

Crises in the Global Network Society

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ABSTRACT: This paper addresses the increasingly conspicuous, threefold crises in the contemporary global(-ized) world, namely the scientifically demonstrable, growing ecological crisis, what Žižek identifies as the lack of ethical substance, and what Foster enables one to understand as a crisis in the human sciences – three crises that are linked together by their occurrence in the globally encompassing “network society”, so graphically described and analysed by Manuel Castells in his book by that name (1996; 2010). Those aspects of the network society that comprise the field within which these crises (which do have their roots in the logic and practices of an earlier phase of modernity) can be comprehended as being systematically interconnected, are the modes of space and time peculiar to the network society. These are what Castells names “the space of flows” and “timeless time”, which contrast starkly with traditional “space of places” and sequential time (or, in the industrial society, “clock time”), as well as with “glacial time”, which underpins the practices of the environmental movement. It is argued that, unless a concerted attempt is made to slow down the process of environmental degradation, hand in hand with the recuperation of the ethical and political capacity of the human sciences and of humanity across the board, the crises in question may well culminate in the destruction of society and non-human nature as humans have known it. Particular attention is given to the work of Jacques Rancière as a source of understanding concerning the relationship between the arts and the human sciences, on the one hand, and their transformative relation to society in terms of “the distribution of the sensible”, on the other hand.

The Planetary Ecological Crisis

We live in apocalyptic times. This is the considered belief of an extraordinary contemporary philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, who also phrases it as *Living in the End Times* – the title of a book that appeared in 2010, and which contains between its covers so many intellectual *tours de force* that I, for one, will not even try to capture where they converge and diverge. Besides, the title neatly summarises what these reflections by the master of

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interweaving (neo-)Marxism and psychoanalytic theory have in common, namely being symptomatic of the “current” historical epoch drawing to a close, or showing signs of exhaustion (perhaps paving the way for the emergence of something new).

One of Žižek’s most timely reflections brings one face to face with the apocalypse in one of the areas of its manifestation: “ecological breakdown”; the other two being “the biogenetic reduction of humans to manipulable machines” and “total digital control over our lives” (2010: 327) – the latter perhaps most tellingly experienced at airports when one has to submit, willy-nilly, to sometimes very invasive “security measures”, which are slowly but surely making their way into other social spaces, too, such as when you have to go to consulates for visa applications. It is worth quoting Žižek at length (quoting Ayres):

At all these levels, things are approaching a zero-point, ‘the end time is near’ – here is Ed Ayres’s description: ‘We are being confronted by something so completely outside our collective experience that we don’t really see it, even when the evidence is overwhelming. For us, that “something” is a blitz of enormous biological and physical alterations in the world that has been sustaining us.’ At the geological and biological level, Ayres enumerates four ‘spikes’ (or accelerated developments) asymptotically approaching a zero-point at which the quantitative expansion will reach its point of exhaustion and will bring about a qualitative change. These four spikes are: population growth, consumption of resources, carbon gas emissions, and the mass extinction of species. In order to cope with this threat, our collective ideology is mobilizing mechanisms of dissimulation and simulation which include the direct will to ignorance [a fundamental Lacanian precept]: ‘a general pattern of behaviour among threatened human societies is to become more blinkered, rather than more focused on the crisis, as they fail.’ ... The recent shift in how those in power are reacting to global warming is a blatant display of such dissimulation.

He proceeds by clarifying what he means by the last statement, above, first reminding us of the recent discovery, by scientists, of the unexpectedly rapid melting of the Arctic sea-ice, and second, that not so long ago the usual response to scientific evidence of such imminent doom was, as might be expected, alarm and a corresponding “call for emergency measures: we are approaching an unthinkable catastrophe, and the time to act is quickly running out” (Žižek 2010: 327-328).

But guess what? This way of reacting has seen an about-turn: “Lately, however, we hear more and more voices enjoining us to be positive about global warming. The pessimistic predictions, so we are told, should be seen in a more balanced context” (p. 328). It is Žižek’s masterly, understated summary of the liabilities and assets, as it were, of global warming that really goes to the heart of the utter cynicism of the ruling elites of today (2010: 328):

True, climate change will bring increased resource competition, coastal flooding, infrastructure damage from melting permafrost, stresses on animal species and indigenous cultures, all this accompanied by ethnic violence, civil disorder, and

local gang rule. But we should also bear in mind that the hitherto hidden treasures of a new continent will be disclosed, its resources will become more accessible, its land more suitable for human habitation... Big businesses and state powers are already looking for new economic opportunities, which concern not only (or even primarily) 'green industry,' but much more simply the potential for further exploitation of nature opened up by climatic changes... according to current estimates, up to one quarter of the world's untapped oil and gas sources may lie under the Arctic Ocean.

If one had not become virtually numb in the face of the barrage of evidence, in one form or another, that the so-called "leaders" of the world – politicians as well as business leaders – do NOT bear the interests of ordinary people and of other living species at heart, this might have come as a shock. However, it does not, for the obvious reason that, after all the revelations, in recent years, of utter disregard for the natural environment as well as for people's so-called "democratic rights", on the part of many governments and many corporations (especially Big Oil), most of us have come to expect nothing less.

An exemplary instance, widely reported in the international media (Neubauer 2013; Safina 2013) recently, concerns coal exports threatening the continued existence of the most bio-diverse undersea eco-system on the planet, the Great Barrier Reef, because of the large amount of cargo shipping traffic right across the Reef. One is given the distinct impression that the human economy (which comprises only a small part of the overarching planetary ecology) is regarded as being more important than the ecology by the relevant Australian decision-makers.

Anyone who knows the difference between the encompassing planetary ecosystem, on which all life depends, and a sub-system such as the human "economy", would know how misguided this economic policy is: without the planetary ecology, there would NOT BE a human economy. Sadly, however, this is exactly the way that most politicians think today: there are no more statesmen and -women; their self-conception is that of "managers of the economy". The fact that politicians in South Africa are willing to prostitute the ecologically unique Karoo environment, as well as South Africa's scarce water resources, for the sake of money for shale gas from Shell Oil, is paradigmatic of this attitude (Du Toit 2013).

Most people have given up thinking of doing something to change this lamentable state of affairs, which is the most saddening thing of all. That does not have to include anyone with an active moral consciousness – there is reason to believe in the constant historical possibility of change, as long as sufficient numbers of people seize upon what Walter Benjamin called the sparks of "messianic time" that always intersperse the degraded time of the status quo, to bring about a "return" to a life worthy of being called human. The present time does not deserve such an epithet.

To return to Žižek's reflections on the "normalisation of the unthinkable", this is how he summarises it (2010: 328):

...an extraordinary social and psychological change is taking place right in front of our eyes – the impossible is becoming possible. An event first experienced as real but impossible (the prospect of a forthcoming catastrophe which, however probable it may be, is effectively dismissed as impossible) becomes real and no longer impossible (once the catastrophe occurs, it is "renormalised", perceived as part of the normal run of things, as always already having been possible). The gap which makes these paradoxes possible is that between knowledge and belief: we know the (ecological) catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not believe it will really happen.

Symptomatic of this paradoxical state of affairs is the way that the very same businessmen and politicians who, not so long ago, rejected the claims of scientists about global warming as "junk science", and claimed that everything will just go on as usual, have done a *volte face*, and now look upon climate change as just another "simple fact, as just another part of 'carrying on as usual'" (Žižek 2010: 329). The unthinkable has been "normalised", or as Žižek also puts it with sardonic humour: "Welcome to the Anthropocene."

The Human Sciences in Crisis

Confirming Žižek's diagnosis of the planetary environmental crisis, the American environmental sociologist, John Bellamy Foster, and his fellow social scientists (2010: 11-16) do not pull any punches in drawing on readily available natural scientific evidence of rapidly deteriorating global ecosystems, and placing these in the context of what they call "capitalism's war on the earth" (the book's subtitle). It is clear from their research that natural scientists have been "radicalized" in the face of the alarming signs of eco-destruction, as well as the denialism and lethargy, if not downright paralysis, of states and corporations when confronted by practically indubitable scientific evidence of the anthropogenic grounds of the looming ecological catastrophe. A very recent instance of natural scientists hardening their stance on the implications of their findings (to the point of claiming that lack of drastic action would lead to "intergenerational injustice"), as described by Foster (*et al.*), is the article from which the following excerpt has been taken, titled "Assessing 'Dangerous Climate Change': Required Reduction of Carbon Emissions to Protect Young People, Future Generations and Nature" (Hansen, Kharecha, Sato, Masson-Delmotte, Ackerman *et al.* 2013):

Relevant fundamentals of climate science are clear. The physical climate system has great inertia, which is due especially to the thermal inertia of the ocean, the time required for ice sheets to respond to global warming, and the longevity of fossil fuel CO² in the surface carbon reservoirs (atmosphere, ocean, and biosphere). This inertia implies that there is additional climate change "in the pipeline" even

without further change of atmospheric composition. Climate system inertia also means that, if large-scale climate change is allowed to occur, it will be exceedingly long-lived, lasting for many centuries.

One implication is the likelihood of intergenerational effects, with young people and future generations inheriting a situation in which grave consequences are assured, practically out of their Assessing Dangerous Climate Change control, but not of their doing. The possibility of such intergenerational injustice is not remote – it is at our doorstep now. We have a planetary climate crisis that requires urgent change to our energy and carbon pathway to avoid dangerous consequences for young people and other life on Earth.

Yet governments and industry are rushing into expanded use of fossil fuels, including unconventional fossil fuels such as tar sands, tar shale, shale gas extracted by hydrofracking, and methane hydrates. How can this course be unfolding despite knowledge of climate consequences and evidence that a rising carbon price would be economically efficient and reduce demand for fossil fuels? A case has been made that the absence of effective governmental leadership is related to the effect of special interests on policy, as well as to public relations efforts by organizations that profit from the public's addiction to fossil fuels...

Foster *et al.* (2010) go further than the undeniable, mounting signs of a looming environmental catastrophe, however, posing the puzzling question, why social (or human) scientists have not been comparably radicalized as evidence of the planetary eco-crisis has become virtually incontrovertible (especially, one would think, because social/human scientists have an interest in mobilizing social actors around a cause that is an indicator of imminent social peril). Foster *et al.* (2010: 18-19) summarize this strange state of affairs as follows:

Tragically, the more pressing the environmental problem has become and the more urgent the call for ecological revolution... the more quiescent social scientists seem to have become on the topic, searching for a kind of remediation of the problem, in which real change will not be required. Although thirty years ago it was common to find challenges to the capitalist exploitation of the environment emanating from social scientists who were then on the environmentalist fringe, today the main thrust of environmental social science has shifted to ecological modernization – a managerial approach that sees sustainable technology, sustainable consumption, and market-based solutions (indeed “sustainable capitalism”) as providing the answers...

Thus as natural scientists have become more concerned about the detrimental effects of the economic system on the environment, and correspondingly radicalized, asking more and more root questions, social scientists have increasingly turned to the existing economic system as the answer.

Human/social science, Foster *et al.* point out, has always been hindered by the ineluctable situation of the *social* itself being its object of investigation. In addition, because the social cannot easily be separated from ethical questions of right and wrong, this investigation inevitably implicates what is regarded as acceptable or unacceptable, and therefore “tends to be filtered through the dominant institutions and structures of the prevailing hierarchical social order” (2010: 20). The human sciences are therefore hampered by the tendency to be uncritical and compliant – Foster *et al.* (2010: 20) refer to “... the system’s commitment to stasis in its fundamental social/property relations”.

They recognize that ingenious social scientists sometimes succeed in circumventing the disapproval of the hegemonic culture, putting forward critical ideas, but according to Foster *et al.* (2010: 20) these usually concern “marginal issues”, with hardly any effect on the fundamental forces driving society. When such social scientists “speak truth to power” by confronting the dominant culture head-on, their claims are simply consigned to irrelevance, with a deathly silence denying them the credibility they require to affect mainstream society. It is therefore understandable that they fail to bring about change in dominant economic and political practices, as shown in the example of Foucault (1995), whose trenchant critique of panoptical, disciplinary social practices, while exercising a pervasive influence in the social sciences themselves, has done little to change the social and political *status quo*.

Foster *et al.* (2010: 20-23) draw on the work of the British social critic and scientist, J. D. Bernal, to explain the critical torpidity in question, which amounts to a systematic repudiation of all those reasons customarily advanced by detractors of the human sciences, for their putative “unscientific” status. In a nutshell, while Bernal readily granted that the human sciences, unlike their natural science-counterparts, face the “reflexive” difficulty of subject/object coincidence – the subject engaged in scientific investigation is itself inextricably entangled with the object or field of investigation – he insisted that this does not make them unscientific; it merely comes with the social science territory, as it were. More particularly, Bernal dismissed the reasons usually provided for this relative weakness, to wit: (1) that experimentation is not possible in social science; (2) that value judgments inhibit the human sciences; (3) that humans being subject and object simultaneously (reflexivity) in the human sciences leads to scientific failure; (4) that the sheer complexity of human society resists scientific understanding; and (5) that society is always subject to becoming or change, which excludes the discovery of “fixed laws” (uncovered in natural science). Bernal granted that these characteristics made the social sciences “distinctive”, but denied that they prevented

scientific advances. Instead, he argued, the “underdevelopment” of these sciences (Foster 2010: 21):

...could be attributed almost entirely to the fact that they were seriously circumscribed by and often directly subservient to the established order of power, and specifically to the dominant social/property relations... Despite important advances and revolutionary developments, social science in “normal times” has been more about maintaining/managing a given social order than encouraging the historical changes necessary to human society, where social capacities and challenges keep evolving...

Social science thus often enters a relatively dormant state once a new system of power is established. A new class-social order, once it surpasses its initial revolutionary stage and consolidates itself, demands nothing so much as “the bad conscience and evil intent of apologetics” – since the main goal from then on is to maintain its position of power/hegemony.

Under present circumstances of an unprecedented ecological disaster looming in the not-too-distant future, the critical muteness deriving from their complicity with dominant economic and political forces instantiates nothing short of a deep crisis in the human/social sciences. It can be formulated as follows: if scientists in this domain ignore the very knowledge generated, first, by the broad panoply of natural and social sciences, and second, in their own disciplines (where first-hand knowledge of ideological or discursive obfuscation is generated), it is tantamount to social/human-scientific paralysis of a cognitive and ethical nature.

Bernal’s account of the human sciences’ tendency to “capitulate to the status quo”, avoid “alternative perspectives” and degenerate into “harmless platitudes with disconnected empirical additions” (Foster 2010: 22) is reminiscent of Thomas Kuhn’s (1970) version of the typical historical development of the natural sciences (from normal science through crisis to revolutionary science, which again stabilizes into normal science, etc.), specifically the tendency of “normal scientists” to ignore increasing phenomenal anomalies and invoke ad hoc explanations for them, rather than to face the obsolescence of their “normal science”.

The Global Ethical Crisis

The account, above, of the “crisis” in the human sciences should be read together with what Žižek – who has been described as the “most dangerous philosopher in the West” (*New Republic*) – argues in ethical vein. In *Living in the End Times* (2010: 324) he makes the following remark:

The task [today] is to restore civility, not a new ethical substance. Civility is not the same as custom (in the strong sense of *Sittlichkeit*, “mores”, that is, the substantial ethical base of our social activity) – civility, on the contrary, and to put it in somewhat simplified terms, supplements the lack or collapse of the substance of mores. Civility stands for custom (or, rather, what remains of custom) after the fall

of the big Other [the conventionally accepted symbolic order at a specific historical juncture]: it assumes the key role when subjects encounter a lack of substantial ethics, in other words when they find themselves in predicaments which cannot be resolved by way of relying on the existing ethical substance. In such situations, one has to improvise and invent new rules ad hoc; but, to be able to do so – to have at one's disposal the intersubjective space in which, through complex interaction, a solution can be agreed upon – the interaction has to be regulated by a minimum of civility. The more the “deep” substantial ethical background is missing, the more a “superficial” civility is needed.

Žižek's remark occurs in the context of a wide-ranging discussion of what Foucault dubbed the “ubuisim” of power – from Ubu Roi (King Ubu), a 19th century play by Alfred Jarry, which satirises obscene power and greed, and raises the question, whether there could be a link between the crazy exercise of power and the kind of “freedom” that is not linked to any accountability. As anyone familiar with Žižek's work knows, he does not fail to inscribe this question in specific historical contexts (too many to deal with here). One of these is the unbelievable celebration, in Indonesia, of a group of killers behind the “ethnic cleansing” (murder) of about 2.5-million people during the 1960s, notwithstanding which they were not held accountable, and instead lionised on state television in 2007, where their leader, Anwar Congo, revealed that their deeds had been inspired by gangster movies (to the delight of the studio audience).

What interests Žižek about this is the fact that Congo and his henchmen made no attempt to hide the gory particulars of their massacres; instead, they openly boasted about the way to rape a woman in the most enjoyable way, to cut a throat efficiently, and to strangle someone with a wire. This brings one back to the question of an ethical vacuum today, of which Žižek says (2010: 323):

Here the “big Other” [the symbolic framework within which “ethical” behaviour is situated] enters, not only with the fact that the killers modeled their crimes on the cinematic imaginary, but also and above all with the fact of society's moral vacuum: what kind of symbolic texture (the set of rules which draw a line between what is publicly acceptable and what is not) must a society be composed of if even a minimal level of public shame – which would compel the perpetrators to treat their acts as a “dirty secret” – is suspended, and such a monstrous orgy of torture and killing can be publicly celebrated decades after it took place, and not even as an extraordinary crime necessary for the public good, but as an ordinary acceptable pleasurable activity?

His next words are crucial for understanding what is going on here (p. 323): “The response to be avoided here is, of course, the easy one of placing the blame either directly on Hollywood or on the ‘ethical primitiveness’ of Indonesia. The starting point should rather be the dislocating effects of capitalist globalisation which, by undermining the ‘symbolic efficacy’ of traditional ethical structures, creates such a moral vacuum”.

Žižek's amusing discussion, in the same context, of the bizarre behaviour of Italy's Berlusconi as another illustration of the obscene consequences of power, combined with the freedom not to be accountable – this time in the shape of a melting pot of private business interests and politics – need not be pursued at length here. What I want to argue, is that one has seen, and is increasingly witnessing, the manifestation of precisely such an ethical vacuum in South Africa, too; in the horrific murder of two toddlers at Diepsloot (Ngobeni 2013), for example – something that would have been far less likely to happen in a cultural context where traditional ethical structures still exercise a decisive influence.

Further light is cast on this issue by the work done by Foucault (in *I, Pierre Rivière, having slaughtered my mother...*; 1982) and his seminar group on the Pierre Rivière dossier dating back to 1835. All the court documents on the appalling multiple murder, by the young peasant, of his mother, brother and sister, together with an exceptionally eloquent memoir by Rivière himself (despite his rudimentary education), formed the basis of the critical essays by Foucault and members of his group in this book. They show that Rivière's memoir became an arena where emerging, competing modern discourses such as the juridical and the psychiatric confronted each other in an attempt to demarcate their respective domains of "power-knowledge" and establish their own legitimacy (1982: x-xi). Regarding Rivière's act of murder, however, the following remark by Edith Kurzweil (reprinted on the back cover of Foucault 1982) testifies to the significance of the fact that this case was set in an historical context characterised by major social changes: "For Foucault, Rivière provides the 'excuse' to examine power structures and social institutions, to question the scientificity of medical science, and to delineate the chaos of values and beliefs, of knowledge and power as it existed 150 years ago – a chaos we have not yet eliminated".

The Rivière case was set at the time when some of the major discursive constituents of modernity were struggling for recognition; a time which had turned (or at least tried to turn) its back on religious "superstition", as Baumer puts it (1977: 314-323). By contrast, the present, "postmodern" era is characterised, on the one hand, by a proliferation of discursive pluralism and cultural eclecticism, and on the other by the fact that the dominant discourse among all of these is that of globalising, neoliberal capitalism – something Žižek also notes.

The effect of this is precisely what the events in Indonesia, referred to earlier, illustrate so well, corroborated by Kurzweil's remark (on the cover of Foucault 1982), that there is "a chaos [of values and beliefs] we have not yet eliminated" – a chaos brought about by the ongoing uprootment of ethical practices by a globalising economic system which does not recognise any traditional ethical contexts, imposing a symbolic frame-

work that valorises excessive consumption and the individualistic pursuit of material wealth in the place of communal values instead. Is it at all surprising that people seem to become morally disoriented and lose their ethical bearings in this situation?

Violent outbursts of frustration and anger in the face of violent events that seem to surpass comprehension are understandable, but they get us nowhere. “What is needed instead”, says Žižek (p. 327), “is the act proper: a symbolic intervention capable of undermining the big Other (the hegemonic social link), of re-arranging its coordinates”. What one is up against if you take this exhortation seriously, becomes clearer in light of the “globalized” (and still globalizing) condition of world societies/society in the early 21st century. It is nothing new to point to this – globalization is by now a familiar phenomenon, and has been examined, characterized, theorized and criticized by several writers, among them Hardt and Negri (2001, 2005, 2009), Steger (2003) and Castells. It is the latter whose grid of comprehending the structure of the global “network society” offers itself as a heuristic regarding the “crises” briefly touched upon above, and we shall turn to it presently, via the work of Jacques Derrida.

Democracy, Media and the World Plagues

To confirm the indelible impression of an ethical crisis of sorts in contemporary society, consider the following. The global situation that is at stake here is inseparably connected to a whole web of interrelated phenomena, which may be characterized in various ways. One such approach is encountered in the work of Jacques Derrida. In his formidable *Specters of Marx* (1994: 81-84) he provides a list of “plagues” of the present world order, which are intimately connected to questions of an ethical, economic, political and cratological nature, and all of which require critical, ethical scrutiny. These include unemployment; the exclusion of homeless citizens from participation in democratic processes; the “ruthless economic war” among nations worldwide; the insurmountability of the contradictions inherent to the concept of the “free market”; the connection between the worsening of foreign debt and economic hardship on the part of many millions of people; the apparently irreversible integration of the “arms industry” with economic activity worldwide; the spread of nuclear weapons; the global proliferation of inter-ethnic wars; the virtually invisible or seamless infiltration of states and economies by “phantom-States” (like the Mafia and the Japanese Yakuza) as a strictly capitalist phenomenon; and the present condition of international law and its institutions, in so far as it suffers from certain historical and state-specific cratological limitations. The enumerated “plagues” (which are inseparable from social and economic suffering), are intimately connected to the nexus of economic and political power in the so-called capi-

talist states, and that this implicates, in turn, what Žižek calls the creation of an “ethical vacuum”.

There is a confluence of ideas between Žižek and Derrida here, but also between Derrida and Manuel Castells’s theory of the “network society” (see Olivier 2013: <http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/bertolivier/2013/04/21/the-space-of-flows-and-the-social-elites-of-today/>). Of the three thinkers, Derrida is undoubtedly the most complex. The list of “plagues” of the present world order must be seen in the context of the triumphalism that followed the collapse of the USSR in 1989. Derrida responded to this premature triumphalism by reminding people that “spectres” or ghosts – like that of Hamlet’s father in the well-known tragedy, or like that of Marx – have a way of exhorting human beings to act according to the responsibility they bear to (dead, or not yet born) others. Significantly, he dedicated the book to South African Chris Hani, who was assassinated shortly before its publication (1994: xvi). It is impossible to do justice to this text in a mere paper, so I will focus on the situating these “plagues” in Derrida’s thinking where, as part of his response (1994: 14-16, 56-57, 59-68) to people like Francis Fukuyama, who proclaimed the “end of history” with the 1989 events, he raised questions of an ethical, economic, political and cratological (power-related) nature.

Even without elaborating on these “plagues”, it is apparent that Fukuyama’s solemn declaration of the advent of the “end of history” on the occasion of the collapse of the USSR – that is, the global realization of the marriage between market capitalism and liberal democracy as the “final”, unsurpassable historical state – is hopelessly out of touch with the uninterruptable historical “process” itself. The plague of the “ruthless economic war” among nations (in accordance with capitalism’s founding anthropology, that we live economically by competing with others), for one thing, is a formula according to which an economic historian can decipher “historical” events post-1989, to which the worsening of foreign debt can be added, starting with that of the United States.

Moreover, these “plagues” would communicate to receptive minds that, if anyone had thought the world post-1989 would answer to the description of “paradise on earth” (as Fukuyama might make one think), they were in for a nasty surprise. Derrida wrote this book before 9/11, and before the 2008 financial crisis, and with hindsight one could possibly draw some connections between these two “historical” events and the “plagues” in question. Consider Derrida’s words (1994: 78), where he quotes American political thinker and Fukuyama’s teacher, Allan Bloom, to illustrate, and combat the naïve, unhistorical optimism in the air after 1989:

But what is one to think today of the imperturbable thoughtlessness that consists in singing the triumph of capitalism or of economic and political liberalism, ‘the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the endpoint of human govern-

ment,' the 'end of the problem of social classes'? [Think of the emergence of new classes around the Occupy Movement! BO] What cynicism of good conscience, what manic disavowal could cause someone to write, if not believe, that 'everything that stood in the way of reciprocal recognition of human dignity [a reference to Hegel's master/slave dialectic; BO], always and everywhere, has been refuted and buried by history'?

For one thing, Derrida points out (p. 79), parliamentary liberal democracy is in a dysfunctional condition in so-called Western democracies. Where he elaborates on this claim, he moves towards the terrain of Manuel Castells's thesis, in *The Network Society* (which appeared in 1996, 2 years after the English translation of Derrida's *Specters of Marx*), that information technology has profoundly changed the very fabric of human experience through the fundamental transformation of space and time. Derrida was evidently acutely aware of this where he deals a blow to the vacuous optimism regarding liberal democracy supposedly being the apogee of historical political development (p. 79):

Electoral representativity or parliamentary life is not only distorted...by a great number of socio-economic mechanisms, but it is exercised with more and more difficulty in a public space profoundly upset by techno-tele-media apparatuses and by new rhythms of information and communication, by the devices and the speed of forces represented by the latter, but also and consequently by the new modes of appropriation they put to work, by the new structure of the event and of its spectrality that they produce (both invent and bring up to date, inaugurate and reveal, cause to come about and bring to light at the same time...) This transformation does not affect only facts but the concept of such 'facts'. The very concept of the event. The relation between deliberation and decision, the very functioning of government has changed, not only in its technical conditions, its time, its space, and its speed, but, without anyone having really realized it, in its concept.

What Castells would later call the "space of flows" and its temporal counterpart, "timeless time", are here anticipated by Derrida in his perspicacious grasp of the modification of political decision-making by the structurally modifying reciprocity that the "new" media – television, for example – have inaugurated between parliamentary processes and politicians' functions regarding governance, on the one hand, and the virtually instantaneous dissemination of any "news" in this domain, on the other. The strictly "political" functioning of legislative bodies such as parliaments cannot escape the effects of these profound transformations. Derrida summarizes this state aptly where he remarks, comparing politicians before the advent of a media-dominated society with those of today (p. 80):

However competent they may personally be, professional politicians who conform to the old model tend today to become structurally incompetent. The same media power accuses, produces, and amplifies at the same time this incompetence of traditional politicians: on the one hand, it takes away from them the legitimate power they held in the former political space (party, parliament, and so forth), but, on the other hand, it obliges them to become mere silhouettes, if not marionettes,

on the stage of televisual rhetoric. They were thought to be actors of politics, they now often risk, as everyone knows, being no more than TV actors. [Small wonder Ronald Reagan succeeded in winning the American presidency! B0]

Everyone who knows how people's behaviour changes when there are television cameras trained on them, will know exactly what Derrida is getting at here. And everyone who understands this, will understand his scepticism in the face of claims, like Fukuyama's, that history has ended because the whole world has finally embraced liberal, capitalist democracy. This is simply not possible, for in the age of media-hegemony, of the network society, democracy (liberal or otherwise) ain't what it used to be. And neither are the conditions for ethical behaviour, as Žižek has argued (above).

The Global *Network Society*, Anthropogenic Climate Change, and the Recuperation of the Ethical

Derrida's claims regarding the transformation of the very concept of government becomes more readily comprehensible in light of the work of Manuel Castells in *The rise of the network society* (1996; 2010), where he painstakingly and thoroughly – alternating between substantiating empirical investigation and illuminating theorization – reconstructs the stages through which what one knows today as advanced electronically mediated information and communication systems developed (see also Hardt and Negri's far-reaching trilogy, *Empire* [2001], *Multitude* [2005] and *Commonwealth* [2009]). In so doing, he has persuasively demonstrated that the information revolution has created the foundation for global economies to become interdependent, in the process altering the relationship between economy, society, politics and culture. What concerns me here, however, is Castells's argument that the very experience of space and time has been structurally altered in this social and economic milieu, in a manner that can be linked to the emerging information-technological changes. His account of such modified experiences, correlative to different, newly dominant modes of time and space (compared to earlier modes), foregrounds social transformations that bear on the question of the very future of human society in its relation to the natural environment.

Although radio and television paved the way for later technological developments, Castells's account of these developments (2010: Chapter 5) highlights the astonishing rate of the establishment and global expansion of the internet, compared to radio and television. He reminds one that the millions of computer networks which exist around the world today accommodate the "whole spectrum of human communication, from politics to religion to sex and research – with e-commerce as the centerpiece of the contemporary Internet" (2010: Chapter 5, Section 3). This multitude of qualitatively and functionally distinct networks were inter-con-

nected to and by the internet by the end of the 20th century, after a mere 3 to 4 decades of development – an astounding achievement. What should not be overlooked – and this is related to Derrida’s observation, above, regarding the manner in which the media-revolution has transformed the logic and the concept of governance – is what Castells (2010: Preface to the 2010 Edition, IV) calls the “transformation of space and time in the human experience”, specifically where he distinguishes between “the space of places” and “the space of flows”, on the one hand, and between sequential, lifeworld time and “timeless time”, on the other.

The “space of flows” denotes a novel form of spatiality, characterized by simultaneity, regardless of physical distance, and is related to social interaction that has been fundamentally modified by advanced communication technologies. The “space of places”, by contrast, marks the historically familiar sense of space as a material precondition of social interaction that proceeds in ordinary lifeworld time-sequence, and of architectural space-modulation into place. The newly emerged “space of flows” is intimately connected to what Castells calls “timeless time”, which appears where experiential time sequences are blurred in contemporary practices such as quasi-instantaneous financial transactions and “flexi-work”. It is important to note that Castells (2010: Preface to the 2010 Edition, iv) further refers to planetary, evolutionary, or “glacial time” – a concept fundamental to the ecological movement – which increasingly conflicts with “timeless time” and its demands in the network society. These spatio-temporal transformations are significant because in every case an ordinary, “natural”, human experience (of time and space) is juxtaposed with an experience which is not natural in this sense, but technologically mediated instead. Small wonder that Gilbert Germain (2004) points to the distance that recent technological developments has introduced between human beings and the earth.

The upshot of these events has been that the familiar “space of places” is still experienced by everyone, for example in their home environment, *but* that it is no longer the dominant mode of space in the network society. It is well-known in social theory that “All major social changes are ultimately characterized by a **transformation of space and time in the human experience**” (Castells 2010, Preface, IV; bold in original). It is therefore not surprising that there have been some fundamental changes in the spatial structure of cities. It is clear from Castells’s work that the changed (and still changing) structure of cities and their adjacent areas into *metropolitan regions* (Castells 2010, Preface, iv; Chapter 6, Section 4) is itself a function of the “space of flows”, introduced by communication technologies. One is increasingly witnessing the emergence of metropolitan *regions* that surpass mere metropolitan *areas* because they usually consist of several of such dense residential metropolitan areas, together with non-

metropolitan areas such as open spaces and agricultural land, instead of the traditional city, with its identifiable urban centre, surrounded by mainly residential suburban areas. Moreover, they are multicentred, given various types of functional importance of different metropolitan nuclei, and vastly exceed traditional cities in population.

Metropolitan regions like these are the urban embodiment of the network-character of this new type of society. They manifest what Castells' (2010, Preface, iv) calls a:

... new form of spatiality [that I]...conceptualized as the *space of flows*: the material support of simultaneous social practices communicated at a distance. This involves the production, transmission and processing of flows of information. It also relies on the development of localities as nodes of these communication networks, and the connectivity of activities located in these nodes by fast transportation networks operated by information flows.

The new kind of metropolitan region (and the mega-cities comprising it), Castells claims, can be understood as a *process*, articulated through “flows” of various kinds – “flows of capital, flows of information, flows of technology, flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols”. Furthermore, “Flows are not just one element of the social organization: they are the expression of processes *dominating* our economic, political, and symbolic life” (Castells 2010: Chapter 6, Section 5). Hence, he defines the novel, dominant spatial mode as follows:

The space of flows is the material organization of time-sharing social practices that work through flows. By flows I understand purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political, and symbolic structures of society. Dominant social practices are those which are embedded in dominant social structures. By dominant structures I understand those arrangements of organizations and institutions whose internal logic plays a strategic role in shaping social practices and social consciousness for society at large.

Castells proceeds to indicate that what one might call the logic of domination appears in the space of flows in a twofold manner: the elites establish “their own society” (secluded communities, exclusively priced real estate, spatially restricted, networked, subcultural, decision-making interactions such as those in exclusive restaurants or airport lounges, and on the golf course), and they create a culturally distinctive “lifestyle” intent on “standardizing” and unifying the symbolic spatial environment of elites globally (e.g. international hotels with similar room-design and decoration¹).

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¹ *Up in the Air*, a film by Jason Reitman (2009), focuses on the kind of life spent largely in the “space of flows” – airports and standardized hotels – as well as on the existential toll it takes of people whose profession leaves them no other option but to live in this space.

Castells (2010: Chapter 6, Section 7) articulates the consequences of the impact of the increasing domination of the space of flows as follows, and this serves to illustrate the extent to which the information-technology revolution has transformed extant society:

Experience, by being related to places, becomes abstracted from power, and meaning is increasingly separated from knowledge. There follows a structural schizophrenia between two spatial logics that threatens to break down communication channels in society. The dominant tendency is toward a horizon of networked, ahistorical space of flows, aiming at imposing its logic over scattered, segmented places, increasingly unrelated to each other, less and less able to share cultural codes.² Unless cultural, political, *and physical* bridges are deliberately built between these two forms of space, we may be heading toward a life in parallel universes whose times cannot meet because they are warped into different dimensions of a social hyperspace.

The “timeless time” induced by the “space of flows” is even more dehumanising than the latter, according to Castells. He contrasts it with experiential time, or the time of natural rhythms and familiar connections between past, present and future, and with the “clock time” of the industrial era (Castells 2010: Chapter 7, Section 1). Since the creation of a world market of virtual, if not actual, instantaneity, when global markets were connected through a global computer-network in the 1980s, this sustained attempt to overcome the constraints of time (and space) has been intensified uninterruptedly. A new “time regime” (Castells 2010: Chapter 7, Introduction) is therefore linked, like the “space of flows”, to the new communication technologies, which can be perceived as constantly striving, like capitalism, towards the optimal minimization of time-lapses.

The mode of time which has been dominant under conditions of industrial capitalism over the last century (2010: Chapter 7, Section 1) is being eroded today, just as the familiar “space of places” is being challenged by the “space of flows” of postmodernity. In Castells’s words (2010: Chapter 7, Section 1):

This linear, irreversible, measurable, predictable time is being shattered in the network society, in a movement of extraordinary historical significance. But we are not just witnessing a relativization of time according to social contexts or alternatively the return to time reversibility as if reality could become entirely captured in cyclical myths. The transformation is more profound: it is the mixing of tenses to create a forever universe, not self-expanding but self-maintaining, not cyclical but random, not recursive but incursive: timeless time, using technology to escape the contexts of its existence, and to appropriate selectively any value each context could offer to the ever-present... Compressing time to the limit is tantamount to make time sequence, and thus time,

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² One could argue that this goes hand in hand with the emergence of an overarching, globalizing set of supra-cultural codes, which tends towards, but does not quite achieve, cultural homogenization, given its complex, often hybridizing interactions with local cultures (Steger 2003: 70-76).

disappear... Capital's freedom from time and culture's escape from the clock are decisively facilitated by new information technologies, and embedded in the structure of the network society.

Castells's (2010: Chapter 7, Sections 1 to 9) traces this emergence of "timelessness" or what Harvey calls (1989: 147, 240, 260-283) "time-space compression" in, among other fields, capitalist transformations of financial investment and speculation. These depend upon the temporal acceleration of financial transactions to the nth degree for the optimization of profits (frequently with devastating effects upon entire economies and the concrete lives of people; see in this regard also Žižek 2009: 67-68, on capital as the "real" of capitalism). Radicalizing the implications of the above in theoretical terms, Castells claims (2010: Chapter 7, Section 9):

... that timeless time, as I label the dominant temporality of our society, occurs when the characteristics of a given context, namely, the informational paradigm and the network society, induce systemic perturbation in the sequential order of phenomena performed in that context. This perturbation may take the form of compressing the occurrence of phenomena, aiming at instantaneity, or else by introducing random discontinuity in the sequence. Elimination of sequencing creates undifferentiated time, which is tantamount to eternity... Timeless time belongs to the space of flows, while time discipline, biological time, and socially determined sequencing characterize places around the world, materially structuring and destructuring our segmented societies. Space shapes time in our society, thus reversing an historical trend: flows induce timeless time, places are time-bounded.

Lest one should be tempted to resort to a belief in technological determinism here, one should note Castells's observation, that social resistance to "the logic of timelessness" occurs from time to time, for the sake of regaining control over social interests. This is conspicuous in a growing concern about the relation between humanity and the natural environment – something that brings one back to what was argued earlier in this paper. In this regard Castells refers to what, in the work of Lash and Urry, is called "glacial time", or the "long-term and evolutionary" temporality that connects humans with the prehistoric past and an unpredictable planetary future (2010: Chapter 7, Section 9): "... the opposition between the management of glacial time and the search for timelessness anchors in contradictory positions in the social structure the environmentalist movement and the powers that be in our society..."

Castells's work, so shrewdly anticipated by Derrida, alerts one to the stark reality, that the disjunction between the space of flows/timeless time, on the one hand, and the space of places/experiential time/"glacial time", on the other, is a manifestation of the consequences of one of the most far-reaching transformations of society in recent history – the technologically driven information-communication revolution. The human sciences are in a position to address this disjunction, even if they cannot undo it. Why is this transformation far-reaching? Because, as the earlier sections

in this paper have indicated, all living beings on earth (plants, animals, working class people as well as social elites), are dependent on a sustainable planetary ecosystem and biosphere. The tension or conflict between the “space of flows”/“timeless time”, on the one hand, and “glacial time”, on the other, is bound to have a major impact on the relation between living beings and the encompassing ecosphere, given the systematic technological distancing from the earth and from place-oriented communities that accompanies the former.³ The human sciences face the task of disseminating an informed awareness, if not a thorough understanding, of what is at stake here.⁴ Only such an awareness can foster a sustained resistance to the momentum of the “space of flows” towards totalization. Needless to stress, it should be accompanied by social and cultural practices predicated on the irreplaceable value of what Habermas (1987: 119-152), following Husserl, calls the “lifeworld”, the integrity of which is indispensable for a recognizably life.

The Human Sciences and the Transformation of Society

At first blush it is beyond doubt that the human sciences are up against impossible odds, in the shape of the technological transformation of society that one has witnessed in the last quarter of the 20th century, which has penetrated to the very fundamentals of the spatiotemporal constituents of being-human. Could one realistically expect that any counter-transformation could possibly emanate from humanities and social science-practices, even if one includes the wide panoply of the arts among them (which, after all, comprises much of the primary material of the humanities)? I believe that the answer to this question is in the affirmative, for the following reasons.

What is required here is the ability to think laterally and creatively, that is, to transfer the knowledge gained in one field to another. Jacques Rancière’s highly original philosophy is invaluable in this regard, because his work offers keen insight into the conditions conducive to the transformation of the subject, and therefore of society. In Rancière’s thinking a provocative deployment of the concept, “aesthetic”, is encountered, which

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³ See in this regard Germain (2004), for an investigation into the alienating technological drive to overcome human dependence on the earth.

⁴ Thomas Princen’s (2010) remarkably argued appeal to people across the world to “tread softly” by learning to live ecologically and economically within their means, instead of “overconsuming” (which belongs with the “space of flows”), is commendable in this regard as one of the most informative and persuasive sources of information. If there were to be an incremental turning to such a way of living, the conflict of interests referred to earlier could conceivably be dissolved. In fact, Paul Hawken, in *Blessed unrest* (2007) believes that a vast, heterogeneous global social movement, aimed at getting beyond what is widely perceived to be a global crisis, is already taking shape, albeit “under-the-radar”.

attributes to both art (literature, cinema, architecture) and theory (as found in the human sciences, for instance) a similar transformative capacity in relation to each other. It is significant that Rancière (in Chapter 9 of *Dissensus*: 2011a), restates Schiller's claim that the foundation of art and of life is to be found in the aesthetic as follows: '... there exists a specific sensory experience that holds the promise of both a new world of Art and a new life for individuals and the community, namely *the aesthetic*'. His resurrection of the etymological meaning of "aesthetic" is decisive: it derives from "to perceive" (ancient Greek: *aisthanesthai*), which ineluctably implicates the sensory world. The aesthetic is for Rancière the domain where art and the political converge, which is suggested by what is probably the most familiar phrase from his work, namely "the distribution of the sensible". An illuminating account of its meaning in relation to the arts is provided by Joseph Tanke (2011: 74-75):

The distribution of the sensible is the system of divisions that assigns parts, supplies meanings, and defines the relationships between things in the common world. One such part belongs to art, with the larger distribution prescribing how the arts relate to other ways of doing and making. As such, the distribution of the sensible defines the nature of art, along with what it is capable of... the arts, even those thought far-removed from the political concerns of the day, can play a role in transforming the world. Art challenges what is sensible, thinkable, and hence possible, on the condition that it not surrender its identity as art.

"The distribution of the sensible" operates in conjunction with something else, however. Rancière argues that, at any given time in their historical development, the arts can only be grasped adequately as "re-partitioning the sensible" by allowing them to converge with contemporary theories of the arts, these theories constituting the conditions of comprehensibility of art, and *vice versa* (Rockhill 2011: 5). Rancière (2011: 31) puts it as follows: "The simple practices of the arts cannot be separated from the discourses that define the conditions under which they can be perceived as artistic practices". It is therefore clear that he thinks in a historicizing manner, but in such a way that artworks and literary texts are not simply equated with the empirical conditions of their production. If this were the case, they would be no more than documents archiving historical developments. Acknowledging the mutual implication of art and (human science-) theory as well as their historical contingency, while simultaneously affirming their specificity, explains their intelligibility. This explains the discursive purchase that the arts-theory correlation has on social relations in space and time.

According to the Rancière "horizontal" correspondence between artworks, on the one hand, and the historically contemporaneous theoretical (or philosophical) works comprising the discursive conditions of their comprehensibility, on the other, impart meaning to such works of art and of literature, but also to the corresponding theoretical works in the

human sciences. An obvious example of this is his own highly innovative philosophical-theoretical work; in fact, it has precipitated a reappraisal of the relations between art and theory.

One has to add that Rancière also recognizes another plane of historical significance, namely a “diagonal” one that intersects with the horizontal plane and brings about a process of “historical cross-fertilization” – what Rancière “... has elsewhere referred to as the complex intertwining of the horizontal and the diagonal dimensions of history” (Rockhill 2011: 6-7). This occurs when, for example, Plato’s notion of art – which falls within what Rancière labels the “ethical regime of images” – demonstrably intersects with the literary texts and artworks, as well as the philosophical texts of a different historical era, in this way transmitting conceptual forces to the latter that unsettle or disrupt their intellectual, artistic and literary-historical specificity. In Rancière’s words (quoted in Rockhill 2011: 7):

Opening this dimension that cuts across so-called historical contexts is essential to grasping the war of writing... and its stakes in terms of the distribution of the sensible, the symbolic configuration of commonality.

Rancière’s notion of “the distribution of the sensible”, which brings together art and politics via the aesthetic, in this way uniting art (including literature) and the “sensible” (social and political) world, thus points to the transformative social and political functioning of cross-historical conceptual displacements and disturbances, as well as to the relation between art and (humanistic) theory at a certain time. If one recalls the significant technological transformation of the social world in the present era, discussed earlier – the “rise of the network society” (Castells) – one can add that Rancière’s idea of the “distribution of the sensible” in the force-field created between artworks (such as novels or films) and relevant, explanatory theories, allows one to understand a different kind of transformation, to wit, that which takes shape according to the lines of anticipatory intelligibility and imaginability embedded in creative texts and visual or auditory artworks, on the one hand, and the theories which they call for (and which anticipate them), on the other. Moreover, theorizing in the human sciences, working in conjunction with the arts, is capable, in other words, of bringing about a transformative “re-distribution of the sensible” in extant social reality – one that could conceivably provide impetus to the already existing social movement (Hawken 2007) intent on counteracting the deleterious ecological effects of consumer/industrial capitalism in its contemporary guise, which includes the “space of flows”.

One could adduce two powerful eco-political films, Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) and Hillcoat’s *The Road* (2009), as instances of such potential aesthetic transformation of social and political space, or in Rancière’s terms, “re-distribution of the sensible”. In both of these cinematic artworks the familiar “sensible” world – meaning both what is regarded as being

commonsensical, and what is readily perceptible – of tacitly tolerated, if not supported, human exploitation of nature (*Avatar*), and of a world where nature's bounty has always been taken for granted (*The Road*), are aesthetically shattered. Simultaneously, these worlds are aesthetically “replaced” or reconfigured with one where people (the Na’vi in *Avatar*, supported by the paralyzed human, Jake) resist the deleterious exploitation successfully in a manner exemplifying Lovelock’s notion of Gaia as a macro-organism, applied here to the fictional Pandora, on the one hand, and where two desperate individuals (the father and son in *The Road*) experience the horrific effects of a collapsed biosphere first-hand (Olivier 2011). These two films “re-partition the sensible” in such a manner as to have a transformative effect on audiences’ awareness, in the first place, but more importantly, by projecting alternative anticipatory possibilities of social, natural and political space, partly preparing it for transformation and partly already modifying this space.

As pointed out before, Rancière posits a reciprocal relation between the arts and (human science-) theories, which means that works in these distinctive domains mutually illuminate one another at a cognitive level, in such a way that their relation could be called “quasi-transcendental” (that is, each domain comprising the *historically contingent* condition of the possibility of the other). In the case of the two films under discussion, for example, James Lovelock’s Gaia theory – the scientifically validated theory that the earth is not a neutral space in which organisms live, but is itself comparable to a macro-organism, which self-regulates its own climate, for example – resonates with especially *Avatar*, where the resistance to the potential human destruction of Pandora’s biosphere is met with a kind of “Gaia immune-system” defence on the part of all its inhabitants. This has far-reaching eco-political implications for comparable resistance to the current destruction of the earth’s biosphere by (mainly) unchecked capitalist economic growth. But more importantly, just as Derrida’s and Castells’s theoretical characterization(s) of the “network society” not only described a process that was underway, but also contributed to the reconfiguration of social space, or to its “distribution of the sensible” by discursively reinforcing emerging spatio-temporal relations, and to opening up new possibilities (of resistance, for instance) in this domain, so, too, these two cinematic works “work” aesthetically by doing so in their inimitable way. One could demonstrate that novels and paintings function to “re-distribute the sensible” in a manner that is peculiar to them as distinct forms of art (see for example Olivier 2013).

What makes the transformative reciprocity between human sciences and the arts, as articulated by Rancière, doubly defensible, I believe, is the consideration that historical, theological, linguistic, communicational, or literary-theoretical knowledge could potentially have the same

(in Rancière's sense of the term) "aesthetically" transformative effects as art, first by enabling an epistemic or cognitive transformation on the part of someone who engages with a humanities-discipline on its own terms, and secondly by transforming extant reality by ordering it according to discipline-specific discursive criteria. A thorough exploration of the work of St Francis of Assisi regarding his rehabilitation of nature and natural creatures or entities (hence the title of Zeffirelli's 1972 film on St Francis: "Brother Sun, Sister Moon") within a holistic framework of creaturely kinship, for instance, could potentially function to "re-partition the sensible" profoundly in this era of capitalistic "war" against nature (Foster *et al.* 2010; Kovel 2007) and recuperate non-human nature as something as intrinsically valuable as humanity.

Conclusion

It should surprise no one that, given the pervasive technologically-based transformation of human society as described by both Derrida and (mainly) Castells, the arts and the human sciences are called upon to actualize, anew, what is part and parcel of their role in society, namely to "re-distribute the sensible" in such a way that human beings would grasp the decisive importance of resisting the deleterious effects of the "space of flows" and of "timeless time" in the network society. To put it somewhat differently, the arts and the human sciences (such as philosophy, theology, literary studies and anthropology) are in a privileged position to revive human appreciation of what Husserl called the "life-world" – that ordinary realm of pre-theoretical involvements with the world and with others that precedes any scientific distancing and objectification. Jürgen Habermas has reformulated the notion of the "life-world" in linguistic and communicational terms as follows (1987: 124):

... we can think of the lifeworld as represented by a culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns. Then the idea of a "context of relevance" that connects the elements of the [or a] situation with one another, and the situation with the lifeworld, need no longer be explained in the framework of a phenomenology and psychology of perception. Relevance structures can be conceived instead as interconnections of meaning holding between a communicative utterance, the immediate context, and its connotative horizon of meanings.

In view of this reconceptualization of the "life-world" in linguistic terms by Habermas – something that eschews conceiving of it phenomenologically in terms of the intentional structures of consciousness – it should be clear that the arts and the human sciences are the obvious candidates to address the recuperation of the "life-world" by broadly linguistic-aesthetic means. Such intervention is given greater legitimacy by Rancière's notion of the (aesthetic) "partitioning of the sensible". Nor should one overlook the fact that this ineluctably involves restoring the

relation between human beings and non-human nature to one where their mutual dependence is recognized and actively defended against damage by technological imperatives. Only this will save the earth as humanity's originary home.

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