

## The Apocalypse will not happen

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**Abstract:** A basic feature of much of the thinking about a threatening overall collapse and how to escape from it is the antagonism between nature and culture. However, this antagonism cannot endure as a basis for human agency to prevent or remedy a breakdown. A vision of the future that is based upon human fear caused by a distorted relation to nature is conceptually flawed. Preventing an apocalypse should not repress the pursuit of a better life now.

**Keywords:** Apocalypse, *collapsologie*, nature/culture, complexity, resistance, metaphor.

On August 4, 2020 a double explosion destroys the port of Beirut and also a large part of the city. Some 300 000 people lose their homes and join the enraged and hungry masses who are already protesting for weeks on end against the neo-liberal government policies and the corrupt political leadership.

The forest fires that had started in California in August reach the more northerly states of Oregon and Washington in September. A month later more than 16 800 km<sup>2</sup> of Californian forest have been destroyed, and with them billions of living creatures.

In Belgium the traditionally common spider, the European garden spider, has practically disappeared. The garden spider feeds on flying insects, but due to drought there is a paucity available for food. According to biologist Gerardo Ceballos the sixth mass extinction of life on earth has started. The five former mass extinction waves date from pre-history and led in particular to the disappearance of the dinosaurs. «I really think our civilisation will collapse», he says.

On January 10, 2021 almost two million (1 919 126) deaths worldwide are attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic. «Climate warming, extinction of species, exhaustion of resources, air and water pollution, soil sterilization, desertification, deforestation,

perturbation of the nitrogen cycle, acidification of the oceans, the list of bad news concerning the state of our planet is virtually endless », as summarised by geographer Renaud Duterme (DUTERME 2020: 151). Further: I would mention growing and persisting material and immaterial inequalities, widespread precarity and poverty, worldwide mass migration, nationalisms and refocusing on ethnicity and closed borders, the seemingly unmanageable expansion of technological control and cybernetics, the growing consciousness of all kinds of tyranny, social and political polarization, violence and endless wars.

All these interrelated phenomena feed what seems to be a widespread fear that the whole world, human as well as non-human, is gliding towards unavoidable general collapse on a planetary scale. There is reason to believe that the breakdown of sanitary and ecosystems are linked to the entropy of global capitalism and its political systems, however class analysis seems to have become obsolete for quite some time. All over the world people rise up against (violent) racism and other forms of discrimination, similarly identity politics also occasionally reinforce the divides within and amongst populations, and «what is liquidated in the turn of understanding social cleavages exclusively through identity is the class antagonism which actually grounds the material interests which shape political life – the antagonism between wage labor, capital, and the professional managerial strata in between». (SHOKI 2020) The concept of Anthropocene offers an interesting conceptual framework, however when it comes to actual practices or policies to ensure survival, it merely leads to the paradox that one cannot escape the Anthropocene. Animal rights or a Parliament of Things (LATOURE 2016: 234-239) are attempts to come to just and more equivalent relationships with all (living) creatures, and they are more than just mind frames, but what can be their influence when it comes to dealing with « times in which we are acutely exposed to death, individually and collectively », as the call for articles for this journal stated?

My point is: it is vain to talk about general collapse or *effondrement* or apocalypse if the foundation of your conceptions is dubious, and secondly, if you nevertheless want to start suggesting responses, you'd better propose approaches that fit situations and urgencies that already today need sustainable remedies.

### *Collapsologie*

It is not by accident that several thinkers deeply concerned about a coming catastrophe (Andreas Malm, Renaud Duterme, Jason W. Moore, ...) prefer to discuss *Capitalocene* rather than Anthropocene. Thus they point to an analysis that the problem (and its solution) does not lie with humankind as such, but with a specific economic and political system that is fundamentally based on the principle of limitless accumulation within a limited world. Countering the negative planetary effects of capitalism would require not only changing individual consciousness, but principally and primarily a change to the political system. Not just personal and local resilience, but organized autonomy in the fields of food provision, energy, finances, territorial development, culture and democracy (DUTERME 2020: 192-193).

Or, as Félix Guattari and Toni Negri formulated it in their own jargon more than thirty years earlier in the preface to the Italian translation of *Les nouveaux espaces de liberté*:

The field of ecological battle, that we thought was coherent with the programme of proletarian liberation, should be better identified. It should encompass not only the need to defend nature against the threatening dangers of destruction and to thus avoid an otherwise nearby apocalypse, but also the urgency to construct new systems and general conditions for the reproduction of the human species, and to define the modes and the times for a revolutionary action based on all this. (NEGRI-GUATTARI 1989:11)

This is a difficult message in an era in which everyone has for decades been indoctrinated with the idea that individually you are responsible for your own fate, happiness and future, and all this in permanent competition with everyone in the market of profit and loss.

That's how, at least in France, *la collapsologie* has found or created an ample popular and mediatic resonance (for instance the eight episodes of the television series *L'effondrement*, broadcasted on Canal+ in 2019). Collapsology *per se*, the science of the systemic crash, is nothing new. Apart from all kind of ancient or traditional theologically tinted eschatological doctrines, there are, when it comes to ecological breakdowns, several contemporary classic texts (the works of Murray Bookchin, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* 1962, the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* 1972, ...). Also still quite influential is Joseph Tainter's *The*

*Collapse of Complex Societies* from 1988. But where Tainter based his historical analyses on a sound application of complexity and network theories, the new French *collapsologie* finds much of its sources in natural sciences, psychology and indigenous spirituality – and a rather a-political understanding of anarchism and municipalism. There are exceptions of course within French literature, as exemplified by Michael Löwy regarding ecosocialism or Renaud Duterme, who writes about ecological urgencies from a perspective of radical geography. And significantly, when it comes to difficult messages, one should not forget Guattari's *Chaosmose* (1992) and *Les trois écologies* (1989) – however a discussion about the lineage Deleuze – Guattari – Negri concerning ecology, capitalism and collapse is not the topic of this article.

The point of departure of the new *collapsologues*, as they call themselves, is universally accepted in the thinking about degrowth or ecological transition: human society as it is today, based on the principle of perpetual growth, is unsustainable; it despoils nature and exhausts its resources; it destroys on a massive scale the living conditions of myriads of creatures and is heading for an inevitable crash. Thus far, nothing new. In these conditions, the *collapsologues* claim there is an urgent need for a biophysical and systemic analysis of the planet and a transdisciplinary science of collapse. However there is in the collapsological sphere also plenty of space for the application of initiatives and information around personal growth and the management of personal «eco-anxiety», dealing with emotions and mourning, reconnecting with nature, the development of inner philosophical, psychological or spiritual paths in dealing with the imminent collapse, or embracing the energetic properties of the St John's wort – a yellow-flowered plant from the genus *Hypericum*, «“the bearer of light”: celestial body: the sun; gender: male; element: fire; chakras: associated to the solar plexus and the third eye; flavours: bitter, astringent, aromatic, slightly spicy and sweet» (MERA 2020).

Nothing wrong with all this, but will it help people to shed their fears (or at least, deal with them)? Can it support them in their further development to become free, autonomous or sovereign individuals and collectives? Certainly the most mediatic part of the French *collapsologues*, of whom Pablo Servigne is the figurehead, promote a de-politicised, individualistic and survivalist reaction to an inescapable disaster. Instead of trying to influence the future, their objective seems to be the adaptation of the individual's lifestyle to

the collapse. Servigne is aware of critiques such as these, and in 2020 he published a comprehensive response in the anarchist semi-annual magazine *Réfractions*. In that article he refers extensively to his 2018 book *Une autre fin du monde est possible*: no longer a collapsological analysis of the coming crash, but «the beginnings of a *collapsosophic* approach» (SERVIGNE 2020: 85) to deal with the impending catastrophes that the living world is actually encountering and will continue to encounter.

In former publications, he writes now, he wanted to limit himself to the description of the catastrophes; who was responsible and what was to be done, were questions he avoided because of divisiveness, due to all the different worldviews and values his potential readers might have. From reaction to the early publications however, Servigne learned that in general people had two kinds of questions: an «internal» one (how to live with all this?) and an « external » one (what to do about it?). The authors of *Une autre fin du monde est possible* decided to focus on the former. All of them were at that time involved in processes of «reconnecting to the living, rituals of grief, circles of listening, etcetera. (...) The internal question seemed to us as important as the organisational one, but more urgent and more accessible» (SERVIGNE 2020: 84-85).

Consequentially however, the problem of the scope of a political project would remain.

That cannot do without a deepening of the understanding of the catastrophic dynamics, but neither without a serious study of the complexity of the *causes* of our situation. Indeed, too often one focuses on one only cause (for example, capitalism), this way hiding other causes (for example, patriarchy, the state, our cognitive system or the separation between nature and culture), which prevents us from considering really complete and innovative action schemes. (SERVIGNE 2020: 91)

Drawing on his *Réfractions* article Pablo Servigne seems to be aware of the omissions in his discourse when it comes to identifying the societal structures which lie at the basis of the collapse he notices all around him. But he also seems stuck in the ambition of convincing as many people as possible with his message, and that makes him avoid taking a clear political or possibly controversial stance on the system behind the deterioration which he sees.

### *The losers of transition*

The contemporary ideas of imminent danger, of the urgency to deal with serious threats, may be ubiquitous in political discourse, but seldom find their way to concrete policy. Moreover, a complicating factor in deciding how to deal with these predictions of doom and gloom is that many of the widely accepted «alternatives» or steps towards ecological transition create their own new victims. One of the most prominent examples is the movement of the French *gilets jaunes*. This movement originated in 2018 from the protests of rural and suburban workers against the imposition of a new so-called CO<sub>2</sub>-tax on diesel, however many people need this relatively cheap fuel for their cars in regions where «unprofitable» public transport has long since disappeared. Meanwhile minister of Ecological Transition and Solidarity Nicolas Hulot planned to install 15 000 wind turbines on French soil – regardless of the protests from the people living in rural areas such as Moselle and Sarthe, where forests would be cut down for the construction of these power plants. To deforest in order to produce clean energy is absurd, even without calculating the tons of concrete needed, or with regard to the conditions in which rare metals and other resources are extracted – but also in Belgium and Germany forests are being devastated for the industrial production of wind energy. The problems around the implantation of wind turbine clusters illustrate what seems to be a feature of much of the actual attempts at ecological transition: the urban middle-class promotes alternative energies, while they know that these are to be produced at the cost of the living conditions of rural and suburban populations. Conversely would you think a 180 meters high wind turbine would be acceptable in the middle of town, on Central Square or the Piazza del Duomo?

The expenses of ecological transition are not just passed on to European rural or peri-urban populations; a great deal of the costs of transition in developed (post)industrial societies is paid by the populations of poorer countries. Even companies which profess a «zero carbon» objective use to conceal the fact that «green» energies are not necessarily ecologically neutral. The ideal of reducing CO<sub>2</sub>-emission through the digitalisation of work, mail or social contacts obfuscates the reality of the immense junkyards in Ghana and Nigeria where 80% of the electronic devices from the West come to perish. Immersed in the fumes of burnt plastic and sulphur, children work there in conditions that are quite similar to those in which others labour for the benefit of the Chinese economy in the exploitation of the rare metals mines in the Congo or Peru. Or what about the Moroccan farmers and shepherds who

are chased away from their grounds, because these are claimed by transnational companies for the construction of gigantic fields of solar panels? (DURIEUX 2019) And when it comes to what western world want to watch on their screens, the preservation of African wildlife in their natural habitat, Africans speak of «green colonialism» that transforms the agro-pastoral spaces where indigenous populations live into natural parcs, and where the locals subsequently survive by serving the tourists.

It led Kenyan «carnivore ecologist» Mordecai Ogada to this furious rant:

Nonagenarian Westerners like Sir David Attenborough routinely prescribe future goals to young populations in the global South (backed by environmental cinema that deliberately excludes human populations from the frame). As our youth struggle with the visions of old Westerners, our leaders are confronted with advice and «guidance» from a European teenage girl, delivered with the glib assurance of someone who doesn't have anywhere near the amount of knowledge required to confer a modicum of self-doubt.

As African students of environmental sciences strive to make their voices heard in academia, they get confronted by ludicrous theories like the half-earth theory, (...). This theory proposes that half the earth should be «protected» for the survival of biodiversity.

However, what proponents of this theory don't state is that this biodiversity will be protected mostly in the tropics, because the temperate lands do not have biodiversity worth protecting in such a drastic manner. Any attempt to actualize such a move would amount to genocide, but the world routinely accepts such fascism when environmental reasons are used to support it. (OGADA 2020)

Worst of all: the promoters of this kind of ecological transition do not care about the victims they make – and not just because they fail to notice them, living in far away regions. Former French minister of Ecological Transition and Solidarity Nicolas Hulot said to Dutch weekly *De Groene Amsterdammer*: «First of all, we need the will to innovate. Only afterwards can we think about setting priorities for the economic and societal model of tomorrow. » Hulot's statement is a variation to what for instance Jan vande Putte of Greenpeace said about the ecological consequences of the off-shore installation of wind turbines: «We go too fast, that's clear. But we can't wait for more studies, because global warming will have more harmful consequences. We have to move forward and minimise the consequences afterwards.» Or what was said by the Belgian economist and fund manager Etienne de Callatay: «How can we help the losers of the transition? But this reflection should not slow down the adoption of measures.» (DURIEUX 2019) Let's move on, we'll look later at the debris we made. And so

that's how in the Austrian government of 2020 *Die Grünen* have chosen in a similar spirit to divert the price for obtaining «green» departments such as health care, the environment and mobility, onto the weakest of society: the migrants, refugees and asylum seekers who are handed over to the xenophobe politics of the right-wing *Österreichische Volkspartei*.

### *Imagining the Apocalypse*

Of the world as we know it, the days are counted, Nicolas Hulot wrote in 2004. The title of his book: *Le syndrome du Titanic*. We are in an ecological state of emergency and the fate of the Titanic is an apt metaphor for how the world is mercilessly going down. What we experience now, says Hulot, is an irreversible collapse caused by climatic disturbances, pollution, the extinction of animals and plants, the exhaustion of resources and the proliferation of sanitary crises. Even then nothing remarkable, but I'll come back to the metaphor.

In 2008 German sociologist Harald Welzer introduced in *Klimakriege. Wofür im 21. Jahrhundert getötet wird*. the metaphor of Easter Island (Rapa Nui) for the catastrophe that awaits the world: the inhabitants had plundered the island's resources so thoroughly that in the end it turned out that they had organized their own extermination. You may want to put things into perspective though. Indeed the example of Easter Island illustrates how a culturally successful strategy turns against those who have developed it. On the other hand, the Rapa Nui culture did last for about nine hundred years, which is significantly longer than capitalism up till now – so one can speculate whether after all this can be considered a failed system.

If there is a text in Western culture that has for almost 2 000 years profoundly shaped the imagery of overall collapse, it is the *Apocalypse of John* (officially the *Book of Revelation*).

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. 2 He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, 3 and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. 4 Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, «Seal up the things which the seven thunders

uttered, and do not write them».

5 The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, 7 but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets. (Revelation 10:1-7).

And so on.

Although – and of course paradoxically also while – this prophecy is «the most unfulfilled, the one that is the most frontally contradicted by history» (QUINZIO 1991: 793) – the *Apocalypsis of John* has been a source of inspiration for artists galore. In 1968 Pierre Henry composed *Apocalypse de Jean*, an «electronic reading timed in 5 parts», and issued a year later as a three vinyl box set. The oratorio which is more than hundred minutes is a long bombastic declamation of the French text, alternated with electronic sounds that are supposed to evoke the four horses of the Apocalypse, the seven trumpets, the falling stars and the cataclysms, the beasts of the sea and of the earth and all the terrible monsters and events that accompany the one and only Doomsday.

How completely different was Olivier Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*, in 1941, the score of which nonetheless carries as an introduction the quote of the *Apocalypse* mentioned above. The context was immensely different of course. Messiaen wrote his quartet while being a prisoner of war, and for the musicians and instruments present in camp Stalag VIIIA in Görlitz: a clarinet, a violin, a cello and a decrepit upright piano. It's evident orchestration plays a role, but compared to Henry's *Apocalypse*, the *Quatuor* – although its parts feature titles taken from John's prophecy – is a masterpiece of austerity. No hell and fire, no thunder and lightning, but an effort to stop time. The composition evolves really slowly, and the irregularities and the asymmetries in the rhythms and the harmonics were supposed to create a consciousness of the end of time, a timeless continuum unstructured by classical rhythms and harmonies.

The apocalypse as the cessation of time, the disappearance of time. My recording by *Het Collectief* on Fuga Libera is called « *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* », but the one on Philips (Spain) is called « *Cuarteto para el fin de los tiempos* ». There is a semantic difference between the « end of time » and the « end of times ». But from a certain point of view both

are completely correct. That is: one can think it, you can think – here and now – the concept of the end or the disappearance of time or of times. But you cannot imagine the end of time, because imagination presupposes some mode of presence, and thus time. So the question is: what do you have in mind, when it comes to collapse, apocalypse, the end of time? Messiaen aimed at creating a timeless continuum – immaterial, spiritual and catholic. But in the real world, where the apocalypse is still frontally contradicted by history, irreversible time remains the basis of everything that happens – at least in Western culture. Indeed, the thinking about a possible end of time presupposes a linear conception of time; if time were cyclic, there would be no end of time.

### *Nature and Culture*

Both the concept of Anthropocene and that of collapsology are frameworks for considering an apocalypse and hence the acknowledgement of fear as a driving factor of human agency. The widespread fear of a monumental crash appears to result from an intensification of the antagonism being constructed between nature and culture. (Strangely enough, the dangers of warfare and geopolitical tensions, that had been at the core of disaster scenario's in the decades following World War II and which have not since diminished, have virtually disappeared when it comes to contemporary thought about doom and gloom.)

In this antithesis, nature is on the one hand almost by definition good, pure, and pristine. On the other hand it is at the same time also inherently cruel, unpredictable and fundamentally strange. Across the ages humankind has developed culture: the amalgam of dispositions, techniques and instruments to survive and procreate within this duplicitous, nourishing as well as hostile, context. It engineered all kinds of nature-transformative activities to meet human needs (shelter, food, clothing, ...). These are not necessarily ecologically incompatible « so long as the transformation of natural ecosystems involved is sustainable – i.e. is not such as to undermine their capacity to reproduce themselves without an application of non-renewable external energy other than human labour » (HAYWARD 1992: 3). Today however, and this is the essence of many of the crash theories, the balance between nature and culture has been fundamentally disturbed. Humankind has exploited, squeezed and

plundered up the earth in such a way that the very existence of both nature and culture is threatened. Hence the message: Reconnect with Nature!

However, among others Murray Bookchin and Bruno Latour have not desisted in emphasizing, that the sharp distinction between nature and culture is at least questionable. When it comes to the ontology of the discernment, Kate Soper distinguishes between realists and constructivists, « between those who insist on the independent reality of a natural domain or mode of being, and those who argue that there is no ‘nature’ in this sense, and that everything we refer to as natural is in one way or another a construct of human culture » (SOPER 2000: 17). Soper’s personal position in this takes into account the normative aspects of the distinction and encompasses both views.

But while we might agree that everything by which we are surrounded (...) is ‘cultural construction’ in the sense of being a product of labour, it is equally important to acknowledge nature in the realist sense of causal powers and processes enabling and limiting the cultural work;

(...)

One can, however, be a realist about nature while both agreeing with the nature-sceptics about the made-over or constructed nature of surface ‘nature’ and agreeing to the need to reject the discursive violence done in the name of nature, exposing the oppressive naturalizations of social hierarchies, ethnic differences and sexual norms. (SOPER 2000: 18-19)

The realist approach is widely accepted: humans are part of nature, and as such they are in essence relatives of and inextricably linked to bees, ferns, even spores and bacteria and the fossilized remnants of ancient organisms that have become coal or oil. It would be a mistake, says Emanuele Coccia (2019: 86), to oppose to the category of humans another one of which the only characteristic is its non-humanity. That might be one that consists of mushrooms, ladybirds and elephants – while nothing proves that a ladybird is more closely related to mushrooms than to humans. On the contrary, what links all living creatures is that they feed on other life forms. This way, *in perpetuum*, every Other transforms to the Self: one takes the substance or the meat of another living creature and makes it a part of the own body. And that body, again is shared with the world.

On one hand, there is the appropriation of a part of the world, to make it flesh of your own flesh; on the other hand, part of our own body is rendered to the world, to turn it into a furniture of this vast and endless universe.

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Through breathing, subject and object, I and the environment, container and content keep changing places.  
(COCCIA 2019: 92)

In that sense it might be rather strange for humans to ‘reconnect’ or even ‘save’ nature –if they were thought of as all being an element of the same whole. Incontrovertibly the most obvious critique on the realist approach to nature is this: nature is for the most part a construct of centuries of human activities – even the so-called wilderness, which is natural world that has been circumscribed by culture. One tends inevitably to the pure constructivist approach: that nature is that what you call nature. Prior to the introduction of the term ‘nature’, there was no such thing.

With regards to specific contexts, one might tend more or less towards a realist or a constructivist approach; an essentialist distinction between nature and culture however is an insufficient basis for a normative (moral or political) position of critique on human agency or reconnection with nature.

### *Time and complexity*

About 2 500 years ago, Herakleitos supposedly said: «Everything changes and nothing remains the same and you can’t step twice into the same river» (Plato, Cratylus, 402a<sup>1</sup>). The river is still there, but the water has flown on by, and that water never comes back. Not only can you not go back into the past (to change the future of that moment); the future ahead is by definition uncertain. Time is an irreversible process.

So on the one hand, the antagonism of nature and culture on which the fear for a general collapse thrives is rather dubious, on the other hand it is impossible to establish linear relations towards future developments. The complexity of the entirety of ecological interrelations necessarily leads to uncertainty. At the same time however, uncertainty about the future might enhance the understanding of the complexity of this reality. When it comes to considering the future, nothing is determined, you can only think in terms of possibilities

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<sup>1</sup> «λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι ‘πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει,’ καὶ ποταμοῦ ῥοῆ ἁπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λέγει ὡς ‘δις ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης.’» (Plato 1903)

and probabilities.

And yes, it's a pity that so many animal species and plants have perished and are disappearing, but after all, dinosaurs became extinct, and so too are probably huge numbers of bacteria and other living beings that haven't even been identified. Biodiversity is not a catalogue of what actually exists; it is a generative process, it is a process that also generates species; biodiversity *is* becoming. The world as you know it today is the result of processes that have taken millions of years to evolve, which started with micro-organisms such as microbes and spores and processes such as photosynthesis and the interactions between carbon dioxide and oxygen. And all these elements will very probably remain here for a very long time, microbes and spores are able to survive and reproduce under the most incredible and severe circumstances. This isn't meant to say that it is a good idea to continue destroying nature, the seas, fauna and flora and decent living conditions for people and non-humans; the point is not that everything that exists nowadays should remain or stay alive, but that one should consider and make decisions – ideally in conjunction with all entities involved, whether human or not human – about what is crucial for the existence of viable and meaningful ecosystems.

The acknowledgement of the irreversibility of time and (social) processes is one of the key features of the acknowledgement of complexity, not as a problem to be solved, but as a set of possible answers. Complexity, as an epistemological strategy, leads to an increase of opportunities, and hence to a growth of freedom. Even after structuralism – and in fact also within structuralism – there's space for human agency, and freedom is then the potential to be sovereign in one's thinking.<sup>2</sup>

### *Fear and freedom*

The fear for a threatening collapse of civilisation is nothing new in Western culture. From the first millennium, past the year 2000, there has been the continuously postponed

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<sup>2</sup> I'm aware it's easy for me to write about sovereign thinking, sitting in my working room in a comfortable apartment, in a country where there's no war, no overall famine or drought, and where my mind and body can focus on something else than the pain to come from the next torture session, or the desperate quest for some water or food for today.

apocalypse of Jehova's Witnesses, the atomic bomb, the population bomb, Star Wars, the irresistible invasion of Europe and North America by all the deplorables of the planet and with it the loss of national identity ... up to the threat of artificial intelligence and the possibility of transhumanism (of a technological post-humanity, the fusion of wo/man and machine) potentially leading to the end of humanity. (Of course I would not be that cynical as to state that much of the fear mongering about an apocalypse is enhanced by those who are thinking about commercializing solutions for the problems they are invoking.)

Fear is being instrumentalized as marketing tool and political tactic. Not just climate activists (all kinds of variations on the famous « I don't want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day »), but also nationalists of all sorts promote fear where and whenever they can. Manifestly if one wants to grow and gain influence, one needs to become populist and stir up people's darkest emotions. The most powerful emotion is fear. Create fear, express it, spread it. Never fails.

The future may be uncertain, but fear is a bad adviser, as the Dutch saying goes. Every problem and every metaphor suggest ways of dealing with them. The perspective of the nearing collapse is ambiguous. Some see it as the final apocalypse, the definitive end of times; for others, the impending catastrophe promises a regeneration of society. This is especially evident with the awareness of the social, political and economic impact of the covid-19 pandemic that has led to a global intellectual enthusiasm for building a « new world » without all the social, ecological and political flaws of the old « normality ». The central question is such – and that is the fundamental point French collapsologists try to avoid – : would it work if everyone in the whole world raised consciousness regarding their situation on the planet and reconnect with nature, and can you trust the existing economic and political system to adapt because this is necessary for its own survival? Or on the contrary, is there a need for a different thinking, living and combating, for the developing of new subjectivities and new territories of desire radically demarcated from the State and Integrated Global Capital, aiming at social and ecological justice, as Negri and Guattari suggested in 1985?

Mexican biologist Ceballos wants to raise a billion dollars from companies like Facebook, Apple, Microsoft or Unilever to finance the counteraction of the mass extinction he describes. So he wants these companies to remediate of the global destruction they are

responsible for? At best, their effort would just constitute one more variable in managing their business operations, one more cost to influence the amount of the dividend. It is also clear that social transformation will not come about by the march through the institutions; nothing else but slightly modified institutions can come out of that. Neither can it come about through trying to modify the society of spectacle by fighting the exhibitions of power or building a counter-spectacle; « playing the game of warfare and pacification with the actual (supra)state constructions can never be won » (DURIEUX 2014: 16). And even though you know with Guy Debord that no idea can lead beyond the existing spectacle, but only beyond the existing ideas on the spectacle (DEBORD 1992: 122), this shouldn't keep you from subverting elements of the existing symbolic order to think beyond the ends to which they are presently employed and, if possible, to root them in concrete practices.

Or one can try positive resistance: not simply infiltrating or opposing the powers that be, but creating situations that reflect what you want to happen. When it comes to wicked problems – and the actual condition of the planet and its inhabitants surely is one of those – consider the approach of complexity: change your point of view and attack a partial problem from an unexpected angle. Grasping in a surprising way a fragment of a problem tackles the rules for an expected general – but unrealistic – approach of the situation. It is what hackers do: look for the unexpected weak points in a system, identify the cracks through which the entire system can be adjusted. It's not about questioning authority or about winning, but about manipulating or bending the rules by which authorities have come to control the situation. In everyday life, rather than striving for an ideal society, you may refuse to contribute to a system that subdivides people into masters and slaves, bullies and victims, leaders and followers. As Raoul Vaneigem recently said: «Never destroy a human and never cease to destroy what dehumanises him or her. Wipe out what claims to have us *pay* for the inalienable right to happiness» (VANEIGEM 2019).

It is important then to keep in mind that, even within a structuralist or systemic paradigm, people have a certain level of sovereignty; that although circumstances might be given and may have come to look natural, they are in fact made by humankind and hence are modifiable. So people can still act as social agents who can shape – or at least influence – social reality, and they are in possession of a power to generate multiple possible futures, «that first and foremost it is they themselves that they have to save, they themselves that they

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have to choose as the centre, their own subjectivity out of which they have to build a world where everyone will feel at home» (VANEIGEM 1983: 188).

Ultimately, what does this all come down to? Sociologist Harald Welzer certainly is an inspiring thinker when it comes to imagining a future proof world. He's the publisher of *Futurzwei – Magazin für Zukunft und Politik*. In a 2020 issue called «Lechts und rinks kann man vergessen», he calls for new concepts and new approaches to deal with questions about future-proofing and future flawed, about life-sustaining and life-threatening, about constructive and destructive, proactive and reactive. Being «left-wing» is then at best nostalgic, Welzer writes.

Such a challenge would include, all arguments considered, the social question since one knows that in general the socially disadvantaged are at the same time the ecologically underprivileged. (...) Only those who have in mind social natural relationships can ascertain future survival, and may claim to be of their time. Is that left? Probably not, but no matter. (WELZER 2020: 12-13)

This «green» attitude to position oneself «beyond left and right» conceals the fact that a possible ecological (including sanitary) catastrophe is not class-blind and does not affect populations equally. But yes, there are many arguments to surpass the traditional left – right classification, but I think that when it comes to dealing with – both conceptually and practically – the main issues about a liveable future, one should turn around Welzer's argument. It is not that new forms of political differentiation «all arguments considered» should include the social question; only if this, and the question of inequality – material, gendered, «racial», ecological, cultural, ... – get a sufficient response, will it be possible to elaborate new or adequate concepts and approaches. Without social justice, there can be no ecological justice or a future proof world. And this can be done. Since concepts and approaches are wo/man-made, they are modifiable. Ideas and suggestions abound, I would think.

Let a hundred flowers bloom in the revolution of everyday life – not molar and monolithic, centralised and jacobine, but molecular and diffuse, plural and fragmented. Making a joyful mishmash of all established (white, male) wisdom and spicing it up with alien and unexpected thoughts and practices.

*The sinking of the Titanic*

In 1969 British musician Gavin Bryars started work on a composition inspired by the myth of the string orchestra that kept playing on the deck of the Titanic even in the final minutes before the ship's sinking. It is written for an indeterminate number of instruments, and the duration can vary from 25 minutes to more than an hour. Maybe the best-known performance is the one with The Cockpit Ensemble and other musicians, produced by Brian Eno in 1975. It is a slow, deeply melancholic piece of music, one that you might almost wish would go on forever.

In explaining the composition Bryars refers to a witness of the disaster (all following quotations are from BRYARS 2006):

... and the last I saw of the band, when I was floating out in the sea with my lifebelt on, it was still on deck playing *Autumn*. How they ever did it I cannot imagine. That, and the way Phillips (the senior wireless operator) kept sending after the Captain told him his life was his own, and to look out for himself, are two things that stand out in my mind over all the rest.

The hymn *Autumn* is the building block of the composition, and it is repeated and transformed in an indefinite number of variations. Basically, after the sinking, the music might go on forever beneath the sea. This idea is strengthened by the fact that the Titanic had on board a device to hear underwater bells, « which were attached to floating buoys out at sea along the east coast of Canada and the United States to warn of the approaching coast (the approaching iceberg was, of course, notoriously silent). »

Wireless telegraphy played an important part in the accounts of the sinking of the Titanic and Bryars pays tribute to that contemporary invention by Guglielmo Marconi. He writes about « the prolongation of the music into eternity »:

Towards the end of his life, Marconi became convinced that sounds once generated never die, they simply become fainter and fainter until we can no longer perceive them. Marconi's hope was to develop sufficiently sensitive equipment, extraordinarily powerful and selective filters I suppose, to pick and hear these past, faint sounds. Ultimately he hoped to be able to hear Christ delivering the Sermon on the Mount. Curiously enough one of the rescue ships, the Birma, received radio signals, apparently originating from the Titanic, 1 hour and

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28 minutes after the ship had finally gone beneath the waves.

The apocalypse as the end of time?

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