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## Nature and its Discontents

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# Nature and its Discontents

*Slavov Zizek*

## **Beyond Fukuyama**

Where do we stand today? Gerald A. Cohen enumerated the four features of the classic Marxist notion of the working class: (1) it constitutes the majority of society; (2) it produces the wealth of society; (3) it consists of the exploited members of society; (4) its members are the needy people in society. When these four features are combined, they generate two further features: (5) the working class has nothing to lose from revolution; (6) it can and will engage in a revolutionary transformation of society (Cohen, 2001). None of the first four features applies to today's working class, which is why features (5) and (6) cannot be generated. (Even if some of the features continue to apply to parts of today's society, they are no longer united in a single agent: the needy people in society are no longer the workers. Correct as it is, this enumeration should be supplemented by a systematic theoretical deduction: for Marx, they all follow from the basic position of a worker who has nothing but his labor power to sell. As such, workers are by definition exploited; with the progressive expansion of capitalism, they constitute the majority that also produces the wealth, and so on. How, then, are we to redefine a revolutionary perspective in today's conditions? Is the way out of this predicament the *combinatoire* of multiple antagonisms, their potential overlappings?

The underlying problem is here: how are we to think the singular universality of the emancipatory subject as not purely formal—as objectively-materially determined, but without working class as its substantial base? The solution is a negative one: it is capitalism itself that offers a negative substantial determination: the global capitalist system is the substantial “base” that mediates and generates the excesses (slums, ecological threats, etc.) that open up the site of resistance.

It is easy to make fun of Fukuyama's notion of the End of History, but the majority today is “Fukuyamaian”: liberal-democratic capitalism is accepted as the finally-found formula of the best possible society; all one can do is to render it more just, tolerant, etc. The only true question today is: do we endorse this “naturalization” of capitalism, or does

today's global capitalism contain strong enough antagonisms that will prevent its indefinite reproduction? There are three (or, rather, four) such antagonisms:

(1) Ecology: in spite of the infinite adaptability of capitalism which, in the case of an acute ecological catastrophe or crisis, can easily turn ecology into a new field of capitalist investment and competition, the very nature of the risk involved fundamentally precludes a market solution. Why? Capitalism only works in precise social conditions: it implies trust in the objectified/"reified" mechanism of the market's "invisible hand" which, as a kind of Cunning of Reason, guarantees that the competition of individual egotisms works for the common good. However, we are in the midst of a radical change. Till now, historical Substance played its role as the medium and foundation of all subjective interventions: whatever social and political subjects did, it was mediated and ultimately dominated—overdetermined—by the historical Substance. What looms on the horizon today is the unheard-of possibility that a subjective intervention will intervene directly into the historical Substance, catastrophically disturbing its run by triggering an ecological catastrophe, a fateful biogenetic mutation, a nuclear or similar military-social catastrophe, etc. No longer can we rely on the safeguarding role of the limited scope of our acts: it no longer holds that, whatever we do, history will go on. For the first time in human history, the act of a single socio-political agent effectively can alter and even interrupt the global historical process, so that, ironically, it is only today that we can say that the historical process should effectively be conceived "not only as Substance, but also as Subject." This is why, when confronted with singular catastrophic prospects (say, a political group that intends to attack its enemy with nuclear or biological weapons), we no longer can rely on the standard logic of the "Cunning of Reason" which, precisely, presupposes the primacy of the historical Substance over acting subjects: we no longer can adopt the stance of "let the enemy who threatens us deploy its potentials and thereby self-destruct"—the price for letting the historical Reason do its work is too high since, in the meantime, we may all perish along with the enemy.

(2) The inappropriateness of private property for so-called "intellectual property." The key antagonism of the so-called new (digital) industries thus is: how to maintain the form of (private) property, within which only the logic of profit can be maintained? (See also the Napster problem, the free circulation of music.) And do the legal complications in biogenetics not point in the same direction? The key element of the new

international trade agreements is “the protection of intellectual property.” The crucial date in the history of cyberspace is February 3, 1976, when Bill Gates published his (in)famous “Open Letter to Hobbyists,” the assertion of private property in the software domain: “As the majority of hobbyists must be aware, most of you steal your software. [...] Most directly, the thing you do is theft.” Bill Gates has built his entire empire and reputation on his extreme views about knowledge being treated as if it were tangible property. This was a decisive signal, triggering the battle for the “enclosure” of the common domain of software.

(3) The socio-ethical implications of new techno-scientific developments (especially in bio-genetics). Fukuyama himself was compelled to admit that the biogenetic interventions into the human species are the most serious threat to his vision of the End of History. What is false with today’s discussion concerning the “ethical consequences of biogenetics” (along with similar matters) is that it is rapidly turning into what Germans call *Bindenstrichethik*, the ethics of the hyphen—technology-ethics, environment-ethics, and so on. Ethics does have a role to play, a role homologous to that of the “provisional ethic” Descartes mentions at the beginning of his *Discourse on Method*: when we engage on a new path, full of dangers and shattering new insights, we need to stick to old established rules as a practical guide for our daily lives, although we are well aware that the new insights will compel us to provide a fresh foundation for our entire ethical edifice (in Descartes’ case, this new foundation was provided by Kant, in his ethics of subjective autonomy). Today, we are in the same predicament: the “provisional ethics” cannot replace the need for a thorough reflection of the emerging New. In short, what gets lost here, in this hyphen-ethics, is simply ethics as such. The problem is not that universal ethics gets dissolved in particular topics, but, quite on contrary, that particular scientific breakthroughs are directly confronted with the old humanist “values” (say, how biogenetics affects our sense of dignity and autonomy). This, then, is the choice we are confronting today: either we choose the typically postmodern stance of reticence (let’s not go to the end—let’s keep a proper distance towards the scientific Thing so that this Thing will not draw us into its black hole, destroying all our moral and human notions), or we dare to “tarry with the negative [*das Verweilen beim Negativen*],” that is, we dare to fully assume the consequences of scientific modernity, with the wager that “our Mind is a genome” will also function as an infinite judgment.

(4) Last, new forms of apartheid, new Walls and slums. On September 11th, 2001, the Twin Towers were hit; twelve years earlier, on November 9th, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. The latter date announced the “happy ‘90s,” the Francis Fukuyama dream of the “end of history,” the belief that liberal democracy had, in principle, won, that the search was over, that the advent of a global, liberal world community was just around the corner, that the obstacles to this ultra-Hollywood happy ending were merely empirical and contingent (local pockets of resistance where the leaders did not yet grasp that their time is over). In contrast, 9/11 is the main symbol of the end of the Clintonite happy ‘90s, of the forthcoming era in which new walls are emerging everywhere, between Israel and the West Bank, around the European Union, on the U.S.-Mexico border.

So, what if the new proletarian position is that of the inhabitants of slums in the new megalopolises? The explosive growth of slums in the last decades, especially in the Third World megalopolises from Mexico City and other Latin American capitals through Africa (Lagos, Chad) to India, China, Philippines and Indonesia, is perhaps the crucial geopolitical event of our times.<sup>1</sup> Since, sometime very soon (or maybe, given the imprecision of the Third World censuses, it has already happened), the urban population of the earth will outnumber the rural population, and since slum inhabitants will compose the majority of the urban population, we are in no way dealing with a marginal phenomenon. We are thus witnessing the fast growth of the population outside state control, living in conditions half outside the law, in terrible need of the minimal forms of self-organization. Although their population is composed of marginalized laborers, redundant civil servants and ex-peasants, they are not simply a redundant surplus: they are incorporated into the global economy in numerous ways, many of them working as informal wage workers or self-employed entrepreneurs, with no adequate health or social security coverage. (The main source of their rise is the inclusion of the Third World countries in the global economy, with cheap food imports from the First World countries ruining local agriculture.) They are the true “symptom” of slogans like “Development,” “Modernization,” and “World Market”: not an unfortunate accident, but a necessary product of the innermost logic of global capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

No wonder the hegemonic form of ideology in slums is Pentecostal Christianity, with its mixture of charismatic miracles-and-spectacles-oriented fundamentalism and social programs like community kitchens and care for children and the elderly. While one should resist the temptation to elevate and idealize slum dwellers into a new revolutionary class, one should nonetheless, in Badiou’s terms, perceive slums as one of

the few authentic “evental sites” in today’s society— slum-dwellers are literally a collection of those who are the “part of no part,” the “surnumerary” element of society, excluded from the benefits of citizenship, uprooted and dispossessed, with “nothing to lose but their chains.” It is surprising how many features of slum dwellers fit the good old Marxist determination of the proletarian revolutionary subject: they are “free” in the double meaning of the word even more than the classic proletariat (“freed” from all substantial ties; dwelling in a free space, outside police regulations of the state); they are a large collective, forcibly thrown together, “thrown” into a situation where they have to invent some mode of being-together, and simultaneously deprived of any support in traditional ways of life, in inherited religious or ethnic life-forms.

Of course, there is a crucial break between the slum-dwellers and the classic Marxist working class: while the latter is defined in the precise terms of economic “exploitation” (the appropriation of surplus-value generated by the situation of having to sell one’s own labor as a commodity on the market), the defining feature of the slum-dwellers is socio-political, it concerns their (non)integration into the legal space of citizenship with (most of) its incumbent rights—in somewhat simplified terms, more than a refugee, a slum-dweller is a *homo sacer*, the systemically generated “living dead” or “animal” of global capitalism. He is a kind of negative of the refugee: a refugee from his own community, the one whom the power is not trying to control through concentration, where (to repeat the unforgettable pun from Ernst Lubitch’s *To Be Or Not to Be*) those in power do the concentrating while the refugees do the camping, but pushed into the space of the out-of-control. In contrast to the Foucauldian micro-practices of discipline, a slum-dweller is the one with regard to whom the power renounces its right to exert full control and discipline, finding it more appropriate to let him dwell in the twilight zone of slums.<sup>3</sup>

What one finds in the “really-existing slums” is, of course, a mixture of improvised modes of social life, from religious “fundamentalist” groups held together by a charismatic leader to criminal gangs and germs of a new “socialist” solidarity. The slum dwellers are the counter-class to the emerging so-called “symbolic class” (managers, journalists and PR people, academics, artists, etc.), which is also uprooted and perceives itself as directly universal (a New York academic has more in common with a Slovene academic than with Blacks in Harlem half a mile from his campus). Is this the new axis of class struggle, or is the “symbolic class” inherently split, so that one can make the emancipatory wager on the

coalition between the slum-dwellers and the “progressive” part of the symbolic class? What we should be looking for are the signs of the new forms of social awareness that will emerge from the slum collectives; they will be the germs of the future.

What makes slums so interesting is their territorial character. While today’s society is often characterized as the society of total control, slums are the territories within a state, with boundaries from which the state (partially) has withdrawn its control—territories that function as white spots, blanks, on the official map of a state territory. Although they are *de facto* included in a state by the links of black economy, organized crime, religious groups, etc., state control is nonetheless suspended therein; they are domains outside the rule of law. In the map of Berlin from the times of the now defunct GDR, the area of West Berlin was left blank, a weird hole in the detailed structure of the big city; when Christa Wolf, the well-known East German half-dissident writer, took her small daughter to East Berlin’s TV tower, from which one had a nice view over the prohibited West Berlin, the small girl shouted gladly: “Look, mother, it is not white over there, there are houses with people like here!”—as if discovering a prohibited slum Zone...

This is why the “destructured” masses, poor and deprived of everything, situated in a non-proletarianized urban environment, constitute one of the principal horizons of the politics to come. These masses are an important factor in the phenomenon of globalization. True globalization, today, would be found in the organization of these masses—on a worldwide scale, if possible—whose conditions of existence are essentially the same. Whoever lives in the *banlieues* of Bamako or Shanghai is not essentially different from someone who lives in the *banlieue* of Paris or the ghettos of Chicago. Effectively, if the principal task of the emancipatory politics of the nineteenth century was to break the monopoly of the bourgeois liberals by politicizing the working class, and if the task of the twentieth century was to politically awaken the immense rural population of Asia and Africa, the principal task of the twenty-first century is to politicize—organize and discipline—the “destructured masses” of slum-dwellers, those regarded as the “animals” by global capitalism.

In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez’s biggest achievement in the first years of his rule was precisely the politicization (inclusion into the political life, social mobilization) of slum dwellers; in other countries, they mostly persist in apolitical inertia. It was this political mobilization of the slum dwellers that saved him from the US-sponsored coup; to the surprise of everyone, Chavez included, slum dwellers descended to the affluent city center en masse, tipping the balance of power in his favor.

The course on which Chavez embarked in 2006 is the exact opposite of the postmodern Left's mantra on de-territorialization, the rejection of statist politics, etc.: far from "resisting to state power," he grabbed power (first by an attempted coup, then democratically), ruthlessly using the state apparatuses and interventions to promote his goals. Furthermore, he is militarizing *favelas*, organizing training of armed units there. And, the ultimate scare: now that he is feeling the economic effects of the "resistance" to his rule of the capital (temporary shortages of some goods in the state-subsidized supermarkets), he has announced the constitution of his own political party! Even some of his allies are skeptical about this move—does it signal the return to the standard party-state politics? However, one should fully endorse this risky choice: the task is to make this party function not as a usual (populist or liberal-parliamentary) party, but as a focus for the political mobilization of new forms of politics (like the grass roots slum committees). So what should we say to someone like Chavez? "No, do not grab state power, just subtract yourself, leave the laws of the [State] situation in place"? Chavez is often dismissed as a clownish comedian, but would not such a subtraction reduce him to a new version of Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista movement in Mexico, to whom many Leftist refer as "Subcomediante Marcos"? Today, it is the great capitalists, from Bill Gates to ecological polluters, who "resist" the State...

The four features presupposed in the Marxist notion of the proletariat are, of course, grounded in the singular capitalist mechanism; they are four effects of the same structural cause. Perhaps one can even map Cohen's four features that threaten the indefinite self-reproduction of the global capital: "majority" appears as ecology, a topic that concerns us all; "poverty" characterizes those excluded and living in slums; "producing wealth" is more and more dependent on scientific and technological developments like biogenetics; and, finally, "exploitation" reappears in the impasses of intellectual property, where the owner exploits the results of collective labor. The four features form a kind of semiotic square, the intersecting of two oppositions along the lines of society/nature and inside/outside the social Wall of a new apartheid: ecology designates the outside of nature; slums designate the social outside; biogenetics, the natural inside; and intellectual property, the social inside.

Why in this overlapping of the four antagonisms is not the Laclauian empty signifier—"people"—filled in through the struggle for hegemony? Why is it not yet another attempt in the series of the "rainbow coalitions" of oppressed sexual practices, races, religions, etc.? Because we still need a proletarian position, the position of the "part of no-part." In other



words, if one wants an older model, it is rather the good old Communist formula of the alliance of “workers, poor farmers, patriotic small bourgeoisie, and honest intellectuals”: note how the four terms are not at the same level—only workers are listed as such, while the other three are qualified (“poor farmers, patriotic small bourgeoisie, honest intellectuals”).<sup>4</sup> Exactly the same goes for today’s four antagonisms: it is the antagonism between the Excluded—the “animals” according to global capital—and the Included—the “political animals” proper, those participating in capitalism—that is the zero-level antagonism, coloring the entire terrain of struggle. Consequently, only those ecologists are included who do not use ecology to legitimize the oppression of the “polluting” poor, trying to discipline Third World countries; only those critics of bio-genetic practices who resist the conservative (religious-humanist) ideology that all too often sustains this critique; only those critics of intellectual private property who do not reduce the problem to a legalistic issue.

There is thus a qualitative difference between the gap that separates the Excluded from the Included and the other three antagonisms, which designate three domains of what Hardt and Negri call “commons,” the shared substance of our social being whose privatization is a violent act that should also be resisted with violent means, if necessary. These commons include those of culture, the immediately socialized forms of “cognitive” capital (primarily language), and our means of communication and education. (If Bill Gates were allowed a monopoly, we would have the absurd situation in which a private individual would literally own the software texture our basic network of communication.) “Commons” also include the shared infrastructure of public transport, electricity, post, etc., and the commons of external nature threatened by pollution and exploitation (from oil to forests and natural habitat), as well as the commons of internal nature (the biogenetic inheritance of humanity). What all these struggles share is an awareness of the destructive potential—up to the self-annihilation of humanity itself—if the capitalist logic of enclosing these commons is allowed a free rein. It is this reference to “commons”—this substance of productivity that is neither private nor public—that justifies the resuscitation of the notion of Communism. Commons can thus be linked to what Hegel, in his *Phenomenology*, deployed as *die Sache*, the shared social thing-cause, “the work of all and everyone,” the substance kept alive by incessant subjective productivity.<sup>5</sup>

### From Fear to Trembling

A further qualification should be added here: the solution is not to limit the market and private property by direct interventions of the State and state ownership. The domain of the State itself is also in its own way “private”: private in the precise Kantian sense of the “private use of Reason” in State administrative and ideological apparatuses:

The public use of one’s reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among men. The private use of one’s reason, on the other hand, may often be very narrowly restricted without particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment. By public use of one’s reason I understand the use which a person makes of it as a scholar before the reading public. Private use I call that which one may make of it in a particular civil post or office which is entrusted to him. (5)

What one should add here, moving beyond Kant, is that there is a privileged social group which, on account of its lacking a determinate place in the “private” order of social hierarchy (as a “part of no-part” of the social body), directly stands for universality: it is only the reference to those Excluded, to those who dwell in the blanks of the State space, that enables true universality. There is nothing more “private” than a State community that perceives the Excluded as a threat and worries how to keep them at a proper distance. In other words, as we have already seen in the series of the four antagonisms, the one between the Included and the Excluded is the crucial one, the point of reference for the others; without it, all others lose their subversive edge: ecology turns into a “problem of sustainable development,” intellectual property into a “complex legal challenge,” biogenetics into an “ethical” issue. One can sincerely fight for the environment, defend a broader notion of intellectual property, oppose the copyrighting of genes, while not questioning the antagonism between the Included and the Excluded. What’s more, one can even formulate some of these struggles in the terms of the Included threatened by the polluting Excluded. In this way, we get no true universality, only “private” concerns in the Kantian sense of the term. Corporations like Whole Foods and Starbucks continue to enjoy favor among liberals even though they both engage in anti-union activities; the trick is that they sell products that contain the claim of being politically progressive acts in and of themselves. One buys coffee made with beans bought at above fair-market value, one drives a hybrid vehicle, one buys from companies that provide good benefits for their customers (according to the corporation’s own standards), etc. Political

action and consumption merge. In short, without the antagonism between the Included and the Excluded, we may well find ourselves in a world in which Bill Gates is the greatest humanitarian fighting against poverty and diseases, and Rupert Murdoch the greatest environmentalist mobilizing hundreds of millions through his media empire.<sup>6</sup>

And, one should be clear at this point, the political expression of this radical antagonism, the way the pressure of the Excluded is experienced within the established political space, always has a flavor of terror. The lesson is thus the one rendered long ago by Athena towards the end of Aeschylus's *Eumenides*:

As for terror,  
don't banish it completely from the city.  
What mortal man is truly righteous  
without being afraid? Those who sense the fear  
revere what's right. With citizens like these  
your country and your city will be safe,  
stronger than anything possessed by men.<sup>7</sup>

How are we to read these famous lines? Are they really yet another example of the line "from Plato to NATO"? Do they really point towards the manipulation of today's politics of fear?<sup>8</sup> The first obstacle to such reading is the obvious fact that Athena does not evoke the fear of an external enemy whose threat justifies the disciplined unity and possible "defensive measures" of the City-State: the fear is here the fear of divine Justice itself, of its blinding authority. From the perspective of modern subjectivity (which is our perspective here), the object of this fear is the abyss of subjectivity itself, its terrifying power of self-relating negativity; it is the terrifying encounter of this traumatic core that Heidegger has in mind when he claims that terror [*Schrecken*] is necessary if the "modern man" is to be awakened from his metaphysico-technological slumber into a new beginning:

We must principally concern ourselves with preparing for man the very basis and dimension upon which and within which something like a mystery of his *Dasein* could once again be encountered. We should not be at all surprised if the contemporary man in the street feels disturbed or perhaps sometimes dazed and clutches all the more stubbornly at his idols when confronted with this challenge and with the effort required to approach this mystery. It would be a mistake to expect anything else. We must first call for someone capable of instilling terror into our *Dasein* again. (2004, 255)

Heidegger thus opposes wonder as the basic disposition of the first (Greek) beginning to terror as the basic disposition of the second, new, beginning: "In wonder, the basic disposition of the first beginning, beings first come to stand in their form. Terror, the basic disposition of the other beginning, reveals behind all progress and all domination over beings a dark emptiness of irrelevance" (1984, 197). (Note that Heidegger uses the word "terror" and not "anxiety.")

Did Hegel not say something similar in his analysis of Master and Servant (bondage), when he emphasized that, since the Bondsman is also a self-consciousness,

the master is taken to be the essential reality for the state of bondage; hence, for it, the truth is the independent consciousness existing for itself, although this truth is not taken yet as inherent in bondage itself. Still, it does in fact contain within itself this truth of pure negativity and self-existence, because it has experienced this reality within it. For this consciousness was not in peril and fear for this element or that, nor for this or that moment of time, it was afraid for its entire being; it felt the fear of death, the sovereign master. It has been in that experience melted to its inmost soul, has trembled throughout its every fibre, and all that was fixed and steadfast has quaked within it. This complete perturbation of its entire substance, this absolute dissolution of all its stability into fluent continuity, is, however, the simple, ultimate nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, pure self-referent existence, which consequently is involved in this type of consciousness. This moment of pure self-existence is moreover a fact for it; for in the master it finds this as its object. Further, this bondsman's consciousness is not only this total dissolution in a general way; in serving and toiling the bondsman actually carries this out. By serving he cancels in every particular aspect his dependence on and attachment to natural existence, and by his work removes this existence away. (189)

The Servant is thus in itself already free, his freedom being embodied outside himself in his Master. It is in this sense that Christ is our Master and simultaneously the source of our freedom. Christ's sacrifice set us free—how? Neither as the payment for our sins nor as legalistic ransom, but as, when we are afraid of something (and fear of death is the ultimate fear enslaving us), and a true friend says: "Don't be afraid, look, I will do it, what you are so afraid of, and I will do it for free, not because I have to, but out of my love for you—I am not afraid!" He does it and in this way sets us free, demonstrating *in actu* that IT CAN BE DONE, that we can also do it, that we are not slaves...

This is the way Christ brings freedom: when confronting him, we become aware of our own freedom. And does, *mutatis mutandis*, the same

not hold for Che Guevara? The photos showing him under arrest in Bolivia, surrounded by the government soldiers, have a weird Christological aura, as if we see a tired but defiant Christ on his way to crucifixion—no wonder that, when, moments prior to his death, with the executioner's pistol already aimed at him, the hand holding it trembled, and Guevara looked at him and said: "Point well. You are about to kill a man."<sup>9</sup>—his version of *ecce homo*... And, effectively, is the basic message of Guevara not just this: how, in and through all his failures, he persisted, he went on? One can imagine his main thought in the desperate last days in Bolivia as a version of the last words of Samuel Beckett's *The Unnameable*: "in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on" (418). In an unsurpassable irony of history, after the triumph of the Cuban revolution, everything Guevara did was a failure—the dismal failure of his economic policies as the Cuban minister of economy (after one year, food had to be rationed), the failure of his Congo adventure, the failure of his last mission in Bolivia. However, all these "human, all too human" failures somehow move to the background, as the ground in contrast to which the contours of his properly over-human (or inhuman) figure appear, confirming Badiou's saying that the only way to be truly human is to exceed ordinary humanity towards the dimension of the inhuman.

### Ecology against Nature

Today, don't we again need such a shattering experience of negativity? That is, what if the true choice today is between fear and terror? The expression "fear and trembling" assumes the identity of the two terms, as if they point toward two aspects of the same phenomenon. What if, however, one has to introduce a gap between the two, so that trembling (being-terrorized) is, at its most radical, the only true opposition to fear? In other words, one can break out of this fear not by a desperate search for safety, but, on the contrary, by going to the end, by accepting the nullity of that which we are afraid to lose. Isaac Asimov said somewhere that there are two possibilities: either we are alone in the universe, with nobody out there watching us, or there is somebody out there—and both possibilities are equally unbearable. So, from the fear of losing our faith in the big Other, we should pass to the terror of there being no big Other. The old formula "there is nothing to fear but fear itself" thus acquires a new and unexpected meaning: the fact that there is nothing to fear is the most terrifying fact imaginable. Terror is this "self-related" or "self-negated" fear: it is what fear changes into once we accept that there

is no way back—that what we are afraid to lose, what is threatened by what we are afraid of (nature, life-world, symbolic substance of our community) is always-already lost. This terror, whose contours Hegel deployed in his description of the servant's subjective experience of the threat of death, should serve as the background against which we read Marx's and Engels's famous description of the capitalist dynamics in *The Communist Manifesto*:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind. [...] In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal inter-dependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature. (83-84)

Is this not, more than ever, our reality today? Ericsson phones are no longer Swedish, Toyota cars are manufactured 60% in the US, Hollywood culture pervades the remotest parts of the globe. Furthermore, doesn't the same hold true for all forms of ethnic and sexual identities? Shouldn't we supplement Marx's description in this sense, adding that also sexual "one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible;" that also, concerning sexual practices, "all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned," so that capitalism tends to replace the standard normative heterosexuality with a proliferation of unstable shifting identities and/or orientations? And today, with the latest biogenetic developments, we are entering a new phase in which nature itself melts into air: the main consequence of the breakthroughs in biogenetics is the end of nature. Once we know the rules of nature's construction, natural organisms are transformed into objects amenable to manipulation. Nature, human and inhuman, is thus "desubstantialized," deprived of its impenetrable density, of what Heidegger called "earth." This compels us to give a new twist to Freud's title *Unbehagen in der Kultur* —discontent, uneasiness, in culture. (This title is usually translated as "civilization and its discontents," thus missing the opportunity to bring into play the opposition of culture and

civilization: discontent is in culture, its violent break with nature, while civilization can be conceived as precisely the secondary attempt to patch things up, to “civilize” the cut, to reintroduce the lost balance and an appearance of harmony.) With the latest developments, the discontent shifts from culture to nature itself: nature is no longer “natural,” the reliable “dense” background of our lives; it now appears as a fragile mechanism which, at any point, can explode in a catastrophic direction.

Biogenetics, with its reduction of the human psyche itself to an object of technological manipulation, is therefore effectively a kind of empirical instantiation of what Heidegger perceived as the “danger” inherent to modern technology. Crucial here is the interdependence of man and nature: by reducing man to just another natural object whose properties can be manipulated, what we lose is not (only) humanity, but nature itself. In this sense, Francis Fukuyama is right: humanity relies on some notion of “human nature” as what we inherit as simply given to us—the impenetrable dimension in/of ourselves into which we are born/thrown. Thus the paradox is that there is “man” only insofar as there is impenetrable inhuman nature (Heidegger’s “earth”): with the prospect of biogenetic interventions opened up by the access to the genome, the species freely changes/redefines itself and its own coordinates. This prospect effectively emancipates humankind from the constraints of a finite species, from its enslavement to the “selfish genes.” This emancipation, however, comes at a price:

With interventions into man’s genetic inheritance, the domination over nature reverts into an act of taking-control-over-oneself, which changes our generic-ethical self-understanding and can disturb the necessary conditions for an autonomous way of life and universalistic understanding of morals.<sup>10</sup>

How, then, do we react to this threat? Habermas’s logic is here: since the results of science pose a threat to our (predominant) notion of autonomy and freedom, one should curtail science. The price we pay for this solution is the fetishist split between science and ethics (“I know very well what science claims, but, nonetheless, in order to retain (the appearance of) my autonomy, I choose to ignore it and act as if I don’t know it”). This prevents us from confronting the true question: how do these new conditions compel us to transform and reinvent the very notions of freedom, autonomy, and ethical responsibility?

Science and technology today no longer aim only at understanding and reproducing natural processes, but at generating new forms of life that will surprise us; the goal is no longer just to dominate existing nature,

but to generate something new—greater, stronger than ordinary nature, including ourselves (note the obsession with artificial intelligence, aimed at producing a brain stronger than the human brain). The dream that sustains the scientific-technological endeavor is to trigger a process with no return, a process that would exponentially reproduce itself and continue on its own. The notion of “second nature” is therefore today more pertinent than ever, in both of its main meanings. First, literally, as the artificially generated new nature: monsters of nature, deformed cows and trees, or—a more “positive” dream—genetically manipulated organisms, “enhanced” in the direction that suits us. Then, the “second nature” in the more standard sense of the autonomization of the results of our own activity: the way our acts elude us in their consequences, the way they generate a monster with a life on its own. It is this horror at the unforeseen results of our own acts that causes shock and awe, not the power of nature over which we have no control; it is this horror that religion tries to domesticate. What is new today is the short-circuit between these two senses of “second nature”: “second nature” in the sense of objective Fate, of the autonomized social process, is generating “second nature” in the sense of an artificially created nature, of natural monsters—the process that threatens to run out of control is no longer just the social process of economic and political development, but new forms of natural processes themselves, from unforeseen nuclear catastrophe to global warming and the unforeseen consequences of biogenetic manipulations. Can one even imagine the unforeseen result of nanotechnological experiments: new life forms reproducing themselves out of control in a cancer-like way?<sup>11</sup> Here is a standard description of this fear:

Within fifty to a hundred years, a new class of organisms is likely to emerge. These organisms will be artificial in the sense that they will originally be designed by humans. However, they will reproduce, and will “evolve” into something other than their original form; they will be “alive” under any reasonable definition of the word. [...] the pace of evolutionary change will be extremely rapid. [...] The impact on humanity and the biosphere could be enormous, larger than the industrial revolution, nuclear weapons, or environmental pollution. (Farmer and Belin, 815)

This fear also has its clear libidinal dimension: it is the fear of the asexual reproduction of Life, the fear of an “undead” life that is indestructible, constantly expanding, reproducing itself through self-division.<sup>12</sup> And, as always in the history of the last two millennia, the master of exploiting this fear is the Catholic Church. Its predominant



strategy today is to try to contain the scientific real within the confines of meaning—it is as an answer to the scientific real (materialized in the biogenetic threats) that religion is finding its new *raison d'être*:

Far from being effaced by science, religion, and even the syndicate of religions, in the process of formation, is progressing every day. Lacan said that ecumenism was for the poor of spirit. There is a marvelous agreement on these questions between the secular and all the religious authorities, in which they tell themselves they should agree somewhere in order to make echoes equally marvelous, even saying that finally the secular is a religion like the others. We see this because it is revealed in effect that the discourse of science has partly connected with the death drive. Religion is planted in the position of unconditional defense of the living, of life in mankind, as guardian of life, making life an absolute. And that extends to the protection of human nature. [...] This is [...] what gives a future to religion through meaning, namely by erecting barriers—to cloning, to the exploitation of human cells—and to inscribe science in a tempered progress. We see a marvelous effort, a new youthful vigor of religion in its effort to flood the real with meaning. (Miller, 2004, 18-19)

The Church's message of hope thus relies on the pre-existing fear: it evokes and formulates the fear against which it then offers a solution of hope and faith.<sup>13</sup> The Life that it promises in its defense of the "culture of life" is not a positive life, but a reactive life, a defense against death. We are dealing here with the latest version of the fear first formulated in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The dilemma faced by many interpreters of *Frankenstein* concerns the obvious parallel between Victor and God on the one side, and the monster and Adam on the other side: in both cases, we are dealing with a single parent creating a male progeny in a non-sexual way; in both cases, this is followed by the creation of a bride, a female partner. This parallel is clearly indicated on the novel's epigraph, Adam's complaint to God: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould Me man? Did I solicit thee / From darkness to promote me?" ("Paradise Lost," X, 743-5). It is easy to note the problematic nature of this parallel: if Victor is associated with God, how can he also be the Promethean rebel against God (recall the novel's subtitle: "... or The Modern Prometheus")? The answer seems to be a simple one, spelled out by Shelley herself: Victor's sin is precisely that of presumption, of "acting like God," engaging in an act of creation (of human life, the crown of the divine creation) which is and should remain the exclusive prerogative of God; if man tries to imitate God and do something for which he lacks qualifications, the result can only be monstrous... There is, however, also a different (Chesteronian) reading possible: there is no problem here, Victor is "like God" precisely when he commits the ultimate criminal

transgression and confronts the horror of its consequences, since God is also the greatest Rebel—against himself, ultimately. The King of the universe is the supreme criminal Anarchist. Like Victor, in creating man, God committed the supreme crime of aiming too high—of creating a creature “in his own image,” new spiritual life, precisely like today’s scientists who dream of creating an artificially intelligent living being; no wonder that His own creature ran out of his control and turned against him. So, what if the death of Christ (of Himself) is the price God has to pay for his crime?

It is precisely within the domain of ecology that one can draw the line that separates the politics of emancipatory terror from the politics of fear at its purest. The by far predominant version of ecology is the ecology of fear, fear of a catastrophe—human-made or natural—that may deeply perturb or even destroy human civilization; fear that pushes us to plan measures that would protect our safety. This fear and pessimism are as a rule simulated, along the lines pointed out by Hans-Georg Gadamer: “The pessimist is disingenuous because he is trying to trick himself with his own grumbling. Precisely while acting the pessimist, he secretly hopes that everything will not turn out as bad as he fears” (Grondin, 329). Doesn’t the same tension between the enunciated and the position of enunciation characterize today’s ecological pessimism: the more those who predict a catastrophe insist on it, the more they secretly hope the catastrophe will not occur.

The first thing that strikes the eye apropos of this fear is the way it remains conditioned by ideological trends. Two decades ago, everyone, especially in Europe, was talking about *Waldsterben*, the dying of forests; the topic was present on the covers of all popular weeklies, but now it has almost disappeared. Although concerns about global warming explode from time to time and are gaining more and more scientific credibility, ecology as an organized socio-political movement has to a large degree disappeared. Furthermore, ecology often lends itself to ideological mystifications: as a pretext for New Age obscurantisms (praising the pre-modern “paradigms,” etc.), or for neo-colonialism (First-World complaints of how the fast development of Third-World countries like Brazil or China threatens us all—“by destroying the Amazon rain forests, Brazilians are killing the lungs of our Earth”), or as a cause of honor of “liberal communists” (buy green, recycle... as if taking ecology into account justifies capitalist exploitation).

This ecology of fear has every chance of developing into the predominant ideology of global capitalism—a new opium for the masses replacing the declining religion<sup>14</sup>: it takes over the old religion’s

fundamental function of having an unquestionable authority that can impose limits. The lesson this ecology is constantly hammering is our finitude: we are not Cartesian subjects extracted from reality, we are finite beings embedded in a biosphere that vastly transcends our horizon. In our exploitation of natural resources we are borrowing from the future, so we should treat our Earth with respect, as something ultimately Sacred, that should not be completely unveiled, that should and will forever remain a Mystery—a power we should trust, not dominate. While we cannot gain full mastery over our biosphere, it is unfortunately in our power to derail it, to disturb its balance so that it will run amok, swiping us away in the process. This is why, although ecologists are constantly demanding that we radically change our way of life, underlying this demand is its opposite—a deep distrust of change, of development, of progress: every radical change can have the unintended consequence of triggering a catastrophe.

It is this distrust that makes ecology the ideal candidate for hegemonic ideology, since it echoes the anti-totalitarian post-political distrust of large collective acts. One of the most effective fictional versions of this distrust is Stephen Fry's *Making History*,<sup>15</sup> about a scientist traumatized by Hitler and the Nazi crimes who, in the 1950s, discovers a way to trespass across the time barrier and intervene into the past in a very limited way. He decides to change the chemical composition of the stream from which the village of Hitler's parents was getting water, so that it renders women infertile; the experiment succeeds and Hitler is not born. However, when we switch into the alternate reality, the scientist discovers with horror what he caused: instead of Hitler, a more intelligent upper-class high-ranking officer leads the Nazis to victory; the Nazis win the war and kill many more Jews than in the Holocaust, even obliterating the memory of their act. The scientist spends the rest of his life trying to intervene again into the past in order to undo the results of his first intervention, and to return us to the good old world with Hitler...

This distrust was given a new impetus by today's biogenetics, which is on the verge of a crucial breakthrough.<sup>16</sup> Till now, geneticists were confined to "tinkering and tweaking what nature has already produced—taking a gene from a bacterium, say, and inserting it into the chromosome of corn or pigs. What we're talking about is producing life that is wholly new—not in any way a genetic descendant of the primordial Mother Cell. The initial members of each newly created breed will have no ancestors at all" (*ibid.*). The genome itself of the organism will be artificially put together: first, individual biological building blocks are to be

fabricated; then they are to be combined into an entirely new, synthetic, self-replicating organism. Scientist designate this new life form as "Life 2.0," and what is so unsettling about it is that the "natural" life itself becomes thereby "Life 1.0"—it retroactively loses its spontaneous-natural character, turning into one in the series of synthetic projects. This is what the "end of nature" means: synthetic life is not just supplementing natural life; it turns natural life itself into a (confused, imperfect) species of synthetic life.

The prospects are, of course, breathtaking: from micro-organisms that detect and eliminate cancer cells to whole "factories" that transform solar energy into usable fuel. However, the main limitation of this endeavor is no less obvious: the DNA of existing natural organisms is "a mess of overlapping segments and junk that has no purpose scientists can fathom," so when geneticists tinker with this mess, they cannot ever be sure of either the outcome or how, exactly, this outcome was generated. The logical conclusion is thus to try to "build new biological systems; systems that are easier to understand because we made them that way." However, this project will work only if we fully accept the thesis that "at least 90 percent of the human genome is 'junk DNA' that has no clear function" (*ibid.*). (The main function envisaged by scientists is that they serve a guarantee against the danger of copying-mistakes, a kind of back-up copy.) Only in this case, we can expect a project of getting rid of the repetitious "junk" and generating the organism only from its "pure" genetic formula work; but what if the "junk" does play a crucial role, unknown to us because we are unable to grasp all the higher-level complexity of the interaction of genes that can only account for how, out of a limited (finite) set of elements, an "infinite" (self-relating) organic structure arises as an "emergent property"?

Those who oppose most ferociously this prospect are religious leaders and environmentalists—for both, there is something of a transgression, of entering a prohibited domain, in this idea of creating a new form of life from scratch, from the zero-point. And this brings us back to the notion of ecology as the new opium for the masses; the underlying message is again a deeply conservative one—any change can only be the change for the worst:

Behind much of the resistance to the notion of synthetic life is the intuition that nature (or God) created the best of possible worlds. Charles Darwin believed that the myriad designs of nature's creations are perfectly honed to do whatever they are meant to do—be it animals that see, hear, sing, swim or fly, or plants that feed on the sun's rays, exuding bright floral colors to attract pollinators. (*Ibid.*, 41)

This reference to Darwin is deeply misleading: the ultimate lesson of Darwinism is the exact opposite—namely, that nature tinkers and improvises, with great losses and catastrophes accompanying every limited success. Isn't the fact that 90 percent of the human genome is "junk DNA" with no clear function the ultimate proof of it? Consequently, the first lesson to be drawn is the one repeatedly made by Stephen Jay Gould: the utter contingency of our existence. There is no Evolution: catastrophes and broken equilibriums are part of natural history; at numerous points in the past, life could have turned in an entirely different direction. The main source of our energy (oil) is the result of a past catastrophe of unimaginable dimensions. Along these lines, "terror" means accepting the fact of the utter groundlessness of our existence: there is no firm foundation, no place of retreat on which we can safely count. It means fully accepting that "nature doesn't exist"—i.e., fully consummating the gap that separates the life-world notion of nature and the scientific notion of natural reality: "nature" *qua* the domain of balanced reproduction, of organic deployment into which humanity intervenes with its hubris, brutally derailing its circular motion, is man's fantasy; nature is already in itself "second nature;" its balance is always secondary, an attempt to negotiate a "habit" that would restore some order after catastrophic interruptions.<sup>17</sup> Thus the lesson to be fully endorsed is that of an environmental scientist who concluded that while we cannot be sure what the ultimate result of humanity's interventions into the geosphere will be, one thing is sure: if humanity were to abruptly cease its immense industrial activity and let nature on Earth take its balanced course, the result would be a total breakdown, an imaginable catastrophe. "Nature" on Earth is already to such an extent "adapted" to human interventions, the human "pollutions" are already to such an extent included into the shaky and fragile balance of the "natural" reproduction on Earth, that its cessation would cause a catastrophic imbalance.<sup>18</sup> Humanity has nowhere to retreat: not only is there "no big Other" (self-contained symbolic order as the ultimate guarantee of Meaning); there is also no Nature *qua* balanced order of self-reproduction, but only one whose homeostasis is disturbed and derailed by human interventions. Not only is the big Other "barred;" Nature is also barred. One should thus become aware not only of the limitation of the ideology of progress, but also of the limitation of the Benjaminian notion of the revolution as the move to put on the brakes of the runaway train of progress: it is too late for that also, since the cessation of activity can trigger an even greater catastrophe.

In his *Reflections at the Edge of Askja*, Pall Skulason reports how he was affected by Askja, a volcanic lake and valley in the middle of Iceland, surrounded by snow-covered mountains:

The world suddenly strikes us in such a way that reality presents itself as a seamless whole. The question that then arises concerns the world itself and the reality that it orders into a totality. Is the world really a unified totality? Isn't reality just an infinitely variegated manifold of particular phenomena? [...] Askja is the symbol of objective reality, independent of all thought, belief and expression, independent of human existence. (11, 21)

One should be Hegelian here: what if this very experience of reality as a seamless Whole is a violent imposition of ours, something we "project onto it" (to use this old, inappropriate term) in order to avoid directly confronting the totally meaningless "infinitely variegated manifold of particular phenomena" (what Alain Badiou calls "the primordial multiplicity of Being")? Shouldn't we apply here the fundamental lesson of Kant's transcendental idealism: the world as a Whole is not a Thing-in-itself, it is merely a regulative Idea of our mind, something our mind imposes onto the raw multitude of sensations in order to be able to experience it as a well-ordered meaningful Whole? The paradox is that the very In-itself of Nature as a Whole independent of us is the result of our (subjective) "synthetic activity." Don't Skulason's own words, if we read them closely (literally), already point in this direction? "Askja is used in this text as the symbol of a unique and important experience of the world and its inhabitants. There are numerous other symbols which men use to talk about the things that matter most" (*ibid.*, 19). So, exactly as is the case with the Kantian Sublime, the unfathomable presence of the raw Nature-in-itself is reduced to a material pretext (replaceable with others) for "a unique and important experience." Why is this experience necessary?

To live, to be able to exist, the mind must connect itself with some kind of order. It must apprehend reality as an independent whole [...] and must bind itself in a stable fashion to certain features of what we call reality. It cannot bind itself to the ordinary world of everyday experience, except by taking it on faith that reality forms an objective whole, a whole which exists independently of the mind. The mind lives, and we live, in a relationship of faith with reality itself. This relationship is likewise one of confidence in a detached reality, a reality which is different and other than the mind. We live and exist in this relationship of confidence, which is always by its nature uncertain and insecure. [...] the relationship of confidence [...] is originally, and truly, always a relationship with reality as a natural totality: as Nature. (*ibid.*, 31-33)

One should note here the refined analysis of the tension between the inhabitable and the uninhabitable: in order to inhabit a small part of reality that appears within our horizon of meaning, we have to presuppose that the Reality-in-itself (“different and other than the mind”) that sustains our ordered world is part of reality, is an ordered and seamless Whole. In short, we have to have a faith and confidence in Reality: nature-in-itself is not merely a meaningless composite of multiples, it is Nature. What, however, if this relationship of faith in Nature, in the primordial harmony between mind and reality, is the most elementary form of idealism, of reliance on the big Other? What if the true materialist position starts (and, in a way, ends) with the acceptance of the In-itself as a meaningless chaotic manifold? One is tempted here to turn again to Iceland’s unique natural landscape: the magnificent misty-green coast plains in the south, full of big rocks covered with wet green-brown moss, cannot but appear as nature run amok, full of pathological cancerous protuberances—what if this is much closer to “nature-in-itself” than the sublime images of seamless Wholes? Indeed, what we need is ecology without nature: the ultimate obstacle to protecting nature is the very notion of nature we rely on.<sup>19</sup>

The true source of problems is not “the most significant event to affect Western culture during recent centuries,” namely the “breakdown of the relationship between man and nature” (Morton, 35)—the retreat of the relation of confidence. On the contrary: this very “relationship of faith with reality itself” is the main obstacle that prevents us from confronting the ecological crisis at its most radical. Disbelief in an ecological catastrophe cannot be attributed simply to our brain-washing by scientific ideology that leads us to dismiss our gut sense that tells us something is fundamentally wrong with the scientific-technological attitude. The problem is much deeper; it lies in the unreliability of our common sense itself, which, habituated as it is to our ordinary life-world, finds it difficult really to accept that the flow of everyday reality can be perturbed. Our attitude here is that of the fetishist split: “I know that global warming is a threat to the entire ecosystem, but I cannot really believe it. It is enough to look at the environs to which my mind is wired: the green grass and trees, the whistle of the wind, the rising of the sun... can one really imagine that all this will be disturbed? You talk about the ozone hole, but no matter how much I look into the sky, I don’t see it—all I see is the same sky, blue or grey!”

Thus the problem is that we can rely neither on scientific mind nor on our own common sense—they both mutually reinforce each other’s

blindness. The scientific mind advocates a cold, objective appraisal of dangers and risks, while no such appraisal is actually possible; common sense finds it hard to accept that a catastrophe can really occur. The difficult ethical task is thus to “un-learn” the most basic coordinates of our immersion into our life-world: what traditionally served as the recourse to Wisdom (the basic trust in the background-coordinates of our world) is now THE source of danger. We should really “grow up” and learn to cut this umbilical cord to our life Sphere. The problem with the attitude of science and technology is not its detachment from our life-world, but the abstract character of this detachment, which compels the science-and-technology attitude to combine itself with the worst of our life-world immersion. Scientists perceive themselves as rational, able to appraise objectively potential risks; for them, the only unpredictable-irrational elements are the panic reactions of the uneducated crowd: with “ordinary people,” a small and controllable risk can spread and trigger global panic, since people project into the situation their disavowed fears and fantasies. What scientists are unable to perceive is the “irrational,” inadequate nature of their own “cold, distanced” appraisal. Today’s science serves two properly ideological needs, “hope and censorship,” traditionally the domain of religion. As John Gray writes in *Straw Dogs*:

Science alone has the power to silence heretics. Today it is the only institution that can claim authority. Like the Church in the past, it has the power to destroy, or marginalize, independent thinkers. [...] From the standpoint of anyone who values freedom of thought, this may be unfortunate, but it is undoubtedly the chief source of science’s appeal. For us, science is a refuge from uncertainties, promising—and in some measure delivering—the miracle of freedom from thought, while churches have become sanctuaries for doubt. (19)

Indeed, as Nietzsche put it more than a century ago: “Oh, how much is today hidden by science! Oh, how much it is expected to hide!” (97). However, we are not talking here about science as such, so the idea of science sustaining “freedom from thought” is not a variation on Heidegger’s notion that “science doesn’t think.” We are talking about the way science functions as a social force, as an ideological institution: at this level, its function is to provide certainty, to be a point of reference upon which one can rely, and to provide hope (new technological inventions will help us against diseases, etc.). In this dimension, science is—in Lacanian terms—university discourse at its purest, S2 (knowledge) whose “truth” is S1 (master-signifier, power). The paradox effectively is that, today, science provides security that was once guaranteed by



religion, and, in a curious inversion, religion is one of the possible places (“sites of resistance”) from which one can deploy critical doubts about today’s society.

### The Uses and Misuses of Heidegger

What ecology-based fear obfuscates is thus a far more radical dimension of terror. Today, with the prospect of the biogenetic manipulation of human physical and psychic features, the notion of “danger” inscribed in modern technology and elaborated by Heidegger is turned into a common currency. Heidegger emphasizes how the true danger is not the physical self-destruction of humanity—the threat that something will go terribly wrong with biogenetic interventions, but, precisely, that nothing will go wrong, that genetic manipulations will function smoothly. At this point, the circle will be closed, and the openness that characterizes being-human abolished. Isn’t the Heideggerian danger [*Gefahr*] precisely that the ontic will “swallow” the ontological (the reduction of man, the *Da* of Being, to just another object of science)? Isn’t this again the formula of fearing the impossible: what we fear is that what cannot happen (since the ontological dimension is irreducible to the ontic) will nonetheless happen... The same point is made in more common terms by cultural critics from Fukuyama and Habermas to Bill McKibben, who worry about how the latest techno-scientific developments (which potentially made the human species able to redesign and redefine itself) will affect our being-human; this concern is best encapsulated by the title of McKibben’s book: *Enough. Staying Human in an Engineered Age*. Humanity as a collective subject has to put a limit and freely renounce further “progress” in this direction. McKibben endeavors to empirically specify this limit: somatic genetic therapy is still this side of the enough point, one can practice it without leaving behind the world as we’ve known it, since we just intervene into a body formed in the old “natural” way; germline manipulations lie on the other side, in the world beyond meaning (127). When we manipulate psychic and bodily properties of individuals before they are even conceived, we pass the threshold into full-fledged planning, turning individuals into products, preventing them from experiencing themselves as responsible agents who have to educate/form themselves by the effort of focusing their will, thus obtaining the satisfaction of achievement—such individuals no longer relate to themselves as responsible agents... The insufficiency of this reasoning is double. First, as Heidegger would have put it, the survival of the being-human of humans cannot depend on an

ontic decision of humans. Even if we try to define the limit of the permissible in this way, the true catastrophe already took place: we already experience ourselves as in principle manipulable, we just freely renounce to fully deploy these potentials. Writing on Heidegger, Mark Wrathall observes, "In the technological age, what matters to us most is getting the 'greatest possible use' out of everything" (102). Doesn't this throw a new light on how ecological concerns, at least in their predominant mode, remain within the horizon of technology? Isn't the point of using resources sparingly, of recycling, etc., precisely to maximize the use of everything?

But the crucial point is that with biogenetic planning, our universe of meaning will disappear. On the one hand, the utopian descriptions of the digital paradise are wrong, since they imply that meaning will persist. But on the other hand, the negative descriptions of the "meaningless" universe of technological self-manipulation are also the products of a perspective fallacy, since they measure the future with present standards, which are inadequate. In other words, the future of technological self-manipulation only appears as "deprived of meaning" if measured from within the horizon of the traditional notion of what a meaningful universe is. Who knows what this "posthuman" universe will reveal itself to be "in itself"? What if there is no singular and simple answer; what if the contemporary trends (digitalization, biogenetic manipulation) open themselves up to a multitude of possible symbolizations? What if the utopia (the perverse dream of the passage from hardware to software of a subjectivity freely floating between different embodiments) and the dystopia (the nightmare of humans voluntarily transforming themselves into programmed beings) are just the positive and the negative of the same ideological fantasy? What if it is only and precisely this technological prospect that fully confronts us with the most radical dimension of our finitude?<sup>20</sup>

Heidegger himself remains ambiguous here. As Mark Wrathall describes it, Heidegger's answer to technology is

not nostalgic longing for "former objects which perhaps were once on the way to becoming things and even to actually presencing as things" ("The Thing"), but rather allowing ourselves to be conditioned by our world, and then learning to "keep the fourfold in things" by building and nurturing things peculiarly suited to our fourfold. When our practices incorporate the fourfold, our lives and everything around us will have importance far exceeding that of resources, because they and only they will be geared to our way of inhabiting the world. (117)

However, all examples Heidegger provides of “keeping the fourfold in things”—from the Greek temple and Van Gogh’s shoes to numerous examples from his Schwarzwald mountains—are nostalgic, i.e., belonging to a past world, no longer ours. For example, he opposes traditional farming practices to modern technologized agriculture; the Black Forest farmer’s house to a modern apartment block. So what would have been examples appropriate to our technological times? Perhaps we should take very seriously Fredric Jameson’s idea of reading Raymond Chandler’s *California* as a Heideggerian “world,” with Phillip Marlowe caught in a tension between heaven and earth, between his mortality and the “divine” shining through in the pathetic longing of his characters. And didn’t Ruth Rendell accomplish the same for UK suburbia with its decaying backyards and grey shopping malls? Hubert Dreyfus’s notion that the way to be prepared for the upcoming *Kehre*, for the arrival of new gods, is to participate in practices that function as sites of resistance to the technological total mobilization is all too short:

Heidegger explores a kind of gathering that would enable us to resist postmodern technological practices. [...] he turns from the cultural gathering he explored in “The Origin of the Work of Art” (that sets up shared meaningful differences and thereby unifies an entire culture) to local gatherings that set up local worlds. Such local worlds occur around some everyday thing that temporarily brings into their own both the thing itself and those involved in the typical activity concerning the use of the thing. Heidegger calls this event a thing thinking and the tendency in the practices to bring things and people into their own, appropriation. [...] Heidegger’s examples of things that focus such local gathering are a wine jug and an old stone bridge. Such things gather Black Forest peasant practices, [...] the family meal acts as a focal thing when it draws on the culinary and social skills of family members and solicits fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, children, familiar warmth, good humor, and loyalty to come to the fore in their excellence, or in, as Heidegger would say, their ownmost.<sup>21</sup>

From a strict Heideggerian position, such practices can—and as a rule do—function as the very opposite of resistance, as something that is in advance included in the smooth functioning of the technological mobilization (like the courses in transcendental meditation that make you more efficient in your job), which is why the path to salvation only leads through the full engagement in technological mobilization.

The aftermath of the constant capitalist innovation is, of course, the permanent production of the piles of leftover waste: “The main production of the modern and postmodern capitalist industry is precisely waste. We are postmodern beings because we realize that all our aesthetically appealing consumption artifacts will eventually end as

leftover, to the point that it will transform the earth into a vast waste land. You lose the sense of tragedy, you perceive progress as derisive" (Miller, 1999, 19). The flip side of the incessant capitalist drive to produce more and more new objects are the growing piles of useless waste—mountains of used cars, computers, etc., like the famous airplane "resting place" in the Mojave desert... In these ever-growing piles of inert, dysfunctional "stuff," which cannot but strike us with their useless, inert presence, one can, as it were, perceive the capitalist drive at rest. Therein resides the interest of Andrei Tarkovsky's films, especially his masterpiece *Stalker*, showing the post-industrial wasteland with wild vegetation growing over abandoned factories, concrete tunnels and railroads full of stale water, where stray cats and dogs wander. Nature and industrial civilization are here again overlapping, but through a common decay—civilization in decay is in the process of being reclaimed, not by idealized harmonious Nature, but by nature in decomposition. The ultimate Tarkovskian landscape is that of a river or pond close to some forest, full of the debris of human artifices—old concrete blocks, rusty metal. The postindustrial wasteland of the Second World is the privileged "evental site," the symptomatic point out of which one can undermine the totality of today's global capitalism. One should love this world, with its grey, decaying buildings and sulphuric smell, for all this stands for history, threatened with erasure between the post-historical First World and the pre-historical Third World.

Let's recall Walter Benjamin's notion of "natural history" as "re-naturalized history": it takes place when historical artifacts lose their meaningful vitality and are perceived as dead objects, reclaimed by nature or, in the best case, as monuments of a past dead culture. (For Benjamin, it was in confronting such dead monuments of human history reclaimed by nature that we experience history at its purest.) The paradox here is that this re-naturalization overlaps with its opposite, with de-naturalization. Since culture is for us humans our "second nature," since we dwell in a living culture, experiencing it as our natural habitat, the re-naturalization of cultural artifacts equals their de-naturalization. Deprived of their function within a living totality of meaning, artifacts dwell in an inter-space between nature and culture, between life and death, leading a ghost-like existence, belonging neither to nature nor to culture, appearing as something akin to the monstrosity of natural freaks, like a cow with two heads and three legs.

The challenge of technology is thus not that we should (re)discover how all our activity has to rely on our unsurpassable (*unhintergebar*) embeddedness in our life-world, but, on the contrary, that we must cut

off this embeddedness and accept the radical abyss of our existence. This is the terror that even Heidegger didn't dare to confront. To put it in the terms of a problematic comparison, insofar as we remain humans, are we embedded in a pre-reflexive symbolic life-world, rather than being something like "symbolic plants"? Hegel says somewhere in his *Philosophy of Nature* that a plant's roots are its entrails which, in contrast to an animal, a plant has outside itself, in the earth, which prevents a plant from cutting its roots and freely roaming around; for a plant, cutting its roots is death. Isn't our symbolic life-world in which we are always-already pre-reflexively embedded something like our symbolic entrails outside ourselves? And isn't the true challenge of technology that we should repeat the differentiation between plants and animals also at the symbolic level, cutting off our symbolic roots and accepting the abyss of freedom? In this very precise sense we can accept the formula that humanity will/should pass into post-humanity, since being embedded in a symbolic world is a definition of being-human. And in this sense, also, technology is a promise of liberation through terror. The subject that emerges in and through this experience of terror is ultimately the *cogito* itself, the abyss of self-relating negativity that forms the core of transcendental subjectivity, the acephalous subject of the death-drive. It is the properly in-human subject.

### What Is to Be Done?

What triggers this terror is the awareness that we are in the midst of a radical change. Although individual acts can, in a direct short-circuit of levels, affect the "higher" level social constellation, the way they affect it is unpredictable. The constellation is properly frustrating: although we (individual or collective agents) know that it all depends on us, we can never predict the consequences of our acts. We are not impotent, but, on the contrary, omnipotent, without being able to determine the scope of our powers. The gap between causes and effects is irreducible, and there is no "big Other" to guarantee the harmony between the levels, to guarantee that the overall outcome of our interactions will be satisfactory.

For long centuries, humanity did not have to worry about the impact on the environs of its productive activity—nature was able to accommodate itself to deforestation, to the use of coal and oil, and so on. However, one cannot be sure if, today, we are not approaching a tipping point—one really cannot be sure, since such points can be clearly perceived only once it is already too late. We touch here the paradoxical nerve of morality that Bernard Williams calls "moral luck."<sup>22</sup> Williams

evokes the case of a painter ironically called “Gauguin” who left his wife and children and moved to Tahiti in order to fully develop his artistic genius. Was Gauguin morally justified in doing this or not? Williams’s response is that we can only answer this question in retrospect, after we learn the final outcome of his risky decision: did he develop into a painting genius or not? As Jean-Pierre Dupuy has pointed out,<sup>23</sup> we encounter the same dilemma apropos of the urgency to do something about today’s threat of ecological catastrophes: either we take this threat seriously and decide today to do things which, if the catastrophe will not occur, may appear ridiculous, or we do nothing, and lose everything in the case of catastrophe. According to Dupuy, the worst choice is the middle ground, of taking limited measures, for therein we will fail in either scenario—there is no middle ground with regard to ecological catastrophe: either it will occur or it will not occur. In such a situation, the talk about anticipation, precaution and “risk control” tends to become meaningless, since we are dealing with what, in the terms of the Rumsfeldian theory of knowledge, one should call the “unknown unknowns”: not only do we not know where the tipping point is, we do not even know exactly what we do not know. The most unsettling aspect of the ecological crisis concerns the so-called “knowledge in the real” which can run amok: when winter is too warm, plants and animals misread the hot weather in February as the signal that spring has already begun, and start to behave accordingly, rendering themselves vulnerable to late onslaughts of cold, as well as upsetting the entire rhythm of natural reproduction. In May 2007, it was reported that a mysterious disease, which is wiping out America’s honeybees, could have a devastating effect on the country’s food supply: about one-third of the human diet comes from insect-pollinated plants, and the honeybee is responsible for 80 percent of that pollination; even cattle, which feed on alfalfa, depend on bees. While not all scientists foresee a food crisis, noting that large-scale bee die-offs have happened before, this one seems particularly baffling and alarming. This is how we must imagine a possible catastrophe: a small-level interruption with devastating global consequences.

We can learn even more from the Rumsfeldian theory of knowledge—the expression, of course, refers to the well-known incident in March 2003, when Donald Rumsfeld engaged in a little bit of amateur philosophizing about the relationship between the known and the unknown: “There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don’t know. But there are also unknown unknowns. There

are things we don't know we don't know." What he forgot to add was the crucial fourth term: the "unknown knowns," things we don't know that we know – which is precisely the Freudian unconscious, the "knowledge which doesn't know itself," as Lacan used to say. If Rumsfeld thinks that the main dangers in the confrontation with Iraq are the "unknown unknowns" – the threats about which we have no clue – what we should reply is that the main dangers are, on the contrary, the "unknown knowns" – the disavowed beliefs and suppositions that we are not even aware of adhering to ourselves. In the case of ecology, these disavowed beliefs and suppositions are the ones that prevent us from really believing in the possibility of the catastrophe, and they combine with the "unknown unknowns." The situation is like that of the blind spot in our visual field: we do not see the gap; the picture appears continuous.

Our blindness to the results of "systemic evil" is perhaps most clearly perceptible apropos of debates about Communist crimes: there, responsibility is easy to allocate—we are dealing with subjective evil, with agents who did it, and we can even identify the ideological sources of the crimes (totalitarian ideology, *The Communist Manifesto*, Rousseau...). When one draws attention to the millions who died as the result of capitalist globalization, from the tragedy of Mexico in the 16th century through the Belgian Congo holocaust a century ago, and more, responsibility is denied: this just happened as the result of an "objective" process, nobody planned and executed it, there was no *Capitalist Manifesto*... (The one who came closest to writing it is Ayn Rand.) And therein lies also the limitation of the "ethical committees" that spring up all around to counteract the dangers of unbridled scientific-technological development: with all their good intentions, ethical considerations, etc., they ignore the more basic "systemic" violence.

The fact that King Leopold of Belgium who presided over the Congo holocaust was a great humanitarian, proclaimed a saint by the Pope, cannot be dismissed as a mere case of ideological hypocrisy and cynicism: one can argue that, subjectively, he probably really was a sincere humanitarian, who even modestly counter-acted the catastrophic consequences of the ruthless exploitation of the natural resources of the Congo (his personal fiefdom!). But the ultimate irony is that even most of the profits from this endeavor went for the benefit of the Belgian people, for public works, museums, and so on.

Back in the early seventeenth century, after the establishment of the shogun regime, Japan made a unique, collective decision to isolate itself from foreign culture and to pursue its own path of contained life, of

balanced reproduction, focused on cultural refinement, and avoiding wild expansion. Was the ensuing period, which lasted till the middle of the nineteenth century, really just an isolationist dream from which Japan was cruelly awakened by Commodore Perry on the American warship? What if the dream is that we can go on indefinitely in our expansionism? What if we all need to repeat, *mutatis mutandis*, the Japanese decision, and collectively decide to intervene into our pseudo-natural development, to change its direction? The tragedy is that the very idea of such a collective decision is discredited today. Apropos of the disintegration of State Socialism two decades ago, one should not forget that, at approximately the same time, the Western Social Democratic welfare state ideology was also dealt a crucial blow, no longer able to arouse a collective, passionate following. The notion that “the time of the welfare state has past” is today conventional wisdom. What these two defeated ideologies shared is the notion that humanity as a collective subject has the capacity to somehow limit impersonal and anonymous socio-historic development, to steer it in a desired direction. Today, such a notion is quickly dismissed as “ideological” and/or “totalitarian”: the social process is again perceived as dominated by an anonymous Fate beyond social control. The rise of global capitalism is presented to us as such a Fate, against which one cannot fight—one either adapts to it, or falls out of step with history and is crushed. The only thing one can do is to make global capitalism as human as possible, to fight for “global capitalism with a human face” (this is what, ultimately, the Third Way is – or, rather, WAS – about). The sound barrier will have to be broken here; the risk will have to be taken to endorse again large, collective decisions.

If we are effectively to re-conceptualize the notion of revolution in the Benjaminian sense of stopping the “train of history” that runs towards a catastrophe, it is not enough just to analyze the standard notion of historical progress. Rather, one should also deploy the limitation of the ordinary “historical” notion of time: at each moment of time, multiple possibilities are waiting to be realized; once one of them actualizes itself, the others are cancelled. The supreme case of this the Leibnizean God who created the best possible world: before creation, he had in his mind a panoply of possible worlds, and his decision consisted in choosing the best among them. Here, possibility precedes choice: the choice is a choice among possibilities. What is unthinkable within this horizon of linear historical evolution is the notion of a choice/act that retroactively opens up its own possibility: the idea that the emergence of something radically



New retroactively changes the past—of course, not the actual past (we are not in science fiction), but the past possibilities, or, to put it in more formal terms, the value of the modal propositions about the past. Dupuy's point is that, if we are to confront properly the threat of a cosmic or environmental catastrophe, we need to break out of this "historical" notion of temporality: we have to introduce a new notion of time. Dupuy calls this time the "time of a project," of a closed circuit between the past and the future: the future is causally produced by our acts in the past, while the way we act is determined by our anticipation of the future and our reaction to this anticipation. This, then, is how Dupuy proposes to confront the catastrophe: we should first perceive it as our fate, as unavoidable, and then, projecting ourselves into it, adopting its standpoint, we should retroactively insert into its past (the past of the future) counterfactual possibilities ("If we were to do that and that, the catastrophe we are in now would not have occurred!") upon which we then act today. Therein resides Dupuy's paradoxical formula: we have to accept that, at the level of possibilities, our future is doomed, the catastrophe will take place, it is our destiny—and, then, on the background of this acceptance, we should mobilize ourselves to perform the act that will change destiny itself by inserting a new possibility into the past. For Badiou, the time/tense of the fidelity to an event is the *futur antérieur*: overtaking oneself towards the future, one acts now as if the future one wants to bring about is already here. The same circular strategy of *futur antérieur* is also only truly efficient when we are confronting the prospect of a catastrophe (say, an ecological disaster): instead of saying "the future is still open, we still have the time to act and prevent the worst," we should accept the catastrophe as inevitable, and then act to retroactively undo what is already "written in the stars" as our destiny.

And isn't a supreme case of the reversal of positive into negative destiny the shift from the classical historical materialism into the attitude of Adorno and Horkheimer's "dialectic of Enlightenment"? While traditional Marxism enjoined us to engage ourselves and act in order to bring about the necessity (of Communism), Adorno and Horkheimer projected themselves into the final, catastrophic outcome perceived as fixed (the advent of the "administered society" of total manipulation, and the end of subjectivity) in order to urge us to act against this outcome in our present. And, ironically, doesn't the same hold for the very defeat of Communism in 1990? It is easy, from today's perspective, to mock the "pessimists," from both Right and Left, from Solzhenitsyn to Castoriadis, who deplored the blindness and compromises of the democratic West,

its lack of ethico-political strength and courage in its dealing with the Communist threat, and who predicted that the Cold War was already lost by the West, that the Communist block had already won it, that the collapse of the West was imminent—but it is precisely their attitude that did most for bringing about the collapse of Communism. In Dupuy's terms, their very "pessimist" prediction at the level of possibilities, of the linear historical evolution, mobilized them to counteract it. We should thus ruthlessly abandon the prejudice that the linear time of evolution is "on our side," that History is "working for us" in the guise of the famous mole digging under the earth, doing the work of the Cunning of Reason.<sup>24</sup> But how, then, are we to counter the threat of ecological catastrophe? It is here that we should return to the four moments of what Badiou calls the "eternal Idea" of revolutionary-egalitarian Justice. What is demanded is:

—**strict egalitarian justice** (all people should pay the same price in eventual renunciations, i.e., one should impose the same world-wide norms of per capita energy consumption, carbon dioxide emissions, etc.; the developed nations should not be allowed to poison the environment at the present rate, blaming the developing Third World countries, from Brazil to China, for ruining our shared environment with their rapid development);

—**terror** (ruthless punishment of all who violate the imposed protective measures, inclusive of severe limitations of liberal "freedoms," technological control of the prospective law-breakers);

—**voluntarism** (the only way to confront the threat of ecological catastrophe is by large-scale, collective decisions that will run counter to the "spontaneous" immanent logic of capitalist development; as early as 1940 Walter Benjamin pointed out in his "Theses on the Concept of History" that the task of a revolution is not to help the historical tendency or necessity to realize itself, but to "stop the train" of history that runs towards the precipice of global catastrophe—an insight that has gained new weight with the prospect of ecological catastrophe);

—**trust in the people** (the wager that the large majority of the people will support these severe measures, will see them as their own, and will be ready to participate in their enforcement). We should not be afraid to assert, as a combination of terror and trust in the people, the rehabilitation of one of the figures of all egalitarian-revolutionary terror, the "informer" who denounces culprits to the authorities. (In the Enron scandal, *Time* magazine was right to celebrate as true public heroes the insiders who tipped-off the financial authorities.)<sup>25</sup>

Thus doesn't the ecological challenge offer a unique chance to reinvent the "eternal Idea" of egalitarian terror? Could this chance have arisen without the division that colors the entire terrain of struggle—the separation between the Excluded (the "animals" of global capital) and the Included (those that capitalism regards as its "political animals")? Thus isn't nature, no less than culture, impossible without its discontented?

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### Notes

1. See the excellent report of Mike Davis, "Planet of Slums. Urban Revolution and the Informal Proletariat," *New Left Review* 26 (March/April 2004).
2. Aren't then slum-dwellers to be classified as what Marx, with barely concealed contempt, dismissed as "lumpen-proletariat," the degenerate "refuse" of all classes which, when politicized, as a rule support proto-Fascist and Fascist regimes (in Marx's case, of Napoleon III)? A closer analysis should focus on the changed struc-

tural role of these “lumpen” elements in the conditions of global capitalism (especially large-scale migrations).

3. The precise Marxian definition of the proletarian position is: substanceless subjectivity that emerges when a certain structural short-circuit occurs—not only do producers exchange their products on the market, but there are those who are forced to sell not the product of their labor, but their labor itself. It is here, through this redoubled/reflected alienation, that the surplus-object emerges: surplus-value is literally correlative to the emptied subject, it is the objectal counterpart of money. This redoubled alienation means that not only “social relations appear as relations between things,” as in every market economy, but that the very core of subjectivity itself is posited as equivalent to a thing. Note the paradox of universalization: market economy can only become universal when the working force itself is also sold on the market as a commodity—i.e., there can be no universal market economy with the majority of producers selling their products.
4. The semiotic that sustains these qualifications obeys a very precise logic and deserves an analysis of its own: one cannot just mix the terms and propose, say, an alliance of “workers, patriotic farmers, honest small bourgeoisie, and poor intellectuals.” Each time, the line of separation is clear: only poor farmers, not the rich ones who belong to or pact with the ruling class; only patriotic small bourgeoisie, not the ones that serve international colonial capital; only honest intellectuals, not those who sold themselves to the ruling class and legitimize its domination. Should we then say that what we need today is an alliance between the Excluded, poor ecologists, patriotic intellectual workers and honest bio-geneticists?
5. The question is, how to distinguish this commons from the premodern commons of collective property?
6. See “Murdoch: I’m proud to be green. News Corp boss orders his entire empire to convert and become a worldwide enthusiast for the environment,” in *The Independent on Sunday*, 13 May 2007, p. 3.
7. Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, Ian Johnston’s translation (2003), available online at [www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/aeschylus\\_eumenides.htm](http://www.mala.bc.ca/~Johnstoi/aeschylus/aeschylus_eumenides.htm).
8. It is strange that Simon Critchley, who quotes these lines in his *Infinitely Demanding*, reads them as prefiguring the politics of fear, although they fit much better the main motif of his book, the pressure of the “infinitely demanding” superego.
9. . There are many further variants of Che Guevara’s alleged “last words” – here are some of them: “I know you’ve come to kill me. Shoot, you are only going to kill a man.” / “Shoot, coward, you are only going to kill a man.” / “Know this now, you are killing a man.” / “I knew you were going to shoot me; I should never have been taken alive.” / “Tell Fidel that this failure does not mean the end of the revolution, that it will triumph elsewhere. Tell Aleida to forget this, remarry and be happy, and keep the children studying. Ask the soldiers to aim well.” / “Don’t shoot, I am Che Guevara and I am worth more to you alive than dead.”
10. Quoted from Thorsten Jantschek, “Ein ausgezehrter Hase,” *Die Zeit*, 5 July 2001, Feuilleton, p. 26.
11. Similarly, while scientists in the CERN particles-collider are preparing the conditions to recreate the Big Bang explosion, some skeptics warn about the possibility that the experiment will succeed all too well, effectively setting in motion a new Big Bang which will wipe out the world we know.
12. In the last decade, this topic was often exploited in sci-fi thrillers—see, among others, Michael Chrichton’s *Prey* (New York: Avon Books 2002).
13. Throughout modernity, the Church presented itself as the guard against the danger of knowing-too-much. When, today, it presents itself as a beacon for the respect of freedom and human dignity, it is advisable to make a simple mental experiment. Till the early 1960s, the Catholic Church maintained the (in)famous Index of works whose

- reading was prohibited to Catholics; we can only imagine how the artistic and intellectual history of modern Europe would look without the works that, at one time or another, found themselves on this Index—Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre, not to mention numerous modern literary classics.
14. I take this expression from Alain Badiou.
  15. See Stephen Fry, *Making History*, New York: Arrow Books 2005.
  16. See the report "Life 2.0" in *Newsweek*, June 4 2007, p. 37-43.
  17. In "Environmentalism as a religion," a speech given to the Commonwealth Club of California, Michael Crichton described the similarities between the structure of various religious views (particularly Judeo-Christian dogma) and the beliefs of many modern urban atheists who, he asserts, have romantic ideas about Nature and our past, who believe in the initial "paradise," human "sins", and "Judgment Day." Today's environmentalists tend to cling stubbornly to elements of their faith in spite of scientific evidence to the contrary (Crichton cites misconceptions about DDT, the dangers of second-hand smoke, and global warming as examples). Problematic as Crichton is (his bestsellers are embodiments of late-capitalism's predominant ideology), he has a point here.
  18. Another example: in order to counteract the policy of ruthless clear-cutting of forests, ecologists often succeeded in imposing strict measures of fire suppression, with the unexpected result of altering the virgin forests even more irrevocably (since occasional fires played a key role in the forests' self-reproduction). Or, at a more anecdotic level, there is the story of a valley in the UK heavily polluted by smoke from burning coal; once the coal burning stopped, the birds and other organisms were so used to coal pollution that they couldn't survive in new conditions; their departure disturbed the fragile balance of the life cycle in the valley... And what about animals like pigs grown in industrial farms, who are not able to survive on their own even for a couple of days (they are half blind, and cannot stand on their own legs)?
  19. See Timothy Morton's outstanding *Ecology Without Nature*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
  20. Giorgio Agamben refuses to enter the US because he does not want his fingerprints taken. For him, fingerprinting makes "the most private and incommunicable aspect of subjectivity" part of the system of state control. Why is the accidental shape of the curves on the tip of my fingers "the most private and incommunicable aspect of subjectivity"?
  21. See Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Highway Bridges and Feasts," available online at [http://www.focusing.org/apm\\_papers/dreyfus.html](http://www.focusing.org/apm_papers/dreyfus.html).
  22. See Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1981.
  23. See Jean-Pierre Dupuy, *Pour un catastrophisme éclairé*, Paris: Editions du Seuil 2002, p. 124-126.
  24. However, this image should nonetheless be supplemented by its apparent opposite. In the last decade of the Cold War, the radical anti-Communists were wrong when they dismissed human rights and other agreements between the West and the East (like the Helsinki Declaration on Human Rights) as a deception by the Communists, who in reality conceded nothing. Although the Communists themselves perceived it as a deception, the dissident movement in the Communist countries used the Helsinki Declaration, adopted as a legally-binding document, as a tool for a vast pro-democratic mobilization. As is often the case, the ruling Communists underestimated the power of appearances: they got caught in the game of what they perceived as a mere appearance.
  25. However, the temptation to be avoided is to perceive ecological catastrophes as a kind of "divine violence" of nature—the justice/vengeance of nature. Such a conclusion would be an unacceptable, obscurantist projection of meaning onto nature.