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Chapter 1

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Dystopian Contemporary Positions: Sustainable Development As A Manifest Instance Of The Epistemological Disposition

Ruth Thomas-Pellicer

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"[A]s long as we replace old values with new ones that only amount to new combinations between reactive forces and the will to nothingness, nothing has changed"

unproblematized reversal of productivity –as an extension and complementing pole of the latter, that is. Sixth, the propensity of sustainable development to take for granted a docile nature assumed as it is to be utterly controllable by Promethean Man is interpreted as an expression of restricted economy, a leading trait of the epistemological disposition. Seven, sustainable development, in its promise to render productivity clean, is severely charged with the perpetuation of the teleology of progress also ingrained in the epistemological trajectory.

1. Descent Into Our Contemporaneity

I

Recollections Of A Past Utopia - Once upon a time there were a little girl, her cousins and friends from all nationalities who yet spoke a common language. They knew well how to proceed with a few affairs. They had come to master a range of trades in the idiosyncrasies of a cove by the name Cala Crancs –‘Crab Cove.’ Notably well, they had developed techniques all their own on how to turn fine-speck sand into a number of items of public display. Their varied production included robust and quite exuberant castles, bakeries exhibiting the most appetitive –or so they believed— shapes of croissants, and impervious barriers against the corrosive salt water in times of choppy sea. Water was another of the domains where these children had found a secure ally. The little girl and her relatives and friends had come to develop a remarkable command of wave-surfing with their physical bodies. Their prolific imagination on how to establish an adequate relationship with the waves made up for boards or any kind of additional accessories. Our characters were indeed remarkably able to hold their breath for as long as the wave was keeping its momentum. On every ride they would succeed in maintaining their bodies stretched out and supple at one and the same time to readily permit wave-transport till shore.

Water being a tacit accomplice, expeditions out to sea were activities they would also undertake on a regular basis. By combining breast and backstroke with crawl, this group of children knew how to swim with and against the mild Mediterranean currents to reach out to a majestic rock offshore. Once standing on that rock that would keep

their bodies submerged up to their hips, they enjoyed gazing at the fauna, often aided with diving goggles. They happily befriended those exotic creatures which looked in any case quite similar to the animals populating the rocks neighbouring the cove. Collective incursions onto the rocks surrounding their cove –that singular and safe place of their childhood— were also frequent. These kids were keen to visit the crabs, the mussels, the winkles, the starfishes and the sea urchins on a regular basis –they were one with their sea-friends.

In her mid-teens that little girl now on her course to womanhood dropped interest in her sand-converting skills. She replaced her direct contact with sand with windsurfing. With the supplement of a board and a sail, our main character preserved her keenness for both swimming out to the Mediterranean sea and playing with the weaves. To her utter surprise and disappointment, the knowledge and skills this girl on her course to womanhood had been accumulating since her tender age had become redundant for a good part. Not because of the uselessness of the skills at issue. This woman remained fond of swimming. She had moreover grown increasingly aware of the healing properties of her swimming practices out to sea. Yet some skills of hers had turned *impracticable* almost overnight. In the course of five years, two blocks of apartments on the rocks where she and her cousins and friends used to visit their sea peers had been built. (Surprisingly, this woman knows well that the Spanish Coast Act, only recently patchily enforced, prohibits built environment within the first 150 meters off the sea coast!). What is more, this woman had at this stage of her life to develop new techniques and precautions to approach the sea –the sewage of the new inhabitants didn't render the swimming always salubrious.

Aware of and preoccupied with her steadily constrained ability to swim out to sea and heal herself at will, in her mid-twenties this character in love with the sea eagerly visited an exhibition at the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). The exhibition in hand was a turning point in the life of this woman wedded to the Mediterranean waters –it was to determine her next moves. The MACBA exhibition was about the promise of sustainable development in a middle-class suburb in a Nordic country. In her condition of curious student, this woman grew much impressed

with this display that was dealing with key issues of her contemporaneity –‘how is one to regain a post-industrial alliance with the sand, the waters, the rocks, the crabs, the mussels, the winkles, the starfishes and the sea urchins –the sea-friends of one’s childhood?’ As a result, she came to hold great convictions and hope that this somewhat mysterious rubric –‘sustainable development’- would tell her how to recover her cherished cove and her practicable ability to swim and heal at will in Mediterranean waters.

II

Religare As An Apt Avenue To Politicize Our Times – Let us note that the narrative above mentions a series of growing constraints in the life of our main character. As the little girl leaves her childhood behind to enter womanhood, the development of new housing on the coastline results in the proliferation of sewage out into sea. With it, the number of people and cars travelling in and out of the new buildings rises sharply. Yet what must be noted is that the case of our main character isn't an isolated one. It conforms to one among billion. It speaks, in the form of an embodied metonymy, of our contemporaneity. It exhibits the contingent fashion in which the elements that conform to reality are arranged. The case of our main character points to a specific mode of *religare*, to a concrete way of binding strongly together the components of reality (cf. Capra 1988: 1945-1946; Ferré 1988). This girl-woman in love with the sea bespeaks two confronted religions –what results from assembling elements or from the act of *religare*. The initial layout to which she is exposed kindly invites her to interact with neighbouring characters –the fine-speck sand, the sea, the rocks, the crabs, the mussels, the winkles, the starfishes and the sea urchins. The disposition of the elements that develops in her puberty, by contrast, interposes a number of instruments –sewage, cars, new buildings— on the girl-woman’s way to relate to her bedfellows.

We can take the two different engagements with the two distinct dispositions of the building blocks of reality on the part of our main character as much informing as intervening in the process of knowledge-production in and for our times. “In a sense [...] we have to conform to a ‘logic’ which is inscribed only in the course of events”

(Vattimo 1991 [1988]: 177). Against this backdrop, we can assert that today all philosopher, as an initial testimony of the conditional and conditioning truth prevalent in the space where we speak, has undergone a particular shift in the manner they customarily interact with the components of reality. Our ability to labour, repose, heal and be at leisure in our native or subsequently adopted places has been constrained to a certain degree.

For the sake of convenience, we may refer to these constraints on different fronts as ramifications, splittings, manifestations of an ecocidal mode of being. As a mode, that is, which deliberately interferes with our ability to work, rest, heal and be playful with and in our autochthonous sites or those subsequently adopted following migratory processes. This feature stands out so prominently in the philosopher's test of our age that in seeking the possibility of knowledge for our times, the feature at issue, surreptitiously but unwaveringly so, creeps in. It filtrates in the process of knowledge-production.

This anterior cognitive condition –*i.e.*, an ecocidal mode of being— carries with it an implication that energetically intervenes in the narrative. It mediates the constitution of knowledge by forcing upon it an irreducibly normative dimension. Attesting to one of the foremost outstanding dimensions of these present times —their systematic ability to debase and replace local knowledges and techniques, medicinal remedies and labour-related and recreational resorts— we take due precautions against giving free reign to an unmitigated relativism. In the present conditions of existence there are palpable ecocidal elements. Our main character cherishes the direct interaction with her surrounding friends –the sand, the sea, the rocks, the crabs, the mussels, the winkles, the starfishes and the sea urchins. Hence the imperative necessity to consider as normative those initiatives which safely secure the keeping of ecocidal elements at bay. The body of knowledge we are to construe should facilitate sharp analysis but shall simultaneously subject this analytical process to the demands of our times, namely, to the placating of the ecocidal mode of being. “The philosopher of the future is both artist and doctor –in one word, legislator” (Deleuze 2001 [1965]: 66); she must be both interpret and evaluator.

This militantly political departure shall at least partially inoculate us against two perverse leanings pervasive among professional philosophers. One is abstract thinking and the other is the incessant speaking of the terms that one is taking issue with. There is indeed a tendentious propensity to address philosophical issues, such as the nature of truth, knowledge, action, reality, morality in a vacuum; debarred from the context which is to define it in the first place. This insidious practice I associate with the history of Western philosophy and science as *epistēmē* and its dogged search for ontological predicates on the eternal nature of being. This tradition has encouraged the circulation of moral and political advocacy (cf. Leiter 2006a: 88; Nietzsche 1989a [1967]). However, our eagerness to regain the conditions to undertake labour, leisure and healing activities rather leads us to engage in a systematic philosophizing out of which certain aspects of reality gain illumination so that we can grow in the position to draw ethical and political conclusions. “The dispute over the reality or non-reality of thinking which isolates itself from practice is a purely scholastic question” (Marx 1976a [1845]: Thesis 2). It must without fail be a political perspective the one that dictates what are we to do with knowledge. Claims to truth are apt to the extent that they cast light upon the set of problematics that beset our times and take us well beyond them. Philosophy must relinquish its immortal aspirations in order to be apt love to timely – however untimely for the status quo- knowledge and knowing. We are to hold a *theoria*, understood in its etymological meaning of speculation, as provisional knowing that momentarily sheds light upon a state of affairs “which attributes a temporal core to truth instead of [approaching] truth as something invariable to the moment of history” (Horkheimer & Adorno 2002 [1969]: xi; cf. also Curry 2010c; Salleh 2010).

It is no less frequent the philosophical practice to engage in a sterile critique of the positions one is in obstinate disagreement with. By way of contrast, the politically-oriented philosopher is constrained to uphold, not the notion -any universal notion- of truth, but a timely and operative truth that shall –in our case– walk us out of the ecocidal mode of being. This truth with a political agenda writ large doesn’t step in virgin and naked. Rather, it shrewdly arms itself with a constellation of effective devices in the form of new categories of knowledge that, wisely operated together,

should be in the position to alter the negative sign of reality. Now, this unstoppable urge for self-articulation overrides the scattering of energies on the fervent disapproval of those philosophical outlooks that one loathes with considerable animus.

Finally, we are interested in the way that the constituents of reality combine together. The metaphor of *religare*, true to its etymological meaning as ‘to bind strongly,’ ‘to put together,’ ‘to assemble’ disperses disembodied and disembedded approaches such as Hegel’s spirit of the times, Michel Foucault’s (1997) fascination with the ethos, milieu of the Enlightenment, Foucault’s own exaltation of discourse as well as Patrick Curry’s (2010d) steady focus on a non-modern sensibility. Our literal meta-physics of religion pays attention to the disposition of the elements of reality, a disposition which is always embodied, embedded and contextualized. The uncompromising politics of *religare* take issue with the various ways in which this contextualized disposition is arranged.

Against this backdrop, we shall refer to the history of Western metaphysics as the disposition proper to philosophy and science as *epistēmē*, or as the epistemological layout or, for that matter, disposition.

III

Four Research Questions For A Post-Ecoidal Age – It should be noted that what was a lived utopia in my teens³, turned into a growing dystopia by my early twenties, and has manifested as a search for understanding and hope since my mid-twenties. Against this background, the present dissertation is an attempt to address the following queries:

(1) What is this pervasive, indisputable, so profoundly palpable, ecoidal contemporaneity we are forced to adapt to as our ability to swim at will, as an instance of labouring, reposing and conducting healing and recreational activities⁴ in our autochthonous or subsequently adopted places, is being constrained by further development?

³ Which can only be so defined in face of our dystopian present.

⁴ As Tim Jackson has aptly noted in a personal communication, these abilities should be extended, among other terrains, to nutrition, shelter, exploration, relationship, reproduction, identity. Jackson also suggested happiness, but as Chapter 9 will clarify, this putative site follows, in my view, from the arrangement of other factors – it is its contingent by product.

(2) How much hope are we to place upon the institutional project for sustainable development in relation to the regaining of our old ability to swim at will, and therefore labour, repose and conduct healing and recreational activities in our native or subsequently adopted places?

(3) Does the regaining of our old ability to swim at will in our original places altogether entail to locate novel conditions of possibility for a kind of knowledge capable of grappling with the ramifications, splittings, manifestations of an ecocidal mode of being? “An inquiry whose aim is to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory bec[o]me[s] possible” (Foucault 1980 [1970]: xxi) again. Or what is equal to saying, what transformations are needed in the ‘critical theory’ project if ‘nature’ is to be wholly incorporated into its conceptual and political framework?

(4) In short, how are we to cognitively –and politically— exit the ecocidal, dystopian present?

2. Sustainable Development In Ecocidal Times: An Anachronistic Instance Of Science As *Epistēmē*

I

Common Denominators Of Sustainable Development - Sustainable development is a project already at work (WCED 1987). It may have some merit to proceed by addressing research question (4) by way of (2). We should therefore conduct an inquiry into whether the project under this rubric is the blueprint that will guide us out of the ecocidal, dystopian present so that we may regain our ability to swim at will –as a metonymy for labouring, reposing and conducting healing and recreational activities in our own or subsequently adopted places.

There are plural understandings of sustainable development (cf. Jackson 2006a). For reasons that will be clarified at the beginning of Chapter 2, the banner at issue has undergone a process that positions it now on a par with the term democracy. Democracy is a highly elastic signifier that speaks for disparate dispensations. It can be stretched out to one extreme by anarchist authors to refer to direct –as opposed to representative— politics. It is reclaimed with the same impetus by an opposite extreme made up of the likes such as the American administration to justify warfare incursions into various countries. Similarly, currently the placard of sustainable development and its associated form sustainability is different things to different

groups of people. It is, on the one hand, eagerly upheld by ecocrats who regard the management of nature as the justification for the centralized forms of governance that have destabilized her in the first place. This signifying bloc is, on the other hand, also appropriated by rural activists in West Bengal who exhibit the most exemplary practices of Gandhian politics. The topic of the present dissertation falls well beyond a discourse analysis of the various ends to which either the placard sustainable development or that of sustainability are put to use –our concern is the conditions of possibility of knowledge for a post-ecocidal age. We shall therefore identify the promise of sustainable development with the official or, at any rate, primordial definition and strategy. This choice is by no means arbitrary. The initial characterization of sustainable development is playing a crucial role in the perpetuation and naturalization of the modern mode of being, as it will be unravelled below.

The *locus classicus* of the primal characterization of *Our Common Future*, a report drawn up by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) under the aegis of the General Assembly of the United Nations. After its chairperson, the document at issue is also known as the Brundtland Report. In this initial statement, “[s]ustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED: 43). Now, to introduce the germane concept ‘sustainability,’ we may go by way of a definition attributed to ‘sustainable consumption.’ Let us take the characterization of the British Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) as an example. The DTI understands “[s]ustainable consumption and production [a]s continuous economic and social progress that respects the limits of the Earth's ecosystems, and meets the needs and aspirations of everyone for a better quality of life, now and for future generations to come” (quoted in Jackson 2006b: 5). This is a precious definition in that it captures the common denominator of sustainable consumption specifically⁵, and the promise of sustainable development more generically. Let us next explore this set of concomitances systematically.

⁵ For more definitions cf. Jackson 2006b: 5.

1/ *The Analytic Of Finitude, Man & The Environment*

As quoted above, the rubric sustainable development highlights environmental limits —‘progress that respects the limits of the Earth's ecosystems’. This appeal to limits is reminiscent of the analytic of finitude proper to the modern mode of being in the West, when “man [...] find[s] the constant reminder of his limitations in his needs” (Foucault 1980 [1970]: 314). Once Western philosophy cleanses itself from religious and metaphysical cosmetics to enter the modern age, the finite status of the human condition is more perspicuously perceived. “Man's finitude is heralded –and imperiously so— in the positivity of knowledge” (ibid: 313). Man, finitude and this kind of knowledge –positivism— that is no longer concerned “with an edifice of theory structured upon deductions from absolute principles, but rather with viewing events as they occurred and discussing actual problems that had arisen” (Shaw 2005 [2003]: 25) conform to the distinctive trinity of the Modern Age:

if man's knowledge is finite, it is because he is trapped, without possibility of liberation, within the positive contents of language, labour, and life; and inversely, if labour, and language may be posited in their positivity, it is because knowledge has finite forms (Foucault 1980 [1970]: 314).

This emphasis upon existential contours is part-and-parcel of the canonical definition of sustainable development, which highlights humanity's finitude *vis-à-vis* the capacity of the environment to sustain its needs. “Sustainable development [...] contains within it [...] the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs” (WCED 1987: 43).

The primacy of finitude follows from the tendency of modern philosophy to regard the being of man as its object of study. One must note that such marked anthropocentrism, first apparent in Kant, is self-referential and moulded by factors internal to philosophy. It reasons that the objective factors that restrict knowledge – space, time and the framework of the categories that Kant proposes— are also the conditions for the possibility of knowledge. “Despite its finitude –and also because of it— human reason takes over the role of God as legislator for both nature and morality” (Yovel 1989b: 7). No wonder that finitude, man and the environment

conform to a triad. We should indeed note the arbitrariness of the chosen objective factors, which fail to highlight the political agenda of Kant's time. Rather, Kant's philosophy aims at an immortal truth, holding together independently of one's actuality. Be this as it may, human finitude's self-foundation in the modern age stands both for the founding, and the fundamental and the positive. In the ecocidal mode of being, the environment turns into the exalted foil for human finitude. The environment becomes part of man's extended finitude and thus part of man's own foundation. Scientific bodies such as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED 1987) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2001, 2007) develop an analytic of finitude of **Man** in relation to the limited carrying capacity of his environment. In so proceeding, these scientific bodies and the institutional endeavour on sustainable development grow situated in the core of the modern mode of being. The empirical work of these two scientific bodies situates Man's needs in the bilateral flows of the physical and cultural bodies, on the one hand, and the environment's "maximum sustainable yield" (WCED 1987: 45), on the other. By way of sustainable development, which poses the queries "which of nature's 'services' are indispensable for further development, and to what extent?" [...] "Which 'services' of nature are dispensable or can be replaced by, for example, new materials or genetic engineering"? (Sachs 1996: 244), the analytic of finitude is drawn on new contours. Man's awareness of his finitude is exacerbated in relation to his environmental limitations.

Whilst in the early modern age, empirical biological knowledge of the human body marks the threshold of finitude, with the advent of the ecocidal mode of being –or at any rate heightened and officially-voiced awareness thereof, it is the environment and its carrying capacities that circumscribe the boundaries of human life. To put it inversely, it is humanity's acute urgency to have "access to resources" (WCED 1987: 43) what extends, via the institutional project of sustainable development, the modern condition onto the environment. "[F]initude is always designated on the basis of man as a concrete being and on the basis of the empirical forms that can be assigned to his existence" (Foucault 1980 [1970]: 318, 313; cf. also Latour 1993). What must be retained at this initial stage is that sustainable development, in enacting the analytic of

finitude to secure humanity's existence, remains anchored in the modern mode of being. This realization modifies, in turn, the course of our investigation. Research questions (2) & (4) in tandem will now read: shall the modern mode of being steer us out of the ecocidal mode of being?

There is a topic closely related to the analytic of finitude which is highly pertinent to address research question (3), that is, relevant to our groping through the conditions of possibility of that kind of knowledge that shall assist us in our process of regaining our sites of labour, repose, healing and leisure. The modern age presents finitude as a caustic fabric against traits of the history of Western philosophy: "Modern thought [...] will contest even its own metaphysical impulses, and show that reflections upon life, labour, and language, in so far as they have value as analytics of finitude, express the end of metaphysics" (Foucault 1980 [1970]: 317). Finitude presents Western metaphysics as "a veil of illusion" (ibid), a form of estrangement –"an alienated form of thought" (ibid)– and, therefore, as a passing "cultural episode" (ibid). Yet for all its anti-metaphysical claims, finitude *per se* is no guarantee of full eradication of Western metaphysical traits. The structure of finitude may be still disposed in dependency upon part of the network that defines the Western metaphysical tradition. "All metaphysics, including its opponent, positivism, speaks the language of Plato" (Heidegger 2000f [1978]: 444).

This being so, the concern for finitude that traverses the politics of sustainable development further contextualizes this institutional endeavour in a context even broader than that demarcated by the modern age. The quest for sustainable development shows some initial signs to be a spinoff of the history of Western philosophy in the ecocidal mode of being. Western philosophy may be characterized as an episode in the history of European culture inaugurated by Socrates but largely prefigured by Parmenides (Feyerabend 1987: 121; Plotnitsky 1994: 231; Panikkar 2009: 284), [that] "goes back to the Greeks, and goes sideways into all sorts of non-philosophical disciplines which have, at one time or another, proposed themselves as substitutes for epistemology, and thus for philosophy" (Rorty 1980: 390). This is a philosophical and scientific trajectory that grounds cognitive processes upon *epistēmē*,

namely, upon the production of “certain theoretical knowledge of abstract universals” (Curry 2004f: 104) commonly understood as *logos*, *ratio*, reason. “Kant is no less certain than Heraclitus that th[e] ordering of perceptions, this *kosmos*, is governed by a *logos* which transcends the merely local differences of history and power” (Allen 1993: 28). This is a tradition ruled by the supreme law of aesthetic Socratism: ““To be beautiful everything must be intelligible”” (Nietzsche 1967a: 84).

In the wake of Nietzsche and denoting distinct emphases upon its different aspects, this philosophical and scientific tradition has been referred to as the history of Western metaphysics, metaphysics of presence, ontotheology, logocentrism and the epistemological tradition (Schrift 1990, 1995: 14; Derrida 1997: 12 *et passim*; Heidegger 2000f [1993]: 446; Rorty 1980). To facilitate research question (3) and feature the fact that it is possible to engage in non-epistemological philosophical and scientific *praxis*, it is equally legitimate to refer to this tradition as philosophy and science as *epistēmē*, or as noted above, in line with our exposition of the facts in the light of *religare*, as the epistemological layout or disposition. In the following, it will be exhibited how the rubric ‘sustainable development’ replicates six traits proper to Western metaphysics, namely, rationalism; logocentrism; binary logic; unproblematic reversal; restricted economy; and teleology of progress.

2/Rationalism

Modern philosophy starts with the acceptance of the collapse of metaphysics, and the search for philosophical grounding for human action out of its own actuality. The leading exponent of modern thought, Immanuel Kant, accepted the loss of metaphysical anchoring. Yet, as it was highlighted in the previous section, Kant came short of deriving a critical rationality out of his contemporaneity. Instead, the Prussian thinker submitted philosophy to an idealist turn. Or, what is equal to saying, Kant faced up to the metaphysical loss by culminating the Cartesian *cogito* and propounding universal –decontextualizing— human subjectivity as the new guardian over superstition, custom and despotism (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1991 [1986]; Habermas 1991 [1986]; Rorty 1980).

The meaning of truth in classical and modern philosophies differs in so far as the latter is brought to bear upon distinct ontological *a prioris*. It is natural phenomena with a principle of their own what marks the tone for truth in classical philosophy. By contrast, the Cartesian *cogito* and its culmination into Kantian ground operate as the new platform for apt knowledge in the modern age. Kant's critical reason, to be sure, supplants the place reserved for nature in classical philosophy by the subject's subjectivity. In this novel setting, human "understanding does not derive its laws from, but prescribes them to, nature" (Kant quoted in Allen 1993: 37).

With Kant, the Archimedean point of philosophy and science as *epistēmē* turns anti-naturalistic and comes indeed to reside upon human reason, "a foreign power that has to impose its laws upon nature from without" (Yovel 1989b: 7). This U-turn is referred to as Kant's Copernican Revolution, namely, the movement by which the *logos* that sanctions the epistemological disposition is relocated in subjective idealism. Kant's scholarly endeavour is the victorious anthropomorphization of *logos*. "The human mind itself, when exercising its rationally structured spontaneity, prescribes the basic laws of morality and religion to itself, just as it legislates the universal and necessary lawlike patterns that nature itself obeys" (ibid).

Subjective idealism is the context where science as *epistēmē* evolves (cf. Rorty 1980: ch 3; Allen 1993: ch. 2; Latour 1993: ch 2). "[T]he truth of the Platonic ideas has become more and more identifiable with the objectivity of the statements of physics" (Vattimo 2002: 14). Rationalist philosophers, Descartes and Spinoza, marked the first moves in this direction (cf. Serrano 2011). Yet it is Kant who substantiates the divide between philosophy vs. science and *epistēmē* by rendering the former the primary, underlying discipline. "The eventual demarcation of philosophy from science was made possible by the notion that philosophy's core was 'theory of knowledge', a theory distinct from the sciences because it was their *foundation*" (Rorty 1980: 132). Heideggerian sources regard the transition from philosophy as *epistēmē* into science as *epistēmē* more as a logical conclusion of a trend long initiated than as a schism. "The development of philosophy into the independent sciences [...] that, however,

interdependently communicate among themselves ever more markedly, is the legitimate completion of philosophy” (Heidegger 2000f [1993]: 434 *et passim*).⁶ Heidegger, that is to say, regards empiricism as a mere prolongation of philosophy as *epistēmē*. “Epistemology was not necessarily a rationalist enterprise. Indeed, its last great defenders were and are empiricists” (Taylor 1987: 465).

Sustainable development attests to this anthropocentric rational vein: “at stake is not just the sustainable development of shared ecosystems and the commons, but of all nations whose development depends to a greater or lesser extent on their rational management,” reads a passage in *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987: 261). Ecology, the discourse on the natural environment set in order by the enlightened mind as we shall further see in the next subsection, is to inform the right management of ‘Earth's ecosystems’ or ‘environmental resources’ an entity which is seen as practically segregated from the human realm, were it not that it guarantees humanity’s needs. “[S]ustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible and to which all can reasonably aspire” (WCED 1987: 44). As it was anticipated above, sustainable development must be read as the legislator of modern features once ecocidal tendencies that follow from the realization of the latter become apparent with the naked eye.

3/ Logocentric Claims to Truth & Ecology

As a vestige of Christian dualism preserved by way of the God that underwrites the Cartesian schism, Kantianism favours logocentric claims to truth anchored in transcendental human reason. This practice “is a product of viewing knowledge as an assemblage of representations” (Rorty 1980: 136). Kantian categories –substance, quantity, quality, relation, action, affection, place, time, position and state— are no more than ontological attributes, properties, qualities or characteristics that can be predicated of a thing. The need for “unconditional authorities [truth and *logos*] is so

⁶Yet as Heidegger (2000 [1978]: 433) notes “[we forget that already in the age of Greek philosophy a decisive characteristic of philosophy appears: the development of the sciences within the field that philosophy opened up.”

strong that, even in a critical age such as Kant's, it showed itself superior to the need for criticism and was, in a certain sense, able to subject the entire work of critical reason and put it to its own uses" (Nietzsche 1967c: § 412; cf. Rorty 1980: ch 3). In this light, biology must be interpreted as the human discourse on life or the logocentric representation thereof; ecology as the discourse on the natural household or the logocentric representation thereof; geology as the human discourse on the Earth or the logocentric representation thereof; sociology as the discourse on society or the logocentric representation thereof; and so on and so forth. All the sciences prolifically ferment in this logocentrically-mediated ethos unravelled by the human mind. "By taking the totality of beings and making it dependant upon the synthetic accomplishments of the subject, Kant downgrades the cosmos into the object domain of the nomological natural sciences" (Habermas 1996 [1992]: 407), where nomology is the human treatise on –read: logocentric representation of– laws and their interpretation.⁷ Kantian and neo-Kantian authors "present themselves as the inheritors of the Greek claim that to understand is to identify a 'logos,' or in Latin a 'ratio,' both terms leading to reason, to account" (Stengers 2009). Hence Nietzsche's (1967a: §. 13) derogatory branding of Socrates as "the precursor of an altogether different culture, art and morality." Socrates readily identified knowledge with *epistēmē*, namely, as a logocentric quest for abstract universals, marking thereby the tone for the entirety of Western philosophy. Socrates "made of life something that must be judged, measured, restricted, and of thought, a measure, a limit, that is exercised in the name of higher values: the Divine, the True, the Beautiful, the Good..." (Deleuze, 2001 [1965]: 70).

This rational vein is with no less impetus exalted in the scientific project of sustainable development. In *Our Common Future* the human power of representation remains another name for the production of knowledge. Ecology turns now into the domain of representation *par excellence*; the cognitive matrix from which predicates on nature emanate, are justified and pronounced as necessary. The "common and mutually supportive objectives" in the Brundtland Report must "take account of the interrelationships between people, resources, environment and development" (WCED 1987: IX).

⁷'Nomos' is the Greek form for 'use, costum, law.'

4/ Culture/Nature As An Instance Of Epistemological Binary Logic

Another salient trait of philosophy and science as *epistēmē* is binary logic or “*the belief in antitheses of values*” (Nietzsche 2003: § 2). The Western philosophical tradition has been one of clear-cut blacks *or* whites. “Aristotle gave us our binary logic and much of our scientific worldview. He taught us to logic chop and always draw the line between opposites, between the thing and the not-thing, between A and not-A. The better you drew those lines, the more logical your mind and the more exact your science” (Kosko 1994: 68). One can find an abundance of these bipolar positions enacted in this tradition; “we define metaphysics by the distinction between two worlds” (Deleuze 2001 [1965]: 69-70): nature/culture, idealism/materialism; good/bad; unity/plurality; *logos/mythos*, logic/rhetoric, intelligible/sensible, speech/writing, literal/figurative, presence/absence, intuition/signification, identity/difference, truth/error (Baynes *et al.* 1987: 119; Schrift 1995: 15; Johnson 2004: viii). It must be noted that the two entities, far from standing on equal footing, form an uneven structure with the first contrasted pole in a privileged position over the second. An “opposition of metaphysical concepts [...] is never the face-to-face of two terms, but a hierarchy and an order of subordination” (Derrida 1984 [1971]: 329). The second term is considered as the degraded, corrupted and undesirable version of the first. Out of the lengthy list, one binary pair may be readily associated with the rubric sustainable development, namely, culture/nature. However, in our context, the order of the opposition is reversed as both the culture and nature we are dealing with are cognates of the Cartesian *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, respectively.

On one reading, sustainable development is the all-out crusade that the West undertakes in face of an increasingly absent nature. This dire situation renders human finitude more acutely conspicuous against a backdrop that now must be taken into account, and for which an alleged whole new culture –sustainable development– is marshalled. In this light, we may corroborate our initial suspicion that the analytic of finitude proper to the modern age –which the institutional project of sustainable development proceeds to relate to environmental matters– is pervaded with vestiges of the tradition of philosophy and science as *epistēmē*. Far from defeating Western

metaphysics, this analytic extends the traits common to this trajectory into the ecocidal mode of being. Sustainable development, in so far as it enlists the Cartesian dispensation that also characterizes the modern age, “require[s] an absolute distinction between the two terms [culture/nature] and the continual repression of the work of mediation” (Latour 1993: 140), and therefore also that of analysis. Yet the proliferation of all kinds of artefacts, from GMOs to IMF policies geared at structural adjustment, to geo-engineering rather speaks of a highly populated space in-between the extremes ‘culture’ and ‘nature’. A genetically-modified seed, to take the example above, is neither fully ‘natural’ nor fully ‘cultural’. Rather, it lies somewhere in-between the continuum that ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ draw should we be able to approach the bipolar oppositions from a non-hierarchical perspective (Nietzsche 2005 [2001]: § 112). In other words, the space of analysis opens up once the contrasted Cartesian *res cogitans* vs. *res extensa* undergo a profound recasting. This space is suffocated in the quest to sustain present and prospective human needs against a backdrop that secures the latter.

The marked anthropocentrism imbuing *Our Common Future*, announced above in the section ‘Logocentric Claims To Truth & Ecology,’ is perennial to the history of philosophy and science as *epistēmē*. “[T]he name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or ontotheology –in other words, throughout his entire history— has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation [...]” (Derrida 1978f: 292). Anthropocentrism is further exacerbated in the modern age, when man, the subject of representational knowledge becomes, at the same time, the object of knowledge. In the ecocidal mode of being, the finitude of the human condition is mainly apparent in the *res extensa*, where environmental constraints limit the possibilities of man. In the institutional project of sustainable development the self-presentation of meaning proper to logocentrism is indeed apparent in the domain of ecology. Universal, regular and unchangeable laws are attributed to Cartesian-Newtonian nature. These emerging epistemological predicates place the latter freely upon the hands of global management (cf. Sachs 1996). The signifying structure man-present-in-nature is another name for sustainable development.

The regular nature by which the application of eco-efficient means are to render productivity sustainable is “a central presence which has never been itself, has always been exiled from itself into its own substitute” (Derrida 1978f: 280). The regular, manipulative and cause-effect-determined presence that man assumes in nature is only a foundered, logocentric representation of the latter. Derrida induces us to conceive the actual manifestation of ‘the natural’ by alternative means. “The most dangerous monotheism is that of a rationalist nature” (Panikkar 2009: 99; own translation from the Catalan translation). In this context, Nietzsche had already suggested to replace the principle of causality proper to the natural sciences with a continuum (cf. Nietzsche 2005 [2001]: § 112).⁸ Via Derrida we can infer that sustainable development conveys a nominal natural presence which coerces “the *play* of the structure” (Derrida 1978f: 278) (read: the activities that take place in a given context)⁹ not by what it promises to be delivering but by what it succeeds in concealing and naturalizing. In other words, by perpetuating the humanity/nature divide, sustainable development closes off the spatiality of critical analysis.

5/ An Unproblematized Reversal Of Productivity In The Context Of Industrial Capitalism

Once the pervasiveness of binary logic is duly understood, we are only one step away from the formulation of another defining trait of philosophy and science as *epistēmē*, namely, ‘unproblematized reversals.’ Within this category, the dialectical space becomes only sufficiently wide to accommodate oscillations between two extremes of the same worldview. An unproblematized reversal is “a reversal that is unaccompanied by a reinscription of the members of a given metaphysically established opposition or hierarchy [...] leav[ing thereby] the metaphysical base supporting the initial configuration untouched” (Plotnitsky 1994: 35). Unproblematized reversals conform to the opposite, second-rate, pole of a logocentric initial position. In this light, ‘nature’ is the unproblematized reversal of ‘culture,’ ‘matter’ that of ‘mind.’ Unproblematized reversals are often adopted when the deficiencies of the initial pole become so

⁸ For a further development of this topic cf. Chapter 6, Section 3, Subsection 1 below.

⁹ To be more precise, in Derrida ‘play’ stands for the inflections that emerge out of the Nietzschean affirmation of life, in contradistinction to the “eschatological meaning of being as presence, [...] as life without difference: another name for death” (Derrida 1997: 71).

conspicuously apparent that one needs to re-invent one's own position. Yet this remains a cosmetic operation as long as one falls short of simultaneously recasting the operative metaphysical disposition where the initial polarity is inscribed. Indeed, it often occurs that values change but "what is essential hasn't changed: the perspectives or the evaluations on which these values, whether old or new, depend" (Deleuze 2001 [1965]: 71) remain intact.

The banner 'sustainable development' lends to the charge of being an unproblematized reversal of, and thus of conforming to a binary pair with, its complementing and ratifying logic, viz. productivity. Let us recall that the second term in the dichotomy is deemed as a second-rate activity; as the undesirable, negative, distancing, failed version of the original. It is the first term the component that opens up the spatiality of meaning and, in so doing, indelibly marks the tone for both ends of the opposition. Within this determined bosom of significance, the second term articulates itself in negative terms. Absence is lack of presence, and error a defiguration of truth. Sustainable development, for its part, should be seen as menaced productivity. The formula 'sustainable development' encapsulates within its heading the two poles of the opposition –viz. productivity/development. "Currently, the term sustainable development is used as a synonym for the oxymoronic sustainable growth" (Daly 1996: 193).¹⁰

The basic message conveyed in *Our Common Future* may be summarized by way of this passage: "What is needed now is a new era of economic growth –growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable" (WCED 1987). The assumptions in these sentences lend to an analogy in a similar debate. Amartya Sen declares that "[t]o lead a life without shame [...] requires a more expensive bundle of goods and services in a society that is generally richer" (quoted in Jackson 2006d: 373-374). Sen, that is, is simply naturalizing people's functioning in wealthy nations. In response, Tim Jackson promptly notices that Sen's declarations are "not really an

¹⁰ This also means that 'sustainable development' lends to the charges of 'development'. "Here is an idea [development] which has been eminently influential, highly misleading (precisely because, in its partial correctness, it has seemed so persuasively self-evident), and consequently generative of false expectations (both intellectually and politically). And yet there are very few indeed who are ready truly to unthink this central notion" (Wallerstein 2001: 2). This exercise is one such attempt.

explanation at all, merely a description of a contingent state of affairs: we behave this way in rich societies, because this is what rich societies are like” (ibid: 374). Correlatively, we may conclude as regards Brundtland's naturalization of Western, industrial standards of living that it ‘is not really an explanation at all’ of essential human needs. Rather, the explicit necessity of industrial production, and, for that matter, sustainable development, is a construct based upon ‘a contingent state of affairs’ that stems directly from Western and Westernized cultural convictions. “Opinions may be ‘objective’ [...] as if they had arisen from the very essence of the world while merely reflecting the peculiarities of a particular approach” (Feyerabend 1987: 73). Besides, this pretence of objectivity further reveals the Western origin of the creed ‘sustainable development’. “Believing that there is such thing as a purely objective thought is one of the main Western dogmatisms” (Panikkar 2009: 99; own translation from the Catalan translation).

In *Our Common Future*, industrial production is the undisputable mode of production for prospective generations (cf. WCED 1987: ch 8). Human finitude is manifested as a multiple concern for food and energy security only met with the expansion of industrial bases. “Many essential human needs can be met only through goods and services provided by industry. The production of food requires increasing amounts of agrochemicals and machinery. Beyond this, the products of industry form the material basis of contemporary standards of living” (WCED 1987: 206), in a context where “all nations” (ibid) are assumed to “require and rightly aspire to efficient industrial bases to meet changing needs” (ibid). The desired form of human culture, that is to say, takes the form of industrial production. We see again how the formula **sustainable development is a late-modern binary pair positioned at the antipodal and complicit extreme of production**. Sustainable development vindicates the existence and implications of industrial production by highlighting the implicit environmental dependency of the latter. Against this backdrop, eco-efficient formulas are to metamorphose domestic productivity into sustainable development. “[I]ndustries and industrial operations should be encouraged that are more efficient in terms of resource use, that generate less pollution and waste, that are based on the use of renewable rather non-renewable resources, and that minimize irreversible adverse

impacts on human health and the environment” (ibid: 213).

Putatively, the motive of this hierarchizing opposition –from industrial productivity to eco-efficiency and sustainable development— must be found in the transgression that the modern green movement represents for industrialization. In the post-1945 period industrialization is rebranded 'development' (Wallerstein 2001: 2; Sachs 1996; Rist 2002: ch. 10). “It is precisely the force and efficiency of the system that regularly change transgressions into ‘false exists’” (Derrida 1984 [1972]: 135). In our context, the ‘false exit’ is industrial eco-efficiency or ‘sustainable development’, which massively sanitizes the green movement. “[T]he naturalist and biocentric currents of present-day environmentalism have been cut out by th[e] conceptual operation” (Sachs 1996: 244) of sustainable development.

“To produce [a] signifying structure obviously cannot consist of reproducing” (Derrida 1997: 158) the disposition of the modern age and of the epistemological tradition in the rubric of ‘sustainable development’. “Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorize itself to say almost anything. But this indispensable guardrail has always only *protected*, it has never *opened*,” (ibid) a spatiality. When the motif sustainable development is engendered along the *guardrail* of industrial ‘productivity’, it preserves all the traits of the latter and, for that matter, it fails to open up the space of modulations. In this light, we can read sustainable development as the strategy in ecocidal times by which “metaphysics normalizes Western discourse” (Derrida 1984a [1968]: 23), rendering propositional, universal knowledge –as delivered by the realm of ecology— the natural way of cognition, and industrial production the common way of sustenance.

It must be noted that a number of scholars have tried to read the rubric ‘sustainable development’ from more radical perspectives. The advent of the related signifier ‘sustainability’ partially attests to these novel developments. The leading ecological economist Herman Daly (1996b: 237, cf. also Daly 1996a), to name one strategy, reclaims the original definition of ‘development’ –“the qualitative evolution to a fuller, better, or different state.” On the basis of this nuanced characterization, Daly is in the

position to extricate sustainable development from 'sustainable growth' (Daly 1996a). "Development without growth is sustainable development" (Goodland 1996: 237). The politics of such alternative approaches are, it goes without saying, respectable. Yet we still must operate a critical reading of these emerging directions from the perspective of post-ecocidal conditions of possibility of knowledge. In this respect, it must be noted that this brand of sustainable development or sustainability which reclaims a qualitative change remains cognate with mainstream sustainable development: it reinstates the anthropocentric analytic of finitude proper to the modern age, it places rationalism centre stage, and it advocates the generation of a logocentric planetary science which easily falls in the hands of global ecocrats.

6/ The Perpetuation Of Restricted Economy

The enlisting of Cartesian nature introduces us to an additional theme of the history of philosophy and science as *epistēmē*. It is the distinction, prominently raised by Georges Bataille, between restricted economy or classical theory and general economy or non-classical theory (Bataille 2004b; Derrida 1978e; Habermas 1987c; Plotnitsky 1993a: ch. 1, 1994: ch. 2). Restricted economy characterizes

classical theories across a broad spectrum of Western intellectual history: in philosophy, in social & human sciences, history and other fields. Mathematics and the natural and exact sciences, too, can be seen as restricted economies, when their practice is governed by metaphysical epistemologico-ontological agendas, as they have often been even in the works of many revolutionary scientists, from Kepler to Einstein, and beyond (Plotnitsky 1994: 2).

One of the cornerstones of this conceptual setting is the position, so called given its staticism in the disposition of the elements, in the *religare* grid. Positions, to be sure, are the currency proper to the epistemological disposition. They convey ontological predicates or, what is equal to saying, perennial, static truths. Different post-Kantian authors have attributed different meanings and emphasized different aspects of the positions at issue and the ontological predicates they generate. Nietzsche (1967c: § 275), to name one, presents the position as a 'categorical imperator' or 'metaphysic of unity'; Derrida (1978f: 279 *et passim*), to name another, as 'metaphors and

metonymies of Being as presence'; Plotnitsky (1994: 6-7) via Bohr and Ferré (1988) names a position as 'idealizations'; and Curry as 'monist essentialism' (2003).

One of the cornerstones of restricted economy is the pervasive tendency to unify diverse parameters under a single value. The belief that plurality may be traced back to one is certainly one of the fulcrums of Western metaphysics. The fall of Christian morality, "Christian conscience, [was] translated and sublimated into a scientific conscience, into intellectual cleanliness at any price" (Nietzsche 2005 [2001]: § 357). Friedrich Nietzsche upbraids the course of Western science for indiscriminately lending allegiance to two authorities exempt from conditions, namely, truth and *logos*. "One needed God as an unconditional sanction, with no court of appeal, as a 'categorical imperator'—: or, if one believed in the authority of reason, one needed a metaphysic of unity, by virtue of which this was logical" (Nietzsche 1967c: § 275; cf. also Curry 2006: 109). Jacques Derrida (1978f: 279), for his part, defines the history of Western metaphysics as a series of "metaphors and metonymies [...] of Being as presence." These are the various expressions of *epistēmē*, which "since Plato" have set philosophical and scientific work under constant "repression and suppression" (Derrida 1978d: 196). These practices have established the science of presence, or logocentrism, where self-evident meaning—the ontological predication of an alleged objective reality ('The sky is blue')— is assumed as the ideal form of knowledge. In a similar manner, Arkady Plotnitsky, in the wake of Niels Bohr, brands as idealizations those theories such as classical physics that unify parameters—as opposed to complementing them. Patrick Curry (2006: 109; cf. also Curry 2003, 2007) calls each such idealizations 'monist essentialism,' the fundamental premise of which being "that there is *a single reference point* by which all other possible perspectives are exhausted". While "the doctrine of universal unity [p]rior to Plotinius [...] was called the idea of the good or the first mover; after him, it was called *summum ens*, the unconditioned, or absolute spirit," (Habermas 1996 [1992]: 399) in the ecocidal mode of being such totalizing doctrine comes in the form of sustainable development. In face of the noxious effects of industrialism, industrial *homo faber* must be tamed but not questioned—let alone eradicated.

A salient trait of restricted economy is indeed the credence that plenitude, full presence, full knowing is a plausible possibility. Restricted economy assumes that “universally true knowledge [is] an achievable goal” (Curry 2003: § 7). Yet the paradox is that “such reasoning *never occurs*” (ibid: § 4; emphasis in the original) or, expressed in Nietzsche’s (1967c: Book I, § 12) apt exhortation “but behold, there is no such universal!; [...] any comprehensive unity in the plurality of events is lacking.” Curry and Nietzsche interpret the epistemological practice of describing “the eternal elements in the intelligible gathering-together (*logos*) of a static yet tensed (enduring, permanently present) natural order (*kosmos*)” (Allen 1993: 11) as thoroughly impracticable. Nietzsche (1967c: Book I, § 12) reads such practice as nihilistic; it renders “the world look[...] *valueless*”. What is more, as soon as one sets to analyze restricted economies, the illusory unity of its provenance vanishes, and the local effects along with its power relations become apparent (Plotnitsky 1993b: 150 *et passim*; Derrida 1978f: 278-281).¹¹

Restricted economies customarily consider their objects as utterly meaningful and claim that the systems they deal with can avoid the unproductive expenditure of energy while controlling multiplicity and indeterminacy (Plotnitsky 1994: 2). General economy, by contrast, repeatedly emphasizes the existence of ineluctable losses in every action. It is thus restricted economies that breed the belief in the suitability of logocentric knowledge on the environment or ecology, in a fully manageable nature and in the possibility of eco-efficiency. “The maintaining of any unique or absolute grounding, such as fundamental meaning, consciousness, or presence, will lead to a restricted economy” (Plotnitsky 1993a: 78). The vision of sustainable development, with a docile nature taken for granted and utterly controllable by Promethean man, is an expression of restricted economy in the ecocidal mode of being.

7/ The Enactment Of The Western Teleology Of Progress

The rigorous preservation of epistemological traits in the age of sustainable development further feeds the faith in a teleology of progress. It portrays Western history from its Socratic cradle and earlier times as an unbroken ascent towards the

¹¹ For the further development of this point, cf. Chapter 2, Section 1, Subsection I below.

perfectibility of the world paying “at once tribute to the greatness, and indispensability of the past, and confidence in an ever more golden future” (Nisbet 1980: 8) sturdily anchored in the industrial mode of production. Sustainable development is, in this light, the consummation of Western metaphysics. “The completion of philosophy, the most extreme possibility or ‘place’ for metaphysics, is a world civilization based on the Western technological model. This model is the Platonic *idea* ostensibly drained of all ontological content and become a mere cipher, a monadic carrier of information, a unit of cybernetic science” (Krell 2000 [1993]: 428). In this unbroken trajectory, the promise of sustainable development is in charge of eradicating the decadent consequences that follow from the deployment of the Western scientific and technological progress. What is more, sustainable development, which, in partaking of “the idea of progress[,] is a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future” (Nisbet 1980: 5), restores the damaged reputation of industrial production in the face of desertification, biodiversity loss, climate forcing, global warming –to name a few expressions of the ecocidal mode of being. Sustainable development, in securing ‘continuous economic and social progress’¹² or ‘development’¹³ is the hinge for industrial production in the ecocidal mode of being. On this reading, the project of ‘sustainable development’ may be read as a Hegelian *Aufhebung* or folding of development theory. Development theory sets down catching-up deployment of technological means for all countries on the planet to reach first world’s standards and beyond (Mies 1993a). Brundtland’s sustainable development prescribes the same recipe but certified with the ontological predicates that emanate from the field of ecology.

II

Sustainable Development Appears Impervious To The Ecocidal Mode Of Being -The rubric ‘sustainable development’, in relating human finitude to environmental limits, perpetuates the analytic of finitude proper to the modern age while extending the epistemological tradition into our days. As such, the institutional project of ‘sustainable development’ must be read as the complicit binary opposite of

¹² In the definition of sustainable consumption provided by the British DTI and quoted above.

¹³ In the canonical definition of sustainable development provided by *Our Common Future* and quoted above.

productivity, aiming at the restoration of a fully present and manageable nature instead of acknowledging the intrinsic failures of the eco-efficient endeavour along the lines of restricted economy. Yet what must be settled in order to address research question (4) by way of (2) is whether the agenda of sustainable development is a compatible candidate to **steer us out of the ecocidal mode of being**. To put it reversely, we must entertain the possibility that the prolongation of the modern mode of being into ecocidal times by way of sustainable development be an undesirable anachronism to conduce us to a post-ecocidal panorama. This hypothesis can be formulated even more compactly: is the modern mode of being capable of coping with –or, at any rate, registering– the ecocidal mode of being? On the grounds of the seven points outlined above, we may initially suspect that the promise of sustainable development “is designed to leave in the domain of the unthinkable the very thing that makes this conceptualization possible” (Derrida 1978f: 284), namely, the ecocidal mode of being.

It is the unpostponable remit of the philosophers of the future, to which we now turn, to render the blind spots of our present times transparent.

