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Peter Klepec*

Caught in the Super-emergency

One of the most general observations about our contemporary age is that we live in a time of transition,[1] for which various alternative terms have been proposed – from "interregnum" (Gramsci)[2] and "the dialectic of standstill" (Benjamin) to "the great regression"[3]. There are many interpretations as to when this transition actually began, what it really means, and what it actually involves. There is also an almost universal consensus that this transition is not yet over and that no one knows for sure when it will end[4] and where it will take us.

Recently, things have become even more complicated as several crises have emerged that overlap and reinforce each other. The problems and contradictions of late capitalism have obviously taken their toll. It began with the climate crisis that was declared many decades ago and that we are all familiar with today, without any appropriate countermeasures having been taken so far. The latter, however, is not the only crisis we have experienced in recent decades. The mere enumeration of the events that have marked the last three decades quickly confronts us with all that we have denied and swept under the rug, but also testifies that great changes are underway. Three decades ago, the Cold War ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of socialism

1 This article is a result of the research programme P6-0014 "Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy" and the research projects N6-0286 "Reality, Illusion, Fiction, Truth: A Preliminary Study" and J6-4623 "Conceptualizing the End: its Temporality, Dialectics, and Affective Dimension".

2 See Nancy Fraser, *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born*, London and New York, Verso, 2019.

3 See Heinrich Geiselberger (ed.), *Die große Regression. Eine internazionale Debatte über die geistige Situation der Zeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2017.

4 Or, as Nancy Fraser put it recently: "The duration of this interregnum is anyone's guess, as is the likelihood of its devolution into full-bore authoritarianism, major war, or catastrophic meltdown – as opposed to 'mere' slow unraveling." (Nancy Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism. How Our System Is Devouring Democracy, Care, and the Planet – and What We Can Do about It*, London and New York, Verso, 2022, p. 156.)

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(with the wars in Yugoslavia and Chechnya). Then, two decades ago, after September 11, the War on Terror erupted, with the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. A decade and a half ago, when all this had not yet settled down, one of the worst economic crises of all time broke out, the economic crisis of 2008. A decade ago, after the Spring of Nations in 2011, two more wars broke out, one in Libya, the other in Syria. In addition, while the second Libyan civil war lasted six years, the Syrian civil war is still ongoing, eleven years thus far. All these wars, together with the economic and political situation in Africa and the Middle East, have led to a severe migrant crisis (in Europe and worldwide). Add to this the long-standing crises of politics, the state, democracy, authority, the welfare state, and many other modern institutions such as schools, universities, hospitals, health care, prisons, and so on. Finally, given the two recent crises, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and Putin's current war against Ukraine, a rough picture emerges. Against this background, it seems that the time of transition is gradually becoming a time of crisis, perhaps even the great crisis of our time.

Although the term "crisis" is used to describe all these phenomena, in reality they are quite different problems with different consequences and effects. The term "crisis" itself comes from economics and in the past we got used to the idea that economic crises are a normal part of capitalism and eventually pass. However, the most recent economic crisis, the 2008 crisis, not only came as a surprise to everyone, especially economists, but was also somehow different. Although some economists warned as early as the time of the 2008 economic crisis that arrogance – we know what the crisis is about, right?[5]– could be damaging, no one even suspected what was coming. Today we know that the 2008 crisis was devastating, some speak of the Great Recession,[6] and others point out the lasting effects for the world economy and Europe in particular.[7] Be that as it may, this crisis, together with the crises mentioned above, form an unprecedented situation. The crises accumulate and follow each other with incredible speed – faster and faster (faster than any alleged master conspiracy could even invent, let alone manipulate). They reinforce each other and now form a veritable crisis

5 See Carmen M. Reinhart and Kenneth S. Rogoff, *This Time is Different. Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2009.

6 Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First* Century, trans. A. Goldhammer, Cambridge (MA) and London, Belknap Press, 2014, p. 472.

7 See Adam Tooze, *Crashed. How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*, London, Allen Lane, 2018.

vortex. Nancy Fraser speaks in this context of "a general crisis of the entire societal order" and of an "epochal crisis":

> Beneath the system's tendency to precipitate an unending string of regime-specific crises lies something deeper and more ominous: the prospect of an epochal crisis, rooted in centuries of escalating greenhouse gas emissions, whose volume now exceeds the earth's capacities for sequestration. The trans regime progression of global warming portends a crisis of a different order. Implacably cumulating across the entire sequence of regimes and historical natures, climate change provides the perverse continuity of a ticking time bomb, which could bring the capitalist phase of human history – if not human history *tout court* – to an ignoble end. To speak of an epochal crisis is not, however, to proclaim an imminent breakdown. Nor does it rule out the advent of a new regime of accumulation that could provisionally manage or temporarily defer the current crisis.[8]

The picture drawn so far is, of course, somewhat simplified, and there is much that could or should be discussed. Nevertheless, for our purposes here, it is sufficient to recall this topic in order to put into context and perspective the questions that interest us here, namely, what urgency and emergency are. What we will try to show is how they define us all. The situation we face, described above, requires different conceptual weapons and different measures than those we have been using. On the one hand, everyone is aware that it is a difficult situation, and paradoxically, people talk about it all the time, but only to keep things as they are and to maintain the existing power relations. However, raising false hopes and illusions can be fatal. Things must be called by their right name, even if we are still searching for a suitable name for what is happening right now.

For this very reason, it is also important to point out that the term "crisis" is misleading in many ways. With its medical, legal, and moral undertones, it suggests that problems are not political, and it implies that they can vanish. The term "crisis" assumes that crises come and go, as they are transitory in nature, that they follow one another in more or less regular cycles, and that they eventually end. More than that, it assumes that they gradually lead to greater progress and general prosperity rather than to greater decline or ruin. The term also suggests that the system itself is not the problem and that it does not have any

8 Fraser, *Cannibal Capitalism*, pp. 16, 126.

major internal contradictions or antagonisms. In this sense, we could say that the term crisis is a fetish. For Freud, a fetish is something that both admits and denies something – in Freud's case, that something is castration; in our case, it acknowledges that there are some "problems" (or, in neoliberal parlance, "challenges"), but denies that they are serious problems, let alone antagonisms and contradictions. Combined with the optimistic ideology of progress and encouraged by the wisdom of the proverb "after the rain comes the sun again", the term "crisis" suggests that bad things always end eventually or "in the end" (or, "in the final instance"). However, "the end", the idea and concept of it, as Alenka Zupančič has recently shown in her book thereon,[9] is conceptually and philosophically a much more elusive category than it seems at first glance. The most persistent and fixed idea of "the end" is that "the new" always brings something better, or that when "the end" comes, the old bad things simply disappear or cease to exist. Briefly, the "spontaneous ideology" of "the end" is that it eliminates chaos (for us) and (our) contradictions.

Both terms, i.e. "crisis" and "end", therefore coincide in their false optimism of a happy ending. Such a fantasy (and its ideology) has accompanied us for a long time, announcing and accompanying various endings, "end times" and now the "times of crisis". But what if the latter are permanent, or do not end in the expected way? What if they do not lead to a better society, as we are spontaneously accustomed to expect, but to a worse one? What if this movement "from bad to worse" does not stop, at least not in the near future? What if we remain trapped in it? And finally, yet importantly – what does any of this have to do with urgency and/or emergency? In this paper we will proceed in three steps. First, we will look at what urgency and emergency are in their simplest terms, then we will turn to the metaphor of imprisonment, which has been very common lately, to describe what is happening to us today, and finally we will briefly state what critical theory has to do with all of this.

Times of Emergency

Urgency and emergency concern our relation to time, which, however, is never free from society and power relations. For what is urgency if not a pressure, a constraint, a demand, a call to action in the shortest possible time? The term

9 See Alenka Zupančič, *Konec*, Ljubljana, Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, 2019.

itself suggests a biological, natural necessity, but it is always social in nature. So, urgency demands from us certain actions and deeds, it imposes on us a certain tempo or rhythm of our actions; it tells us what counts in terms of time. In its guise we are told what we must do, what is important (and what is not). In short, urgency mobilizes us, and it is worth remembering in this context that for Peter Sloterdijk (echoing Ernst Jüenger) our time is a time of "infinite" or "total" mobilization. Urgency urges, to speak like Heidegger, and interpellates us, as Althusser would put it, but in doing so, we still have the more or less free choice to do (or to not do) what we are (more or less subtly) told. An emergency is another matter. In it, one does what is necessary (to avoid greater threats and dangers). An emergency knows no alternative, no free choice; one must submit to its call immediately, without reservation and without hesitation. In the case of urgency one would wonder or doubt what to do, while an emergency no longer allows this possibility.

An emergency supposedly follows the logic of the "thing itself", at least in principle. An emergency demands an immediate response to an ultimatum – hence the gradations and varying degrees of urgency: urgent, very urgent, most urgent, extremely urgent, and so on. One is forced to follow the imperative of the emergency or perish. "Be quick or be dead," as Iron Maiden put it. The pressure of the current state of emergency is relentless – not only is there virtually no distinction between urgency and emergency, every urgency is already an emergency, moreover, one emergency follows another without pause, the emergencies never stop and so their pressure never abates.

Contrary to appearances, emergencies are not about speed, quickness, acceleration, or expeditiousness, but primarily about the lack of alternatives. In other words, our societies today are under immense dictatorial pressure from emergencies of all kinds. Therefore, as Nicole Aubert suggests, we can speak here of "a perversion of time,"[10] or, as Christophe Bouton claims, of the "dictatorial imposition of time."[11] In a similar context, as early as 1993, Paul Virilio introduced the concept of the "tyranny of real time, which would no longer permit dem-

[10] Nicole Aubert, *La culte de l'urgence. La société malade du temps*, Paris, Flammarion, 2003, p. 130.

[11] See Christophe Bouton, *Le temps de l'urgence*, Lormont, Éditions Le bord de l'eau, 2013, p. 21.

ocratic control, but only the conditioned reflex, automatism." He repeats this point in an interview with Philippe Petit published in 1996: "The tyranny of real time is not very different from classical tyranny, because it tends to liquidate the reflective capacity of the citizen in favour of a reflex action."[12] In other words, urgency compels us but still leaves the door open, but we have no alternative to an emergency. With it, we are literally thrown through a window – the short time we have left, the time that "passes" until you reach the ground, is perhaps the definition of an emergency. In other words, an emergency has no excuses; it leaves us no choice but to face its agenda. Therefore, what do you do when your "house is on fire," as Agamben would put it?[13] Be realistic and face the situation, do what is necessary – that is the message of an emergency.

It is worth noting that in English there is a difference between *urgency* and *emergency*. The main difference is that in the latter case there is an immediate threat or danger to life, health, property, or the environment, while in the case of urgency there is no such immediate threat or danger. However, a state of urgency can become an "emergency" if it is not managed and addressed properly, i.e. within a specified time, which is relatively short, of course. An emergency, then, is an unexpected and dangerous situation that requires immediate action and has important consequences, not only in terms of the immediate concrete danger one faces, but also in broader terms. As Elaine Scarry points out, the "implicit claim of emergency is that all procedures and all thinking must cease because the emergency requires that 1) an action must be taken, and 2) the action must be taken relatively quickly. [...] The unspoken presumption is that either one can think or one can act, and given that it is absolutely mandatory that an action be performed, thinking must fall away."[14]

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The choice is not only between action and between thought; it is also a choice that excludes any simultaneous or alternative action. An emergency is actually an exclusion of "whatever is not necessary". Actually, it is not an exclusion, but a suspension at least for the time that the threat is real. While it primarily excludes or suspends doubt, hesitation, thought, reflection, and discussion, an

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12 Paul Virilio, *The Politics of the Very Worst*, trans. M. Cavaliere and S. Lotringer, New York, Semiotext(e), 1999, p. 87.

13 See Giorgio Agamben, *Quand la maison brûle. Du dialecte de la pensée*, trans. L. Texier, Paris, Éditions Payot and Rivages, 2021.

14 Elaine Scarry, *Thinking in an Emergency*, New York and London, W. W. Norton, 2011, p. 5.

emergency not only commands a particular action, but also excludes certain other actions and, by extension, other future events. In the context of the economic and political system, an emergency is not just something that affects a particular life or existence, but something that determines the entire society, the existence and the way the whole society functions. In an emergency, the society is actually given an ultimatum to act in a certain way. When everything becomes so urgent that the use of emergency procedures becomes generalized, there is no longer a temporal normality in the sense that an urgency or emergency is an exception to the norm. Today, in various sectors of society, an emergency has simply ceased to have the status of an exception and has become the rule, the new socially dominant norm that permeates all everyday life and discourse. When one emergency follows another, permanently, constantly and without interruption, we enter a permanent state of exception. This supposedly saves us from the impending destruction or catastrophe; however, it is also a catastrophe in its own right. Not only does it introduce a certain order and priorities, but it also prepares the way for the unleashing of even greater new emergencies. In reality, this process weakens our societies, common organizations, and institutions. How? By disintegrating and weakening them it simultaneously mobilizes us for a specific cause and action, which are often (mis)used for individual purposes, profits, and gains.

Because of all that, we can say that today we live in societies of a permanent ultimatum, societies of emergency. While some of this overlaps with the "politics of fear" that local and global authorities are engaging in to mobilize us all, it would be too simplistic to say that this is all for show. Some of the threats are real and not imagined. Of course, it is all for the sake of maintaining power and for private gain, as "conspiracy theories" keep trying to show, but things are not entirely simple and straightforward. On the one hand, a great deal of effort is made to cover up and disguise the real conspiracies and power, but on the other there is a certain logic that depersonalizes and naturalizes the situation so that the (capitalist) system itself is never questioned. In our societies, there is the appearance that there are no (visible, identifiable, recognizable) dictators or dictatorial forces. There are those who benefit from such a situation, but they tend to hide and camouflage themselves. Ultimately, the goal is to hide, disguise, or erase any possible personal influence on what is happening. The rule of emergency makes all of this irrelevant because, by definition, things have always gone too far in an emergency – there is only time for an instinctive re-

action. The (necessary) appearance is that this emergency rule is a natural or semi-natural necessity.

The spontaneous idea here is that it is *time* itself that puts pressure on us. Time, which is always something difficult to imagine and always something abstract, is best imagined as "passing time", as a clock ticking, counting down the time, and thus exerting a certain pressure. The widespread image of a clock ticking down the final minutes or seconds serves this purpose – recall the image of the so-called Doomsday Clock invented by Eugene Rabinowitch just after WW II, which has been on the cover of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* since 1947. As Eva Horn points out, the Doomsday Clock

> indicates not only the feeling of imminent threat but also the irreversible nature of the new military technology – as irreversible as the course of time. What has been invented, as Günther Anders put it, cannot be uninvented: "Our age is the Last Age. The possibility of our self-extinction cannot be taken back and cannot end – except by the end itself." In the over seventy years since its inception, the clock's hands have oscillated between fifteen (1995) and two minutes to midnight (1953). The clock now not only indicates nuclear-threat levels, but also reflects dangerous technologies, political events, and, since 2007, factors contributing to climate change. It indicates a feeling that has revived in the modern age: the feeling of living in the end times.[15]

Although the Doomsday Clock image was intended as a warning of nuclear war and a wake-up call to avoid it, it has become embedded in many other ideologies and representations over the years. At the individual level, such range from the academic slogan "publish or perish" to the pressure on midlife women with regard to the fact that their "biological clock is ticking". Each of us perceives this pressure on a different level and experiences that the clock is ticking. As consumers, we are constantly confronted with various tasks concerning what we have to do, try, see, visit, read, hear, taste, eat, drink, fuck, etc., etc. – *before our bell rings, i.e. before we die*. Alternatively, as Jonathan Crary puts it: "The absolute abdication of responsibility for living is indicated by the titles of the many bestselling guides that tell us, with a grim fatality, the 1,000 movies to see before we die, the 100 tourist destinations to visit before we die, the 500 books to read

[15] Eva Horn, *Zukunft als Katastrofe*, Frankfurt am Main, S. Fischer Verlag, 2014, p. 79.

before we die."[16] The same is true at other levels: Nations, for example, fear being overtaken by time and their neighbours because they cannot adapt, reform, and modernize fast enough. Time is running out, as the saying goes.

In this way, the general impression given is that the real problem is time, this abstract entity, and not our social, intersubjective, or class relations, with their problems, antagonisms, and contradictions. The problem, however, is not time itself, but the *form* in which it appears. For this reason, emergency is also often confused with speed. Although speed is the key, as Virilio would point out,[17] the speed per se is not the problem. As Christophe Bouton shows in his work[18] – one must distinguish between urgency/emergency and speed. The formula is not "I do not have time", but "I do not have *enough* time". While we can have the speed without the emergency, the latter presupposes a threat that must be avoided. Bouton therefore claims that Virilio is wrong because speed is neutral, it is what we do – the solution to the problem of emergency is not to slow down, to praise slowness, as Hélène L'Heuillet recently proposed.[19] Boutuon even asserts "My common thread is that there is no emergency per se: emergency is a highly socialized time, constructed by Western societies according to procedures established over centuries."

It is true that an emergency is a threat that requires the fastest possible response and maximum mobilization – but who or what decides what a real threat to society is? What are the priorities here? If anything, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has shown that things can be turned upside down literally overnight. What the dominant ideology has long told us was absolutely impossible has suddenly become possible. It is precisely these incredible reversals, of which there have been quite a few, that have contributed to the rise in "conspiracy theories". Moreover, to the widespread realization that we have often been subjected to such "tricks" and "reversals" of the ruling ideology in the recent past. Once again, who decides what a threat to society is? The threat must be as convincing and realistic

16 Jonathan Crary, *24/7. Late Capitalism and the Ends of Sleep*, London and New York, Verso, 2014, p. 60.

17 Speed is the key to not only power, but also wealth. The adage that time is money should be taken literally – as Michael Lewis has shown in his book *Flash Boys*, those who were faster at high-frequency trading on the stock market were also richer.

18 See Bouton, *Le temps de l'urgence*, pp. 31–34.

19 Hélène L'Heuillet, *Éloge du retard*, Paris, Albin Michel, 2020, pp. 15–21.

as possible, and this is achieved through fear, anxiety, and panic. The so-called "politics of fear" began already in the early 1990s, i.e. in the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall, which – ironically – fell precisely in the name of overcoming the fears of the Cold War. In one form or another, the politics of fear have continued for several decades now. The logic is cheap, but effective: if we do not follow the logic imposed on us by emergency/necessity, we will be destroyed. The conclusion from this is military in nature and simply continues the old Cold War logic: if we do not defend our way of life, the others will destroy us. This, of course, leaves us no time for the problems, the questions, the contradictions that our way of life, which we defend with all our might, actually causes in the first place. The problem is not only the forced way of acting, but also the choices that are repressed, pushed aside, or made impossible.

In this way, it seems that someone, a group of people, elites, conspirators, or a conspiracy is cleverly manipulating the situation. However, perhaps the greatest "cunning of reason" of history is precisely that despite many actual conspiracies, manipulations, and lies, the great manipulator does not really exist. Rather, every deceiver is ultimately deceived him- or herself. In our current situation, it is clear that there are players and financial speculators who benefit from it, but the "*cui bono*" interpretation cannot apply unreservedly here. The game has become too complex, too irrational, and has long been beyond the control of the players. Of course, there are many interests at play, lots of money, power, speculators – it is not that hard to figure out "*cui bono*" and "*cui malum*", who has the most to lose here. Even if there are interests and conspiracies, the strange situation we are in now cannot be explained by conspiracy theories. The latter are still ultimately far too rational and assume that "someone" is actually controlling the situation. Nevertheless, the problem is that in reality there is no one in control – this time there really is no pilot flying the plane.

What should we call this strange situation, characterized by a chaotic mix of actors, agents, factors, events, and emergencies, with their unpredictable logic? We propose to call it the Super-emergency. The Super-emergency is primarily the name of a situation that is out of control and feeds on our own antagonisms and contradictions. The Super-emergency, then, is the name of an entity or subject that does not really exist. It is the name of a logic of a situation that is neither a logic in the strict sense of the word, nor a logic of anyone or anything in particular. It is also a name for the blurring of the line between urgency and

emergency – every urgency immediately becomes an emergency, one emergency following another without pause. The Super-emergency, then, is something additional, unwanted, superfluous, even surplus, and yet something that comes across as first-class, first-rate, something superior. It supposedly comes out of nowhere and yet imposes its own primary importance. It has a dictatorial character and follows one of the most important principles of neoliberalism, the one propagated by Margaret Thatcher: "There Is No Alternative" (TINA). The rule of the Super-emergency seems to be a blind necessity guided by a higher, cruel Providence, but still just Providence. Through it, we are not only compelled to act and wait as we do, but we are inevitably convinced that it is impossible for us to act otherwise, and that this seems to be the most reasonable and sensible thing to do at any given time.

The Super-emergency seems to come out of nowhere, and yet it is a result of our unresolved antagonisms and contradictions. They beset us unbearably, precisely in the guise of the very Super-emergency, and yet because of it, due to the ever-new emergencies, we cannot address them – even if we intend to deal with them directly, we simply do not have the time to deal with them, since we have to deal with the Super-emergency. The latter is then the name of the constant, direct intrusion and imposition of ever-new emergencies, for the ultimate replacement and override of already existing emergencies. In its power (i.e. to be more urgent than the existing most urgent emergency), the Super-emergency keeps pushing forward. With it, time is not only "out of joint", it is downright adrift. The Super-emergency coincides with what we called in the introduction the "vortex" of crises, and it takes place against a specific historical, political, economic, and cultural background. Although on the one hand it cannot be understood without it, on the other, it is not its logical or natural consequence. The paradox is that the Super-emergency acts in the name of urgency and necessity, that it presents itself in the name of a super-power once attributed to God ("*Immensa potestas*" in Descartes), and yet, paradoxically, it is itself nothing necessary or essential.

As a dictatorship without a dictator, it dictates a certain tempo and rhythm of action, but this is different in different temporal situations. In other words, it is different in cyclical time and in linear time. Nicole Aubert, in her work that deals with many aspects of urgency and emergency, points out that "in the cyclical vision of time, the emergency does not exist, or at least does not exist in the

same way as in linear time."[20] Nevertheless, things are a little more complicated. We have already mentioned that today's crises are of a different nature. Thus, although our modern capitalist society has long since left behind cyclical time in the strict sense, until recently it was still possible to speak of a cyclical occurrence of crises. Capitalism, then, is not just the rule of linear time, but a combination of different times. Aubert's argument is problematic for us here in at least three respects. First, it is questionable whether cyclical time really knows no urgency or emergency. Even in so-called primitive societies, natural phenomena such as earthquakes or solar eclipses can herald the end of the world or the end of cyclical time, requiring some action, not to mention other disasters such as plague and war, which no society can ignore. Another question is whether the difference between cyclical and linear time explains the difference between pre-capitalist and capitalist societies, since the latter in fact combine versions of both linear and cyclical time. Third, what is crucial for us here, urgency itself appears in different ways in linear time. Not only are there different criteria, thresholds, at which urgency becomes emergency, but there are different types of urgencies and different types of emergencies.

In what sense? The urgency of our present emergency is not that we are in too much of a hurry in this "crazy world" today, that we are racing and rushing in our alienation from ourselves, from each other, and from nature. In short, the problem is not the acceleration that comes with modernity and capitalism. In fact, as Hartmut Rosa has shown, there are different kinds of accelerations in modern society. The Super-emergency is not simply the result or effect of what Rosa calls the intertwining of the three main types of acceleration, namely technical acceleration, the acceleration of social change, and the acceleration of the rhythm of life, leading to what Rosa calls the "circle of acceleration" or sometimes the "spiral of acceleration."[21] Nor is the problem what Giddens calls the experience of a "runaway world" combined with globalization trends. The urgency imposed by the Super-emergency is of a different kind. It represents *the clash*, the *fallout* of several different logics, even of several different urgencies, of several different antagonisms. It is a name for their repression and denial in the Freudian sense. This does not mean that it pretends that these antagonisms

[20] Aubert, *La culte de l'urgence*, p. 190.

[21] See Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity*, trans. J. Trejo-Mathys, New York, Columbia University Press, 2013, pp. 162, 185, 194, 311.

do not exist or that they have disappeared; on the contrary, it tries to resolve them; however, in a failed or false way, or better put: it solves them so that they remain unsolved. Many antagonisms have been created by the reign of neoliberalism, of which we do not know exactly whether it is alive or dead.[22] It is rather "undead", as Žižek would put it, and it is precisely as the living dead that it leaves a dangerous and persistent legacy of its principles and the antagonisms it has created. In addition, since, of course, the Super-emergency can never address them properly, let alone save them in such a false way, they are its eternal alibi. The Super-emergency is thus the name of the "eternal" displacement of the antagonisms of our society and of the capitalist system.

In other words, the Super-emergency must be understood against a particular background and context, but it cannot be *reduced* to it either. The reasons are complex and cannot be attributed solely to the urgency of various acceleration processes. Historical, technological, economic, and cultural reasons and antagonisms, which would have to be joined by several others, such as geostrategic, political, and systemic ones. As Wallerstein and Arrighi showed a long time ago, capitalism forms a world system, and its longest cycle, which began five hundred years ago, is now unstable. However, there are also some other important processes that have recently failed, or rather started to fail without really failing completely. The dictatorship of the Super-emergency is triggered by events that are unwelcome and undesirable to most (e.g. crises, wars, climate change, the rise of authoritarianism and inequality in the world) and that seem impossible to prevent or stop. These events follow one another without pause and with incredible speed, but the main problem is not speed; the problem and the solution to it are not acceleration or deceleration. The problem is the social and economic conditions under which such a mixture, such Super-emergency, can arise at all; the problem is the way in which the class struggle manifests itself today.

One of its manifestations is also a special mood, which is dominant today. For Christophe Bouton, every emergency as a social situation is accompanied by a certain atmosphere, mood,[23] and he speaks in this context about a "climate of

[22] See Colin Crouch, *The Strange Non-Death of Neoliberalism*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2011; Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *Never-Ending Nightmare. The Neoliberal Assault on Democracy*, trans. G. Elliot, London and New York, Verso, 2019.

[23] There is, of course, no room here for a fuller discussion of this topic, which is quite complex and related to issues that at first glance seem unrelated – for example, Heidegger's

emergency."[24] Following Bouton, we claim here that the Super-emergency, too, is accompanied by what we call the "mood of nightmare". Since we have recently written about it at length elsewhere,[25] we will here only briefly present its general idea. In the narrow sense, a nightmare is a traumatic or anxious dream, i.e. a dream in which something extremely unbearable appears to the dreamer, while in the broader, colloquial sense, it describes a dire situation in which one is trapped and from which one cannot escape. A nightmare is always traumatic and unique. Every person and every social class have a unique, one-of-a-kind thing or idea that is the worst or most unbearable for them. For this reason, nightmares are usually given a special adjective, such as "Darwin's nightmare", "every parent's nightmare", "every artist's nightmare", and so on. The nightmare is on the other side of our desires, our dreams, and our fantasies. It embodies our worst fears; it is a situation that you fear the most. It is something you would most like to avoid – if you knew what you did not want, how to do it, and of course, if you had a choice. It is often accompanied by another adjective, the superlative of the word bad – "the worst": "Even in my worst nightmare, I would not imagine/think/wish/desire…." Moreover, a nightmare is associated with something that drags on, that keeps repeating itself and will not and cannot end. At least, that is how it seems when we are trapped in it. Worse, it is characterized by a sense of stagnation, even stasis (a word that has many interesting meanings), as if one were in a torture chamber. Not only does the suffering not stop, but it also gradually and progressively becomes more intense. Hence the "real" nightmare "mood": when we already think that something worse than what is happening can no longer happen, or that the nightmare will finally stop, we experience a surprise – something new appears and the aggravation occurs. As if the nightmare is the embodiment of Murphy's Law, which states that if something can go wrong, it will. Therefore, a nightmare is the case of a situation where if it can get worse, it will get worse. This gives rise to another fundamental dimension of nightmare: something that seemed impossible yesterday

introduction of *Stimmung* in his work *Being and Time* (1927) and his later discussions on this topic. Heidegger is well aware of the connection between mood and necessity, for he claims: "Die Not nötigt in der weise der Stimmung." (Martin Heidegger, *Grundfragen der Philosophie. Ausgewählte »Probleme« der »Logik«* [Freiburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1937/38], *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 45, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1984, p. 159.)

24 Bouton, *Le temps de l'urgence*, p. 19.

25 See Peter Klepec, "Covid-19, *das Unheimliche* in nočna mora", *Problemi*, 58 (9-10/2020), pp. 111–139.

is not only shamelessly enforced today, but becomes the standard of normality. Something that seems to belong in the realm of dreams and fantasy suddenly appears in reality, further blurring the line between dream and reality. A nightmare makes the adage true: truth is stranger than fiction. Therefore, there are four main features that characterize a nightmare: trauma or dread, confinement or suffocation (recall here the rallying cry: "I can't breathe!"), the unending or never-ending, singularity or uniqueness. As already mentioned, the nightmare mood is a privileged mood of this frenetic "stasis" that accompanies the "end times", which here we call the Super-emergency.

The Prison-House of the Super-emergency

Although the Super-emergency is something that constantly extorts speed, it is also characterized by stagnation, even confinement. This is also one of the reasons why it seems so natural to us today to speak of arrest, imprisonment, or entrapment – the history of the metaphors of confinement is actually quite long.[26] It was particularly prominent during the pandemic "lockdown" or "confinement", which is not particularly surprising. The metaphor of prison, of course, has various shades, nuances, and levels – from being locked in a claustrophobic place to a situation in which we find ourselves against our will. Deleuze, for example, once remarked that "[i]f you are trapped in the dream of the other, you are fucked." Catherine Malabou, in her recent article "Life and Prison", highlighted "the fact that the most important and profound contemporary philosophical texts devoted to the issue of life practically always comprise, in their very core, a reflection on the prison, on what it is to live in prison. As if life was the privileged victim of philosophical concepts as well as the privileged victim of language, of language's fascism."[27]

One of the texts Malabou mentions in this context is Fredric Jameson's *In the Prison-House of Language*,[28] published fifty years ago. Alhough Malabou does not go into detail, the details about Jameson's use of a carceral metaphor are

[26] See Monika Fludernik, *Metaphors of Confinement. The Prison in Fact, Fiction, and Fantasy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2019.

[27] Catherine Malabou, "Life and Prison", *E-flux*, 10 October 2020, https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/ confinement/351041/life-and-prison/, accessed 5 August 2022.

[28] Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.

quite interesting. Why? Because they do not really exist. Alternatively, as Emily Apter recently remarked,

> it is hard to underestimate the impact of the master trope of the *prison-house* on literary theory, and yet nowhere in the text [Jameson's] is it directly addressed. This is curious given that the book was written at a time when the prison was such an important crucible of the civil rights and Black Power movements [...] From the standpoint of theory already prevalent at the time, *prison-house* must be positioned in relation to Michel Foucault's project, itself informed by the French anti-psychiatry movement forged in the 1950s by François Tosquelles, Frantz Fanon, Jean Oury, Georges Canguilhem, and a bit later Félix Guattari.[29]

Even more unusual and strange is that the text Jameson uses as a motto, Nietzsche's thought on language, in its original does not even use the word *prison-house*. As Apter in her text extensively shows, the word was added in the English translation of Nietzsche's notebooks from 1886-1887. In German, Nietzsche speaks about "*sprachlichen Zwang*," constraints, compulsions, coercions of language: "*Wir hören auf zu denken, wenn wir es nicht in dem sprachlichen Zwange tun wollen, wir langen gerade noch bei dem Zweifel an, hier eine Grenze als Grenze zu sehen*." Jameson uses the following English translation: "We have to cease to think if we refuse to do it in the prison-house of language; for we cannot reach further than the doubt which asks whether the limit we see is really a limit." The same fragment was translated by Walter Kaufman as follows: "We cease to think when we refuse to do so under the constraint of language; we barely reach the doubt that sees this limitation as a limitation."[30] Another English translation, William Bittner's alternate translation, reads: "We cease thinking when we no longer want to think within the constraints of language, we just manage to reach the suspicion that there might be a boundary here." It is not only that Jameson used the wrong translation, but, as Apter points out, his "lack of explicit reflection on the book's prison trope – whether as institution or episteme – is especially curious given that so much of the book consists of a sustained critique of theory that lacks 'self-consciousness of the object with which it is concerned'."[31]

[29] Emily Apter, "The Prison-House of Translation?", *Diacritics*, 47 (4/2019), pp. 52–53.

[30] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, R. Bittner (ed.), Cambridge (MA), Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 110 (Fragment 5 [22] under the heading "Fundamental solution."). *Cf.* also Apter, "The Prison-House of Translation?", pp. 54, 69.

[31] Apter, "The Prison-House of Translation?", p. 54.

Without going into too much detail, we can say that Jameson simply used what he thought was the most appropriate. What he probably wanted to emphasize in the first place was a certain constraint and entrapment, the feeling or mood that "we can't get out". Here we are not concerned with what this means in the strict sense for his theses on structuralism or on language, but only with the moment of "being trapped", which has a strict parallel with what we above described as a "nightmare mood".

Nevertheless, there are many other parallels, of course. Without defending Jameson too much, it must be said that Nietzsche uses the carceral metaphor quite a few times in *Writings from the Late Notebooks*; he was quite fond of speaking of imprisonment or confinement – once he speaks of Dostoevsky being surrounded by criminals in prison, another time he speaks of the prison of the madhouse, he also speaks of man being imprisoned "in an iron cage of errors," and so on. In short, carceral metaphors abound in Nietzsche. Not only in Nietzsche, of course. Metaphors that speak of imprisonment and prison are, as mentioned earlier, ubiquitous in literature and in our everyday lives. One of the most popular authors today, Yuval Harari, in his best-selling book *Sapiens*, also used it. On one occasion, he says: "There is no way out of the imagined order. When we break down our prison walls and run towards freedom, we are in fact running into the more spacious exercise yard of a bigger prison."[32] In addition, if Jameson seemed pessimistic (at least as regards language), Harari seems much more so – all we can do is exchange one prison for another. Therefore, obviously the use of the carceral metaphor is widespread.[33] There are many reasons for this. One of the reasons, but not the only one, is certainly a political one. Today the vast majority of people are no longer slaves, servants, or serfs, all over the world the great majority live in (some kind of) democratic regimes (whatever that means), and yet we consider ourselves less and less truly free. The more we are free, the more we feel enslaved, subordinated, subjugated, subjected,

[32] Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens. A Brief History of Humankind*, London, Harvil Secker, 2012, p. 133.

[33] Another example of a modern bestseller would be Tim Marshall with his two books: *Prisoners of Geography. Ten Maps that Explain Everything about the World*, London and New York, Scribner, 2015, and *The Power of Geography. Ten Maps that Reveal the Future of Our World*, London and New York, Scribner, 2021.

trapped in a certain version of freedom, and no wonder that, as our contemporary Frank Ruda claims, we would have to abolish freedom itself.[34]

If we return here briefly to Jameson again for a moment, some other reasons why he speaks of prison should be mentioned – one of them is surely that he is above all a Marxist. Moreover, even if, half a century later, there are fewer and fewer examples of Marxists in the world, Jameson remains one to this day. Why is Marxism relevant for us here? For Marxism, namely, it is fundamental to eliminate everything that enslaves or subjugates the man, the woman, the worker – in short, all the oppressed and exploited. In other words, Marxism is the thought and practice of emancipation. Emancipation, however, means not only empowerment or liberation, but also "liberation from", not only liberation from a higher authority (the act of liberating a child from parental authority), but also from any visible or "invisible hand" (to refer here to an infamous metaphor of Adam Smith, which was used, by the way, by him only twice). The invisible hand refers of course, at least for us here, to the Super-emergency. Indeed, one of the etymological origins of the word emancipation is "*ex manu capere*", which literally means, "to seize from another's hand". In other words, emancipation means to problematize the existing distribution of the places where we are socially fixed and distributed: "emancipation means leaving the conditions that have been imposed on us."[35]

How are we deprived of our freedom, or, to use Rousseau's opening phrase from *The Social Contract*: "Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains." – how does this happen? What are the modalities of unfreedom[36] today for those who are neither prisoners nor captives? We could discuss this at length, but there will never be enough space to do it properly anywhere. Perhaps critical thought, indeed all of philosophy since its beginnings, has grappled with this question. Recall Plato's famous allegory of the cave, for which Malabou asserts in her text "Life and Prison" that "philosophy, as Plato so forcefully demonstrates with the

[34] See Frank Ruda, *Abolishing Freedom. A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*, Lincoln and London, University of Nebraska Press, 2016.

[35] Jacques Rancière, *Penser l'émancipation. Dialogue avec Aliocha Wald Lasowski*, Paris, Éditions de l'aube, 2022, p. 103.

[36] Recall that the *Merriam-Webster*'s dictionary enlists the following synonyms or near-synonyms for "unfreedom": dependence, heteronomy, subjection, captivity, enchainment, enslavement, immurement, imprisonment, incarceration, internment, subjugation.

cave, begins in prison." Not only in philosophy, but, as we have seen above, in many popular models of thought today the metaphor of the prison is used – one can add any number, from the "prisoner's dilemma" in economics to the cultural look and ideology of being "free", "out of the box", and "cool".[37] Not to mention that philosophy has "evolved" or "advanced", if one may say so, since Plato. While for Michel Foucault, a convinced Nietzschean, in his work *Discipline and Punish*, the question of the prison is perhaps the central problem of our modernity, uniting philosophical, political, ethical, institutional, and architectural problems in a single model, for Giorgio Agamben, who follows Foucault in many respects, a much more severe diagnosis is appropriate – not prison, but concentration camps – "as the pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space (insofar as it is founded solely on the state of exception)" appears "as the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity."[38]

The issue here is not which of the two, if either, is right. Rather, we wish to call attention to a shift that affects the institution of the deprivation of liberty itself. It is a complex shift, but for the purposes of this paper, we will highlight only a few points. Put simply, it is a shift from prison as a particular and specialized institution, to a general prison that is no longer a prison in the proper sense and, above all, no longer has the visible or physical characteristics of a prison – flesh and blood guards, walls, cells, uniforms, time regimes. It is, so to speak, a shift toward a different kind of imprisonment and detention that coincides with other major changes of capitalism. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault wondered where the modern institution of the prison came from. Foucault was dealing with the problem of the prison around the same time that Jameson's book was written and for him prison goes together with other modern disciplinary institutions, such as the army, the school, and the factory, and they all function according to the same pattern and principles. Foucault calls all that "disciplinary power" and the best model for him is the (Benthamian) model of the prison, the panopticon. Hence Foucault's term panoptism for a model of power that was about to be replaced or supplemented with another kind of power, which Foucault did not realize at the time. There are different names for this "newcom-

[37] See in this context Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool. Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1997.

[38] Giorgio Agamben, *The Omnibus Homo Sacer*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2017, p. 102.

er", from "new spirit of capitalism" (Boltanski and Chiapello) to Post-Fordism and neoliberalism. The latter emerged in the name of solving economic problems (inflation), but eventually "expanded to become a comprehensive worldview, and has not been just a doctrine solely confined to economics."[39] Neoliberalism openly advocated openness, freedom, free exchange, and the free market. Although its main enemy was socialism and the (a certain kind of) State, neoliberalism appeared precisely against the model of power that Foucault analysed in his work on prison. Neoliberalism coincides with another kind of power (and that Foucault was somehow aware of since he gave lectures in the late 1970s on it, but this is a long story in itself), the kind that Deleuze defined in his text "On the Society of Control". In this wide-ranging and prescient text, Deleuze first notes a general breakdown of all sites of confinement – such as prisons, hospitals, factories, schools, and the family. According to Deleuze, all of these institutions are now in a state of permanent reform, and so societies of control take the place of societies of discipline. Whereas in disciplinary society one enters and leaves an institution in which one is confined for a certain period, in the society of control there is an endless postponement (constant change). Deleuze claims that disciplinary societies have two poles: signatures, which stand for individuals, and numbers or places in a register, which stand for their position in a mass. In control societies, on the other hand, it is no longer the signature or the number that matters, but the code: codes are passwords that provide access to a limited space. Instead of the analogue language in disciplinary societies, the digital language of control consists of codes that indicate whether access to a particular piece of information should be allowed or denied. Moreover, whereas disciplinary man produced energy in discrete amounts, control man undulates, moving among a continuous series of different orbits. Whereas the old sovereign societies worked with simple machines, levers, pulleys, and clocks, and the newer disciplinary societies were equipped with thermodynamic machines, control societies work with a third generation of machines, information technology, and computers, where the passive danger is noise and the active one is piracy and viral contamination. This technological development is, according to Deleuze, more deeply rooted in a mutation of capitalism. This mutation is widely recognized and can be summarized as follows: capitalism in the 19th century was concentrative, focused on production, and property-oriented. This made the factory

[39] Phillip Mirowski, *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste*, London and New York, Verso, 2013, p. 56.

a place of confinement where the capitalist owned the means of production and perhaps other similarly organized places such as hospitals and schools. Capitalism in its current form, however, is no longer focused on production, which is often moved to remote parts of the Third World, even in the case of complex operations such as textile plants, steelworks, and oil refineries. It is focused on metaproduction. It no longer buys raw materials or sells finished products: it buys finished products or assembles them from parts. What it wants to sell are services, and what it wants to buy are activities. It is a capitalism that no longer focuses on production, but on products, that is, on sales or markets. Therefore, it is essentially dispersive, with factories giving way to businesses. The sales department becomes the business centre or soul of the company and marketing is now an instrument of social control and production: such control is short-term and rapidly shifting, but at the same time continuous and unlimited, while discipline is long-term, infinite, and discontinuous. In a sense, Deleuze summarizes the transition from disciplinary society to control society: "A man is no longer a man confined [enclosed], but man in debt."[40] Alternatively, as Hélène L'Heuillet puts it: "time has become the modus operandi of control."[41]

This entire transition took some time for the changes in the political, social, and economic landscape to take full effect. Many critics, including Foucault, did not see that the nature of the prison (as well as other rigid institutions like the school and the factory) had changed in the meantime, corresponding to the transition from disciplinary power to a society of control. Of course, this transition has not been as smooth as Deleuze expected. Jonathan Crary makes the following critique, which is relevant to our issues here:

> As influential as Deleuze's text became, it is clear with hindsight that disciplinary forms of power did not disappear or become superseded, as he maintains. Rather, the continuous forms of control he identifies took shape as an additional layer of regulation alongside still functioning and even amplified forms of discipline. Contra Deleuze, the use of harsh physical confinement is greater today than at any time previously, in an expanding network of deliriously panoptic prisons. His evocation of open, amorphous spaces without boundaries is belied by the

40 Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations. 1972-1990*, trans. M. Joughin, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 181.

41 L'Heuillet, *Éloge du retard*, p. 34.

> brutal deployment of walled borders and closed frontiers, both of which strategically target specific populations and regions. Also retrospectively, it can be noted that Deleuze did not address the intensifying overlap between control society and consumer society's proliferating manufacture of individual needs, far beyond the products and commodities that were obligatory even in the 1970s. Nonetheless, in affluent sectors of the globe, what was once consumerism has expanded to 24/7 activity of techniques of personalization, of individuation, of machinic interface, and of mandatory communication. Self-fashioning is the work we are all given, and we dutifully comply with the prescription continually to reinvent ourselves and manage our intricate identities. As Zygmunt Bauman has intimated, we may not grasp that to decline this endless work is not an option.[42]

The prison in the classical sense of the word is a secluded place with walls, uniforms, guards, and a special regime. The essence of the prison is not only that the prisoners are locked up in a separate environment and subjected to the rules that prevail there, but above all that time is robbed from them, time is taken away. The punishment consists in being thrown into prison for a certain period of time and paying with what is most precious to people – their time. In this context, it is not unimportant that "being imprisoned", means "serving" or "doing time" in English. Alternatively, as is nicely put by Michael Hardt in his essay "Prison Time": "By an indubitable logic, then, the paradigm for punishment is the loss of this most precious asset that all possess equally: time."[43]

The dilemma of us humans, finite beings, is that our time (on earth) is limited and therefore priceless to us. We value above all free time, time for ourselves, we value above all the time in which we can do what we want. Free time. In which we can even do nothing. Or whatever we want. Even to think or to philosophize, for which, as Aristotle already knew, one must have free time. Therefore, to think the dilemma of time, we need time. We are free or unfree to the extent that we freely dispose of our free time. The time we have to spend to ensure our existence, our physical survival, and our needs is not our free time. Even Benjamin Franklin recognized a connection between time and value – time is money, he said. Since human labour creates value, that value has a common equivalent,

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42 Crary, *24/7*, p. 72.

43 Michael Hardt, "Prison Time," *Yale French Studies* (special issue *Genet: In the Language of the Enemy*), 91 (1997), p. 64.

money. If we have to work part of the time to earn a living, then we are not free for at least part of our time. For this reason, emancipatory thought since Marx has pointed out that we are prisoners of capitalism. Not only because "capitalism is fundamentally about time,"[44] but also because capital is above all the master of time. Alternatively, as Hardt puts it: "Power in our society is above all power over our time."[45]

Perhaps only two brief remarks. The first relates to reflections on common time, the second to the increasing scarcity of time and the transformation of leisure into working time. As the contemporary French philosopher Alain Badiou remarked:

> [it] is very striking to see that today we are practically bereft of any thinking of time. For just about everyone, the day after tomorrow is abstract and the day before yesterday incomprehensible. We have entered a period of a-temporality and instantaneity; this shows the extent to which, far from being a shared individual experience, time is a construction, and even, we might argue, a political construction. For example, let us briefly reconsider the 'five-year plans' that structured the industrial development of the Stalinist USSR. If the plan could be celebrated even in works of art, such as Eisenstein's film *The General Line*, it is because, over and above its (doubtful) economic significance, planning designates the resolve to submit growth to the political will of men. The five years of the five-year plan are much more than a numerical unit, they are a temporal material in which the collective will inscribes itself, day after day. This is indeed an allegory, in and by time, of the power of the 'we'. In various ways, the entire century saw itself as a constructivist century, a vision which implies the staging of a voluntary construction of time.[46]

The other side of this process, the flip side of our inability to comprehend collective action and time planning, is the privatization of our time. The latter takes many forms, of which we will mention only two here: the privatization of our common time in the debt economy and the colonization of our free time with the rise of digital capitalism. Maurizio Lazzarato's thesis on the "debt economy"

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44 Bouton, *Le temps de l'urgence*, p. 219.

45 Hardt, "Prison Time", p. 65.

46 Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. A. Toscano, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2007, p. 105.

shows how debt has become the basis of the social through the reign of neoliberalism and how it restructures individuals, the state, and society. For Lazzarato, debt is transversal, cutting across all of society and all power relations. This means that it is not limited to the economic, the political, or the social. Crucially, the debt relationship robs us of our own future. Alternatively, as Lazzarato puts it: "The debt economy has deprived the immense majority of Europeans of what was already weak political power, a power conceded by representative democracy. It has deprived them of a growing share of the wealth that past struggles had wrested from capitalist accumulation. And, above all, it has deprived them of the future, that is, of time, time as decision-making, choice, and possibility."[47]

The other important process today is the colonization and privatization of time, which affects not only workers' time and working time, but also all our time, especially our so-called "free time". Since Marx, workers have been demanding an eight-hour workday; today we are confronted not only with the fact that working time has become almost unlimited and flexible, but also with the fact that it extends to what we used to call our free time, the weekend, the holiday. Today, paradoxically, our free time, our (in)activity in our own free time is something that produces value and surplus value. Free time has actually become a value-creating activity and, in this sense, work. Today, we do not even need a special institution to stay in or to be locked into – we are, so to speak, enslaved and locked into our own homes. "We are doing time" there, at home, so to speak. All our free time has become working or labour time. Even when we express ourselves online, we are actually doing work. The World Wide Web is not only a platform for the expression of feelings and affects, but also a huge tool for the evaluation and valorization of affects. In their work *Le Web affectif*,[48] Camille Alloing and Pierre Julien have pointed out that affect is something that circulates and must circulate, and that it is, of course, primarily for profit. In this context, they put forward the thesis of the "affective proletarian" who produces value through his affects but is not paid for it. In a sense, of course, today we are all "affective proletarians" who are not paid for our work – which is not real work strictly speaking. Moreover, even if "modern progress" consists in the fact that we are "no longer in prison", we re-

47 Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Making of an Indebted Man*, trans. J. D. Jordan, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2012, p. 2.

48 See Camille Alloing and Julien Pierre, *Le Web affectif. Une économie numérique des émotions*, Bry-sur-Marne, INA Éditions, 2017.

main bound by the fundamental logic of prison – which consists in the fact that our time, our future, is taken from us. In addition, here the question of urgency and emergency arises again, but from a slightly different angle.

What Is to Be Done With the Super-emergency?

The question of urgency has been a constant companion of politics and philosophy since its beginnings. Its relevance and meaning for us today is undoubtedly complicated; it has a long history and many important dilemmas and dichotomies. For the sake of simplicity, however, we select here three unsurpassable milestones that continue to shape this issue today. First, there is a problem of an urgent political action exemplified in the figure of revolution. The French and American Revolutions as two seminal events that put such issues on the political agenda. Then there is the October Revolution with its repetitions, partisans, opponents, and failures. Lenin created one of the most iconic images related to this question in his 1903 work "What Is to Be Done?", which is a literal repetition of the same title of a 1863 essay by Nikolai Gavrilovich Chernyshevsky, a 19th-century Russian revolutionary democrat. That title, throughout the 20th century and to this day – rightly or wrongly, is another question – has summed up the essence of Marxism. To act here and now, the call "*Hic Rhodus, hic salta!*", has always been the motto of Marx and Engels. This call is still relevant today, in our time of counterrevolution, and outlines the dilemma of urgent political action as well as urgency or emergency. Above, we tried to make a rather simple thesis: because we are trapped today in a certain logic, which we have called the Super-emergency, we are trapped in a perpetuation of the same, and this not only steals our own individual and personal time, but also deprives us of any common future. The revolution, which no one knows what it might look like today and whether it is still feasible or possible, thus continues to shape the question of the urgency of political action here and now. In this context, however, the question "What is to be done?" is not only a call for immediate political action, not only a call for revolution, but also a call to reflect in our time on the relevance, meaning, purpose, and utility of theory (of the revolution) as such.

As Boris Groys emphasizes, any

> theory confronts us with the paradox of urgency. The basic image that theory offers to us is the image of our own death – an image of our mortality, of radical fini-

> tude and lack of time. By offering us this image, theory produces in us the feeling of urgency – a feeling that impels us to answer its call for action now rather than later. But at the same time, this feeling of urgency and lack of time prevents us from conceiving long-term projects; from basing our actions on long-term planning; from having great personal and historical expectations concerning the results of our actions.[49]

However, if theory and philosophy privilege contemplation, it also at the same time hates passivity. Therefore, for Groys, every

> secular, postidealistic theory is a call for action. Every critical theory creates a state of urgency – even a state of emergency. Theory tells us that we are merely mortal, material organisms – and that we have little time at our disposal. We cannot waste our time in contemplation. Rather, we must act, here and now. Time does not wait and we do not have enough time for further delay. In addition, while it is of course true that every theory offers a certain overview and explanation of the world (or explanation of why the world cannot be explained), these theoretical descriptions and scenarios play only an instrumental and transitory role. The true goal of every theory is to define the field of the action we are called upon to undertake.[50]

All of the above reasons, including those mentioned by Groys, are also – at least for us – the main reasons for a certain need of intellectuals, especially in the twentieth century (from Nietzsche, Adorno, and Heidegger, to Derrida and Agamben), to "catastrophize" the situation. It is a need to exaggerate, to shock, which is supposed to "wake people up". This task is dubious in its nature and in reality, shocking people all the time actually numbs them. The truly pessimistic and black portrayal of the present therefore not only failed in its basic purpose, but also has at best provoked mocking comments, like the "Hotel Abyss" style of thought, a style that paints the blackest picture of the present for someone who has all the benefits at his or her disposal. In other words, the fate of theory and philosophy, which, as the famous 11th thesis of Marx states, should actualize or realize itself, not to mention the difficulties with revolution – its failures and counter-revolutions in the West and its reversals in the East, along with its final infamous demise – led to what Slavoj Žižek describes as follows:

[49] Boris Groys, *In The Flow*, London and New York, Verso, 2016, p. 33.

[50] *Ibid*., pp. 28–29.

> A favored exercise of intellectuals throughout the twentieth century – which can also be taken as symptomatic of what Badiou calls the 'passion of the Real' (la passion du reel) – was the urge to 'catastrophize' the situation: whatever the actual situation, it had to be denounced as 'catastrophic', and the better it appeared, the more it solicited this exercise. Heidegger denounced the present age as that of the highest 'danger' of the epoch of accomplished nihilism; Adorno and Horkheimer saw in it the culmination of the dialectic of enlightenment in the administered world; up to Giorgio Agamben, who defines twentieth-century concentration camps as the 'truth' of the entire Western political project. [...] So I am tempted to propose a radical reading of this syndrome: what if what the unfortunate intellectuals cannot bear is the fact that they lead a life which is basically happy, safe and comfortable, so that, in order to justify their higher calling, they have to construct a scenario of radical catastrophe?[51]

Žižek later even named this strategy the "Hölderlin paradigm":

> More generally, the entire Judeo-Christian history, up to postmodernity, is determined by what one is tempted to call the 'Hölderlin paradigm': 'Where the danger is, grows also what can save us' (*'Wo aber Gefahr ist wächst das Rettende auch'*). The present moment appears as the lowest point in a long process of historical decadence (the flight of Gods, alienation ...), but the danger of the catastrophic loss of the essential dimension of being-human also opens up the possibility of a reversal (*Kehre*) – proletarian revolution, the arrival of new gods (which, according to the late Heidegger, alone can save us), etc.[52]

Of course, Žižek is right when he points out the special enjoyment we all have in observing this world of ours, which is not only afflicted by one crisis after another and goes from "bad to worse", but has also passed the critical point of impending catastrophe. The latter, however, has already occurred. Here it is Žižek, again, who emphasized the role of the contemporary ideology of cynicism and denial, so well described by Octave Mannoni – "I know very well, but..." throughout virtually all of his work. Add to all this "the politics of fear" and you get a mixture of despair and terror reminiscent of what we described above as a mood of night-

[51] Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversations with Žižek*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2004, pp. 48–49.

[52] Slavoj Žižek, *Absolute Recoil. Towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*, London and New York, Verso, 2014, p. 344.

mare. The fact is that the constant awakening of fear and threat can dissipate and exhaust. Even the founder of the Doomsday Clock, Eugene Rabinowitch, deplored the strategy of his movement: "While trying to frighten men into rationality, scientists have frightened many into abject fear or blind hatred."[53]

In the end, we get a mixture that Badiou nicely described as follows and which nicely fits our topics of urgency:

> Today we endure the marriage of frenzy and total rest. On the one hand, propaganda declares that everything changes by the minute, that we have no time, that we must modernize at top speed, that we're going to 'miss the boat' (the boat of the Internet and the new economy, the boat of mobile phones for everyone, the boat of countless stockholders, the boat of stock options, the boat of pension funds, I could go on...). On the other hand, all this hubbub cannot conceal a kind of passive immobility or indifference, the perpetuation of the status quo. This is a type of time upon which the will, whether collective or individual, has no grip: an inaccessible amalgam of agitation and sterility, the paradox of a stagnant feverishness.[54]

Even before the current pandemic, "the neoliberal glorification of competition, constant conformity, and 'personal improvement' triggered has created an epidemic of mental suffering. In the United States, mental suffering is more American than Coca-Cola."[55] In this sense, Berardi speaks of the (capitalist) economy as a "Prozac economy." The latter is not a specifically American characteristic, but something inherent to capitalism as such. As Laurent de Sutter has shown in his book *Narcocapitalism*, all capitalism "is, necessarily, a narcocapitalism – a capitalism that is narcotic through and through, whose excitability is only a manic reverse of the depression it never stops producing, even as it presents itself as a remedy. [...] Narcocapitalism is the capitalism of narcosis, that enforced sleep into which anaesthetics plunge their patients so as to unburden them from everything that prevents them from being efficient in the current arrangement – which means, work, work and more work."[56]

53 Steven Pinker, *Enlightenment Now*, New York, Viking, 2018, p. 311.

54 Badiou, *The Century*, pp. 105, 106.

55 Franco 'Bifo' Berardi, *The Second Coming*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2019, p. 53.

56 Laurent de Sutter, *Narcocapitalism*, trans. B. Norman, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2018, pp. 43, 44.

No wonder, then, that intellectuals call the situation catastrophic, because it is catastrophic! Here we should introduce a logic that Žižek also uses frequently in his works – an x looks like an x, but we must not deceive ourselves, it is actually an x! Žižek refers here to the well-known joke of the Marx brothers: "You remind me of Emanuel Ravelli. – But I am Emanuel Ravelli. – Then it's no wonder you look like him!" Today, radical action is called for because the situation demands it – and the situation is indeed catastrophic.

It has long been known that the coming decades will be decisive, and futurologists have known this for a long time. Futurology relies heavily on a pattern that combines observation of the present and past trends with the identification of the new. Any knowledge of the future assumes that similar conditions that have occurred in the past will occur again in the future. This notion relies on the extrapolation of what exists – but remains blind to more than just our orientation and disposition to action. Alternatively, as Derrida put it: the future comes in two forms: the French term *futur* is something that relies on what is already there in some sense, while *avenir* is what will happen and what cannot be known in advance. In other words, predictions and forecasts are one thing; actual history is another. Or, as the appropriate saying for our time goes, truth is stranger than fiction. Much of what has happened even futurologists could not predict…

On the other hand, it is true that futurologists in particular have known for a long time that the carbon stocks that drive today's mode of production will soon be exhausted and that we will find ourselves in a difficult situation. For them, it was no secret that in the future we will have to deal with the climate crisis and the switch to other means of production because the reserves of gas, oil, and coal will simply be exhausted:

> The challenges we face for near and long-term futures have been called a crisis of crises. They range across the gamut of socio-cultural, geo-political, and environmental domains. Bearing in mind that all these challenges are complex and systemically interconnected, this chapter offers multiple starting points for further dialogue. Futurists discuss the grand global challenges from a variety of perspectives. James Dator calls them the 'Unholy Trinity, Plus One'. Dator's Unholy Trinity is the end of cheap and abundant oil; multiple environmental challenges; and global economic and fiscal collapse. Dator's Plus One is lack of adequate government intervention. Jorgen Randers claims that a sustainability revolution is

> under way, but that it will take most of this century to complete. He identifies five big issues, which are inextricably linked with the sustainability revolution and its likelihood of success. His big issues are the end of capitalism, the end of economic growth, the end of slow democracy, the end of generational harmony, and the end of a stable climate.[57]

Awareness of the urgency of action against climate change is now widespread. Even if we, we as humanity, have reached and signed the Paris Agreement, even if there is general agreement that urgent action is needed, something always comes up and prevents or postpones the actual implementation plans. This "something" is not only at the level of subjective or particular evasions or trickery, but also at a more "objective" level. The introduction of new situations (e.g. in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic or the war in Ukraine) introduces a completely new group of unpredictable and uncontrollable actors who act according to an autonomous, unpredictable self-will. Although there was (once) unity and will on climate change, there are now divisions again, and the question is when the moment of urgent collective action will come again. If ever. Here we have the most fundamental level of the current paradoxical situation – even when something is urgent, even when there is an emergency, something even more urgent immediately emerges. We lacked time, but now we lack it even more; we lack it in an even more urgent sense of the word. We have no time, and yet we never get around to it; something seemingly more urgent keeps getting in our way, it keeps popping up. It is as if we are trapped, locked into a certain logic of time, that dictates a constant and random, ever-new emergence of emergencies, to the point of a perpetual reign of the Super-emergency.

There is an urgent need for action, perhaps more urgent than ever. This is now widely known and generally accepted, at least as far as climate change is concerned. However, even when there is agreement on the need for urgent action, something always comes up and prevents or postpones the actual implementation plans. We have called this "something" the Super-emergency, which always leads to a paradoxical situation – even when something is really urgent, even when there is an emergency; something even more urgent immediately pops up. We lacked time, but now we lack it even more, we lack it in an even

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57 Jennifer M. Gidley, *The Future: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, p. 116.

more urgent sense of the word. We have no time, and yet we never get around to it; something seemingly more urgent keeps getting in our way or keeps popping up. It is as if we are trapped in a certain logic of time that dictates a constant and random, ever-new, emergence of emergencies, to the point of a perpetual reign of the Super-emergency.

Therefore, it is not only urgent to think about and deal with urgency and emergency per se, but with their particular deviation, even perversion – the Super-emergency. Even if we do not have time to think and act differently, as our leaders, the media, and propaganda keep claiming ("now we do not have time to hear, discuss, exchange opinions, talking"[58]; now is not the time to "philosophize, now is the time to act"[59]), we should insist on it. Or, as Žižek emphasizes in his text "Die populistische Versuchung": "The very urgency of the present situation can in no way serve as an excuse – it is precisely urgent situations that are situations of time for reflection [*Nachdenken*]."[60] And action, radical action, of course. With the aim of recuperating our common future. As Daniel Innerarity pointed out: "The most pressing matter for contemporary democracies is not to accelerate social processes but to recuperate the future. The future must once again be granted a privileged space on democratic societies' agendas."[61] In other words, what we have tried to show here is that what is really urgent and necessary for us now, today, is to free ourselves from this yoke of emergency in which we are imprisoned and which we have here called the Super-emergency.

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58 Aubert, *La culte de l'urgence*, p. 89.

59 Of course, there are many other dimensions, one of them the following: "Billions of dollars are spent every year researching how to reduce decision-making time, how to eliminate the useless time of reflection and contemplation. This is the form of contemporary progress – the relentless capture and control of time and experience." (Crary, *24/7*, p. 40.)

60 Slavoj Žižek, "Die populistische Versuchung", in Geiselberger (ed.), *Die große Regression*, p. 309.

61 Daniel Innerarity, *The Future and Its Enemies: In Defense of Political Hope*, trans. S. Kingery, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2012, p. 17.

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Foucault's Adventure in Iran and His Last "Turn"

Revolt: Foucault and Jesi

Michel Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: an encounter that drew a great deal of criticism from the very beginning, as it could be considered the most controversial political adventure of his life. To many of those who had already read works such as *The Order of Things* (1966) and *Discipline and Punish* (1975), reading a series of sympathetic reportages on the Iranian uprising in 1978–79 seemed to be indigestibly repugnant. Among his critics, there are ones who do not miss any opportunity to vehemently excoriate him, pointing out that Foucault's account of the Iranian revolt is but a sheer scandal; sometimes they even go beyond this and mockingly maintain that Foucault's affirmative account of Khomeini's movement as a manifestation of "political spirituality" is a side-effect of his *mind-blowing* LSD trip in Death Valley in 1975. There are also other critical voices that, without being surprised by Foucault's reportages, find a reason for such a sympathetic account in an "anti-Enlightenment" approach he took in the archaeological and genealogical periods of his work. They go so far as to accuse Foucault of being involved in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, because they think that he, by supporting the Iranian uprising, paved the way for the formation of a religious government that sowed the seeds of "Islamic fundamentalism" in the world. Those severe criticisms made Foucault very upset, as he preferred to say nothing more directly about his account of the Iranian uprising. The last time he talked about it goes back to August 1979, ten months after the victorious revolution, when he was interviewed, unpublished in French until 2013, by a Lebanese journalist, and maintained his previous statements about political spirituality. After that until his death in 1984, he no longer spoke publicly about Iran. Of course, apart from those harsh criticisms, some observations defend Foucault's account of the Iranian uprising and, contrary to those who condemn his sympathy for the uprising as an anti-Enlightenment phenomenon, they maintain that the 1979 Iranian Revolution is a moment of the Enlightenment movement. Here, we are not going to stage another trial against Foucault. We mean the trials, of

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course, which prosecuted Foucault not because of his reportages on the Iranian uprising before the victory of the 1979 Revolution, but because of what happened afterwards. His critics, indeed, without taking into account the *structural* difference between the 1978–79 revolt and the state formation that occurred after the 1979 Revolution, take Foucault's account of the Iranian uprising as an endorsement of what took place in the wake of the revolution under the Islamic Republic. Not only were almost all of Foucault's texts written *before* the victory of the revolution, but even in the very first text that was published just a few months after the revolution, an open letter to the then Prime Minister of Iran, Mehdi Bazargan, he explicitly criticized the violence perpetrated by the government, considering such to be unacceptable and undermining the revolutionary spirit of the Iranian uprising.

Foucault's journeys to Iran (he visited Iran twice: first, from 16 to 24 September 1978; and the second time from 9 to 15 November 1978) took place when he was probably preparing the materials for his well-known lectures on biopolitics in which he was to deal with, in a genealogical way, the various formations of the modern state, including liberal and neo-liberal ones. Thus, there seems to be no direct link between what Foucault's intellectual project was in that particular period of time and his reportages on the Iranian revolt – one can say that in his "historicist" approach to *history* or *the historical*, there was no room for a certain event that interrupted the continuity of historical time itself. However, the fact that Foucault was seriously involved in Iran just weeks before his lectures began is not something that happened all of a sudden and without any precedent. First of all, there was an invitation from the Italian publishing house Rizzoli, which was the publisher of his works in Italian, proposing that he regularly collaborate with *Corriere della Sera* in the form of "points of view". Foucault accepted the invitation and started to launch a *philosophical journalism* project by gathering a group of intellectuals and reporters whose task was to "'witness the birth of ideas and the explosion of their force' everywhere in the world, 'in the struggles one fights for ideas, against them or in favour of them.'"[1] The aim of this project was to "[develop] a new form of journalism. Such 'reportage of ideas' (*reportage des*

[1] Michel Foucault, "Les 'reportages' d'idées", in *Dits et écrits 1954-1988 (III 1976-1979)*, D. Defert and F. Ewald (eds.), Paris, Gallimard 2001, p. 707; quoted in L. Cremonesi, O. Irrera, D. Lorenzini, and M. Tazzioli, "Foucault, the Iranian Uprising and the Constitution of a Collective Subjectivity", in L. Cremonesi et al. (eds.), *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, London, Rowman & Littlefield International Ltd, 2016, p. 12.

idées) would affirm the significance of everyday notions. In addition to portraying the opinions, beliefs and thoughts of 'simple people' – and calling attention to 'overlooked' ideas – the project sought to investigate matters in social context and in relation to historical events. The point was to examine how ideas orient and motivate actions."[2] Foucault's account of the Iranian revolt was the first one in this journalistic project to be published. Following his reportages, there were published only two more, one by Alain Finkielkraut on the United States under the Carter administration and the other by André Glucksmann on the boat people – the two members of the group of intellectuals who had gathered under the banner of The New Philosophers (*Les Nouveaux Philosophes*) with whom Foucault had a friendship.

In addition to this journalistic project, one could point to the other conditions that made Foucault's journeys to Iran possible. In his interview with Sassine, Foucault addresses his impression of reading Ernest Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (1954) when news of the mass protests in Iran was broadcast as another reason behind his becoming interested in the Iranian revolt:

> It really left an impression on me because, after all, the book remains rather unknown in France, and it's had relatively little influence. And yet it seems to me that the problem it poses is absolutely crucial. I mean, the problem of that collective perception of history that begins to emerge in Europe during the Middle Ages, most likely. It involves perceiving another world here below, perceiving that the reality of things is not definitively established and set in place, but instead, in the very midst of our time and our history, there can be an opening, a point of light drawing us towards it that gives us access, from this world itself, to a better world. Now, this perception of history is at once a point of departure for the idea of revolution and, on the other hand, an idea with a religious origin. Religious groups and especially dissident religious groups were basically the ones who held this idea—that within the world of the here-below, something like a revolution was possible. Yes, that's it. Well, this theme really interested me because I think it's true historically, even if Ernst Bloch doesn't really demonstrate all that in a very satisfying way, in terms of the methods of academic history. [...] So, well, I was in the middle of reading about all that when the newspapers informed me that

[2] Thomas Lemke, *Foucault's Analysis of Modern Governmentality: A Critique of Political Reason*, trans. E. Butler, London and New York, Verso, 2019, p. 330.

> something like an uprising was taking place in Iran. [...] So, it seemed to me that there was a relationship between what I was reading and what was taking place. And I wanted to go and see. And I really went to see it as an example, a test of what I was reading in Ernst Bloch. There you have it. So, you could say, I went there with one eye conditioned by this problem of the relationship between political revolution and religious hope or eschatology.[3]

We can also mention another factor that played a major role in making Foucault's Iranian adventure possible. Several months before his first visit to Iran, he met with some Iranian "dissidents" who had formed a committee in Paris to monitor the situation of Iranian political prisoners. Foucault, who had previously been actively engaged in the experience of the *Groupe d'Information sur les Prisons* (GIP, 1971-1972), became increasingly aware of the situation in Iran through those meetings and began to seriously study Iran as well as follow the news about it. Needless to say, we are simply referring to these three conditions (an invitation from the Italian publisher, reading Ernest Bloch's *The Principle of Hope*, and meeting with Iranian political activists living in Paris) that made Foucault's involvement in the Iranian political scene possible, to just provide the context in which he was led to his account of that scene, and not reducing "the conditions of the possibility" for his engagement in the Iranian uprising to only those three ones.

Now if we turn to the texts themselves, three main points need to be emphasized regarding what Foucault wrote about the Iranian uprising. First, it should be said that what caught Foucault's attention in the Iranian uprising was the fuel that energized it, which, from his standpoint, was different from what can be taken as the driving force of a typical revolutionary uprising in the West. For him, in contrast to the European revolutionary movements, which were largely formed on the basis of class struggle, the Iranian uprising was strongly rooted in religious soil. In addition, Foucault emphasizes that even when we pay attention to how the Iranian uprising manifested itself, we can see a remarkable difference in its organizational approach from that of the revolutionary movements in the West. If, in the case of the classic revolutionary movements, it was the parties and unions that were in charge of organizing movements, in Foucault's

[3] Michel Foucault and Farès Sassine, "There Can't Be Societies without Uprisings", in L. Cremones et al. (eds.), *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, pp. 25–26.

view, the religious force of the Iranian uprising was organized without any effort from such parties or unions: "this uprising stood out because it wasn't obviously governed by a Western revolutionary ideology, it wasn't governed or directed by a political party either, not even by political organizations—it truly was a mass uprising."[4] It was because of these differences that Foucault was reluctant to use the term "revolution" for the Iranian uprising – he used the term "revolt" instead. The second point to be emphasized in those writings, which prompted the sharpest criticism of Foucault, is his insistence on the notorious *political spirituality*. Foucault not only distinguished the form of the Iranian uprising by using the term revolt from conventional revolutions, but also maintained that what determines the content of that revolt is a kind of political spirituality that is unparalleled in modern revolutions – the intertwining of religion and politics that, in Foucault's view, has been forgotten in Europe since the Renaissance. And the last point is related to what affected Foucault personally in his observations of those Iranians who radically risked their lives and stood up courageously, with "bare hands", against the armed-to-the-teeth regime. Foucault drew his readers' attention to the impressive scenes in the streets of Tehran where the revolutionary protesters raised their bloody hands and smiled triumphantly after being shot in the body by soldiers of the Pahlavi regime: a vivid example of what Foucault was told in his meetings with many revolutionaries. They had told Foucault that they were not afraid of death and sacrificing their lives for the victory of the revolution because in their view death was easier than living under the Pahlavi regime. Thus, "revolt," "political spirituality," and "courage and no-fear-of-death" are the three main points that Foucault highlighted in his journalistic account of the Iranian uprising.

Foucault does not discuss any of these three points in detail in his reportages. He tries to further explain the term political spirituality in his interviews in order to address the misunderstandings that this term had fuelled and which led to vehement criticism against him; however, we argue that even his further explanation of political spirituality is not sufficient to conceptually digest what he observed in Iran in 1978-79 as a scene of the intertwining of politics and religion. We will discuss these three points from a different theoretical perspective than that of Foucault himself so that what he observed in Iran can be more understandable than what his reportages provide.

4 *Ibid*., p. 26.

As mentioned above, Foucault tries to distinguish the Iranian uprising from Western ones through the name he chooses for the former. Whenever he refers directly to the Iranian uprising in the title of his reportages he uses the term revolt, while he does not mention the word revolution in such titles even one single time. In a discussion published in March 1979 between Foucault and two other journalists who had also visited Iran amid the uprising, he sought to clarify the difference between the Iranian uprising and what he called a revolution:

> Now, we recognize a revolution when we can observe two dynamics: one is that of the contradictions in that society, that of the class struggle or of social confrontations. Then there is a political dynamic, that is to say, the presence of a vanguard, class, party, or political ideology, in short, a spearhead that carries the whole nation with it. Now it seems to me that, in what is happening in Iran, one can recognize neither of those two dynamics that are for us distinctive signs and explicit marks of a revolutionary phenomenon.[5]

Also, a few months before this interview, in one of his reportages, he emphasized this difference even more strongly, explicitly stating that he did not hear the word revolution even once during his entire stay in Iran. If in Foucault's view the manifestation of class struggle in its ultimate form is one of the known characteristics of a revolution, in the uprising of the Iranian people, despite some hidden class struggle in society, this struggle was not effective enough to "find expression in an immediate, transparent way" – which is why he maintains that, for example, the economic difficulties at the time were not so decisive as to encourage people to take to the streets in protest. Underestimating the role of class struggle is even more obvious when Foucault points out that, in contrast to the Cultural Revolution, in the Iranian uprising we do not see some kind of struggle between different factions, groups, parties, and elements. For him, "what has given the Iranian movement its intensity has been a double register. On the one hand, a collective will that has been very strongly expressed politically and, on the other hand, the desire for a radical change in ordinary life."[6]

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5 Michel Foucault, "Iran: The Spirit of a World without Spirit", in J. Afary and K. B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 251.

6 *Ibid*., p. 260.

It should be emphasized that Foucault, in his reportages, still keeps using the same approach that characterizes his historicism based on "differentiation" and "periodization". Nevertheless, such a historicist method could not provide a full-fledged *descriptive* account of a new phenomenon that fundamentally *ruptured* the very continuity of history *as* discourse. In other words, Foucault's historicist method faces its limit where it fails to deal with the Iranian uprising as a *structural* rupture. What he was witnessing in the streets of Iranian cities brought to the surface a series of untouched questions in his historicism: *How, beyond the descriptive "differentiation" and "periodization", is a discourse structured? What are the conditions of the possibility for a discourse? How is a discourse structurally ruptured, and what are the consequences of this rupture?* These are the questions that bring us to the quandary of *the transcendental* and the tension between the latter and *the empirical* in Foucault's work. However, instead of taking the structural rupture of the Iranian revolt as an opportunity to focus on answering these questions, he approached his Iranian experience as an appropriate answer to his main preoccupation at the time. One of the key claims of Foucault in his two lecture courses, *Security, Territory, Population* (2004) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2004), between 1977 to 1979, which is the period he was also engaged in the Iranian political scene, "is that specific governmental rationalities were accompanied by equally specific forms of resistance, or 'counter-conducts.'"[7] We are arguing that for Foucault, who himself failed to introduce the forms of counter-conduct appropriate to the neoliberalism of Freiburg and the Chicago school as a new governmental rationality in the above-mentioned lecture courses, the Iranian revolt could be considered to be an exemplary phenomenon of such counter-conduct. Being preoccupied with the question of counter-conduct appropriate to the new governmental rationality in the late 1970s and his adventure in Iran led Foucault to walk a new intellectual path that determined the orientation of his thinking till the end of his life – a new path which some of his commentators improperly refer to as the "ethical turn". It is, indeed, a path that allows him – four years after his adventure in Iran – to return to the questions raised by his reading of the new governmental rationality and the Iranian uprising, and this time, through his interpretation of Kant's answer to the question of

7 Jessica Whyte, "Is revolution desirable?: Michel Foucault on revolution, neoliberalism and rights", in B. Golder (ed.), *Re-reading Foucault: On Law, Power and Rights*, London, Routledge, 2012, p. 209.

Enlightenment, he tries to address such questions on a more sophisticated theoretical level. We will return to this point below.

Here, let us take the concept of revolt itself as a matter to be scrutinized and, characterizing its distinguishing features, suggest a more extended conception of the Iranian uprising than what Foucault tried to provide in his texts. Unlike Foucault, whose account of the Iranian uprising did not provide a specific conceptualization of revolt, Furio Jesi, the Italian mythologist and historian, in his *Spartakus: The Symbology of Revolt* (2000), articulated the relationship between revolt, time, and myth, and introduced a kind of "phenomenology of revolt" that can be very helpful in conceptually elaborating on the Iranian uprising.

Like Foucault, Jesi distinguishes between revolution and revolt. However, he does not stop there and focuses on the relationship that each has with time:

> I use the word *revolt* to designate an insurrectional movement that differs from revolution. The difference between revolt and revolution should not be sought in their respective aims; they can both have the same aim—to seize power. What principally distinguishes revolt from revolution is, instead, a different experience of time. If, following the ordinary meaning of the two words, revolt is a sudden insurrectional explosion, which can be placed within a strategic horizon but which does not in itself imply a long-distance strategy, and revolution is a strategic complex of insurrectional movements, coordinated and oriented over the mid- to long term towards ultimate objectives, then we could say that revolt suspends historical time. It suddenly institutes a time in which everything that is done has a value in itself, independently of its consequences and of its relations with the transitory or perennial complex that constitutes history. Revolution would, instead, be wholly and deliberately immersed in historical time.[8]

In Jesi's work, the suspension of historical time as the main feature distinguishing revolt from revolution leads to the introduction of mythical time into history. On the one hand, *revolution*, *historical time*, and *history*; on the other hand, *revolt*, *mythical time*, and *myth*. In order to elucidate such a relationship between revolt, myth, and mythical time, we need to briefly paraphrase the main

[8] Furio Jesi, *Spartakus: The Symbology of Revolt*, trans. Alberto Toscano, London, Seagull, 2014, p. 46.

points raised in Jesi's reading of myth. Influenced by his teacher during the period 1964-1969, Károly Kerényi, the Hungarian mythologist and philologist, Jesi makes a fundamental distinction between myth and mythological materials: the former is defined as something that is not given by representation, something that is *not* there, and the latter as the product of a mythological machine that, presuming myth as its "immovable mover", produces products that are historically verifiable:

> If by *myth* we mean that 'something' alluded to by the mythological machine as to the existence of its presumed immovable mover; and if by *mythological materials* we mean the machine's historically verifiable products, then the science of myth is a typical science of what is historically not there, whereas the science of mythology is the study of mythological materials as such. The science of myth, in my view, tends to be actualized as a science of reflections about myth, and thus as an analysis of the various modalities of non-knowledge of myth. The science of mythology, consisting as it does the study of mythological materials 'as such', tends to be actualized first and foremost as a science of the workings of the mythological machine, and thus as an analysis of the internal, autonomous linguistic circulation that makes those materials mythological. I use the word *mythology* precisely to indicate that linguistic circulation and the materials that document it.[9]

Also, in line with this, we can quote Jesi's letter to Gershom Scholem at the end of 1966 where he writes: "I have found that my atheism increasingly turns into a hesitation to name the darkness I perceive in the depths of being—into the refusal of a naming that appears blasphemous to me."[10] This negative dimension of myth, "*the darkness in the depth of being*" that prompts Jesi to take the science of myth as "an analysis of the various modalities of non-knowledge of myth," is an original negativity. It is a negativity *which is already there* when an analysis of the different ways *to not know* myth gets started, a negativity which conditions the very process of analysis as such. This process gets started only because there is already a fundamental negativity there from which every experience will be generated. Thus, one could say that "an analysis of the various modalities of non-knowledge of myth" could be paraphrased as an analysis of the various

9 Furio Jesi, *Time and Festivity*, trans. Cristina Viti, London, Seagull, 2021, pp. 190–191.

10 Furio Jesi, quoted in Andrea Cavaletti, "Festivity, Writing, and Destruction", *Theory & Event*, 22 (4/2019), p. 1059.

ways to tarry with "the darkness in the depths of being" (myth as that which is *not* there) that repeats itself through an analysis of its unknowability in different ways. *There is no such thing as Myth*. What there *is* is the in-existence of Myth. It is this in-existence of Myth, the darkness or *non-being* in the depth of being that is taken as the immovable mover of the mythological machine.

This leads us to another important point. Although Jesi defines myth as *something* that is not given by representation, that does not mean that myth is separated from history. In *Spartakus*, Jesi tried to articulate the relationship between myth and history by interpreting the defeat of the Spartacist revolt in 1919. There, he portrayed revolt as *an epiphany of myth within history* that suspends historical time and introduces mythical time into history instead. In the experience of a revolt, the "I" involved in that experience finds herself in a different situation from her historical experience. As soon as she takes part in the revolt, her presence in historical time is suspended, and, gaining access to myth that emerged as an epiphany through the revolt, becomes the "I" who is the point of the intersection of myth and history:

> In the moment that it gains access to myth, the I that is subject to historical time while nevertheless participating in mythical time, 'pours forth like a spring'; it destroys itself in a dynamic process that involves its historical duration. In other words, the I really participates in the flow of history when it succeeds in identifying history with the course of its own destruction and therefore with its access to myth.[11]

The disappearance of this point of intersection of myth and history is the most important factor that paves the way for the defeat of a revolt. In other words, in revolt, it is always possible that, after suspending historical time and getting access to myth, one can no longer separate oneself from mythical time and return to historical time. Thus, maintaining the point of intersection allows one to move back and forth between myth and history, and, without absorbing and integrating myth into history or vice versa, ensures the permanence of history, while myth is not abandoned. Speaking of the need for a "*double Sophia*" that serves as a common denominator between history and myth, Jesi proposes a new mode of subjectivity in the last chapter of *Spartakus*. The double Sophia

[11] Jesi, *Spartakus: The Symbology of Revolt*, p. 156.

as the mode of subjectivity that he proposes emerges topologically at the point of the intersection of myth and history where, as Jesi points out, at the moment of self-destruction in myth, the "I" who underwent such a destruction, to quote Rainer Maria Rilke, "pours forth like a spring"[12] flowing through history:

> The I that saves itself from the collaborating play of all oppositions is the one that situates itself precisely at the point of their intersection. It is an I which in knowing itself also 'knows [...] permanence and self-destruction, historical time and mythical time [...] it is the common element, the point of intersection, between two universes—of [...] historical time; of [...] mythical time.'[13]

Maintaining the point of the intersection of revolt as an epiphany of myth and history that ensures self-destruction and permanence simultaneously is the most difficult task on which the fate of any revolt depends. As Andrea Cavalletti points out in his introduction to *Spartakus*: "The revolt is the suspension of historical time. But this suspension remains an isolated interval; after its cruel end, the normalizing *dispositif* starts functioning again. Monster/man, historical time/mythical time, life/death—these are actually collaborating oppositions. *One must therefore ward off their interplay, which separates and isolates the revolt from history*."[14] This provides us with an insight into better understanding the failure of the Spartacist revolt. Given the duration of that revolt, it could be said that its failure to survive for more than just eight days is due to the lack of a collective "I", a double Sophia, that could move back and forth between myth and history – a double Sophia whose existence means resisting to the absolute isolation of revolt as *only* a rift in historical time and consequently its separation from history.

Now, let us, in the light of Jesi's symbology of revolt, address Foucault's reading of the Iranian revolt in a context in which Foucault himself did not step.

Given the triplet nexus of revolt, myth, and time in Jesi's thought, we discuss the Iranian revolt with a controversial claim: the state of revolt, which erupt-

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12 Rainer Maria Rilke, "Duino Elegies: The Sonnets to Orpheus", trans. Robert Hunter, https://chimerapoetry.wordpress.com/2014/11/21/the-sonnets-to-orpheus-by-rainer-maria-rilke, accessed 2 October 2022.

13 Andrea Cavaletti, "Introduction", in Jesi, *Spartakus: The Symbology of Revolt*, p. 18 (emphasis added).

14 *Ibid*., p. 17.

ed about a year before the victory of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, lasted for a decade, that is, until the end of the Iraq-Iran war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Here we are faced with an ostensibly paradoxical situation. It seems to be the case that the Iranian uprising achieved victory in the form of a revolution on 11 February 1979, leading to the establishment of a new regime called the Islamic Republic. With the new government in power, it was expected that sooner or later "the normalizing *dispositif* [would start] functioning again." However, if we take into account the set of events that took place after the revolution, it could be said that in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, the mythical time of the 1978–79 revolt still prevailed over historical time. In that situation, the revolution should no longer be seen as a phenomenon opposing the revolt, as Foucault and Jesi believed; on the contrary, it has to be understood as the culmination of the revolt itself. In addition to this, the establishment of the new government failed to completely pave the way for "the normalizing *dispositif* to start functioning again." In other words, the revolt is a ten-year phenomenon that began in the winter of 1978, reaching its pinnacle on 11 February 1979, and ended in June 1988. How could this paradox – that revolution itself is the most intense form of revolt – be understood?

In the light of Jesi's *Spartakus*, the Iranian revolt, as portrayed by Foucault in his account, should be recognized as a *rupture* in the continuity of historical time that introduces myth into history. That revolt, in the absence of any specific demand from the Pahlavi regime, was triggered by a total rejection of the regime as such: "At any rate, we want nothing from *this regime*."[15] Foucault was told by an active participant in the revolt that the Pahlavi regime as "the modernization-despotism-corruption combination is precisely what we reject."[16] The regime, which in the eyes of the Shah was to become, thanks to petrodollars and by implementing a "modernization" project, "the world's fifth-largest economy," was, according to Foucault, rejected by "a whole culture," "a whole people," and "by all social classes." For Foucault, the 1978-79 revolt was the interruption of such a project that, despite its so-called *modernized* guise, was built on what he described as *archaism*. In other words, it was the abolishment of an archaic regime that was producing *mythological materials* by its *mythological*

[15] Foucault, "The Shah Is a Hundred Years Behind the Times", in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, p. 195.

[16] *Ibid*.

machine in order to eliminate, if it could, the possibility of a manifestation or epiphany of *genuine myth*. For Kerényi, genuine myth, as the "original phenomenon" (*Urphänomen*) spontaneously arising in man and forming the basis of all mythologies, is distinguished from *inauthentic myth*, a dangerously "technicized" myth that is reduced to an instrument of political power.[17] From a Jesian standpoint, however, one could say that the most dangerous threat to a revolt is getting completely stuck in the epiphanic moment of revolt, the manifestation of myth as "the darkness in the depths of being," without being able to return to historical time. This is where, for Jesi, the importance of a double Sophia comes to the fore, *where getting access to myth and destructing oneself in its epiphany must be accompanied by constructive permanence in history*. The existence of such a double Sophia allows the collective "I" of the revolt to move constantly from self-destruction to construction and vice-versa – a constant back and forth between myth and history without separating the former from the latter, as well as without sacrificing one for the sake of the other. As Cavalletti puts it:

> The "I" saved from sacrifice is neither the one glorified in the images of the hero [...], nor, clearly, the one who survives by chance or escapes the battle to rejoin the ranks of bourgeois society. For Jesi, the saved "I" is the one who can escape the collaborating game of myth vs. history, positioning itself exactly at their intersection and "knowing at one and the same time [...] permanence and self-destruction, historical time and myth time." It is "the common element, the point of intersection between two universes [...], that is subject to historical time while being part of mythical time"; or again, with the Rilkean formula much loved by Kerényi, it is the "I" who "in the instant of its access to myth "pours forth like a spring", i.e. destroys itself in a dynamic process that involves its own historical duration. In short, the "I" is truly part of the flow of history when it succeeds in identifying with that flow the course of its own destruction, and hence its own access to myth.[18]

What Foucault observed in the Iranian revolt was only one side of the story, that is, the self-destruction of the collective "I" in myth. The climax of such self-destruction can be seen in his descriptions of the people who, with bare hands and without any fear of dying, exposed their chests to the bullets shot by the Pahla-

17 Cavaletti, "Festivity, Writing, and Destruction", p. 1060.

18 *Ibid*., p. 1062.

vi armed men. Foucault was so impressed by such scenes that he was not sure if those bare-chested people, profoundly fascinated with death, were more focused on martyrdom than on the victory of their uprising.[19] Although they finally celebrated the victory of their uprising on 11 February 1979, their self-destruction in the epiphany of the revolution was not accompanied by moving back and forth between myth and history, self-destruction and permanence. They were caught up in the moment of self-destruction without moving back to history. This paved the way for a decade-long dynamism of self-destruction, which took on its most dreadful form in the Iraq-Iran war.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Last Foucault, and the Quandary of the Transcendental

Considering the works of Foucault's last years, that is, the period that started with the publication of the first volume of *The History of Sexuality* (1976) and continued until the end of his life, we are arguing – contrary to those who think that Foucault's account of the Iranian revolt is a scandalous exception in his works – that there is a strong connection between his Iranian experience and his other works in this period, which is inattentively referred to as Foucault's "ethical turn". This so-called "turn" should not be understood as Foucault's withdrawal from politics and turn to ethics; rather, as Judith Revel points out, "ethics must be conceived as a continuation of politics, and not as its 'retreat'."[20] Catherine Malabou goes even further and leaves no room for ethics in Foucault's last seminars:

> Foucault never sought shelter in ethics; neither did he elaborate a neoliberal and individualist affirmation of life. On the contrary, through his reading of the Cynics, he announces a transition towards what he calls 'the *other* politics'. Such a passage is precisely not a dismissal of politics, but of the necessity of government, which is of course dramatically different.[21]

[19] Foucault, "Tehran: Faith against the Shah", in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, p. 201.

[20] Judith Revel, "Between Politics and Ethics: The Question of Subjectivation", in L. Cremonesi et al. (eds.), *Foucault and the Making of Subjects*, p. 163.

[21] Catherine Malabou, "Cynicism and anarchism in Foucault's last seminars", in P. Osborne (ed.), *Afterlives: transcendentals, universals, others*, Kingston upon Thames, UK: CRMEP Books, 4 (2022), p. 147.

This is why Malabou, contrary to those scholars who find an implicit affirmation of neoliberalism in his last works, refers to the late Foucault as a thinker of anarchism, despite the fact that he "expressed many times his distance from anarchism."[22]

Foucault's encounter with the Iranian revolt was, as mentioned above, like a new door to what he, just a few months before his first trip to Iran, called "the art of not being governed quite so much."[23] If, for him, the result of the genealogy of various ideas, forms, and practices of government in the West was that, despite this diversity, the government was always reproducing the pattern of "commandment and obedience," a popular uprising in a Middle Eastern country with Shia Islam as its main content was something completely new that, in his view, could promise a new form of politics, a new counter-conduct. His sympathetic remarks on "political spirituality" and "Islamic government" are in line with his concerns in the years that followed, when he was involved in a project that could be named, following Foucault himself, "the inventing of self" beyond the governmental pattern of "commandment and obedience":

> By "Islamic government," nobody in Iran means a political regime in which the clerics would have a role of supervision or control. To me, the phrase "Islamic government" seemed to point to two orders of things. "A utopia," some told me without any pejorative implication. "An ideal," most of them said to me. At any rate, it is something very old and also very far into the future, a notion of coming back to what Islam was at the time of the Prophet, but also of advancing toward a luminous and distant point where it would be possible to renew fidelity rather than maintain obedience. In pursuit of this ideal, the distrust of legalism seemed to me to be essential, along with a faith in the creativity of Islam. [...] It is often said that the definitions of an Islamic government are imprecise. On the contrary, they seemed to me to have a familiar but, I must say, not too reassuring clarity. [...] When Iranians speak of Islamic government; when, under the threat of bullets, they transform it into a slogan of the streets; when they reject in its name, perhaps at the risk of a bloodbath, deals arranged by parties and politicians, they have other things on their minds than these formulas from everywhere and no-

[22] *Ibid*., p. 161.

[23] Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?", trans. L. Hochroth and C. Porter, in *The Politics of Truth*, S. Lotringer (ed.), Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2007, p. 45.

> where. They also have other things in their hearts. I believe that they are thinking about a reality that is very near to them, since they themselves are its active agent. It is first and foremost about a movement that aims to give a permanent role in political life to the traditional structures of Islamic society. An Islamic government is what will allow the continuing activity of the thousands of political centers that have been spawned in mosques and religious communities in order to resist the shah's regime. [...] I do not feel comfortable speaking of Islamic government as an "idea" or even as an "ideal." Rather, it impressed me as a form of "political will." It impressed me in its effort to politicize structures that are inseparably social and religious in response to current problems. It also impressed me in its attempt to open a spiritual dimension in politics.[24]

Less than four years later, at the first session of his 1982 lectures, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* (2001), Foucault described such spirituality in a more affirmative way:

> We will call "philosophy" the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth. If we call this "philosophy," then I think we could call "spirituality" the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out *the necessary transformations* on himself in order to have access to the truth.[25]

This last quote clearly shows that not only did the oppressive and violent initiatives by the Islamic Republic not push Foucault to critically reconsider the concept with which he portrayed the Iranian uprising, but he took such a concept to be a means through which the subject can gain access to the truth. In other words, like Kant, who did not make his defence of the idea of revolution dependent on particular revolutions and their consequences, Foucault separated the idea of spirituality from what happened in Iran after the 1979 Revolution and did not give up on this idea for the rest of his life. Of course, this does not mean that Foucault disregarded the intensity of oppression and violence under the Islamic Republic. Two months after the victory of the revolution, Foucault,

[24] Foucault, "What Are the Iranians Dreaming [Rêvent] About?", in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, pp. 206–208.

[25] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*, trans. G. Burchell, New York, Picador, 2005, p. 15.

in an open letter to the then Prime Minister of Iran, Mehdi Bazargan, explicitly expressed his concern about the revolutionary trials and executions of the officials of the previous regime by the revolutionaries, and, emphasizing the issues of justice and injustice, warned that this is exactly the point at which revolutions get lost and go astray. At the end of the letter, he asks Bazargan "to do what is necessary in order that the people will never regret the uncompromising force with which it has just liberated itself."[26] Less than a month after the letter, in his last note on Iran, "Is It Useless to Revolt?", Foucault repeated his previous sympathetic stance on the Iranian uprising and made a clear distinction between that uprising and the post-revolutionary government: "The spirituality of those who were going to their deaths has no similarity whatsoever with the bloody government of a fundamentalist clergy."[27] Thus, he answers the question in the title of this text as follows: "I do not agree with those who would say, 'It is useless to revolt, it will always be the same.' [...] One must be respectful when a singularity arises and intransigent as soon as the state violates universals."[28] If we put this Foucault next to his own reading of Kant, we will see that his texts on Iran are no longer scandalous exceptions that should be ignored when measured against his other work. Rather, for him, the Iranian revolt was an example of what he tried to theorize in his reading of Kant and other later works, namely the inventing of a new kind of subject who, constantly transforming herself through certain practices, not only does not want to "be governed quite so much," but does not want to be governed at all – an anarchist subject, following Malabou. In other words, Foucault saw those who rose up "in front of the gallows and the machine guns" as examples of a subject that he conceptualized in his later works – the subject who, according to Pierre Macherey, is the product of ethical labour through which an individual transforms into a subject.[29] In his reading of Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784), Foucault provides a unique definition of modernity, according to which Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi maintains that, for Foucault, the Iranian revolt was

[26] Foucault, "Open Letter to Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan", in Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islam*, p. 263.

[27] Foucault, "Is It Useless to Revolt?", in *ibid*., p. 265.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 266.

[29] Pierre Macherey, "Foucault: Ethics and Subjectivity", trans. T. Stolze, in *In a Materialist Way: Selected Essays*, W. Montag (ed.), New York and London, Verso, 1998, p. 97.

an Enlightenment moment,[30] although, he does not particularly mention that revolt in such reading. He, instead, sought the exemplary figure of his "anarchist" (Malabou) or "ethical" (Macherey) subject in the West in general and in ancient Greece and early Christianity in particular:

> Thinking back on Kant's text, I wonder whether we may not envisage modernity as an attitude rather than as a period of history. And by 'attitude,' I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality [*actualité*]; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. No doubt, a bit like what the Greeks called an ethos.[31]

Judith Revel sees Foucault's reading of Kant as a break from his previous two periods: archaeology and genealogy. While in the period of archaeology his analysis was limited to the study of "the differences between different systems of past thought," and in the period of genealogy to "the difference between our own system of thought and previous ones," in his reading of Kant's "What is Enlightenment?" Foucault suggests a form of philosophical research that, "taking the contemporary reality [*actualité*] as a material, interrogates itself less on the basis of existing difference between different pasts, or in relation to those pasts, than on the constancy of a 'permanent process.'"[32] That is why in this reading he emphasizes the *present* as a condition of possibility for philosophy in Kant. In other words, in his reading of Kant, Foucault addresses the difference at stake in the two periods of archaeology and genealogy in the very present, thus dividing the latter itself into two. As Revel states, "the difference is now what could be imagined between a present that we belong to and a future and that is, at least in part, ours to construct."[33] In his archaeological and genealogical works, Foucault adopted, as mentioned above, the method of periodization and differentiation, which was based on the "characteristic mark": any episteme in the past

30 Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution after the Enlightenment*, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, p. 159.

31 Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", trans. C. Porter, in *Ethics: Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984, Vol. 1*, P. Rabinow (ed.), New York, New Press, 2003, p. 309.

32 Judith Revel, "'What Are We At the Present Time?' Foucault and the Question of the Present", in S. Fuggle, Y. Lanci and M. Tazzioli (eds.), *Foucault and the History of Our Present*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 17.

33 *Ibid*., pp. 18–19.

can be historicized by the characteristics that differentiate it from other epistemes in the same or different historical periods. However, in his later works, Foucault abandons this methodology and instead adopts a method in which the emphasis is put on the *difference* itself, which is now inherent in the present and structurally divides it into *the present to which we belong* and *the possibility of changing it*. This possibility of changing the present as a structural possibility in the present itself encourages Foucault to read Kant's transcendental critique in such a way that he separates its two elements, the transcendental and the critique, and puts emphasis only on the latter:

> [T]he critical question today has to be turned back into a positive one: in what is given to us as universal necessary obligatory what place is occupied by whatever is singular contingent and the product of arbitrary constraints? The point in brief is to transform the critique conducted in the form of necessary limitation into a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression. [...] The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them [*de leur franchissement possible*].[34]

Here, according to Colin Koopman: "Foucault is a Kantian but not a transcendental idealist in that Foucault took from Kant the project of critique but not the project of transcendental critique."[35] The tension between the historical and the transcendental has always been one of Foucault's preoccupations throughout his works so that the difference between the three periods of his intellectual life did not diminish the importance of this tension, and has always been one of the points of interest in Foucault's works for scholars. Here, we can allude to the famous debate between the Cercle d'Épistémologie and Foucault in the *Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, where the topic of the debate was Foucault's avoidance of the transcendental:

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34 Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?", pp. 315–319.

35 Colin Koopman, "Historical Critique or Transcendental Critique in Foucault: Two Kantian Lineages", *Foucault Studies*, 8 (2010), p. 106.

> More than the superficial veneer of structuralism, what made Foucault's work an object of interest for the Cercle d'Épistémologie was the common concern to develop a methodology that avoided any appeal to the transcendental, be it phenomenological ground or synthetic consciousness. The desire for 'analysis' was integrally connected with the desire to have a theory of the subject that was consistent with such a method's disavowals of the transcendental.[36]

However, despite his "method's disavowals of the transcendental," Foucault, after this debate, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) introduced the term the "historical *a priori,*" as opposed to "the formal *a priori*", appealing to a kind of transcendental that is, for him, historical:

>]W[hat I mean by the term is an *a priori* that is not a condition of validity for judgements, but a condition of reality for statements. It is not a question of rediscovering what might legitimize an assertion, but of freeing the conditions of emergence of statements, the law of their coexistence with others, the specific form of their mode of being, the principles according to which they survive, become transformed, and disappear.[37]

As we can see, Foucault's conception of the transcendental is not consistent; he takes various positions on various occasions that sometimes contradict each other. In this regard, we can mention his discussion with Giulio Preti in 1972, wherein he states that:

> I am not Kantian or Cartesian, precisely because I refuse an equation on the transcendental level between subject and thinking "I." I am convinced that there exist, if not exactly structures, then at least rules for the functioning of knowledge which have arisen in the course of history and within which can be located the various subjects. [...] In all of my work I strive instead to avoid any reference to this transcendental as a condition of the possibility for any knowledge. When I say that I strive to avoid it, I don't mean that I am sure of succeeding. [...] I try to historicize to the utmost to leave as little space as possible to the transcendental.

[36] Knox Peden, "Foucault and the Subject of Method", in P. Hallward and K. Peden (eds.), *Concept and Form, Volume 2: Interviews and essays on Cahiers pour l'Analyse*, New York and London, Verso, 2012, p. 71.

[37] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 143.

> I cannot exclude the possibility that one day I will have to confront an irreducible *residuum* which will be, in fact, the transcendental.[38]

Contrary to what Foucault says regarding the possibility of confronting such *residuum* as the transcendental in the future, such a confrontation had already occurred not only in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, as mentioned above, but also in *The Order of Things*, as the main text of the archaeological period. According to Knox Peden, if we accept that in the latter, which is an attempt to historicize epistemes, the emergence of one episteme and the transition from one episteme to another means that each episteme is finite as "the episteme in which Foucault's own effort must be located bears the signal mark of finitude," then it can be concluded that "the emergence of the concept of the historicity of epistemes has *the specific episteme of finitude as its historical condition*"[39] – one could say, the epistemic finitude as the historical *a priori*. Hence, the question is not simply the confrontation with the transcendental, which we just demonstrated had already occurred in Foucault's works. Rather than confronting the transcendental, it is important to accept the consequences of such a confrontation, which he refuses to do. It is safe to say that, in this particular case, Foucault is an example of how ideology works today. Commenting on our inability to solve the problems that are unfolding before our eyes in the world today, Alenka Zupančič argues that it is "as if a precipitated recognition and knowledge about some problem (which we now know all about) actually helped us disregard this very problem (as problem.)"[40] Alluding to the psychoanalytic notion of the "fetishist disavowal" and Freud's discussion of the phenomenon of *fausse reconnaissance* (false memory), she argues that our knowledge of these problems serves as a fetish that prevents such problems themselves from being solved:

> In the case of fetishist disavowal we are dealing with the split between knowledge and belief ('I know very well that there is no X, but I keep believing there is'), in which the fetish functions as material existence (form) of our disavowed beliefs. We don't need to secretly believe what we know is not the case, because the fetish 'believes' it in our stead. The belief is outsourced to the fetish, while we know

[38] Michel Foucault, "'An Historian of Culture,' debate with Giulio Preti (1972)", trans. J. Becker and J. Cascaito, in S. Lotringer (ed.), *Foucault Live (Interviews, 1961–1984)*, New York, Semiotext(e), 1989, pp. 98–99.

[39] Knox Peden, "Foucault and the Subject of Method", p. 74 (emphasis added).

[40] Alenka Zupančič, "'You'd have to be stupid not to see that'", *Parallax*, 22 (4/2016), p. 421.

> perfectly well how things stand. [...] In the classical structure of fetishist disavowal the fetish takes upon itself the material existence (the existence in the reality) of our disavowed belief, which thus persists against our better knowledge. What happens with the structure that we are pursuing here, however, is that *knowledge itself starts to function as fetish*: the precipitated knowledge (the awareness of how things really stand) makes it possible for us to ignore what we know, and even to actively support what we know to be wrong.[41]

Could it not be said that Foucault's confrontation with the transcendental follows the same structure? As if Foucault knows very well that "there exist, if not exactly structures, then at least rules for the functioning of knowledge," but he keeps believing in avoiding "any reference to this transcendental as a condition of the possibility for any knowledge." Thus, it could be said that when the Cercle d'Épistémologie emphasizes that in Foucault's work the historical serves as the transcendental and Foucault himself confirms this by inventing the concept of the historical *a priori* in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, it does not mean that he has given up on refusing "an equation on the transcendental level between subject and thinking 'I'." The problem, then, is not simply whether there is the transcendental in Foucault's work. Rather, it is how Foucault avoids confronting the consequences of the presence of the transcendental in his works precisely by affirming it as the historical *a priori* or as an irreducible *residuum*. For further explanation, we could here allude to Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis that, in this respect, stands in stark contrast to Foucault. Although it may be misleading to use the term transcendental in psychoanalysis, here we take a risk and suggest considering the "unconscious" as a specific kind of transcendental that "takes place precisely as a *discontinuity* (of the present, and of being) [and] appears as a complication, torsion of the (present) being as such."[42] If we accept this suggestion, then it could be said that throughout its history, Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis has always been patiently and painstakingly dealing – both at the clinical level, through *symptoms*, and at the theoretical level, through conceptual articulations such as "*objet petit a*" – with the traces (*residues*) of the unconscious within the discursive (language, structure, the symbolic). Thus, unlike Foucault, who "tries to historicize to the utmost to leave

41 *Ibid*., pp. 421–422.

42 See Alenka Zupančič, "Hegel and Freud: Between Aufhebung and Verneinung", *Crisis & Critique*, 4 (1/2017), p. 490.

as little space as possible to the transcendental" as *residuum*, the psychoanalytic *residue* is essentially the trace of the unconscious in the discursive and what structurally divides the latter from within. In psychoanalysis, it is through such a *residue* that the unconscious as the transcendental is retrospectively determined, and not the other way around. This means that the unconscious is not a *positive* entity from which everything originates; it is, rather, the negative dimension of being, the missing signifier that we only realize later, through its trace in reality. Thus, conceptually determining such a trace, psychoanalytic theory emphasizes that there is a structural link between the unconscious and its *residue*, as the latter is always the (unconscious) *residue*. On the contrary, one could say that there is, in Foucault, a strong tendency to cut off the link between the unconscious as the transcendental and such a *residue*, banishing the former to somewhere outside the discursive and treating the latter as a *purely* historical construction. Such an approach can best be seen in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, where Foucault in his (mis)reading of the theory of sexuality in psychoanalysis, without mentioning the term the unconscious one single time throughout his book, separates sexuality from the unconscious, while these two are inseparable in Freud, and sexuality is always the (unconscious) sexuality.[43] Through his Iranian experience, Foucault was pushed toward confronting the internal difference/division of history as the discursive, leading him, in his reading of Kant, to see such a difference/division in the present itself, although he never clarifies how this structural division arises and what its relation to the transcendental is. In other words, emphasizing a structural difference within the present itself, whereby it is divided between *the present to which we belong* and *the possibility of changing it*, Foucault somehow confronts the consequences of the presence of the transcendental in the discursive, although he never explains where this difference comes from – as Lacan and Deleuze do – and how the present is divided. From now on, Foucault will be involved in this structural difference/division between what we belong to and the possibility of changing it. Here we can note a short text devoted to Pierre Boulez in 1982, where Foucault tries to illustrate how this structural difference/division within Boulez's musical thought unfolds:

[43] See Alenka Zupančič, "Biopolitics, Sexuality and the Unconscious", *Paragraph*, 39 (1/2016), p. 51.

> What he [Boulez] expected from thought was precisely that it always enables him to do something different from what he was doing. He demanded that it open up, in the highly regulated very deliberate game that he played, a new space of freedom. One heard some people accuse him of technical gratuitousness, others, of too much theory. But for him the main thing was to conceive of practice strictly in terms of its internal necessities without submitting to any of them as if they were sovereign requirements. What is the role of thought, then, in what one does if it is to be neither a mere savoir-faire nor pure theory? Boulez showed what it is – to supply the strength for breaking the rules with the act that brings them into play.[44]

Here, there is also a difference that divides thought from within and becomes its driving force for "*breaking the rules with the act that brings them into play*." However, our surprise at this new image of Foucault is yet to come.

In a text entitled "Life: Experience and Science," which is a modified version of his introduction to the English translation of George Canguilhem's *The Normal and the Pathological* (1966), we face the most intense inversion of Foucault's thought in the last period of his intellectual life compared to the early and middle ones. Although the text was published less than a year after his premature death from AIDS in the January-March 1985 issue of *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, it was, as Giorgio Agamben pointed out, "submitted to the journal in April 1984 and therefore constitutes the last text to which the author could have given his *imprimatur*"[45] – thus, we can take it as Foucault's intellectual testament. While in his reading of Kant he transfers the *difference* to the present, and in the text on Boulez he does so to musical thought, in "Life: Experience and Science" he refers to an inherent wrongness in life which disturbs its vitality from within:

> [A]t the most basic level of life, the processes of coding and decoding give way to a chance occurrence that, before becoming a disease, a deficiency, or a monstros-

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44 Michel Foucault, "Pierre Boulez, Passing Through the Screen", trans. R. Hurley, in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, J. D. Faubion (ed.), New York, The New Press, 1998, p. 244.

45 Giorgio Agamben, "Absolute Immanence", in *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 220.

> ity, is something like a disturbance in the informative system, something like a "mistake."[46]

Here, we see a Foucault who is opposed to the author of *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), in which he was "under the inspiration of Xavier Bichat's new vitalism and definition of life as 'the set of functions that resist death.'"[47] Now, for Foucault, life is "the proper domain of error" where:

> [L]ife – and this is its radical feature – is that which is capable of error. [...] [W]ith man, life has led to a living being that is never completely in the right place, that is destined to "err" and to be "wrong." [...] [O]ne must agree that error is the root of what produces human thought and its history. The opposition of the true and the false, the values that are attributed to the one and the other, the power effects that different societies and different institutions link to that division – all this may be nothing but the most belated response to that possibility of error inherent in life. [...] ["E]rror" constitutes not a neglect or a delay of the promised fulfillment but the dimension peculiar to the life of human beings and indispensable to the duration [*temps*] of the species.[48]

Not only do we hear the resonance of "that Nietzschean idea of 'ennoblement through degeneration' which lies at the very core of the Foucauldian notion of life as *error*,"[49] but Foucault, without being aware of it, speaks to us in a Hegelian tone wherein he takes the whole dynamism of thought and history as a *belated* response to error as the condition of possibility for such a dynamism. It could even be said that by considering history and thought as *belated* responses to error, Foucault's conceptualization of error comes closer to the concept *the death drive*. However, unlike error which serves the purpose of "the duration [*temps*] of the species," the death drive is fundamentally indifferent to any purpose, and its radicalism comes precisely from this lack of purposefulness. Not only does

46 Michel Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science", trans R. Hurley, in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, J. D. Faubion (ed.), New York, The New Press 1998, p. 476.

47 Agamben, "Absolute Immanence", p. 220.

48 Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science", p. 476.

49 Marco Piasentier, "Foucault and the Two Approaches to Biopolitics", in *Biopolitical Governance: Race, Gender and Economy*, Hannah Richter (ed.), London and New York, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018, p. 33.

the death drive not care about life/death and "the duration [*temps*] of the species," it also does not make of the very lack of purpose a purpose.

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Lidija Šumah*

The Final Countdown: Fascism, Jazz, and the Afterlife

Count till All

It is well known that Mussolini was not a fan of opera. Instead, he praised and advocated for the "theater of masses," which could accommodate a large number of people.[1] Though a theater of the masses in its own right and in its own time, opera houses could no longer keep up with the political demands for mass-consumable culture.[2] In the early 1920s, beginning with the Milanese La Scala, the Italian regime started undermining and reorganizing the so-called *ente autonomo* model of the opera houses to bring all private and public opera

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2 I quote Benito Mussolini: "The time has come to prepare a theater of masses, a theater able to accommodate fifteen or twenty thousand. La Scala was adequate when, a century ago, Milan's total population equaled 180,000 inhabitants. It is not today when the population has reached one million. The lack of seats creates the need for high prices which drive the crowds away." (Quoted from Roberto Dainotto, "The Saxophone and the Pastoral. Italian Jazz in the Age of Fascist Modernity", *Italica*, 85 (2–3/2008), pp. 273–294.) *Cf*. Michael Steinberg: "Opera, most specifically Italian opera, plays a surprisingly scant role for the fascist regime. [...] Benito Mussolini was not interested in opera. He favored the kind of spectacle that could be matched with new technology – film and sound amplification – and that could reach at least 30,000 spectators at once. The confines of the theater had no place in his fascism of immense scale." (Michael Steinberg, "The Politics and Aesthetics of Operatic Modernism", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 36 (4/2006), pp. 635–636.) For a detailed analysis of the relationship between fascism and the use of (new) technologies, see Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Fascist Mass Spectacle", *Representations*, 43 (1993), pp. 89–125, and Jeffrey T. Schnapp, "Epic Demonstrations: Fascist Modernity and the 1932 Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution", in R. I. Golsan (ed.), *Fascism, Aesthetics, and Culture*, Hanover, NH, University Press of New England, 1992, pp. 1–37. For the collision of politics and popular culture with national identity and technology in fascist Italy, see Anna Harwell Calenza, *Jazz Italian Style: From its Origins in New Orleans to Fascist Italy and Sinatra*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017.

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houses under its control.[3] In the early 1930s, all the main opera houses "transferred the property of the theater building from *ente autonomo* to the municipality, and dictated that the president of the institution was to be appointed by [...] Mussolini" himself.[4] Consequently, the opera repertories, informed by nationalistic ideology and subject to censorship, drastically changed, and the selection process tended to favor (living) Italian composers. By the time anti-Semitic legislation came into force in 1938, most major compositions were already ignored or began to systematically disappear from programs. At La Scala, for instance, one could no longer listen to Rossini's *Mosè* or Verdi's *Nabucco*. However, works by Arnold Schoenberg, Felix Mendelssohn, Kurt Weill, Alban Berg, Anton Webern, Paul Hindemith, and other (living) Jewish composers were intentionally overlooked, too.[5]

That is why it is all the more surprising that in an interview from 1932 Mussolini defined race as a feeling and not a reality. The political censorship of the aesthetic was itself grounded in an aesthetic dimension of the political. I quote from Mussolini's interview with Emil Ludwig:

> Of course, there are no pure races left; not even the Jews have kept their blood unmingled. Successful crossings have often promoted the energy and the beauty of a nation. *Race! It is a feeling, not a reality*; ninety-five per cent, at least, is a feeling. Nothing will ever make me believe that biologically pure races can be shown to exist today. [...] No such doctrine will ever find wide acceptance here in Italy.[6]

Mussolini juxtaposes race as a feeling to race as reality, seemingly delivering it of its absolute dependence on supposed biological substance. Racism thus construed pertains to subject rather than substance. However, while Mussolini may be said here to deliver race of its absolute dependence on presupposed (biological) substantiality, he does not deliver it of absolute dependence itself. Race is

3 *Cf*. Paola Merli, "La Scala in the Aftermath of the Liberation, 25 April 1945 to 22 June 1946", *The Musical Quarterly*, 100 (2/2017), pp. 155–198.

4 Paola Merli, "La Scala in the Aftermath of the Liberation, 25. April 1945 to 22 June 1946" (pre-published version), p. 8. Available at http://eprints.nottingham.ac.uk/51214/.

5 *Ibid*., p. 18.

6 Emil Ludwig, *Talks with Mussolini*, Boston, Little, Brown, and Company, 1933, pp. 69–70 (my emphasis). Quoted from Frank M. Snowden, "Race Propaganda in Italy", *Phylon* (1940–1956), 1 (2/1940), p. 104.

posited here as a matter of belief, and racists are absolutely dependent on it. We may be reminded of Friedrich Schleiermacher's notion of religious faith as being entirely dependent on a feeling of absolute dependence.[7] Furthermore, we should remind ourselves of Hegel's reply to Schleiermacher: "[Then] a dog would be the best Christian, for it possesses this [felling of absolute dependence] in the highest degree and lives mainly in this feeling." Dogs that are fed the bone of race so as to secure their own "salvation"[8] are racist.

After the official implementation of the *Manifesto of Race*,[9] the state apparatus stripped Italian Jews of their citizenship and prohibited them from participating not just in opera but also in jazz and swing music, which at that time started to massively increase in popularity. *Manifesto of Race* was first published on 14 July 1938 in *Il Giornale d'Italia* under the title "Il Fascismo e il problema della razza" and republished a month later in *La Difesa della Razza* in an attempt to popularize racism. It was written by the members of the Fascist Party and several established scientists who, in the form of ten propositions, delivered biological explanations of and justifications for the notion of race. Significantly, a month before the document was made public it was circulated anonymously under the title *Il Manifesto degli Scienziati Razzisti* (Manifesto of Racist Scientists).[10] But what was distinctive about the *Manifesto* was not so much the ongoing hostile attitude towards Jews, but also the introduction of a hostile attitude toward people of color.[11] This turn from anti-Semitism to racism, however, did not undermine the hostility toward Jews, but rather strengthened it even further. The *Manifesto* effectively reduced the "intolerance" within its own, already fascist-oriented group and increased the difference between Italians and "the rest".[12]

Another distinctive feature of the *Manifesto* is summed up by the old accusation against Jews as being mere usurers and emotionally inert people not ca-

7 See Richard Crouter, *Friedrich Schleiermacher: Between Enlightenment and Romanticism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

8 Quoted from *ibid*., p. 91.

9 For a more detailed account, see Snowden, "Race Propaganda in Italy", pp. 103–111.

10 *Cf*. "The Italian Racial Laws", Centro Primo Levi, New York, October 2011, https://primolevicenter.org/events/the-italian-racial-laws/.

11 *Cf*. *ibid*.

12 *Cf*. Theodor W. Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda", in A. Arato and E. Gebhardt, *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York, Continuum, p. 130.

pable of producing the real passions necessary to produce music. Similarly, in his controversial article "Judaism in Music"[13] Wagner posed a question of "how it grew possible to the Jew to become a musician" and claimed that if "we hear a Jew speak, we are unconsciously offended by the entire want of purely-human expression in his discourse: the cold indifference of its peculiar 'blubber' ('*Gelabber*') never by any chance rises to the ardour of a higher, heartfelt passion. [...] Never does the Jew excite himself in [a] mutual interchange of feelings with us, but – so far as we are concerned – only in the altogether special egoistic interest of his vanity or profit [...]."[14] In making his anachronistic claim, Wagner draws on, in a sinister spin, the Kierkegaardian idea of music as a medium of sensuality – a point to which I return in the third section of this text.[15] However, Wagner names exceptions to this rule. First, he speaks favorably of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Heine, Mendelssohn, etc. A few paragraphs later, he approvingly mentions – and capitalizes – only three (Jewish) names, namely Mendelssohn,[16] Heine,[17] and Börne, and then, in the very last paragraph, he highlights a single name, the one true exception: BÖRNE, who

> came among us seeking for redemption: he found it not, and had to learn that only with our redemption, too, into genuine Manhood, would he ever find it. To become Man at once with us, however, means firstly for the Jew as much as ceasing to be Jew. And this had BÖRNE done. Yet Börne, of all others, teaches us that this redemption can not be reached in ease and cold, indifferent complacence, but costs – as cost it must for us– sweat, anguish, want, and all the dregs of suffering and sorrow. [...] But bethink ye, that one only thing can redeem you from the burden of your curse: the redemption of Ahasuerus – Going under![18]

13 Richard Wagner, "Judaism in Music", trans. W. A. Ellis, in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works, Volume III. The Theatre*, London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., Ltd., 1907, pp. 79–100.

14 *Ibid*., p. 85.

15 For an extensive analysis of Kierkegaard's thesis on the ultimately Christian invention of carnal sensuality, see Simon Hajdini, *Na kratko o dolgčasu, lenobi in počitku*, Ljubljana, Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, 2012.

16 "FELIX MENDELSSOHN BARTHOLDY [...] has shown us that a Jew may have the amplest store of specific talents, may own the finest and most varied culture, the highest and the tenderest sense of honour." (Wagner, "Judaism in Music", p. 93.)

17 "He was the conscience of Judaism, just as Judaism is the evil conscience of our modern Civilization." (*Ibid*., p. 100.)

18 *Ibid*.

Here, I propose reading the above-mentioned old accusation against Jews against the backdrop of the claim that every virulent anti-Semitism depends on making an exception (which in turn proves the rule). In order to truly hate something in its entirety, one needs to make an exception. Within the context of Wagner's essay, this implies that to "exclude" all Jews, i.e., *everybody*, from the domain of music, one needs a figure of the Jew that stands for *Judaism disembodied*. And that is precisely what Wagner does when subtracting, *counting down*: first, Wagner discusses a series of artists; then, only Mendelssohn, Heine, and Börne are left; until – finally – only Börne is left standing in this final countdown.

Here, a type of exception is announced that follows the *logic of count till none* and to which I will return in more detail in the final section of this text. For now, I would like to claim that every addition comes at the expense of subtraction; whenever we add up, something must necessarily be subtracted so as to arrive at the desired result. Concretely, while adding seats at the opera houses, for example, Mussolini simultaneously excludes/subtracts Jewish composers. Or, to take another example, from Arthur Rosenberg, who in his 1934 analysis of the origins of fascism[19] famously argues that the distinctive feature of fascism is not its ideology but rather its origin myth, entirely premised on the operation of addition: according to the myth in question, Hitler started with six followers, who then became a thousand, then a million, then 40 million, until finally encompassing the entire German nation.[20] Or, in the case of Italy, how on 23 March 1919 in Milan, when the first Congress of the Italian Fascists took place, there was a gathering of 145 people, which finally grew to encompass the entire Italian nation.[21] While counting "their own" (*till all are included*), the fascists at the same time exclude "the others" (Jews, people of color, homosexuals, etc.). Put differently: the fascists simultaneously *count till all (are included) and count till none (are left)*. This double count provides the model and basic mechanism of racism.

[19] Arthur Rosenberg, "Fascism as a Mass Movement", *Historical Materialism*, 20 (1/2012), pp. 144–189. *Cf*. also Georges Bataille, "The Psychological Structure of Fascism", in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927–1939*, A. Stoekl (ed.), Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1985, pp. 137–160.

[20] Rosenberg, "Fasicsm as a Mass Movement", p. 144.

[21] *Ibid*.

The point I am trying to make here is that counting alone, either *forward*, as was the case with the myths that sustained the fascist mass movements, or *in reverse*, as is the case with Wagner's count, already *makes the difference*.

Dubbed Music

But let me return to the relationship between Judaism and music, specifically jazz in fascist Italy. In 1940, an article appeared in *Minerva* that claimed that "Jews have used jazz for economic reasons only: this music has become an instrument for ideological propaganda and for the corruption of our spiritual health."[22] However, at that time in Italy, but also in the rest of Europe, especially in France, Germany, and England,[23] it was not only Jews and people of color who were not allowed to produce jazz, as it was banned in general. Although the reception of jazz in Europe varied, it was generally perceived as a "foreign" and "degenerate" art form, originating in African American culture. Jazz first arrived in Italy in 1924 with American soldiers. It soon became associated with the wealthy bourgeois and other nobles, who could afford to travel abroad, while signaling the barbarism and corruption synonymous with capitalism.[24] Moreover, the corrupting nature of jazz was further accentuated by its close relationship to dance, further signaling perversion and testifying to corrupted morals.[25]

All these negative connotations leading up to the prohibition of jazz music presented the political regime with an additional problem: jazz was precisely *the* art form that attracted large crowds, the form of evental gathering that Mussolini was opting for. In his brilliant essay "The Saxophone and the Pastoral: Italian Jazz in the Age of Fascist Modernity," Robert Dainotto points out that in Italy jazz was marked by a specific ambiguity: on the one hand, it was unwelcome due to its African American roots, and as such did not adhere to or glorify the Italian

22 Max Merz, "Noi E II 'Jazz'", in *Minerva, Rivista delle riviste*, 22 (1940), no pagination. *Cf*. Dainotto, "The Saxophone and the Pastoral", p. 279.

23 Most scholars agree that the birthplace of jazz is New Orleans, where it developed in the 1910s, and that it first arrived in Europe after the end of World War I. *Cf*. Calenza, *Jazz Italian Style*, p. 4.

24 Calenza, *Jazz Italian Style*, p. 4.

25 However, that which was seen by some as perversion, meant liberation for others, especially women. It is widely accepted today that the jazz age, which began in the 1920s, goes hand in hand with the women's rights movement.

tradition; but on the other hand, jazz served very well to protect the "national interests in the light of mass society."[26] Along the same paradoxical lines, Ruth Ben-Ghiat has argued that although jazz was imported, the Italian regime was able to paint it as both fascist and Italian.[27] Ben-Ghiat speaks of this paradoxical process in terms of a "*politics of display and appropriate*." To a surprising extent, fascist Italy was able to absorb, assimilate, and recreate "that which it has received from other races, making it something entirely [Italian]."[28] Jazz, so it seems, although officially banned and undesired by the State, was effectively appropriated and put to use by the State in order to lead the country into a new era. Following Adriano Mazzoletti's *Il Jazz in Italia*, Roberto Dainotto further shows that no jazz concert was ever cancelled in Italy and that no other country broadcast as much jazz music on the radio as fascist Italy. The peak of this acceleration was seen especially from 1938 to 1942, when the strictest racial laws were in force. Alessandro Pavolini, the then Italian Minister of Popular Culture who ordered the writing of the *Manifesto*, considered listening to jazz a "fascist duty."[29] When trying to understand this strange phenomenon, one is led to consider the question and problem of exceptionality, i.e., of what type of exception had to be operative in Italy for this to have been possible.

One of the most thoughtful answers to this question was provided by Dainotto who, echoing Paul Gilroy's *Against the Race*, claims that

> the racial element associated with this music represented for Italian fascism, especially after the racial laws of 1938, an opportunity, rather than a problem, to "aestheticize" the entire political question of race. [...] In [1935], Louis Armstrong's February concert in Turin was organized with the full support of the regime, especially of Vittorio Mussolini. In 1936, in a climate of full cultural autarchy, virtually everything could be broadcasted as long as Louis Armstrong would be introduced

[26] Dainotto, "The Saxophone and the Pastoral", p. 279.

[27] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001, p. 3.

[28] *Ibid*., p. 33. *Cf*. Dainotto, "The Saxophone and the Pastoral", p. 280.

[29] *Cf*. Gianlorenzo Capano's review of Camilla Poesio's "Everything is Rhythm. Everything is Swing. Jazz, Fascism, and Italian Society", *Difesa*, https://en.difesaonline.it/evidenza/recensioni/camilla-poesio-tutto-è-ritmo-tutto-è-swing-il-jazz-il-fascismo-e-la-società, accessed 5 September 2022. *Cf*. Camilla Poesio, *Tutto è ritmo, tutto è swing. Il Jazz, il fascismo e la società italiana*, Milano, Mondadori Education, 2018.

> as Luigi Braccioforte, and Benny Goodman as Benito Buonuomo – as if to signal the autarchic capability of Italian culture to absorb and appropriate any alien element.[30]

Domestication of the names of foreign jazz artists[31] is only one side of the coin, the other one being the introduction of the comical element. Trivially speaking, to some jazz enthusiasts, not necessarily familiar with the Italian language, Luigi Braccioforte or Benito Buonuomo already sounds comical. The names have the same effect as revoicing or dubbing, as if these artists were the very first proponents of *the dub*.

According to Dainotto, Louis Armstrong's quirky stage persona was the first instance of this merging of jazz music with the comic: "It is exactly this association of jazz with the comic, I believe, that explains the surging popularity of jazz in the years following the implementation of the racial laws. More than the mere lure of the exotic, jazz could banalize and trivialize the entire question of race, which could thus be reduced to a comical episode on the path to Italy's historical realization of its own Aryan-ness."[32] It seems that this excessive disregard for one's own dignity turned out to be the only way to circumvent the laws.

In retrospect, this comical aspect of jazz is perhaps best captured by a flood of sitcoms and movies attempting to embody the spirit of fascist Italy. Here, the two most notable characters come to mind: the annoying captain Alberto Bertorelli (from the British sitcom *Allo Allo!*) with his catchphrase "What a mistake-a to make-a!", and Ferdinando "Nando" Mericoni (from *An American in Rome*), who one day realizes that his future is not in Rome, where he was born and raised, but in the United States. Nando Americanizes his life by mimicking the sounds of the English language and by trying to live out everyday situations as though

30 Dainotto, "The Saxophone and the Pastoral", pp. 280, 285.

31 In her *Everything is Rhythm. Everything is Swing*, Camilla Poesio lines up various replacements and periphrases used to replace originally Anglo-Saxon words: most notably, jazz with "giazzo" or sometimes simply "musica ritmica", and, perhaps most unusually, "accordion" instead of "saxophone". (Poesio, *Tutto è ritmo, tutto è swing*, pp. 87–88 and 115–116, quoted from Ben Earle, "Camilla Poesio, *Tutto è ritmo, tutto è swing. Il Jazz, il fascismo e la società italiana*", *Transposition*, 8 (2019), https://journals.openedition.org/transposition/2908.

32 Dainotto, "The Saxophone and the Pastoral", p. 290.

he was a character in some Hollywood movie. Both Nando and captain Bertorelli are irreducible to the role they imagined for themselves. Their irreducibility to an American identity (in the case of Nando) or to captainship (in the case of Bertorelli) resembles Wagner's depiction of a Jew and his "peculiar blubber," which is irreducible to the highest passion necessary to produce music.[33]

Here, I would like to direct my focus at the question of the fascist regime itself and its leader, which had a stake in sustaining this type of excessiveness. In his analysis of Freud's theory and the structure of fascist propaganda, Adorno argues that the key feature of a fascist leader is his "orality," or more specifically, his "compulsion to speak incessantly and to befool the others."[34] For Adorno, the sole reason for the leader to deliver these kinds of speeches was not to persuade the masses with his arguments. Such freely "associative speech" involved occasional absence of self-control, "a temporary lack of ego control": "[i]n order successfully to meet the unconscious dispositions of his audience, the agitator to speak simply *turns his own unconscious outward*."[35] One could argue that instead of entering analysis, the fascist leader exits analysis, deciding to display his unconscious in front of everybody, thus turning the multitude of his followers into his mass analysts, or into a crowd of analysts. While the "psychology of fascism," as Adorno would have it, is manipulative through and through,[36] and serves one purpose only, namely to subjugate the masses, this subjugation is not achieved through the repression of the masses as correlative to the speaker holding back and repressing his own true views, but rather through the process of externalizing or publicizing his own unconscious desire, thereby conferring it on the listeners. Thus, the crowd is not a proper Freudian analyst. On the contrary, the crowd identifies with the leader's displayed desire, his meaningless babble, which is the minimal mark of its submission. At the same time, this is the first step toward reducing any intolerance within one's own group, which, by extension, then entails greater hostility toward groups deemed foreign.

To return to Ben-Ghiat's "politics of display and appropriate," we can claim that the fascist leader *displays* his unconscious in front of the masses, while

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33 A Jew's song, Wagner writes, "is just Talk aroused to highest passion," and not a "speech of passion" that defines the properly musical. (Wagner, "Judaism in Music", p. 8)

34 Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda", p. 132.

35 *Ibid*., p. 133 (my emphasis).

36 *Cf*. *ibid*.

the masses, the addressees of his unconscious babble, *appropriate* his unconscious by identifying with it. Moreover, this identification, as both Adorno and Dainotto claim, entails a specific comical element that often takes the form of mockery (of the object of identification). That is why captain Bertorelli, for example, is so funny to watch. Instead of being a true invader of France, he is reduced to a comical figure incapable of causing any real harm. The funniest thing about him is precisely his irreducibility to the role entrusted to him. He is not a captain; he is the guy next door, a nobody, masquerading as somebody wearing a ridiculous peacock-feathered hat. Put differently, the solemn and serious core of fascism in fact amounts to an object of ridicule – however, this ridiculous aspect of fascist domination is the lever of its authority. Recall Adorno's warning: in Nazi Germany, "everybody used to make fun of certain propagandistic phrases such as 'blood and soil' (*Blut und Boden*), jokingly called *Blubo*, or the concept of the Nordic race from which the parodistic verb *aufnorden* (to 'northernize') was derived."[37]

In order to unpack this thesis, let us return to the figure of *Il Duce*. Romano Mussolini, his fourth child and an ardent jazz pianist (!) provided some valuable insight into Il Duce's musical taste. Here is a quote from his memoirs: "Everybody knows of the Duce's passion for the violin: my mother once told me he used to play near [my sister] Edda's cradle, in order to calm her down when we used to live in the house of via Merenda. Some reader will be surprised, but the *Duce* was also a jazz lover."[38] Though not a fan of the opera, Il Duce, as well as the rest of his extended family,[39] were fans of jazz. But what exactly does this imply? Dainotto's claim that the regime was never serious in its intention to ban jazz music falls somewhat short and requires further unpacking and specification so as to account for this apparent contradiction.

In their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer provide a key to understanding this seeming contradiction with a reference to the schema of the

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37 *Ibid*.

38 Romano Mussolini, *Il Duce Mio Padre*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2004, p. 72; quoted from Dainotto, "The Saxophone and the Pastoral", p. 281.

39 "Yet, the fact remains that Romano, starting his career in 1948 as the accordion player of Ugo Calise's Star Jazz Quartet, grew up to become a leading pianist of the Italian jazz scene; that his brother Vittorio was, in fact, a renowned jazz critic in the thirties; and that, at a closer look, the regime never meant seriously to suppress jazz music at all." (*Ibid*.)

anti-Semitic reaction. When something prohibited is identified with the prohibiting agency, the forbidden becomes allowed:

> That is the schema of the anti-Semitic reaction. The anti-Semites gather to celebrate the moment when authority lifts the ban; that moment alone makes them a collective, constituting the community of kindred spirits. Their ranting is organized laughter. The more dreadful the accusations and threats, the greater the fury, the more withering is the scorn. Rage, mockery, and poisoned imitation are fundamentally the same thing. The purpose of the fascist cult of formulae, the ritualized discipline, the uniforms, and the whole allegedly irrational apparatus, is to make possible mimetic behavior. [...] The Führer, with his ham-actor's facial expressions and the hysterical charisma turned on with a switch, leads the dance. In his performance he acts out by proxy and in effigy what is denied to everyone else in reality. Hitler can gesticulate like a clown, Mussolini risk false notes like a provincial tenor, Goebbels talk as glibly as the Jewish agent whose murder he is recommending [...]. Fascism is also totalitarian in seeking to place oppressed nature's rebellion against domination directly in the service of domination.[40]

Bertorelli is funny and harmless until he is not. *Blubo* and *aufnoredn* are funny until they are not. Mussolini may sound like a clownish provincial tenor, but ultimately the joke is on the listeners, with the clown grabbing hold of them (*tenor* comes from *teneō*, "I hold"). Through the act of the simultaneous suspension of the ban and appropriation of the banned, that which is considered rebellious and is thus prohibited is made to directly benefit this oppression – such was the dialectics of racism in fascist Italy.

The mechanism continues to be relevant today. Many Holocaust scholars, for example, would read it as a corollary to the logic of de-humanization that sustained the brutality of the Nazi concentration camps.[41] However, Italian fascism may have gone furthest in exploiting this clownish suspension of the prohibition. Consider the following quote from Dainotto: "While Hitler sent trains to Auschwitz with Teutonic eagerness, Italy, engaged exactly in the same process,

[40] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, trans. E. Jephcott, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 151–152.

[41] *Cf*. Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz: If This Is a Man*, trans. S. Woolf, New York, The Orion Press, 1959.

accompanied its trains with a note of humor and *commedia*. If Primo Levi theorized de-humanization as the logic sustaining the violence of Auschwitz, I wonder if we should not theorize a different form of de-humanization – the reduction of the human to clown – as the logic sustaining the Italian concentration camps in Manfredonia and Fossoli."[42]

Minding the gap indicated by Dainotto, fascist de-humanization was not one of reducing the Other to bare, de-humanized life. Fascist de-humanization of the Other coincided with its *cartoonization*. But what is its function? Is the Other thereby reduced not to *bare life* (which can be legally extinguished), but rather to *bare afterlife*, i.e., to a non-human, creaturely substance situated beyond life and structurally akin to a cartoon character perpetually surviving its own death?[43]

Count till None

In this section, I would like to highlight and unpack the type of exception indicated at the end of the first section and associated not with jazz but with its opposite, i.e., with so-called "serious music". For Adorno, every representation of suffering eliminates "our shame before the victim." While delivering us of shame in the face of the victims, such representations also nourish the "barbaric" assumption that even in the most extreme of situations "humanity flourishes." Representations of extreme suffering are impossible in the sense that they (inadvertently or not) effect the opposite of what they intend. However, one cannot overlook the peculiar exception to this rule – an exception that is all the more peculiar because its source is Adorno himself:

[42] Dainotto, "The Saxophone and the Pastoral", p. 290.

[43] In his reading of Adorno and Benjamin's interpretations of animated films, Simon Hajdini comments: "Benjamin sees cartoon characters as creatures of satanic laughter that have 'thrown off all resemblance to a human being,' while Adorno reduces these same characters to symptoms of traumatized bourgeois subjectivity. Their resilience and literal 'destructive plasticity' (to use Malabou's term), their immeasurable capacity for enduring violence place them beyond the concept of trauma. The new subjectivity emerging from the burning ground of experience therefore disrupts 'the entire hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind,' that is, in man as a reservoir of tradition and 'inner life.' The new subject is emphatically *a subject without a biography*: its life cannot be written because it is situated beyond life." (Simon Hajdini, "Ste slišali tistega o Benjaminu?", *Problemi*, 59 (9-10/2022), p. 148.)

> Schoenberg [...] suspends the aesthetic sphere through the recollection of experiences which are inaccessible to art. Anxiety, Schoenberg's expressive core, identifies itself with the terror of men in the agonies of death, under total domination. The sounds of *Erwartung* [...] finally meet what they had always prophesied. That which the feebleness and impotence of the individual soul seemed to express testifies to what has been inflicted on mankind in those who represent the whole as its victims. *Horror has never rung as true in music,* and by articulating it music regains its redeeming power through negation. The Jewish song with which the *A Survivor from Warsaw* concludes is music as the protest of mankind against myth.[44]

Adorno is referring to Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw*. A quick overview of this rather unknown piece seems in order. *A Survivor* is a six-minute cantata set for narrator, male chorus, and orchestra. The piece has a tripartite structure; in the first part the narrator depicts the story of a survivor from the Warsaw ghetto during Second World War. One day, in the ghetto, the Nazi authorities held a roll call of a group of Jews. The group tried to assemble, but there was confusion, and the guards beat the old Jews who could not line up quickly enough. The Jews left on the ground were deported to the death camps. The guards then ask for a faster and faster head count, and the work culminates as Jews begin to sing the prayer Shema Yisroel (Hear, O, Israel). The work was composed in August 1947. Considered one of the first musical depictions of the Holocaust, it is often referred to as the "Holocaust cantata". The piece premiered in November 1948 in New Mexico by the Albuquerque Civic Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Kurt Frederick. According to Schoenberg's biographer Stuckenschmidt, the audience was so stunned by the composition that the work had to be performed twice: "After the first time the audience of 1,500 sat in astonished silence; after the second the applause was stormy."[45] Another reaction to the performed work was provided by the conductor himself. In a letter to Schoenberg, Frederick informed the composer of the huge success the work had achieved and of the audience's persistent requests for an encore: "The audience of over 1,000 was shaken by the composition and applauded until we repeated the performance."[46] *A Survivor's* success continued the following year in New York, when the piece

44 Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. S. Weber and S. Weber Nicholsen, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1981, pp. 171–172 (my emphasis).

45 Hans Hein Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work,* trans. H. Searle, London, John Calder, 1977, p. 485.

46 *Ibid*.

was performed under the direction of Dmitri Mitropoulos. According to *Musical America*, "the listeners cheered and would not let the performers leave the stage for the intermission until the conductor had broken a Philharmonic Symphonic precedent"[47] and the performance was repeated.

A Survivor was indeed a huge success, and despite Adorno's comment, we should take note of this overexcitement, bordering on obscenity. Two things need to be noted, one particular and one more general. First, Adorno later revoked his favorable mention of *A Survivor*, which is a point worth mentioning. And second: amongst all of the art forms, music is possibly best equipped to encapsulate and trigger the most extreme of emotions; as such, music has, in the history of philosophy, held a privileged position. Suffice it to recall Nietzsche's first book, *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*, or Kierkegaard's analyses of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*. In the context of this text, it is possible to claim that the Holocaust finds its only adequate representation precisely in music. Where words fail, music succeeds in representing the impossible. However, one can also claim that music is the ultimate fetishistic art form. Mladen Dolar, in his book *A Voice and Nothing More*,[48] has drawn attention to the fact that music is somehow immediately understandable, that it emanates sense immediately understood by any listener. However, Dolar adds, this characteristic of music as emanating an immediately comprehensible sense coincides with its opposite, i.e., with music's ultimate meaninglessness. As listeners, we immediately, without thinking, without any apparent mediation, "get the gist of it"; we immediately know what it means, but once asked to convey this meaning we resort to empty phrases and commonsensical descriptions. Music means that it means, and that is all that it means. Its aura of deep meaningfulness is immediately confronted with its ultimate meaninglessness. Music's meaning is the embodiment of an absence of meaning, just like a fetish is the embodiment of an absence, a stand-in, covering up the hole at the core of reality.

But if ever there was a musical piece that is the Platonic Idea of such a notion of music as conveying the highest of meanings, it is Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. In

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47 See http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.13.19.1/mto.13.19.1.argentino.html, accessed 2 September 2022.

48 *Cf*. Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, Cambridge (MA) and London, MIT Press, 2006.

his book on Beethoven's *Ninth*, Esteban Buch succinctly designates Beethoven's symphony as the fetish of Western civilization, "an aural fetish in the Western world."[49] If we follow Adorno in reading Schoenberg's *A Survivor* as an adequate representation of the Holocaust, it is no surprise that after the 1960s a strange ritual emerged, namely that of performing Beethoven's *Ninth* immediately after Schoenberg's *A Survivor*. The film documentary *Following the Ninth: In the Footsteps of Beethoven's Final Symphony* mentions one performance that joined the two pieces as follows: "In a tremendous symbolic gesture, the Beethoven Orchestra of Bonn plays Schoenberg's 'A Survivor from Warsaw' and without a pause goes straight into the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven. The Jewish prayer is joined by Beethoven's."[50] Although the documentary does not mention the exact date of the performance, the pairing of Schoenberg's cantata and Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* in fact occurred on numerous occasions,[51] gaining additional popularity in recent years. In 2012, The Cincinnati Symphonic Orchestra and its musical director Louis Langrée announced the initiative "One City, One Symphony". The initiative was described as a "journey from tragedy to triumph," i.e., as a journey from the split to the restoration of totality.[52] I want to propose two possible interpretations of this curious match.[53]

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49 See Esteban Buch, *Beethoven's Ninth: A Political History*, trans. R. Miller, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2003, p. 4.

50 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Survivor_from_Warsaw.

51 For instance: on April 1969 under the baton of Erich Leinsdorf, the musical director and conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. This was Leinsdorf's farewell concert. A recording that combined *A Survivor* and *Ode to Joy* was made on 14 March 1986. This, too, was the farewell concert of the conductor and musical director of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Michael Gielen. In the CSO program book that Gielen wrote for the concerts held in March at Music Hall in Cincinnati, we read that he juxtaposed the two pieces because he wanted to combine the old and the new, to see how the old music would react to new music and vice versa, adding that at "first there seems to be no connection – but they are related. The connection is dialectical and not easy for me to describe." (See http://www.musicincincinnati.com/site/commentary_2013/Michael_Gielen_Musical_Visionary_for_Cincinnati.html, accessed 2 September 2022.)

52 *Ibid*.

53 Throughout recent history, especially in the last decade, Schoenberg's *A Survivor* has been performed alongside many symphonies. In 2012, for instance, Kurt Masur and the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra released an album that pairs Schoenberg's piece with Anton Bruckner's *Seventh*, while Simon Rattle paired it with Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 2* (known as the *Resurrection Symphony*). For my present purpose, I will focus only on the pairing with *Ode to Joy*.

The first possibility would be to interpret the pairing of the two musical pieces in terms of an ultimate obscenity. A deep wound of the Real, opened up by Schoenberg's piece and producing traumatic effects, is sutured by the fetish of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. The most radical split of the social is thus amended, and society – after performing the traumatic duty of listening to Schoenberg's piece – is once again restored in its unproblematic, harmonious totality. In his analysis of ideology, Dolar often uses the paradigmatic Brechtian example of a capitalist who enters the stage and declares the following: "I am a capitalist, and my sole aim is to exploit the workers." Dolar argues that such a statement can never properly function in ideological discourse, since it unveils the (hidden) background of the ideological intention itself. Ideological discourse remains ideological only insofar as it does not proclaim itself to be ideological, thus masking and obfuscating its ideological pretext. The direct assertion of the capitalist's interest would thus mark the very impossibility of ideological discourse.

However, in *A Survivor*, this ideological appendage is fundamentally lacking, a step away from the Thing, a withdrawal from the Real, comes to the fore only *via* its add-on, namely by way of adding to the cantata *Ode,* which has not only the capacity to restore the harmonious totality but also the ability to insert the missing ideological framework.[54] The main fetishizing effect of *Ode to Joy* is not only that it covers up the "horror ringing true" in Schoenberg's cantata, but that by adding to the *Survival's* prayer its own, joyful one, celebrating life and the flourishing of all humanity, it effectively sublates the suspended aesthetic sphere of *Survivor*, thus eliminating "its redeeming power through negation." As indicated by Adorno, the lesson of such an endeavor is that it falls into the abyss of its opposite, into aesthetic pleasure that erases the dimension of the trauma. No wonder, then, that the audience of "One City, One Symphony", when asked

[54] The Brechtian procedure is discernible in Schoenberg's libretto for *A Survivor*. For instance: "Faster! Once more, start from the beginning! In one minute I want to know how many I am going to send off to the gas chamber! Count off!" The sergeant who is counting off people is indeed directly asserting the interest of the Nazis ("I am an SS officer, and my sole aim is to kill off the Jews"). However, this does not necessarily imply the above-mentioned impossibility of ideology. Here, one should take note of Adorno's thesis regarding Italian fascism and its lack of *Verfremdungseffekt* (a distancing or alienating effect) as crucial to the very functioning of ideology: "Fascism has in some respects realized this procedure of Brechtian theater: it has directly asserted the demand for obedience [...] but in such a way that it did not produce the distancing effect. Although faked, the fascination was there." (Mladen Dolar, *Strel sredi koncerta*, Ljubljana, Cankarjeva založba, p. 158, note.)

to share their thoughts on what they had just heard completely forgot about *A Survivor*, instead praising *Ode to Joy* and expressing their gratefulness for being able to participate in this initiative. Reportedly, some even danced while drinking their champagne in the reception hall.[55] What is sublated here is precisely the suspended aesthetic sphere of *A Survivor*, and by way of abolishing this abyss of the Real opened up by Schoenberg's piece, *Ode* remains the sole "survivor". Differently put, *Ode* becomes the ultimate "truth" of *Survivor*. (One may note here that the original libretto was initially titled "A Survivor *of* Warsaw.")[56] The inner split, or inherent tension, in Schoenberg's cantata is not abolished for the sake of some higher totality, of the unification of the human spirit. The Warsaw prayers do not praise the triumph of the human spirit. The ultimate tragedy of the Warsaw prayers is that they are praying for themselves – although they escaped the killings and the beatings in the ghetto; although they are still alive, they are already (un)dead. The name of the initiative "One City, One Symphony" should thus be read by the letter: the symphony serves not only as a fetishistic ideological appropriation of the musical piece, but also as the ultimate ideologization of the Holocaust.

From here, let us return to the problem of the (im)possibility of aesthetic representations to point out two irreducible attitudes towards it. The first attitude, or theoretical stance, is in line with Adorno's claim according to which such representations sublate "our shame before the victims" and thus turn into their very opposite, obfuscating or rather erasing the difference between the victim and executioner. The second option is provided by narratives that render neither facts (documents, testimony, etc.) nor ideological truisms, but opt for the subjective truth as provided by the victims. For Adorno, such "committed literature"[57] translates and integrates the Holocaust into "cultural heritage," conse-

55 "I thought it was incredible, I've never seen so many people this excited about a concert, it's really kind of fulfilling for me to see that!" Another audience member commented: "Yes, I also loved it, it's my third time seeing this symphony, and each time I like get a way bigger perspective on it." (See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s7VK-fpeS7A, accessed 2 September 2022.)

56 See Kurt List, "On the Horizon: Schoenberg's New Cantata", *Commentary*, https://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/on-the-horizon-schoenbergs-new-cantata/, accessed 2 September 2022, my emphasis.

57 Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment", *New Left Review*, 1/87–88 (1974), no pagination, https://newleftreview.org/issues/i87/articles/theodor-adorno-commitment, accessed 30 August 2022.

quently allowing for its incorporation into the very culture that generated it. For Adorno, the insistence on impossibility is the only possibility. However, as emphasized by Wajcman, one has to avoid falling into the trap of praising this impossibility. In his *The Object of the Century*, Wajcman claims that the representation of the Holocaust as impossible is not enough; such a claim might as well be a call to forget, i.e., to paradoxically forget that which we cannot remember.[58] A further impossibility needs to be added here: it is not merely impossible to represent the Real of the Holocaust; it is also impossible *not* to represent it, albeit in failed and ever failing attempts.

The "One City, One Symphony" initiative is nothing if not an appropriation of the Real, or of the lie about the truth. But this "lie about the Real" should not simply be read along the lines of Lacan's famous claim according to which "the truth has the structure of a fiction." Lacan's point, of course, is not that no truth is possible; he is no postmodernist relativist proclaiming our structural embeddedness in the cobweb of fiction, while discarding the very notion of truth as something potentially "totalitarian". To refer to one of Žižek's arguments that points in the same direction: in Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing*, the Real or the truth of this Real is not abolished by the fiction; it is rather the fiction itself that renders it visible in the first place. One ought to distinguish between a lie and a *lie*, i.e. between, on the one hand, a "true lie" (as in the famous title of the film *True Lies* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger), a lie as the structural component of the very conveying of the truth, as its "medium", and, on the other, a "false lie" (as brought about by Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* as it sublates the horror of *A Survivor*). *Ode* is the epitome of a "false lie" which fails to encapsulate both the inherent impossibility (of aesthetization) and the (aesthetic) symbolization of the impossibility of the Real, or the formalization of this impossibility, serving as a means of its ideologization. However, if we follow the thesis about the Holocaust's necessary elusion of representation, the failure of *Ode* could be said to be structural: there is no true lie about the Holocaust; all lies, all symbolic representations, amount to "false lies" and are thus manifested in the fetish, standing for the truth of this "false lie" itself.

Let us proceed with our second reading. What if we must abandon this simplistic opposition and block our theoretical reflexes, and instead take this idea se-

[58] Gérard Wajcman, *L'objet du siècle*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2012.

riously? What if such a denouncement of the succession of the two pieces is a way of escaping another, more fundamental truth? What if the simplistic opposition between Schoenberg's Truth and Beethoven's Lie is itself false and should be rejected? What could be this bitter truth that only comes to the fore if we abandon this opposition? It is the following, deeply unsettling one: There is no Schoenberg without Beethoven; there is no Auschwitz without the cartoonishly obscene rejoicing of humanity.

Can such a paradox serve as a potentially productive principle? Fascist modernity seems to have managed to do just that: against the backdrop of a flexible national identity that followed Ben-Ghiat's logic "of display and appropriate," there emerged a new (monolithic) ethnic identity. And the paradoxical role of jazz within the fascist movement seems to have been the harbinger of just such a change. In short, the prohibited became a symbol of national identity.

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Perverse Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the End

A man says to his wife: "If one of us dies, I'll move to Paris."

This is the joke that Freud uses in his text "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death" (first published in 1915) to illustrate his argument that we (and particularly our unconscious) do not believe in our own death, that it is impossible to imagine our own death, for even when we do imagine it, we are still there, present as spectators.[1] Of course we know that death exists, and also "experience" it with others, with the pain and irreversibility that come when people close to us die. But this knowledge of death, and the capacity to talk rationally about death as natural, undeniable, and unavoidable, changes nothing of the fact that "in reality, however, [...] we behave as if it were otherwise."[2] Those familiar with psychoanalysis will recognize in this formulation the template of the notion of the disavowal (*Verleugnung*), as formulated most explicitly by Octave Mannoni: "I know well, but all the same (I still behave as if ...)."[3] Freud already uses the term disavowal in this paper, although one usually quotes his latter paper "On Fetishism" as the key reference in this regard. He also makes a very interesting observation regarding one of the forms that the disavowal of death can take, pointing out our habit of laying stress on the fortuitous, accidental causation of the death – "accident, disease, infection, advanced age; in this way we betray an effort to reduce death from a necessity to a chance event."[4] In other words, by

1 This article is a result of the research programme P6-0014 "Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy" and research projects J6-2589 "Structure and Genealogy of Perversion in Contemporary Philosophy, Politics and Art" and J6-4623 "Conceptualizing the End: its Temporality, Dialectics, and Affective Dimension".

2 Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death", in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV*, J. Strachey and A. Freud (eds.), London, The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis, 1957, p. 289.

3 Octave Mannoni, "'I Know Well, but All the Same...'", in M. A. Rothenberg et al. (eds.), *Perversion and the Social Relation* (SIC 4), Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2003.

4 Freud, "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death", p. 290.

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naming the immediate cause of death, we obfuscate death as necessity, even if we admit that it happens to everyone. We say something like: "Everybody dies, but accidentally:" Our unconscious, states Freud, "does not believe in its own death; it behaves as if it were immortal [...] there is nothing instinctual [drive-related, *Triebhaftes*] in us which responds to a belief in death."[5] The fear of death (*die Todesangst*) is in this sense only secondary, although it dominates us more often than we know, and is usually the outcome of a sense of guilt.[6] *Todesangst* is thus conceived by Freud as already part of (subsequent) *psychology*; it is conceived as a psychological consequence, rather than as something original.

Freud names the war as one of the occasions which sweep away this mode of thinking about death, and no longer allow for the death to be disavowed. But he uses a most interesting wording to express this idea: "we are *forced to believe* in death," he writes. As if the impossibility to just "take it in" would remain, and with it the structure of the disavowal and of belief. It is not that we now know that death is real, we "believe" it since we are forced to do so.

There is, however, a certain paradox or ambiguity at work in Freud's considerations. Namely and to put it very simply: if the non-belief in our own death is a fundamental fact (also and primarily in the unconscious), if we profoundly do not believe in (our) death, why would we need to disavow it? The situation is not that deep down that we know that we will die, we just will not accept it; it is rather that "deep down" we are sure we will not die, we just superficially and "rationally" accept it. In other words, although it resonates strongly with the structure of the disavowal and its fundamental formula ("I know well, but nevertheless"), the non-belief in death also seems to lack something in order to actually qualify as disavowal. What it lacks is the traumatism, and its relationship to our experience. However, things are not as straight forward in this respect as it might seem. There is an interesting discussion going on in psychoanalysis concerning the question of a possible "traumatism outside experience", which "drives", for example, the compulsive repetition of unpleasant, painful experiences that Freud discusses in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle".[7] This suggests that even though something is not, and cannot be, a direct object of experience,

5 *Ibid*., p. 296.
6 *Ibid*., p. 297.
7 *Cf.* Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, Chapter 7.5.

it can nevertheless qualify as traumatic. The question of what can induce something like an "experience of death," even if it does not involve (our) death, is very important indeed.

Jacques Lacan has a most interesting take of this when he asks: What exactly is it that makes our relationship to death, or the relationship between life and death, dramatic? Why are we not simply indifferent to (our) death as something situated beyond our experience properly speaking? Philosophy has answered by emphasizing our awareness of death, our being conscious of the fact that we will die, our capacity to think it, to talk about it, to anticipate it (rationally). Lacan has a somewhat different answer. He suggests that our relationship to death is not simply or only "virtual" (symbolic, rational) in the sense of being deprived of the real of its experience, but is present on the level of experience thorough the drive. This stance departs from Freud's view that there is nothing drive-related in us which would correspond to a belief in death. In his conceptualization of the drive (as essentially a dead-drive), Lacan posits that death is present at the level of the drive not as something that the drive aims at, but through the surplus enjoyment that keeps disturbing our relationship to our own body. It is the fact that we are situated within an (unsought) portion of enjoyment (*jouissance*) that makes different attitudes toward death possible to begin with. Death as such, in itself, does not yet involve the possibility of a "dramatic" relationship to itself:

> The life-and-death dialogue [...] only assumes a dramatic character from the moment jouissance intervenes in the balance between life and death. The vital point, the point of emergence of something that all of us here more or less believe we form part of, namely speaking being, is this disturbed relation to our bodies that is called jouissance.[8]

Lacan's point here could be summed up as follows: the relationship between life and death is indeed trivial, or would indeed be trivial, if it were not necessarily interrupted, complicated from within. Something third comes between life and death and complicates their (indifferent) relationship for us, something implicates one in another, something that cannot simply be identified with our con-

[8] Jacques Lacan, *... or Worse. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIX*, transl. A. R. Price, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2018, pp. 31–32.

sciousness. And something similar is at stake in the relationship between our being awake and sleeping:

> Sleep is designed to suspend the ambiguousness that there is in the body's relation to itself, namely the deriving of jouissance therefrom. [...] When one sleeps, it's a matter of making the body coil up. It rolls itself into a ball. To sleep is not to be disturbed. After all, jouissance is disturbing. Naturally, the body gets disturbed, but so long as it's asleep, it can hope not to be disturbed. This is why, from then on, all the rest vanishes. Nor is it a question any more of semblance nor of truth – because all of this holds together, it's the same thing – nor of surplus jouissance. Except, there you have it. What Freud says is that, during this time the signifier is still on the go.[9]

And here, with this last remark, we of course raise the specifically Freudian question of dreams and of that surplus-enjoyment, or truth, or semblance, that the working of the signifier can smuggle into a dream, and which eventually *disturbs* us – even when we are fast asleep, rolled up into a ball – waking us from within the dream. The edge at play here is the same "rub" upon which Hamlet's famous monolog dwells: "*For in that sleep of death what dreams may come*..." We will not pursue it any further here, but will instead use this cue to point out the ambiguity of the trope of "waking up" – also in our contemporary social context and discussions. Namely, and as Lacan also perspicuously suggested, it often happens with dreams that *we wake up to so as to go on dreaming*. This is particularly true for nightmares, and generally true for the dreams in which a real appears that is more real, more traumatic and shattering than our everyday reality. So, in response we wake up, and proclaim to be awake, in order to be able to continue to dream, that is, to continue to exist untouched, unscattered by the real that has just appeared. The real nightmare is thus precisely one from which we cannot wake up.[10]

With this in mind, we could clearly see how "waking up" can function (and does indeed function) in a strange complicity with disavowal, the concept of

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9 *Ibid*., p. 193.

10 Peter Klepec has recently written about the notion of "nightmare" in our social context. See his paper "Covid-19, das Unheimliche in nočna mora", in *Problemi*, 57 (9-10/2020), pp. 111–139.

which we will return to in a moment. Just think of the contemporary crises that befall us, one after another – which now already account for something like a "serial crisis" – from climate change, to financial crisis, to Covid pandemic, to the Ukraine war, to the global energy crisis, as well as more and more perceptible tectonic shifts that indicate the collapse of capitalism as we used to know it, and its possible transformation into something else (some speak of "neo-feudalism"), etc. Are we not dealing in all these cases, and in spite of their obvious differences, with a situation where we wake up so as to be able to continue to dream? Each time we proclaim that this is now a complete "game changer", that we have woken up from the "end of history" and its lull, we at the same time go on mostly as before, as if nothing really happened, or else we (want to) return to some anterior state. There are certainly many declarations and a lot of commotion surrounding this "waking up", but in the midst of all this commotion we seem to just go on dreaming.

In previous decades there was a lot of talk about the "need to change," but now it seems that the reality has overtaken us: things are changing, quite dramatically. So no wonder that the talk about the "need to change" has passed from critical voices to the mainstream discourse, where it basically means adapting to the new reality of something that looks gloomier every day. It means: we need to change our way of being in order to accommodate these tectonic shifts, this real that has hit us as if accidentally. And can we not hear in this an echo of Freud's observation that one way of disavowing something is to emphasize its fortuitous, accidental character? (In our case, disavowing the deeply systemic causes of different crises, springing necessarily from the existing global system?) It also seems that, over the past 50 years, the less we allowed our politics to be "radical", that is, to address the root cause of our issues, the more it is the external reality (including nature) that has become "radicalized", and is now closing in on us with revenge.

To resume: a change, a major tectonic change, is already happening, whether we like it or not. It did not wait for us to decide whether we now *really* wanted to put an end to what has been going on, and say "That's it! And now for something completely different." The world as we knew it is really falling apart, changing dramatically, all around us and right in front of our eyes. In most cases it is certainly not what we had in mind when we were critically demanding a

change, but the change *is real*, and ongoing. It is penetrating and shaking up all spheres of our life.

We sense this, we know this, yet, to some extent at least, we seem to be caught up in a bizarrely cheerful mood of "the show must go on" (greatly captured in Adam McKay's film *Don't Look Up*), which the word *cringe* would seem to describe very well and which could be summed up as follows: "The world is ending, but hey, it's not the end of the world!"

And this cheerful attitude is mostly *not* due to the fact that some other organization of the social is now possible, and we are actively thinking of it, celebrating it, engaging with it, but is rather related to a disavowal of this Change that *is* taking place. It has to do with depriving the end/rupture of its reality, rather than with looking beyond it. Put differently: we do not strive to inhabit and steer the Change, but mostly lose our breath trying to keep up with it. In this situation, a strange and unexpected complicity arises between the functioning of the economic and political "elites" and the conspiracy theorists, which we will return to in a moment.

To be sure, there is also a lot of catastrophism around, fascination with the apocalypse, with various disasters and prophesies of doom, with the spectacle of the End. Yet far from being the opposite of disavowal, this vivid catastrophism constitutes an important and integral part of it. The end of the world thus appears as a kind of general spectacular environment, a coulisse of the stage on which we go on with our business as usual. Images of apocalypse are precisely the fantasmatic screen obfuscating ("protecting" us from) the real apocalypse, which has already started creeping up on us, and is not looming, waiting for us somewhere in the future.

Let us therefore look a bit more closely at the concept of the disavowal, also known as "fetishist disavowal". Disavowal is not the same as denial, it brings about the split between *knowledge* and *belief*: "I know very well that there is no X, but I keep believing that X" – I keep behaving and acting as if I did not know what I know and what I am able to state as my knowledge (in this sense there is no repression, no amnesia at work here). I know, and I am able to acknowledge some fact, yet the latter seems to be deprived of its reality and meaning. It is not that I unconsciously keep believing what I know to be otherwise; I do not

need to do this, for the fetish believes it in my stead. As already pointed out by Mannoni: Whereas the phrase "I know well, but all the same" is the trademark or signature of disavowal, a fetishist will never *say* "but all the same" since his "but all the same" is his fetish.[11] The belief is outsourced to the fetish, while we know perfectly well how things stand and are able to talk about it rationally.

To illustrate how fetish works in disavowal, Slavoj Žižek[12] recounts a story about a man whose wife was diagnosed with acute breast cancer and who died three months later; the husband survived her death unscathed, being able to talk coolly about his traumatic last moments with her – how? Was he a cold, distant, and unfeeling monster? Soon, his friends noticed that, while talking about his deceased wife, he always held a hamster in his hands, her pet object and now his fetish, the embodied disavowal of her death. When, a couple of months later, the hamster died, the man broke down and had to be hospitalized for a long period.

It could be argued that a further twist in this structure appears in our contemporary functioning and in contemporary forms of disavowal.[13] We could describe it as a configuration in which *knowledge* about some traumatic reality gets strangely *redoubled*, and starts playing itself the role of the object-fetish that protects us against this reality. From the hamster example Žižek concludes:

> So, when we are bombarded by claims that in our post-ideological cynical era nobody believes in the proclaimed ideals, when we encounter a person who claims he has been cured of any beliefs, accepting social reality the way it really is, one should always counter such claims with the question: OK, but where is your hamster – the fetish which enables you to (pretend to) accept reality "the way it is"? [14]

And the point we are arguing here would be that, in an intriguing short circuit, it is the knowledge itself (about how things really stand) that is our hamster, enabling us to (supposedly) accept the reality that this knowledge refers to. Just think of how important it is today to declare that we are not naïve, not deceived or duped by anything, how important it is to know "how things really stand," to

[11] Mannoni, "'I Know Well, but All the Same…'", p. 70.

[12] Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, London and New York, Verso, 2008, p. 299.

[13] I first introduced this argument in my paper "'You'd have to be stupid not to see that'", *Parallax*, 22 (4/2016), pp. 422–423.

[14] *Ibid*.

know what is "behind," to know that the Other is unreliable and full of tricks, and above all to *let others know that we know*. We are much more concerned with the possibility of deception than with the traumatic dimension of the real. Even the craziest and weirdest conspiracy narratives are primarily anchored in this will to not be deceived. For example, the belief that the earth is flat is not really a quarrel about *the shape* of the earth, but an attempt to point out the massive *deception* that has been systematically going on for hundreds of years. It is not simply that flat earthers refuse science and scientific proofs, they refuse to be deceived, taken in by the "manipulation" of science...

The permutation thus also appears at the level of "but nevertheless", which presupposes an opposition, a contradiction. The structure of fetishist disavowal ("I know very well, *but I nevertheless* continue to believe the opposite.") mutates into "I know very well, *and this is why* I can go on ignoring it." Or: I see it, I acknowledge it, and this is why I can now forget about it.

In a kind of folding over itself, knowledge takes the structural place of the fetish that helps us ignore some traumatic reality. All that is important is that we "know everything about it," that we are "nobody's fools," and that we let others know that we know it. Letting others know, proclaiming, *flagging* our knowledge is a crucial element. (And the apocalyptic coulisse, the rhetoric of the end, is part of that.)

Let us take a nice example of this structure from the movie *Don't Look Up*. There are many ingenious formulations in the film that encapsulate this form of disavowal, for instance the following newspaper headline: *Deadly comet about to hit Earth. Will there be a Super Bowl?* This formulation does in fact render the gist of the configuration much better than a direct denial would (if the headline had read: *There is no deadly comet, it's all a lie!*). It is almost as if the first part of the sentence – the declared "knowledge" of the approaching deadly comet – needed to be there in order for us to then peacefully talk about the Super Bowl. All we want is to talk about the Super Bowl, and the acknowledgment of the deadly comet is there just a kind of courtesy requirement, like greeting others and asking them how they are, before starting a real conversation. But precisely as such, as purely formal, this first part is essential to the functioning of disavowal (it could not be simply left out); its declaration is precisely what makes the "business as usual" attitude of discussing the Super Bowl possible.

There is yet another important thing that McKay's film makes very palpable, namely that – contrary to what we like to think – disavowal does not simply take place on the side of conspiracy theorists and "blind masses," but perhaps primarily on the side of the "elites," of the (supposedly) "rational" mainstream, of the carriers of economic power. Conspiracy theories are rather a symptom or, I would argue, an embodiment of the grotesque unconscious of the elites. And the "elites" need conspiracy theorists to point their finger at them, to contrast them with their own supposed rationality, and make us blind to their own madness. Which is why, albeit usually abhorring each other, the "elites" and the conspiracy theorists often function in a strange complicity.

Conspiracy theories are right in one point: the elites like it when there is a threat in the air, and they like to cash in on that threat, both ideologically and economically (for instance by making huge amounts of money with strategies for preventing it, for attending to it). In order to cash in on the threat, to go about making money based on that threat, they must not fully and genuinely believe in its reality and danger, even if they keep talking about it. In other words, they need to disavow it, that is, to continue to behave – in their everyday business lives – as if the danger is not "really real," or not really that big. For conspiracy theorists, this constitutes yet another "objective" *proof* that the danger does not really exist, and is merely being staged by the elites in order to subdue us and make money. The reasoning goes as follows: since the elites clearly do not really believe in the danger, and continue with their business, there is no danger. "The elites are not crazy," goes the argument, *they know exactly what they are doing*, the whole thing is a masterplan. And it is this very presupposition that actually makes it possible for the elites to continue to de-realize the danger, (the catastrophe which they themselves are often causing). It is herein that resides the key mistake of conspiracy reaction, a mistake to which we would have to respond something like: *No, it's worse! The elites really are so crazy (to not take the danger seriously)! And this is precisely why we should be truly scared! No, they do not know what they are doing, they have no masterplan beyond keeping themselves in business*. Instead, the conspiracy theorists tend to declare the unconscious of the "elites", their pathological madness posing as "rationality" ("the danger is manageable by our usual means"), to be the objective reality. In this precise sense, the conspiracy theorists are basically staging, embodying, the very unconscious of the elites, that is, the very madness on which their "rationality" leans in what is a classic case of disavowal. No wonder that the

"elites" tend to regard conspiracy theories with horror: it is certainly distressing to see your own unconscious "return from the real," to see it exist out there. But it can also come in handy to be able to point the finger at these crazy Others from which your rationality is allegedly saving the world.

A very popular reference of conspiracy theorists is the film *The Truman Show*, in which the audience of a gigantic reality show is entertained by watching the hero of the show conducting his life *without knowing* that he is part of a reality show. Everything, every little piece of reality is staged for him, including the firmament, the sky. Everyone is there in order to create a fictitious world for this one person, to convince him of its reality, and to keep him there. What is happening today is in fact something very different. First, the elites are creating a fictitious world primarily *for themselves*, not for us; they are staging it so as to be able to continue to believe that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with it, and that, with some ingenuity and some "adjustments," it can simply go on toward an even brighter future. However, although they are staging this for themselves, their crazy beliefs have an effect on us as well: while watching them continue with their business as usual, we also start to believe that nothing is fundamentally wrong, and that we just need to make some adjustment and amends. *The Truman Show* today is nothing but the so-called real world of capital, of stock markets, of financial markets, transactions, and balloons, which the elites are putting up – often with our help – mainly for themselves. Their benefit is double, financial or material, as well as psychological, namely the psychological gain provided by the fetishist disavowal of the real crisis. Whereas the real catastrophic effects take their toll mostly on the opposite end of the social ladder, and often on the opposite end of the world.

Conceptually, the notion of disavowal may also help us explain what looks like *crazy heroism*, accompanying the crazy cheerfulness that we mentioned earlier: namely, it seems that we would – quite literally – rather die than let ourselves be scared to death by what is coming if we let the change and the events take their "natural course"; this is particularly striking in respect of climate change. *We are more afraid of being scared to death than of actually dying*. This brings us to the next and final point of our discussion, which could be called "the difference between two survivals".

There is a strange ambiguity and paradox today surrounding the notion and discussion of survival. "The logic of sheer survival" has a pretty bad reputation in contemporary, but not only contemporary, emancipatory philosophy: it basically means that we merely cling on to our lives, in the absence of any idea or truth. The ideological domination of *primum vivere* is denounced as oppressive, and it is sometimes contrasted with some other cultures or civilizations – "less decadent" and more "vital" ones – where this is not the case.[15] We also often hear that contemporary (bio)politics reduces us to "bare life", or that it enslaves us by making us hostages to mere survival. However, it suffices to just look around and think about what is mostly going on, and it becomes far less certain that we really care that much about our survival. It is almost the opposite that seems to be the case. In other words, it is as if two quite different notions or modalities of survival were being confused in these debates and social diagnostics.

So perhaps we should return to Hegel on this point, and articulate the difference between two modalities of survival and fear, as follow from the famous section on the master – the slave (or "lord and bondsman") dialectics in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Briefly stated: in the life-and-death struggle between the two self-consciousnesses, and in mortal fear, the slave chooses life, yet this does not mean that he thus forever condemns himself to living in the modality of sheer survival, without any idea or truth. The master is prepared to go all the way and die, yet this also does not mean that he is henceforth immune to the logic and straitjacket of "survival mode". Hegel's point is rather that the *actual freedom* (also with respect to the demands of sheer survival) cannot be chosen directly, and in this sense the master's choice is no more "correct" than the slave's. And of course this is also not simply about the fact that we first have to choose life, if we want to make something of it; it is about the fact that we first need to experience the *trembling of pure negativity*, the mortal dread.

> [Servitude] does in fact contain within itself this truth of pure negativity and being-for-itself, for it has experienced this in its own essential nature. For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing, or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned,

[15] This self-perception and *self-accusing* of the West as decadent is itself an interesting phenomenon.

> has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations.[16]

If the choice of life is not a *forced choice* (forced because of mortal fear, as in the case of the "slave"), but appears natural and immediate, then we have no means of accessing it and repeating the choice, since there is nothing to repeat here, we can only cling on to our lives, without even knowing why we bother. In other words, the problem is not a slave who, in mortal terror, has bent before a master (or rather before death as the "absolute master") – for him there is still a possible emancipatory future, even freedom. The problem is with the idea of "neutral persons" who are neither masters nor slaves, but who "freely" *create* their life and personality, change roles, etc., whose whole being has never been seized with dread, by the experience of sheer negativity. Paradoxically, what condemns us to the logic of survival without any idea or truth (or emancipatory politics) is not the experience of mortal fear, but rather the *absence of this experience*, of the (also symbolic experience) *cut* it represents, cut into the immediacy of our lives, and of the *subjectivation* – in one way or another – of this cut, of this negativity. There is thus an important difference between the mortal fear (Hegel's *erzittern* in the face of pure negativity), in response to which we *choose* to survive, and survival as an immediate fact (that comes with life), as the conservation and maintenance of life, known as *primum vivere*.

To say, as we suggested earlier, that today it mostly seems that we would rather die than allow ourselves to be scared to death, points in the direction of this second alternative, and appears as its symptom. We fear dread more than death. Is this – and to return to the beginning of our discussion – because dread presents something like a lived experience of death, whereas "death" itself remains too abstract for that?

We could further relate this to another Hegelian point, namely the way in which Hegel conceives the difference between understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*). Maurice Blanchot draws our attention to this in an essay written back in 1964, in the context and at the peak of the Cold War, when the possibility of total nuclear destruction was literally just a "push of a button" away. Blanchot's

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[16] Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 117.

essay, with the truly inspired title "The Apocalypse is Disappointing", resonates strongly in our present social and political context. I have written on it extensively elsewhere, and here I would just like to bring in one particular argument that relates directly to the issue of courage, fear, and survival.

Drawing on the Hegelian distinction between the notions of understanding and reason, Blanchot's diagnosis is – to put it very simply – that humanity is stuck at, caught in, the logic and functioning of understanding (and of the "abstract negation" that characterizes it). Understanding, he writes, is cold and without fear. It analyses a danger, subjects it to its measures, and looks for solutions, strategies, adjustments. This work is useful; it demystifies the apocalypse and shows that it is possible to live with it (and the normalization/adaptation discussed earlier in this article is precisely this: we are learning how to make do with the apocalypse.) Blanchot continues: "It shows that the alternative of all or nothing, which turns the atomic weapon in a quasi-mystical force, is far from being the only truth of our situation. [...] Yes, this lesson of understanding is sound. Only, it is almost too sound, because it exposes us to a loss of fear, the fear that misleads but also warns."[17]

This is the last sentence of the essay, and it does not explicate in what sense the term fear is used here. Our interpretative intervention would be to cut the sentence short ("exposes us to a loss of fear", full stop), and relate it to Hegel's discussion of the dread in which pure negativity makes our whole being tremble.

The quoted passage from Blanchot also brings us back to several of the themes discussed earlier in the context of disavowal. It brings us to the importance of knowledge ("cold analysis"), of calling things by their names and "maintaining no illusions," as well as to what looks like the "crazy heroism" of our attitude toward the changing world, and toward catastrophes that are becoming part of if it. (We would rather die than let ourselves be scared to death...)

So, what to make of this loss of fear? It does not mean that we have become so brave that we are no longer afraid of anything; it does not speak of our courage,

17 Maurice Blanchot, "The Apocalypse is Disappointing", trans. E. Rottenberg, in *Friendship*, W. Hamacher and D. E. Wellbery (eds.), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997, p. 108.

but rather of our perception of the world in which, with necessary adjustments, everything can be solved...

In our apocalyptic world, in the smooth run of normalization and adaptation to one problematic thing after another, when our attitude toward the world is so "sound" that it is actually *all too sound*, true scares occur from time to time. But can they scare us to death, so to say? Can they scare us so much that we start fighting, organizing for our lives, and switch from the survival mode of coping with things one day at a time (and as comfortably as possible), to a common struggle for our (future) lives? These two meanings of "survival" are not the same. To say that nothing can scare us to death is not to say that we do not feel scared and insecure; of course we do, most of the time even, but this "*living in fear*" (and insecurity) is quite different than the experience of mortal fear (or of "trembling in every fibre of our being," as Hegel terms it) and of the cut that this pure negativity presents in the immediacy of our lives.

We thus have the dubious courage to *endure to the end*. And "the end" still persists here as the ultimate point on the horizon, as well as a source of (morbid) fascination. It is also here that a shift in perspective is needed. Today, the most lucid analysts do not warn against what will happen if we press the wrong buttons; they rather insist that the wrong button *has already been pressed*, several of them even. The apocalypse has already started and is becoming an active part of our life and our world, such as it is. It is not waiting for us somewhere in the future, but is dictating our social, economic, and environmental conditions as we speak.

In his play *Endgame* Beckett comes up with the famous line: "*The end is in the beginning, and then you go on*."[18] I would slightly modify this for the purposes of the present argument, and say: The end is in the middle, in the midst of a crisis, and we (need to) keep returning to it. The end is not a finality; it is not what crises *lead to*. The end is not in the endpoint; we should not think of it as an endpoint, but more as something like an *impasse* (a "*dead end*") to which we need

[18] For an inspired reading of this line in the broader context of the "figures of the end", see Tadej Troha, *Intervencije v nepovratno*, Ljubljana, Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, 2015, pp. 72–107.

return, again and again. Not in order to simply avoid dying "in the end," but rather in order to *die better*, to paraphrase another Beckettian line.

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Reclaiming "Climate Emergency"

Fifteen years ago, the term "climate emergency" was employed in the book *Climate Code Red: The Case for Emergency Action* to propose that we are in an emergency (as a problem statement) and that we need to declare and act on this climate emergency with an urgent mobilisation of unprecedented scale in peacetime (a solutions strategy).[1]

"Climate emergency" was the Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year in 2019.[2] Remarkably, only two years earlier, the term was in use only within relatively limited climate activist circles. And today the phrase has become ubiquitous and applied so indiscriminately – even by governments who simultaneously champion the fossil fuel industry – that it has significantly lost meaning. Reclaiming the term "climate emergency" is an urgent task.

The Genesis of "Climate Emergency"

The origins of the idea that we are in a climate emergency go back at least 19 years. The US environmental analyst Lester Brown advocated "climate action on the scope of the WWII mobilisation" in his 2003 *Plan B*, and in subsequent editions.[3] Whilst not using the language of "climate emergency", Al Gore in a 2006 essay entitled *The Moment of Truth* and in the film *An Inconvenient Truth* urged the world to take the threat of climate change no less seriously than the threat of the Nazis during WWII, to face the "global emergency."[4]

1 David Spratt and Philip Sutton, *Climate Code Red: The Case for Emergency Action*, Melbourne, Scribe, 2008.

2 OUP, "Word of the year", Oxford Languages, https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2019, accessed 22 December 2022.

3 Lester R. Brown, *Plan B: Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble*, New York, W. W. Norton and Company, 2003.

4 Al Gore, "The moment of truth", *Vanity Fair,* May 2006; Davis Guggenheim (dir.), *An Inconvenient Truth*, Lawrence Bender Productions/Participant Productions, 2006.

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The term "climate emergency" was popularised – and perhaps first codified – by Philip Sutton and myself in a 2007 report and subsequently in the June 2008 book *Climate Code Red*, which initiated the climate emergency movement in Australia. A network of grassroots climate activists emerged and set out to wake up the world to the fact that climate disruption constitutes an emergency, requiring a response at emergency scale and speed of action. The book argued the need to:

> [D]evote as much of the world's economic capacity as is necessary, as quickly as possible, to this climate emergency. [...] Declaring a climate and sustainability emergency is not just a formal measure or an empty political gesture, but an unambiguous reflection of a government's and people's commitment to intense and large-scale action.[5]

Climate Code Red was the spark for *Climate Safety: In Case of Emergency...* published in November 2008 in the UK and launched at an event with Green Party leader Caroline Lucas, George Monbiot, Jeremy Leggett, Prof. Kevin Anderson, and Tim Helweg-Larsen.[6]

In 2011, Paul Gilding's *The Great Disruption* laid out the reasons to "address the emergency with the commitment of our response to WWII and begin a real transformation to a sustainable economy."[7] This was a follow-up to his November 2009 *The One-Degree War Plan* essay with Jorgen Randers, which stated that it was time to "develop a global emergency response to cut climate emissions and pursue a safe climate 'whatever the cost'."[8]

Awareness of the need for a qualitatively higher level of action grew. "We are now at a tipping point that threatens to flip the world into a full-blown climate emergency," wrote Tony de Brum, the Marshall Islands political leader, Kelly

5 Spratt and Sutton, *Climate Code Red*, pp. 230, 251.

6 Richard Hawkins, Christian Hunt, Tim Holmes, and Tim Helweg-Larsen, *Climate Safety: In Case of Emergency...*, London, Public Interest Research Centre, 2008.

7 Paul Gilding, *The Great Disruption: How the Climate Crisis Will Transform the Global Economy*, London, Bloomsbury, 2011.

8 Jorgen Randers and Paul Gilding, "The one-degree war plan", *Journal of Global Responsibility*, 1 (1/2010), pp. 170–188.

Rigg, and Mary Robinson, the former Republic of Ireland President, in November 2013.[9]

In September 2014, The Climate Mobilization (TCM) was launched in the USA by Margaret Klein Salamon and Ezra Silk, calling for governmental climate action on the scale of the WWII mobilisation, a proposal which was detailed in 2016 in Silk's *Victory Plan*[10] and Klein's *Leading the Public into Emergency Mode*.[11] TCM drew on the work of Gilding and Brown on mobilisation, and on the climate emergency proposals developed in Australia and *Climate Code Red*. TCM's advocacy resulted in a climate mobilisation resolution being included in the Democratic Party's platform for the 2016 Presidential election.

In June 2018, before the US Congressional primaries, Justice Democrat candidate Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez signed TCM's pledge to champion climate mobilisation; in October, TCM proposed to Ocasio-Cortez's communications director that she "introduce a climate emergency declaration into Congress as a first step toward shifting America into a wartime-level mobilization in response to the accelerating climate crisis."[12] She subsequently championed the Green New Deal.

In Australia, grassroots activists campaigned for politicians and candidates at all levels of government to declare their support through various climate emergency declarations[13] and campaigns such as CACE, the Council and Community Action in the Climate Emergency. This led the City of Darebin in the suburbs of Melbourne in December 2016 to become the first council in the world to recognise the climate emergency, as part of an international campaign focused on local government. In the USA, such work by TCM led to the Montgomery County

9 Tony de Brum, Kelly Rigg, and Mary Robinson, "Warsaw climate talks: The world's poorest cannot wait for a 2015 deal", *The Guardian*, 21 November 2013, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/21/warsaw-climate-talks-the-worlds-poorest-cannot-wait-for-a-2015-deal, accessed 22 December 2022.

10 Ezra Silk, *The Climate Mobilization Victory Plan*, New York, The Climate Mobilization, 2016.

11 Margaret Klein Salamon, *Leading the Public into Emergency Mode: Introducing the Climate Emergency Movement*, New York, The Climate Mobilization, 2016.

12 Ezra Silk, "Proposal: A Congressional climate emergency declaration", TCM memo to Corbin Trent, 20 October 2018, pers. com.

13 CED, "Petitions", Climate Emergency Declaration, https://climateemergencydeclaration.org, accessed 22 December 2022.

Council becoming the first council in that country to follow suit, in December 2017, and subsequently others, including the City and County of San Francisco.

In the UK, a campaign initiated by The Green Party, and subsequently supported by Extinction Rebellion (XR), resulted in more than a hundred councils – starting with Bristol City Council and including the City of London – rapidly supporting the climate emergency approach, starting in November 2018. XR also drew inspiration from the work of TCM to make local declarations and the climate emergency a key part of its strategy and the November 2018 protests in London. A separate initiative in Canada led to councils covering more than 10 million people declaring a climate emergency ("*la déclaration d'urgence climatique*"), starting in August 2018.

The local government declaration movement spread quickly: by May 2019, 548 councils in twelve countries had adopted climate emergency language, though the meanings attached to the term varied, from full societal mobilisation to statements of increased ambition, although a general common thread was the goal of zero emissions by 2030, and often a call for large-scale carbon drawdown. By November 2022, 2,295 jurisdictions from local to national in 39 countries had declared a climate emergency, with the populations covered by those jurisdictions exceeding one billion citizens.[14]

The use of the term "climate emergency" exploded in late 2018 following its use by School Strike for Climate activities around the world and Greta Thunberg's brutally direct language, the rapidly growing climate emergency local government campaigns, its adoption by XR, and the enormous response in the USA, and internationally, to Green New Deal proposals.

The term was applied by a group of eminent scientists in 2019.[15] And in June 2019, both the language and the analysis were taken up by UN Secretary General António Guterres:

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[14] CED, "Climate emergency declarations in 2,305 jurisdictions and local governments cover 1 billion citizens", Climate Emergency Declaration, 12 December 2022, https://climateemergencydeclaration.org/climate-emergency-declarations-cover-15-million-citizens, accessed 22 December 2022.

[15] Timothy M. Lenton, Johan Rockström, Owen Gaffney, Stefan Rahmstorf, Katherine Richardson, Will Steffen, and Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, "Climate tipping points – too

> So we are losing the race, climate change is running faster than we are, and we need to sound the alarm, this is an emergency, this is a climate crisis and we need to act now [...] Unfortunately in politics, there is always a huge trend to keep the status quo. The problem is that the status quo is a suicide. Those (Paris) commitments, even if fully met, would lead to an increase in temperature [...] above 3 degrees which would mean a catastrophic situation.[16]

That same year, Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz concluded that: "the climate emergency is our third world war. Our lives and civilization as we know it are at stake, just as they were in the second world war";[17] Pope Francis said that "faced with a climate emergency [...] we must take action accordingly, in order to avoid perpetrating a brutal act of injustice toward the poor and future generations";[18] and Patricia Espinosa, then executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, declared: "We are literally in a climate emergency, and [...] we are increasingly hearing that this is the fight of our lives."[19]

Climate Code Red

The purpose of the 2008 book *Climate Code Red: The Case for Emergency Action* was to codify "climate emergency" as both a problem statement in the first two sections of the book, and as a solutions strategy in the third section.

Part 1 dealt with the science of climate change, scientific reticence, and why emerging observations and research showed that the biophysical circumstances

risky to bet against", *Nature*, 575 (2019), pp. 592–595.

16 Julia Pyper, "UN chief Guterres: The status quo on climate policy 'Is a suicide'", gtm, 7 June 2019, https://www.greentechmedia.com/articles/read/un-chief-guterres-the-status-quo-is-a-suicide, accessed 12 December 2022.

17 Joseph Stiglitz, "The climate crisis is our third world war. It needs a bold response", *The Guardian*, 4 June 2019, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/04/climate-change-world-war-iii-green-new-deal, accessed 12 December 2022.

18 Carol Glatz, "Mitigate global warming, spare further injustice to poor, pope says", *The Catholic Spirit*, 14 June 2019, https://thecatholicspirit.com/news/nation-and-world/from-the-pope/mitigate-global-warming-spare-further-injustice-to-poor-pope-says, accessed 12 December 2022.

19 Megan Rowling, "UN climate chief says 3C hotter world 'just not possible'", *Thomson Reuters Foundation*, 18 June 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-global-climatechange-talks-idUSKCN1TI23E, accessed 12 December 2022.

were more disturbing, and the action required more urgent, than policymakers appeared to understand.

Part 2, on targets, challenged the policymaking paradigm of "avoiding dangerous anthropogenic influence" by limiting warming to two degrees Celsius (2°C) as an appropriate target, and instead proposed the goal of a "safe climate" (safe for all people and species) which, following James Hansen et al., meant warming within the Holocene range and CO_2 levels of no more than 325 ppm.[20] The book proposed the goal of maximum protection so that concerns for people and other species, and for current and future generations, could be "amalgamated into a concern to protect the welfare of 'all people, all species, and all generations'."[21]

Part 3 drew on the experience of WWII and emergency responses to natural disasters to paint a picture of an emergency mode in which all available/necessary resources are devoted to the threat, in contrast to the "business-as-usual" mode of contemporary climate policymaking, which is characterised by incrementalism and trade-offs. *Climate Code Red* included this table comparing the two modes:[22]

Normal political-paralysis mode	Emergency mode
Crises are constrained within business-as-usual mode.	Society engages productivmodeely with crises, but not in panic mode.
Spin, denial, and 'politics as usual' are employed.	The situation is assessed with brutal honesty.
No urgent threat is perceived.	An immediate, or looming, threat to life, health, property, or the environment is perceived.
The problem is not yet serious.	A high probability of escalation beyond control if immediate action is not taken.
The time of response is not important.	The speed of response is crucial.
The crisis is one of many issues.	The crisis is of the highest priority.

[20] James Hansen, Makiko Sato, Pushker Kharecha, David Beerling, Robert Berner, Valerie Masson-Delmotte, Mark Pagani, Maureen Raymo, Dana L. Royer, and James C. Zachos, "Target atmospheric CO2: Where should humanity aim?", *The Open Atmospheric Science Journal*, 2 (1/2008), pp. 217–223.

[21] Spratt and Sutton, *Climate Code Red*, p. 112.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 224.

A labour market is in place.	Emergency project teams are developed and labour planning is instituted.
Budgetary 'restraint' is shown.	All available/necessary resources are devoted to the emergency and, if necessary, governments borrow heavily.
Community and markets function as usual.	Non-essential functions and consumption may be curtailed or rationed.
A slow rate of change occurs because of systemic inertia.	Rapid transition and scaling up occurs.
Market needs dominate response choices and thinking.	Planning, fostering innovation, and research take place.
Targets and goals are determined by political trade-offs.	Critical targets and goals are not compromised.
There is a culture of compromise.	Failure is not an option.
There is a lack of national leadership, and politics is adversarial and incremental.	Bipartisanship and effective leadership are the norm.

A threat may be civil or military: physical (such as fire, flood, tsunami, or earthquake); political (war and conflict); biomedical (infectious diseases); or the result of a combination of factors, such as famine or population displacement. A climate emergency response was necessary because the neoliberal reliance on markets and incremental change had and would continue to fail:

> Sharp changes mean disruption, and disrupting business or lifestyle is a political sin. In the developed world, "politics as usual" places the free-market economy at the heart of its project, and governments, as a matter of political faith, are loath to intervene decisively. Even though Sir Nicholas Stern named global warming as the "greatest market failure" in history, governments have been ideologically reluctant to act sufficiently to correct this great distortion of the market.[23]

So the key is decisive government intervention in planning and coordinating the transition. The particular nature of such a government would depend on the ca-

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 214.

pacity of people to build its democratic character, and to provide national leadership when conventional politics fails to do so:

> It should not be assumed that strong state intervention requires an autocratic government. If, as a society, we are to engage in a rapid change, it will require the active democratic participation of the population, rather than its passivity.[24]

Finally, *Climate Code Red* argued that the emergency must be seen as a climate *and* sustainability emergency, a multi-issue crisis of sustainability that incorporates food, water, peak oil, and global warming. Climate-specific solutions (such as renewables replacing fossil fuels) would not by themselves solve the biodiversity and resource overuse crises.

So how has the *Climate Code Red* analysis fared in the fifteen years since publication?

Faster than Forecast

The reticent nature of the reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and indeed the essentially conservative nature of the scientific method, are now more widely appreciated.

The 2018 Breakthrough report *What Lies Beneath* examined the scientific underestimation of existential climate risk, particularly in relation to the IPCC. In the foreword, Prof. John Schellnhuber, then Director of the Potsdam Institute, wrote that a scientific "trend towards 'erring on the side of least drama' has emerged" and "when the issue is the very survival of our civilisation, *conventional means of analysis may become useless*" (emphasis added),[25] in that:

> [C]alculating *probabilities* makes little sense in the most critical instances, such as the methane-release dynamics in thawing permafrost areas or the potential failing of entire states in the climate crisis. Rather, we should identify *possibilities*, that is,

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[24] *Ibid*., p. 220.

[25] Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, "Foreword", in D. Spratt and I. Dunlop, *What Lies Beneath: The Understatement of Existential Climate Risk*, Melbourne, Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration, 2018, p. 2.

> potential developments in the planetary make-up that are consistent with the initial and boundary conditions, the processes and the drivers we know.[26]

The conclusions of *What Lies Beneath* were echoed in a 2019 paper, "Climate tipping points – too risky to bet against", by a number of eminent scientists, including Schellnhuber, which directly took up the existential risk idea, and provided an "existential formula" and this conclusion:

> The evidence from tipping points alone suggests that we are in a state of planetary emergency: both the risk and urgency of the situation are acute [...] If damaging tipping cascades can occur and a global tipping point cannot be ruled out, then this is an existential threat to civilisation.[27]

The Earth's climate systems are undergoing abrupt change, which is happening faster than forecast only two decades ago. At the current 1.2°C of global average warming, tipping points have been passed for Arctic sea ice,[28] the Greenland Ice Sheet,[29] the Amundsen Sea glaciers in West Antarctica,[30] the eastern Amazonian rainforest,[31] and the world's coral systems.[32] Research released in December

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26 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

27 Lenton, Rockström et al., "Climate tipping points – too risky to bet against", p. 595.

28 Paul Voosen, "Growing underwater heat blob speeds demise of Arctic sea ice", *Science*, 25 August 2020, https://www.science.org/content/article/growing-underwater-heat-blob-speeds-demise-arctic-sea-ice, accessed 12 December 2022; Robert Monroe, "Research highlight: Loss of Arctic's reflective sea ice will advance global warming by 25 years", Scripps Institution of Oceanography, 22 July 2019, https://scripps.ucsd.edu/news/research-highlight-loss-arctics-reflective-sea-ice-will-advance-global-warming-25-years, accessed 12 December 2022.

29 Nick Breeze, "Professor Jason Box | Greenland today & [not for] tomorrow #COP26Glasgow", YouTube, 12 November 2021, youtube.com/ watch?v=P6LrGetz10g, accessed 23 December 2022; Willow Hallgren, "What Greenland's record-breaking rain means for the planet", *The Conversation*, 25 April 2021, https://theconversation.com/what-greenlands-record-breaking-rain-means-for-the-planet-166567, accessed 12 December 2022.

30 Eric Rignot, Jérémie Mouginot, Mathieu Morlighem, Hélène Seroussi, and Bernd Scheuchl, "Widespread, rapid grounding line retreat of Pine Island, Thwaites, Smith, and Kohler glaciers, West Antarctica, from 1992 to 2011", *Geophysical Research Letters*, 41 (10/2014), pp. 3502–3509.

31 Thomas E. Lovejoy and Carlos Nobre, "Amazon tipping point'" *Science Advances*, 4 (2/2018).

32 Terry P Hughes, James T. Kerry, Andrew H. Baird, Sean R. Connolly, Tory J. Chase, Andreas Dietzel, Tessa Hill, Andrew S. Hoey, Mia O. Hoogenboom, Mizue Jacobson, Ailsa Kerswell,

2021 provided new evidence that West Antarctica's Thwaites Glacier has passed the tipping point, likely triggering a cascade of similar events on the peninsula.[33] The events at both poles are not properly incorporated into current climate models.[34] By way of comparison, successive IPCC reports suggested that most of these systems would still be stable at 2°C.

Individual elements of the climate system that are tipping and/or changing rapidly may also interact and cascade. "Hothouse Earth" is a plausible scenario in which climate system feedbacks and their cascading interactions drive the Earth system climate to a "point of no return", whereby further warming would become self-sustaining.[35] This is not to say that this scenario is already locked into the system, but the authors warned that it may become active in the 1.5–2°C range, which is where we are heading now and will likely exceed, at an accelerated rate of warming, over the next two to three decades.

In finding robust solutions, special attention should be devoted to potential high-end outcomes in a climate system changing faster than forecast, and beyond conventional risk-management practice. But this is what the IPCC and climate research has overwhelmingly not done. New analysis shows that the potential to end humanity is "dangerously underexplored" by the IPCC, with

Joshua S. Madin, Abbie Mieog, Allison S. Paley, Morgan S. Pratchett, Gergely Torda, and Rachael M. Wood, "Global warming impairs stock–recruitment dynamics of corals", *Nature*, 568 (7752/2019), pp. 387–390.

33 Erin C. Petit, Christian Wild, Karen Alley, Atsuhiro Muto, Martin Truffer, Suzanne Louise Bevan, Jeremey N. Bassis, Anna J. Crawford, Ted A. Scambos, and Doug Benn, "C34A-07 – Collapse of Thwaites Eastern Ice Shelf by intersecting fractures", presentation to AGU Fall Meeting, 16 December 2021, https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm21/meetingapp.cgi/Paper/978762, accessed 12 December 2022.

34 Andy Aschwanden, Timothy C. Bartholomaus, Douglas J. Brinkerhoff, and Martin Truffer, "Brief communication: A roadmap towards credible projections of ice sheet contribution to sea level", *The Cryosphere*, 15 (12/2021), pp. 5705–5715; Peter Hannam, '"How lucky do you feel?': The awful risks buried in the IPCC report", *The Age*, 11 August 2021, https://www.theage.com.au/environment/climate-change/how-lucky-do-you-feel-the-awful-risks-buried-in-the-ipcc-report-20210811-p58hut.html, accessed 22 December 2022.

35 Will Steffen, Johan Rockström, Katherine Richardson, Timothy M. Lenton, Carl Folke, Diana Liverman, Colin P. Summerhayes, Anthony D. Barnosky, Sarah E. Cornell, Michel Crucifix, Jonathan F. Donges, Ingo Fetzer, Steven J. Lade, Marten Scheffer, Ricarda Winkelmann, and Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, "Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115 (33/2018), pp. 8252–8259.

textual analysis finding that IPCC assessments have shifted away from high-end warming to increasingly focus on lower temperature rises,[36] even as "global heating could become 'catastrophic' for humanity if temperature rises are worse than many predict or cause cascades of events we have yet to consider, or indeed both."[37] "We know least about the scenarios that matter most," says Luke Kemp from Cambridge's Centre for the Study of Existential Risk.[38]

The Efficacy of the 1.5 and 2°C Targets

When 154 nations signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in June 1992, the goal was "preventing dangerous anthropogenic interference with Earth's climate system," with subsequent discussion centring on the 2°C target.[39] But today Earth is already too hot and climate change is already dangerous, so what is the goal now?

By the time of the Paris Agreement in 2015, preventing dangerous interference was out the window, replaced by "holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels,"[40] even though the concrete commitments made by nations in 2015 would produce an outcome of 3°C or more.

The agreement was warmly embraced by most climate advocates and policymakers, with barely a whisper that the Paris range was far from safe and would be an existential threat to the most climate vulnerable, including small-island states, for example. Even as the 1.5°C goal was being elevated in 2015, there was clear evidence that climate change was already dangerous at just 1°C, for ex-

36 Florian U. Jehn, Luke Kemp, Ekaterina Ilin, Christoph Funk, Jason R. Wang, and Lutz Breuer, "Focus of the IPCC assessment reports has shifted to lower temperatures", *Earth's Future*, 10 (5/2022).

37 University of Cambridge, "Climate change: Potential to end humanity is 'dangerously underexplored' say experts", *phys.org*, 1 August 2022, https://phys.org/news/2022-08-climate-potential-humanity-dangerously-underexplored.html, accessed 23 December 2022.

38 *Ibid*.

39 Samuel Randalls, "History of the 2°C climate target", *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 1 (4/2010), pp. 598–605.

40 UN, *Paris Agreement*, United Nations, 2015, p. 3, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf, accessed 12 December 2022.

ample 2014 research showing that glacial loss in West Antarctica was unstoppable.[41]

Sir David King, the former Chief Scientist and adviser to the UK government, had collaborated with the small-island states in the lead-up to the 2015 Paris conference, arguing successfully that global temperature should not go above a 1.5°C rise for safety. But in 2021, *The Independent* journalist Donnachadh McCarthy reported that King "astounded me by saying he now realised this was wrong, and believes the passing of the Arctic tipping point has been reached. […] He said the *1.1°C rise that we already have is too dangerous* – and candidly admitted he believed US climate professor James Hansen had been right after all in 1988, when he warned the US Congress that we should not pass 350 ppm CO_2. We have now breached 415 ppm and are heading fast towards 500 ppm, Sir David said" (emphasis added).[42]

Hansen's proposition is well supported. In 2009, scientists proposed that "human changes to atmospheric CO_2 concentrations should not exceed 350 ppm by volume, and that radiative forcing should not exceed one watt per square metre above pre-industrial levels. Transgressing these boundaries will increase the risk of irreversible climate change, such as the loss of major ice sheets, accelerated sea-level rise and abrupt shifts in forest and agricultural systems."[43] Other evidence points to the need to return to pre-industrial levels of 280 ppm, for example in relation to the cryosphere.[44] And in 2022 a group of Australian scientists suggested that from a geologic perspective: "a justifiable aim for a future climate is one akin to pre-industrial conditions."[45]

41 NASA, "West Antarctic glacier loss appears unstoppable", Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 14 May 2014, www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/news.php?release=2014-148, accessed 12 December 2022.

42 Donnachadh McCarthy, "We need to start refreezing the Arctic Ocean as soon as possible to save our megacities", *The Independent*, 8 February 2021, https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/opinion/arctic-ocean-ice-temperature-climate-change-b1790779.html, accessed 12 December 2022.

43 Johan Rockström et al., "A safe operating space for humanity", *Nature*, 461 (2009), p. 473.

44 ICCI, *Thresholds and closing windows: Risks of irreversible cryosphere climate change*, International Cryosphere Climate Initiative, December 2105, https://iccinet.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ICCI_thresholds_v5_151128_high_res1.pdf, accessed 12 December 2022.

45 Andrew D. King, Jacqueline Peel, Tilo Ziehn, Kathryn J. Bowen, Harry L. O. McClelland, Celia McMichael, Zebedee R. J. Nicholls, and J. M. Kale Sniderman, "Preparing for a post-net-zero world", *Nature Climate Change*, 12 (9/2022), p. 775.

It is well-known from paleoclimate research that the current level of greenhouse gases is enough, over time, to inundate coastal cities, low-lying island nations and regions, and the world's agriculturally rich alluvial deltas. Scientists from the University of NSW conclude: "An equilibrium climate under *current* temperatures would have a sea level several metres higher than what we have today (likely 5–10 metres higher). We also know that an equilibrium climate under *current* CO_2 concentrations would have a sea level 5–25 metres higher" (emphasis added).[46] US government agencies have a high sea-level-rise scenario of 2.5 metres by 2100, and even the Pentagon uses a two-metre scenario.

There can be no excuse for not knowing that 1.5°C of warming will create a disastrous outcome, but few climate advocates, governments, and policymakers have chosen to say so. Is 1.5°C a desirable end-goal, or a political trade-off? What are their goals and what are they aiming to protect?

Maximum Protection or Acceptable Damage?

For a quarter of a century, policymakers have speculated about the maximum climate damage that civilisation and the Earth system can tolerate and adapt to. How close to the edge of the climate cliff can we stand without falling to our death?

Clearly, the goal pursued in mainstream climate advocacy is not the provision of "maximum protection" to the most climate vulnerable,[47] or concern "to protect all people, all species, and all generations,"[48] but rather some poorly-informed notion of maximum acceptable damage.

To protect small-island states, the Great Barrier Reef, Antarctica, the Amazon – indeed to provide protection for the many places and people we care about – re-

46 Andy Pitman, Ian Macadam, Nerilie Abram, Steve Sherwood, and Martin De Kauwe, "Can we limit global warming to 1.5°C?", ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes Briefing Note 15, 2021, https://climateextremes.org.au/briefing-note-15-can-we-limit-global-warming-to-1-5c, accessed 22 December 2022.

47 Adam P. A. Cardilini and Philip Sutton, *Delivering Maximum Protection: An Effective Goal for a Climate Emergency Response*, Melbourne, Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration, February 2020. Available at https://www.breakthroughonline.org.au/papers.

48 Spratt and Sutton, *Climate Code Red*, p. 119.

quires returning to a climate similar to the relatively stable Holocene conditions of the last 9,000 years of fixed human settlement, during which time CO_2 levels did not exceed 280 ppm. It also requires preventing a cascade of tipping points in the meantime, a task to which policymakers have turned a blind eye.

If this were the goal, advocates and policymakers would advocate a "three levers" approach to reversing global warming: a "reduce, remove, and repair"[49] strategy:

- **Lever 1. Reduce emissions to zero at emergency speed**. 2030 – not 2050 – is the crucial time frame. The primary task is to build capacity for emergency speed and scale emissions elimination, and to minimise the rate and magnitude of warming. Long-term targets are an excuse for procrastination, as the history of international climate policymaking shows. Fast reduction of methane emissions must be a focus, because the gas is short-lived in the atmosphere and its mitigation can reduce the climate forcing.
- **Lever 2. Remove carbon from the atmosphere.** Removing CO_2 from the atmosphere can cool an overheated Earth. Stabilisation (at the current climate) would require carbon drawdown of 60 ppm (back to ~350 ppm) to stop further warming of ~0.7°C. Lowering the current level of warming would require more drawdown.[50] Drawdown is a slow process that will not provide active cooling until it is greater than the level of ongoing emissions. Some nature-based processes are well-known, safe, and can be enhanced. Other new technologies are far from being proven viable and safe, so large-scale research and deployment is also crucial.
- **Lever 3. Short-term cooling and repair.** We need ways to cool the planet and/or protect vital climate systems in the near term, particularly in the polar regions, until the other two levers have time to take effect. Options for polar cooling include enhancing the capacity of marine clouds to reflect incoming radiation, and sulfate aerosols injection (SAI) – using cooling aerosols – which can have a strong, immediate cooling effect. Early studies of climate repair should be incrementally scalable – so they can be paused or reversed

49 CCAG, The Global Climate Crisis and The Action Needed, London, Climate Crisis Advisory Group, 2021.

50 Karina von Schuckmann et al., "Heat stored in the Earth system: where does the energy go?", *Earth System Science Data*, 12 (3/2020), p. 2029.

at any point; and transparency and good governance will consolidate trust in the process, states the Climate Crisis Advisory Group.[51]

The harsh reality is that the first two levers alone – zero emissions and drawdown – are not sufficient to prevent a catastrophe of difficult to comprehend proportions. Warming to date plus the observed Earth Energy Imbalance (EEI) at the top of the atmosphere adds up to about 2°C for today's level of greenhouse gases. And the paleoclimate record suggests the current level of CO_2 would result in 3°C or more of warming in the longer term, so a strategy of emissions elimination only will not prevent a global disaster. Large-scale carbon drawdown is essential, but this cannot be done at a scale and speed fast enough to prevent more tipping points being activated and the possibility of a cascade of consequences or triggering the "Hothouse Earth" scenario.

Hence, the third lever of action is required: the urgent scaling up of research and investigation into an additional range of climate interventions that aims to rapidly cool the planet, including various solar radiation management (SRM) options. If shown to be efficacious, SRM could play a vital role in flattening the warming peak whilst allowing time for zero emissions and carbon drawdown to create a path back to a safe, liveable climate.

Too often, climate strategy has been reduced, if somewhat unconsciously, to a "triage politics" of selecting what to save and what to abandon. Whilst advocates would likely claim this is grossly unfair, that is what setting 1.5–2°C as the goal means.

In the absence of normative goals for the maximum protection of species, peoples, and the Earth system, there is a tendency for political trade-offs between protection and sounding politically reasonable. Thus, goals may be set, only to be abandoned as warming accelerates. "Avoiding dangerous climate change" has already been left by the wayside. When warming hits 1.5°C within a decade, will the Paris goal be abandoned too?

[51] CCAG, *A critical pathway for a manageable future for humanity*, London, Climate Crisis Advisory Group, 2022.

The Emergency Is Now

Covid supply-chain disruption and the war in Ukraine have sidelined the task of rapid emissions reductions. Both have contributed to inflation and a political focus on cost-of-living pressures, and the war has disrupted energy markets, driven a return to coal, whose use is at an all-time high, prompted an increase in emissions-intensive arms production and use, and become an excuse for governments to delay climate action. Increased fertiliser costs, driven by rising fossil fuel prices, have contributed to food insecurity in developing nations.

Atmospheric levels of all three main greenhouse gases have reached record highs.[52] The latest International Energy Agency projections show that global carbon emissions from energy may peak in 2025, but are likely to plateau at a high level after that for a decade or more, rather than decline in any significant manner.[53]

The warming trend will reach 1.5°C around 2030, irrespective of any emissions reduction initiatives taken in the meantime;[54] the UN Environment Program says there is no longer a credible path to holding warming below 1.5°C in the short term,[55] without deploying global cooling interventions. Keeping warming to 2°C

52 Helena Horton, "Atmospheric levels of all three greenhouse gases hit record high", *The Guardian*, 27 October 2022, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/26/atmospheric-levels-greenhouse-gases-record-high, accessed 12 December 2022.

53 Jasper Jolly, "Carbon emissions from energy to peak in 2025 in 'historic turning point', says IEA", *The Guardian*, 22 October 22, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/27/carbon-emissions-to-peak-in-2025-in-historic-turning-point-says-iea, accessed 12 December 2022.

54 H. Damon Matthews and Seth Wynes, "Current global efforts are insufficient to limit warming to 1.5°C", *Science*, 376 (6600/2022), pp. 1404–1409; IPCC, "Summary for Policymakers" in V. Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M.I. Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R. Matthews, T.K. Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelekçi, R. Yu, and B. Zhou (eds.), *Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge UK and New York NY, Cambridge University Press, 2021, table SPM.1.

55 Taejin Park, Hirofumi Hashimoto, Weile Wang, Bridget Thrasher, Andrew R. Michaelis, Tsengdar Lee, Ian G. Brosnan, and Ramakrishna R. Nemani, "What does global land climate look like at 2 degrees warming?", *Earth's Future*, published online 20 December 2022; UN, *Emissions Gap Report 2022: The Closing Window,* Nairobi, UN Environment Programme, 27

means aiming for zero emissions by 2030 for high-per capita emitters, but with emissions and greenhouse gas levels still rising, the Earth will likely reach 2°C of global warming by the 2040s and the 2°C target will very likely be missed by a significant margin,[56] as the Chatham House analysis suggests (discussed below).

When large-scale, self-reinforcing climate system feedbacks are considered, current emissions reduction commitments may still lead to 3°C or more of warming, which US security analysts say could result in a world of "outright chaos."[57] And six in ten climate scientists surveyed by the journal *Nature* say that they expect the world to warm by at least 3°C by the end of the century.[58]

Global demand for food by 2050 is likely to be 50% higher than today. Over that time, the impacts of climate change on the capacity to feed the global population, which is projected to increase 20% over three decades, will have a profound negative impact on human and global security. Chatham House's *Climate Change Risk Assessment 2021* warned that the world is "dangerously off track" to meet the *Paris Agreement* goals, that the risks are compounding, and that "without immediate action the impacts will be devastating" in the coming decades, especially for food security.[59] The report concluded that impacts likely to be locked in for the period 2040–2050 unless emissions rapidly decline include a global average 30% drop in crop yields by 2050, and that more severe and extensive droughts will contribute to cascading climate impacts that will "drive

October 2022, https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/40874/EGR2022.pdf, accessed 22 December 2022.

56 UN, *Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement – Synthesis Report by the Secretariat*, New York, UNFCCC, 26 October 2022, p. 7, unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2022_04.pdf, accessed 22 December 2022.

57 Kurt M. Campbell, Jay Gulledge, J. R. McNeill, John Podesta, Peter Ogden, Leon Fuerth, R. James Woolsey, Julianne Smith, Richard Weitz, Derek Mix, and Alexander T. J. Lennon, *The Age of Consequences: The Foreign Policy and National Security Implications of Global Climate Change*, Washington DC, Center for Strategic and International Studies /Center for New American Security, p. 7, www.csis.org/analysis/age-consequences, accessed 22 December 2022.

58 Jeff Tollefson, "Top climate scientists are sceptical that nations will rein in global warming", *Nature*, 599 (7883/2021), p. 24.

59 Daniel Quiggin, Kris De Meyer, Lucy Hubble-Rose, and Antony Froggatt, *Climate Change Risk Assessment 2021*, London, Chatham House, 2021.

political instability and greater national insecurity, and fuel regional and international conflict."[60]

The current policymaking path has failed. Every meeting of the Conference of the Parties under the UNFCCC has seen emissions and temperature trends rise in the following period. Species are dying off as much as a thousand times more frequently than before the arrival of humans 60 million years ago.[61] Climate-specific solutions (such as renewables replacing fossil fuels) will not in themselves solve the biodiversity and resource overuse crisis.[62] Turning recognition of the climate and sustainability emergency into an emergency plan and mobilisation around the world is the only strategy that matches ambition to the scale of the problem.

Disruption and the Market

Markets crave stability and fear disruption. Yet the world is entering an era of instability and uncertainty driven in part by climate-related financial risks, preventing the market generation of reliable prices. Energy markets provide just one example.

In 2011, Paul Gilding concluded that it was an illusion to think the contradictions can be resolved within the current economic frame and that disruption and chaos was now inevitable as system failure occurs.[63] Five years earlier, Nicholas Stern had said that "paths requiring very rapid emissions cuts are unlikely to be economically viable" and disruptive because "it is difficult to secure emission cuts faster than about 1% per year except in instances of recession."[64]

Analyst Alex Steffen concludes that:

60 *Ibid*., p. 36.

61 Jurriaan M. De Vos, Lucas N. Joppa, John L. Gittleman, Patrick R. Stephens, and Stuart L. Pimm, "Estimating the normal background rate of species extinction", *Conservation Biology*, 29 (2/2105), pp. 452–462.

62 Christopher Ketcham, "Addressing climate change will not 'Save the planet'", *The Intercept*, 3 December 2022, https://theintercept.com/2022/12/03/climate-biodiversity-green-energy, accessed 22 December 2022.

63 Gilding, *The Great Disruption*.

64 Nicholas Stern, *The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review*, London, UK Treasury, 2006, pp. 203–204.

> It is no longer possible to achieve [an] orderly transition, to combine action at the scale and speed we need with a smooth transition and a minimum of disruption. [...] We are not now capable of designing a future that works in continuity with our existing systems and practices while producing emissions reductions and sustainability gains fast enough to avoid truly dire ecological harm. This is an option that no longer exists.[65]

And the risk intelligence company Verisk Maplecroft assesses that "there is 'no longer any realistic chance' for an orderly transition for global financial markets because political leaders will be forced to rely on 'handbrake' policy interventions to cut emissions."[66]

So, when all is said and done, the choice is social collapse and economic disruption due to the failure to act fast enough, or economic disruption as a necessary consequence of emergency-level fast change. There is no third way.

Yet climate policymaking has been built on two foundational pillars: a bedrock assumption that change should be slow and incremental in a manner that not does disrupt growth or inhibit the market, or leave capital stranded; and that levers for change should be market-focused, thus the emphasis on such mechanisms as carbon prices, tradeable offsets, tax credits, new markets for carbon capture and storage with or without bioenergy, and even commodifying nature.[67] This is reflected in IPCC reports and the preferred net-zero-2050 scenarios of central bankers and the fossil fuel industry.

The major fossil fuel producers and nations have ensured that their sector is not targeted by policymakers. The COP 21 *Paris Agreement*, for example, is almost devoid of substantive language on the cause of human induced climate change

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65 Alex Steffen, "Discontinuity is the Job", *The Snap Forward*, 9 August 2021, https://alexsteffen.substack.com/p/discontinuity-is-the-job, accessed 23 December 2024.

66 Jillian Ambrose, "Prepare for disorderly shift to low-carbon era, firms and investors told", *The Guardian*, 26 May 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/26/prepare-for-disorderly-shift-to-low-carbon-era-firms-and-investors-told, accessed 23 December 2022.

67 Todd Woody, "Scientists to carbon markets: Don't monetize the whales", *Bloomberg*, 16 December 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-12-15/whale-conservation-funded-by-carbon-markets-scientists-push-back, accessed 22 December 2022.

and contains no reference to "coal", "oil", "fracking", "shale oil", "fossil fuel", or "carbon dioxide", nor to the words "zero", "ban", "prohibit", or "stop". By way of comparison, the term "adaptation" occurs more than eighty times in 31 pages, although responsibility for forcing others to adapt is not mentioned, and both liability and compensation are explicitly excluded.

Instead, emphasis is given to speculative, but potentially highly-profitable, market-based solutions. There is no better example than most economy–energy–climate Integrated Assessment Models' (IAMs) scenarios, which have come to dominate IPCC mitigation pathway reports and net-zero-2050 paths.[68] They contort a path towards the Paris targets by – in the best Orwellian tradition – "overshooting" the target and then returning to it by century's end through an undue reliance on bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS), a technological imaginary that would pay oil and gas producers to pump gigantic volumes of carbon dioxide into wells they have emptied of fossil fuels. The focus is on the "efficiency" of the market; in the IPCC's most recent Working Group 3 report, the expression "cost-effectiveness" is mentioned 173 times.[69]

IAMs reflect modellers' values and policymakers' perceived needs. Depending on how modellers perceive the roots of the problem to be solved, they will "design the model structure, including possible instruments and relationships within the model accordingly. Hence, the very structure of a model depends on the modeller's beliefs about the functioning of society."[70] IAMs are based on faith in the efficacy and efficiency of market-driven change and so privilege particular pathways, and entice policymakers into thinking that the forecasts the models generate have some kind of scientific legitimacy.

IAMs project only gradual physical changes, in which climates will "migrate" slowly, yet we are now in an era of physical disruption, cascades and fast change. The models, says financial analyst Spencer Glendon, quoting Thom-

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68 David Spratt and Ian Dunlop, *Degrees of Risk: Can the Banking System Survive Climate Warming of 3˚C?*, Melbourne, Breakthrough National Centre for Climate Restoration, 2021, pp. 25–26.

69 Robert Chris, pers. com., 24 December 2020.

70 Saskia Ellenbeck and Johan Lilliestam, "How modelers construct energy costs: Discursive elements in Energy System and Integrated Assessment Models", *Energy Research and Social Science*, 47 (2019), p. 73.

as C. Schelling, "probably cannot project discontinuities because nothing goes into them that will produce drastic change. There may be phenomena that could produce drastic changes, but they are not known with enough confidence to introduce into the models."[71] Thus, the very models that underpin climate policy-making are not fit for purpose.

Mathematical models of the climate and the economy use quantifiable, probabilistic risk analysis to reduce complexity and high levels of uncertainty to numerical expressions and formulae, but cannot adequately express non-linear processes in the climate system. Schellnhuber describes a "probability obsession," which he says makes little sense in the most critical instances, in part because "we are in a unique situation with no precise historic analogue."[72]

Corporate and state climate policies and scenarios lack appropriate non-probabilistic risk-management approaches to both the physical and social risks, and exhibit an inadequate understanding of the high-end possibilities. Mostly, they are based on IPCC processes and methods, which are scientifically reticent and a poor basis for understanding the full range of potential outcomes.

Neo-classical economics assumes an idealised world of market participants operating with "perfect knowledge" to produce smooth change and optimal outcomes via efficient prices. If risk is quantifiable, then it can be priced, so that uncertainty is tamed by the market. But markets so far have been poor at recognising and pricing risks and suffer from the "tragedy of the horizon"[73] and the "tragedy of the commons": hence greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise at worst-case rates.

The global economy relies on endless layers of systems that were built within the stable climate of the past, but "investing in an environment where tomor-

71 Spencer Glendon, "A price, but at what cost?", Woodwell Climate Research Centre, 18 February 2019, https://www.woodwellclimate.org/a-price-but-at-what-cost, accessed 23 December 2022.

72 Schellnhuber, *What Lies Beneath*, p. 3.

73 Mark Carney, "Breaking the tragedy of the horizon – climate change and financial stability", Bank of England, 29 September 2015, https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/-/media/boe/files/speech/2015/breaking-the-tragedy-of-the-horizon-climate-change-and-financial-stability.pdf, accessed 12 December 2022.

row doesn't look like today is very tricky," as Dickon Pinner, a senior partner at global management consultants McKinsey, acknowledges. Pinner says that if investors do not change direction now, then governments will likely "have to pull that lever hard [...] and I think that would cause a lot of massive, massive disruption."[74]

Climate change is not a market optimisation problem, it is a risk problem – the risk of the loss of capitalism – says Spencer Glendon.[75] He also notes that the economics of climate change "will be seen as one of the worst mistakes humans have made."[76]

Thus, the current, market-dominated approaches to managing climate risks are not efficacious, and another approach – that of state-led mobilisation is necessary – but barely on the agenda.

Collapse, or State Leadership?

In times of emergency – wars, pandemics, natural disasters – what is salient is the key role of government in planning and overseeing the immediate response to the threat, and then the transition out of the crisis. In these cases, markets fail because they cannot adequately assess or respond to the risks which are society-wide and cascading, and because the solutions are not reducible to a bazaar of tradable goods and services.

This is also true for weapons of mass destruction, for ecological collapse, and for other existential risks, where the primary risk-management responsibility lies with the state apparatus. And it is the case for climate disruption, where markets have hitherto failed to heed the high-end, planetary-wide risks, and the range of potential second-order impacts is difficult to articulate.

Faced with, in Glendon's language, the "loss of capitalism," why has capital's own response been so myopic and so self-destructive in the longer-term? Per-

74 Carolyn Kormann, "Will big business finally reckon with the climate crisis?", *New Yorker*, 4 February 2020.

75 Spencer Glendon, "Climate risk and the capital markets', *Fintech TV*, 20 September 2020, fintech.tv/climate-risk-and-the-capital-markets, accessed 12 December 2022.

76 Kormann, "Will big business finally reckon with the climate crisis?".

haps that is its nature. Perhaps much of the global elite, by their inaction, indicate that they think they can survive well enough despite disabling climate impacts, and have made a fateful – if delusional – decision to live with warming rather than face the disruptive consequences of large-scale state intervention and mobilisation.

According to Bruno Latour, a super-rich caste recognises that in a hotter world there will not be enough Earth for everyone, hence they have given up on a common future purpose for humanity and are determined that a sort of gilded fortress must be built for that small percentage who would be able to make it through.[77] In this world, artificial intelligence and automation will replace the shrinking global population, with elaborate plans for self-protection such as escape to a remote island or a New Zealand hideaway as plan B, or heading for Mars as plan C, led by Musk, Branson, and Bezos.

Latour describes:

> [T]he sense of vertigo, almost of panic, that traverses all contemporary politics arises owing to the fact that the ground is giving way beneath everyone's feet at once, as if we all felt attacked everywhere, in our habits and in our possessions. [...] The most basic right of all is to feel safe and protected, especially at a moment when the old protections are disappearing.[78]

The old certainties have disintegrated, and the dynamics of business have become more and more short term. Gone are the days of long-term thinking, and career-long jobs in both public and private sectors. Horizons have shrunk to the time it takes private equity to buy out a company, strip costs, return it to the market, and pocket the gains – or the length of many electoral cycles – of about three to four years.

The global elites' capacity – or perhaps willingness – to fully imagine the climate consequences of their inaction seems limited. In my experience, few at the highest levels of politics and business in my own country, Australia, demon-

77 Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, Cambridge, Polity, 2018.
78 *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 11.

strate a full understanding of the real climate risks and the likelihood of societal collapse.

A 2016 report, *Thinking the Unthinkable,* based on interviews with top leaders around the world, found that "A proliferation of 'unthinkable' events [...] has revealed a new fragility at the highest levels of corporate and public service leaderships. Their ability to spot, identify and handle unexpected, non-normative events is [...] perilously inadequate at critical moments."[79] The report identified a deep reluctance, or what might be called "executive myopia" amongst top leaders to contemplate even the possibility that "unthinkables" might happen, let alone how to handle them. At the highest board and senior management levels, executives confessed to often being overwhelmed, including by the rate and scale of change. Time is at such a premium that the pressing need to think, reflect, and contemplate in the ways required by the new "unthinkables" is largely marginalised. Often blind eyes were turned, either because of a lack of will to believe the signs, or an active preference to deny and then not to engage.

With regard to climate change, the Managing Director of Royal Dutch Shell, Ben van Beurden, confirmed: "Yeah, we knew. Everybody knew. And somehow we all ignored it."[80]

Then there is the "group-think" that pervades the public and private sector global elites. The delusional "official future" is expressed, for example, in the preferred net-zero-2050 scenarios of the world's central bankers of a world of manageable risks, economic growth, and steady transition where fossil fuels still provide one-third of primary energy in 2050, dutifully set out in the imaginary landscape of IAMs. These scenarios feature temperature overshoot, a large role for currently non-viable technologies, and a gross underestimation of future damages, based on a poor understanding of the dynamics of the climate system and its tipping points.[81] Overshooting climate targets to 2°C or more could significantly increase the risk of tipping cascades, and large tipping risks can be

79 Nik Gowing and Chris Langdon, *Thinking the Unthinkable: A New Imperative for Leadership in the Digital Age*, London, Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, 2016, p. 4.

80 Justin Worland, "The reason fossil fuel companies are finally reckoning with climate change", *Time*, 16 January 2020, https://time.com/5766188/shell-oil-companies-fossil-fuels-climate-change, accessed 23 December 2022.

81 Spratt and Dunlop, *Degrees of Risk*, pp. 25–26.

avoided only if temperatures are below the current level of global warming of 1.2°C, say Potsdam Institute researchers.[82]

This is also the world of global climate policymaking. In the comfort of large numbers of fellow professionals, surrounded by fossil fuel lobbyists and fuelled by the reticence of IPPC reports, policymakers at the annual UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties have constructed a make-believe "official future" of incremental change and unimpeded growth. This is bolstered by a lowest-common-denominator consensus decision-making process – the power of the big fossil fuel exporting nations to sabotage effective outcomes – that has no capacity to engage in the existential risk management required.

Most substantially, capital has been unprepared to face the consequences of planetary limits being exceeded – both in the overuse of finite resources and by climate disruption – and to acknowledge that market forces have been unable to adequately respond to these crises, and to recognise that neoliberalism is incapable of resolving the contradictions.

Four critical features of our time are: climate denial and delay; the overuse of resources and the exceedance of planetary boundaries; deregulation; and growing inequality (both within and between nations). They can only be addressed together, with an emergency mobilisation to "reduce, remove and repair" requiring global cooperation and an ethic of collective responsibility and a fair sharing of the burden.

Oxfam has reported that the wealthiest 1% of humanity are responsible for twice as many emissions as the poorest 50%, and that the richest 5% were responsible for over a third (37%) of this growth of 60% in annual emissions between 1990 and 2015.[83] Growing inequality has contributed to disillusionment with govern-

82 Nico Wunderling, Ricarda Winkelmann, Johan Rockström, Sina Loriani, David I. Armstrong McKay, Paul D. L. Ritchie, Boris Sakschewski, and Jonathan F. Donges, "Global warming overshoots increase risks of climate tipping cascades in a network model", *Nature Climate Change*, 22 December 2022.

83 Oxfam, "A billionaire emits a million times more greenhouse gases than the average person", media release, *Oxfam*, 7 November 2022, https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/billionaire-emits-million-times-more-greenhouse-gases-average-person, accessed 23 December 2022; Oxfam, "Carbon emissions of richest 1 percent more than double the emis-

ment as an agency that will protect the vulnerable. The hyper-consumption of the world's most affluent 10–20% – no matter whether they live in the developed or developing economies – is a material obstacle to building global agreement on the necessarily disruptive and at times painful economic and social transitions towards the fair use of finite resources.

In a world where resource use is already unsustainable, economic growth can only occur by the absolute decoupling of production (producing more while reducing the absolute quantity of resource inputs), but decoupling is a "fiction":

> What policy wonks call "absolute decoupling" – the only kind that would do the climate any good – turns out to be a fantasy akin to a perpetual motion machine, a chimera of growth unhindered by material constraints. One recent analysis of 835 peer-reviewed articles on the subject found that the kind of massive and speedy reductions in emissions that would be necessary to halt global warming "cannot be achieved through observed decoupling rates." The mechanism on which mainstream climate policy is betting the future of the species, and on which the possibility of green growth rests, appears to be a fiction.[84]

Using the measure of "domestic material consumption", which is the total weight of raw materials (biomass, minerals, metals, and fossil fuels), the evidence shows that our material footprint has not diminished and is outpacing GDP growth.[85] And a 2020 study estimated that a "successful decoupling" – 2% annual GDP growth and a decline in resource use by 2050 to a level that could be sustainable and compatible with a maximum 2°C global warming – would

sions of the poorest half of humanity", media release, *Oxfam*, 21 September 2020, https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/carbon-emissions-richest-1-percent-more-double-emissions-poorest-half-humanity, accessed 23 December 2022.

84 Dominik Wiedenhofer, Doris Virág, Gerald Kalt, Barbara Plank, Jan Streeck, Melanie Pichler, Andreas Mayer, Fridolin Krausmann, Paul Brockway, Anke Schaffartzik, Tomer Fishman, Daniel Hausknost, Bartholomäus Leon-Gruchalski, Tânia Sousa, Felix Creutzig, and Helmut Haberl, "A systematic review of the evidence on decoupling of GDP, resource use and GHG emissions, Part I: Bibliometric and conceptual mapping", *Environmental Research Letters*, 15 (6/2020); Ben Ehrenreich, "We're hurtling toward global suicide", *The New Republic*, 18 March 2021; https://newrepublic.com/article/161575/climate-change-effects-hurtling-toward-global-suicide, accessed 23 December 2022.

85 Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis, "Is green growth possible?", *New Political Economy*, 25 (4/2020), pp. 469–486.

require 2.6 times more GDP out of every ton of material used between 2017 and 2050, and concluded that "there are no realistic scenarios for such an increase in resource productivity."[86] Voluntary market self-regulation can provide no path to sustainable resource use.

Within resource limits and with no path to absolute decoupling, there is no credible scenario of affluence for nine billion people, and a global buy-in for emergency mobilisation will only happen if there is a global reallocation of resources based on the threefold needs of the climate emergency, reducing resource use to sustainable levels, and equitable responsibility.

Boris Frankel, in his *Fictions of Sustainability*, has pointed out that in the present economic circumstances – low growth, stagflation, disruption – the material needs of decarbonisation cannot be absorbed by growth, but only by reallocation.[87] He says that if there are no major technological breakthroughs in the next decade (especially regarding decoupling), then climate disruption and resource depletion will force governments to take emergency action and scale back production in the face of systemic breakdown.

Climate disruption and resource overuse will also destabilise markets, resulting in the continuation of low growth and growing inequality. Markets have and will likely continue to fail to respond to the twin crises, and instead creeping financialisation – credit-fuelled consumption, speculation in everything from shares and real estate to NFTs and crypto currencies, and an increasing burden of debt and debt servicing – will continue to be the hallmark of neoliberalism's pernicious hold.

If resources are to be redirected to economic transition and equity needs, there is a crying need to curb the power of financial capital and rechannel current economic behaviour away from speculation to socially-useful ends: a liveable and biodiverse planet. Against this possibility, business has strongly opposed state intervention as a guiding principle of its behaviour, and succeeded in block-

86 Tere Vadén, Ville Lähde, Antti Majava, Paavo Järvensivu, Tero Toivanen, and Jussi T. Eronen, "Raising the bar: on the type, size and timeline of a 'successful' decoupling", *Environmental Politics*, 30 (3/2021), pp. 462–476.

87 Boris Frankel, *Fictions of Sustainability: The Politics of Growth and Post-Capitalist Futures*, Melbourne, Greenmeadows, 2018, p. 192.

ing state leadership of the climate emergency. Australian financial commentator Alan Kohler once quipped that politics is a sideshow, as central banks run the global economy and Silicon Valley governs society.[88]

The urgent need is to take back and rebuild state institutions destroyed by neoliberalism in order to redirect production to socially-necessary goals (decarbonisation and cooling, and basic public needs including secure food and water, and health, education, and transport), to plan and manage the transition and adjustment, and to curb the destructive path of financialisation. This would be a massive politically-directed reallocation of resources not only in the OECD, but in China, India, Nigeria, and more. In the first instance, this is not a question of growth versus degrowth, but what needs to be, and can be, produced within resource sustainability and safe-climate boundaries.

There is a battle for the role of the state, with democratic community movements around the world – including student strikers, the labour movement, Extinction Rebellion and its successors, and a myriad of other constituencies – demanding that the state act to overturn deregulation's hegemony. And just as proposals focussed on Green New Deals and market-driven growth have failed to deal with systematic market failure regarding climate risks and resource depletion, so enhanced social expenditure will also fail if state leadership does not provide a path out of the climate and ecological crises via an emergency mobilisation.

The situation is unprecedented and there are complex issues about political agency, and democratic or authoritarian solutions. Frankel asks whether preventing ecological and civilisational disaster is more important than democracy, especially as the "conflicted state" is wedged between the need to transition to a sustainable economy operating within safe planetary boundaries, and the need to ensure political support from business and the community by adhering to a narrative of prosperity through growth.[89]

Emergency-level action will become inevitable, but will it be democratic? In terms of states' capacity to mobilise, authoritarian China is perhaps best placed.

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88 *Ibid*.

89 Boris Frankel, *Capitalism Versus Democracy: Rethinking Politics in the Age of Environmental Crisis*, Melbourne, Greenmeadows, 2020.

People do not lightly accede to deep change, even when it is necessary to protect the things they care about, and reducing the hyper-consumption of the world's most affluent seems like an unimaginable political obstacle, whether in North America or Europe, the Gulf, China, or Japan.

Perhaps there is a path forward which starts with an honest, and necessarily disturbing, public conversation about the choices we face and the need to act upon the realistic assessments of the existential threat that scientists and activists have exposed, and which capital and governments have done everything to avoid. In times of adversity, people are willing to accept radical changes to their circumstances if there is a commonly shared purpose. Ukraine is but one example.

Studies of rationing imposed during WWII in the UK found that the population largely accepted the rigours and deprivations imposed by the state because they saw them as both fair and necessary.[90] Yet when it comes to climate change and the objective need for an emergency mobilisation, the conversation about equitable responsibility has barely started, and a message of economic reallocation will fall on deaf ears unless people see that the affluent are carrying their fair share of the burden and disruption.

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[90] Mark Roodhouse, "Rationing returns: a solution to global warming?", *History & Policy*, March 2007, https://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/rationing-returns-a--solution-to-global-warming, accessed 24 December 2022.

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Against Environmental Ethics

The concluding scene of Adam McKay's 2021 comedy *Don't Look Up* contains a surprising lesson on environmental ethics. After having realized that their efforts to prevent the devastating impact of a comet have failed and that life on Earth will be wiped out imminently, the main protagonists – the young astronomer Kate Dibiasky (Jennifer Lawrence) and her supervisor Randall Mindy (Leonardo DiCaprio) – do not crumble in despair of their horrific fate, nor do they act out in desperate escapades of drugs or sex. Instead, they travel back home to Mindy's family and share a calm evening dinner together. He reunites with his wife, whom he has been betraying, and with his sons. With them are also a scientist from NASA and a young shoplifter (who has a crush on Dibiasky), the latter of whom says a perfectly solemn prayer just before they are all obliterated.

What is surprising about this scene, and about the movie as such, is not that it carries a rather heavy sentimental tone, even though it is really a comedy about environmental disaster. (A Hollywood comedy without sentimentality would be a much bigger surprise.) The surprise is that the sentimental final scene is in fact a rather precise comment on environmental ethics – or on the relevant kind of ethical stance in the contemporary situation. If ethics concerns questions about how we should comport ourselves, how we should relate to others, how we should make sense of doing good in the face of meaninglessness, etc., then there can hardly be a more condensed ethical question than this one: How should we live together in our final hours? How do you maintain some level of dignity, when you know that chaos or even devastation will shortly follow?

When I claim that these questions are particularly relevant for environmental ethics, I do not mean to say that we are all doomed, or that environmental action no longer makes any sense, but only that the kinds of particularly ethical questions that can be meaningfully asked about the environment are rapidly becoming fewer as the climate emergency intensifies. As a teacher of environmental ethics, for example, I have increasingly sensed an uncanny impatience over

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the past couple of years (if not in my students, then certainly in myself): Why should we discuss our relation to nature, the delicate similarities and differences between humans and other beings, the alienating forces of consumption, etc., when we are approaching tipping points that will accelerate the destruction of habitats across the globe? It makes sense to recycle your waste, I would claim, even until the very moment before the comet impacts, but only seen from the point of view of a kind of existentialist perspective, insisting that you want to complete your life as a person who recycles their waste.

Environmental ethics has a particular way of being out of joint. Warnings about the environmental unsustainability of societal structures always seem to be either too early or too late. They are still mostly dismissed as overly dramatic, hysterical, or, indeed, "politicizing", because they usually imply a demand for certain drastic measures to reform the prevailing situation. The curious thing is that they are dismissed until the moment when they are suddenly no longer enough. (Who needs a poetic appreciation of the beauty of nature when a series of disasters is tangibly approaching?) We seem to fail to understand how we are creating environmental emergencies, until this understanding is no longer enough; until it is too late, almost like the predicament in Zeno's paradox about Achilles and the tortoise in Jacques Lacan's interpretation: "It is quite clear that Achilles can only pass the tortoise," as he said in his Seminar XX, "he cannot catch up with it."[1]

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that philosophy has generally been too late. Allegedly, it is even a defining trait of the trade. Thinking about the environment, however, contains the obvious predicament that the objective conditions themselves undergo change, while great thoughts are contemplated, and so prescriptive philosophy with suggestions for the right conduct or "relation to nature" risks being strangely moot even before it is printed. When philosophy finally paints its green in green, another kind of truth is already required. (The owl of Minerva does still fly at dusk, but some of its cousins have gone extinct and a number of them are endangered, e.g. due to deforestation.) Some, it must be said, were too early rather than too late, but they were marginal figures: Arne Næss, Hans Jonas, Michel Serres. Their philosophies were esoteric and strug-

[1] Jacques Lacan, *Encore – On Feminine Sexuality, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1998, p. 8.

gled with genres and conventions, and generally were not taken seriously by the mainstream. Instead, they were aligned with mystics and poets and hippies. Many others have now appeared, but they are too late: researchers with cross-disciplinary projects that include "new" approaches to sustainability, nature, economy, and what not, mostly written in the jargon of the postmodern (neoliberal) academy. Paradoxically, being too late with respect to the problems that we are facing is no hindrance with respect to funding and institutional acceptance. On the contrary, it almost seems to be a necessary precondition for being on time, catching the wave, if you will. Those who were too early marginalized themselves from the academic mainstream; those who are too late are comfortably placed at its centre.

Science and Politics

More specifically, the reason for the particular impasse in environmental ethics, I think, must be found in the relation between science and politics. Science ideally describes the world, but generally does not "act" on its own knowledge. Others do but depend on science for their orientation. Those who know do not act, while those who act do not know. Although there is an undeniable level of more immediate experience in some aspects of environmental concern (the birds that did not sing in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*,[2] for example), environmental activism generally relies, and should rely, on scientific knowledge in some form – about the fall in biodiversity, the rise in temperature, chemical pollution, etc. (indeed, the explanation of *why* the birds did not sing was ultimately a question of a chemical understanding of the effects of pesticides). Activists, whether in the form of environmental groups or individual opinion makers, however, are mostly rejected as being "too early" and for reasons that are very difficult to circumvent: they do not know *themselves* or cannot explain all the scientific details behind their concerns and are therefore easily dismissed as hysterics. The powers that be will typically listen to them "respectfully" and patiently explain their own responsibility for weighing other concerns as well and not getting ahead of themselves, when it comes to the outcries from the so called "interest groups".

The response to environmental concerns from the broader public and the political domain as a result tends to be "too late". There might even be a case to be

[2] Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Boston, Mariner Books, 2022.

made for the interpretation that the very enjoyment of dismissing "naïve" environmentalists in and of itself contributes to delaying serious action towards real problems. Perhaps this is even the reason why we have had to go through such a painful process of make-believe environmentalism, which we are still in. The pressure stemming from public concern in many areas, especially with respect to climate change, has become strong enough to demand some kind of action, but instead of addressing the problems directly, businesses, politicians, and academics establish a semblance of environmentalism addressed to the *concern* that people might have – not to that which they are concerned *about*. Instead of actual changes in infrastructure and economic incentives, we get public statements and agreements about "goals", hopeful anticipation of research on new, technological solutions, programmes for "raising awareness", pseudo-solutions like CO_2-quotas, and generally networking around "green economies", while the problems continue to get worse. This is also where we find a very large portion of the academic interest in "sustainability": career professionals in academia who are themselves not experts on chemistry, glaciology, oceanography, etc., but who react, when political actors and research foundations call for "answers". They react, undoubtedly, out of genuine concern, or at least partly out of genuine concern (and maybe a little bit out of self-interest), but this concern is nonetheless a reaction to a reaction. Research foundations and ministries have finally reacted to the public concern, and this reaction causes the academic communities to react (and apply) in turn.

Climate science has been especially haunted by this paradox from its beginning. Due to the otherwise healthy conservative tendency in most natural science, reports about future scenarios, possible effects, tipping points, etc., have been described with precaution and caveats, which has led to complications and delays in the interpretation of what it is that science encourages us to do (if anything). Science does not write in imperatives, nor does it run ahead of itself in mixtures of stylistic experiments. It writes, at most, in conditionals: given so-and-so, such-and-such might happen, but we can only predict this within a certain statistical uncertainty. In many cases, this has led scientists themselves to experience an uncanny sensation of being too late, or that society seems to react ineffectively or even irrationally to their insights, because the very (cautious) nature of scientific prognoses opens a loophole for denial. (In *Don't Look Up*, the scientists initially predict the probability of the impact of the detected comet to be 99.78%, which makes the president (Meryl Streep) conclude that there really

is no reason to sound the alarm, since they cannot even say for certain that anything drastic must be done).

Sustainabilty or Deep Adaptation

In 2018, Jem Bendell wrote a review of recent climate science in which he concludes that we should stop pretending that we can avoid climate disaster and instead start talking about what he calls "deep adaptation". His starting point is a meta-study of what climate science actually tells us, which is, basically, that the situation is much worse than we like to pretend. Temperatures have risen, the Arctic is melting, storms, floods, and droughts are increasing, agriculture is being impacted, marine ecosystems are deteriorating, and "the reported impacts today are at the very worst end of predictions made in the early 1990s."[3] Bendell finds no reason to doubt that the future consequences will be dramatic and severe, and his message is that we should finally start believing what science is telling us about climate change – if not even that the scientific community *itself* should start believing its own words.

Instead of the continued, sympathetic, and moderate research within the "sustainability field", within which he has been working for many years himself, he therefore encourages "research that starts from or considers social collapse due to environmental disaster."[4] Again, this is not meant as a kind of nihilism or resignation – almost the contrary. The reality is that climate change is already here, and that some of its even very serious consequences can no longer be avoided. Therefore, the continued belief in an escape from disasters by changing one's lifestyle, improving waste recirculation, etc., is itself a form of resistance to confronting what can in fact be done. Bendell turns the problem on its head: the question is not how we can establish or re-establish some kind of sustainability, but rather how soon we will accept the fact that "despite the attention of international institutions to 'sustainable development goals', the era of 'sustainable development' as a unifying concept and goal is now ending."[5] (Bendell's own situation in writing his paper underlines the problem with the

3 Jem Bendell, "Deep Adaptation: A Map for Navigating Climate Tragedy", *Institute for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS) Occasional Papers Volume 2*, Ambleside, University of Cumbria, 2018, p. 8. Available at http://insight.cumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/4166/.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

academic incentive structures: in order to even write his paper on deep adaptation, he actually went on an unpaid sabbatical.[6])

When I claim that the field of ethical questions relevant to asking about the environment is becoming narrower, it relates to what Bendell says about "the sustainability field" of research in which a cross-disciplinary optimism is networking to find smart solutions and sustainable forms of life. Bendell identifies several reasons for a rather systematic denialism in this field. There is, for example, no self-interest in "articulating the probability or inevitability of social collapse" and "the internal culture of environmental groups remains strongly in favour of appearing effective, even when decades of investment and campaigning have not produced a net positive outcome on climate, ecosystems or many specific species."[7] Psychologically speaking, there may furthermore be strong incentives to avoid traumatic topics and refrain from questioning the status quo, and such incentives certainly reinforce the social and institutional tendencies. Bendell's suggestion is that these forms of denialism will have to come to an end: "Emotional difficulties with realizing the tragedy that is coming, and in many ways that is upon us already, are understandable. Yet these difficulties need to be overcome so we can explore what the implications may be for our work, lives and communities."[8] Like the very idea of "sustainability", the ethical attitude of "getting it right" and behaving correctly towards others, finding one's own, appropriate conduct, creating meaningful communities, etc., is increasingly out of joint, as if it has been overtaken by natural forces that do not care about animal welfare, gender studies, balancing the considerations of all involved actors, etc. In a fundamental sense, *we got it wrong*, and this is what we have to deal with. This is also why the Aristotelian concept of phronetic reason is no longer adequate (if it has ever been) to the task: in its core, most ethical thinking is built on a sense of wisdom in tradition, language, or reason, which must be uncovered and might have been forgotten or repressed, but nonetheless contains lessons that will enlighten us about the right thing to do. Again: yes, if we must find out how to spend our final hours, then virtue ethics can certainly help us, but except for that, its advice increasingly resembles the melancholic

6 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

thinking of a person on their deathbed contemplating what they *should have done* on important occasions in their life.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Already in 2014, Eve Chiapello wrote that, unlike the wave of ecological awareness in the 1960s and 1970s, ecological critique no longer needs to "brandish values"[9], because it is no longer about values: it is about survival. The question is not so much what kind of lives we want to live (with colours and diversity, healthy food, and strong communities or with monocultural, industrial landscapes, fast food, and social disintegration, etc.). The question is whether we want to live at all. Chiapello herself emphasizes how this scientifically based sense of emergency is politically open-ended and potentially volatile: because it does not require a "foundation" of some kind of value system in order to justify its adherence to certain environmental principles, it does not *a priori* contain any guidelines for the kinds of ethical and political structures that should follow from the measures that have to be taken to stop environmental degradation. This is a dangerous situation in a double sense: partly because we do not really know what kinds of political answers are the most effective for confronting the challenges stemming from (especially) climate change. So far, the response to the crises has been a half-hearted transition to a form of "green capitalism", which does not really seem to be able to solve the problem. Partly because the environmental devastation that will follow, if we do not respond effectively in time, could lead to new conflicts over natural resources, vastly increased migration, and therefore political unrest and maybe new forms of authoritarian government. In any case, the political openness that Chiapello detects in recent ecological critique could certainly be seen as a danger, but perhaps it nonetheless contains some more positive prospects as well: maybe there is in fact a political opening that can also be usurped by more progressive forces. Are there new ways of thinking solidarity and universality that we have not yet completely thought through? Could we reconceptualize the foundation of the community of the future through a more thorough acknowledgement of "having gotten it wrong"? "Getting it wrong" would here mean something other than being

[9] Eve Chiapello, "Capitalism and its Criticisms", in P. Du Gay and G. Morgan (eds.), *New Spirits of Capitalism? Crisis, Justifications, and Dynamics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 76.

wrong about this or that point (like the size of a planet or the implications of Russell's paradox). It would mean being wrong in a pervasive, systematic sense. To just give an indication of how I think this might make sense, it would mean, for example, acknowledging that the failure of human civilization would have to be thought at a scale that far surpasses the consequences of the Holocaust (and which would therefore require an even deeper reassessment of the "dark side" of the Enlightenment). I mean this literally, although with careful consideration of the implications (and limitations) of such a comparison. In strictly ethical terms, of course, the Holocaust is certainly "worse" than the climate emergency, because it contained countless cases of eye-to-eye brutality and a complete distortion of ethical compasses. But *both are worse*, as they say, since the climate emergency contains a dimension of global pervasiveness that transcends the impact of the Holocaust – a malice that affects even the life cycles of algae on the bottom of world oceans. There is no comparison between algae and humans when it comes to ethics (and when "deep ecology" went down that path, it erred), but there is nonetheless another, and broader, kind of question involved in the ecological emergency, because it relates to the conditions of life on the globe as such. Maybe the implications of this globalized failure contain an occasion to think something new. *Es gibt was zu bedenken*, as Martin Heidegger would probably have formulated it.

One place to start could be a renewal of the conception of a "dictatorship of the proletariat". This concept itself was always essentially flawed. Describing a supposedly necessary stage in the transition from capitalist ownership of the means of production to a form of communist society, it relied on the emergence of a collective agent with the resolve and insight to administer a just transformation of the basic, economic, and political structures of society. Not only did this ambition fail empirically, it also contains a philosophical mistake, I would say: too great a reliance on a particular group within society. Although the working class of course ideally sheds its particularistic identity, when it takes on its role of the proletariat (the universality based on the excluded particular), it is nevertheless due to its virtue of being this particular group that it earns the privilege (or duty) of *taking the step* from particularity to universality and consequently governing through a gigantic change of everything down to the last button on the shirt (like Mayakovsky wrote in the 1920s). What extreme confidence in humanity that this collection of workers, peasants, and bureaucrats would be the one that would be able to finally make everything *right*!

If, however, we started from the notion that humanity essentially got it wrong, then the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat could take on another meaning as well. Etymologically, the "proletariat" is the class of those who have nothing but offspring. In Roman law, if you were a citizen with no significant livestock, but only possessed that which sprang off from your very biological existence, you could be counted as part of the proletariat. This perspective opens a different path for conceptualizing that which the *proletarius* is bound by: not only is he bound by the alien forces of repression and alienation; he is also linked (like protesters at the site of a new coal mine or the expansion of an airport) to the very prolongation of his existence, his *Nachwuchs*.

Instead of (or besides) "being bound by", the proletariat could thus be seen as "being tied to" in a way that does not allow for any humanistic solution. While the oppression of the dispossessed is certainly an acute (and continued) injustice, it does contain hope of emancipation within the parameters of a certain contemporaneity. If you have "only your chains" to lose, there is a secret promise that the removal of the chains would enable a flourishing of the subject (alienation can be lifted). The perspective of the offspring, however, implies a postponement of emancipation, at the very least. Even if some form of communism would magically emerge overnight, there would still be a price to pay for the offspring. If we follow Bendell and accept that the catastrophe is already taking place, we have already failed our commitment, there is a breach in the solidarity with future generations that cannot be completely recovered. At most, we can hope of getting it wrong in the best way possible.

Two clarifications are of course necessary for this to make any sense: first of all, I do not ascribe to the dispossessed of the Roman Empire any romantic feelings for their offspring. My guess would be that such an ascription would be empirically false, but I do not want to make such a claim at all. Second of all, the point is not to simply exchange one group (the working class) for another (parents). Instead, the point should be to exchange the viewpoint of one particular class of the present with the viewpoint of what Kojin Karatani has called "future others"[10]: those, unknown and unidentified, who will suffer the consequences of contemporary injustices. This would simultaneously be an attempt at changing the focus from how we get it right to how we come to terms with the fact that we

[10] Kojin Karatani, *Transcritique – on Kant and Marx*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2003, p. 125.

got it wrong. The question is not how we can improve or make society perfect, but rather how much we are willing to accept that future generations should suffer from our failure. The "dictatorship of the proletariat" would be the seizure of power by those who care enough about the not-so-distant future of human life to intervene in the accelerated destruction of the environment. It could be a democratic takeover of power, why not, but it would include very drastic measures that would make some groups rather upset.

And one last caveat: defining "those who care enough about the not-so-distant future of human life" is again a conceptualization with some ambiguity. You may certainly care enormously about your own offspring and interpret this care as an obligation to maintain the privileges that you have ensured for yourself and thus strive to make sure that nothing fundamentally changes. (This is why the proletariat in question cannot be conceptualized as a sociological group, parents, but must be understood as a universal concept of those who acknowledge the interests of the future others – from behind a veil of ignorance, if you will). The effects of the threats to the environment are extremely unevenly divided among the human population. One of the reasons why there is still such massive resistance to the transition to a "green economy" that lives up to its name is the incredible ingenuity of the rich to stall and find loopholes. I think that the prospects of geoengineering and carbon capture technology should be seen in this light: before *we* are affected for real, there will be some techniques to ameliorate the problem (in *Don't Look Up*, this tendency is symbolized by the spaceship that takes off with a small elite just before the comet's impact and travels 22,000 lightyears to find another planet suitable for the human species). I therefore completely acknowledge that one should be very careful not to be too optimistic about said dictatorship, and it should be emphasized that, much as I would like to save the world, I am merely trying to exemplify a rather modest, conceptual point.

Arne Næss, the founder of the deep ecology movement, wrote in a postscript to a volume entitled *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* that he was an optimist about the ability of humanity to create the conditions for a sustainable way of life, but only with respect to the twenty-*second* century. He thought the realistic date for creating a sustainable society would be 2101.[11] This was

[11] Arne Næss, "Deep Ecology for the Twenty-Second Century", in G. Sessions (ed.), *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century*, Boulder, Shambala Publications, 1995, p. 465.

not an ironic comment, nor was it a kind of defeatist stoic stance in the sense that one should just accept destiny and wait for better conditions: "Not at all! Every week counts. How terrible and shamefully bad conditions will be in the twenty-first century, or how far down we fall before we start on the way back up, *depends upon what YOU* and others do today and tomorrow."[12] Næss's statement about the 22nd century was simply a prognosis: It will probably take time before we take the threats seriously enough to actually change society in ways that really count. Enlightenment is needed, alliances must be made. Maybe it will even take outbreaks of chaos and "enormous ecological devastation," as he puts it, before there is really a push towards sustainability. Even this realistic and patient approach, however, taking into account how stubborn and self-destructive human communities can be, does not yet abandon the deeply rooted confidence in our ability to get it right. That is why fully acknowledging Jem Bendell's claim of an "end of the era of sustainability" requires at the very least a shift in the way we think of ethics. From the realistic ethics of a gradual coming-to-awareness – of what is, in some form, essentially already known – to an uncompromising ethics of the real, to the scarcely lit landscape of the law of the unknown.[13]

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 461.

[13] *Cf.* Alenka Zupančič, *Ethics of the Real*, London and New York, Verso, 2000.

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Siren Song to the Last Man: Mary Shelley and the Loss of the World[1]

> A spacious cave, within its farmost part, / was hew'd and fashion'd by laborious art. / Thro' the hill's hollow sides: before the place, / a hundred doors a hundred entries grace; / as many voices issue, and the sound / of Sibyl's words as many times rebound. / Now to the mouth they come. Aloud she cries: / "This is the time; enquire your destinies. He comes; behold the god!" / Thus while she said, / (And shiv'ring at the sacred entry stay'd), / Her color chang'd; her face was not the same, / and hollow groans from her deep spirit came. / Her hair stood up; convulsive rage possess'd, / her trembling limbs, and heav'd her lab'ring breast. / Greater than humankind she seem'd to look, / and with an accent more than mortal spoke. / Her staring eyes with sparkling fury roll; / when all the god came rushing on her soul.[2]

Mary Shelley opens her novel *The Last Man* with an introductory account of how, during her visit to Naples, she came across the writings from the future that she now presents in collected and restored form. She tells of how on 8 December 1818 she and her companion set out across the Gulf of Naples to the half-submerged ancient city of Baiae to see the archaeological sites in its vicinity. During their visit to Lake Avernus, which lies above Baiae and near the ancient Greek colony of Cumae, they descended into a nearby cave and, after long wandering in the dark and water, abandoned by their Italian guides, found themselves in the legendary cave of the Cumaean Sibyl – the very cave that Virgil's sixth book of the *Aeneid* had inspired them to seek out.[3]

The long-forgotten path has left the cave of the famous ancient prophetess asleep for ages, and with it a multitude of the famous Sibyl's leaves inscribed

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[2] Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. J. Dryden, London, Penguin Books Ltd, 1997, Book VI, p. 148.

[3] Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*, New York, Oxford University Press, Inc., 2008, p. 5.

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with prophecies. Covered by a dome and illuminated by only a ray of light penetrating through the dense vegetation from the upper pastures, the cave preserved the Sibyl's writings in their original form for all that time, until Shelley came across them and, together with an unnamed companion, set out to collect them, translate them from the many ancient and modern languages they were written in, and learn their contents. When her companion – a possible allusion to Percy Shelley, who tragically drowned four years before the novel's publication – abandons her in this endeavour, Mary Shelley assumes the role not only of archaeologist and restorer but, above all, of the unraveller of ancient prophecies, both fulfilled and unfulfilled, focusing the main body of her work on a single extensive prophecy in which the Cumaean Sibyl predicts the end of humanity in the year 2100. In the preface, she writes:

> I present the public with my latest discoveries in the slight Sibylline pages. Scattered and unconnected as they were, I have been obliged to add links, and model the work into a consistent form. But the main substance rests on the truths contained in these poetic rhapsodies, and the divine intuition which the Cumaean damsel obtained from heaven [4]

Thus the reader is introduced to the story of the endling Lionel Verney, the last of the human race, who, after the relentless march of a deadly plague, finds himself alone in a deserted Rome, where he decides to write the last book, the final human's attempt to capture the world, before it leaves him behind, as it has left behind all the other creations, achievements, and reflections of a man, now gathering dust in the great libraries, forgotten by a world where there is no one left to read them. Like Shelley, Verney includes a dedication in his autobiographical work in which he recounts his personal history and the events that have led to the gradual extinction of the human species over the past seven years, but that is no longer truly intended for anyone, as he himself states in the hopelessness of despair and utter loneliness:

> I also will write a book, I cried – for whom to read? – to whom dedicated? And then, with silly flourish (what so capricious and childish as despair?) I wrote,

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

DEDICATION
TO THE ILLUSTRIOUS DEAD
SHADOWS, ARISE AND READ YOUR FALL!
BEHOLD THE HISTORY OF THE
LAST MAN.[5]

Thus, at the end of the book, we learn that we have been reading the memoirs of someone who has been in the future all along, and that none of what he describes has (yet) come to pass. With the last man writing the last book, Shelley succeeds in bringing the specific temporal structure of her novel to closure – even though Verney's book is a record from the future, we are actually reading the unfulfilled prophecy of the Cumaean Sibyl, who in ancient times somehow managed to intercept the coming history of the not-yet-living Verney, the last man, which Shelley finds, revises, and publishes as her third novel in 1826. The image of the dusty and forgotten cave of the Sibyl, awakened from its long slumber by visitors, coincides with the image of the empty and deserted towns through which Verney passes on his way to Rome, and on the walls of which he leaves messages for anyone who might see them and join him in Rome ("Verney, the last of the race of Englishmen, had [*sic*][6] taken up his abode in Rome. Friend, come! I wait for thee! *Deh, vieni! ti aspetto*!"[7]). He waits there for a year, and when no one appears, he decides to leave the ancient city behind with all its forgotten relics, including his book, and departs. For a being of solitude, Shelley writes, is a wandering being,[8] and Verney ultimately decides to follow suit:

> And then – no matter where – the oozy caves, and soundless depths of ocean may be my dwelling, before I accomplish this long-drawn voyage, or the arrow of disease find my heart as I float singly on the weltering Mediterranean; or, in some place I touch at, I may find what I seek – a companion; or if this may not be – to endless time, decrepid and grey headed – youth already in the grave with those I love – the lone wanderer will still unfurl his sail, and clasp the tiller – and, still

5 *Ibid.*, p. 466.
6 Some of the citations herein contain grammatical forms and spelling that might be deemed archaic.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 456.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 468.

> obeying the breezes of heaven, for ever round another and another promontory, anchoring in another and another bay, still ploughing seedless ocean [...].[9]

This does not mean that Verney does not believe that he holds the status of the last man. He leaves Rome at the end of the novel, not out of naiveté or a deeply smouldering hope that this is not the case, but because he realizes that there is nothing left for him to do in this deserted world. As the last human being, he can only be a wandering creature in a world where humanity no longer exists to maintain its significance or in any way justify or assert its mere presence therein. It is perhaps for this reason that death as such is void of any real solace or salvation for him, and why he does not choose it. At a certain point, he seems to realize that in this world even the death of the last man, when it happens, will not be an epochal event, but a completely silent, unnoticed, and unlamented event that will seamlessly blend into a much larger universal flow and disappear – and that there is therefore no point in seeking it out too hastily.

It is death, Verney says, that will be welcomed as a friend, unless by some lucky chance his fate is reversed and he feels again his "heart beat near the heart of another like to me"[10] – one who may have survived the deadly plague as he did. This possibility of re-encounter is evoked several times, but it only seems to take its place when Verney tries to portray his utter loneliness with this relentless longing, rather than actually conveying hope that it exists as a real possibility. For he longs for something inscribed in irreversibility – for those who have left him, and for a world that no longer exists and will never return. With this inscription, Verney concludes his book and sets out to sea:

> Neither hope nor joy are my pilots – restless despair and fierce desire of change lead me on. I long to grapple with danger, to be excited by fear, to have some task, however slight or voluntary, for each day's fulfilment. I shall witness all the variety of appearance, that the elements can assume – I shall read fair augury in the rainbow – menace in the cloud – some lesson or record dear to my heart in everything. Thus around the shores of deserted earth, while the sun is high, and

9 *Ibid*., p. 469.
10 *Ibid*.

> the moon waxes or wanes, angels, the spirits of the dead, and the ever-open eye of the Supreme, will behold the tiny bark, freighted with Verney the LAST MAN.[11]

The moment when Verney sails out alone across the vast sea in a small boat, in the shadow of this terrible thought – that he is indeed alone – is reminiscent of the biblical patriarch Noah surviving the Flood on his ark – except, of course, that Noah is not alone and that he and his family successfully continue the human lineage. The allusion to Noah is strong as we follow Verney onto the boat in which he lands after the deluge of the plague, and especially as he meaningfully alludes to the rainbow as a good omen in his final entry. For it is the rainbow[12] in the Old Testament that is the sign of the covenant between God and man that the past flood was the last and never to be repeated again.

> And God said: "This *is* the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations: I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth. It shall be, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the rainbow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember My covenant which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* on the earth."[13]

In sum, God promises Noah that never again will there be a flood that destroys the earth, and sets up the rainbow as a sign and reminder of this promise.[14] However, as Morton D. Paley reminds us at the end of his analysis of *The Last Man*, [15] this analogy between Noah and Verney that Shelley draws is at the same time quite ironic in all its suggestiveness, given that there is a fundamental difference between the two. Namely, there is another divine commandment imposed on Noah that Verney, in his solitude, cannot possibly fulfil while Noah does – the commandment to continue the human race:

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11 *Ibid.*, p. 470.

12 New King James Version (NKJV), Genesis 9:13.

13 NKJV, Genesis 9:12–16.

14 NKJV, Genesis 9:11.

15 Morton D. Paley, "Mary Shelley's The Last Man: Apocalypse Without Millennium", *Keats-Shelley Review*, 4 (1/1989), p. 25.

> And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it.[16]

If Noah is thus a figure of continuity and the safe landing of his ark after the Flood is the point of a new beginning for mankind, Shelly's Verney, on the other hand, is a pure figure of finality and his small boat the point of the end rather than the beginning, which is probably the reason for some of the unsparing criticism the novel received when it was first published. The author was repeatedly criticized for creating a work with a theme of finitude that was described as downright sickening[17] and for writing "a monstrous fable,"[18]"a product of a diseased imagination and a polluted taste,"[19] or rather "another raw head and bloody bones."[20] A narrative that countered the common notion of man as the focal point of the world and, on the contrary, portrayed him as a rather ephemeral and, for the world itself, rather insignificant and easily forgettable creature, was clearly eerie enough to provoke such revulsion among literary critics of the time. After all, Shelley's protagonist has no continuation in his posterity, and as the last of his kind, he cannot save humanity. He can only be a witness to its demise, which he describes in great detail in his book, and as a witness he persists only as a confirmation of its lack in the world. So it is we, as his readers, before whose eyes is drawn an image of the end of the old and the emergence of another world in which man simply no longer exists:

> A herd of cattle passed along in the dell below, untended, towards their watering place – the grass was rustled by a gentle breeze, and the olive-woods, mellowed into soft masses by the moonlight, contrasted their sea-green with the dark chesnut[*sic*] foliage. Yes, this is the earth; there is no change – no ruin – no rent made in her verdurous expanse; she continues to wheel round and round,

16 NKJV, Genesis 9:7.

17 "Review of New Books", *The Literary Gazette and the Journal of the Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences*, 474, 18 February, 1826, pp. 102–103. Available at https://archive.org/details/sim_literary-gazette_1826-02-18_474/mode/2up?q=last+man&view=theater.

18 *Ibid*., p. 102.

19 *The Monthly Review*, 1 (March 1826), p. 335. Available at https://archive.org/details/sim_the-monthly-review_1826-03_1/page/334/mode/2up.

20 *The Literary Magnet, Or, Monthly Journal of the Belles Lettres*, 1 (1826), p. 56. Available at https://archive.org/details/sim_literary-magnet-or-monthly-journal-of-the-belles-lettres_1826-01_1/page/n55/mode/2up. Here, they refer to Shelley's first masterpiece, *Frankenstein* (1818).

> with alternate night and day, through the sky, though man is not her adorner or inhabitant.[21]

The vision of this new world seems almost like something forbidden – and it is precisely in this vision that another thread is woven that connects Verney to Noah. If one glances at the title page of *The Last Man*, one recognizes a certain repetition of something that also occurs in Shelley's first novel[22] and manifests itself in the form of the incorporation of a quotation from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* – it may in this way already serve as a warning of the prophecy of the Sibyl that the reader has just gotten his hands on:

> Let no man seek
> Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall
> Him or his children.[23]

These are the words spoken by Adam after the coming of the Flood is revealed to him, where he beholds "the end of all thy offspring, end so sad."[24] He regrets looking into the future, and then goes on to say that there is no one (yet) whom he can warn of the terrible things to come. In desperation he then implores the Archangel Michael to tell him nevertheless whether this is the end that is destined for mankind.[25] The archangel then tells him how the human race survived the Flood thanks to Noah's Ark, at which Adam rejoices and proclaims:

> O thou, who future things canst represent
> As present, Heavenly Instructor, I revive
> At this last sight, assured that Man shall live,
> With all the creatures, and their seed preserve.[26]

21 Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 459.

22 On the first page of her 1818 novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus,* we may find Milton's Adam asking: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay / To mould me man?" (John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, London, Penguin Books Ltd, 1996, Book X, 743–744, p. 259).

23 Book XI, 770–72, *ibid.*, p. 291.

24 Book XI, 755, *ibid.*, p. 290.

25 Book XI, 785–786, *ibid.*, p. 291.

26 Book XI, 870–873, *ibid.*, p. 293.

In *Paradise Lost*, Adam thus beholds the end of humanity and laments that he is unable to warn anyone about it ("Man is not whom to warn"[27]). The future is revealed to him as the present, and Shelley incorporates this admonition of the first man into her narrative of the last man – destined to remain alone – further unravelling the leaping temporal structure of her work. Since Lionel Verney wrote his own biography, which we read in *The Last Man*, Shelley reduces herself to the role of an editor who extracts Verney's work from the "leaves, bark, and other substances"[28] where the ancient prophetess inscribed it, and then subtitles it with Adam's warning – the one Adam could not give to men who got lost in the deluge, but which, through Shelley's intercession, could be delivered by the Sibyl, who had learned what would happen in 2100, when the "true" end of mankind would come and the only boat left would be the one drifting with the lonely Verney.

The intertwining of the author's personal life and her work, which has often been regarded as a *roman à clef* – for several parallels can be drawn between the characters and the loved ones she had lost by 1826 – is perhaps most clearly encapsulated in the motif of the boat's departure. In Verney's last account before sailing from Rome, the rainbow is mentioned as a harbinger of a happy voyage, a kind of embodiment of the old nautical saying "fair winds and following seas" that would bring the ship to a safe haven. Mary Shelley's bark motif, however, is closely linked to another motif that is tragic in nature for the one who sets sail, namely the theme of drowning. As for Verney, we know that he considers the rainbow to be a good omen, but we do not know whether he actually lays his eyes on it before he leaves. In addition, there is also an element of divination that suggests some affinity between the author and the Sibyl. For example, Mary Shelley writes in one of her letters that now, less than a year after Percy Shelley drowned aboard his boat Ariel, her earlier writings seem prophetic:

> Is not the catastrophe [in Valperga] strangely prophetic? But it seems to me that in what I have hitherto written I have done nothing but prophecy what has arrived

[27] Book X, 743-744, Book XI, 777, *ibid*., p. 291.
[28] Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 5.

> to. Matilda foretells even many small circumstances most truly – [...] the whole of it is a monument of what now is.[29]

She is alluding to her second novel, *Valperga* (1823), which was written in 1820, and to the novella *Matilda* (1959), which she composed between 1819–20. In both, she writes of a death in the water – two years before it befalls her husband – and sees herself in retrospect as Matilda, rushing to prevent her father's suicide at sea while she herself hastens to Pisa to confirm her husband's demise. A repetition of this theme is apparent in *The Last Man*, where Verney acquires the status of the last man through the loss of his last two companions when the boat in which they were sailing to Athens is caught in a sudden storm, [30] and, of course, at the end of the novel when he himself sets off into the unknown. Most likely, judging from all of the other hints Shelley gives us, into his own damp grave, of which he reveries earlier[31] – however, it does not really matter, because the end, no matter for how long the death of the last man has been postponed, has already come.

It could be said, then, that prophecy – whether found on the leaves buried deep in the Sibyl's cave, in the revelation of Milton's Adam, or in Shelley's own premonition – is central to the story of a very specific end around which all of the novel's leaps in time are arranged. Verney's written memoir, delivered to us for reading through prophetic intervention, [32] may indeed serve as a warning, but not against the catastrophe that awaits humanity in 2100, but, as Adam laments

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[29] Shelley's letter to Maria Gisborne (May 1823). See Mary W. Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Volume I*, B. T. Bennett (ed.), Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980, p. 336.

[30] "The day passed thus; each moment contained eternity; although when hour after hour had gone by, I wondered at the quick flight of time. Yet even now I had not drunk the bitter potion to the dregs; I was not yet persuaded of my loss; I did not feel in every pulsation, in every nerve, in every thought, that I remained alone of my race, – that I was the LAST MAN." (Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 446.)

[31] *Ibid*.

[32] Prophecy as an intervention in the irreversible, manifests itself in the form of the Sibyl's interception of Verney's memory. As Tadej Troha shows in his *Intervencije v nepovratno* [Interventions into the Irreversible], an intervention in the irreversible "is not a gesture of negation and its annulment [of the irreversible], but of its affirmation," while at the same time, if it is to be enacted, it "must rely on the dimension of the collective." (Tadej Troha, *Intervencije v nepovratno*, Ljubljana, Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, 2015, pp. 45–46.)

on the title page, against looking into the future. For that is how the passage runs in its entirety:

> O visions ill foreseen! Better had I lived ignorant of future, so had borne / My part of evil only, each day's lot / Enough to bear; those now that were dispensed / The burden of many ages on me light / At once, by my foreknowledge gaining birth / Abortive, to torment me, ere their being, / With thought that they must be. Let no man seek / Henceforth to be foretold what shall befall / Him or his children – evil, he may be sure.[33]

To whom is Verney writing? The dedication tells us that he dedicates his book to the dead. Yet Verney is not writing in vain – as it turns out, his readership is only temporally displaced – into the past. His readers are us, the unliving. For while it is true that there *will* be no one to read him, that does not mean that there *was* no reader. Verney's memoir, then, is not at all addressed to his descendants, whose nonexistence he for a time despairingly dwells on,[34] but to those who precede him. The prophecy of the Cumaean Sibyl thus becomes a premonition of Verney's memory, and due to the role of the soothsayer as mediator between future and past, the last man ultimately gains his readership.

The answer to the question of why Verney writes the book in the first place may lie precisely in the structure of temporality that Shelley develops in her work to address the very particular expectation that man cultivates for the future – to see himself always in it, even if only in the image of his descendant. Within this structure of *anthropocentric expectation*, a descendant functions as a guarantee of reconciliation with an individual finitude insofar as it is replaced by the universal eternity. Shelley, however, strips away this guarantee in her narrative and achieves a kind of superimposition of that romantic sublime that we might have forgotten about as inhabitants of a century Shelley imagined (ironically or perhaps prophetically) as the last, and which suggested a different kind of domination – of the world over man. A world that overwhelms man, marks him, but at the same time remains itself fundamentally untouched by him, whereby Shelley also manages to transcend any human ressentiment that might have arisen from her personal nostalgia, which permeates her entire futuristic narrative. As a re-

33 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book XI, 763–772, pp. 290–291.

34 Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 466.

construction of future annihilation and its admonition, the prophecy does not aim to forestall the coming end – after all, according to Virgil, the Cumaean Sibyl merely reveals what is to come[35] without intervening – but rather to enable the possibility of imagining the coming of another world that can only be born through the end.

In this respect, Shelley seems to recognize that the looming end, especially when it appears certain, stirs the idea of a new beginning. Not only that, but as Maurice Blanchot points out in his text *The Apocalypse is Disappointing*,[36] it is the idea of the end, of the total annihilation of the world, that produces the possibility of thinking of the world as whole, or rather, that introduces the notion of the world as totality. Blanchot develops his thesis in response to the climate of the Cold War and the ongoing controversy over what the possibility of setting off the atomic bomb actually evokes in thought as he tackles the ideas of power and dominance, universal annihilation, and especially two notions that tend to be used much more generally than they actually are – the world and humankind. Applied to our present context, we can further say that the extinction of humankind in *The Last Man* is not the result of humans as the agents of their own and, above all, collective annihilation, but of the intrusion of an unexpected external factor into the interior – of something which, after all, we have recently experienced collectively ourselves in a "milder" version: the sudden appearance of a deadly disease that is extremely contagious and kills a previously healthy person in less than twenty-four hours. No one but Verney escapes this death, which does not mean that the destruction of humanity has not occurred. It just means that with the survival of the endling there is a remnant left after its end.

For if we look at the first discussion of the coining of this term in *Nature* in 1996, the endling, by its most general definition, is the one who remains as the last part of a whole:

35 "And nearby, in a place apart / –a dark enormous cave– / the Sibyl feared by men / In her the Delian god of prophecy / Inspires uncanny powers of mind and soul / *Disclosing things to come*." (Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. R. Fitzgerald, New York, Random House, 1989, p. 159.)

36 This is Blanchot's response to Karl Jaspers's *The Atomic Bomb and the Future of Man: The Political Conscience of Our Time* (1958). See Maurice Blanchot, "The Apocalypse is Disappointing", trans. E. Rottenberg, in *Friendship*, W. Hamacher and D. E. Wellbery (eds.), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 101–108.

> There is a need for a word in taxonomy, and in medical genealogical, scientific, biological and other literature, that does not occur in the English or any other language. We need a word to designate the last person, animal or other species *in his/her/its lineage*. [37]

The notion of the endling is therefore always introduced in its relation to the whole. The whole as something that has been produced in its relation to its last part, or, as Blanchot shows, something inaugurated particularly when even the presence of the last is no longer there, as its remnant, but we are confronted with the loss of something that we have only begun to think in its totality under the threat of its loss – as the loss of it all. Loss as the moment when we thus begin to think that what remains after us is simply – nothing. Of course, it is not true that this totality ever existed in concrete form – no, on the contrary, and here lies the disappointment, this totality never existed at all, because it was formed (phantasmatically) only when the light of its loss fell upon it. It was thus created through the production of a certain perspective, that through total destruction we will indeed lose everything, which is why the totality of notions such as "world" or "humanity" and the attached apocalypse that brings them to an end is abstract at best, and disappointing in its absolute emptiness. In this sense, the end is, as Blanchot writes, "an event of enormous size, but enormously empty." [38] And here lies, as Alenka Zupančič puts it in her work on the end, the *paradox of the whole*.[39]

In the novel, the moment of sighting emptiness is wonderfully set shortly after Verney realizes that he has been left behind. As he slowly makes his way to Rome, he finds himself each night standing in front of a deserted cottage, staring at the closed door without the strength to open it and enter. Thus, he sits for hours on the threshold: "unable to lift the latch, and meet face to face blank desertion within."[40] He instead finds refuge outside, for he notices that his loneliness only recedes there. The emptiness lies in the ruins of the old world, while to be in the world is to inhabit a certain fullness of the world that has arisen within

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37 Robert M. Webster and Bruce Erickson, "The Last Word?", *Nature* 380 (1996), p. 386, and further: David Craig, Elaine Andrews, and Mark Smith, "The Last Word", *Nature,* 381 (1996), p. 272.

38 Blanchot, "Apocalypse is Disappointing", p. 104.

39 Alenka Zupančič, *Konec*, Ljubljana, Društvo za teoretsko psihoanalizo, 2019, p. 67.

40 Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 457.

its loss. This fullness can manifest itself only through the emptiness in which the opening of the world takes place – a world that does not perceive this loss, except for the last man, who lives on as a mere remnant of it. In Shelley's apocalyptic narrative, true solitude seems to be hidden in confined spaces; a cure for it lies in distance, in stepping away and thus *out* – and in this respect the endling finds himself where man in his *natural state*, of whom Rousseau writes in his *Second Discourse*, might have wandered alone:

> I see him sating his hunger beneath an oak, slaking his thirst at the first Stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal, and with that his needs are satisfied.[41]

Similarly Verney:

> Many nights, through autumnal mists were spread around, I passed under an ilex [oak] – many times I have supped on arbutus berries and chesnuts [*sic*], making a fire, gypsy-like, on the ground – because wild natural scenery reminded me less acutely of my hopeless state of loneliness.[42]

This brings us to the Hegelian power of negation that Blanchot evokes in relation to understanding the world in its totality through the potentiality of its destruction: "the power of understanding is the absolute power of negation."[43] To understand totality is to be confronted with the thought of its loss – an understanding that only comes through its negation. It is in the confrontation with emptiness, with the loss of all, that the world appears to Verney as whole. Blanchot's point is not that confronting the emptiness of the end, that is, the lifting of the veil thrown over us by the mystification of the apocalypse (as the *loss of all*), means that we have lost that totality, but rather that the very recognition of the fallaciousness of the existence of the whole that negation brings about opens up the possibility of a "whole" yet to be created.[44] The thinking of the end brings with it the possibility of creating a new world. And herein lies the

41 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, trans. V. Gourevitch, New York, Harper & Row Publishers, 1990, p. 142.

42 Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 457.

43 Blanchot, "The Apocalypse is Disappointing", p. 105.

44 "The choice is to fight not simply to preserve the world such as it is, but to unite in creating, in forming a world, for the first time...This is not so much about 'changing the world', but

message of Verne's prophecy, which it can only make sense to read *now* – in the past, where this possibility is not (yet) lost.

For, as Zupančič shows, two kinds of totality can be thought within the Lacanian differentiation between "all" and "not-all". While on one hand the very "loss of all" is deceptive insofar as it offers us the idea of a false totality, namely that this "all" ever existed, on the other hand, the "not-all" does not mean that this notion of "not-all" in itself does not encompass totality and therefore negates it. On the contrary, this "not" adds something essential to the "all". Thus Zupančič says:

> In truth, we are dealing with two different types of totality or "whole", the difference conceptualized by Lacan as that between the "all" and the "not-all". Crucial in understanding this difference is precisely to avoid the idea that "not-all" is the opposite of all, and thus of totality. Rather, the "not-all" is the "all" to which something more gets added, it is the "all" plus the point of view from which this all appears as "all". This point is now situated within the "whole"/"all", which for this very reason becomes not-whole/not-all; that is to say, it includes its own negativity.[45]

The encounter with the negative, manifested in Verney's confrontation with the closed latch of the deserted house, bestows on the last man the mandate of a witness – a witness who lingers in the new world as a remnant of the one that has been brought to an end. When the endling remains in the world, as the last remnant of humankind, there is no reconfiguration of that irretrievably vanished totality. Verney persists as that very "not" of "all", as the one who remains in the destruction of the whole as its last part, alone through whom the glimpse of the whole is possible, which now emerges as another (different) totality. The endling stands in the place "from which this all appears as 'all'."[46] – at the place of beholding the new world, as something that has remained "after us" – after the destroyed whole that has left its last witness to stand at the end. The last

about making it." (Alenka Zupančič, *The Apocalypse is (Still) Disappointing*", *S: Journal of the Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, 10–11 (2017–2018), p. 22.

45 *Ibid*., p. 28.

46 *Ibid*.

man who, as the bearer of its memory, at last finds his home in the emptiness of the end.[47]

It is memory that chases Verney, that "haunts" him.[48] Here a specifically Nietzschean moment creeps in, revolving around the concept of forgetting, with which Verney has great difficulty –as much as he wishes to forget, he cannot, and it is precisely from this that his envy of the animals, whom he envies for their ability to be unhistorical, arises. Thus, on one occasion, as he watches a herd of cattle pass by, he wonders, "Why could I not forget myself like one of those animals, and no longer suffer the wild tumult of misery that I endure?",[49] and another time, as he searches for the difference between them and himself:

> I am not much unlike to you. Nerves, pulse, brain, joint, and flesh, of such am I composed, and ye are organized by the same laws. I have something beyond this, but I will call it a defect, not an endowment, if it leads me to misery, while ye are happy.[50]

Here Mary Shelley, through Verney, seems to be invoking the voice of Friedrich Nietzsche, who writes in the famous passage from *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* in Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*:

> Consider the herd grazing before you. These animals do not know what yesterday and today are but leap about, eat, rest, digest and leap again; and so from morning to night and from day to day, only briefly concerned with their pleasure and displeasure, enthralled by the moment and for that reason neither melancholy nor bored. It is hard for a man to see this, for he is proud of being human and not an

47 In her spin on Blanchot's thought, Zupančič demonstrates that the end is not something that lies somewhere further ahead in time, but that the end has already come. (See *ibid.*, p. 24.) Tadej Troha makes a similar argument in his analysis of the structure of the crisis, in which he highlights the notion of the "beginning" as something that the "end" entails: "The beginning, insofar as it was left to play, was not a beginning understood as the usual opposite of the end – its function was rather to dynamize, to bring into being the space of the end itself and to extend it into eternity." (Troha, *Intervencije v nepovratno*, p. 225.)

48 To paraphrase Nietzsche's thought about the past returning like a "specter" in Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. P. Preuss, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1986, p. 8.

49 Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 459.

50 *Ibid.*

> animal and yet regards its happiness with envy because he wants nothing other than to live like the animal, neither bored nor in pain, yet wants it in vain because he does not want it like the animal. Man may well ask the animal: why do you not speak to me of your happiness but only look at me? The animal does want to answer and say: because I always immediately forget what I wanted to say—but then it already forgot this answer and remained silent: so that man could only wonder.[51]

Verney sees his ability to remember or rather his inability to forget not as an advantage he would have as a human being in contrast to an animal, but as something fundamentally defective that, on the contrary, deprives him of something that an animal has. According to Nietzsche, the past is the burden of human existence – a heavy chain that man, unable to free himself from it, drags behind him while it drags him down: "however far and fast he runs, the chain runs with him."[52] Or, to use another Nietzschean metaphor, memory is like a page continuously being torn out of the "scroll of time," always "fluttering" back into one's lap,[53] and as impossible to get rid of as it is easy for an animal to do so, which is capable of forgetting every moment almost instantaneously – while man, if we apply here Virno or Bergson, rather hypertrophizes than erases – constantly making a copy of the present and duplicating it in his memory as the surplus of this work.[54]

In this way, memory becomes a distractor from that true animal happiness of which the animal cannot speak because instantaneous erasure is inscribed in it as its condition, which so often eludes man and of which the animal would sooner be silent than speak. Verney, on the other hand, sees himself as an unhappy being, unable to forget his own finitude, a remnant of a past world that now dwells in him only as a memory. If the animal lives unhistorically, "for it goes into the present like a number without leaving a curious fraction," [55] Verney shows himself precisely as the remnant of an equation that has not been solved completely.

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51 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, p. 8.

52 *Ibid*.

53 *Ibid*.

54 Paolo Virno, *Déjà Vu and the End of History,* London and New York, Verso, 2015, p. 11, and Henri Bergson, "Memory of the Present and False Recognition", trans. M. McMahon, in *Key Writings*, K. Ansell-Pearson and J. Ó Maoilearca (eds.), London, Bloomsbury, 2018, p. 143.

55 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,* p. 9.

What Verney longs for, when he is not longing for a companion – for he is aware that there are only two possibilities of a happy outcome – is a return to that state of *natural man* of whom Rousseau writes that it is precisely when he drinks, eats, and sleeps under a tree that he sees him as an animal[56] and in that state as content.[57] Rousseau's Savage lives in the immediacy of the moment,[58] that is, according to Nietzsche, unhistorically, without regard to any time other than the present. In this natural state, he also has no need for another man, for it is, among other things, the break with the solitary way of life that is, according to Rousseau, the source of all man's ailments and sorrow.[59] The natural man, instead of chains, always carries "all of [him]self along with him"[60] and thus wanders in the woods without any need of his fellow man.[61] On the other hand, the historical man, such as Verney, who remains as a living memory of another world and as such is unable to forget himself and live like an animal – unable to return to a life that resides only in the present, untouched by the past – can only find happiness in a non-natural state[62] in which he dwells with his fellow man – but even that is no more – and so the miserable predicament of the endling comes full circle.

As Nietzsche says, "the past must be forgotten if it is not to become the gravedigger of the present,"[63] and Verney shows himself to be the ultimate example of the man Nietzsche offers us when he says that we should imagine as "an extreme example a man who possesses no trace of the power to forget, who is condemned everywhere to see becoming: such a one no longer believes in his own existence, no longer believes in himself; he sees everything flow apart in mobile points and loses himself in the stream of becoming: he will, like the true pupil of

56 Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, p. 141.

57 "I ask, which of the two, Civil life or natural life, is more liable to become intolerable to those who enjoy it? We see around us almost only People who complain of their existence, even some who deprive themselves of it as far as they are able, and the combination of divine and human Laws hardly suffices to put a halt to this disorder: I ask whether anyone has ever heard tell that is so much as occured to a Savage who is free to complain of life and to kill himself? One ought, then, to judge with less pride on which side genuine misery lies." (*Ibid.* p. 158.)

58 *Ibid.*, p. 151.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

62 For Rousseau that would be the *Civil state*.

63 Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,* p. 9.

Heraclitus, hardly dare to lift a finger."[64] When Verney realises that he has been left in the world as the last of his kind and that, as a consequence, everything around him has been subjected to oblivion, he begins in a certain sense to dwell within the end.[65] An end which, like ink, blends with the specific atmosphere of the feeling of grief,[66] as Shelley describes it, a sensation marked by time and that precisely for this reason encompasses "all", stains it and inhabits it, and is thus spatialized: [67]

> Oh! Grief is fantastic; it weaves a web on which to trace the history of its woe from every form and change around; it incorporates itself with all living nature; it finds sustenance in every object; as light, it fills all things, and like light, it gives its own colours to all.[68]

Although the last man is surrounded by oblivion, at the same time it is everything that is subject to it that triggers his memory most intensely. The end thus covers all that Verney sees and permeates everything wherever he goes, and his loss begins to function as a certain colouring of the world to which everything but he is blind. In his final decision to set sail, [69] Verney reminds us of another famous seafarer – Homer's Odysseus, who on one of his most famous journeys sailed past the Sirens, tied to the mast, listening to their song, which lured him, like all their victims, to jump into the water and join them – and in doing so, to perish. As interpreted by Horkheimer and Adorno in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the siren song is essentially a call of allurement, luring the lis-

64 *Ibid*., pp. 9–10.

65 Zupančič considers our contemporaneity as a time of living within the apocalypse, see Zupančič, "The Apocalypse is (Still) Disappointing".

66 Similar on the relation between grief and the apocalypse can be found in *ibid*.

67 The dynamics of the spatialization of the end, evident in Verney's confronation with the closed latch of the empty cottage he cannot enter and his takinf refuge outside in the open, can be condensed into what Troha call the "topology of the end", in ibid., p. 46. "In the universe of time that has turned into spade [...] the dynamics can only be generated within what is usually considered as the materialization of stasis and monotony." (Tadej Troha, "No Louder: Beckett and the Dynamics of Monotony", in E. Ruda (ed.), *Beckett and Dialectics*, London, Bloombsbury, 2021, p. 191.)

68 Shelley, *The Last Man*, p. 446.

69 "I would coast the beauteous shores and sunny promontories of the blue Mediterranean, pass Naples, along Calabria, and would dare the twin perils of Scylla and Charybdis." (*Ibid*., p. 469.) This note makes it clear that on this journey he will inevitably pass by the Sirens, which, according to Homer, are located before Scylla and Charybdis.

tener to lose himself in the past – a temptation that tempts the yearning with the promise of the return of what has been irretrievably lost.

> Come hither, as thou farest, renowned Odysseus, great glory of the Achaeans; stay thy ship that thou mayest listen to the voice of us two. For never yet has any man rowed past this isle in his black ship until he has heard the sweet voice from our lips. Nay, he has joy of it, and goes his way a wiser man. For we know all the toils that in wide Troy the Argives and Trojans endured through the will of the gods, and we know all things that come to pass upon the fruitful earth.[70]

The siren song is deceptive, for it lures under the pretext of knowledge, but the knowledge offered by the sirens is the temptation to return the irretrievable – that which has already taken place and is written into the irreversible. Whoever wishes to persevere must plug their ears with beeswax or, like Odysseus, tie themselves tightly to the mast, otherwise they will pay for the past with the future: "If the Sirens know everything that has happened, they demand the future as its price, and their promise of a happy homecoming is the deception by which the past entraps a humanity filled with longing."[71] Verney, the last man, the only remnant of the past world he longs for and without a future of his own, cannot resist its lure – the song may not be false after all and fulfils what it promises; in exchange for the sacrifice, the promised return is enacted in the transmission of a memory that returns as a prophecy from the lips of the Sibyl – finally, the last man answers the call that rises from the sea and sails into the embrace of the Sirens.

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Nietzsche and Badiou: Event, Intervention, "God is dead"

In this text I will try to draw attention to a certain parallel between Nietzsche's and Badiou's theory of the event, which Badiou, in my view, has evaded through a kind of strategic relocation.[1] My interest is not so much directed at (and even less against) Badiou's philosophy, but I am interested in the possible impact of this relocation on Badiou's interpretation of Nietzsche.

Nietzsche and Badiou are, of course, names that are usually placed on opposite shores of modern philosophy. The tone of Badiou's discussions of Nietzsche in the aftermath of *Being and Event* does not hide a certain affection for the "prince of the sophists," with regard to whom Badiou admits that the twentieth century was in many respects Nietzsche's century,[2] and with whom he even found himself at one point in an unlikely alliance – namely when the French *nouveaux philosophes* pompously renounced Nietzscheanism in the name of ethics. But although he wrote at the time that "when I see Messrs Ferry and Renault raising high the banner of anti-Nietzscheanism, I say to myself, by a conditioned reflex, that I must be a Nietzschean myself in some way or another,"[3] it is also clear that Badiou recognizes in Nietzsche the opposite of his philosophical undertaking at practically every step of the way.

This opposition is understandable. Nietzsche, who wrote that "the struggle against Plato [...] has created a magnificent tension of spirit in Europe, the likes of which the earth has never known,"[4] cannot of course, serve as a model for

1 This article is a result of the research programme P6-0014 "Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy" and the research projects J6-2589 "Structure and Genealogy of Perversion in Contemporary Philosophy, Politics and Art" and J6-4623 "Conceptualizing the End: its Temporality, Dialectics, and Affective Dimension".

2 Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. A. Toscano, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2007, p. 115.

3 Alain Badiou, "Zgodovino sveta prelomiti na dvoje", trans. P. Klepec, *Filozofski vestnik*, 21 (3/2000), p. 104.

4 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. J. Norman, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 4.

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a philosopher who has set himself the goal of a renewal of philosophy on the very basis of a revival of its "original Platonic gesture." It is no less obvious that Badiou, who, in accordance with this "Platonic gesture," seeks to reintegrate and recentre philosophy around *the category of truth*, will not find a comrade in arms in the thinker who put forward the famous thesis that after centuries of being asked countless questions in the name of truth, it is now time for us to turn things around and *direct a few questions at truth ourselves*.[5]

While Badiou argues that any definition of philosophy must distinguish philosophy from sophism, Nietzsche is openly sympathetic to sophism, whereas with regard to philosophy itself he oscillates between vehement attempts to reassert its leading, dominant role,[6] and a critical distance that can sometimes give the feeling that Nietzsche sees himself as something other than a philosopher, or perhaps even as a new evolutionary stage of the philosopher. In mathematics, to which, according to Badiou, philosophy must surrender its traditional centre in ontology, Nietzsche sees nothing more than a "distortion of the world by number." The extent to which the fervent communist Badiou and Nietzsche are far apart in their political views is sufficiently illustrated by the following sardonic comment of Nietzsche on the workers' question: "The hope is now completely gone that a modest and self-sufficient sort of human being, a Chinese type, could build itself up into a class here."[7]

Perhaps the most concrete manifestation of all these philosophical, attitudinal, ideological oppositions can be seen in the case of the two famous interpretations of St Paul – Nietzsche's *The Antichrist* and Badiou's *St Paul*: for Nietzsche, Paul of Tarsus is undoubtedly the darkest figure of Christianity, the one who has caused Christianity to evolve into the most perverted form of religion possible – a religion of love, from which boundless hatred grows against everything external, non-Christian. In complete contrast, for Badiou, it is Paul who is the key personality who, through his tireless activism, brought out of Christianity its true gift to humanity, the principle of universality.

5 *Ibid*., p. 5.

6 *Ibid*., p. 95.

7 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, trans. R. Polt, Indianapolis and Cambridge, Hackett Publishing, 1997, p. 77.

If we add up all these fundamental differences, it should not be surprising that Badiou – again along the lines of the original Platonic gesture – does not simply see Nietzsche as an opponent of his own philosophical positions, but rather understands Nietzsche's work as admirable thinking, which, nonetheless, *in its essence, embodies the opposite of philosophy as such*. In other words, Badiou discovers in Nietzsche a virtually ideal protagonist to fill up all those spaces that Badiou – one could almost say – accumulates at the outer limits of philosophy: for him, Nietzsche is not only "the prince of the sophists," a kind of "Gorgias of our age," but he also constitutes, along with Wittgenstein and Lacan, the core group of contemporary "antiphilosophers."

I do not think that this positioning should be taken in a purely negative sense; I would rather say that, on the one hand, it even sets the stage for a kind of reconciliation, while, on the other hand, together with it – within the framework of Badiou's perception of Nietzsche – a sort of point of the unthinkable is thus established.

When I say "reconciliation", I clearly do not mean a convergence with Nietzsche's view of the workers' question. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that Badiou's central thesis on Nietzsche overlaps with a certain turn in the understanding of the connection between Nietzsche and politics. While Badiou went on to write in *Being and Event* that "it is well known what kind of pessimistic political conclusions and nihilist cult of art are drawn from this evaluation of the will in 'moderate' (let's say: non-Nazi) Nietzscheanism,"[8] the thesis he later developed in the text "Who is Nietzsche?" is characterized by a different emphasis, which gives a much more marginal significance to the confusion of Nietzsche's political views – which range from his sympathy for the *Manu Code* and his recognition of certain advantages of the Indian caste system, to his declaration of war against Bismarck, his pan-Europeanism, his glorification of the European South versus the North, and his "death sentence" against anti-Semites.

In fact, one could even say that from the point of view from which Badiou has set out his thesis on Nietzsche, it is noticeable that any attempt to approach the essence of Nietzsche's thought through an assessment of his political positions remains trapped in a dead end. For Nietzsche, according to Badiou's interpreta-

8 Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham, New York, Continuum, 2005, pp. 202–203.

tion, was essentially interested *in a single political,* and indeed only *inherently* political, question: *how to make philosophy transcend the effects of the political event by its own means alone*, and without even stepping onto the terrain of proper political thought.

For this tendency towards a *radical philosophical act*, which he places at the very centre of Nietzsche's work and which, although not apolitical in its ambitions, touches politics in the real sense only with the tips of its fingers, Badiou coined a new term, "archi-politics", and explained it as follows:

> I would say that this act is archi-political, in that it intends to revolutionise the whole of humanity at a more radical level than that of the calculations of politics. Archi-political does not here designate the traditional philosophical task of finding a foundation for politics. The logic, once again, is a logic of rivalry, and not a logic of foundational eminence. It is the philosophical act itself that is an archi-political act, in the sense that its historical explosion will retroactively show, in a certain sense, that the political revolution proper has not been genuine, or has not been authentic.[9]

It is clear that for Badiou, who takes the position that there is only one politics – left, progressive, emancipatory politics – "archi-politics", with all that this description entails (the tendency to bypass politics in the strict sense and to retroactively undermine the authenticity of the political revolution), in principle denotes an inclination towards the political right. However, this swing to the right, rather than being linked to a right-wing political outlook, must be explained as a spontaneous effect of the workings of the very essence of Nietzsche's archi-politics, which, as Badiou puts it, centres entirely around the problem of the "power of philosophy." The optimization of the power of philosophy, of course, does not itself look either "left" or "right". But since it clashes with the competition of politics, and in particular with the competition of its revolutionary potential, there can arise within it an obsession to develop a philosophical idea whose effect on humanity would be so fundamental that the significance of the political event would be revealed as a kind of surface noise in the face of it. In this sense, the obsessive aim of archi-politics is to develop a thought *with the effect and weight of an action* that can occupy (or destroy) the place of the po-

9 Alain Badiou, "Who is Nietzsche?", trans. A. Toscano, *Pli*, 11 (2001), p. 4.

litical event; and it is precisely in this archi-political obsession, and the related problem of a philosophical act, that Badiou also sees the key to understanding the singularity of Nietzsche's thought, which, in his view, precisely at this point partly eluded both Heidegger and Deleuze.

The notion of a philosophical act, however, also constitutes a link with Badiou's other, broader label for Nietzsche's work, "antiphilosophy", which Bruno Bosteels, as regards its arguably most important feature, described as follows:

> The notion of the act is without a doubt the most important element in the formal characterization of any antiphilosophy, namely, the reliance on a radical gesture that alone has the force of dismantling, and occasionally overtaking, the philosophical category of truth. All antiphilosophers posit the possibility of some radical act such as Pascal's "wager", Kierkegaard's "leap of faith", Nietzsche's "breaking in two of history", or Lacan own notion of the "act", as in the still unpublished book XV of Lacan's seminar from 1967-1968, precisely titled The Psychoanalytical Act and appropriately interrupted by the events of May 68[.][10]

There is in this respect a very clear analogy between archi-politics and antiphilosophy, the sole difference being that archi-politics, through the construction of a philosophical act – which opts to either destroy or take possession of it (as in the case of Nietzsche's proclamation of the "great politics") – is in competition with politics, whereas antiphilosophy is characterized by entering, through the construction of a philosophical act, into a very similar competitive relationship with the *philosophical category of truth*, which oscillates between the (typical of Nietzsche in particular) tendency to adopt a kind of active stance in relation to truth as such, and the articulations of its dismantling. We cannot, of course, go into the ways in which this antagonism between a philosophical act and truth is reflected in the individual thinkers listed – certainly the gap between Lacan, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche is considerable – but that is not decisive at this point. More than the subtleties of the differences, what is crucial for Badiou's characterization of antiphilosophy is the (antiphilosopher's) general conviction that such a philosophical act – which, to formulate it

[10] Bruno Bosteels, "Nietzsche, Badiou, and Grand Politics: An Antiphilosophical Reading", in K. Ansell-Pearson (ed.), *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, London and New York, Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 225.

in Nietzsche's pungent vocabulary, *does not place itself in a receptive position in relation to truth, but dictates truth* – is possible at all.

Badiou, of course, rejects this belief, and sees in it an illusion, even a path to madness. Nevertheless, the rejection of the antiphilosopher's "active attitude" towards truth, as the following example shows, concerning Christianity and another anti-philosopher, Pascal, is not entirely unambiguous:

> In Christianity and in it alone it is said that the essence of truth supposes the evental ultra-one, and that relating to truth is not a matter of contemplation – or immobile knowledge – but of intervention.[11]

But isn't there also something distinctly Nietzschean in this description, especially in the second part? If there is some continuity between Christianity and Nietzsche, the most famous critic of Christianity, it is undoubtedly to be found in this view, expressed by Nietzsche, that the discovery of truth does not take place as "disinterested contemplation," as Nietzsche himself puts it. The forthcoming of truth, on the contrary, is always correlative to a certain incision, to *an intervention*: is this not, after all, the central point of Nietzsche's critique of objectivity?

It is well known that Badiou's interpretation relies considerably on Nietzsche's "hammering" notes from the last two months of his writing, in particular on excerpts from Nietzsche's last letters and drafts of letters, first collected in the French milieu and brilliantly commented on by Pierre Klossowski in his book *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*.[12] The emphasis on these late writings that already show the outbursts of megalomania that ultimately abruptly interrupted Nietzsche's philosophical path, is of course not accidental. Badiou's thesis reaches its dramatic climax in a sort of demonstration that in the form of Nietzsche's madness, which is already taking hold of these writings, it is possible to behold the tragic truth of the whole of Nietzsche's archi-political antiphilosophy. Nevertheless, perhaps the most crucial passage that allows Badiou to make his case for Nietzsche's archi-politics is to be found in the chapter "On the Great Events" of Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

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11 Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 212.

12 Pierre Klossowski, *Nietzsche and the Vicious Circle*, trans. D. W. Smith, London, Continuum, 1997.

In this key passage, which takes place against the spectacular backdrop of a volcanic peak, through which a path is said to lead to the deepest underworld, Zarathustra addresses one of the two "skin diseases" that afflict the Earth: the first is called "human being", and the second skin disease – and it is this that Zarathustra has chosen to challenge on the volcanic peak and to measure its true depth – is called the "fire hound." There is no doubt that the "fire hound" represents the revolutionary political event to which Zarathustra dedicates the following words:

> "Freedom" the lot of you are best at bellowing, but I lose faith in "great events" as soon as they are surrounded by much bellowing and smoke.
> And just believe me, friend Infernal Racket! The greatest events – these are not our loudest, but our stillest hours.
> Not around the inventors of new noise does the world revolve, but around the inventors of new values; *inaudibly* it revolves.
> And just confess! When your noise and smoke cleared, it was always very little that had happened. What does it matter that a town becomes a mummy and a statue lies in the mud![13]

It seems hard to find better evidence for Badiou's archi-political argument. Let us first look at how he himself comments on this passage:

> The opposition here is between din and silence. The din is what attests externally for the political event. The silence, the world pregnant with silence, is instead the name of the unattested and unproved character of the archi-political event.[14]

Nietzsche, then, according to Badiou, contrasts the "noise" of the political event, which, "once all the smoke cleared," leaves behind little actual effect, with "silence," which, according to Badiou, is "the name for the unattested and unproven character of the archi-political event" – that is, of a philosophical act that has yet to happen, an act for which we have no guarantee except Nietzsche's prediction that it might occur; an act that Nietzsche clearly observes

13 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. A. Del Caro, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 104.

14 Badiou, "Who is Nietzsche?", p. 8

as *inherent in the potential of his own thought*, and whose "common name" is "the revaluation of all values."

Badiou also explains convincingly where Nietzsche's belief in the shallowness, the superficiality of political revolution comes from: Nietzsche's opposition to revolutionary events had nothing to do with being reactionary or conservative. On the contrary, Nietzsche was convinced that political revolution *could not be radical enough*, that it could not cut deep enough: because it is itself a political manifestation of Christian ideals, of the "equality of all before God"; revolution, even if it is fervently initiated under the banner of atheism, is incapable of overturning the most fundamental determination of Western society, which, under the rule of Christian morality, is sliding into nihilism. Hence the necessity or (rather) the opportunity for deeper, more radical action, which cannot be produced by any politics, but only by "creators of new values."

Badiou's reading of the passage is undoubtedly correct in principle – it is not even a question of disputing it in general, but rather a question of a certain nuance. And this nuance refers first of all to *silence*.

As we have seen, Badiou, here but also elsewhere, interprets Nietzsche's frequent emphasis on the silence that usually accompanies the announcement of a groundbreaking act as a sign of the uncertainty, the unascertainability, of the announced archi-political event. In contrast, Alenka Zupančič, particularly on the basis of her treatment of the figures of "midday" and "the stillest hour," has put forward the thesis that the opposition between noise and silence, which pervades the entire book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, must be understood primarily as the opposition between the explosive exteriority of the event and the silence that reigns at its epicentre:

> Furthermore, why does Nietzsche propose, as the emblem and the "time" of the event, the figure of *midday*, which he describes as "the stillest hour" (this does not simply imply some sort of "lull before the storm," since midday is defined by Nietzsche as the moment when "One turns into Two," namely, as the very moment of a break or a split)? Why is he so insistent that "it is the stillest words that bring the storm," and that "thoughts that come on dove's feet guide the world"? [...] In reading Nietzsche, we must never lose sight of this irreducible obverse of his bombastic expressions (silence, solitude, playfulness, lightness, nuance,

> minimal difference). Yet as I suggested above, the silence is not something that takes place before or after the explosion – it is the silence at the very heart of the "explosion," the stillness of the event.[15]

This divergence in the assessment of the meaning of silence is, I think, more far-reaching than it may seem at first sight. When he explains silence as Nietzsche's "name for the unattested and unproven character of the arch-political event," Badiou is also referring to an *essential absence of theory and concept*. For the predicted philosophical act – it is on this basis, in a sense, that also rests its evental character – "does not take the form either of a project or of a program."[16]

The "revaluation of all values" that Nietzsche contrasts with the shallowness of the revolutionary event is, as Badiou puts it, merely the *common name* of Nietzsche's philosophical act. What can be said without any reservation, says Badiou, about this admittedly crucial but famously vague notion of Nietzsche's philosophy is that the revaluation of all values "is life itself against nothingness."[17] However, this revaluation, whose central term is life, or rather the affirmation of life against nothing and the negative – against the nihilism of the metaphysical supersensible world and of Christian values, which place the centre of gravity of life in nothing, and thus take away the centre of gravity of life altogether – collides with an internal paradox, which, according to Badiou, is summed up by what he considers to be the decisive axiom of Nietzsche's philosophy, which is: "*the value of life cannot be assessed*."[18]

Nietzsche's problem, therefore, is that his aim is the affirmation of life, which, if we try to assign a value to it, we *devalue* it at best. Equally, just as any attempt to determine the meaning of life is repelled by the infinite heterogeneity of life, so too is any attempt to determine the value of life, which also falls into the field of the abstract and the negative. Therefore, at the decisive moment of revaluation – that is, at the moment when "evaluation, values and meaning" fade into the shadow of life – its fate is entirely left to the "trial posed by the act."[19] This act,

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15 Alenka Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*, Cambridge (MA) and London, MIT Press, 2003, pp. 8–9.

16 Badiou, "Who is Nietzsche?", p. 2.

17 *Ibid*.

18 Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, p. 13.

19 Badiou, "Who is Nietzsche?", p. 3.

which is divested of meaning and evaluation, an act inherent in life, however, can no longer properly be called by the name of a concept, the "revaluation of values," which betrays it by its generality, but in its essential "opacity" can only be called by the proper name "Nietzsche."

The most likely criticism that Badiou could address to Zupančič in terms of his interpretation, then, is that Zupančič attributes to Nietzsche a concept of the event that Nietzsche not only does not have, but *also must not have*, since the "essential opacity" of the philosophical act is contradicted by the idea of a concept or theory standing behind it. Nietzsche can only rush blindly towards the predicted event that will occur in the form of himself. And also the silence that inhabits the conceptual figures of Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* must, from this point of view, be understood more as a kind of thick whiteness in which Nietzsche loses himself in order to find himself again, but no longer as a person, but as *an event*.

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Of course, it is hazardous to talk about a theory of event on the basis of complex figures such as "the stillest hour" and "midday". If such a theory of event in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* really exists, then it must be almost entirely contained in its *actualization*, just as the sculptor's knowledge is expressed in the sculpture and not in aesthetic theory. I believe – and I am certainly not alone in this – that Nietzsche develops this mute theory from inside an event which bears the name "God is dead." I also think that Badiou, starting from his own theory, would have to agree in principle that the protagonist of the event – that is, the philosophical subject who acts inside the event and, at the same time, retroactively only makes it manifest – is *bound by a certain rule of interpretive ascesis* that does not allow much more than giving the event a name that must be "torn from the void." Of course, Badiou himself thinks that the basic problem of Nietzsche's archi-politics is precisely that it necessarily lacks a real event, and that is why Nietzsche himself is forced to step into the place of the real.

Among other things, we will therefore be interested to know where, in the context of Badiou's interpretation, the "death of God" has disappeared: that event which, after all, is given a central place in Nietzsche's philosophy by Heidegger and Deleuze, with whom Badiou is engaged in polemics in his discussion. The

least that can be said is that the story of this "disappearance" – which, at least in my opinion, is anything but a disappearance – is very intriguing.

But let us bring the discussion down to more concrete ground. The first cue for my argument is a thesis of Nietzsche, which at first sight seems remarkably simple, but which nevertheless constitutes one of the key points of his critique of the mind. It concerns the notion of *understanding*.

> "To understand" means merely: to be able to express something new in the language of something old and familiar.[20]

We can immediately see the multilayered nature of this thesis, which presents understanding as a regression in time. One could say that it implies a classical dialectical form and links it to a minimalist expression of one of the most fundamental problems of theories of the event, including Badiou's.

The dialectical formula, to begin with, would be this: understanding (as the "translation of the new into the old") is the negation of *the essence of its object* (the "new"; that which is to be understood) and, consequently, the negation of itself. Of course, we will stop before the "negation of negation", or synthesis, since Nietzsche's intention is precisely to draw attention to an irremediable contradiction of understanding as such.

The understanding of the new is no doubt only possible in the way that the novelty we seek to understand is linked to something we already understand. But even if we are so attentive to the otherness of what the novelty brings – in short, even if we describe the novelty through the determination of its differences in relation to the already existing knowledge – it is clear that in this way (i.e. by placing it in a differential correlation to what is already known) we are also already

[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufman, New York, Vintage, 1986, p. 266. "The origin of our concept of 'knowledge' – I take this explanation from the street; I heard one of the common people say 'he knew me right away' - and I asked myself: what do the people actually take knowledge to be? what do they want when they want 'knowledge'? Nothing more than this: something unfamiliar is to be traced back to something familiar. And we philosophers – have we really meant anything more by knowledge?" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. J. Nauckhoff, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 214).

accommodating the novelty to the already established schemata of our understanding. This means that with each step of our understanding – the better we understand a novelty – we also cut off from it a piece of what we truly seek to understand, that is, the novelty itself.

This paradox of understanding is most pronounced in the case of radical breakthroughs, pure discontinuities, new beginnings, that is to say, *events*. In his *On the Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche describes historical events which were so colossal and which took place so rapidly that, even though they transformed us as a species almost instantaneously, we only become aware of them and understand them from a great distance in time. An example of such an event is the emergence of "bad conscience" – that moment when the "human beast," which had found itself trapped overnight in the grip of the State, turned its aggressive instincts on itself – which Nietzsche accompanied with the comment that this emergence of bad conscience took place "as a breach, a leap, a compulsion, an inescapable fate that nothing could ward off, which occasioned no struggle, not even any ressentiment."[21] One of the lessons of the *genealogical theory of the event* – in this respect, there is no doubt that Nietzsche possesses such a theory; the whole of genealogy is constructed out of events – is therefore that the more decisive and colossal an event is, i.e. the greater its transformative power, *the less it will be noticeable within the situation on which it produces change*. In some cases, such as the emergence of "human memory," the first rudiments of the conditions for understanding the event are *only established by the event itself*; realistically speaking, such an event launches the possibility of its understanding into a distant millennium.

The most radical ruptures and discontinuities can only be observed, if at all, at the moment of their occurrence, as a kind of *vague disturbance in understanding*. To discover them, one must actually swim against the current of understanding that washes away the novelty, in a sense resisting the temptation to explain, and focusing, as it were silently, on that which somehow does not fit the account. But let us look at another, related, Nietzschean thesis, which in a narrower sense refers to "genuine experience":

[21] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. C. Diethe, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 58.

> Our real experiences aren't chattery at all. They couldn't communicate if they wanted to. That means that there are no words for them. When we have words for something, we've already gone beyond it. In all speaking there is a grain of contempt. Language, so it seems, was invented only for what is mediocre, common, communicable. In language, speakers *vulgarize* themselves right away.[22]

Although in some ways they belong to different fields, it is not difficult to see the deep connection between the two passages. In the last passage, the main focus is on the problem of language, or more precisely, on the problem of the *discrepancy between the generality of language and the singularity of "authentic experience"*. Klossowski has shown that this problem – which began to preoccupy Nietzsche with all its force after the "thought of the eternal recurrence" revealed itself to him in spectacular circumstances – constitutes one of the most intense areas of Nietzsche's research, bringing together in the terrain of language such problems as: evaluation in the sense of the distinction between "high" and "low" mental states (or as Klossowski calls it, "tonalities of the soul"), psychology, semantics, and epistemology.

According to Nietzsche, languages, which have evolved as means of communication and transmission, and which therefore spontaneously follow the ideal of intelligibility for all, gravitate towards the general and the "average". Therefore, if we try to articulate the singularity of "genuine experience" in ordinary language, we are at best vulgarizing ourselves by speaking. The connection with the paradox of understanding – the translation of something new into the language of something old – is clearly shown in the sentence "when we have words for something, we've already gone beyond it": ordinary language flows smoothly only on the ground where the singularity of experience and novelty have already been resorbed into an established meaning; the word comes into play at the point where the "translation into the language of something old" covers the trace of the singularity or the novelty.

Nietzsche does not resolve this problem dialectically: he does not attempt to bring singularity and commonness to a point where they mirror each other – which Nietzsche would see as merely an unhealthy compromise to the detriment of "genuine experience." His solution to the problem of the articulation

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[22] Nietzsche, *The Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 65–66.

of the singular, on the contrary, places its entire stake on that universal means which language itself has provided us with as a counterweight to its generality – namely, *naming*.

One could say that Nietzsche – as we all do, but with an additional emphasis – counteracts the generality of language by anticipating the (already familiar) "word" and giving the still mute singularity a name of its own, thus protecting it from erosion into the generality of language, and in this way, if nothing else, *buying it time*. This "buying time", in the case of *singularities of the evental type*, is anything but trivial: since, as we have seen, one of the specific possible properties of the event with which we must always reckon is *that the event itself potentially only creates the conditions of its understanding*, it means to "buy time" for the event, by means of its naming, *to preserve some small possibility of catching up with it even at the time of its action*, in short, before the closure of its sequence, when the possibilities of intervening in the event have expired.

Nietzsche's naming usually has the quality of being both an explosion of meaning and at the same time something opaque from which all meaning is reflected. Of course, there is a general quality of the proper name to be seen in this, but Nietzschean names such as – "God is dead," "the eternal return of the same," "Dionysus versus the Crucified," "the seventh solitude," "the ascetic ideal," "Zarathustra," and perhaps also "Nietzsche" – raise it to a certain higher potency. With these designations, Nietzsche not only stops the erosion of the singular, its drift towards the general of the language, but also in a sense turns the vacuum of understanding in his favour: his designations are a magnet for countless interpretations which – precisely in so far as they necessarily halt at what cannot be tied to meaning in a name – in a sense encircle and mark the place of the singular.

However, the effect of naming is not only to stop the erosion of the singular; another essential feature of naming is that – as François Wahl said in relation to Badiou's concept of naming – every naming always carries with it a risk, a kind of "roll of the dice": the fate of what we have named becomes *indistinguishable from the effects of the name* we have given it.

Thus, we have gathered four related concepts, from which we can draw the first few parallels with Badiou's theory of the event. I will list them in a slight-

ly modified order to facilitate comparison: a) the genealogical rule of the *minimal observability* of an event during its duration; b) the *paradox of understanding*, which dictates that this minimum observability of novelty must be extricated from the danger of resorption into a pre-existing meaning, or rather, as Nietzsche wrote, it must be preserved from its "premature understanding"; c) the likelihood that the conditions of its understanding are *inherent in the event itself*; d) *the emphasis on naming,* which protects the singularity from erosion in the generality of language and thus "buys time" for the inherent establishment of the conditions of its understanding.

For the complex of these four concepts taken as a whole, I will use the expression *interpretive ascesis* – perhaps a surprising term, given the broader context of Nietzsche's philosophy. For they all intersect in the recognition that, in the duration of an event, no grand *interpretation* of it is really possible. On the contrary, it follows from these four concepts that a grand interpretation in the sense of a clamour of grand general words – for instance, the cry of "freedom" with which Zarathustra reproaches the followers of the "fire hound" – can only signify a kind of contamination of the event, in both the epistemological and value senses.

When it comes to the comparison with Badiou, one must, of course, start from an irreducible difference, which is that Badiou derives all his implementations from his *definition of the event*, which has a background and a basis in his mathematical ontology. Because of this divergence of starting points, the first round of comparisons, at least, can only be a kind of description of external affinities. The comparison refers exclusively to what might be called the "operational" part of the theory of the event, in short, not to its ontological background, but to the concept that Badiou calls "intervention." Of course, here we will also have to give up on following Badiou's long and complex transitions between the different concepts.

Badiou's definition of an event is:

> *I term event of the site X a multiple such that it is composed of, on one hand, elements of the site, and on the other hand, itself.*[23]

[23] Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 179.

Badiou's event is thus composed of elements that belong to the site of the event, but in addition, it includes *an elusive surplus* that cannot be included among the elements of the site of the event, but is constituted by the event itself, only this time taken *as its own internal element*. Badiou explains this doubling of the event with the example of the French Revolution. On the one hand, the French Revolution is, of course, the great political event that brought together everything that took place within it between 1789 and 1794 – the convocation of the Estates, the storming of the Bastille, the slogan "equality, fraternity, liberty", the Jacobins, the deposition of the king, the guillotine, Robespierre, Marseillaise. But the Revolution is not only this broadest framework of historical occurrences, it is also *the central term* of the Revolution itself – and one that, unlike all the others, cannot be clearly located, and about which there was constant uncertainty among the revolutionaries themselves.

> When, for example, Saint Just declares in 1794 'the revolution is frozen', he is certainly designating infinite signs of lassitude and general constraint, but he adds them to the *one-mark* that is the Revolution itself, as this signifier of the event which being qualifiable (the Revolution is 'frozen'), proves that it is itself *a term* of the event it is.[24]

This essential duality of the event, which includes itself as its central term, is the key to understanding several major concepts, such as the "two", which Alenka Zupančič has linked to Nietzsche's philosophy, and the conceptual meaning of "naming".

However, the basic and fundamental corollary that Badiou draws from his definition of the event is that the event – which in itself, in the form of itself, includes an elusive surplus that cannot be counted among the "positive" elements of the evental site – can only be something "undecidable," i.e., something about which it is impossible to decide, from the point of view of the situation in which it takes place, whether it belongs to that situation at all.

> If there exists an event, *its belonging to the situation of this site is undecidable from the standpoint of the situation itself.*[25]

[24] *Ibid*., p. 180.
[25] *Ibid*., p. 181.

And of course, the reverse is also true: within the very situation in which it unfolds, the event is noticeable at first only and exclusively as the undecidable. The event, then, initially escapes all other identification, except the absolutely minimal one, which is that it cannot be subsumed into what Badiou calls the "language of the situation." So, it is only if we can see that something is going on within the situation that does not fit into it – something that interferes with our understanding of the situation – that we can begin to suspect that we are witnessing the occurrence of an event.

> An intervention consists, it seems, in identifying that there has been some undecidability, and in deciding its belonging to the situation.[26]

The event is only revealed in a true sense *retroactively*, through the course of the event itself – more precisely, through the "retroaction of an interventional practice." One of the key concepts of Badiou's theory of the event is therefore "intervention," which he first defines in a very general way: "I term intervention any procedure by which a multiple is recognized as an event."[27]

However, intervention breaks down into two procedures: the first is to *give a name* to what we recognize as the undecidable within a situation; the second is to *expose the implications of this naming for the situation* of the site of the event.

> The essence of the intervention consists – within the field opened up by an interpretive hypothesis, whose *presented* object is the site (a multiple on the edge of the void), and which concerns the 'there is' of an event – in naming this 'there is' and in unfolding the consequences of this nomination in the space of the situation to which the site belongs.[28]

Although this path undoubtedly leads to the real of the event, i.e. to what has actually happened independently of the intervention, we can nevertheless observe that the whole process takes place in the *relation of naming and its consequences for the site of the event*; the event itself, in short, the real of the event, does not move from the place of the "undecidable" in the whole process.

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[26] *Ibid*., p. 202.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 202.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 203.

Moreover, the only event to which the interventional practice refers in the *classical sense of interpretation* is not the actual event that is taking place at all, but a past event in relation to which the actual event, according to the interpretive hypothesis, *reveals itself as its essential repetition*. This concept of "evental recurrence" will be important in what follows – it is almost impossible to avoid the impression that it is Nietzschean from head to toe, but in fact it is also the basis of a key divergence.

The problem that Badiou solves with the concept of "evental recurrence" is in fact – although he does not mention it in *Being and Event* – very close to the problem of that deadly loop that is usually considered to be at the core of Badiou's thesis on Nietzsche. This problem is: How to prevent the intervention, which, given the undecidability of the event, is the *only visible part* of its presentation, from confusing itself with *the real of the event* (which in reality conditions it)?

> In order to avoid this curious mirroring of the event and the intervention – of the fact and the interpretation – the possibility of the intervention must be assigned to the consequences of another event. It is evental recurrence which founds intervention. In other words, there is no interventional capacity, constitutive for the belonging of an evental multiple to a situation, save within a network of consequences of a previously decided belonging.[29]

From here, Badiou draws two more critical implications, which are very probably directly (but in my opinion unjustifiably) directed at Nietzsche: the first is the opposition to the figure of the philosophical *hero* of the event, and the second, which is directly evident in the concept of "evental recurrence," is the critique of the absolute new beginning.

But first let us summarize this, outer, circle of comparison. Although it is obvious that Badiou's theory is permeated with a completely different spirit, and although the difference between the two starting points is more than evident – it is nevertheless also noticeable that the basic conceptual structure of Badiou's event-intervention relation contains all the elements that I have previously called interpretative ascesis, on the basis of my treatment of Nietzsche: the minimal observability of the event at the time of its occurrence (the undecidable); its

[29] *Ibid*., p. 209.

perceptibility exclusively in that which does not fit into the "language of the situation"; the inherent conditions of the event's cognition, which are only revealed by the (event-contingent) intervention; and the reduction of interpretation to a naming that "buys time" for the intervention. We have also already mentioned the concept of "evental recurrence", which is undoubtedly Nietzschean at its root. To all this we must add that affinity which we pointed out at the outset – namely, the tendency towards "actively" relating to truth, which is most clearly expressed in Nietzsche's critique of objectivity, and which also reveals itself in Badiou's priority of intervention over interpretation.

Of course, all these affinities, in themselves, fall into nullity. The essential question is: Where can we find in Nietzsche what is most essential for Badiou in his theory of the event, namely, the link between the event and truth? In order to answer this question, let us first focus once again on the very core of Badiou's thesis on Nietzsche, in short, on the famous "event Nietzsche." The point of Badiou's thesis is succinctly made in the following two passages:

> I think that this circle is the circle of any archi-politics whatsoever. Since it does not have the event as its condition, since it grasps it – or claims to grasp it – in the act of thought itself, it cannot discriminate between its reality and its announcement. The very figure of Zarathustra names this circle and gives the book its tone of strange undecidability with regard to the question of knowing whether Zarathustra is a figure of the efficacy of the act or of its prophecy pure and simple.[30]

> The archi-political declaration misses its real because the real of a declaration, of *any* declaration, is precisely the event itself. Thus it is at the very point of this real, which he lacks and whose presence and announcement he cannot separate, that Nietzsche will have to make himself present. And it is this that will be called his madness. Nietzsche's madness consists in this, that he must come to think of himself as the creator of the same world in which he makes his silent declaration, and in which nothing proves the existence of a break in two.[31]

Badiou's argument can be summarized in three points.

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30 Badiou, "Who is Nietzsche?", p. 7.

31 *Ibid*., pp. 7–8.

1. Even the very core of Badiou's thesis is derived from the concept of archi-politics. Nietzsche's archi-political antiphilosophy attempts to intervene in the field of the political, but – since its aim is not a positive political programme, but *the triumph over politics* and the annulment of the political event – Nietzsche's archi-politics deprives itself from the outset of the very bases that would enable it to intervene in the first place: precisely, politics and the grounding of the intended intervention in the *real* of a political event.

2. This lack of the "real", or of a real political event, is compensated for by Nietzsche with an event that is intrinsic to his thinking. We have seen that the common name of this event is "the revaluation of all values," but its true name can only be "Nietzsche." Another, more familiar formulation of Badiou's is that Nietzsche compensates for the lack of the real event by himself stepping into the place of the real and announcing himself as the event that will "break the history of the world in two."

3. The price Nietzsche paid for insisting on this event without a real background, which, one way or another, was to appear *as the direct continuity of his thinking*, is that – as his last writings prove – Nietzsche, from a certain moment onwards, was no longer able to distinguish between the *prediction* of this event and its *reality*.

This last point is probably true:

> *We have just entered into great politics, even the very greatest... I am preparing an event which, in all likelihood, will break history into two halves, to the point that one will need a new calendar, with 1888 as Year One.*[32]

It also seems likely that Nietzsche at some point came to see himself as an event of sinister proportions:

> *It is not inconceivable that I am the first philosopher of the age, perhaps even a little more. Something decisive and doom-laden standing between two millennia*.[33]

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[32] Letter to Brandes (December 1888), quoted in *ibid*., p. 4.

[33] Letter to Von Seydlitz (February 1888), quoted in *ibid*., p. 5.

It is also a fact that Badiou's interpretation offers an explanation for one of the more enigmatic features of Nietzsche's philosophy, which is perhaps most clearly expressed in the figure of Zarathustra himself, about whom, in fact, as Badiou says, we do not come to a clear conclusion, whether he is merely the prophet of a tectonic break and the "overman," or whether this break itself is already speaking out of him, and whether the words of Zarathustra are the first words uttered by an "overman,"

Nevertheless, Badiou's interpretation lacks something: namely, it lacks some *minimal explanation* of the absence of that famous event that Nietzsche does not relegate to an obscure future, but describes *as a recent, silent, terrestrial explosion, the waves of which are just beginning to reach us* – I am speaking, of course, of the event to which Nietzsche gave the name "God is dead." In other words, we have to ask ourselves whether Nietzsche's philosophy is really, as Badiou claims, groundless in the reality of the event – and, if so, what the status of the "death of God" is.

This minimal clarification that one would expect from Badiou could include many things: for example, we could easily understand if Badiou were to dismiss the "death of God" in a similar way as Lacan, who saw in this phrase of Nietzsche more a dramatic interjection rather than a serious philosophical thesis, because, according to him, the "death of God" has always already occurred within Christianity. One could also understand if Badiou, for example, had expressed the view that the emphasis placed by other philosophers on the "death of God" is exaggerated, and that it does not occupy the central place within the edifice of Nietzsche's "antiphilosophy" that is often attributed to it. Ultimately, one could even understand that Badiou simply would not have paid much attention to this notorious phrase.

However, Badiou did not write and speak a great deal only about Nietzsche; he also wrote and spoke a great deal – and in decisive places – about the "death of God": however, in doing so, he managed to achieve something rather extraordinary – *namely, that the philosopher and the event virtually do not meet at all in his texts*.

In the text "Who is Nietzsche?", despite his polemics with Heidegger and Deleuze, both of whom attribute to the "death of God," I would say, an almost

ontological significance, Badiou does not mention the dictum "God is dead" at all. If for no other reason, this is strange because the "death of God" in these debates is at least intrinsically related to the decline of the concept of the One that is so relevant to Badiou.

In the text entitled "God is Dead", with which he opens his *Short Treatise on Transitory Ontology*, the reference to Nietzsche is obvious, but in that essay Badiou mainly gives his own vision of the rupture marked by this famous phrase. What is certainly decisive here is that Badiou's implementation goes in a direction opposite to that of Lacan's – in short, "God is dead," according to Badiou, undoubtedly marks the site of a real breakdown of religions.[34]

> Now, my conviction on this matter is the opposite. I take the formula "God is dead" literally. It *has* happened. Or, as Rimbaud said, it has passed. God is finished. And religion is finished, too. As Jean-Luc Nancy has strongly stated, there is something irreversible here.[35]

Does this not mean that Badiou thus tacitly ascribes to the "death of God" an evental-reality, or, to put it naively, does he not *understand it as a truth*, even though it is also clear that he does not, and cannot characterize it as an event-truth of his own type – also because it is impossible to allocate the "death of God" to any of his "generic processes of truth."

The most decisive moment, in my opinion, however, takes place earlier: in *Being and Event*, Badiou chooses the "death of God" as the *formal model of his theory of the event*, on the basis of which he clarifies and concretizes all the key concepts of this theory – but not the Nietzschean version, according to which "God also remains dead," but the original Christian Death of the Son of God on the Cross.

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[34] Alenka Zupančič has argued very well that this emphasis is not necessarily Nietzsche's, and that Nietzsche's phrase "God is dead" should precisely be followed by "and Christianity has survived it." The question that arises here is only whether Christianity, at least as far as Nietzsche is concerned, has really survived the "death of God" in *the form of religion*: for Nietzsche points out in several places that the Church itself, with its clumsiness and obsolescence, has become the greatest obstacle to the irresistible march of Christianity, which in the meantime has already transformed itself into many other forms.

[35] Alain Badiou, *Briefings on Existence*, trans. N. Madarasz, New York, State University of New York Press, 2006, p. 23.

I find it hard to resist the impression that in this case the original is a forgery, and the repetition is the place of the truth.

This raises three questions for me. First, is the Christian event, "the death of God," really at all separable from the resurrection of the Son of God? Secondly, is not this very "death of God" – notwithstanding Badiou's description of it as an "evental recurrence" in relation to Adam's sin, from which Christ redeems us by His death – the very synonym of an absolutely new beginning to which Badiou is opposed in principle. And thirdly, why choose as an example of event-truth a model that can only be formal – for it is clear that Badiou is reluctant to accept Christian truth – if we also have a model at our disposal of the nominally same event, the "death of God," whose truth, so to speak, has in fact reached us?

The second, inner circle of comparison – this will be made somewhat easier by the fact that Badiou, as it were, groups his main concepts of the theory of the event precisely around the model of the "death of God" – can only begin in one way, namely with the famous proclamation "God is dead," which Nietzsche entrusted to the voice of an unknown madman.

> *The madman.* – Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, 'I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!' Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated? – Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where is God?' he cried; 'I'll tell you! *We have killed him* – you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sidewards, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder? Isn't night and more night coming again and again? Don't lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? – Gods, too, decompose! God is dead!

> God remains dead! [...] Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it? There was never a greater deed – and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now!' Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; they too were silent and looked at him disconcertedly. Finally, he threw his lantern on the ground so that it broke into pieces and went out. 'I come too early,' he then said; 'my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds need time, even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard. This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars – *and yet they have done it themselves*!'[36]

The first thing to notice is that "God is dead" is by no means an event that Nietzsche describes as inherent in his thinking. Anything rather than that: the most fundamental characteristics of this proclamation are, on the contrary, the *universal participation of absolutely everyone* in the "murder of God" and the *anonymity of the proclamation* itself. In fact, we can observe that Nietzsche – in complete contrast to Badiou's "event Nietzsche" – completely evacuates himself from the centre of this event, in which he plays no more part than any other of us who, although the news of his death has not even reached us yet, have murdered God.

The death of God is therefore an act that took place independently of Nietzsche's thinking; in fact, one might rather say that Nietzsche discovers the event of "God is dead," or the real of this event, in the retroaction of that, in Badiou's terms, "interventional practice" which in Nietzsche is undoubtedly constituted by his *critique of Christian morality* – that is, he discovers it as that *rupture within Christianity itself* which, in a certain epochal sense, only made this critique possible. The "evental site" – to cash in on another of Badiou's key concepts – in the case of the "God is dead" event, is undoubtedly Christianity; in fact, we can be even more precise: the murder of God undoubtedly took place within a form of Christianity which, on the one hand, *sharpened to the extreme the truthfulness* of Christian morality, which gradually could *no longer tolerate the naivety and intellectual inconsistencies of Christian dogma*, and which, on the other hand, demanded a personal relationship with God, a relationship without priestly in-

[36] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, pp. 119–120.

termediaries, no longer symbolic, but as much as possible with *a living God* with whom the individual is in constant dialogue – and the strand of Christianity that made *God alive enough to die* is undoubtedly Protestantism. Nietzsche is quite clear on this point: God has been murdered by Christian morality itself, with its increasing truthfulness, and it is precisely this breakdown of dogma that has made possible the next stage of this event, when this morality turns against itself, when it starts to dismantle itself.

Another of the main aspects of the madman's proclamation is partly also related to this point. The madman's proclamation, for which he was widely ridiculed, was made before a predominantly atheist crowd. Of course, it is precisely for atheists that the "death of God" is an event which – at least as long as it is taken literally, and there is something *fatally literal about this event* – makes no sense: how could someone who never existed die? But Nietzsche's point here is by no means that the "death of God" in its true sense can only be experienced and understood by one who – as, after all, Nietzsche himself did in his youth – believed in God. Anything but that: Nietzsche made it very clear in *Ecce Homo* that his personal drama with God, this "highlander hypothesis," was practically minimal, and even the biographies of his youth show that Nietzsche dealt with God – especially given the circumstances of his upbringing in a pastoral family and his intended priestly vocation – relatively early, very rationally, and without particular personal drama.[37]

The discrepancy between the "God is dead" event and atheism must be explained differently, and on several levels. This discrepancy shows clearly that there is something about the "God is dead" event that cannot be articulated in the form of any kind of outlook (or, to use Badiou's phrase, in the "language of the situation") – even if it is an outlook like atheism, which is, in a sense, a consequence and a corollary of the death of God. One could say that the event itself has already overtaken all possible points of view, and, at the moment of its proclamation, presents itself only in the form of Nietzsche's intervention – in the form of his critique of Christian morality – which has long since left behind the church and the priests, and is now focused on those forms of Christian morality that have survived and even gained strength within atheism itself. What is

[37] See Daniel Blue, *The Making of Friedrich Nietzsche. The Quest for Identity, 1844–1869*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016.

certain, though, is that the "death of God" is "undecidable" within what Badiou would have called "the situation of the evental site."

But how then to account for that most famous and much-vaunted feature of the madman's proclamation – its description of a meaningless delusion through nothingness, and the dissolution of all meaning that is supposed to occur as a consequence of the event?

The dissolution of sense can occur for two reasons: either as a consequence of that which bore the name of God no longer existing, that is to say, as *a consequence of some loss*; or, on the contrary, it can also occur as a *consequence of the coming into being of that in the face of which all sense always somehow loses its ground*, and that is some new truth. There is no doubt that Nietzsche's declaration "God is dead" contains both meanings, which are in some way connected. It is in this context, in fact, that we can bring into circulation two more of Badiou's categories: "naming" and the "two". We have said that Badiou's basic rule for naming an event is that this name must be torn from the void; we have also seen that an event is a "two" – the event itself and the same event as the central term of this event.

Nietzsche's "death of God" is also characterized by a specific duality. I would say that it takes place on two stages – in a kind of split between the *name* God and *nothing*. The "death of God" can only occur as a kind of *shadow* in nothingness. For God, even if He were the "living", experienced God, can only be an *informed nothing*: the greatest masterpiece of all the great religions, according to Nietzsche, is that they bring us – sooner than representing a remedy for the *horror vacui* – into some intimate relationship with nothing.[38] However, as Alenka Zupančič has shown in her interpretation, Christianity is a step ahead of other religions in this respect: unlike Buddhism or Taoism, where meditation on emptiness severs us from the world, and turns the world and its burdens into an almost transparent veil, Christianity rather relies on nothing *as the active principle of all passionate will*. In order to really passionately will *something*, one must also will the *nothing itself*, and it is precisely to this – as Zupančič posits, nothing as the "transcendental condition" of all will – that Christianity has given the name

[38] On this topic, particularly in relation to Hegel's "absolute negativity", see Aleš Bunta, "To Annihilate Nothing?", *Filozofski vestnik*, 26 (2/2005), pp. 129–143.

God and made the central object of its passionate devotion.[39] In this sense – because we were no longer able to sustain God as the platform for this nothing perceived as the condition of a passionate will to be kept in place by our belief – the "death of God" marks the beginning of a great crisis of the will that Nietzsche, in the narrower sense, calls nihilism. And in this sense, the death of God is a real event, albeit a shadow in nothing, that marks both a loss and an advent of truth.

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[39] Zupančič, *The Shortest Shadow*, p. 126.

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Emergency Revisited

Ex-communicating the Pandemic

Now, at the end of 2022,[1] we may indeed be past the acute phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, as predicted.[2] However, given the regular tendency to underestimate the resilience of the virus, which has already been demonstrated in all of the earlier phases – and we have no reason to expect this to change – one thing is fairly certain: while we have somehow managed to bring the pandemic *under control*, the entity *in control* is not human society, but the one that started the process in the first place, and which still shows some interest in running the show. The SARS-CoV-2 virus, which advanced from one dominant variant to the next in the first two years, has eventually evolved into a multitude of synchronous variants that only the most ardent enthusiasts systematically track. In parallel with the evolution of the virus, the dynamics of the pandemic have also changed significantly. Successive waves with large amplitudes have been replaced by barely perceptible constant levels, which turn out to be even more constant if we focus on the amount of the virus measured in wastewater instead of the number of recorded human cases.[3] At the population level, Covid-19 has

1 This article is a result of the research programme P6-0014 "Conditions and Problems of Contemporary Philosophy" and the research projects N6-0286 "Reality, Illusion, Fiction, Truth: A Preliminary Study" and J6-4623 "Conceptualizing the End: its Temporality, Dialectics, and Affective Dimension".

2 "WHO: 2022 can mark the end of COVID's acute stage", *UN News*, 29 December 2021, https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/12/1108932, accessed 7 November 2022.

3 "The potential advantage of environmental surveillance in WBE [wastewater-based epidemiology] is to enable predicting the overall status of a given catchment area with much less effort than clinical surveillance. WBE can provide insight into the outbreak situation in the entire catchment area by testing the wastewater sample over time. In contrast, clinical surveillance requires more time and cost for sample collection and testing. An additional big advantage of WBE is capturing people with asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic infections, who may not be included in clinical surveillance." (Shelesh Agrawal, Laura Orschler, and Susanne Lackner, "Long-term monitoring of SARS-CoV-2 RNA in wastewater of the Frankfurt metropolitan area in Southern Germany", *Scientific Reports*,

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become a less acute but increasingly definitive chronic threat – as well as another chronic disease in its own right, or rather a complex of more or less long-term conditions estimated to affect tens of millions people worldwide.[4] The pandemic, then, has a double non-ending: not only has it fully integrated itself into the web of human relations and become a constant trigger of potentially dangerous conditions, but it also leads a prolonged intracorporeal existence through the pathological processes it has already triggered. No matter how you slice it, the virus has learned to live with us and has achieved its only conceivable goal: to maximize its replication for the foreseeable future.

From a human perspective, the process and its results were far less straightforward.[5] Admittedly, the proponents of what soon became known as the Swedish model had a clear idea from the beginning. They did not hesitate to acknowledge the existence of the pandemic, but nevertheless believed that the easiest way to get rid of it would be to welcome the virus into the social body, expose such to infection, boost its immunity, and thus also endow it with the power to irrevocably disinfect all the physical, mental, and ethical domains that the virus and its sociopolitical counterparts were trying to contaminate. From their perspective, the viral pandemic had no potential in itself to cause a serious crisis. As long as people were determined to defend the normalcy they had hitherto lived until now, the viral pandemic would remain an isolated medical problem and slowly dissipate.

11 (5372/2021). In the late stages of a pandemic, other factors must be added to this 2021 assessment, namely all aspects of what we call "pandemic fatigue": at the societal level (reduced testing capacity and the change in public health messaging); at the level of individual psychology (reluctance to test and to engage with the pandemic in general); and at the level of the virus pathogenicity (reduced severity of acute illness in the majority of the population). For wastewater monitoring in major cities in Slovenia, which indicates relatively constant levels of the virus throughout 2022, see https://www.nib.si/aktualno/novice/1500-pilotni-monitoring-sars-cov-2-v-odpadnih-vodah and https://covid-19.sledilnik.org/en/stats#sewage-chart.

4 Heidi Ledford, "How common is long COVID? Why studies give different answers", *Nature*, 606 (2022), pp. 852–853.

5 Some ideas in the following segment were first published in Tadej Troha, "Kako smo ekskomunicirali virus?", *Disenz.net*, 12 October 2022, https://www.disenz.net/kako-smo-ekskomunicirali-virus/.

In contrast to this extraordinarily rigid epidem-ideological stance, most countries have taken a much more convoluted path, stumbling over every conceivable way imaginable to end the pandemic: an initial naïve denial of its existence, in which the pandemic was over simply because it had never begun; a structurally belated desire to eradicate the virus that followed the shocking realization that it posed a clear and present danger; an unprecedented collective effort to maximize infection reduction driven by the idea of elimination; the phase of deliberate and somewhat ill-advised abandonment of the elimination strategy, which resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths in the fall and winter of 2020–2021, just before vaccines were to become available; vaccination as a pharmacological solution, which ended in a mismatch between the abstract idea of having the ultimate means of ending the pandemic at hand, rendering all other available means obsolete, and the reluctance to maximize its distribution in the population both globally and locally; and finally, the speculative prediction that Covid-19 would soon become endemic, which helped to keep out of sight the unmitigated spread of the Omicron variant, which in turn caused hundreds of thousands of additional deaths worldwide.[6]

The phases, of course, were rather more confused than the schematic sequence suggests, and were all the while permeated by a fundamental opposition between two tendencies: between the objective and subjective elimination of the pandemic, that is, between the actual disappearance of the virus and its collective denial, between fighting the infection and the imperative of learning to live with the virus. Be that as it may, the fact is that from a certain point on, when the waves were counted only by epidemiological modellers, the memory of the history of the pandemic and our participation in it also became blurred.

The last phase – let us call it ex-communication – was not another successive phase in the development of the pandemic, but the one that essentially took place after the pandemic had already ended, at least in the perception of its proponents. The ex-communication was posited, in short, as a process of recovery from an irrational obsession with a problem that society should never have accepted as its own. The virus we were trying to get rid of by the usual antiviral means – the more or less implicit narrative went – should have been fought from

6 "Omicron fuels record weekly COVID-19 cases, but deaths 'stable'", *UN News*, 12 January 2022, https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/01/1109652, accessed 7 November 2022.

the beginning with exclusively social instruments: societies wanted to eradicate the virus, they wanted to eliminate it, they wanted to suppress it, they wanted to manage the pandemic and mitigate the damage, but they could not really get rid of it until it was fully "socialized". Only after societies bridged the gap between the viral and the social pandemic – by allowing the virus to freely integrate into the population – could the pandemic be genuinely "eradicated", i.e. ex-communicated from our communities. In order to live with Covid and Covid with us, it was thus necessary to ex-communicate all messages that disturbed the tranquillity of "positive" communication – from calls for vaccination to projects for the installation of ventilation systems – and, above all, the de facto and discursive elimination of the central insignia of the pandemic, namely the face mask.

The final transition to the stage of ex-communication, which occurred in much of the world at the end of the summer of 2022, was largely carried out in a low-key manner, almost devoid of any gesture of authority, almost uncommunicated. From time to time, the authorities may have declared that we were entering the final stretch of the beginning of the end of the pandemic, but the role of effective mediator of the transition was mostly delegated to the population – which only had to overcome its inhibitions, let go of its long-standing but hitherto suppressed true opinion, and translate it definitively and unreservedly into pre-pandemic behaviour.

The precondition for this seemingly automatic leap into a new stable state of the social system was created much earlier, namely in that structurally premature anticipation of the end contained in the idea of a transition to endemicity at the end of 2021 – which was itself a repetition of the abstract idea that the best way to end the pandemic was to expose the population to infection, or, to use the German term, to carry out the process of *Verseuchung*, to "contaminate" the population with the virus and thus generate herd immunity. In terms of caring for the population, the proclamation of the impending endemic proved irresponsible, to say the least – in that while it promoted hope for a better future, it also implicitly glorified the catastrophic situation in the present and sublimated it to a sacrifice that simply had to be made at some point. (Sweden, they believed, had already accomplished this inevitable task in 2020.)

Although the actual numbers spoke for themselves, proponents of the endemization strategy – that is, an approach that required society not to take extreme

measures that might impede or even reverse a natural course that had already set in on its own – found their triumph in the fallacy of those who saw the emergence of Omicron at the peak of the Delta wave as the final cataclysm, surpassing previous pandemic waves by an order of magnitude. In their alarmist reaction – which was by no means unfounded given past experience and the increased infectivity of the new variant – they overlooked that despite the modifications, Omicron was nevertheless a variant of SARS-CoV-2 and not an entirely new virus that would transmit an altogether new disease. As a result, their predictions ignored the partial immunity acquired in one form or another and, more importantly, the price already paid for earlier waves, especially in vulnerable populations.

In contrast to the prediction of an immediate cataclysm, the bet on the transition to endemicity established quite different and much more ambiguous criteria of verifiability. Endemicity, which in the future mode suggested coexistence with a virtually completely harmless viral disease that could be cured by aspirin, tea, and rest (and salt water and sunshine, as Slovenia's first post-Covid Prime Minister liked to repeat in Summer 2022), had not yet been reached in the winter of 2021–2022. But in this case, the prophecy found its confirmation also in less direct and seemingly contradictory omens. The prospect did not come true in its definitive form, but since it was not determined in time, it could never be convincingly disproved either, unlike the prediction of a cataclysm. And that was enough in mid-2022 to transform the collective subject of hope into the collective subject of the gradual elimination of the signals of pandemic inertia – or, to put it simply, into the subject of the ex-communication of the pandemic.

Decision-makers, individuals, and collectives who entered the public debate on the pandemic only later had a relatively easy time in the process of ex-communication. Their effectiveness in stimulating the predisposed process rested on their ability to frame their messages without feeling burdened by continuity and possible contradictions with earlier positions. For example, when the time came to lift the mandatory use of face masks, they could go along with the spirit of the times, which tended toward the more or less complete abolition of masks.

It was more difficult for those individuals and institutions that had actively promoted the wearing of masks in the earlier stages of the pandemic and tried to communicate the recommendations and obligations, searching for every possi-

ble way to get the intended message across. For these actors, ex-communication took on its full scope: to integrate themselves into a strangely unified collective subject that had rapidly emerged, to escape the fate of being ex-communicated themselves, they were compelled to perform their final act. To work themselves out of the communication of the outdated message, to eliminate the traces of the false belief they had participated in spreading, it was not enough for them to declare that what used to be mandatory had now become recommended. Ultimately, they had to ex-communicate the communication – by turning it into a parody.

Perhaps the best example of this sort is the campaign to promote protective behaviour called Operation Respect, launched in 2020 by the New York City Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).

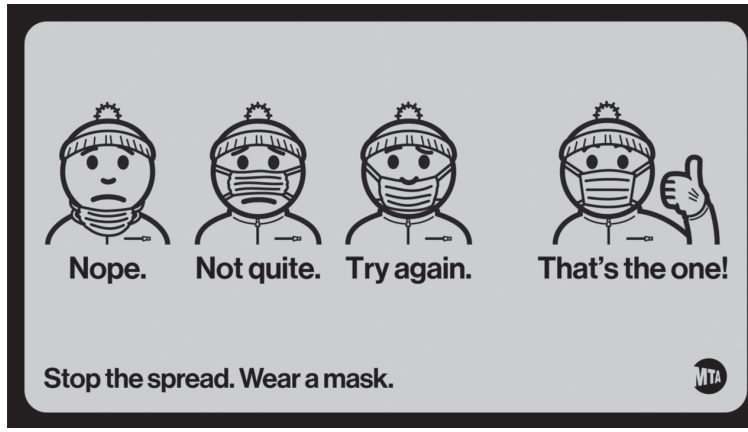
> In mid-March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic effectively shut down the New York metropolitan region as non-essential businesses closed and many office workers began working from home. Midtown Manhattan, the nation's largest central business district, became desolate. Concerts, festivals, and sporting events were cancelled and the City's famed nightlife and restaurant scenes disappeared. Ridership on NYC's subways and buses plummeted to less than 10% of the pre-pandemic volume of 5.8 million daily riders. But while New York had paused, the MTA didn't. We maintained nearly-normal levels of train and bus service so that essential workers could get to their jobs at critical services and businesses. By keeping transit service levels high, we also ensured that those still riding with us had more room for social distancing on trains and buses and mostly normal commute times. As New York and the world struggled to understand and respond to the pandemic, the need for effective and accessible communications from public institutions like the MTA was critical.[7]

The communication of measures was framed entirely in the spirit of Western liberalism. Rather than directly imposing or giving precise and concise instructions on the proper use of PPE according to the science of the transmission of the particular virus, the communication was primarily tailored to the awareness that the commandment to act conflicted with the idea of the freedom of choice. To find a way out of this impasse, the authors drew inspiration from the more or

7 *Safe Travels and Operation Respect*, https://new.mta.info/safetravels, accessed 7 November 2022.

less phantasmatic image of a typical NYC resident, which provided a convenient model for dealing with all those who refused to do what was necessary at that moment. A rebuke was allowed – but with a twist.

> From the outset, the MTA in-house creative team knew that even though the pandemic was scary, our communications didn't have to be. We wanted our campaign to feel like advice from a fellow New Yorker: honest, direct, concise, and even a little playful at times. In other words, just like how a New Yorker would face down immense challenges.[8]



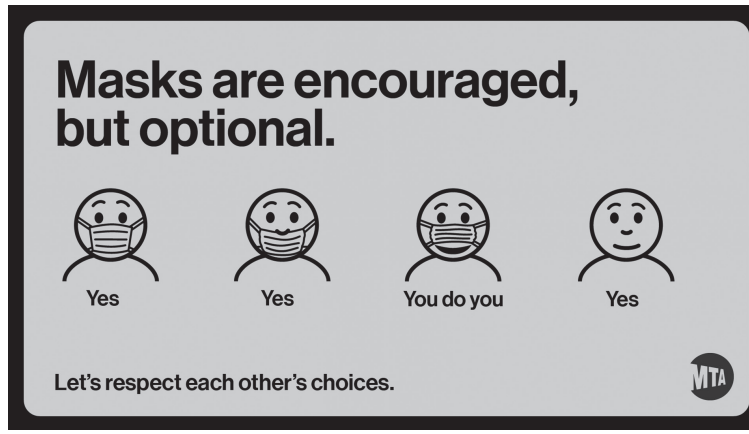
According to the MTA, the campaign was more than successful, increasing mask use to 95%, with proper mask use up 21%, and to 97% on buses, with proper mask use up 4%. Moreover, "the ideas and images of Safe Travels also found their way far beyond the MTA system. The campaign was shared globally, inspiring others in both public and private sectors to create similar designs and ideas. Our monthly Mask Force mask giveaways on MTA trains and buses also led other transit agencies to start their own mask distribution events."[9]

Over the course of two years of active campaigning, Operation Respect produced a variety of different, more or less successful visuals that attempted, in different ways, to convince the public that a protracted, but nonetheless tem-

8 *Ibid.*
9 *Ibid.*

porary, change in behaviour makes sense. These included ad hoc images, such as a masked Halloween pumpkin (saying "Have fun and keep a mask on your gourd.") and a masked Thanksgiving turkey (saying "Birds of a feather wear masks together.").

But on 7 September 2022, just before the U.S. President famously announced that "the pandemic is over," there was a sudden about-face that was met with a strong response on social media (something that would have been hard to imagine just a few months later). As mentioned earlier, an institution that had spent the two years of the pandemic promoting a message that was now at odds with the increasingly widespread change in perception of the pandemic had to find a way out. And it published the following image:



The image went viral, triggering the obsessive production of memes that tried to reproduce the enigmatic impression it left and more or less failed in that attempt. In this case, analogies were impossible for structural reasons. For Western societies, in particular, the introduction of face masks was an unprecedented move (the memory of mask mandates during the 1918 pandemic[10] was too abstract to make a difference), and much effort was put into preventing it from ever becoming a precedent. For the time being, the majority accepted that face

[10] David M. Morens, Jeffery K. Taubenberger, and Anthony S. Fauci, "A Centenary Tale of Two Pandemics: The 1918 Influenza Pandemic and COVID-19, Part II", *American Journal of Public Health*, 111 (7/2021), pp. 1267–1272.

masks were effective and indispensable. However, it simultaneously held on to the belief that it was justified in principle to resist the mask mandates as potential means of oppression. The pandemic emergency was never fully recognized as a legitimate reality but rather as a half-crazed aberration. In practice, the old "normal" reality was suspended, but we continued to hold on to it as a normative framework and essentially judged our actions according to its criteria. The pandemic emergency was perceived as a unique process of provisional habituation, of provisional enlightenment: the actions it demanded were more or less accepted in our behaviour but questioned on every point. That's the one? Nope. Not quite. Try again.

The gesture of withdrawing this measure also led to a strange contradiction: when the authorities decided that masks would no longer be mandatory but would continue to be recommended, they avowedly acknowledged that it was reasonable to retain some fragment of this provisional habituation. Nevertheless, a lesson we never wanted to accept as permanent was not completely discarded, even at the moment of the return to normality, the return of the phantasmatic reality that ran parallel to the provisional state of emergency and that all along was the point from which we judged the measures and their justification. And when the old reality was reanimated, it discovered something it did not want: the remnants of a pandemic inscribed in it. These remnants had to be dealt with if it was to function as the bearer of normality.

Once again, the uniqueness of both processes makes quick analogies that attempt to interpret the vague impression of the second image doomed to failure. Instead, it is better to focus on the visual mechanism at work. In both images, the basic progression is from left to right. In the first image, the final goal is clear and consistent with the verbal message: the figure with an adequately positioned mask on the right gives meaning to the piece of fabric that the first three figures have yet to learn to use. The mask gradually falls into place and becomes a functional protective tool. When the process is complete, and our gaze is directed to the right (as also indicated by the jacket zippers), it is fixed there.

In the second image, our gaze is also directed to the figure on the right. This figure is fundamentally distinct from the previous ones – and is the one that visually supports the message that "masks are encouraged, *but optional*." But unlike in the first image, our gaze cannot remain fixed. The more we focus on this

figure, the more our gaze is drawn to the surplus of material substance added to the other three figures, which we repeatedly recognize as face masks. And it is the figure on the far left, with the correctly placed mask, where our gaze finally halts. However, we no longer see what we saw in the original image, but only a mask in its pure form, stuck to the person wearing it, numbed, stiff, and even lacking the spirit of self-irony of the "You do you" caption. No matter what position we brought with us, our viewpoint is now unmistakably the figure that first drew our attention. Even if we were still wearing the mask in September 2022, even if the image shocked us, even if we were appalled by it, as observers we have objectively become subjects of ex-communication: we inadvertently inhabited the light-hearted figure of normality that turns with amusement, disbelief, contempt, pity, or disgust to the image of its provisional past, which we have to do with for good.

The retroactive superego mechanism that pertains to the process of ex-communication, which instigates doubt (or even shame) as to the legitimacy (or even rationality) of our past decision to take emergency action, is perhaps the most unwelcome consequence of the pandemic for all those who had hoped that societies would draw lessons from it for dealing with the problem that is our constant, that we were more or less born into, and that is becoming increasingly impossible to banish from our minds – the issue of climate change.

Re-communicating the Climate Emergency

Admittedly, the pandemic has forced some reversal in economic policy in most countries, eliminating the fixed idea of austerity that has been employed for decades to respond to every crisis and has blocked any thought of substantial public investment in transforming the energy system, to begin with. Perhaps somewhere between the wars and the switch from Russian pipelines to American liquefied natural gas, some green transition will also take place – but no matter how ambitious it may sound, it will remain isolated, non-excessive, and non-invasive; rather than becoming one of the elements of a legally binding mechanism of the climate emergency, it will serve as an instrument of defence against immature, excessive, and invasive ideas that fail to adhere to the harsh reality of what is socially and economically possible.

In *Climate Emergency Defined*, Paul Gilding suggests that the decision whether to switch to an emergency mode of response "should be considered as a rational, analytical question, not one of advocacy, belief or ideology."[11] According to Gilding, an emergency response requires two statements to both be true:

- there is a large and unacceptable impact and reasonable likelihood of the risk in question;
- an abnormal level of urgency, mobilization, and action is required to address and reduce the risk.[12]

After having provided evidence as to the impact of the risk (the existential risk to human civilization), the scale of the change required (a complete transformation of the economy), and the speed required to deliver the change (largely within a decade), he concludes that "even using a cautious and conservative analysis, it is clear that *only* shifting to an emergency mode of action could successfully address the existential risk that the climate crisis presents to humanity."[13]

In the abstract, the argument for the climate emergency does indeed seem obvious. Not only is there a clear scientific consensus on the severity of the crisis, but there is also a general public and political conviction that addressing this challenge requires swift and large-scale action. As for the practical implementation of this conviction, however, the persistent understatement of the urgency cannot be overlooked. To capture the shift from conventional forms of climate denial directed against the sheer reality of anthropogenic climate change to a network of more complex mechanisms aimed at reducing the time pressure to act, William. F. Lamb et al. coined the term *discourses of climate delay*.[14] The term encompasses a number of separate strategies, ranging from redirecting responsibility to a certain Other, to advocating incremental change, emphasizing unacceptable downsides, or the sheer impossibility of mitigating the inevitable future catastrophe. Despite their heterogeneity, all of these responses share the view that climate change is real and, in principle, requires some kind of action. However, if action is not guaranteed to be compatible with certain conditions,

11 Paul Gilding, *Climate Emergency Defined*, Melbourne, Breakthrough, 2019, p. 6.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
14 William F. Lamb et al., "Discourses of climate delay", *Global Sustainability*, 3 (E17/2020), p. 2.

i.e. with economic progress, with our way of life, with conventional democratic procedures, or even with some notion of a more just future society, then action should either be postponed, mitigated, or transformed into methodical inaction

It is therefore crucial to adopt the more challenging, counterintuitive, and seemingly reductive strategy. Rather than treating the climate emergency in advance as an absolutely unprecedented crisis requiring absolutely unprecedented action – and ending up doing nothing – we should nevertheless take as our vantage point the minimal conceptual precedent and explore the potential of conceiving the climate emergency as a special case of the general concept of (a state of) emergency in its original legal sense.

However, this idea immediately encounters a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. There is a general consensus among climate scientist that some of the effects in the climate system are irreversible, largely due to positive feedbacks in the system triggered by human-induced perturbations. While these considerations by no means imply that all attempts to intervene in the process are futile, they do call into question the prospect of a return to the previous state of the climate system, at least for the foreseeable future. In this respect, the climate emergency points to a potentially infinite crisis that may require infinite emergency measures, seemingly contradicting the inherently finite, transient, and instrumental nature of a state of emergency.

It is the awareness of the potentially infinite character of the climate crisis that renders the legal idea of climate emergency in the strict sense impossible and illegitimate in the general perception. All the more so as the climate emergency not only requires a greater focus on climate and environmental issues, but also categorically demands all possible actions to resolve the crisis, which are "by definition and intent, disruptive to the status quo"[15] and thus inevitably come into conflict with various social values and may also affect certain fundamental human rights.

Finally, since the climate and environmental emergency ultimately concerns the threat posed by nonlinear processes in the Earth system progressively evading our control, it is important to bear in mind that an emergency response requires

[15] Gilding, *Climate Emergency Defined*, p. 6.

an ethical decision to fully embrace this unprecedented constellation – in which inaction is no longer neutral – and to invent an adequate mode of our engagement with the systemic emergency. Therefore, the emergency response directed against the inertia of the socio-economic system that is threatening to trigger harmful nonlinear processes cannot only be restrictive; rather, the task is also to open up the possibilities of initiating alternative nonlinear processes in the social, economic, and technological spheres that gradually gain inertia and thus become irreversible.[16]

In order to develop a functional concept of the climate emergency, it is therefore necessary to outline a notion of the end of the climate emergency response that does not coincide with the (potentially unattainable) end of the climate crisis. In doing so, we can start from the minimal difference between two approaches to defining the end of the state of emergency at the level of the general concept.

In the standard approach, the goal of the state of emergency is to restore the previous normal state. In this respect, the return to a normal legal order is possible when the authority that originally declared the state of emergency concludes that the disturbance of the normal state has ended. The end of the state of emergency is thus determined by an external reference to the normal state, which may be subjectively (and often arbitrarily) redefined in the process.

In the alternative approach, the goal of the state of emergency can be defined from within. From this perspective, the state of emergency aims at abolishing its own *raison d'être*, i.e. the reason that originally led to its introduction. Accordingly, its end can be defined as a turning point at which its formal continuation is no longer indispensable to resolving the crisis.

In the face of the potentially infinite crisis, the second approach opens up space to circumvent the impasse, since the goal of the climate emergency as a legal

[16] In the words of Hans Joachim Schellnhuber: "You have to identify a portfolio of options [...] disruptive innovations, self-amplifying innovations. You cannot predict precisely. You need to look into whether there are high nonlinear potentials. Then you have to bet ... Say you identify twenty horses, you then have to send all of them into the race, and maybe three of them will make it across the finishing line. But they will instigate the change you need." (Nick Breeze, "It's nonlinearity – stupid!", *Ecologist*, 3 January 2019, https://theecologist.org/2019/jan/03/its-nonlinearity-stupid, accessed 7 November 2022.)

and political instrument does not have to be to effectively end the crisis and fully restore the previous normal state, but rather to transform the socioeconomic system so that it forms an alternative irreversible trajectory that leads us out of the crisis through inertia. Once the legal, political, economic, and behavioural patterns are reformulated to give shape to a new kind of systemic inertia, the reason for instituting the legal state of a climate emergency no longer exists and such can be lifted. In turn, the persistent elements of the climate crisis (i.e. the consequences of climate change that are nonetheless irreversible on a human time scale) can, in principle, be regulated within the framework of the generally applicable legal order.

The goal of the above outline is by no means to reduce the climate emergency to a legal problem. It is not to rely exclusively on legal mechanisms that would solve the problems on their own and miraculously tame national, international, supranational, and non-national actors. But the simple fact remains: law is the fundamental instrument of every state and, at least potentially, of every citizen. And perhaps the ultimate trick of late capitalism is that, by parasitizing on legal mechanisms, it has created absolute doubt that they could ever become an effective instrument in anyone else's service.

As David Spratt writes in the present issue of *Filozofski vestnik*: "when all is said and done, the choice is social collapse and economic disruption due to the failure to act fast enough, or economic disruption as a necessary consequence of emergency-level fast change. There is no third way."[17] And it is clear that the second way necessarily involves legal instruments – not only to strengthen the state's role but to enable the state to enact its own transformation.

> The urgent need is to take back and rebuild state institutions destroyed by neoliberalism in order to redirect production to socially-necessary goals (decarbonisation and cooling, and basic public needs including secure food and water, and health, education, and transport), to plan and manage the transition and adjustment, and to curb the destructive path of financialisation. This would be a massive politically-directed reallocation of resources not only in the OECD, but in China, India, Nigeria, and more. In the first instance, this is not a question of growth versus degrowth, but what needs to be, and can be, produced within resource

[17] David Spratt, "Reclaiming 'Climate Emergency'", *Filozofski vestnik*, 43 (2/2022), p. 123.

> sustainability and safe-climate boundaries. There is a battle for the role of the state, with democratic community movements around the world – including student strikers, the labour movement, Extinction Rebellion and its successors, and a myriad of other constituencies – demanding that the state act to overturn deregulation's hegemony. And just as proposals focussed on Green New Deals and market-driven growth have failed to deal with systematic market failure regarding climate risks and resource depletion, so enhanced social expenditure will also fail if state leadership does not provide a path out of the climate and ecological crises via an emergency mobilisation.[18]

The reduction of law to an instrument for managing-the-possible has had damaging consequences in other crises as well, most recently, of course, in the management of the pandemic – when many countries, including Slovenia, spent the entire acute phase of the pandemic in endless debates about the (dis)proportionality of the emergency measures, not only because they were exceptional or invasive, but also due to their grossly inadequate legal regulation. And when it comes to the climate emergency, the problem is even more far-reaching: in the climate emergency, law is not only a ready-made instrument providing the grounds for solutions that are self-evident at certain moments (e.g. a lockdown), but is, as such, one of the mechanisms for generating solutions that we do not yet know and cannot yet imagine, developing triggers with "high nonlinear potentials," to quote Hans Schellnhuber again.

But in addition to the solutions that have yet to be invented and the obvious solutions that we deploy when necessary, there is another kind of solution: the obvious solutions that, at some level, we know very well would still make sense but are considered impossible or not considered at all (such as building railways or averting wars, but also the basic idea of a legally regulated climate emergency that would go beyond non-binding declarations). Is the rejection of obvious solutions due to the fact that we have not even reached the point where we would recognize the need to implement them? Or, on the contrary, is this stalemate a consequence of the fact that we have, somewhere in the past, already "ex-communicated" the climate crisis, along with self-evident solutions that might one day significantly limit its impacts, like masks during a pandemic? In other words: Is the climate crisis, with all its extreme consequences, com-

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 131.

parable to the pandemic as we perceived it in January, February, and March 2020 – or, on the contrary, does it make us as fatigued as the pandemic in late 2022? Are we avoiding actions that would help limit the climate crisis due to a primary aversion to the new (remember the first time you put on a mask?) or because of the secondary, habituated, cynical, and somewhat fabricated aversion we feel today to the idea of mask mandates or lockdowns?

Apart from directly addressing the current state of affairs, there are two far more intriguing and certainly less psychologically exhausting approaches to dealing with the climate crisis: first, various versions of "climate fiction" that point to the future and show the evolved effects of current processes with essentially deferred realization (the main author here is undoubtedly Kim Stanley Robinson); second, an approach that looks to the past and examines the genealogy of the underlying concepts (sometimes going back to the 19th and early 20th centuries) or the genealogy of denial mechanisms, which usually centres around the early 1990s (the most prominent representatives being Naomi Oreskes and Naomi Klein).

In this regard, Nathaniel Rich's 2019 *Losing Earth*, which focuses on the period between 1979 and 1989, "the decade we could have stopped climate change," as the subtitle goes, is certainly ground-breaking. It is not a story about the organized production of denial by the fossil fuel industry; that decade was still relatively free of such pressures. If the efforts of activists and scientists failed during that decade, the reasons are much more complex and ambiguous.

> There can be no understanding of our current and future predicament without an understanding of why we failed to solve this problem when we had the chance. For in the decade that ran between 1979 and 1989, we had an excellent chance. The world's major powers came within several signatures of endorsing a binding framework to reduce carbon emissions – far closer than we've come since. During that decade the obstacles we blame for our current inaction had yet to emerge. The conditions for success were so favorable that they have the quality of a fable, especially at a time when so many of the veteran members of the climate class – the scientists, policy negotiators, and activists who for decades have been fighting ignorance, apathy, and corporate bribery – openly despair about the possibility of achieving even mitigatory success. As Ken Caldeira, a leading climate scientist at the Carnegie Institution for Science in Stanford, California, recently put it,

> "We're increasingly shifting from a mode of predicting what's going to happen to a mode of trying to explain what happened."[19]

If there is a lesson to be learned from the Covid-19 pandemic, it is not substantive, but formal: the only valuable experience we have gained lies in the fact that we have been able to observe it from the beginning. In this way, we could follow its entire development, mainly the evolution of its perception and understanding. The course of the pandemic was not absolutely determined. It resulted from a combination of the fundamental system coordinates into which it entered and the contingent elements, which, at specific points, created inflexions in its trajectory. And it is precisely research thereon that is needed in the case of the climate crisis: before it became a manifest crisis and, to some extent, absolutely intractable, there must have been – we assume – a series of contingencies that both determined the "objective" state of the current Earth system and framed the contemporary collective psychology of climate delay. As a combination of the two, the disposition of our societies was formed, from which we can no longer extricate ourselves by normal means – or, to paraphrase Freud, the moment of *Klimakatastrophenwahl*, the choice of the climate catastrophe.

One of the fascinating events that Nathaniel Rich refers to in his book is the first interdisciplinary symposium on climate change, organized by Margaret Mead back in 1975. The report of the seminar reads like a strange mixture of the familiar and the peculiar, of phrases and programme texts that could easily be included in a research project proposal even today, of projections of primitive models that are virtually consistent with actual trends, of the birth of an early scepticism that has hardly changed in 50 years, of speculations about the coming of the next ice age, and of expressions of serious concern about the then extremely acute problem of stratospheric ozone depletion, which we have somehow miraculously managed to mitigate.

Of course, there were sceptics of the standard science/social science sort even then, but they were refuted with great ease, perhaps even more effectively than today:

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[19] Nathaniel Rich, *Losing Earth. The Decade We Could Have Stopped Climate Change*, New York, Picador, 2019, pp. 5–6.

One participant wondered whether the Conference was organized with the preconceived notion that environmental change was automatically dangerous and bad. Do we equate change with danger – or are we looking for the good that might come of change? [...] Regarding the desirability of change, a participant suggested that if we know absolutely nothing about the effects of change, then we might assume that 50 percent will be bad and 50 percent will be good. The question then becomes: What is the potential magnitude of any change for which we want to worry about the 50 percent that will be bad? [...] Those comments were attacked as misleading, like saying that "when I stick my pencil into my watch and stir it around there is a 50-50 chance I will improve it." When we are dealing with a biological system which is rather finely tuned in many respects and which has evolved over a long period of time, the odds are much higher that a given perturbation will cause a negative effect. The importance of time scales cannot be emphasized enough. Some people tend to argue that "evolution is the solution to pollution." Yet when you look closely at how evolution tends to solve things, you find it solves them with extreme mortalities per generation. [...] [S]everal people questioned whether the ecosystem really is as fragile as we think. One person noted that we have been screaming this at the public for so long that we now have an obligation to be more objective about "the delicacy of the ecosystem." We are finding that polluted lakes can rejuvenate at remarkable speed and that most pollutants added to the atmosphere are removed or rendered harmless within a relatively short time. [...] An ecologist countered that Dr. Broecker had given an excellent example of how the biosphere is not compensating for the activities of man [...]. Man-produced CO_2 is not being taken up by the biosphere at a rate comparable to its production rate. Further, the evidence that biotic systems are sensitive to human activities is overwhelming. No one is ever going to repair the damage done to the fisheries of the Great Lakes and most of the rivers of the East Coast of the United States. No one will ever repair the damage to our eastern forests – the loss of the chestnut tree was a very serious loss, both economically and ecologically. There are many other examples. Man is having important, lasting effects on the ecosystem, he said.[20]

[20] William W. Kellogg and Margaret Mead, *The Atmosphere: Endangered and Endearing*, Kent, Castle House Publications Ltd., 1975, pp. 69–72. Available at https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.132143/mode/1up.

So, if we are looking for a signal of the contradiction that might be responsible for the later developments, it is pretty unlikely that we will find it in the opposition between the early climate realists and the early sceptics – the sceptics were too weak for something like that in that particular historical context. An ambitious effort was not as unthinkable in the 1970s as today. It is hard to believe that the transition to serious action could have been prevented by a bunch of sceptical naysayers (especially since the action could have been much less disruptive and much less transformative given the much lower cumulative carbon emissions at that time).

On the contrary, the signal of contradiction must be sought in the ambition itself. To quote a longer passage from the report from the panel "Managing the Atmospheric Resource: Will Mankind Behave Rationally?":

> What international measures could be taken, and what international organizations could be charged with what tasks? How do we get from here – with our currently rising but mostly isolated concern for the problems – to there – with an international will effectively mobilized for actions (or inactions) to benefit all?
>
> One step, perhaps achievable fairly quickly, would be a ban on using the atmosphere for hostile purposes, including banning weather or environmental modification for those ends. The USSR and the United States, as noted earlier, already have developed draft materials along such lines for consideration. Currently, no country has the capability to create such effects while limiting them to the target country, yet all can appreciate the dangers should some country try to do so. Thus, such a ban is one from which all nations can benefit.
>
> Another area, not under wide discussion but potentially similar to the above, would be an international agreement to ban modification of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets. These ice masses, along with the Arctic Sea ice, are coupled closely with the atmosphere and are integral parts of the thermodynamic system that drives the world's weather and climate.
>
> One reason to formalize international understandings fairly quickly on these ice masses is that plans are extant for modifying them. One such plan is to sprinkle vast areas of Arctic and Greenland ice with coal dust. This would increase the amount of heat held in the system (because the white snow or ice reflects heat

> back out to space at a much higher rate than black dust would) and thus presumably counteract a possible global cooling trend; its advocates hope it will result in increased melting of the ice, opening northern ports to year-round shipping, and raising ocean levels (although this last would happen slowly – no tsunami would engulf the world's port cities in a few weeks, months, or even years).
>
> Our current knowledge is not good enough to predict the exact consequences of a major modification of these ice masses, but is sufficient to suggest that the effect could be significant, both on the global average climate and in increasing local variability of weather patterns.
>
> Perhaps, with increasing knowledge of how the ice masses interact with the atmosphere, we could learn to "fine tune" our weather patterns, offsetting a general cooling trend (if there is such) by one technique, a general warming trend by another. But those skills are well beyond us today. Rather like a small child trying to fix his grandfather's fine old watch, the potential for unintentional harm far exceeds the potential for a happy improvement. The goal of such a ban on the modification of these ice packs would be to minimize disruption of the system until we learn how – and whether – to initiate such controlled changes.[21]

Of course, it would be premature to draw definitive conclusions from a single historical record, as this is a subject that requires much more extensive research. But if we have been looking for the minimal signal of the contradiction that caused an impasse at a time when action could have been taken, we seem to have found it. This internal contradiction, this internal split between the ambition to prevent an ice age by increasing warming and the ambition to stop global warming, was most likely one of the main reasons for the initial delay. Scientists knew even then that deliberately and purposefully interfering with the system was too risky. However, this caution not only stopped the techno-utopian projects to prevent an ice age but also held back the urgency to adopt preventive measures that would have mitigated a more or less invisible process at the time. The concurrence of two contradictory tendencies led to caution, the caution led to general inaction, and this inaction – ironically – solved the very problem from which it retreated. As Ganopolski, Winkelmann, and Schellnhuber demonstrated in their 2016 paper, it is implausible for an ice age to happen for at least

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

100,000 years.[22] Not because the anthropogenic global warming would compensate for the cooling of the planet, but because we have prevented the inception of the next glaciation or perhaps even brought the Earth system to exit the Pleistocene glacial-interglacial cycle. Such clear signals of the Anthropocene present us with a new choice, i.e. a choice between two versions of the self-evident, two versions of the impossible. Either we open up a whole new set of possibilities of the thinkable, the normal, and the legitimate – or we surrender to reality and wait calmly to watch all of it unfold. But most likely we will choose neither and dive passionately into a world that no longer exists.

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Povzetki | Abstracts

Peter Klepec
Caught in the Super-emergency
Keywords: urgency, emergency, crisis, emancipation, critical theory, Žižek, Badiou

The paper proceeds in three steps. First, it addresses what urgency and emergency are in their simplest terms; then, it places this in the context of the now very popular metaphor of imprisonment, which supposedly describes what is happening to us today; and in the final steps, it presents the task of critical theory today. Starting from the distinction between urgency and emergency (the main difference being that in the latter case there is an immediate threat or danger to life, health, property, or the environment, while in the case of urgency there is no such immediate threat or danger), the paper proposes the concept of Super-emergency as a name for a (contemporary) situation that is out of control and feeds on our own antagonisms and contradictions. The accompanying atmosphere or mood is the "mood of nightmare", which also explains why it seems so natural for us today to speak of arrest, imprisonment, or entrapment. By pointing out some consequences of prison metaphors, we suggest in the last part of the paper that it is not only urgent to think about and deal with urgency and emergency per se, but also with their particular deviation – the Super-emergency. Even if we do not have time to think and act differently, as our leaders, the media, and propaganda keep claiming ("now we do not have time to listen, to discuss, to exchange opinions, to talk"), it is precisely urgent situations that provide time for reflection and radical action to reclaim our common future. In other words, what is really urgent and necessary for us now, today, is to free ourselves from this yoke of emergency in which we are trapped and which we call here the Super-emergency.

Peter Klepec
Ujeti v super-urgentnost
Ključne besede: urgentnost, kriza, emancipacija, kritična teorija, Žižek, Badiou

Prispevek postopa v treh korakih. Najprej obravnava, kaj angleška izraza *urgency* in *emergency*, urgentost in izredne razmere predstavljata v najpreprostejši obliki, nato to umesti v kontekst dandanes zelo priljubljene metafore zapora, ki naj bi opisovala, kaj se nam danes dogaja, v zadnjem koraku pa nam predstavi nalogo kritične teorije. Izhajajoč iz razlikovanja med *urgency* in *emergency* (glavna razlika je v tem, da gre v slednjem primeru za neposredno grožnjo ali nevarnost za življenje, zdravje, premoženje ali okolje, medtem ko v prvem primeru takšne neposredne grožnje ali nevarnosti ni),

prispevek predlaga koncept super-urgentnosti kot ime za (sodobno) situacijo, ki je ušla izpod nadzora ter se hrani z našimi lastnimi antagonizmi in protislovji. Spremljajoče vzdušje ali razpoloženje le-te je »razpoloženje nočne more«, kar tudi pojasnjuje, zakaj se nam danes zdi tako naravno govoriti o zaporu, zapiranju ali ujetništvu. Z izpostavitvijo nekaterih posledic metafor zapora prispevek v svojem zadnjem delu predlaga, da se ni nujno ukvarjati le z *urgency* in *emergency* kot takima, temveč tudi z njunim posebnim odklonom – super-urgentnostjo. Četudi se zdi, da nimamo časa, da bi razmišljali in delovali drugače, kot sicer nenehno zatrjujejo naši politični voditelji, mediji in propaganda (»zdaj ni časa za razpravo, za izmenjavo mnenj in pogovor«), so prav urgentne razmere tudi čas za razmislek in za radikalno delovanje, katerega cilj je ponovno si priboriti našo skupno prihodnost. Z drugimi besedami, tisto, kar je za nas zdaj, danes, resnično nujno in urgentno, je, da se osvobodimo tega jarma izrednih razmer, v katerega smo ujeti in ki ga tu imenujemo super-urgentnost.

Arsalan Reihanzadeh

Foucault's Adventure in Iran and His Last "Turn"

Keywords: Foucault, revolt, Jesi, the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the transcendental, the historical, Kant

In light of the Iranian uprising of 1978–79, Foucault preferred to use the term revolt instead of revolution. In the first part of the article, we attempt to go beyond the limits of the nonspecific distinction he made between revolt and revolution by drawing on Furio Jesi's phenomenology of revolt and showing in what sense the Iranian uprising can be considered a revolt. In the second part, the article highlights the connection between the Iranian uprising and Foucault's later works by arguing that his adventure in Iran effectively shaped his final intellectual trajectory. By examining the tension between the transcendental and the historical in Foucault's works, we propose to read his Iranian experience against the backdrop of such tension to better understand his different approach to the question of the transcendental in his final years.

Arsalan Reihanzadeh

Foucaultova avantura v Iranu in njegov zadnji »obrat«

Ključne besede: Foucault, upor, Jesi, iranska revolucija 1979, transcendentalno, historično, Kant

V odnosu do iranske vstaje v letih 1978–79 je Foucault namesto o revoluciji raje govoril o uporu. V prvem delu članka poskušamo preseči limite nespecifičnega razlikovanja med uporom in revolucijo. Pri tem se opremo na fenomenologijo upora, ki jo je razvil Furio Jesi, in pokažemo, v kakšnem smislu je iransko vstajo mogoče razumeti kot upor. V dru-

gem delu članek izpostavi povezavo med iransko vstajo in Foucaultovimi poznimi deli ter zagovarja tezo, da je njegova avantura v Iranu močno oblikovala njegovo zadnjo intelektualno trajektorijo. Po preučitvi napetosti med transcendentalnim in historičnim v Foucaultovih delih predlagamo, da velja njegovo iransko izkušnjo brati na ozadju prav te napetosti, s čimer se odpre tudi razumevanje spremenjenega pristopa do vprašanja transcendentalnega v njegovih zadnjih letih.

Lidija Šumah

The Final Countdown: Fascism, Jazz, and the Afterlife

Keywords: Adorno, alienating effect, anti-Semitism, critical race theory, exception, fascism, Freud, identity, music, psychoanalysis, racism, women's rights movement

The general question underlying this article is whether it is possible to turn a paradox into a productive principle. The article approaches this question through Adorno's and Dainotto's analyses of the jazz movement in fascist Italy. Jazz was marked by a specific paradox: on the one hand, it was banned due to its African American roots, and as such did not adhere to or glorify the Italian tradition; on the other hand, jazz served very well to protect the nationalist interests in the light of the nascent mass movements. Against the backdrop of these analyses, the article proposes two distinct paradigms of exception: the logic of count till all and the logic of count till none.

Lidija Šumah

The final countdown: fašizem, jazz in onostranstvo

Ključne besede: Adorno, učinek odtujitve, antisemitizem, kritična teorija rase, izjema, fašizem, Freud, identiteta, glasba, psihoanaliza, rasizem, gibanje za pravice žensk

Osrednje vprašanje, na katerem temelji članek, je, ali je mogoče paradoks spremeniti v produktivno načelo. Tega vprašanja se loteva s pomočjo Adornove in Dainotove analize jazzovskega gibanja v fašistični Italiji. Jazz je zaznamoval poseben paradoks: po eni strani je bil prepovedan zaradi svojih afriško-ameriških korenin in kot tak ni sledil ali poveličeval italijanske tradicije, po drugi strani pa je jazz v luči porajajočih se množičnih gibanj zelo dobro služil zaščiti nacionalističnih interesov. Na ozadju teh analiz članek predlaga dve različni paradigmi izjeme: logiko štetja do vsega in logiko štetja do ničesar.

Alenka Zupančič

Perverse Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the End

Keywords: disavowal, fetish, denial, crisis, end

The classic formula of disavowal given by Octave Mannoni, "I know well, but all the same," undergoes interesting and far-reaching permutations in today's social context. When it comes to dealing with and (not) responding to various crises, we usually point the finger at deniers and their "irrational" attitudes. However, far more common and socially problematic is the attitude that combines full recognition and denial in the same movement. Moreover, knowledge of a problem not only goes seamlessly with ignoring it but seems to make ignoring it possible in the first place. Saying that "we know well" often enables us to ignore the real of that knowledge. Disavowal thus takes a doubly perverse turn, which is the focus of the analysis in this article.

Alenka Zupančič

Perverzna utajitev in retorika konca

Ključne besede: utajitev, fetiš, zanikanje, kriza, konec

Klasična formula utajitve, ki jo je podal Octave Mannoni – »saj vem, pa vendar« –, v današnjem družbenem kontekstu doživlja zanimive in daljnosežne permutacije. Ko gre za soočanje in (ne)odzivanje na različne krize, običajno prst usmerimo v zanikovalce in njihova »iracionalna« prepričanja. A precej bolj pogosta in družbeno problematična je drža, ki v isti gesti združuje polno pripoznanje in zanikanje. Še več, vednost o problemu ne gre le z roko v roki z ignoranco, temveč jo sploh šele omogoča. Ko rečemo »dobro vemo, da«, nam to omogoča spregled realnega vednosti. Utajitev tako doživi dvojni perverzni obrat, ki je osrednji fokus analize v tem prispevku.

David Spratt

Reclaiming "Climate Emergency"

Keywords: climate emergency, climate change, risk management, existential risk

The term "climate emergency" was employed in the 2008 book *Climate Code Red* as both a problem statement and a solutions strategy. The core propositions – that the biophysical circumstances were worse than generally understood, that the 2°C goal was dangerously high, and that the time for incremental change had expired – are re-examined in light of events over the last decade and the growing existential risk. The failure to recognise and respond to the climate emergency, and the incapacity of markets to do so, means that widespread social, economic, and physical disruption is now inevitable. An emergency mode of response, characterised by decisive state leadership and market

intervention which challenges the dominant economic paradigm, is now necessary to protect contemporary civilisation.

David Spratt

Povrnitev »podnebnih izrednih razmer«

Ključne besede: podnebne izredne razmere, podnebne spremembe, upravljanje tveganj, eksistencialno tveganje

Izraz »climate emergency« (»podnebne izredne razmere«) je bil uporabljen v knjigi *Climate Code Red* iz leta 2008 obenem kot opredelitev problema in kot strategija reševanja. Osnovne trditve – da so biofizikalne razmere slabše, kot je splošno sprejeto, da je cilj 2 °C nevarno visok in da se je čas za postopne spremembe iztekel – so ponovno preučene v luči dogodkov v zadnjem desetletju in vse večjega eksistenčnega tveganja. Neuspeh, da bi podnebne izredne pripoznali in se nanje odzvali je ob nezmožnostih trga, da bi to dosegel sam, pomeni, da so zdaj neizogibne obsežne družbene, ekonomske in fizične disrupcije. Za zaščito sodobne civilizacije je zdaj nujen krizni modus odziva, za katerega sta značilna odločno ukrepanje države in intervencija v trg, ki izpodbija prevladujočo ekonomsko paradigmo.

Marisa Žele

Siren Song to the Last Man: Mary Shelley and the Loss of the World

Keywords: endling, prophecy, oblivion, unhistorical, irreversible

The paper analyses the place of the End in Mary Shelley's 1826 science fiction novel *The Last Man*, in which the image of a world devoid of humanity, as portrayed by the last man writing the last book, is drawn before the reader through a conceptual rethinking of notions such as the loss of the world, prophecy of the future, and oblivion of the past, as well as the return of the irretrievable through the siren song.

Marisa Žele

Sirenin spev poslednjemu človeku: Mary Shelley in izguba sveta

Ključne besede: poslednjik, prerokba, pozaba, nezgodovinsko, nepovratno

Prispevek se nameni analizirati mesto konca v znanstvenofantastičnem delu *Poslednji človek* Mary Shelley iz leta 1826, v katerem se pred bralcem zariše podoba sveta brez človeštva, kot jo upodobi poslednjik, ki napiše poslednjo knjigo, skozi konceptualni premet pojmov izgube sveta, prerokovanja prihodnosti in pozabe preteklosti ter vrnitve nepovrnljivega skozi spev siren.

Henrik Jøker Bjerre

Against Environmental Ethics

Keywords: ethics, environmental ethics, climate change, climate crisis

The kinds of specifically ethical questions we can meaningfully ask about the environment are rapidly becoming fewer as the climate emergency intensifies. The article argues that there is something fundamentally inadequate about the traditional conceptions of ethics regarding the climate crisis because they all tend to presuppose that we can somehow get it right. The problem is that we got it wrong and must start dealing with the consequences.

Henrik Jøker Bjerre

Proti okoljski etiki

Ključne besede: etika, okoljska etika, podnebne spremembe, podnebna kriza

Z zaostrovanje podnebnih izrednih razmer se vrsta specifičnih etičnih vprašanj, ki si jih lahko smiselno zastavljamo o okolju, hitro zmanjšuje. Članek postavlja tezo, da so tradicionalni koncepti etike v odnosu do podnebne krize v temelju neustrezni, saj vsi predpostavljajo, da lahko vse skupaj nekako spravimo v red. Težava je v tem, da smo jo dojeli napačno in da se moramo začeti spopadati s posledicami.

Aleš Bunta

Nietzsche and Badiou: Event, Intervention, "God is dead"

Keywords: Nietzsche, Badiou, event, intervention, naming, antiphilosophy

The article draws attention to a certain multi-layered parallel between Nietzsche and Badiou's theory of the event, which the author argues Badiou evaded by a kind of strategic relocation. The article does not focus so much on (and certainly not against) Badiou's philosophy, but attempts to assess the possible implications of this relocation for Badiou's interpretation of Nietzsche. In the first part of the article, the key concepts of Badiou's account of Nietzsche are introduced, such as "archi-politics", "antiphilosophy", and the "event Nietzsche". Later, it is shown that, despite some fundamental differences, there is a strong resemblance between some key concepts of Badiou's theory of the event, especially those related to the notion of "intervention", and some concepts found in Nietzsche. Finally, the paper focuses on the problem of the "death of God", which is somehow absent in Badiou's interpretation, even though the term itself resonates strongly in various aspects of Badiou's philosophy.

Aleš Bunta

Nietzsche in Badiou: dogodek, intervencija, »Bog je mrtev«

Ključne besede: Nietzsche, Badiou, dogodek, intervencija, imenovanje, antifilozofija

Prispevek opozarja na neko večplastno vzporednico med Nietzschejem in Badioujevo teorijo dogodka, ki se ji je Badiou, kot zatrjuje avtor, izognil prek nekakšne strateške premestitve. Članek ni toliko usmerjen v Badioujevo filozofijo (in še manj zoper njo), pač pa poskuša podati oceno možnega vpliva te premestitve na Badioujevo interpretacijo Nietzscheja. Prvi del prispevka vpelje ključne pojme Badioujeve razlage Nietzscheja, kot so »arhe-politika«, »antifilozofija« in »dogodek Nietzsche«. Kasneje pokaže, da kljub nekaterim temeljnim razlikam obstaja izrazita podobnost med nekaterimi osrednjimi koncepti Badioujeve teorije dogodka, zlasti tistimi, ki se nanašajo na pojem »intervencije«, ter nekaterimi pojmi, ki jih najdemo pri Nietzscheju. Na koncu pa se prispevek osredotoči na problem »smrti Boga«, ki nekako manjka v Badioujevi razlagi, četudi sama fraza močno odmeva znotraj različnih vidikov Badioujeve filozofije.

Tadej Troha

Emergency Revisited

Keywords: climate emergency, climate change, crisis, pandemic, Covid-19, virus, Anthropocene

In the first part of the article, the author analyses the last phase of the Covid-19 pandemic, which he terms “ex-communication”. A characteristic of this phase is not only virus”, but also the irrevocable transition to “living with the virus” but also the retroactive erasure of potentially valuable lessons from the pandemic for dealing with other crises. After outlining a new legal understanding of climate emergency in the second part of the text, the author concludes by focusing on the global warming debate in the 1970s. In doing so, he posits that we must search for the origin of all forms of “climate delay” (Lamb et al.) in the confluence of two contradictory tendencies during that period: the determination to stop global warming early and the techno-utopian desire to prevent the onset of an ice age by deliberately warming the atmosphere. The irony is that the caution offered as a way out of the contradiction not only failed to mitigate climate change but ultimately prevented the onset of an ice age for the foreseeable future. Such clear signals of the Anthropocene present us with a new choice, i.e. a choice between two versions of the self-evident, two versions of the impossible.

Tadej Troha

Nazaj k izrednim stanjem

Ključne besede: podnebne izredne razmere, podnebne spremembe, kriza, pandemija, covid-19, virus, antropocen

V prvem delu članka avtor analizira zadnjo fazo pandemije covid-19, ki jo poimenuje eks-komunikacija. Značilnost te faze ni le dokončen prehod v »življenje z virusom«, temveč tudi retroaktivni izbris potencialno dragocenih naukov pandemije za spopadanje z drugimi krizami. Potem ko v drugem delu besedila očrta novo razumevanje pravnega pojma podnebnih izrednih razmer, se avtor v zaključku osredotoči na razprave o globalnem segrevanju v 70-ih letih 20. stoletja. Pri tem postavi tezo, da velja izvore vseh oblik »podnebnega odlašanja« (Lamb et al.) iskati v sovpadu dveh protislovnih tendenc v tistem obdobju: odločenosti, da v zgodnji fazi ustavimo globalno segrevanje, in tehno-utopične želje, da bi z namernim segrevanjem ozračja preprečili nastop naslednje ledene dobe. Ironija je v tem, da previdnost, ki se je ponudila kot izhod iz protislovja, ni le spodletela v blaženju podnebnih sprememb, temveč je naposled za dogledno prihodnost preprečila nastop ledene dobe. Tovrstni jasni signali antropocena nas soočajo z novo izbiro, izbiro med dvema različicama samoumevnosti, dvema različicama nemožnega.

Obvestilo avtorjem

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Citiranje monografij
Gilles-Gaston Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Pariz, Odile Jacob, 1988, str. 57.
Immanuel Kant, *Kritika razsodne moči*, prev. R. Riha, Ljubljana, Založba ZRC, 1999.

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Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, str. 31.

Uporaba *Ibid*.
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Granger, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, str. 31.
Ibid., str. 49

Citiranje delov monografij
Cf. Charles Taylor, »Rationality«, v M. Hollis, S. Lukes (ur.), *Rationality and Relativism*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983, str. 87–105.

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Citiranje člankov v revijah
Friedrich Rapp, »Observational Data and Scientific Progress«, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 11 (2/1980), str. 153.
oz. pri revijah, ki imajo številke numerirane od začetka izhajanja:
Michel Aglietta, »European Vortex«, *New Left Review*, 75 (2012), str. 36.

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Jacques Rancière, *Les bords de la fiction*, Pariz, Seuil, 2017, EPUB, 2. pogl.

William James, *A Pluralistic Universe*, Project Gutenberg, 2004, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11984/pg11984.html, predavanje III, dostopano 4. maj 2021.

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Aglietta, Michel, »European Vortex«, *New Left Review*, 75 (2012), str. 15–36.
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Granger, Gilles-Gaston, *Pour la connaissance philosophique*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1988.
James, William, *A Pluralistic Universe*, Project Gutenberg, 2004, https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/11984/pg11984.html, Lecture III.
Rancière, Jacques, *Les bords de la fiction*, Paris, Seuil, 2017, Kindle.
Rancière, Jacques, *Les mots et les torts: Dialogue avec Javier Bassas*, Paris, La Fabrique, 2021.
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