# 2 Anthropocenic Politicization
## From the Politics of the Environment to Politicizing Environments

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Let's start by stating that after "the rights of man," the rise of the "the rights of Nature" is a contemporary form of the opium for the people. It is an only slightly camouflaged religion: the millenarian terror, concern for everything save the properly political destiny of peoples, new instruments for control of everyday life, the fear of death and catastrophes . . . It is a gigantic operation in the depoliticization of subjects. (Badiou, 2008, p. 139)

We should reinvent utopia. But in what sense? There are two false meanings of utopia. One is this old notion of imagining an idea of society which we know will never be realized. The other is the capitalist utopia in the sense of new perverse desires that you are not only allowed but even solicited to realize. The true utopia is when the situation is so without issue, without a way to resolve it within the coordinates of the possible, that out of the pure urge of survival you have to invent a new space. Utopia is not kind of a free imagination; utopia is a matter of innermost urgency. You are forced to imagine it as the only way out, and this is what need today. (Žižek, quoted in Konner & Taylor, 2005)

This chapter explores an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, there is a consensual concern, shared by many politicians, activists, and most scientists, that the environmental conditions of the world are rapidly reaching a potentially irreversible tipping point threatening to plunge humans and nonhumans alike into an abyssal socioenvironmental decline. This concern has been translated into the incorporation of "environmental" themes into practically every policy domain, while explicitly "environmental" policies have been designed to mitigate or manage the growing anxiety over the condition Nature seems to be in. A proliferating literature and committed environmental activism invariably signals the importance of a determined environmentalization of politics to assure a "green future," one that takes Nature really seriously while assuring that civilization as we know it can continue for a while longer. On the other hand, a growing number of political theorists and proliferating political activism, such as the Arab Spring and various Indignado and Occupy! movements that demand a radical and democratic overhaul of the existing social and political configuration,

signaled that the past few decades have been characterized by a process of depoliticization whereby political matters have been reduced to the pluralist negotiation of a series of techno-organizational activities designed to manage consensually established issues and problems (including environmental ones), but within a social and political-economic frame—institutional liberal democracy as the sphere for public decision-making and market-led capitalism as the naturalized configuration for organizing the transformation and allocation of nature/resources—that is itself beyond contestation.

I shall explore the apparent tension between the process of environmentalizing politics on the one hand and its insertion in an institutional configuration that is marked by alleged deepening processes of depoliticization or post-politicization on the other. More importantly, the elevation of the environmental condition to the status of universal global concern that requires urgent techno-managerial attention has in fact been one of the key drivers through which the annulment of the political has progressed. In addition, the inauguration of a politics of the environment, albeit nurtured by a fear of socioecological disintegration, is sutured by a particular fantasmic scripting of what Nature is, deflects attention from the socioecological predicament we are actually in, solidifies the very dynamics and processes that produce radically uneven and unequal socioecological outcomes and prevents a politicization of the environment understood as the egalitarian-democratic dispute and struggle over the production of the socioecological conditions we wish to inhabit. Producing green utopias cannot be other than a political process. It is precisely the latter that much of the contemporary politics of the environment not only disavows but actually forecloses. All this unfolds in a context in which it is now abundantly clear that environmental conditions are rapidly worsening. Climate scientists, for example, argue that the Kyoto objective of keeping global warming below 2°C is a pipe dream; temperature increases of more than 4°C are indeed very likely and probably inevitable, even if we change course radically today. Despite the promises of the "green" economy and the policy attention to sustainable green futures, the socioenvironmental nightmare that many have warned us of is actually already here. We shall conclude by considering the emergent hesitant forms of repoliticization that may open new avenues for politicizing the environment.

## 1. THE DEATH OF NATURE: EMERGENT VIBRANT NATURES

The death or the end of Nature has been announced many times[1] (see, e.g., McKibben, 1989). This "death" does not, of course, imply a dematerialization of human life. On the contrary, humans and nonhumans are ever more entangled through myriad interactions and transformative processes, some which alter the very dynamics of deep geological time itself. "Welcome to the Anthropocene" has become in recent years a popular catch-phrase to

inform us that we are now in a new geological era, one in which humans are coproducers of the deep geological time that hitherto had slowly ground away irrespective of human dabbling with the surface layers of earth and atmosphere. Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen coined the term about a decade ago to refer to the successor of the Holocene. Since the beginning of industrialization, so the Anthropocenic argument goes, humans' increasing interaction with their physical conditions of existence has resulted in a qualitative shift in the geoclimatic behavior of the earth system. Ocean acidification, biodiversity transformation, gene displacement and recombination, climate change, and major infrastructures affecting the earth's geodetic dynamics have resulted in knotting together "natural" and "social" processes such that humans have become active agents in coshaping earth's deep geological time. The term "Anthropocene" affirms that humans and nature are coproduced and that the particular historical epoch that goes under the name of capitalism forged this mutual determination. The Anthropocene is indeed just another name for Nature's death. Nature framed as the imaginary externally conditioning sphere of human existence has come to an end. This cannot be unmade, however hard we try. It is from the position of the radical entanglement of the social and the natural that the environmental conundrum ought to be approached. Such perspectives move the gaze from thinking through a "politics of the environment" to "politicizing the environment." This extends the terrain of the political to domains hitherto left to the mechanics of Nature. The nonhuman world becomes "enrolled" in a process of politicization, and that is precisely what needs to be fully endorsed.

The death of Nature signals the demise of particular imaginings of Nature, of a set of symbolic inscriptions that inferred a singular Nature, at once external and internal to humans and human life. Yet particular imaginaries and fantasies about what Nature is still suture the terrain of environmental politics. In *Ecology Without Nature*, for example, Timothy Morton (2007) calls Nature "a transcendental term in a material mask [that] stands at the end of a potentially infinite series of other terms that collapse into it" (p. 14). He distinguishes between at least three interrelated places or meanings of Nature in our symbolic universe. First, as a floating signifier, the "content" of Nature is expressed through a range of diverse terms that all collapse in the Name of Nature: DNA, elephants, mineral water, the Andes, hunger, heart-beat, markets, desire, profits, $CO_2$, greed, competition, etc. Such metonymic lists, although offering a certain unstable meaning, are inherently slippery and show a stubborn refusal to fixate meaning consistently and durably. Morton's argument resonates with Slavoj Žižek's statement that "Nature does not exist!" His Lacanian perspective insists on the difference "between [a] series of ordinary signifiers and the central element which has to remain empty in order to serve as the underlying organizing principle of the series" (Žižek, 2000, p. 52). Nature constitutes exactly such a central (empty or floating) element whose meaning can be gleaned only by relating

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it to other more directly recognizable signifiers. Nature becomes a symbolic tapestry—a montage—of meaning, held together with quilting points. For example, "biodiversity," "eco-cities," "$CO_2$," or "climate change" can be thought of as quilting points (or *points de capiton*) through which a certain matrix of meanings of Nature is articulated. These quilting points are also more than mere anchoring points; they refer to a beyond of meaning, a certain enjoyment that becomes structured in fantasy (e.g., the desire for an environmentally balanced and socially harmonious order). In other words, there is always a remainder or excess that evades symbolization.

Second, Morton argues, Nature has "the force of law, a norm against which deviation is measured" (Morton, 2007, p. 14), for example, when Nature is summoned to normalize heterosexuality and to think queerness as deviant and unnatural or to see competition between humans as natural and altruism as a product of "culture" (or vice versa). Normative power inscribed in Nature is invoked as an organizing principle that is transcendental and universal, allegedly residing outside the remit allocated to humans and non-humans alike, but that exercises an inescapable performative effect and leaves a nonalienable imprint. This is a view that sees Nature as something given, as a solid foundational (or ontological) basis from which we act and that can be invoked to provide an anchor for ethical or normative judgments of ecological, social, cultural, political, or economic procedures and practices. Consider, for example, how the vision of a stable climate is elevated to a "public good," both by the British parliament and by the UNHCHR: "[T]he delivery of a stable climate, as an essential public good, is an immediate security, prosperity and moral imperative, not simply a long-term environmental challenge" (cited in Hulme, 2010, p. 270).

Third, Nature invokes, for Morton, a plurality of fantasies and desires, such as the dream of a sustainable nature, a balanced climate, the desire for love-making on a warm beach under the setting sun, the fear of the revenge of Nature if we keep pumping $CO_2$ into the atmosphere. Nature is invoked here as the stand-in for other, often repressed or invisible, longings and passions—the Lacanian *objet petit a* around which we shape our drives and that covers up for the lack of ground on which to base our subjectivity (Žižek, 1999). It is the sort of fantasy displayed in calls for restoring a true (original but presumably presently lost) humane harmony by retrofitting the world to ecological balance and in the longing for a Nature that functions as the big "Other," the one that guides us on the path to redeeming our predicament. Here, Nature is invoked as the "external" terrain that offers the promise, if attended to properly, of fostering a truly harmonious life, a shiny green utopia, but also from which threat of disaster emanates if we perturb its internal functioning.

In sum, these three uses of Nature simultaneously imply an attempt to fixate its unstable meaning while being presented as a fetishized "Other" that reflects or at least functions as a symptom through which our displaced deepest fears and longings are expressed. As such, the concept of Nature

becomes ideology par excellence and functions ideologically, and by that
I mean that it forecloses thought, disavows the inherent slipperiness of the
concept, and ignores the multiplicities, inconsistencies, and incoherencies
inscribed in its symbolization (Morton, 2007, p. 24). For Slavoj Žižek, any
attempt to suture the meaning of empty signifiers is a decidedly political
gesture. The disavowal or the refusal to recognize the political character of
such gestures, the attempts to universalize and suture the situated and posi-
tioned meanings inscribed metonymically in Nature, lead to perverse forms
of depoliticization, to rendering Nature politically mute and socially neutral
(Swyngedouw, 2007). The disavowal of the empty core of Nature by coloniz-
ing its meaning, by filling in the void, staining it with inserted meanings that
are subsequently generalized and homogenized, is the gesture par excellence
of depoliticization, of placing Nature outside the political, that is, outside
the field of public dispute, contestation, and disagreement. In addition, such
symbolizations of Nature disavow the Real of natures, that is, the heteroge-
neous, unpredictable, occasionally catastrophic, acting out of socioecologi-
cal processes that mark the Anthropocene. It is these unsymbolized natures
that haunt us in their excessive acting: droughts, hurricanes, tsunamis, killer
heat waves, roaming environmental refugees, oil-spills, recombinant DNA,
floods, globalizing diseases, and disintegrating polar ice are just a few of the
more evocative markers of such socionatural processes.

Bruno Latour, albeit from a rather different perspective, equally pro-
poses abandoning Nature and advocates turning to a political ecology
that sees the world as filled with socionatural quasiobjects. For Latour,
there is neither Nature nor Society (or Culture) outside the cultural and
discursive practices that produced this binary formulation (Latour, 1993).
For him, the imbroglios of human and nonhuman things that proliferate
in the world consist of continuously multiplying nature–culture hybrids
that stand between the poles of nature and culture. Think, for example,
of greenhouse gases, Dolly the cloned sheep, tar sands, dams, oil rigs, cit-
ies, or electromagnetic waves. They are simultaneously social/cultural and
natural/physical, and their coherence, i.e., their relative spatial and tempo-
ral sustainability, is predicated upon assembled networks of human and
nonhuman relationships (Swyngedouw, 2006). Natures are always already
social. Jane Bennett (2010) extends this by insisting that these socionatu-
ral materials are "vibrant matter," exercising their own performative effect
in the shaping of socioenvironmental things, conditions, dynamics, and
politics. Much of this thought is perhaps best summarized by the geophilo-
sophical perspectives of Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari:

> There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process that
> produces the one within the other and couples the machine together . . .
> the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any mean-
> ing whatsoever . . . the human essence of nature and the natural essence
> of man become one within the form of production or industry, just as

they do within the life of man as a species . . . man and nature are not like two opposition terms confronting each other . . . rather they are one and the same essential reality, the producer-product (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, pp. 2–5).

These perspectives, too, reject retaining the concept of Nature and suggest in its stead to consider the infinite heterogeneity of the procedures of assembling, disassembling, and reassembling the rhizomatic networks through which things, bodies, natures, and cultures become enmeshed and through which relatively stable quasiobjects come into view (Braun, 2006; Castree, 2003). This gesture also attempts to repoliticize the "environment," to let quasiobjects enter the public assembly of political concerns (Latour, 2004).

Eminent natural scientists echo these critical social theory perspectives. Harvard biologists Lewontin and Levins (2007), for example, also argue that Nature has been filled by scientists with a particular set of universalizing meanings that ultimately depoliticize Nature and facilitate particular mobilizations of such "scientifically" constructed Nature. In contrast, they insist that the biological world is inherently relationally constituted through contingent, historically produced, infinitely variable forms in which each part, human or nonhuman, organic or nonorganic, is intrinsically bound up with the wider relationships that make up the whole (Harvey, 1996). There is no safety in Nature: Nature is unpredictable and erratic, moving spasmodically and blindly. There is no final guarantee in Nature on which to base our politics or the social, on which to mirror our dreams, hopes, or aspirations.

In sum, and in particular as a result of the growing global awareness of "the environmental crisis," the inadequacy of our symbolic representations of Nature becomes more acute as the Real of natures, in the form of a wide variety of socioecological threats (e.g., global warming, new diseases, biodiversity loss, resource depletion, and pollution), invades and unsettles our received understandings of Nature, forcing a transformation of the signifying chains that attempt to provide "content" for Nature, while at the same time exposing the impossibility of capturing fully the Real of natures (Žižek, 2008). The point of the above argument is that the natures we see and work with are necessarily radically imagined, scripted, and symbolically charged as Nature. These inscriptions are always inadequate, they leave a gap, an excess or remainder, and maintain a certain distance from the coproduced natures that are there, which are complex, chaotic, often unpredictable, radically contingent, historically and geographically variable, risky, patterned in endlessly complex ways, ordered along "strange" attractors. In other words, there is no Nature out there that needs or requires salvation in name of either Nature itself or a generic humanity. There is nothing foundational in Nature that needs, demands, or requires sustaining. There is no utopia to be discerned in the inner functioning of Nature. The debate and

controversies over Nature and what to do with it, in contrast, signal our political inability to engage in directly political and social arguments and strategies about rearranging the socioecological coordinates of everyday life, the production of new socionatural configurations, the contingencies of material natures, and the arrangements of sociometabolic organization (something usually called capitalism) that we inhabit. In the next section, we shall exemplify and deepen this analysis by looking at sustainability policies and arguments as depoliticizing gestures, predicated upon a growing concern for a Nature that does not exist.

## 2. THE FANTASY OF SUSTAINABILITY: A POSTPOLITICAL GREEN UTOPIA?

There is now a widespread consensus that the earth and many of its component parts are in an ecological bind that may short-circuit human and non-human life in the not too distant future if urgent and immediate action to retrofit nature to a more benign equilibrium is postponed for much longer. Irrespective of the particular views of Nature held by different individuals and social groups, consensus has emerged over the seriousness of the environmental condition and the precariousness of our socioecological predicament. While there is certainly no agreement on what exactly Nature is and how to relate to it, there is a virtually unchallenged consensus over the need to be more "environmentally" sustainable if disaster is to be avoided.

In this consensual setting, environmental problems are generally staged as universally threatening the survival of humankind, announcing the premature termination of civilization as we know it. The discursive matrix through which the contemporary meaning of the environmental condition is woven is one quilted systematically by the continuous invocation of fear and danger, the specter of dystopian ecological annihilation, or at least seriously distressed socioecological conditions in the near future. "Fear" is indeed the crucial node through which much of the current environmental narrative is threaded, and that continues to feed the concern with "sustainability" (Swyngedouw, 2011a).

This scripting of Nature permits and sustains a postpolitical arrangement sutured by fear and driven by a concern to manage things so that we can hold on to what we have (Swyngedouw, 2007). This constellation leads Alain Badiou to insist that ecology has become the new opium of the masses, replacing religion as the axis around which our fear of social disintegration becomes articulated. Such ecologies of fear ultimately conceal, yet nurture, a conservative or at least reactionary message. While clouded in rhetoric of the need for radical change in order to stave off immanent catastrophe, a range of technical, social, managerial, physical, and other measures have to be taken to make sure that things remain the same, that nothing really changes, that life (or at least our lives) can go on as before.

This sentiment is also shared by Frederic Jameson when he claims that "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (Jameson, 2003, p. 76).

In the call for rebalanced environmental conditions, many actors with very different and often antagonistic cultural, economic, political, or social positions, interests, and inspiration can find common cause in the name of a socially disembodied humanity. *An Inconvenient Truth* becomes, strangely enough, a very convenient one for those who believe that civilization as we know it (I prefer to call this capitalism) needs to be preserved, rescued from potential calamity and ecological Armageddon. It calls for the rapid deployment of a whole battery of innovative environmental technologies, ecofriendly management principles, and sustainable organizational forms, so that the existing socioecological order really does not have to change radically.

The generic signifier that encapsulates these postpolitical attempts to deal with Nature is, of course, "sustainability." Even more so than the slippery and floating meanings of Nature, "sustainability" is the empty signifier par excellence. It refers to nothing and everything at the same time. Its prophylactic qualities can only be suggested by adding specifying metaphors, hence, the proliferation of terms such as sustainable cities, sustainable planning, sustainable development, sustainable forestry, sustainable transport, sustainable regions, sustainable communities, sustainable yield, sustainable loss, sustainable harvest, sustainable resource (fill in whatever you fancy) use, sustainable housing, sustainable growth, sustainable policy, etc. The gesture to "sustainability" already guarantees that the matter of Nature and the environment is taken seriously, that our fears are taken account of by those in charge.

The fantasy of imagining a benign and "sustainable" Nature avoids asking the politically sensitive, but vital, question of what kind of socioenvironmental arrangements and assemblages we wish to produce, how these can be achieved, and what sort of environments we wish to inhabit, while at the same time acknowledging the radical contingency and undecidability of natures. Imagining a harmonious "sustainable" Nature is the clearest expression of the structure of fantasy in the Lacanian sense. While it is impossible to specify what exactly sustainability is all about (except in most general or generic of terms), this void of meaning is captured by a multiplying series of fantasies, of stories and imaginations that try to bridge the constitutive gap between the indeterminacies of natures on the one hand (and the associated fear of the continuous return of the Real of natures in the guise of ecological disasters such as droughts, hurricanes, and floods), and the always frustrated desire for some sort of harmonious and equitable socioecological living on the other, one that disavows the absence of a foundation for the social in a Nature that, after all, does not exist. "Sustainability" or, more precisely, the quilting points around which its meaning is woven, is the environmental policy maker and activist's *objet petit a*, the thing around which desire revolves, yet simultaneously stands in for the disavowed Real,

the repressed core, the state of the situation, i.e., the recognition that the
world is really in a mess and really needs drastic and dramatic, that is, revo-
lutionary (a metaphor that of course can never be mobilized, that is banned,
censured) action. It is in this phantasmagorical space that the proper politi-
cal dimension (on which more below) disappears to be replaced by a con-
sensually established frame that calls for techno-managerial action in the
name of humanity, social integration, Nature, the earth and its human and
nonhuman inhabitants, and all peoples in all places.

In sum, postpolitical sustainability policies rest on the following foun-
dations. First, the social and ecological problems caused by modernity/
capitalism are external side-effects; they are not an inherent and integral
part of the relations of liberal politics and capitalist economies. Second,
a strictly populist postpolitics emerges here: one that elevates the interest
of an imaginary "the People," Nature, or "the environment" to the level
of the universal rather than opening spaces that permit us to universalize
the claims of particular socionatures, environments, or social groups or
classes. Third, these side-effects are constituted as global, universal, and
threatening: they are a total threat. Fourth, the "enemy" or the target of
concern is thereby, of course, continuously externalized and disembodied.
The "enemy" is always vague, ambiguous, socially unnamed and politically
uncounted, and ultimately empty. Fifth, the target of concern can be man-
aged through a consensual dialogical politics whereby demands become
depoliticized and politics naturalized within a given socioecological order
for which there is ostensibly no real alternative (Swyngedouw, 2009).

## 3. POLITICIZING ENVIRONMENTS

As I have argued elsewhere (see Swyngedouw, 2007, 2011a), such consensu-
ally established concerns, such as "sustainability," structured around ecol-
ogies of fear that nurture a reactionary stance and urge techno-managerial
forms of intervention, are an expression of the current process of postpo-
liticization and postdemocratization, one that is arranged around distinct
biopolitical gestures. Postpolitics refers to a politics in which ideological or
dissensual contestation and struggles are replaced by techno-managerial
planning, expert management, and administration, "whereby the regula-
tion of the security and welfare of human lives is the primary goal" (Žižek,
1999). Such postpolitical arrangement signal a depoliticized (in the sense
of the disappearance of the democratic agonistic struggle over the con-
tent and direction of socioecological life) public space whereby expertise,
interest intermediation, and administration through governance define the
zero-level of politics (see Marquand, 2004). This depoliticized consensual
arrangement is organized through postdemocratic institutions of gover-
nance, such as the Kyoto protocol, the European Union, or assorted other
public–private governing arrangements, that are increasingly replacing the

political institutions of government (see Crouch, 2004) and are embedded in a broadly and naturalized neoliberal political–economic order.

The arguments explored above are, I would argue, of vital importance for grappling with the process of postpoliticization, marked by the dominance of empty signifiers such as Nature or Sustainability, and for moving from a politics of the environment to environmental politics. The call made above to abandon Nature in no way suggests ignoring, let alone forgetting, the Real of natures or, more precisely, the diverse, multiple, whimsical, contingent, and often unpredictable socioecological relationships of which we are part. The claim we make is about the urgent need to question the legitimizing of all manner of socioenvironmental politics, policies, and interventions in the name of a thoroughly imagined and symbolized Nature or Sustainability, a procedure that necessarily forecloses a properly political frame through which such imaginaries become constituted and hegemonized and disavows the constitutive split of the people by erasing the spaces of agnostic encounter. The above reconceptualization urges us to accept the extraordinary variability of natures, insists on the need to make "a wager" on natures, forces us to choose politically between this rather than that nature, invites us to plunge into the relatively unknown, expect the unexpected, accept that not all there is can be known, and, most importantly, fully endorse the violent moment that is inscribed in any concrete or real socioenvironmental intervention.

Indeed, the ultimate aim of politics is intervention, to change the given socioenvironmental ordering in a certain manner. Like any intervention, this is a violent act, erasing at least partly what is there in order to erect something new and different. The recognition that political acts are singular interventions that produce particular socioecological arrangements and milieus and, in doing so, foreclose the possibility of others emerging, is of central importance. Any intervention enables the formation of certain socioecological assemblages and closes down others. The "violence" inscribed in such choice has to be fully endorsed. For example, one cannot have simultaneously a truly carbon-free city and permit unlimited car-based mobility. They are mutually exclusive. Even less can an egalitarian, democratic, solidarity-based, and ecologically sensible future be produced without marginalizing or excluding those who insist on a private appropriation of the commons of the earth and its mobilization for accumulation and personal enrichment.

Such violent encounters, of course, always constitute a political act, one that can be legitimized only in political terms, and not—as is customarily done—through an externalized legitimation that resides in a fantasy of Nature or Sustainability. Any political act is one that reorders socioecological coordinates and patterns, reconfigures uneven socioecological relationships (while foreclosing others), often with unforeseen or unforeseeable consequences. Consider, for example, how the historical struggle for political emancipation and equality was predicated upon sustained class

and political struggle in the face of often sustained and ruthless oppression and opposition.

Such interventions that express a choice, take sides, invariably signal a totalitarian moment and the temporary suspension of the democratic understood as the agonistic encounter of heterogeneous views under the aegis of an axiomatically presumed equality of all. The gap between the democratic as a political given, predicated upon the presumption of the equality, on the one hand, and the autocratic moment of political intervention as the (temporary) suspension of the democratic, on the other, needs to be radically endorsed. While a pluralist democratic politics, founded on a presumption of equality, insists on difference, disagreement, radical openness, and exploring multiple possible futures, concrete spatial–ecological intervention is necessarily about relative closure (for some), definitive choice, singular intervention and, thus, certain exclusion and occasionally even outright silencing. For example, tar sand exploitation and fracking cannot coincide with a climate policy worthy of the name. While "traditional" democratic policies are based on majoritarian principles, the democratic–egalitarian perspective insists on foregrounding equality and socioecological solidarity as the foundational gesture for a green future.

Thinking through the politics of democratic green futures requires holding together two spheres simultaneously. Jacques Rancière (1998) and others (see, e.g., Marchart, 2007, and Swyngedouw, 2011b, for a review) define these spheres as "the political" and "the police" (the policy order), respectively. The (democratic) political is the space for the enunciation, performative staging, and affirmation of egalitarian difference, for the cultivation of dissensus and disagreement, for asserting the presumption of equality of all and everyone. The police, in contrast, "is both a principle of distribution and an apparatus of administration, which relies on a symbolically constituted organization of social space, an organization that becomes the basis of and for governance. Thus, the essence of the police is . . . distribution of places, peoples, names, functions, authorities, activities and so on—and the normalization of this distribution" (Dikeç, 2007). As such, the "police" is rather close to Foucault's notion of governmentality, the conduct of conduct, the "governing" mode of assigning location, relations, and distributions. And this precisely permits the opening up of the abyssal difference between a politics of the environment understood as a form of governing, on the one hand, and politicizing environments as a mode of reasserting the political.

It is precisely the various Indignado, Occupy!, and assorted other emerging political movements that express and nurture such processes of embryonic repoliticization. Rarely in history have so many people voiced their discontent with the political and economic blueprints of the elites and signaled a desire for an alternative design of world. Alain Badiou (2011) recently explored the significance of these insurrectional events. For him, the proliferation of these insurgencies is a sign of a return of the generic ideas of

freedom, solidarity, equality, and emancipation (which generically go under the political "name" of communism), which are marked by procedures of *intensification, contraction,* and *localization.* A political Idea/Imaginary cannot find grounding without localization. A political moment is always placed, localized, and invariably operative in a public space. Squares and other (semi-)public spaces have historically always been the sites for performing and enacting emancipatory practices. At the same time, enormous vital energies are mobilized for a sustained period of time. All manner of people come together in an intensive explosion of Bakhtinian acting, of an intensified process of being. And this intensity operates in and through the collective togetherness of a wide variety of individuals who, in their multiplicity and intense process of political subjectivation, stand for the metaphorical condensation of The People (as political category). However, such intense and contracted localized practices can only ever be an event, original but ultimately prepolitical. It does not (yet) constitute a political sequence. A political truth procedure or a political sequence, for Alain Badiou, unfolds when, in the name of equality, fidelity to an event is declared, a fidelity that, although always particular, aspires to become public, to universalize. It is a wager on the truth of the egalitarian political sequence (Badiou, 2008). Such democratic political procedure requires painstaking organization, sustained political action, and a committed fidelity to universalizing the egalitarian trajectory for the management of the commons. This procedure raises the question of political subjectivation and organizational configurations and requires the development of a political name that captures the imaginary of an egalitarian commons. While during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these names were closely associated with "communism" or "socialism" and centered on the key tropes of party, proletariat, and state, the present situation requires a reimagined socioecological configuration that still revolves around the notion of equality. However, state, party, and proletariat may no longer be the key axes around which an emancipatory sequence becomes articulated. While the remarkable uprisings of 2011 signaled a desire for a different political configuration, there is a long way to go in terms of thinking through and acting upon the modalities that might unleash a proper transformative democratic political sequence. What organizational forms are appropriate to the task, what is terrain of struggle, and what or who are the agents of its enactment?

Politics, from this perspective, is about enunciating demands that lie beyond the symbolic order of the police, demands that cannot be symbolized within the frame of reference of the police and, therefore, would necessitate a transformation in and of the police to permit symbolization to occur. Yet, these are demands that are eminently sensible and feasible when the frame of the symbolic order is shifted, when the parallax gap between what is (the constituted symbolic order of the police) and what can be (the reconstituted symbolic order made possible through a shift in vantage points, one that starts from the partisan universalizing principle of

equality) is fully endorsed. They are the sort of demands that "restructure the entire social space" (Žižek, 1999, p. 208).

The urgent tasks to now undertake for those who maintain fidelity to the political events choreographed in the new insurrectional spaces that demand a new environmental politics (that is, a new mode of organizing everyday environments) revolve around inventing new modes and practices of collective and sustained political organization, organizing the concrete modalities of spatializing and universalizing the Idea provisionally materialized in these localized insurrectional events and the mobilization of a wide range of new political subjects who are not afraid to stage an egalitarian being-in-common, imagine a different commons, demand the impossible, perform the new, and confront the violence that will inevitably intensify as those who insist on maintaining the present order realize that their days might be numbered. While staging equality in public squares is a vital moment, the process of transformation requires the slow but unstoppable production of new forms of spatialization quilted around materializing the claims of equality, freedom, and solidarity. This is the promise of the return of the political embryonically manifested in insurgent practices.

Politicizing environments democratically, then, becomes an issue of enhancing the democratic political content of socioenvironmental construction by means of identifying the strategies through which a more equitable distribution of social power and a more egalitarian mode of producing natures can be achieved. This requires reclaiming proper democracy and proper democratic public spaces (as spaces for the enunciation of agonistic dispute) as a foundation for and condition of the possibility of more egalitarian socioecological arrangements, and the naming of positively embodied ega-libertarian—Balibar's metonymic fusion of equality and liberty (Balibar, 2010)—socioecological futures that are immediately realizable. In other words, egalitarian ecologies are about demanding the impossible and realizing the improbable, and this is exactly the challenge the Anthropocene poses. In sum, the politicization of the environment is predicated upon the recognition of the indeterminacy of nature, the constitutive split of the people, the unconditional democratic demand of political equality, and the real possibility of the inauguration of various possible public and collective socioecological futures that express the democratic presumptions of freedom and equality.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## NOTES

1. I shall use "Nature" to refer to the notion of an imagined universal nature; I shall use "natures" to refer to the kaleidoscopic diversity of things and processes that make up the physical world.

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# 3 A Feminist Project of Belonging for the Anthropocene

*J.K. Gibson-Graham*

## 1. OUR CHALLENGE

In this paper we are trying to do something we are not ready to do—which is to begin to rethink regional development as a way of belonging differently in the world. Regional development has been a longstanding interest for us, starting with research on deindustrialization in the New England region of the United States in the late 1970s. Our political economic take on regional development was later broadened by a feminist perspective on household and industry regional restructuring and then by a Foucauldian interest in gene-alogies of regional identity (Gibson, 2001; Gibson-Graham, 1994). More recently we have taken up action-oriented research on alternative pathways for regional development both in our respective "local" regions as well as at some distance in regions of the majority world (Gibson-Graham, 2010). In all our work thus far, the focus has been on economic activities and human political subjects—hence our unreadiness to write a paper that displaces the assumed primacy of humans to the project of regional development.

We have come to see that the scale of the environmental crisis we are part of is creating a new "we" and convening new publics on this planet. No longer can J.K. Gibson-Graham avoid the challenge of how to live differently with others on the earth. In the words of ecofeminist Val Plumwood (2007),

> If our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure to imagine and work out new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves and our high energy, high consumption, and hyper-instrumental societies adaptively . . . We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity or not at all. (p. 1)

While Plumwood's challenge is seemingly directed at all of humanity, we read it as targeting some more than others—most notably those living in Australia and the United States who have the largest ecological footprints in the world and whose lifestyles would require three or more planets if replicated globally. Plumwood's provocation spoke directly to the amal-gamated US-Australian J.K. Gibson-Graham and called us into action as