Homage to Prof. Milton Santos

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Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza

Translator: Archie Davies

Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/terrabrasilis/8924>

DOI: 10.4000/terrabrasilis.8924

ISSN: 2316-7793

Publisher

Rede Brasileira de História da Geografia e Geografia Histórica

Electronic reference

Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza, "Homage to Prof. Milton Santos", *Terra Brasilis* [Online], 15 | 2021, Online since 31 July 2021, connection on 05 December 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/terrabrasilis/8924> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/terrabrasilis.8924>

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This paper was originally published in *Revista do Departamento de Geografia*, n. 11, 1997, p. 5-9, and it is available on: <<https://www.revistas.usp.br/rdg/article/view/53712>>. I would like to express my gratitude to Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza to authorize the current translation into English. Translated by Archie Davies (The University of Sheffield).

- 1 Magnificent Vice-Rector of the University of São Paulo, Professor Myrian Krasilchik;
Most Illustrious Professor João Baptista Borges Pereira, Director of the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences;
Professors, Students and Staff, members of the Congregation of the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences;
University Authorities and the other Authorities here present;
Colleagues;
Staff and students;
Ladies and gentlemen;
Professor Milton Santos, my colleague, my teacher, my friend;
- 2 I need not say with what emotion and honour I have accepted the privilege of addressing you from the Department of Geography and the Congregation of the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences of the University of São Paulo.
- 3 In the name of a delighted University and Faculty I undertake with deep satisfaction the joyful task of honouring you, Professor Milton, with the title of Professor Emeritus.

- 4 This is cause of elation! It is a privilege for the Faculty to be able to celebrate you with a beautiful party that, as I have myself just recently witnessed, if it were held in your homeland of Bahia, would probably last for days.
- 5 Preparing for this ceremony, I began to imagine everything that I could say to you. This would not, I assure you, be difficult for me: I know you and your work inside out. My difficulty is in how to represent you, as my subject. I hope not to betray my subject through exaggeration, thanks to the personal affection I hold for you. I will stay true to the rigorous canons of Academia. Indeed, I am a rookie in these ceremonies. My life and my dedication to this University has, at times, stopped me from attending so many things...
- 6 Thinking of all this and, indeed, looking through the documents of past ceremonies such as this, I decided to take a side.
- 7 If I followed the most traditional pattern, as is the custom in Academia, I would spend hours describing and commenting on your résumé.
- 8 I will not give a list of your vast output: the dozens of books published and translated in various countries and languages. It is not for nothing that your colleagues call you a citizen of the world!
- 9 It would exhaust the audience, too, if I listed all the Universities where you have worked across continents, and across the world: in America, in Europe, in Asia, and in Africa.
- 10 It would be quite a task to name all the universities that have already celebrated you, and honoured you with titles of different kinds: some have given you the title which the University of São Paulo now offers you, others, both in Brazil and abroad, have made you Doctor Honouris Causa!
- 11 It would take an age to talk about your pupils, your research and your theses. To mention all the Departments of Geography, the Master's and Doctorates you have helped to create for the world, the journals you have helped to found, not only through your personal talent, but through definitive material contributions. Richard Peet and Neil Smith, our illustrious colleagues working in the United States, David Slater in England, Hélène Lamicq, Michel Rochefort, Bernard Kayser, Jacques Levy and Georges Benko in France, Takahashi in Japan and President Nyerere in Tanzania would all have a great deal to say about all of these things.
- 12 As for the prizes you have received, there are many stories to tell: about the Vautrin Ludd, a true Nobel of the Human Sciences with which you were consecrated among the greatest European intellectuals – the first man from South of the equator to receive it. And the Jabuti, that you won even this year and did not go to receive?
- 13 Indomitable Milton, always rigorous, careful and attentive to the intricacies of the world!
- 14 Adorable Milton, for the tricks you play you, and the marvellous life lessons that you give us.
- 15 But it is exactly for your audacity that I salute you now. I do not know if this fits the task they set me or not. But I am willing to take the risk.
- 16 I could spend hours fulfilling everyone's curiosity – a curiosity I myself used to feel – to understand who this black man is, this Titular Professor of an institution that is so dear to the most rigorously traditional of Paulista families! In fact, your being black at USP is

itself a denunciation of a rarity. Here, black people need to create special strategies to be noticed. I will not fulfil that curiosity of those present in presenting Milton Santos to them. I only hope that he will not be the last black man to sit where he sits...

- 17 And so, Professor Milton, I am adopting your style. I am bearing witness through it of what you have taught us about the University, and, I would say too, about Geography, about our country and about life.
- 18 I do not have time to dwell on your period of exile: France, Venezuela, the United States and Tanzania welcomed you and your family with open arms.
- 19 Wandering Citizen of the World, you knew, as few did, how to build a fertile and critical mode of thought, without ever taking a step back, seeding your New Geography across the planet with the strictest theoretical and philosophical and, yes, political rigour.
- 20 I will not have time in this important but brief ceremony to discuss your relationship with power. One of your lapidary phrases is already well known: *it is not power that matters, but prestige and posterity*.
- 21 To many, this is Milton's arrogance! For the shrewd, this is the wise Milton who carefully distinguishes the way from the mode. It has always been hard to involve him in any superficial or vague projects, whether in relation to the country, the university, or life.
- 22 Milton: a lover of Brazil, unmoved by contemporary fashions, a severe colleague and friend, an academic like few others.
- 23 A capable intellectual, moving across different disciplines. I will not go into his brilliant career as a journalist, an advocate, a professor of mathematics and politics. *His pen was the most feared in Salvador*, his friend Jorge Calmon tells us.
- 24 His rigour, his cordiality, his "intolerant" resistance to the charms of fashions, of rushed affiliations, of letting yourself be used by anyone who comes along. The rigour and integrity that you demand of your friends can sometimes be extremely cruel: your integrity and ethical stance, my friend, has no limits.
- 25 A friend of ours, the illustrious French geographer Jacques Levy, who is now visiting us in the Department of Geography, recently paid homage to you. He began by saying that *to speak to others about a friend is, in a certain way, to make them a stranger, to make of them a cold object, when it is the warmth of affection that you want to express*. My condition as a friend and as representative of the Congregation is a very strange one, that is difficult to navigate.
- 26 How to speak of the rigour and firmness of Milton, without speaking of his cordiality and his tenderness! Do not panic, I will not repeat the beautiful slogan of the Guevara loyalists, so often repeated in this our beloved Latin America.
- 27 It was in this way that you talked to us and taught us about the University, about the Geography of the World and of Places, about the Territory of everything and everyone, about Citizenship. It was in this way that you warned us about the trickeries of the contemporary.
- 28 I am speaking now of the eruption of your work and the importance that it has for the Brazilian *intelligentsia* and the universities that house it, particularly the University of São Paulo.
- 29 I want to follow, closely, your scientific and academic production: your thought is deep, erudite, and sinuous like the *country path* in Heidegger's metaphysics.

- 30 Your work is confounded, for me, with the history of Brazilian geographical thought: empiricist to begin with, in your first works; afterwards written under the inspiration of the inductive deductive method – the Shared Space and other texts on the Urban Economy; and, from the New Geography onwards, dialectical. From then on we are in the world-totality, contemporary acceleration, and submergence in the movement of the world.
- 31 Thus, Professor Milton, you came to transform yourself into a geographer-philosopher: unbound, ethical, and completely committed to your time, to your people, but above all to the world. You had the audacity to declare that Geography is *the philosophy of technics!*
- 32 You teach us that *the landscape is an accumulation of times* and *geographical space is a system of objects and actions* in which technics has a central role.
- 33 You introduce us to *contemporary acceleration*, whose interpretation is based on characterizing the world of today as belonging to a *techno-scientific and informational period* of History and, consequently produces a *techno-scientific and informational environment*, not forgetting the lessons of one of your great teachers, Max Sorre. You speak to us about time, and introduce us to the concept of the event, *empiricized time, bearer of a historical happening.*
- 34 You develop the concepts of the system, that is, the functioning of technics in different epochs – in their material and immaterial aspects – that today makes possible the creation of what you call *planetary intelligence*; networks, *product of contemporary conditions of technics* and of actions that are distinguished by their rationality and intentionality. You speak to us of verticalities, *this space of fluxes formed by points* and of horizontalities, *the spaces of contiguity.*
- 35 In your formulations, centred on an irreproachable humanism, there is a place also for the slow people and the poor people of the planet who find themselves faced with the voluptuousness of these accelerated times. You introduce us to *opaque and luminous zones* to warn us of the technification of territory in this new division of labour mediated by technics.
- 36 But, what is more important, you make us revisit the old geographical concepts – region, place, territory – and adjust them to today's world.
- 37 It is thus that you give Geography a new birth.
- 38 Your new book, carefully and laboriously worked on in distant geographies. A jewel! It will be, without doubt, in your style.
- 39 But, there are already new projects...
- 40 The time has come to think about the history of the Brazilian territory.
- 41 It is purely my own speculation, but behind this idea must be a new interpretation of globalization. The reflection of a geographer on Brazilian society.
- 42 And there is more... in the texture of conversation new epistemology of existence emerges: the question of emotion. But technics remains the central question. This is the enormous contribution of Milton Santos for the understanding of Contemporaneity. Out of it emerges his proposition for geography as a philosophy of technics.

- 43 A vision of technics that does not suppress History. There is a deep preoccupation with what it means to break with the seeming impossibility of change, especially in the processes of understanding of our own time, and consequently of Brazil today.
- 44 Professor Milton Santos understands technics in another way, in other combinations, and with a deep belief in History.
- 45 Enormous projects oriented by the absolute necessity of understanding the world and your country through the eyes of a geographer.
- 46 But what lasts is the desperate appeal to thought: to the new thought that constructs the new and does not confuse it with novelty.
- 47 We have to learn how to teach not only how to perceive the difference between rich and poor, but how to see the poor as human beings. The epistemology of existence which you insistently describe must be found right there.
- 48 You constantly reveal your vision of geography, of Brazil and of the world to us. Your sinuous thought lights up what we cannot yet see. Your life has always been like this...
- 49 I could go on, and try to interpret your vision of the University.
- 50 You are a stubborn and combative rebel against the extension of university bureaucracy. Every day, in your work and in the spaces it gives you, you denounce it, preaching a critical University, capable of making true intellectuals. A plural University, transversal in your terms, with clear, contemporary policies for Teaching and Research and, above all, possessed of absolute clarity about the meaning of its relationship with the world. You are a tough critic of USP's entropy, but you do not undermine the importance of its role and relevance in Brazil. You struggle against mediocrity, denouncing it in the classroom, at conferences, and wherever retrograde minds or lazy thought are to be found.
- 51 In an excellent colloquium organized by our Faculty of Philosophy in 1994, you alerted us about the role of the Humanities in the University. You called out the importance of our understanding of this changing world, and the hard relationship between the so-called *soft* and *hard* sciences.
- 52 You taught us that *the great challenge of the University is to discern, in the midst of perplexity, the true structure of the world. It is a question, in truth, of re-learning the world, that every day creates new projects, new facts, new relations, and, therefore, new ignorance.*
- 53 On that occasion you also warned us that *our key problem is that science, the tributary of technics and the market, is increasingly subject to perverse principles of organization. Programmes and projects based on the policies of business and institutions preside over our schools.* Your analysis of the precedence of pure research over applied research is remarkable.
- 54 Even this intervention of yours makes us think of a country *that grew, without ceasing to raise its philosophers, its thinkers, its intellectuals,* recalling Kant's *conflict of the Faculties* in discussing the role of the Faculty of Philosophy.
- 55 You declare, severely, that *today, to the extent that the rationalist nexus and the technological nexus are installing themselves in the human and social disciplines, there grows within them the risk of the triumph of calculative thought.*
- 56 I hope, professor Milton Santos, to have been true to your teachings and to the intentions of this place, that has been, and remains, home to so many illustrious professors.

- 57 We are indebted to your rigour and to your work. We are grateful for your teachings, your cordiality and your wisdom.
- 58 The Department of Geography, the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences and the University of São Paulo, through the little that I was able to pass on here, are proud to have you as Professor Emeritus.
- 59 May you be very happy, Professor Milton, my friend, and my teacher.
- 60 Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza
Titular Professor of the University of São Paulo
São Paulo, 28th August 1997.
Main Hall of the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences
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ABSTRACTS

In this short speech, Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza pays homage to her friend and colleague Milton Santos, on the occasion of his being named Professor Emeritus at the University of São Paulo.

Nesse breve discurso, Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza homenageia seu amigo e colega Milton Santos por ocasião de sua nomeação como Professor Emérito da Universidade de São Paulo.

Dans ce petit discours, Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza rend hommage à son ami et collègue Milton Santos à l'occasion de sa nomination en tant que Professeur Émérite à l'Université de São Paulo.

En este breve discurso, Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza rinde homenaje a su amigo y colega Milton Santos con motivo de su nombramiento como Profesora Emérita de la Universidad de São Paulo.

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Palavras-chave: Milton Santos, Universidade de São Paulo, geografia brasileira, cerimônias canônicas, geografia crítica

Palabras claves: Milton Santos, Universidad de São Paulo, geografía brasileña, ceremonias canónicas, geografía crítica

Keywords: Milton Santos, University of São Paulo, Brazilian geography, canonical ceremonies, critical geographies

Mots-clés: Milton Santos, Université de São Paulo, géographie brésilienne, cérémonies canoniques, géographie critique

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