where three continents—South America, Africa, and Asia—were labeled as "underdeveloped," and the reorganization of bureaucracy aimed at systematically changing the "Third World."

**Envisions a post-development era**

**Chapter 6: Autonomous Design and the Politics of Relationality and the Communal**

Between Social Movement and Academic World (academics and activists), inter-epistemic conversations. The world is in a moment of transition where the old is no longer, and the new has not fully emerged yet. “The thought of transition” (p. 167).

Envisioned by Indigenous, Afro-descendant, women activists, peasants, and workers in the Latin American context, grounded in decolonial thinking from scholars across Abya Yala (the Americas), this vision has an onto-epistemological dimension (ontological, as it concerns lifeworlds).  
**Autonomía (autonomy)**  
**Comunalidad (communality)**

**What is autonomous design?**  
Is it an oxymoron?  
For, and from autonomy,  
Denies design that is unsustainable and based on defuturing practices (e.g., supports terracide).  
World-making projects focus on the flourishing of more-than-human worlds and pluriversality, as well as technodiversity, derived from Latin American experiences and ideas.

1. **Borrowing from Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980/1987; see titles), autopoiesis/biological autonomy is a guideline for autonomous design.**

* Living beings are characterized through self-production (not in isolation).
* A network of processes (relations).
* Constitutes an organization (machine).
* Continued interactions produce units.
* This continued interaction is called structural coupling.
* Open to the environment and operationally closed (membranal).

**IMPORTANT**: It is not the environment that dictates the coupling, but the unit itself (think of living webs). Autonomous structures (biological, social, or cultural) can undergo structural changes, but they must maintain a basic organization to remain the unit they are. Often, this is guaranteed by establishing a pattern of mutuality within congruent systems (e.g., for humans, language). In biology, ontogenesis (from fertilization to anatomical and behavioral features).

This can be called co-design. Why do we speak of systems?  
Emergent. Self-organizing systems act as a whole without totalizing.  
Can we think of conventional systems that act as a whole but are not totalizing? (e.g., self-regulating systems, open, adaptive, unstable).

This image can be translated to the communal form of living and politics.

**Important in Latin America**:  
Autonomy is always based on the notion of:

* Relationality
* Alterity
* The universe as flux
* Mutual constitution
* Active engagement with others (Love)

**2. Autonomy in the Social and Cultural Domain**  
The call for autonomy critiques formal democracy (e.g., Occupy Wall Street, Indignados movement). It always comes with a call for reconstructing a new form of rule based on people's lives.  
This contrasts Ontonomy (traditional, endogenous, collective) with heteronomy (established by others, experts, institutions, universal, standardized).

Autonomy: changing norms from within, defending, transforming, and inventing traditions.  
Changing the way we change (shifting from heteronomy to autonomy or ontonomy).  
In autonomy, communities relate to each other and other entities (communities or states) through structural coupling, but they have their own proposals for existence and decision-making.  
It is understood as a cultural, political, and ecological process—there is no absolute autonomy, but a guideline!  
It is not simply invented but stems **from centuries of Indigenous resistance** (a long historical background).  
Nevertheless, it is **strictly contemporary**—societies and worlds in movement.  
It is not about change but about **creating new worlds**.  
It’s not about capturing the state but about creating new institutional arrangements.  
New social foundations (Zapatista: learning, living, dwelling, working—active verbs instead of passive nouns).  
**Often place-based and territorial, though this looks different from territory to territory (in urban spaces**, e.g., city gardens, free clinics, public schools).  
Reclaiming the commons.  
Also, another word for conviviality (Esteva).  
The control of basic production is crucial.

**3. The Realization of the Communal**  
In the context of Latin American Indigenous movements since 1992, see also the political turn in the late '90s (e.g., Evo Morales in Bolivia, 2006).  
**Entremados comunitarios** (communitarian entanglements) as opposed to “coalitions of transnational corporations.”  
See also Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who interprets the Indigenous communal resistance, starting with the rebellion of Tupac Amaru and Tupac Katari (1780-1781).  
Rivera speaks of the non-linear time of struggle and their “strict contemporaneity.”  
The communal as a “socio-natural space” does not distinguish between the social, ecological, and political but sees them as a single system that relates to both internal and external structures.

Power does not anchor in the individual but in the collective:

* Expansion of communal enterprise instead of capital’s mode of ownership.
* Decentralization of representative democracy in favor of communal democracy.
* Interculturality: Utilizing liberal knowledge and technology but subordinating them to the communal logic.
* From heteronomy to autonomy.
* Autonomy anticipates capital but not necessarily socialism.
* Dialogical, dispersed.
* Historical, open, and non-essentialist.

**4. An Outline of Autonomous Design**

**Feet on the Earth, Territory**  
Autonomy (not as institution/separation) but in relation.  
Community of communities (federation).

**Propositions**  
No more of the same.  
Go for the impossible.

**AGAINST TERRACIDE**  
[Video Link](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UKXg_Agw3c)

**Humanities, Pluriversal Transitions, Living a Life for Futurity**  
Call for institutional change (ecological degradation, climate change, racial injustice, call for decolonization).  
What makes a life worth living?

How, in the face of the failure of globalization and ecological deprivation, can we think of a failure in the ontological dimension of politics (ontological conflict)?  
Nature-culture divide: modern Western ontology is not the only way of being in the world.  
Living as a part of the world, inhabiting the pluriverse (worlds of worlds), not changing the world but changing in the world (ontologically).  
Not a crisis of capitalism but a civilizational crisis.  
Not only the killing of ecology but also the spiritual ecosystem.  
Not one new story but multiple stories.  
"Carbon colonization!"

**Ecological, Social, and Epistemic Emergency**  
**The Earth and the People as Emergent**  
Ideas about the human.

**RE:MAKING LIFE**  
How to make life (we have outsourced life to corporations, the state, or experts—there’s a lot of Illich in here).  
Political activation of relationality.

**Between Social Movement and Academic World**  
A new world is emerging:  
Territoriality  
Communality  
Autonomy  
Re-Existence  
Pluriversality/Bien Vivir  
Politics in the feminine (Black Feminist, Indigenous Movement).  
**Sentipensar** (thinking-feeling).

**CURRENT**  
Individual  
Scarcity  
One Truth  
One State/Rights  
One World/One Reality

**EMERGENT STORY**  
(Mexico, Chiapas, Huaca):  
Exists in a territory.  
Rooted to the communal.  
In search of autonomy.  
Struggle for re-existence.  
Aim for a transition to the pluriverse.  
Feminist, center of care and life.

* What does that mean in a time of migration and unrootedness?  
  Living out of interdependence, not separation.  
  Change the subaltern.

These are ontological concepts. It’s not just about the struggle for the river but a defense of the whole tapestry (it goes beyond just the resources of land).  
We are the river, we are the forest, inseparability between humans and non-humans, pluriversal contact zone (multiple ways of designing the worlds coming together), ontological negotiation, local ontology and instruction.  
We bring forth worlds with others—**weaving**.

**TERRITORY**  
More than just land—a space for life, where we dwell.  
Territories of life.

“El territorio es la vida, la vida no se vende, se mide, da vida.” (This is the concept of relationality).  
Non-patriarchal, non-liberal territoriality.

**COMMUNALITY**  
In the '70s, coined by intellectuals in Huaca, being communal.  
Nosotricamente (We, communally).  
Communitarian-popular horizons (also, there are no pure communities).  
Recentering politics (against economies and corporations).

**AUTONOMÍA (Making Life Otherwise)**  
Sufficiency, conviviality, self-determination.  
Based on active verbs (to dwell, to eat, to learn) instead of passive nouns (SEE ILLICH).

**RE:EXISTENCE**  
The fact that people have to build and dignify their existence.  
Change from within/re-generative/ancestry.

**PLURIVERSE**  
Around for 15 years.  
Walter Mignolo looks at the genealogy of the concept.  
Not to change the world (capitalist hydra) but to create a world where many worlds fit (Zapatistas in Chiapas, beginning in the 1990s).  
Beyond the OWW (One World World)—the West destroys all worlds that are not like them.

**FEMININE**  
There is no decolonization without depatriarchalization.  
Patriarchy is a 7,000-year-old ontology (domination, violence, war).  
Marxist, post-Marxist concepts that weave with relationality and interdependence.  
Rita Segato centers care, re-generation.

These 6 concepts can be reorganized into strategies for transition:  
Building horizontal mesh networks.

**Futurity**  
Who is doing the cultural/political work to imagine the worlds?  
Currently, this is being done by technocrats—they are colonizing the future.  
We have to be attentive to these.  
Algorithmic relationality of life (capitalist, secular world) (algorithmic oppression).  
Algorithm: an ontology of a secular world.

**PLURIVERSALIZING TECHNOLOGY**

The modern city has been made possible because of carbon/energy (see Le Corbusier).  
Is it possible to have non-extractive architecture?  
EZIO Manzini.

Questions about the possible, the real, and the future.