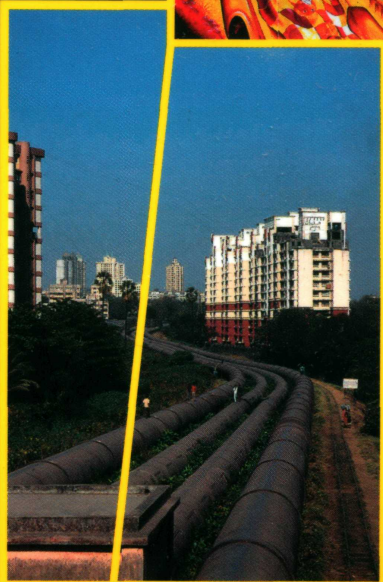
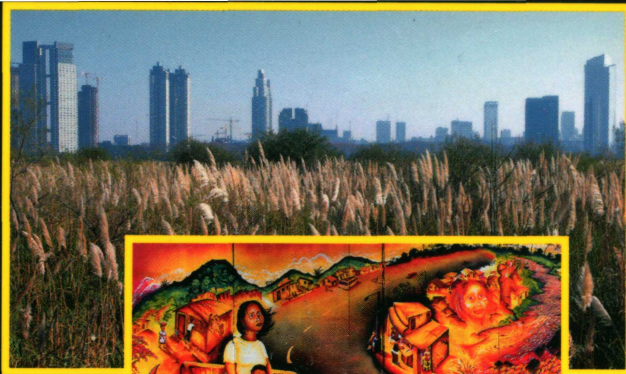
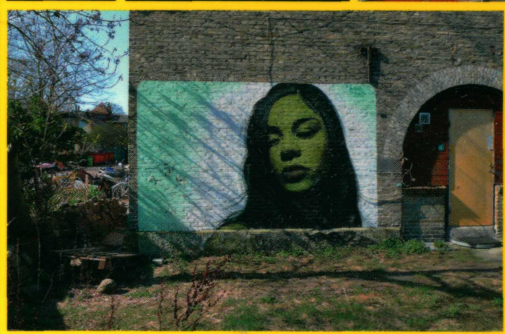




URBAN CONSTELLATIONS



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MATTHEW GANDY [ED.]

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OTHERWORLDLINESS

Benedikte Zitouni

Capitalism is no longer boasting and bragging as it was in the 1990s. It now seems at best, a necessary evil, and at worst, more lucidly, a catastrophic way of existence. Financial as well as ecological disasters leave no doubt as to the destructive nature of current metabolic regimes.¹ Except for some wishful think-tanks perhaps, and even there, candid optimism is out. The End of Cold War is finally over. The years since 2000 have evened the score. For as much as the previous decade condemned us anti-capitalists to live in a monolithic era, bereaved us, and left us floundering in a no-choice zone, the past decade has given us a confident inkling that the future is ours to reclaim. With a world heading to calamity, the need for change is more often acknowledged. Our present-day is pushing for alternative ways.² And in the meantime, over the last couple of years, we ourselves have been transformed and are better prepared to the task. We've become otherworldly.³

Metamorphosis started in November 1999. Alter-globalists breached the defences of the World Trade Organisation summit and declared to the world that "Another world is possible!"⁴ For a while, Seattle was the word. It disturbed the expected course of events, it showed an awe-inspiring opposition (no more condoling please), and last but not least, it instilled a new sense of struggle.⁵ For class consciousness was not the only force at work. Seattle's battle was fought on many fronts at once. The choice was no longer between whales or workers, women's rights or healthy food, as only a collective assault would make the monolith stagger. And there's more to it than mere tactics. Such solidarity or connectivity was possible, precisely, because the future is so indeterminate and because—that's the feat—alter-globalists *claimed* that indeterminateness.

We do not know any longer—if we ever did—where exactly change must come from. All kinds of events may sign promising points of no return and so we've learned to place our bets on many fronts at once.⁶ Claiming the future's indeterminateness means, thus, call-

ing on the collective. It establishes a sense of multifariousness. We do not have to conform to the right ideological stances anymore, holding out one doctrine over the others but, rather, we must learn to live in a realm where no one has the ultimate answers and where all of us are trying to make valuable changes.⁷ Connectivity, then, becomes vital. Only the relaying of our attempts will give rise to partial strongholds.⁸ Or, inversely, *all* of our attempts are reclaims, taking back terrain from the monolith. The "us" is diversified, active, and branching out.⁹ Realising this has been the first step, out of three, of our becoming otherworldly.

The next step is an earthly one. Lately, the issue of climate change has disrupted the elementary configurations drawn by the 1972 Club of Rome's Report, which stated the depletion of natural resources and pleaded for limiting growth,¹⁰ by introducing two radical premises. One, the Planet is about to go awry, ready to run wild. Two, there are global and hence elusive Rubicons not to be crossed. Jumpiness and thresholds were added to finiteness and, together, they've overturned our existential mappings. We are no longer living in a world that can be drawn with arrows of aims and means, rarity and remedy, extraction and consumption, but are engulfed by billions of bonds, thrown into the maze of inter-specific and atmospheric reliances.¹¹ Rarity itself—as Peak Oil shows—is now part of our earthly, virtuous, or vicious circling.¹² We're not taking care of it any longer; we're in it.

But what's to be "in it"? What's the bonding about? Many of us who are involved in social sciences—in contemporary cultural mapping, so to speak—are looking for answers by reinvigorating perception. We're forging new words and brains. "Technonatures," "naturecultures," and "zoopolises" signal our enmeshment.¹³ Fish "work," organs "feel," dunes "sing," or with an urban tinge, wastes "metabolise," streets and metros lead "virtual" or "atmospheric" lives because we are training our senses.¹⁴ In order to get our bearings, we're learning how to be *emulated* by earthly reliances (rather than just accepting them).¹⁵ We're redistributing active qualities, reconsidering passive ones, and infusing the entire maze with lively bustle so that we can become part of it, i.e., act within the maze.¹⁶ That's the second step: we're (re)connecting and turning our backs on human exceptionalism.

When fish work and dunes sing, anti-capitalism has indeed changed. Today, perhaps, we have come to a point where we can acknowledge that 1989 did not only launch capitalism into a state of frenzy (1990s) before it fell into catalepsy (2000s), but that it also launched and freed us. Retrospectively, what then felt like defeatism and helplessness on our part now looks more like the flailing tentacles of aspiring brains and bodies set loose. The sudden collapse of the Eastern Bloc, the surging desire witnessed in Berlin and Tiananmen, cracked up our own rigid intellectual framing.¹⁷ This is maybe the most important change: we've let go of scientism, of knowledgeable and structuralist disdain. No more do we put the future into the hands of (our) thinkers. No more do we want scientists to discriminate between the different options. No expert nor intellectual will do, for collective desire has come into play.¹⁸

This is not to say that desire overrules science but rather that it gets into science. All knowledge-making is motivated, and luckily so. The Left never claimed otherwise but it has (had) a harder time accepting the next point made by the sudden surges of desire: nothing is structurally determined; all is want and subjectivity-in-the-making; only collective practices matter; or, in sum, desire, thinking, and action coincide and they're everywhere. We're all think-doers, players, practitioners and none of us can tell others what to think-do without exposing ourselves and offering alliances first.¹⁹ Exit the avant-garde. Exit the intellectual framing.²⁰ If we take that point, we can learn how to strengthen our practitioners' locales, wherever they are, be it by brainy, hands-on, experimental, or traditional means. All registers are open to us for the deterministic Left has loosened its grip.²¹ That's the third and maybe most recent step.

To conclude, then, we might take a look at the emerging current decade. Whatever its outcome, the Arab Spring has already marked an epochal change. Uprisings do happen. From there on, anti-capitalism or what can now be called otherworldliness might take yet another step. After the transversal reclaiming, the plunge into earthly reliances and the spread of think-doing, non-Western and non-Christian heritages might hold our fourth mutation.²² And this says something about otherworldliness. "How is 'becoming with' a practice of becoming worldly?"²³ "What change are we capable of when we encounter others?"²⁴ Otherworldliness consists of continually enriching our relations with the world.²⁵ It is a way of adding issues to our concern and letting ourselves be activated by it. Perhaps, its subtitle should be "The Rehabilitation of Our Experimental Capacities" or maybe it should declare "The End of Sitting Upon Our Laurels." For we're not waiting anymore. We're exposed, and that's the least we can say.

Endnotes

- 1 Isabelle Stengers, *Au temps des catastrophes: Résister à la barbarie qui vient* (Paris: La Découverte, 2009); Jared Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2005); Franz Broschimmer, *Ecocide: A Short History of the Mass Extinction of Species* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); Mike Davis, *Dead Cities and Other Tales* (New York: The New Press, 2002).
- 2 See radio series such as: "Terre à terre" ("2004, France Culture, led by Ruth Stegassy) and "Objecteurs de croissance" ("2006, Radio Panik in Belgium), literally meaning "Down to Earth" and "Growth Objectors." Or written accounts of recent movements such as in: David Vercauteren, *Micropolitiques des groupes: pour une écologie des pratiques collectives* (Mayenne, France: HB éditions, 2007). Or exhibitions such as: "Bêtes et Hommes," curated by Vinciane Despret, Yolande Bacot and Catherine Mariette at La Villette, Paris, from 12 September 2007 until 20 January 2008; "Making Things Public. Atmospheres of Democracy," curated by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel at ZKM—Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany, from 20 March until 3 October 2005. These are but a few inspiring instances, others will be mentioned in the following notes.
- 3 The word "otherworldliness" is inspired by Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)—at the end of the text, I mention more, but suffice to say here that the word is inspired by the French and Spanish "alter-globalisation" (rather than anti-globalisation). Other than that, this article is based on Felix Guattari, *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (Bloomington: In-

diana University Press, 1995) (or. Fr. 1992). The reading of the book was done collectively, by the GECO - Group of Constructivist Studies reading group at the University of Brussels (ULB) during 2010–11. I would particularly like to thank Sophie Auby, Julie Colaiacovo, Fleur Courtois-l'Heureux, Serge Hayez, Ardan Kalantaran, Nicolas Prignot, Isabelle Rouquette, Isabelle Stengers, and Willy Wolsztajn for this shared learning.

- 4 Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers, *La Sorcellerie Capitaliste: Pratiques de désenchantement* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005) the title of which deserves translation: *Bewitching Capitalism: How to Break its Spell*.
- 5 Starhawk, "How We Really Shut Down the WTO," December 1999, available on www.starhawk.org. Starhawk, *Web of Powers: Notes from the Global Uprising* (Gabriola Isl, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2002). On the importance of considering all-pervasive struggle, see: Géraldine Brausch, "Un détour par les stratégies de Jullien pour relire les analyses stratégiques de Foucault," in *Dissensus* 4 (2011), 80–118, 2011. For a new sense of struggle, see also: Michael Hardt & Toni Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (London: Penguin, 2005); or recent documentaries such as "Marx Reloaded" (Arte, April 2011) and ongoing meetings such as the European Social Forums (2002).
- 6 On the importance of placing the bets, see American Pragmatist

- Philosophy in general and more particularly: William James, *The Will to Believe & Human Immortality* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1956); or films by Frank Capra such as *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* (1939), *Meet John Doe* (1941), or *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946).
- 7 Vinciane Despret, "En finir avec l'innocence. Dialogue avec Isabelle Stengers et Donna Haraway," Eva Rodriguez (ed.), *A propos de Donna Haraway* (working title) (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, forthcoming). In the same book, see also my text: "With whose blood were my eyes crafted" (D. Haraway) Les savoirs situés comme la proposition d'une autre objectivité."
 - 8 For relays and connexions between different struggles, see Michel Foucault & Gilles Deleuze "Les intellectuels et le pouvoir," in *L'Arc* 49 (1972), 3–10. Republished in Foucault's *Dits et Ecrits* (1994, 2001).
 - 9 The tactic of defining the "us" as being variegated and already active on the ground, be it by sometimes mundane but nevertheless decisive acts, is inspired by the way in which Virginia Woolf brings on the "Society of the Marginals" in *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1938).
 - 10 See their website: www.clubofrome.org > history.
 - 11 On atmospheric reliances, see: Peter Sloterdijk, *Ecumes, Sphères III* (Paris: Hachette, 2006) (first translation 2005, or. Germ. 2003, and the English translation is forthcoming by Semiotext(e) editions); Peter Sloterdijk, *Neither Sun nor Death* (New York: Semiotext(e), 2011) (or. Germ. 2001). For the difference between elementary configurations and the maze of interspecific reliances, see: Reviel Netz, *Barbed Wire, an ecology of modernity* (Wesleyan University Press: 2004) and especially his critique of Soviet agricultural planning; James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Bruno Latour, "A Plea for Earthly Sciences," keynote lecture for the annual meeting of the British Sociological Association, London, April 2007 (online www.bruno-latour.fr).
 - 12 On Peak Oil, see: Rob Hopkins, *The Transition Handbook: From oil dependency to local resilience* (White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008); Giovanna Borasi and Miro Zardini, dir., *Désolé plus d'essence: L'innovation architecturale en réponse à la crise pétrolière de 1973* (Montreal & Mantova: Centre Canadien d'architecture & Corraini Edizioni, 2007); James Howard Kunstler, *The Long Emergency: Surviving the Converging Catastrophes of the Twentieth Century* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005).
 - 13 Damian White and Chris Wilbert, *Technonatures: Environments, Technologies, Spaces, and Places in the Twenty-First Century* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009). For natureculture, see: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993) (or. Fr. 1991). Jennifer Wolch, "Zoöpolis," Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel (eds.), *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands* (London and New York: Verso, 1998). See also my article: "L'écologie urbaine: mode d'existence? mode de revendication?" in *Cosmopolitiques—Cahiers théoriques pour l'écologie politique* 7 (2004), 137–148.
 - 14 For the fish, see: Richard White, *The Organic Machine: The Remaking of the Columbia River* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995); Christelle Gramaglia, "Passions et savoirs contrariés comme préalables à la constitution d'une cause environnementale. Mobilisations de pêcheurs et de juristes pour la protection des rivières," in *Anthropologie des connaissances* 3/3 406–431. For the organs, see: Katrin Solhdju, *Selbstexperimente: Die Suche nach der Innenperspektive und ihre epistemologischen Folgen* (München: Finke, 2011). For the dunes, see: Stéphane, Douady, *Le chant des dunes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2006). On wastes metabolising, see: Matthew Gandy, "Rethinking urban metabolism: water, space and the modern city," in *City* 8/3 (2004), 381–387. On the streets' virtual life, see my book: *Agglomérer: Une anatomie de l'extension bruxelloise (1828-1915)* (Brussels: ASP & VUB Brussels University Press). On the metros' atmospheric existence, see work by Olivier Thiery: "Diagnostiquer les devenirs du métro à travers 'Meteor': Ethnologie et prospective avec Isaac Joseph," Daniel Cefai an Carole Saturno, *Isaac Joseph: Itinéraires d'un pragmatiste* (Paris: Economica, 2007); "Ethnographie des atmosphères, ethnographie atmosphérique. Éléments pour une reconfiguration de l'enquête anthropologique avec Peter Sloterdijk," in *Ethnographiques.org* 5 (2004).
 - 15 This emulation by non-humans was taught to me by Bruno Latour, as is the case for many other researchers who have followed his doctoral seminars. See for instance the following collection of recently published essays, Sophie Houdart and Olivier Thiery, dir., *Humains non Humains: Comment repeupler les sciences sociales* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011). Otherwise: Isabelle Stengers, *The Invention of Modern Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000) (or. Fr. 1993); Vinciane Despret, *Quand le loup habitera avec l'agneau* (Paris: La Découverte & Seuil, 2002). In a more hands-on and collectively brainy manner, see the group Rotor (www.rotordb.org), who initially worked on wastes and reuse only and who now, more broadly speaking, brings connections to everyday materials. See our collaboration at the Architecture Biennale of Venice and also two of their other books: Rotor, Ariane d'Hoop and Benedikte Zitouni, *Usus / usures: How Things Stand* (Bruxelles: éditions de la Communauté française de Belgique, 2010); Rotor, Coproduction (Brussels: CIVA & A16, 2010); Chus Martinez and Katja Schroeder (eds.), *Deutschland im Herbst*, a project by Rotor (Kraichtal: Ursula Blickle Foundation, 2008).
 - 16 On the redistribution or reconsideration of the active and passive qualities, see: Bruno Latour, *On the Cult of the Factish Gods* followed by *Iconoclasm* (Duke University Press, in press) (or. Fr. 2009); Didier Debaise (ed.), *Philosophie des possessions* (Paris: Presses du Réel, forthcoming).
 - 17 See also Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis, op. cit.*, on surging desire, historical subjectivity and the events of Berlin and Tiananmen as being, amongst others, the starting point for his book.
 - 18 Desire is an upcoming theme in political movements and collective claims. See, for example, an anonymous and collective leaflet: *Chomping Out: Les désirs ne chôment pas* (Bruxelles: Editions d'une Certaine Gaïeté, 2011). It literally means "Coming Out" as "Chomeurs", i.e., jobless people who advocate the right to be jobless and to choose the activities and engagements they're involved in, as well as claiming and redefining the solidarity between workers in a more general sense. Apparently, the title was taken from the following article: Valérie Marange, "Le désir ne chôme pas", *Chimères* 3 (1998). See also the part on "Elles voulaient plus," in Vinciane Despret and Isabelle Stengers, *Les faiseuses d'histoires: Que font les femmes à la pensée* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011).
 - 19 See the "Ecology of Practices" developed in: Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques: Pour en finir avec la tolérance (partie 7)* (Paris: La Découverte, 1997). English translation is forthcoming at the University of Minnesota Press; the first three parts have already been published in one single volume.
 - 20 On the difficult and even hateful relationship of intellectuals with the masses, on the disdain for popular knowledges, see: Jacques Rancière, *La Haine de la démocratie* (Paris: Fabrice, 2005).
 - 21 Especially in France, Deterministic or Structuralist or what is also called Systemic Left have been poignantly present. I remember being a student and participating in a seminar at the EHESS—Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales in Paris, at the end of the 1990s, where it was impossible to object to the precise and timed predictions of Capitalist Downfall given by Immanuel Wallerstein without being accused of betraying the ideals of Science and of Marx. It is not surprising that Félix Guattari, in *Chaosmosis, op. cit.*, felt compelled to criticise structuralist and deterministic thinking and pleaded for a transition from the Scientist Paradigm to the Ethic-Aesthetic Paradigm. In other words, this part of the article should be put into a French, Continental, context where Deterministic, Structuralist and Systemic thinking have been extremely important for the Left.
 - 22 This might again take an English or American audience by surprise. But it must be said that in French or Francophone Belgian academic and political thinking, very few non-Western, non-Christian heritages are at work or explicitly taken on. Just to take an example: the world-known ecofeminist Vandana Shiva or the as well-known alter-globalist Arundhati Roy, both women living in India, are simply ignored in French-speaking academia. This is to say that the fourth mutation is an urgent one and will, quite probably, be a slow one in some cultural settings.
 - 23 Donna Haraway, *When Species ...*, op. cit., 3.
 - 24 Taken from a recent conference paper by the anthropologist Graziella Vella on her work on slaughterhouses and architecture, where she refers to Vinciane Despret saying: "La lecture par contraste n'est pas tant d'interroger les autres qu'une façon d'interroger ce que peut notre culture quand elle les rencontre et ce que cette rencontre suscite comme invention," taken from Vinciane Despret, *Ces émotions qui nous fabriquent: Ethnopsychologie des émotions* (Paris: Le Seuil & La Découverte, 1999) (translated into English: *Our Emotional Makeup: Ethnopsychology and Selfhood*).
 - 25 This is directly inspired by a sentence in Félix Guattari, *Chaosmosis* (Paris: Galilée, 2005): "La seule finalité acceptable des activités humaines est la production d'une subjectivité auto-enrichissant de façon continu son rapport au monde" (38).