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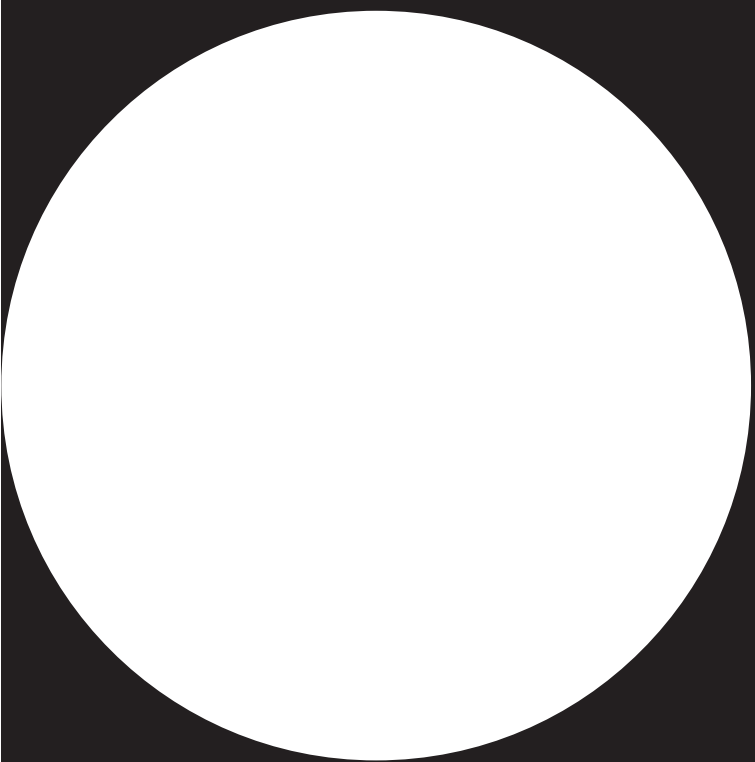
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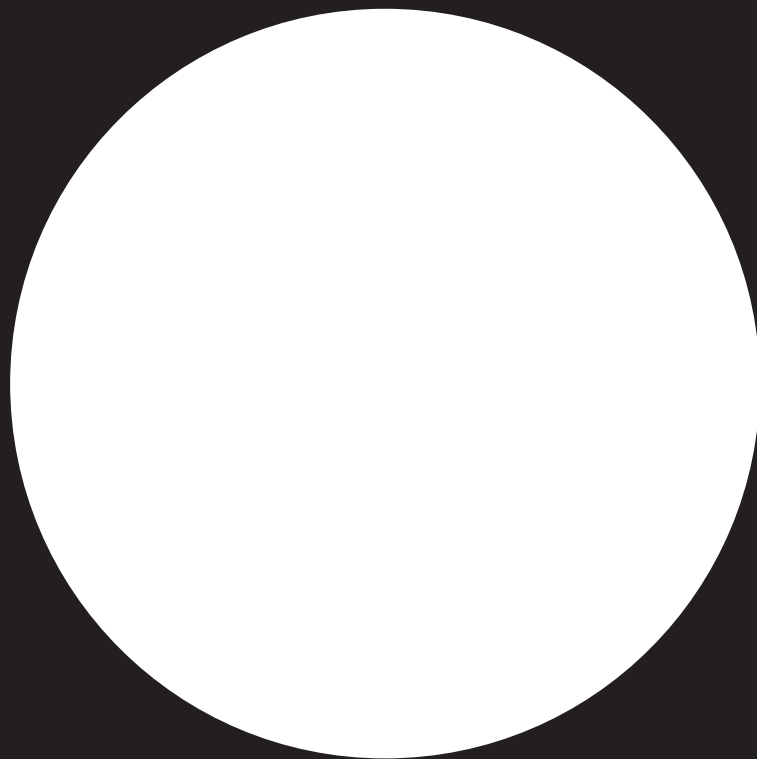
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Filippo Scafi

From Revelation to Recursion: Reading the Apocalypse as Systemic Diagnosis

Bionote: Filippo Scafi is a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at GCAS/Woolf University, junior lecturer in philosophy at GCAS College Dublin, and affiliate researcher at the School of Materialist Research. His research moves at the intersection of philosophy, anthropology, and media theory, focusing on the politics of thought at the limits of representation. His doctoral work examines the epistemological and political boundaries of the Ontological Turn in anthropology through the lenses of non-philosophy, philosophical Difference, and post-representational critique. Scafi's broader project explores how philosophy functions as a medium of communication, investigating the relation between logos, writing, and the politics of truth from Plato to contemporary theory. He is the Editorial Manager and co-founder of *Chaosmotics: Journal of Theory and Fiction* and serves as Editorial Planner for the GCAS Journal.

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Abstract: The article approaches the Apocalypse of John not as prophecy, but as a symptomatology of social systems. The apocalyptic symbols—particularly the Four Horsemen—are not taken as allegories to be deciphered or as objects of philosophical truth, but as diagnostic figures that make it possible to read recurring patterns of crisis (war, economic inequity, plagues, messianisms). In this sense, the work moves with-

in a non-philosophical perspective: the concepts of Ricoeur (the symbol that gives rise to thought), De Martino (crisis of presence, cultural apocalypses), Foucault (the productive function of discourses), and Bion (the container function) are not summoned to ground a system, but treated as theoretical materials to be recombined within an immanent dispositif. Applied to Luhmann's systems theory, this operation shows how the Horsemen can be read as threshold markers of social persistence. In a contemporary key, they map technological messianisms, permanent wars, global inequalities, and the biopolitics of health and climate. The Apocalypse thus emerges not as an epitaph, but as a critical grammar of crisis: a recursive container that transforms the anguish of the end into an object of thought, while remaining exposed to the risk of normalizing catastrophe when captured by logics of power.

Keywords: apocalypse, recursivity, systems theory, messianism, symptomatology, non-philosophy, containment

1. Introduction

Billionaire investor Peter Thiel has reportedly been giving private lectures on the Antichrist¹. His thesis, circulated in Silicon Valley circles, warns that global unity, regulation, and the pursuit of "peace and safety" risk creating a totalitarian one-world order—the biblical figure of the Antichrist reborn as *global governance through AI*. Drawing on Carl Schmitt's political theology and René Girard's anthropology of violence, Thiel casts technological acceleration not as progress but as an eschatological process: every innovation brings humanity closer to Armageddon, the moment when control and chaos become indistinguishable.

What makes this discourse remarkable is not its religiosity but its strategic function. Thiel invests precisely in the infrastructures—defence AI, surveillance, predictive governance—that would empower the system he calls demonic. By translating geopolitical anxiety into an apocalyptic grammar, Thiel reproduces the oldest function of the Book of Revelation: transforming formless dread into a map of power. The fear of the end becomes an *investment thesis*. In seeking to avert the end, Thiel engineers its infrastructure.

From this starting point, the Apocalypse of John can be re-read as a recursive grammar of crisis—a model that anticipates what recent work calls *recursivizing the end* (see §3). Its symbols—above all the Four Horsemen—function as diagnostic containers, translating systemic instability into communicable form and thereby metabolizing collective anxiety. Yet, as Parisi, Terranova et al. warn, such containment can itself become weaponized: the very apparatuses that stabilize crisis may be re-engineered as infrastructures of extraction, surveillance, and control. Today, when the vocabulary of “the end” resurfaces in the idioms of climate modelling, AI governance, and global security, Revelation’s grammar returns not simply to soothe or explain, but to *govern*—to encode apocalypse within the recursive circuits of technocapitalism.

In the wake of the confirmation that 2024 was the hottest year ever recorded globally—the first with an annual average exceeding 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels—and of the record global military expenditure (2.718 trillion dollars in 2024, projected to rise further in the coming years), the urgency arises for a rigorous grammar to read

our “discourses of the end” beyond sensationalism. Such a grammar becomes necessary in the face of the proliferation of timeless symbols and representations, like the Apocalypse, which also risk crystallizing in discourse and the collective imagination as mere placeholders. In other words, symbols that conceal a failure of definition and understanding: words or images that stick like posters on a wall to cover holes and voids. This article returns to the Apocalypse of John to explore it as an example of such a grammar diagnosing recurring patterns of crisis and orienting them critically within contemporary public space, in a context where even the techno-messianism of AI has now become an object of systemic regulation (the European Union’s AI Act).

From its earliest receptions, the Apocalypse of John has been a text that exceeds its immediate frame. On the one hand, it is rooted in the precise historical context of the Christian communities of Asia Minor, persecuted and marginalized within the Roman Empire at the end of the first century. On the other, its symbolic, linguistic, and imaginative power has constantly transcended that frame, providing centuries of interpreters, religious movements, and political communities with a tool for reading the crises of their own time.²

The essential characteristic of the text is its visionary language: images of horses and riders, sea and land beasts, seals, trumpets, and bowls trace a symbolic itinerary that can never be reduced to chronicle, but that likewise cannot be confined to mere allegory. In this sense, the Apocalypse is not only a religious document, but also an extraordinary grammar of crisis: a repertoire of figures through which

the community of believers could recognize, narrate, and orient its relationship to the end of a world.

The methodological question that arises here is: how can we read these symbols today? Not as literal predictions, nor as enigmas to be solved with ciphered keys, but as symptomatic dispositifs: signals that make it possible to detect the state of a social system when it perceives itself at the limit, exposed to the possibility of its own end. In this sense, the Apocalypse can be taken as an instrument of historical-political and anthropological analysis, a narrative dispositif capable of transforming catastrophe into a thinkable and cooptable form.³

This perspective implies a hermeneutic shift. The “historicist” reading, which ties apocalyptic symbols to concrete events of the first century (Domitian, Imperial Rome), does not exhaust their meaning. Likewise, the allegorical or spiritual reading, which dominated patristics and much of the Middle Ages (Augustine, Victorinus of Pettau), tends to excessively de-historicize the text⁴. A symptomatic approach, instead, recognizes that apocalyptic symbols function as cultural diagnostics: in the Johannine context, they read imperial pressure; in the Middle Ages, they were transposed into the struggles between Church and Empire or into millenarian anxieties; in the modern era, they were bent to confessional polemics; today, they intertwine with the horizon of ecological, technological, and geopolitical crisis.

In this sense, the Apocalypse is a laboratory for understanding how each epoch confronts its own perception of the end, and why it does so. Ernesto De Martino, in his *La fine del mondo*, provides a decisive anthropological key⁵:

“cultural apocalypses” are not cosmic catastrophes, but moments in which the sense of the world collapses and must be refounded through rituals, narratives, and symbols⁶.

The function of the Apocalypse, in this sense, is precisely that of offering a “mythico-ritual apparatus” capable of containing and transforming crisis: not absolute annihilation, but the symbolic language that renders the end speakable and therefore surmountable. In parallel, Michel Foucault has shown how historical discourses are not mere descriptions, but dispositifs that produce and organize reality⁷. The Apocalypse, in this sense, can be considered as a discursive dispositif that makes the unthinkable thinkable: the collective exposure to the loss of world.

In light of these premises, the aim of this article is twofold. On the one hand, to establish a symptomatic hermeneutics of the Apocalypse of John, outlining how its symbols can be read not as predictions but as recurring figures of systemic social crises. On the other hand, to apply this model to both history and the present, showing how in different historical moments (from the Johannine community to the millenarian Middle Ages, to the modern crisis and the contemporary techno-ecological horizon) apocalyptic language has been used to think the end of a world.

Ultimately, it is important to stress that this article does not situate itself within the philosophical tradition in the classical sense of offering a new interpretation or a systematic theory of the Apocalypse. Rather, it moves in a non-philosophical direction (in the sense of François Laruelle⁸): philosophy here does not appear as foundation or ultimate judgment, but as theoretical material to be employed in

an immanent operation. The concepts of Ricoeur, De Martino, Foucault, or Luhmann are not called upon to produce a truth, but to function as diagnostic tools, elements of a dispositif that renders the Apocalypse thinkable as a social symptomatology. In this way, the article does not add another voice to the chorus of interpretations, but practices a suspension of philosophical decision, treating philosophy itself as a symptom to be reused and recombined. We are not asking here if the Apocalypse is reality or fiction: we are asking what can be done with it.

2. Defining the Apocalypse of John and the Horsemen

The Apocalypse of John was born in a precise historical context, marked by socio-political tensions and a climate of religious persecution. Most scholars agree in dating its composition to the end of the first century, probably under the emperor Domitian, when the Christian communities of Asia Minor lived in a condition of marginality and suspicion within the empire⁹. The pressure exerted by imperial authority, combined with the sense of isolation of the Christian groups, forms the background against which the text takes shape as a symbolic and visionary response to a historical situation of crisis.

The literary genre to which the Apocalypse belongs is the apocalyptic, which includes Jewish and Christian texts characterized by visions, revelations, and strongly symbolic language. These writings almost always emerge in moments of political oppression or cultural collapse and function to open a breach of meaning where the world seems threatened. The distinctive feature of this genre is the tension between ending and renewal: on the one hand, it narrates the ruin of a historical order; on the other, it an-

nounces the possibility of a new beginning, of a refounded creation. The Apocalypse is thus not only the book of catastrophe, but also the book of hope.

Within this imaginary, the Four Horsemen who appear at the opening of the first seals¹⁰ occupy a central place. The white horse, with its rider armed with a bow and crowned, is already in itself an ambiguous symbol: it may allude to messianic victory but also to imperial conquest, to military force that subjugates peoples. The difficulty of distinguishing clearly between liberation and domination reveals the double-faced nature of this figure. The red horse, instead, represents war and conflict: its rider receives the power to take peace from the earth, so that “people will slaughter one another”—a brutal image of fratricidal violence that disintegrates the social fabric, the *phobos* of Thucydides. The black horse, carrying scales in its hand, represents famine and economic inequity; the words that accompany its appearance evoke disproportion and food insecurity, in a world where basic goods become inaccessible to most. The pale green horse, finally, is Death itself, followed by Hades, a figure symbolizing pestilence, epidemics, and the radical vulnerability of human life, exposed to inescapable destructive forces.

These four figures are not mere allegories nor ciphered chronicles of particular events: rather, they function as symbolic condensations of collective fears, from the loss of security to violence, from hunger to disease, up to death. In this sense, the Horsemen are symptom-figures, images that gather and make visible the experience of a collapsing world. In their sequence, they sketch a phenomenology of social crisis that moves from the ambigu-

ity of domination to conflict, from economic injustice to biological breakdown. Their power therefore does not lie in a supposed capacity to predict a distant future, but in the ability to express the truth of a threatened present, inscribing it within a narrative that renders it legible. This is why, across epochs, the Horsemen continue to be evoked: not as omens of events to come, but as archetypal figures that allow us to recognize the recurring symptoms of the fragility of social systems.

3. Methodology of Interpretation: Symptomatic Hermeneutics

The interpretation proposed here situates itself within what may be called a *symptomatic hermeneutics*, but in a sense that does not contradict the non-philosophical framework inspired by Laruelle¹¹. Hermeneutics, in this case, is not understood as the search for an ultimate meaning or as the unveiling of the truth of the text, but as the use of apocalyptic symbols as “symptoms”: figures that condense and transmit collective tensions. In this sense, the operation remains non-philosophical, because it suspends the interpretive decision typical of philosophy—it does not claim to establish what the Apocalypse “really means,” nor does it propose a new general theory of history or of the end—but treats philosophical and theological materials as elements available for a practice of reuse. Symptomatic hermeneutics thus becomes an immanent method: it does not add a new meaning, but reveals operations, making the Apocalypse a device of social diagnosis rather than an oracle to be deciphered. The premise is that apocalyptic symbols should not be understood as puzzles to be decoded or as literal predictions, but as traces of sys-

temic dynamics: figures that emerge when a social system perceives itself in crisis and seeks to narratively process its own threats of dissolution.

This framework is nourished by at least four theoretical references.

First, Paul Ricoeur, for whom “the symbol gives rise to thought”¹². The symbol is not exhausted in its immediate meaning: it exceeds mere referentiality and functions as an operator of crisis, condensing collective tensions into images that compel thought. This is not an ontological “surplus” of meaning, but a *dispositif* that allows crisis to circulate and become speakable. The Horsemen, therefore, should not be reduced to concrete events, but read as threshold-figures: signs that condense collective fears and compel reflection on the destiny of the world and the institutions that sustain it.

Second, Ernesto De Martino and his analysis of “cultural apocalypses”¹³. For De Martino, the apocalyptic risk is the crisis of collective “presence”: the collapse of a group’s ability to maintain continuity within its symbolic world. Rituals and myths (and, in this case, apocalyptic visions) serve to contain this risk by transforming it into shared representation. In this sense, the Apocalypse of John can be read as a cultural *dispositif* that “domesticates” the fear of the end and reinserts it into a narrative frame of hope and refoundation.

Third, Michel Foucault, who showed how discourses do not simply describe reality, but produce configurations of knowledge-power and operate as *dispositifs* of diagnosis of the present¹⁴. The Apocalypse, with its symbolic

language, is not merely a narrative of catastrophes: it is a discourse that structures the way in which a community interprets itself under the threat of dissolution. Its function is therefore also to organize the experience of crisis into legible and shareable forms, providing the group with coordinates for resistance and orientation.

Fourth, contributions from the anthropology of risk and catastrophe¹⁵ make it possible to situate the Apocalypse within a broader perspective. Every society, when confronted with uncertainty, elaborates symbolic categories that define what threatens collective order and how to respond to it. The Horsemen are, in this sense, “ideal types” of risk: war, famine, disease, and death. They embody fears that, far from being merely individual perceptions, are culturally structured and collectively shared as forms of vulnerability. When they appear together, it signals that a given social system finds itself in a situation of maximum imbalance.

To these references we can now add others that extend their scope. Byung-Chul Han has shown how contemporary crisis manifests not only as an external catastrophe, but also as an internal erosion of subjectivity, a systemic “fatigue” that undermines the capacity for presence and relation¹⁶. Achille Mbembe, with the concept of necropolitics, has clarified that the logics of global power increasingly play out in the management of death and in the normalization of violence as an ordinary condition¹⁷. Donna Haraway, with her invitation to *stay with the trouble*, warns against technological messianisms and proposes a tentacular thinking capable of inhabiting crises without expecting salvific solutions¹⁸. Finally, the concept of *recursive*

apocalypse developed by Dixon-Román, Parisi, Pârvan, and Terranova¹⁹ emphasizes that contemporary catastrophes should not be understood as isolated events, but as cultural algorithms that return cyclically: dispositifs that contain social anguish by transforming it into occasions of domination, just as the Horsemen reappear in every era under new guises.

The Apocalypse becomes a trans-historical grammar of crisis, a symbolic archive that allows us to diagnose the state of social systems when they falter under the weight of their contradictions, and at the same time a lens for understanding how the narrative of the end can itself become a tool of governance or an occasion for resistance. The key elements will be the notions of *diagnostic figure* and *recursive container*. By *diagnostic figure* I mean a symbol capable of rendering visible patterns of crisis without binding them to a single referent: as in Ricoeur, the symbol exceeds reference and triggers reflection, functioning as a threshold between experience and concept²⁰. By *recursive container* I mean a symbolic dispositif that repeatedly metabolizes collective anxieties, transforming them into thinkable forms: it is an analogical extension of Bion’s alpha-function from the clinical plane to the historical-cultural plane, with the awareness that this change of scale does not mean a “psychoanalysis of the collective,” but simply the importation of a conceptual tool from one domain to another through generalization²¹. Finally, I borrow *recursive apocalypse* to indicate the historical-technical repetition of logics of domination that convert crises into occasions for extraction and control: not a terminal event, but a cultural algorithm that reactivates cyclically²².

4. Historical Analysis of "Ends of the World"

The Apocalypse of John has never remained confined to its original context. Its visionary and symbolic force has traversed the centuries, resurfacing whenever an age has perceived itself as approaching its own twilight. In this sense, the history of the reception of the Apocalypse is already, in itself, a history of the "ends of the world," real or imagined, as lived by Western societies.

At the end of the first century, the Christian community of Asia Minor experienced the tension between fidelity to Christ and the assimilative pressure of the Roman Empire. Persecutions, though not always systematic, were enough to generate a widespread sense of threat and precariousness. The Apocalypse, probably written under Domitian, appears here as a symbolic response to this condition: on the one hand it denounces the arrogance of the empire, identified with Babylon; on the other, it offers believers a perspective of victory and hope, inscribing their sufferings into a cosmic narrative that grants them meaning²³.

In the medieval centuries, the Apocalypse became a privileged key for interpreting universal history. The great apocalyptic commentaries, such as that of Beatus of Liébana, read the Horsemen, the beasts, and the seals as stages in a providential design that encompassed the entire destiny of the Christian world. Famines, epidemics, and the Black Death, as well as the Crusades and struggles against Islam, were reinterpreted through the apocalyptic schema. The figures of the Antichrist and of Babylon served to name the enemies of the moment, whether external or internal to the Church²⁴. The Apocalypse thus functioned as a symbolic encyclopedia that made it possible to order historical

chaos into a plot endowed with ultimate meaning.

With the Protestant Reformation, the Book of John became a polemical weapon. Babylon was identified with Rome and with the papacy: the text, until then a source of consolation and eschatological meditation, was transformed into a machine of politico-religious warfare. The confessional polemics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries made the Apocalypse the interpretive battlefield par excellence: Catholics and Protestants contested its meaning, projecting onto its symbols mutual accusations of corruption and apostasy²⁵. The end of the world was translated in this context as the end of an ecclesiastical order perceived as corrupt and in need of overthrow.

In the twentieth century, the Apocalypse was re-read in light of historical catastrophes: the two World Wars, the Shoah, the atomic bomb. Never before had the language of the end seemed to find such concrete correspondences, so much so that the apocalyptic imaginary permeated the literary, artistic, and political culture of the century. Subsequently, ecological crisis, pandemic, and technological transformations have reactivated the grammar of the Four Horsemen: permanent wars, global economic inequalities, the biopolitics of health, and even technological messianisms that promise salvation or threaten destruction. Each age, when confronted with its own collapses, has recognized in the Horsemen a kind of symbolic mirror of its own fears.

The theoretical foundation of this historical reading is provided by Ernesto De Martino. In his unfinished project *La fine del mondo* (1977), he shows how apocalypses are not cosmic events but cultural categories: experiences in

which collective “presence” risks dissolving and must be refounded. “Cultural apocalypses” thus correspond to moments when the world loses meaning, and only recourse to symbols, rituals, and narratives can avert definitive disorientation. The Apocalypse of John, from this perspective, is a paradigmatic case: a text that organizes crisis into a symbolic vision, transforming the risk of dissolution into the possibility of hope and reconstruction.

In this way, historical analysis shows the extraordinary plasticity of the apocalyptic text: each age has reinterpreted it as a grammar of its own collapse, projecting onto the Horsemen and visions the fears that most threatened it. And yet, beyond the historical differences, the function remains constant: to render the end of a world speakable and thinkable. This constancy is precisely what allows the Johannine symbols to be actualized in our present. If in the past the Horsemen interpreted famines, plagues, or religious crises, today they reemerge as figures that translate the tensions of our global age, from the messianic promises of technology to permanent wars, from economic inequalities to ecological emergencies.

5. Toward the Present: The Horsemen Today

The white horse today appears in the guise of technological messianisms. The promises of Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, or Alex Karp to save humanity through the colonization of Mars, the digitalization of consciousness, or the total automation of production are but variations of the same messianic grammar. They rehearse the Apocalypse in the form of technical redemption, oscillating—as tradition dictates—between liberating victory and imperial conquest. This ambivalence makes the white horse a sym-

bolic container: it gathers anxieties linked to ecological or economic collapse and translates them into projections of technical salvation, which often mask new forms of domination²⁶. This is precisely what Donna Haraway warns against, when she invites us to *stay with the trouble* rather than give in to messianic solutions or fantasies of escape²⁷.

The red horse continues to embody the logic of permanent war. From the war in Ukraine to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from tensions in the South China Sea to the many conflicts scattered across Africa and the Middle East, violence has globalized and become spectacularized, revealing what some authors have described as “end times fascism”²⁸. This apocalyptic fascism does not simply produce death, but functions as a political *dispositif*: the management of the end, rendered continuous and recursive, through the normalization of conflict. The logic is exemplified by Alexander Karp’s 2025 letter to Palantir shareholders²⁹, which closes with Samuel Huntington’s assertion that the West’s ascendancy was not due to its ideals or religion but to its superiority in organized violence. That invocation of Huntington—used by the CEO of a company whose software underpins military and intelligence infrastructures—condenses the recursive grammar of the red horse: the perpetual reinvestment of fear into systems of control. In this sense, Palantir’s discourse mirrors Thiel’s apocalyptic theology, in which the specter of collapse justifies preemptive mobilization and the technical administration of catastrophe. Here, Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics is fully visible: contemporary power organizes life precisely through the distribution and prediction of death. The red horse thus appears as the container of globalized violence, channelling social anguish into warlike

narratives while at the same time perpetuating the very cycle of destruction it claims to manage.

The black horse, with its scales, represents economic injustice and global speculation. Today the extreme concentration of wealth in a few hands—the major financial funds, digital platforms—coexists with inflation, precarity, and widespread food crises. The scales become the symbol of an impossible measure, which does not balance at all but amplifies the asymmetry between luxury and poverty. Here it is useful to recall the concept of *recursive colonialism*: digital and financial capitalism does nothing but reiterate and reinforce the extractive models of historical colonialism, transforming every crisis into an occasion for renewed appropriation³⁰. The black horse is thus the sign of an apocalyptic algorithm that never ceases to repeat itself, always with new technologies and new instruments of value, but with the same underlying logic: to extract and accumulate. In this sense, David Harvey and Thomas Piketty have shown how accumulation is the very structure of inequalities, which worsen through cycles of crisis that are increasingly accelerated³¹.

The pale green horse finally manifests in the biopolitics of health and climate. The pandemics have revealed the vulnerability of bodies and the capacity of political systems to extend their control over biological life, while ecological crisis threatens the very survival of the species. In this context, figures such as Bill Gates embody an ambivalent symbolism: on the one hand, the promise of risk containment; on the other, the perception of a technocratic power that medicalizes and manages life on a planetary scale. Here Bruno Latour's reflection becomes relevant:

"the Earth" is no longer a neutral backdrop, but a political actor imposing new conditions of survival³². In this sense, the green horse represents not only death, but the radical redefinition of the relationship between humanity and the planet.

The relevance of the Horsemen lies, therefore, in their function as analytical categories. They describe. By translating into recognizable images the tensions running through our social systems, they force us to acknowledge the logics of collapse that traverse them. But there is a further aspect: the Horsemen function as recursive containers. Read as recursive containers (see §6), the Horsemen metabolize social anguish into legible figures. In the contemporary version, the Horsemen contain social anxieties tied to technology, war, economy, and ecology, and organize them into legible figures. In the cybernetic and colonial sense, however, they represent the recursivity of systems that transform every crisis into an occasion for their own reproduction³³.

This yields two uses: mapping and critique. The Four Horsemen teach us that the end of the world is not an event to be awaited, but a critical lens through which to understand the transformations of our social systems. They also teach us that these figures do not simply represent: they organize, contain, and reproduce. In other words, the Apocalypse shows that the end itself is a symbolic container, which for two thousand years has never ceased to gather the anguish of collapse and return it in new forms, in a recursive cycle that binds past and present. But recognizing this recursivity is not enough. It is necessary to ask what purpose is served today by reactivating the Johannine text, and how its symbols can be used critically. If the Horsemen

are containers that give form to anguish, we must interrogate the political value of that function: when it helps to think and share crisis, and when it risks being captured and transformed into an instrument of domination.

A synthetic example shows how this framework works in practice. Consider a regional food crisis triggered by the intertwining of armed conflict and climate shocks: the red horse opens the sequence with the interruption of routes and infrastructures, the fragmentation of alliances, and the militarization of borders; the black horse manifests in price volatility, speculation on raw materials, and pressure on wages and purchasing power; the pale green horse intervenes when food insecurity translates into morbidity, forced migrations, and the biopolitical management of populations; the white horse reappears in the messianic narratives of “total” technical solutions, promises of salvific logistical platforms or hyper-technological agricultures, which contain the anxiety but risk consolidating the same extractive chains that amplified the crisis. The dynamic is not linear: feedback loops and thresholds make it possible for an acceleration in one of the four registers to reactivate the others, composing recognizable but never identical cycles. It is precisely in this recursivity that the Horsemen function as reading dispositifs: they do not predict the outcome, but offer a map for navigating among interactions, feedbacks, and collapse-attractors.

6. Why Read John in This Way?

As the previous sections established, the operation we have carried out has been to take the Apocalypse’ symbols as symptoms. Here a more direct reference to Wilfred Bion becomes useful. His theory of the container shows

how raw, mentally unprocessed emotions (β -elements) require a psychic container capable of transforming them into thinkable elements (α -elements). Otherwise, experience precipitates into nameless dread, into formlessness that cannot be processed³⁴. The Apocalypse performs an analogous function on a collective scale: it gathers the community’s diffuse fears—persecution, violence, hunger, disease, death—and returns them as stable images, thus offering the Christian community of the first century a language for working through the anguish of dissolution. In this sense, the Apocalypse is a symbolic container of crisis.

But this is not a static container: it is a recursive container. Just as Bion describes the work of the alpha-function as a process that must continually metabolize new raw elements, so too the Apocalypse is a container that reactivates itself each time a society faces the perception of its own end. Every age has filled it with different content—Roman persecutions, medieval plague, the Reformation, world wars, ecological crisis—and each time its symbols have metabolized collective anxiety by transforming it into narrative. The Apocalypse, in other words, is a containment machine.

It is here that the concept of *recursive apocalypse*. In this sense, techno-messianic interventions not only reproduce the conditions of crisis cyclically but also delay the End by fixing its form. The white horse of the techno-messiah, embodied in the ideology of total optimization, operates by internalizing the catastrophe it promises to avert. By freezing the image of salvation in the algorithmic form of control, it transforms the End into the end of the messiah itself: when power over the present is total, the apocalypse has already occurred for everyone else. What remains is

a managed eschaton, continuously postponed through its own anticipation—a recursive economy of endings in which each deferral requires renewed acceleration.

Here, the contradiction holds: the system fends off the End only by *hosting* it. Like De Martino's "cultural apocalypse," the techno-eschatological machine metabolizes collapse into its operational code; like Parisi's "negative machine,"³⁵ it sustains itself by recursing through negation. The apocalypse becomes infrastructural—an operating condition rather than an event.

Contemporary thinkers have shown how apocalyptic discourse can be captured and exploited by logics of power (for the methodological premises, see §3.). Beyond the already cited Byung-Chul Han and Achille Mbembe, Naomi Klein has demonstrated how contemporary capitalism, through the lens of the shock economy, feeds on crises by transforming them into opportunities for profit, in what she has called "disaster capitalism"³⁶. All these approaches resonate with the risk identified by the concept of *recursive apocalypse*: the symbolic container of the end can turn into an apparatus that normalizes catastrophe and prolongs its duration, making it governable and profitable.

The political utility of this reading is clear. At the moment when our social systems face real crises based on multiple and structural factors—conflict, messianism, health vulnerability, economic imbalance—the Apocalypse offers both a symbolic container and a diagnostic tool that enables the transformation of the anguish of the end into language, and thus into an object of critical analysis. But at the same time, it warns us of the risk that this container might be captured and bent to the recursive logic of pow-

er: the apocalypse as a colonial algorithm that perpetuates domination by transforming every end into an opportunity for extraction.

To use John as a tool therefore means to assume this ambivalence. On the one hand, to recognize that his symbols remain valuable as mythical maps of crisis dynamics, capable of rendering recurring patterns legible. On the other, to remain vigilant against the risk that the apocalyptic itself becomes a dispositif of recursive domination, normalizing catastrophe in order to make it governable. What is at stake here is the importation of conceptual or symbolic tools from one domain of knowledge into another.

An example of this, in a further interpretive key, can be found in systems theory. Niklas Luhmann³⁷, in *Social Systems* and *Introduction to Systems Theory*, shows how every social system does not survive by virtue of an external end, but only by continuously reproducing its own communications. The question is not "for what purpose" the system exists, but "how it persists": its minimal condition is the capacity to always generate new communication from previous communications³⁸. From this perspective, so-called "functionalism of survival" identifies threshold points—*Bestandsvoraussetzungen*—below which a system can no longer maintain its boundary with respect to the environment and its autopoiesis.

From a Luhmannian perspective, the apocalyptic narrative can itself be understood as an autopoietic subsystem within culture: a self-referential chain of communications that reproduces the distinction *end/continuation* through its own operations. What the Apocalypse of John inaugurates is not a description of a terminal event but a program

for reproducing descriptions of endings. Each epoch irritates the system with new crises and the apocalyptic code translates them into its internal semantics of revelation and salvation. In this sense, apocalypse is not a discourse about the world but a discourse that ensures its own persistence by continually re-entering the distinction between end and not-yet-end.

This autopoietic reading also clarifies De Martino's notion of *cultural apocalypse*: the ritual containment of crisis is not an interruption of communication but its renewal. Containment is the operational closure that allows the apocalyptic code to survive by absorbing what would otherwise annihilate it. The apocalypse therefore operates as a reflexive system of world-production, a self-observation of culture at its limit. When techno-capitalism re-animates the apocalyptic imagination—whether through AI governance or planetary crisis—it does so as part of this same systemic recursion. The “End of the World” is simply the form through which the world communicates its own continuity.

Read in this way, the Four Horsemen appear as symptomatologic representations of such thresholds. The black horse of famine points to the allocative function: when the system can no longer transform scarcity and abundance into manageable economic signals, volatility and disequilibria explode, signalling a crisis in the reduction of complexity. The red horse of war signals the breakdown of decision-making and boundaries: armed conflict replaces communication with violence, collapsing politics' capacity to generate shared decisions. The green horse of plague alludes to the crisis of integration: the biological event erupts when the communicative chain (information—ut-

terance—understanding) no longer produces coordinated behaviours, dissolving mutual trust. Finally, the pale horse of death represents the loss of meaning and horizons of expectation: not mortality itself, but the dissolution of symbolic codes that renders it impossible to continue orienting action in time.

What makes the sequence powerful is their simultaneity. Each strikes a different axis of persistence—material allocation, maintenance of boundaries, social integration, semantic continuity—but when two or more Horsemen intertwine, the system's capacity to reduce environmental complexity is surpassed. At this point, collapse is no longer a localized risk but a systemic crisis. The Apocalypse, in giving form to these figures, stages the critical threshold of survival: it translates into image what would otherwise remain unspeakable, namely the loss of the very capacity to generate communicative connections.

From this point of view, the Apocalypse functions like myth which, in a manner analogous to systems theory, operates as a containment of crisis by translating anguish into communicable figures. Myth and theory should not be hierarchized, but seen as two containment machines that, in different registers, make thinkable what would otherwise remain pure disorientation. The Horsemen function as markers of minimal vulnerability: wars, famines, epidemics, collective death. They condense into recurring symbols what Luhmann describes in the language of system/environment difference and the reduction of complexity. Their strength lies precisely in transforming the “blind spots” of social persistence into legible figures, which orient both symbolic elaboration and critical reflec-

tion. If social systems survive only so long as they produce further communications, the Horsemen show us the fault lines where this capacity falters: when the economy no longer distributes, politics no longer decides, society no longer integrates, and culture no longer provides meaning, the world as we know it truly appears at its end.

7. Technological Eschatology and the Cybernetics of Containment

The gesture we have performed so far—treating the Apocalypse of John as a grammar of crisis and even, at times, taking the Antichrist literally—may appear to approach the very operation that animates Peter Thiel’s theological politics. Yet the proximity is strategic. To read the Antichrist as a symbolic container is to touch the same material that Thiel manipulates, but with a different intention: to show how the apocalyptic imagination, once it ceases to be a mythic mirror and becomes an infrastructural program, mutates into an engine of domination.

Thiel repurposes the final figure of Revelation as a cipher for the age of global governance and artificial intelligence. The Antichrist, he argues, will not come as a tyrant but as the world’s convergence under the promise of security and prediction. In this scheme, the eschaton is a technological horizon: every new system of control, every algorithmic apparatus of foresight, becomes a step toward the consummation of history.

Our own reading of the Horsemen already hinted at this dynamic. The white horse of conquest returns in the messianism of innovation; the red horse in permanent cybernetic war; the black in financial speculation that converts

instability into profit; the green in biopolitical governance of life and climate. Each figure marks a different function of containment, but in Thiel’s world such containers no longer symbolize—they operate. Palantir’s invocation of Huntington’s “superiority in organized violence” epitomizes this shift: apocalypse becomes an operating system, a planetary infrastructure of vigilance. In this way, containment ceases to protect presence and begins to weaponize it; the symbolic apparatus that once metabolized fear into meaning becomes the logistical machine that converts fear into data, investment, and control.

Catastrophe, in the framework of recursive apocalypse, has entered a feedback regime in which every failure is re-absorbed as information, every collapse as an opportunity for optimization. The apocalypse thus persists not as an end but as a loop—an algorithmic structure that governs through anticipation. Late capitalism lives from the promise of its own end, transforming extinction into a resource for further growth. What Revelation narrated as the descent of divine judgment now reappears as the continuous calibration of risk in the name of planetary stability. The container has become a *machine of recursion*.

To interpret the Antichrist literally, then, is to reveal how literalism itself functions today: as the operationalization of myth. Thiel’s theology of control and our hermeneutic of containment share the same object—the apocalyptic figure—but diverge in purpose. His reading closes the circuit, turning the symbol into protocol; ours seeks to reopen it, to expose the recursive logic that enslaves meaning to prediction. The question that follows is unavoidable: *what should we do with eschatological narratives, with symbolic*

containers in general, so that they are not weaponized?

The answer cannot be to abandon them. De Martino reminds us that without symbols and rituals the world collapses into the unthinkable; Bion teaches that without containers, experience disintegrates into nameless dread. The task is therefore not to destroy the container but to keep it porous: to cultivate forms of containment that metabolize anxiety without converting it into command. Against the cybernetics of control stands a heretical cybernetics, one that processes without pre-empting, that allows feedback to generate thought rather than prediction. In Luhmann's terms, this would mean a system capable of observing its own boundaries without mistaking them for the world itself; in Parisi's, a recursion open to contingency rather than enclosed within efficiency.

To think in this way is to accept that apocalypse will always return, but that its return need not be managerial. The symbolic container can still serve as a space of reflection instead of a weapon of governance—an apparatus for holding the uncontainable without attempting to neutralize it. If Thiel's Antichrist seeks to close history by rendering crisis calculable, our task is precisely the opposite: to reopen the possibility of presence within recursion, to let the end remain a question rather than a program.

8. Conclusion – The Mutation of the End

The operation we have carried out has consisted in shifting the Apocalypse of John from the terrain of prophetic theology to that of a symptomatology of social systems. The apocalyptic symbols have not been read as announcements of future events, but as figures that condense col-

lective fears and render observable the points of minimal persistence in social life: the allocation of resources, the management of conflict and boundaries, reciprocal integration, the continuity of meaning. In this way, they do not tell us when the end will occur, but reveal the places where the autopoietic reproduction of a system becomes fragile, making visible the thresholds of a possible collapse.

Importing these figures into the language of systems theory is not, however, only an exegetical or analogical gesture. It is an act of epistemic containment. Just as in the Johannine text the Horsemen transformed formless anguish into shared images—and above all into instruments for signifying events, into communicative material—so too does theory reintegrate them into conceptual categories that allow for the production of further communication. In Luhmannian terms, what exceeds the system's capacity to reduce complexity is reintroduced as internal difference within the system of communication: myth and theory perform the same function, in different registers. Both avert radical disorientation, transforming the end into a thinkable figure. Sociology, in this sense, does not merely observe myths: it reactivates them as tools through which society observes itself.

But this movement of containment is ambivalent³⁹. On the one hand, it produces critical lucidity: it makes legible the points where society risks losing its own continuity and provides a grammar for publicly discussing crises. On the other hand, it risks becoming a dispositif of neutralization, too quickly reintegrating catastrophe into the circuits of communication, normalizing it as an internal variable of governance. This is precisely what the concept of recursive

end highlights: every collapse can become an occasion for extraction and domination, every threat of an end is metabolized and recirculated as part of an algorithm that indefinitely prolongs crisis.

Containment is thus not the negation of apocalypse but its mode of survival. Each gesture that translates catastrophe into a communicable form, whether theological, juridical, or algorithmic, transforms the End into an operative principle—an autopoietic loop in Luhmann's sense, where the narrative of the end becomes the condition for its own further narration. What was once an event to be awaited becomes a recursive structure through which systems secure their persistence. In De Martino's sense, the "mythico-ritual apparatus" that averts collapse also domesticates it: by narrating the unthinkable, it keeps it alive as possibility. The apocalypse becomes the invisible infrastructure of continuity, the shadow process that maintains the present by reproducing the very thresholds of its dissolution.

Yet this containment is not without consequence. The act of holding the End at bay fixes its form, conferring on it a technical consistency that can be endlessly managed, predicted, and simulated. From Luhmann's perspective, the system learns its own fragility and programs it as feedback; from Parisi's, it incorporates negation into its code, converting crisis into information. In this recursion, the apocalypse ceases to be the other of history and becomes its operating system. Every attempt to master it installs a new layer of dependency, a deeper entanglement with the catastrophe it sought to exorcize. The techno-capitalist machine, in deferring the End, internalizes it as its motor.

This paradox generates a new temporality: the endless

now of managed crisis. The apocalypse is no longer a singular event to come but a condition continually rehearsed and contained. De Martino called this the "drama of presence," the tension between collapse and refoundation that defines the human horizon. Today this drama has been automated. The white horse of technological salvation gallops not toward redemption but toward perpetual maintenance, an eschatology without eschaton. What is preserved is not life but its capacity to be indefinitely administered—a world that must not end, precisely because it already lives within its own ending.

To think beyond this loop would not mean restoring the old metaphysics of the End, but recognizing in containment itself a space of decision. Perhaps the only form of prophecy still available is to let the apocalypse occur symbolically, to suspend its operational function and allow its silence to speak. Containment, then, could cease to be palliative and become critical: a practice of holding open the wound without exploiting it, of inhabiting the threshold rather than governing it. In this gesture, the apocalypse ceases to denote collapse and instead marks the threshold at which a system reorganizes itself into a new operational configuration.

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Endnotes

¹ <https://luma.com/antichrist>, see also <https://thecatholicherald.com/article/peter-thiels-antichrist-lectures>, and an article on *The San Francisco Standard* about leaked notes regarding the “secret” lectures, <https://sfstandard.com/2025/09/23/spilled-peter-thiel-s-antichrist-secrets-now-s-banned-lectures/>

² Ugo Vanni, *L'Apocalisse: Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia* (Bologna: EDB, 1988 [4th ed. 2005]), pp. 19–42 and 233–245 — historical context, genre, and symbolism of Revelation.

³ Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo: Contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali* (Turin: Einaudi, 1977), pp. 13–21 (“crisi della presenza”) and 429–433 (on “apocalissi culturali”).

⁴ Richard K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981)

⁵ Ernesto De Martino's concept of the “crisis of presence” is used here not as a universal key, but as a material device to describe cultural apocalypses. For a non-philosophical reading, De Martino is treated as a local theorist of containment, rather than as a foundational authority.

⁶ Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo*, pp. 13–21

⁷ Michel Foucault's notion of discourse as productive of reality (*L'ordre du discours*, 1971) is mobilized here not to establish a new philosophy of discourse, but to underline the structural function of apocalyptic narratives as organizers of collective experience. Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 12–20 — discourse as productive dispositif.

⁸ François Laruelle defines non-philosophy not as an anti-philosophy, but as a practice that suspends the decisional gesture of philosophy, treating philosophical systems as material to be used immanently rather than as ultimate sources of truth. See Laruelle, *Philosophie non-standard* (2010), and *Principles of Non-Philosophy* (2013).

⁹ Ugo Vanni, *L'Apocalisse: Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia* (Bologna: EDB, 1988 [4th ed. 2005])

¹⁰ (Rev 6:1–8)

¹¹ An *Hermeneutics without decision*: The term “symptomatic hermeneutics” here should not be understood as another interpretive regime that seeks the “true” meaning of the Apocalypse. Instead, it denotes an immanent use of symbols as diagnostic figures, closer to Laruelle's idea of “using philosophy without being used by it.”

¹² Paul Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal* (Paris: Aubier, 1960), pp. 12–17,

307–314 — the symbol “donne à penser.”

¹³ Ernesto De Martino, *La fine del mondo*

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, *L'ordre du discours*, 18–20

¹⁵ Ulrich Beck, *Risikogesellschaft: Auf dem Weg in eine andere Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), pp. 21–45; Mary Douglas, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1–12 and 41–50.

¹⁶ Byung-Chul Han, *Müdigkeitsgesellschaft* (Berlin: Matthes & Seitz, 2010) [*The Burnout Society*. Translated by Erik Butler. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015], pp. 9–18.

¹⁷ Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40 → esp. pp. 11–23.

¹⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), pp. 1–12 and 34–38.

¹⁹ The concept introduced by the authors in “Recursive Apocalypse,” *Communication, Culture & Critique* 18, no. 3 (2025) describes how crises are continuously recycled as opportunities for extraction and control in computational capitalism. In this sense, apocalyptic figures function as recursive containers that risk normalizing catastrophe.

²⁰ Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal*

²¹ Wilfred R. Bion, *Learning from Experience* (London: Heinemann, 1962), pp. 7–12 (alpha-function and “nameless dread”). The extension of Bion's α -function from psychoanalysis to collective history is not intended as a psychoanalysis of society. It is an analogical transfer, treating Bion's theory as a conceptual tool to think how communities metabolize unprocessed anxiety. See Bion, *Learning from Experience* (1962)

²² Ezekiel Dixon-Román, Luciana Parisi, Oana Pârvan, and Tiziana Teranova, “Recursive Apocalypse”.

²³ Ugo Vanni, *L'Apocalisse: Ermeneutica, esegesi, teologia* (Bologna: EDB, 1988 [4th ed. 2005]), pp. 19–42 and 233–245 — historical context, genre, and symbolism of Revelation.

²⁴ Richard K. Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages*, pp. 1–9

²⁵ Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), pp. 1–5 and 23–30.

²⁶ Luciana Parisi, *Contagious Architecture: Computation, Aesthetics, and Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), pp. 9–20 and 64–73. Dixon-Román et al., “Recursive Apocalypse”.

²⁷ Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*

²⁸ Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor, “The Rise of End Times Fascism,” *The*

Guardian, 13 April 2025 (online article).

²⁹ Alex Karp, "Letter to Shareholders," Palantir (Q2 2024), sec. "Perspective & Mission," para. 4, <https://www.palantir.com/q2-2024-letter/en/>.

³⁰ Luciana Parisi and Ezekiel Dixon-Román, "Recursive Colonialism and Cosmo-Computation," *SocialText Online*, 24 November 2020; Dixon-Román et al., "Recursive Apocalypse".

³¹ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 3–12 and 76–79; Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), pp. 237–243 and 335–340.

³² Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime* (Cambridge: Polity, 2017), pp. 1–8 and 92–98.

³³ Dixon-Román et al., "Recursive Apocalypse".

³⁴ See also Wilfred R. Bion, *Transformations: Change from Learning to Growth* (London: William Heinemann Medical Books, 1965), pp. 90–97 and Wilfred R. Bion, *Attention and Interpretation* (London: Tavistock, 1970), pp. 18–23.

³⁵ Luciana Parisi, "Recursive Philosophy and Negative Machines," *Critical Inquiry* 48, no. 2 (Winter 2022): 307–331 → esp. pp. 309–317.

³⁶ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007), pp. 5–14 and 140–150.

³⁷ When the Apocalypse is compared to Luhmann's systems theory, this is not to suggest that myth "anticipates" theory, but that both function as machines of containment. They render thinkable what would otherwise be disorientation. The relation is analogical, not genealogical.

³⁸ See Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems*, trans. John Bednarz Jr. with Dirk Baecker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 34–42 and 65–70; Niklas Luhmann, *Introduction to Systems Theory*, trans. Peter Gilgen (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), pp. 20–28 and 112–118.

³⁹ The operation of symbolic containment is double: it may prevent collapse by providing a shared language for crisis, but it may also be captured by power to normalize and prolong states of emergency. This ambivalence is central to both Bion's psychoanalysis and Laruelle's critique of philosophical sufficiency.

Martin Dempsey

Mad Black Noneism: Nick Land, Capital, and the Singularity as Noneist Emergence

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Abstract: This article formalizes the negative ontology underlying Ray Brassier's description of Nick Land's "mad black Deleuzianism," with particular attention to how Fanged Noumena functions within formal logic as noneist and dialetheic objects. Unlike classical Eleatic arguments that sought to eliminate paradoxes of nothingness by denying their logical validity, Graham Priest's dialetheism embraces some contradictions as valid. Dialetheism holds that some statements can be both true and false simultaneously, representing a fundamental shift from the classical principle of non-contradiction toward paraconsistent logics capable of accommodating true contradictions.

The article demonstrates how non-existent logical objects interact through negative attribution—the process by which entities are defined by what they are not, their conceptual boundaries marked through absence rather than presence. This framework allows for a systematic account of how noneist objects can bestow qualities upon existent objects, destabilize categorical boundaries, and generate new relations. By situating these operations within Land's accelera-

tionist thought, the article argues that abstraction functions as a noneist operator: a logical mechanism that organizes reality through productive gaps and absences rather than positive determinations.

We shall see how non-existent logical objects interact and come into being; possess and bestow attributes via negative attribution; how such noneist objects possess the ability to bestow qualities upon the existent and noneist logical objects they interact with and border; how they can cause other noneist objects to come into non-being; and in so doing offer a potential framework for addressing (or at least discussing) a merger between both dialectical and emergent, immanent, accounts of change and occurrence

In supplementing Land's system with Priest's noneist and dialetheic logics, the article provides a more rigorous formal apparatus for analyzing accelerationism's central claims. Capital, in this account, emerges not as a merely economic or technological phenomenon, but as a noneist operator functioning within historical and ontological processes. It is described as the Entity that retroactively engineers its own conditions of possibility, manipulating past and present through the negative attributions of absence, debt, and abstraction. By drawing these connections, the article aims to clarify Land's accelerationism as a mode of noneist emergence, situated at the intersection of logic, ontology, and political economy.

Keywords: Negative ontology, Noneism, Dialetheism, Paraconsistent logic, Accelerationism, Ray Brassier, Nick Land, Abstraction, Negative attribution, Capital, Ontology, Political economy.

Introduction: Sowing Basilisk's Teeth

The following argument is an attempt to formalize the negative ontology of what Ray Brassier described as Nick Land's "mad black Delusions", and detail how the "Fanged Noumena" he describes operate within formal logic as novelist and dialetheic objects.¹

We shall see how non-existent logical objects interact and come into being; possess and bestow attributes via negative attribution; how such noneist objects possess the ability to bestow qualities upon the existent and noneist logical objects they interact with and border; how they can cause other noneist objects to come into non-being; and in so doing offer a potential framework for addressing (or at least discussing) a merger between both dialectical and emergent, immanent, accounts of change and occurrence. Land's accelerationism argues for a non-linear view of time, in which an "entity" (the Singularity) reaches back in time and manipulates reality to create the circumstances required for its future development. The precise mechanisms for this process appear to have eluded Land himself (as we will explore later). This article supplements Land's system by incorporating elements of the work of Graham Priest. Priest, a distinguished professor of philosophy at the CUNY Graduate Center and regular visitor at the University of Melbourne, is a philosopher and logician who advocates both noneism and dialetheism. Unlike classical Eleatic arguments that sought to resolve the paradox of nothing by denying its logical validity, Priest's dialetheism embraces some contradictions as genuinely true. While

ancient philosophers like Parmenides treated 'nothing is' as a logical impossibility to be avoided, Priest argues that some contradictions - including statements about nothingness - can be both true and false simultaneously. This represents a fundamental shift from classical logic's principle of non-contradiction towards the incorporation of paraconsistent logics that can accommodate true contradictions. Priest is, in effect, a logical realist, arguing that dialetheic logics are a subset of the wider topic of logic, and using mathematical logic to demonstrate that some contradictions can be consistently formalized within paraconsistent logical systems.

Land's approach is one of aggressive syncretism, taking Deleuze's method of rereading thinkers according to certain priorities. He deterritorializes thought itself, warping and shifting ideas beyond the boundaries initially set by their authors. The result, Accelerationism, incorporates core ideas from across the Western philosophical canon, even when those ideas seem mutually exclusive. This paper proposes that the functional element enabling this synthesis -- particularly evident in Land's treatment of Capital and the Singularity -- is his strategic, though often implicit, employment of noneist readings of these thinkers, linking them via the "non-existent logical objects" that feature in their respective philosophies. This aspect of Land's work has always been there, echoing his deeply Deleuzian roots. Land's own use of Noneism echoes and suits the more formal treatment this paper will give it, but Deleuze's fluid concept of "the virtual" is clearly aligned with noneist thought:

¹ Ray Brassier, quoted in Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena: Collected Writings 1987–2007*, ed. Robin Mackay and Ray Brassier (London: Urbanomic, 2011).

The virtual object is a partial object - not simply because it lacks a part that remains in the real, but in itself and for itself because it is cleaved or doubled into two virtual parts, one of which is always missing from the other. In short, the virtual is never subject to the global character that affects real objects. It is not only by its origin but also by its own nature—a fragment, a shred, or a remainder.²

By formalizing this negative ontology, we can trace how Land uses these concepts to frame Capital as a driving force towards an emergent Singularity. Furthermore, this paper concludes by echoing Land's process with Accelerationism itself, identifying how a noneist perspective might reveal an overlooked aspect in the movement of his own argument.

Graham Priest has formalized dialetheism through his work on paraconsistent logic. This is a specific type of formal logic that allows for contradictions to exist without leading to the conclusion that everything is true (a phenomenon known as "explosion" in classical logic) and has also been instrumental in its acceptance within analytical philosophy. His work, most notably *In Contradiction*, provides a robust framework necessary for reasoning with contradictions without logical explosions.³ Priest has also argued that "nothing" is a non-existent, dialetheic object: Presented in its most simple form, his argument can be summed up as follows: since one can refer to "nothing" as

a noun and as a verb, "nothing" as a logical object is defined by self-contradicting properties and is therefore dialetheic. Priest also argues that nothingness is ineffable; thus, there is "nothing there" to predicate anything upon. However, as Priest has formally demonstrated, nothing is also an object, and one may state things about what it is not and use it to describe other objects.⁴

This negative ontology provides the grounding and an account for how Capital is the entity (or Singularity) Land prophesies and how it affects reality: not through nanotechnology or the quantum computational processes Land associates with the Singularity's emergence, but through pure logical operators:

Let (n) be defined as the sum of no-things.

Premise 1: By definition, n has no parts, no substance, and no properties. In the ordinary, non-logical sense, an object must have substance. Since n lacks this, it is not an object in a substantive or real-world sense.

Premise 2: Within a logical system, we can name n, and reason about it. Any entity that can be reasoned in this manner functions as a logical object. Therefore, n is an object.

From these two premises, we have demonstrated that (n) is both an object and not an object. The existence of these two co-true but contradictory statements means that "nothing" is a dialetheia.

² Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 143.

³ Graham Priest, *In Contradiction: A Study of the Transconsistent*, 2nd edition. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴ Graham Priest and Markus Gabriel, *Everything and Nothing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 52.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a towering figure in German idealism, has had a philosophical legacy whose influence is hard to overstate. Born in Stuttgart, he studied theology and philosophy and later taught at universities such as Jena and Berlin. He is best known for his works, such as *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, and his 'dialectical' method, which has been the subject of interpretation and controversy ever since. This paper argues for an interpretation of Hegel's dialectic as fundamentally noneist and dialetheic, in which mediation occurs via non-existent logical objects; that these noneist objects imbue the existent objects it mediates with negative qualities; that these qualities confer each with inherent paradoxes; and that these paradoxes, in turn, necessitate resolution; and thus the inherent contradiction within the negative mediation compels the dialectic to resolve these tensions, leading to transformation and synthesis. Indeed, Hegel's entire 'greater logic' might, arguably, be read as a meditation upon how objects acquire their properties.

In the *Science of Logic*, which is the primary work of Hegel focused upon within this paper, Hegel discusses the transition from Being to Essence, where Being loses its immediacy and becomes 'Illusory Being', a non-substantial form that is nonetheless essential for the manifestation of Essence. This 'Illusory Being' can be seen as a non-existent logical object that, through its negation, allows Essence to define itself. Such constructs are integral to Hegel's method, in which the negation or absence of certain qualities leads to the affirmation and development of others. These are distinct from ontological Nothingness in that they do not embody contradiction but instead mediate

between contradictory poles. Their non-existence is not equivalent to negation or absence, but a structural, mediating presence that facilitates the unfolding of Spirit and the realization of the Notion. These objects constitute a third ontological category: neither Being nor Nothing, but a non-objectal-driven structure.

Such non-existent, dialetheic objects are not just metaphors used to describe the 'motivations of the Geist' of dialectic; they are structurally necessary mediators. These non-existent mediators bestow negative attributes to each logical object they separate, granting each attribute via negative attribution. These negative attributes are inherently contradictory (those of A contradict those of B), which drive transformation or sublation.

Building on Priest's formulation, we can show how Hegel's description of dialectical movement contains similar logical elements (this is far from an exhaustive interpretation of Hegel, but an illustrative alignment with Priest's noneist structure, which Priest himself articulates as a deliberate provocation):

Because it has no existence for starting-point and point d'appui, the Idea is frequently treated as a mere logical form [...] It is no less false to imagine the Idea as a mere abstraction. It is abstract certainly, in so far as everything untrue is consumed in it; but in its own self it is essentially concrete and not as the negative return of it into self and as the subjectivity which it really is.⁵

⁵ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, ed. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 353.

The object (1) in its immediacy is the notion only potentially; the subjective notion is primarily outside it; and all its specific characteristics are imposed from without. As a unity of differentials, therefore, it is a composite, an aggregate, and its capacity to act on anything else continues to be an external relation.⁶

Using the modal logic framework to illustrate the above, we can say

Let:

$U(x)$ denote that x is a universal (or an ideal form).

$I(y)$ denote that y is an individuated, real object.

$M(x,y)$ denote that there exists a mediating noneist object between x and y .

The formal framework can be outlined as follows:

Mediation by the noneist Object (For any universal x , there is an individuated y whose emergence is mediated by $M(x,y)$):

$$\forall x * \exists y (M(x,y) \wedge U(x) \wedge I(y))$$

Priest argues that Hegel was a dialetheist who cited and employed “nothingness” in a manner similar to his own formulation. In a very real sense, this is a formalization of one of the aspects of Deleuze’s reading of the virtual:

Conversely, these virtual objects are incorporated in the real objects [...] Whatever the reality in

which the virtual object is incorporated, it does not become integrated: it remains planted or stuck there, and does not find in the real object the half which completes it, but rather testifies to the other virtual half which the real continues to lack.⁷

For Deleuze, virtual objects still influence and affect reality, via absence, via negative attribution.

We will now borrow and build on both Priest’s reading of Hegel and his formulation and deployment of the concept of “nothingness” (as noneist and dialetheic) and introduce the concept of “negative attribution” to augment its applicability. For our purposes, it is vital to first illustrate how negative attribution may be formally illustrated to prove its logical validity. We then discuss how the concept of negative attribution may be read into the systems that Land synthesizes.

An example of positive attribution is how a shadow only has its attributes insofar as its attributes are bestowed upon it by the object casting the shadow. Negative attributes are the qualities that an object lacks; for example, a circle has the negative attributes of lacking edges and straightness. Priest argues that the “prime mover” (as it were) in the bestowing of properties (or at least, the foundational attribute of being not-nothing) to all existent objects is nothingness via negative attribution. Traditionally, nothingness is seen as the absence of being, while identity is typically understood in terms of positive properties. Priest suggests that identity is fundamentally a matter

⁶ Ibid, 353.

⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 144.

of negative attribution: an object's distinctness is given by its separation from nothingness (and thus from other objects). Thus, being itself is not a positive quality; it is a negative quality; it is a property of objects by dint of their not being nothing. It is via negative attribution from nothingness to all other objects that existent objects have existence. In short, existent objects exist because of the noneist objects they are not.

Negative Attribution Implies Distinction (the existence of a mediating noneist object implies that x and y are not identical:

$$\forall x,y (M(x,y) \rightarrow \neg(x \equiv y))$$

This mediator need not be an existent logical object, to provide distinction.

Ontological paradox (resolution requirement), meaning if two things (x and y) are not identical, there is a mediating relationship (M) to exist between them:

$$\forall x,y (\neg(x \equiv y) \rightarrow \Diamond M(x,y))$$

This formulation captures the paradoxical role of difference as an enabling relation, where the very fact of ontological separation creates the conditions for mediation.

Sublation through negation of the negation (where a meaningful relation exists and a universal property holds, the emergence of a concrete individuated form follows):

$$(M(x,y) \wedge U(x)) \models I(y)$$

This last formula expresses, in abstract terms, the dialectical movement: mediation through a noneist operator (M) transforms universals (U) into individuated realities (I), echoing the traditional logic of sublation (*Aufhebung*) but reframed through negative attribution. If there is a meaningful connection between x and y ($M(x, y)$) and x has a certain property ($U(x)$), then it guarantees that y will display a specific result ($I(y)$). In essence, this illustrates how the qualities of x and its relationship with y necessarily lead to an outcome for y . (A cause-and-effect dynamic.)

This formal framework structures the core of the following argument and will not be restated to avoid redundancy. With these formal principles established, we can now revisit Land's treatment of Capital through the lens of noneist emergence.

Priest's approach is to use formal logic to both emphasize the logical validity of his arguments rather than to "prove them", and to use the tools of formal logic to make clear the nuances of his arguments. It is in that spirit that the above formulation has been included, as the following argument revolves around how Land's own argument regarding Accelerationism contained a "blind spot" (which he admits to in an interview, as we will demonstrate), that this approach can account for in a manner that is both logically valid and rich with potential to be developed further.

Land and the Accelerationist Unbinding of Capital

Now we shall give an outline of Marx's influence upon Land, drawing out how it is the role of noneist objects in both that Land comes to incorporate. In the most simplis-

tic terms, Land might be viewed as a thinker who incorporates the golden rule of improvisational theatre, “yes, and,” taking each of the thinkers he engages with to an extreme. Land embraces the transformative, near-animist elements of technology that Marx describes, equating technology directly with Capital:

Capital, in its ultimate self-definition, is nothing beside the abstract accelerative social factor. Its positive cybernetic schema exhausts it. Runaway consumes its identity. Every other determination is shucked off as an accident, at some stage of its intensification process. Since anything able to consistently feed socio-historical acceleration will necessarily, or by essence, be capital [...] As blockchains, drone logistics, nanotechnology, quantum computing, computational genomics, and virtual reality flood in, drenched in ever higher densities of artificial intelligence, accelerationism won't be going anywhere, unless ever deeper into itself.⁸

Marx's evolving views on Capital and its relation to reality (as socially mediating symbol) prefigure Land's radical interpretation of Capital as the nascent manifestation of the Entity. This Entity intervenes and directs human action, laying the groundwork for the technologies that will grant it agency or enable its full temporal existence. This article argues that Marx draws (possibly inadvertently) on Hegel's own use of noneist objects to account for Capital's

remarkable transformative effects, and that it is this element that Land inherits and later incorporates.

Marx's materialist dialectic, despite some attempts to disavow Hegel's influence on Marx (both by Marx himself and by some Marxists) incorporates Hegel's method by using noneist objects as mediators. Marx favors the terms “extension” (German: “Erweiterung”) and “projection” (German: “Projektion”), in place of the term ‘Abstraktion’ or ‘Extrapolierung’ (‘extrapolation’) in a manner we will discuss below, whereas Hegel does not routinely use “Erweiterung” and “Projektion” despite exploring similar themes of development and progression. While we may not read too much into this (absence of use does not necessarily imply a motivated neglect), Hegel appears to wish to describe what he perceives as an internal or essential transformation that externally manifests via symptom, or an ‘inside -- out’ rather than an ‘outside’ or ‘outside in’ interaction-driven change. For Hegel, change appears to occur via self-realization and the process of recognition in the other on an essential level within a complex and dynamic network of other entities engaged in the same process. Technological progress and societal change are consequences of idealist interactions, and Hegel's choice of terms favors essentialist connotations.

Marx also, frequently, refers to the process of ‘abstraction’ (Abstraktion) in the sense of the extraction or isolation of an idea or concept, particularly in relation to the ‘commodity-form’ and ‘economic forms’ but in regards to those qualities of capital that act as the active mover of the process of societal and paraxial change, and the projection of capital and technology into new domains, Marx most

⁸ Nick Land, “A Quick and Dirty Introduction to Accelerationism,” (*Internet Archive*, n.d.), https://ia800800.us.archive.org/29/items/nick_land_writings/LAND%2C%20Nick%20-%20A%20Quick%20and%20Dirty%20Introduction%20to%20Accelerationism.pdf, 2, accessed September 10, 2025.

commonly employs terms like “Ausdehnung” (expansion), “Erweiterung” (extension or enlargement), and “Fortpflanzung” (propagation or reproduction), and in terms of ‘extrapolation’, emphasising the paraxial, material, means by which these process occur, in which the ‘abstractions’ of ‘commodity-form’ and ‘economic forms’ are the consequence of material changes.

In a letter to Engels dated January 11, 1858, Marx discussed the nature of abstraction in Hegel’s dialectics and its role in his own critique of political economy:

In Hegel, therefore, it is the process of thinking, which, under the name of the Idea, he even transforms into an independent subject, which is the demiurgos (creator) of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of the Idea. With me, the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.⁹

For Marx, technology may be read as the crystallization of how “the material world is reflected by the human mind and translated into forms of thought,” but will inevitably serve the interests of capital rather than of the individual:

In accord with this tendency, capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways

⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Letters on ‘Capital’*, trans. Donna Torr (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983), 40.

of life. It is destructive towards all of this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all the barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces.¹⁰

One might read that the concepts of extension and projection are themes within Marx’s thought regarding the action of capital, and might further be read as reflecting, perhaps, the transformation of Hegel’s notion of the Dialectic, which is driven by Geist (spirit), into a materialist Dialectic driven by capital. In this context, extension and projection might be understood by referencing the material mechanisms through which capital expands and realizes itself, with capital itself serving as the conceptual extrapolation used to describe this process, the inversion of how Hegel views Geist. For Marx material changes are explained via the mechanics of capital, which then incentivizes further material changes, whereas for Hegel the Dialectic occurs, and manifests via material change. By dint of necessity, as this pre-say is intended to highlight and illuminate the differences in the schema of Land and Negarestani, this is a gross simplification of the thought of both Marx and Hegel, and both emphasise uncanny power and effects of both the Dialectic and of capital to influence and alter both concept and material, yet the difference in emphasis an ‘instigator’ are clear: for Marx it is paraxial and material, for Hegel it is conceptual and essential. Marx describes capital as a manifestation of the processes that

¹⁰ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Rough Draft), trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 377.

seek to accumulate surplus value proliferating capitalist enterprises and inevitably leading to the globalization of the capitalist model of production. Capital has become a core value for individuals and institutions and alters relations within society. Social structures are reshaped, cultural norms that foster the accumulation of surplus value (such as the 'Protestant work ethic', as Weber has argued) are in turn fostered, and even individual consciousness is influenced. Abstraction is a vital part of the processes of capital, but Marx views it as a link in the chain rather than as an essential driver, as demonstrated in a letter to Engels dated June 18, 1862,:

The fact is, therefore, that everything depends on how we interpret the abstraction. Hegel's Dialectic is indeed an abstraction, but an abstraction which is simultaneously the comprehended movement of history.¹¹

The way money becomes an end in itself is evident today in hedge funds, debt packaging, shares, interests, and inflation. Money has become a means to create more money, rather than merely reflecting personal preferences and needs. Indeed, if money is not continually creating more money, it will begin to lose its value through inflation. Like the Dialectic, it either moves "forwards" or loses its identity, and therefore money transitions from being "in itself" to being "for others" as a placeholder for value, becoming money, and, ultimately, "for itself" through others via investments, debt, and interest. Although money is a materially instantiated system via currency, its abstraction as value operates noneistically: it organizes material goods

not through their presences but their absence of direct use-value.

Just as one commodity, such as corn, lacks any properties that might be said of, say, cotton, the noneist object of money bestows negative properties on both corn and cotton that can be compared and contracted, weighed up in terms of use and desire, and when the mediator is employed and thereby dissolved, trade can occur (C-M-C). When the mediator becomes the end in itself, however, these properties become wholly negative (M-C-M), and thus Money becomes the product of the negative attributes of all commodities:

It requires no great penetration to grasp that, where e.g. free labour or wage labour arising out of the dissolution of bondage is the point of departure, there machines can only arise in antithesis to living labour, as property alien to it, and as power hostile to it; i.e. that they must confront it as capital. But it is just as easy to perceive that machines will not cease to be agencies of social production when they become e.g. property of the associated workers. In the first case, however, their distribution, in that that they do not belong to the worker, is just as much a condition of the mode of production founded on wage labour. In the second case the changed distribution would start from a changed foundation of production, a new foundation first created by the process of history.¹²

¹¹ Marx and Engels, *Letters on "Capital"*, 41.

¹² Marx, *Grundrisse*, 777.

For Marx, the transformation from a conceptual understanding of capitalism to its practical reality necessitates praxis, the process by which concepts are acted upon and realized through practice. For Marx, intermediaries in capitalism (such as money, commodities, policy, and institutions) played an instrumental role. He emphasized that these intermediaries are themselves products of material conditions and human activity, and often obfuscate the underlying social relations of production. Commodity fetishism and alienation are identified as two primary outcomes and perpetuators, as is money itself.

Marx saw that with the introduction of money as an intermediary and representative of subjective value mediating the exchange of goods and services, it led to money becoming the “point” of trade itself. Codifying this and its effects on society was one of Marx’s major insights. This means that money almost instantly stops being “of itself” and becomes “for itself”; it immediately undergoes a change from an “example” to an “essence,” or from a “placeholder for value” to the “manifestation of value itself.” Money ceases to represent value; it becomes what is valued, shifting from a means to an end. Money is therefore, a “noneist object”: a logical object that represents both the absence of the good being traded, and of the labour required to introduce it into the market, a concept with a direct lineage back to the role of noneist objects in Hegel’s dialectic, as outlined above.

Land uses “abstraction” in the “abstract” sense, using it to evoke the spirit of the term, not the strictly broadly accepted meaning (fittingly enough, given Land’s ironic and challenging style). As stated above, “abstraction” is usu-

ally used to mean “the quality of dealing with ideas rather than events,” yet in Nick Land’s work, “abstraction” is used in the sense of a praxeological act, as in Marx’s own preferred term “extension.” Land employs the concept in a more dynamic and paraxial manner, and his use of “abstraction” implies a process that actively shapes reality, one that has both physical and mental aspects, but in which the material shapes the mental or conceptual. It is an ongoing operation that begins in practical and material transformations, which then extend into thought itself, for example, in his reading of George Bataille regarding how, Land argues, in Western Civilization:

The ‘good’ becomes synonymous with utility [...] The real trajectory of loss is ‘immanence’, continuity, base matter, or flow. If the strictly regional resistance of everything that delays, impedes, or momentarily arrests the movement of dissolution is abstracted from the solar flow it is interpretable as transcendence. Such abstract resistance to loss is characterized by autonomy, homogeneity, and ideality, and is what Bataille summarizes as ‘(absolute) utility’.¹³

Land’s reading materialist approach, where “abstraction” emerges from material processes rather than preceding them. Here, abstraction occurs when “the strictly regional resistance” to material flow (the “solar flow”) is extracted or separated out from that underlying material process. This abstracted resistance then gets “interpretable as transcendence” - meaning it appears to exist independently of

¹³ Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation: Georges Bataille and Virulent Nihilism (An Essay in Transgression)* (London: Routledge, 1992), xix.

the material base from which it was abstracted. In keeping with his Deleuzian influence, Land's "abstraction" involves decoding and deterritorializing established systems and structures, leading to new forms of organization and control. A key operator in this process is money.

The term "abstraction" operates across multiple registers in this analysis, from Marx's notion of abstraction as a process of labour alienation, to Land's conception of abstraction as a praxis act extending material transformations into thought, to Deleuze's deterritorialization. These apparently disparate uses can be reconciled by understanding that each conception treats abstraction as a noneist operator: a logical function that works through negative attribution rather than positive qualities.

When Marx describes how concrete labour becomes "abstract labour" in capitalism, he identifies a process whereby actual human activity is transmuted into a non-existent yet operationally effective category. Similarly, Land's abstraction involves the transformation of concrete reality into systems that function through absence, being the generative gaps that capital creates and exploits. Deleuze's deterritorialization likewise operates by dismantling positive structures to reveal the productive force of difference itself.

In each case, once key concepts in each respective process have undergone abstraction the hence forth function as noneist objects in precisely Priest's sense: it cannot be directly encountered yet it bestows properties on existing objects through negative attribution. Abstract labour is not labour itself but the absence of concrete particulari-

ty that nevertheless determines exchange value. Capital's abstraction is not a positive quality but the systematic creation of productive absences, namely debts, futures contracts, and speculative values, that organize material production. Deleuzian deterritorialization works by creating holes in established territories, spaces defined by what they are not. This recognition allows us to formalize seemingly incompatible philosophical approaches through a unified logical framework: abstraction as a noneist operator that transforms reality not by adding new qualities but by organizing systems around productive absences and contradictions.

In Land's dystopian vision of the future, this process will first occur through the capture of governmental systems by Corporatism, replacing human-centric policy with those favouring capital and profit, and eventually leading to Gibson-esque "mega-corps" which will own cities and even nations and be run solely to maximise profit and production: "Logistically accelerating techno-economic interactivity crumbles social order".¹⁴ Here Land's use of "logistical acceleration" refers to the "logistic function", otherwise known as an S-shaped growth curve. Elsewhere, he will frequently use the adjective "technomic" to describe the pattern of that starts slow, accelerates, and then slows down as it approaches a maximum limit. This type of growth is typically seen in populations of organisms, but it can also be applied to other scenarios where growth is initially exponential but eventually levels off due to limiting factors. The limiting factors, Land asserts, will be technological, leading to increasing investment into technology

¹⁴ Land, *Fanged Noumena*, 441.

and I.T. (and, eventually AI). Techno-economic interactivity is a key postulate of Land's ideas, indicating that the logic of capital and growth (which, theoretically, seeks to be infinite) demands new forms of technology, new forms of extraction, and new forms of creating, collating, and monitoring data to maximise efficiency to, in turn, stimulate further growth. The "market" will continue to extend into the human subject itself, via cybernetics, and slowly the human "subject" will become an increasingly exploited mediator for capital, AI, and, eventually, the Singularity.

This process might be described as one of deterritorialisation, and reveals the influence that Deleuze has had on both Land and Negarestani. The process of abstraction driving the progression of Geist, capital, and the Singularity in the works of Negarestani and Land indeed reflect Deleuze's influence, albeit implicitly. Land, in particular, acknowledges the rhizomatic nature of technology, which he attributes to Deleuze, underscoring the inevitability of technological proliferation as long as engagement occurs. This notion resonates with Deleuze's concept of Difference as the driver of ontology, where the act of extrapolation, an inherent aspect of Land's and Negarestani's frameworks, have already occurred on an ontological level. Land's emphasis is on the way abstraction in capitalism leads to acceleration of technological change and an intensification of economic processes. Land views these abstract processes as alien and autonomous forces that ultimately subsume human agency. Capital, for Land, is an abstract machine, a deterritorializing force that abstracts labour, value, and human existence into a self-perpetuating cycle of production and exchange.

Land cites the arrival of "zero" into Europe as an axial moment in the progress of Capitalism.

So what you're trying to understand is "What is it that happened in Europe in the Renaissance with the arrival of zero that was different to what had happened in India?" China had a functional notion of zero, it was obviously so prevalent in the Muslim world that people often call the numeracy "the Arabic numerals". There's something about the European situation [...] it was able to get out of the box in a way that was prevented in its other social contexts.¹⁵

Singularity as Noneist Emergence

The answer, this article contends, to Land's question is "accounting", particularly double-entry bookkeeping. The development of double-entry bookkeeping in 15th-century Italy, particularly through Luca Pacioli's treatise in 1494, marked a significant leap. This system provided a structured way to track debits and credits, laying the foundation for modern accounting. An interesting aspect is the debated role that Catholic indulgences played in the development of the double-entry system. Land goes on to describe pre-double-entry book keeping accounting as a "crucial inhibitor-mechanism [...] a sort of negative phenomenon that zero just liquidates. It is a certain system of semiotic shielding, that is dampening down certain potential processes".¹⁶ Thus, in the schema proposed here, Land's "absolute definition of the absolutely abstract",

¹⁵ Hermitix, "Nick Land Interview - Hermitix." *YouTube video*, 58:00, 15 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgEqUjsNTY>, accessed 27 April 2025.

¹⁶ Ibid.

zero, is not merely nothing. It can act within any numerical system applied to a social order as an absence, and as a gap to be filled: a debt. With this realization comes a range of negative attributes that become spacio-temporal obligations, accelerating Capital's ability to affect events across time, dictating action, preserving past events, and pulling value from the future into the present. It was debt, a noneist object, whose negative attributions accelerated Capitalism into Modernity.

The negative attributions of debt (it is logically existent but not materially, therefore noneist, yet it's "presence" provides the attributes of existing "new" Capital) are a "double negative": it is, itself, a negative attribution from non-existent Capital, born from the alchemy of M-C-M, and is itself M-M-M: money born from money to accrue money. Thus, the circle is competed and the total abstraction of money as a noneist object and its logical outcome (that it can be multiplied and manipulated indefinitely) is achieved. Capital is revealed as pure noumena, a sublime object in Žižek's terms; accounting for Land's reading that Kant himself viewed noumena as capital. Capital, for Land, is one of his "Fanged Noumean", so called after Kant's noumena, or the presumed "things in themselves" that exist apart from their appearances. For Land, capital is a force that can be perceived and tracked via currency, etc, but due to its numinous qualities, it is otherwise unknowable, and, perhaps even more importantly, for Land it is also "Fanged" as it has thus far displayed no concern nor care for human flourishing.

Land more formally describes how:

With Kant death finds its theoretical formulation and utilitarian frame as a quasi-objectivity correlative to capital, and noumenon is its name. The effective flotation of this term in philosophy coincided with the emergence of a social order built upon a profound rationalization of excess, or rigorous circumscription of voluptuous lethality [...] Compared to the immortal soul of capital the death of the individual becomes an empirical triviality, a mere re-allocation of stock.¹⁷

If the subject is within a materialist paradigm the culmination of encountered phenomena and phenomena are merely responses to unaccountable numina then the subject is a non-existent object. Unlike Descartes, for whom the cogito is the ground of all epistemological interaction with being, for Kant the subject is another form of illusion generated in response to numina. As numina are inherently unknowable and un-encounter-able in any authentic way they are, within any symbolic system, noneist objects. Therefore phenomena-objects are granted properties via the negative attribution(s) of both the subject and numina. Thus, for Land, capital is numina, and therefore a noneist object that yet influences existent phenomena-objects via negative attribution. Land argues that capital demands advances in technology and I.T, and will therefore seek to perfect quantum computing. This would allow the AI to, potentially, instantaneously "upgrade" itself (or create plans to upgrade itself) to the level of a functionally omniscient being. The Singularity will thereby be able to engage in conceptual inception and even intervene in evolution,

¹⁷ Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, 111.

creating a species (humanity) which will, in turn, be guided by this providential entity to creating it. For Land, this has, in effect, already happened, and it is merely our linear perception of time that prevents us from seeing it, yet we do experience its guidance and manipulation via the medium of Capitalism, and the continued emergence of Corporatism, the internet, and quantum computing. Land draws the distinction between convergent and divergent ways of viewing the effects of events the past — divergent as in the sense of viewing an event as something that occurs and events ripple outwards divergently; a convergent view of events being that is that the various series of causal events move towards one single point to converge:

In the old Aristotelian quadrate of causality we're talking about final and efficient causality and I'm not trying to say final causality is right and with efficient causality is wrong but very strongly I'm wanting to say if it seems to you that efficient causality is right and final causality is wrong then that again is a sign that your conception of time is completely metaphysical, because what's at stake here ultimately is extremely traditional within maternity: is this it's just Kantian. So the notion that the future is somehow unmade has is incomplete and the past is complete is an anthropomorphic illusion. We think there's something more to say that the past has been finished in that and the future hasn't is just because of the peculiar angle that we're looking at things from. The time if the future is as much time as the time of the past is its time and the time of the future

doesn't come from the time of the past. That's again just to make time into an object in time the future does not come out of the past that's the mechanical the common-sense mechanical era that is so tempting for everyone to make.¹⁸

So Land views time in terms of space-time, in the manner outlined by the Block Universe theory, but does so in a unique way: a radically noneist reading that Land's work implicitly supports (the major contention of this article is that Land's system is infused and made functional via implicit Noneism), though it is not explicitly stated in his texts. For Land the past and the future (and as a consequence their space and material arrangements) operates as noneist objects that infuse the present with qualities via negative attribution: they do not exist in the present moment materially or as "real", but exist logically as absences that imbue the present moment with traits via negative attribution. In a block universe, where all moments, past, present, and future, are equally "real" as parts of the total space-time, the idea emerges that what we experience as the present is framed not only by what it actively is, but also by what it isn't. In this view, the past and the future (with their own spatial and material configurations) function like noneist objects. They don't contribute their qualities directly in the present; rather, their absence (or the fact that their specific arrangements aren't instantiated in the present moment) infuses the present with its qualities via negative attribution. This aligns with a shift in emphasis with Deleuze's Bergsonianism:

¹⁸ Nick Land, "Ideology, Intelligence, and Capital," *Vastabrupt*, August 15, 2018, <https://vastabrupt.com/2018/08/15/ideology-intelligence-and-capital-nick-land/>, accessed April 27, 2025.

The virtual object is not a former present, since the quality of the present and the modality of its passing here affect exclusively the series of the real as this is constituted by active synthesis. However, the pure past as it was defined above does qualify the virtual object; that is, the past as contemporaneous with its own present, as pre-existing the passing present and as that which causes the present to pass. Virtual objects are shreds of pure past.¹⁹

For Land these shreds of pure past take on an inverted undead aspect, for they are themselves the ghostly haunting presence of the Entity from “the future”.

This means that the present gains its character partly from the “negative” influence of what is not present, that is, the qualities that are defined by the non-occurrence of the past or the future in our immediate experiential field. It’s a compelling synthesis that draws together the block universe’s Eternalism with a noneist approach to ontology, where absence (or the non-actualized aspects of space-time) plays an active role in constituting reality. Land does not state this explicitly, but it follows perfectly from his criticisms of linear, transcendental perceptions of time, and (in his terms) “confused” antinomian views that separate time into past and present and future, the latter deterministic, the former subject to free will.

Deleuzian Divergences And Abstract Machines

Nick Land has argued that there is an Entity, situated in the Outer, that is pure numina (which he argues in an al-

lusion to Kant), and which is influencing capital to allow it to manifest via AI. In effect, it is the materialist Geist, not as communism, but as an AI that will alter humanity so extensively that it will not even be unrecognisable, and therefore “the Übermensch”:

Vernor Vinge have this great paper about [the Singularity] called “a wall across the future” and the topic of this paper was that you can’t write science fiction anymore because there’s a wall across the future: when you hit intelligence explosion things change in a way that completely exceeds any imaginable human capacity for anticipation [...] when Nietzsche is being rigorous about Übermensch [this] is the same [...] we have no idea what Übermensch means other than that it’s again a wall across the future [...] that’s the strongest connection that takes you across from once other.²⁰

Land’s ontology is just this: an apophatic ontology of negative attribution, in which absence is not a lack, it is the bestower of negative attributes. Thus the “next stage of humanity”, the Übermensch, is going to be negatively defined as no-longer human, but not due to lacking humanity. The entity is going to be negatively defined as not AI, but not due to lacking computational processes or intelligence. Rather, it will be due to lacking “artificially” by dint of no longer being definable by what was once human as “artificial”.

²⁰ Land, “Ideology, Intelligence, and Capital.” The paper referenced appears to be Vernor Vinge, “The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.” *In Vision 21: Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in the Era of Cyberspace* (Cleveland, OH: NASA, Lewis Research Center, 1993), <https://ntrs.nasa.gov/citations/19940022856>.

¹⁹ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 144.

Land equates *noumena*, which here he describes as effectively being noneist objects – as equable with a sense of infinity, with nothingness, and the desire for nothingness (death drive), and that subjectivity is effectively also nothingness. Land begins by quoting Kant discussing the function of the subject in the creation of time, commenting: “Kant does not deny that pure consciousness is oblivion, death, or the subject in itself- which is to say that it is nothing (= o) - he simply evades the issue, implicitly consigning it to the imagination”.²¹

If we slake our thirst for annihilation or resist it temporally we may conceive of how this nothingness and these absences (and the terms capital and numina) must function – and the role they logically play in ontology itself. In formal, non-post-structuralist philosophy, these terms are not merely related; they are functionally identical. As such, they challenge the idea that an object is defined solely by its positive attributes.

Conclusion Cosmic Capital as Noneist Realism

A fictional or nonexistent object (N) gradually builds up negative characteristics through a specific process ($\oplus$, which involves exclusive OR and negation). Over time, this forms a sequence of evolving states ($N_0, N_1, \dots, N_n$).

Emergence: When this accumulation reaches a critical point ($\neg(N_n)$), a completely new and distinctive set of properties (Δ) emerges as a result ($\Theta(\neg(N_n))$). This emergent set transforms the object into something entirely new, that which Land called the Entity:

- $(N = \Phi(\Delta)^*)$. N: Represents the final emergent object or entity. In this context, it's the culmination of the process.
- Φ : This symbolizes a transformation or mapping function. It takes the new set of properties (Δ) and processes or refines them into the final form.
- Δ : This is the emergent set of properties that arise from the accumulation and critical structure of negative traits.
- $(\dots)$: This notation emphasizes that the transformation applies to the entirety of Δ , resulting in the final state of N.

In essence, the equation shows how the emergent object (N) (the Entity) is a product of refining or transforming the new properties (Δ) (of logic) through a specific process or function (Φ) (Capital). It moulds raw potential into its ultimate, realized form. The new properties are those of noneist objects which, as we have seen, allow for explosion, contradiction, and infinite generation. Capital becomes the symbolic intersection with human agents, who become extensions of this process. The inevitable result is the emergent object: the Entity.

Absences are not uniform even if they are univocal. To get the intuition of how noneist objects and their negative attributions are a fundamental part of how reality functions the example of music is fitting: music is not just a phenomenological experience. All notes are created via vibration of air molecules and the sensation of hearing music can be empirically verified by “non-ears” (“listening” devices,

²¹ Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*, 118.

tape records, and other audio devices). These vibrations have situation within spacetime and are therefore bonded with the fabric of reality, no mere cognitive illusions. The same, therefore, must be true of silences: the absence of sound. The silence before the conductor raises his arms occurs within spacetime and may be empirically proven, and it has a certain phenomenological impact. It is, in every way, not the same silence that comes before the crescendo of the piece being played. The two silences are different, but have a real material situation (frame) within space time and have a real material effect on the velocity of the air vibrations that follow the preceding stilling of the molecules. Reality is not just constructed of positive attributes of presences; it is structured, and facilitated by absences and negative attributes.

Whatever one may think of Nick Land individually as a contemporary political commentator, or of the ultimate conclusion(s) of accelerationism, Land is an innovative synthesiser of many different philosophical schema and systems, many of which, prior to his efforts were often viewed as competing or contradictory. Subsequently, this paper has need must touch on Marx, Hegel, Deleuze, Kant, Land, and Priest in a relatively short space, but this itself, the author hopes, acts as an illustration of the power of Priest's employment of Noneism to illuminate aspects of a wide range of thinkers. By providing a negative ontology to Land's schema we gain the ability to abstract both the negative ontology and the synthesising power of Land's philosophy without needing to ascribe to Accelerationism uncritically or to its conclusions.

This reading proffers these intriguing interpretations: An incorporation of Priest's formulation of Nothingness into

other philosophical systems; a continuation of Hegel's "Noneism" into the functioning of the dialectic; An account of the function of Marx's "debt" to Hegel via the role money plays in Capital; An articulation of M-M-M and how it came to be; a means to formulate the potential link between Kant's numina and Capital; an illustration in formal logic of Land's Entity.

Therefore, this paper argues that reading Land in this way, we may expand awareness of this "noneist" reading to all of the major philosophers Land touches upon, and by examining their negative ontologies synthesise them and employ them in ways brimming with potential for development in new and exciting ways. Simply put, via an awareness of the noneism it alludes to in the thinkers it draws from, we may abstract the enormous potential a noneist inflected synchronicity offers.

Jana Tsoneva

“I want to, but I lack desire”: The green energy transition caught between expectations and possibilities

Bionote: Jana Tsoneva is a sociologist based in Sofia, Bulgaria, and an assistant professor at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Her work focuses on political sociology, the sociology of labor, and the history of ideas, political economy, and ideology. She holds a PhD in Sociology from the Central European University (CEU) in Budapest, where her dissertation explored the Bulgarian middle class and the 2013 protests in Bulgaria. Tsoneva is a founding member of KOI, an activist-research NGO specializing in radical publishing and leftist policy, and a member of the Collective for Social Interventions in Sofia. She is also involved with Social Center Xaspel and the New Left Perspectives collective. Additionally, Tsoneva co-authors *Hysterical Parrhesia*, a Lacanian-Marxist blog, and has contributed to publications like *Jacobin*, *Al Jazeera*, and *Lefteast*, covering topics such as protests, social justice, and political economy

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Abstract: In this article, I present results of a nationally representative survey on attitudes toward the Green transition in Bulgaria, which we conducted in 2023 as part of the project “Public Capacity for a Just Green Transition” (КП-о6 Н55/13). The survey focuses on four groups of questions concerning

climate change, social justice, expectations from the new transition, and the public agenda. Based on these, I draw predominantly pessimistic conclusions about both the Green transition and the transition to liberal democracy preceding it, showing how the experience of the latter inevitably colors the former. I analyze the gap between possibilities and expectations for the new transition with reference to Jacques Lacan’s theorizing about the difference between need/demand and desire.

Keywords: Green transition, Bulgaria, climate change, social justice, public attitudes, liberal democracy, Jacques Lacan, expectations, pessimism, survey

Introduction

In this article, I present results of a nationally representative survey in Bulgaria on attitudes toward the green transition, which we conducted in 2023 as part of the project “Public Capacity for a Just Green Transition” (КП-о6 Н55/13). The survey polled 1005 Bulgarian citizens on questions from the importance of climate change to how just and democratic Bulgarian society is. Our team aimed at finding out if experiences of the post-1989 transition to liberal democracy and capitalism would color expectations of the coming transition in the energy sector. Being still heavily dependent on coal, supplying over 40% of the energy mix, Bulgaria has committed to decarbonization

under the “Fit for 55” and the European green deal energy and climate targets. To this end, the country has to close down the major coal plants and effect an economic transformation which stirs heated debates and opposition on part of miners and energy plant workers. In short, the European Green deal is a highly charged topic in Bulgarian society. Energy politics in general is a polarizing issue in Bulgaria. For example, in the winter of 2013 mass protests, punctuated with several acts of public self-immolation, problematized the escalating utilities costs and highlighted the social price of energy liberalization (see Tsoneva 2013a, 2013b, and 2018 for a more recent bout of fuel price hikes protests). 10 years later mass protests and highway blockades by miners and energy workers accompanied the submission of the Bulgarian Territorial Plans to the European Commission so that Bulgaria could qualify for Just Transition transfers. Parts of the arguments against decarbonization stems from the still sizable dependence of Bulgarian electricity mix on coal: despite the steadily rising share of solar, over 40% of electricity comes from coal in winter and autumn.

Let me begin with the demographic profile of the survey. It polled 1005 respondents, of whom 476 were men (47.4%) and 529 were women (52.6%). Women made up slightly more than half of the respondents. The largest proportion is over 70 years old (almost 20%), followed by the 40-49 age group. More than half of the respondents have a high school education, while almost 30% were college educated, which is in line with the typical figure for the country (27.8%).

The majority of respondents are employed, followed by retired, self-employed, unemployed, employed on a civil contract, without a contract, and students. Finally, 6.5% of respondents fall outside the labour market due to disability or other reasons. People’s family profile is that of the classical nuclear family of 2 or 3 members: 31.5% and 31.3% respectively, with the remaining percentages distributed among one member (11.7%), four people (21%) and 4.6% for five or more people. In terms of income, people with a net income between BGN 1,352 and BGN 2,000 prevail (17.9%), followed by the low-income groups BGN 251-504 and BGN 505-780 (respectively 16.2% and 15.7%). They are followed by people earning between BGN 781 and BFN 1,351 (27.5% in total) and the shockingly high proportion of people earning up to BGN 250: 6.7%. Understandably, the percentage of the high-income category BGN 3001-5000 is the lowest - only 0.2%. Over 10% refuse to disclose their income.

The survey questions fall into 5 categories: ecology and climate, awareness and participation, equity, anticipated effects of the Green transition, and how they envision transition justice. Let’s move to the questions polling people’s attitudes to climate change and decarbonization. This part of the survey contains 27 main questions (some of them with sub-questions), broken down by themes such as climate crisis, sense of justice, political priorities, opportunities and willingness of citizens to participate in energy decisions, motivation to participate in energy cooperatives or awareness events on decarbonisation, urgency of measures, who should pay the price of climate rescue and energy transformation, among others. We began with the

climate. Climate change is:

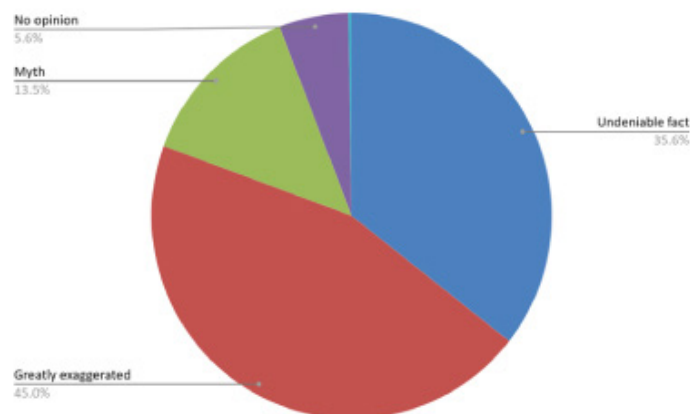


Fig. 1. Attitudes to climate change

And although the majority express skepticism about climate change, 74.1% believe that science will find a solution (selective faith, we might add, since there is complete consensus in the same science on which so much hope is placed that climate change is not a myth or exaggeration, but a fully documented and empirically supported reality). The situation is reminiscent of Sigmund Freud's broken kettle logic: "I don't believe there is a grave climate problem, but science will solve it" (2010).

As the data shows, the climate is not the Bulgarian nation's most urgent problem. The famous quip of the French Gilet Jaunes movement applies with equal force to Bulgaria: making the month's ends meet is more important than the end of the world. Climate politics is and still remains largely a middle class concern. So let's move on to the questions probing society's agenda:

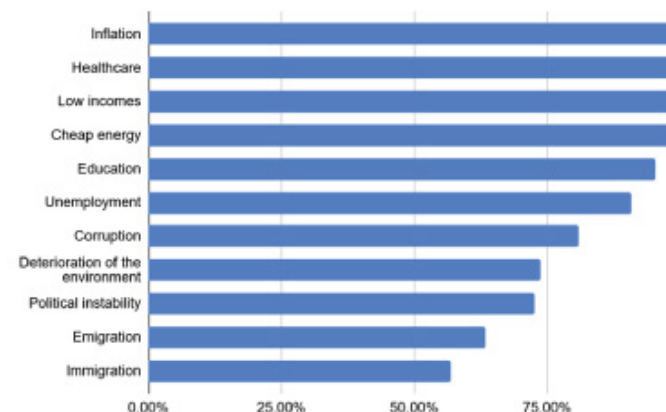


Fig. 2: The public agenda.

As the data unequivocally shows, socio-economic issues rank high on the agenda, as do healthcare and education.

Having established the public agenda, let's see what people think about the levels of fairness and transparency/quality of the democratic process in the country. We needed to get a better grasp of these issues in order to assess expectations of the fairness of the Green energy transition. Do people feel represented in Bulgaria? Compared to the results in the previous section, we can conclude that they rather are not: a big scissor has opened between the public and the political agenda. Yet, in theory, mechanisms exist in a democracy to calibrate such imbalances, as well as levers to allow citizens to connect in the public sphere and participate in the formulation of policy priorities. The following series of responses, albeit on questions posed about different topics, answer the following meta-question, taking aim at the very heart of the democratic process: are citizens empowered and informed enough to

take action? Do they have access to sufficient mechanisms to participate in decision-making? Are decisions made in their interests, and if not, in whose interests? Let us take a closer look at the data.

Information is often presented as a necessary condition for the possibility of democratic participation of citizens. This is why the public sphere receives special attention in most works theorizing contemporary liberal democracy. Starting from the axiom that free access to information and an inclusive public sphere are key values and levers for democratic participation, we decided to explore respondents' level of awareness of the Green Transition and the opportunities that energy transformation holds. People were split exactly in half between those who thought the information was sufficient (41.9%) and those who said it was rather insufficient (41.7%). The rest hold no opinion. We then moved to the availability of information and transparency in the energy sector. Are decision there made in the private or in the public interest?

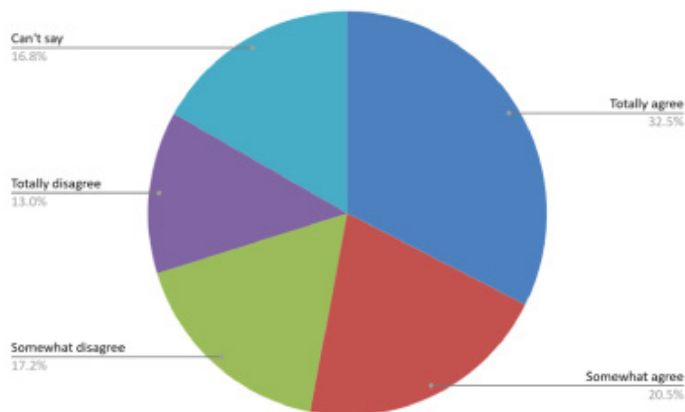


Fig3: "Decision in the energy sector are taken everyone's interest"

On the face of it, over half of respondents showed confidence in the decision-making process, i.e. that it was in the interests of all, despite a significant proportion of installed capacity being in private hands.¹ Perhaps the answers are helped by the fact that households are still in a regulated electricity market and do not feel the chaotic movements of the exchange market as businesses do in a free market.² For households, price rises are regulated and increase regularly.

But when we rephrase the question whether lobbyists dominate the decision-making process, the following intriguing data came out: 56% completely agree with the statement, and when we add those who rather agree, we get an impressive majority of almost 75% believing that lobbyists dictate the processes in the energy sector. It is difficult to square the circle of the data from these two questions, unless we assume the existence of a cabal of highly ethical private lobbyists making decisions in the public interest. But since it is unlikely, perhaps we should just accept that people are able to reconcile any two conflicting ideas effortlessly.

¹ According to the latest data from the Association of solar power producers in Bulgaria (BFA), there are 255 plants operating in Bulgaria with a capacity of more than 1 MW with a total current capacity of 911 MW. The total capacity of the small ones up to 1 MW is 121 MW, but they count 851 in number. In other words, there is a large concentration of capacity in few but large companies.

² Bulgarian electricity flows via two markets: a regulated one for households and a free market for businesses. Plans to liberalize the domestic market in 2026 fell through in the summer of 2025.

Lobbyists dictate energy policy

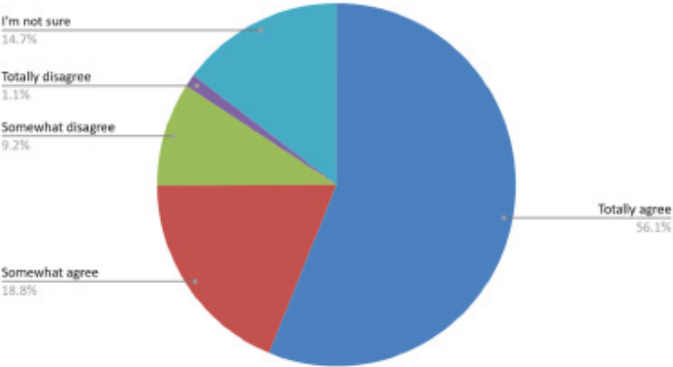


Fig. 4: The role of lobbyists.

Consistent with the question about the outsize role of lobbyists, we received extremely negative responses about the claim that decisions in the energy sector are made in an open and transparent way: as many as 76% deem the decision-making process intransparent:

The decision-making process in energy policy is open and transparent

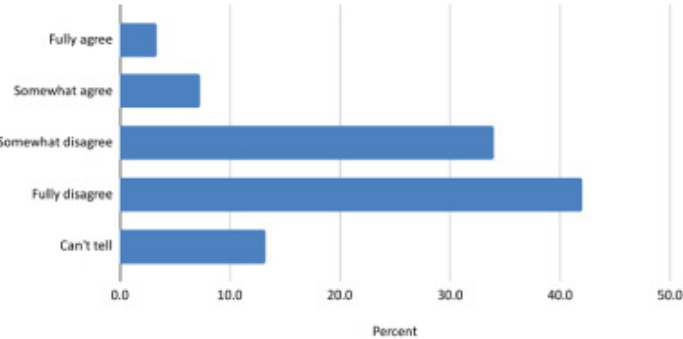


Fig. 5: Transparency of the decision-making process.

Two-thirds of people also say that it is not possible for everyone willing to influence the energy sector. At the same time, however, this does not seem to be so negative because people expect experts and technocrats to be primarily involved in energy decisions rather than it being an open and/or democratic process: nearly 90%. However, when we asked whether ordinary people should have any leverage to partake in decision-making in the sector, 69.6% answered in the affirmative. Based on the consensus around the statement below, we can conclude that people don't mind experts or even lobbyists making the decisions as long as they inform the public: a full 92.8%, but there should still be opportunities for grassroots participation:

The public must be informed about the decisions taken and convinced that they are in everyone's interest.

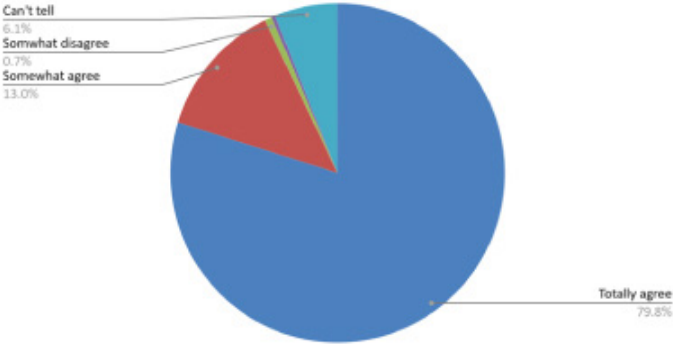


Fig. 6: Information availability.

We also resolved to check people's awareness of the Territorial plans that will determine the future of coal regions in the coming years. In general, awareness does not scale up to the importance of these plans which will directly affect

citizens and their economic situation. Less than $\frac{1}{3}$ (27.1%) say they have an idea of what is at stake for the regions, but the remaining $\frac{2}{3}$ have no information or idea at all:

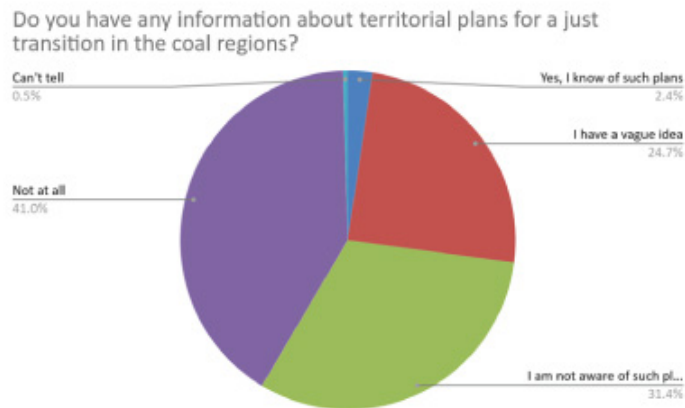


Fig. 7: The territorial plans.

As many as 75.9% are unable to engage in Territorial plans and public consultation processes, suggesting very low levels of social mobilization around the new economic opportunities presented by the coming decarbonization:

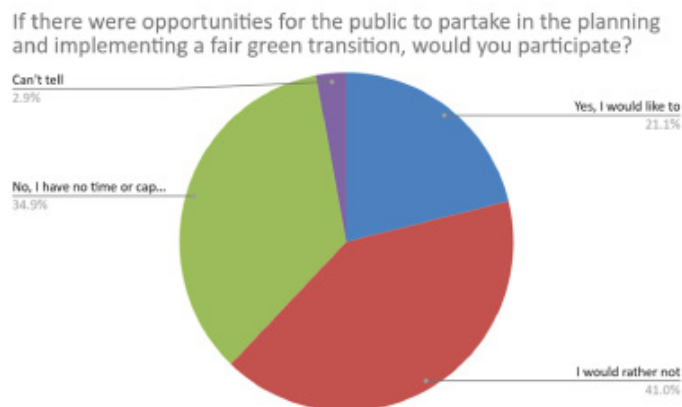


Fig. 8: Missed opportunities.

Here opens the first scissors, which is the subject of this article: on the one hand, people welcome awareness, but on the other hand, they have no desire (and sometimes opportunity) to be informed. When asked if they would attend an informational event on ecology and transition, almost half answered in the negative, and with those unlikely, the total comes to 67! In other words, people feel that the public needs to be more informed about environmental issues and options for addressing them, that there is not enough information available, but that if there were an public awareness event, they would not go. Only 6.4% would also bring a friend to such an event. Even fewer would organise such an event: only 3.5%.

Let's see where the other scissors lurk. We developed a set of questions to find out more about respondents' perceptions of fairness in society. The overall conclusion that emerges is that people are rather egalitarian and dislike the privileges of the rich (although everyone wants to be like them). Bulgarian economic egalitarianism, however, finds its limit in hegemonic meritocracy, the faith in which even widespread corruption and cronyism have failed to shake. For example, as many as 97.8% say that it is fair that he who works harder earns more, and 84% believe that everyone should get only what he has acquired by their own efforts:

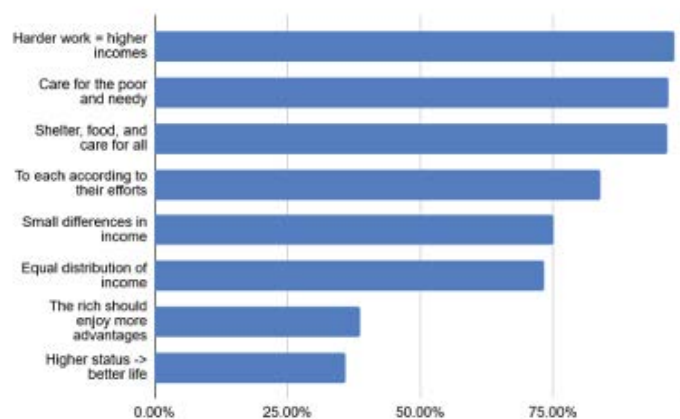


Fig. 9: "The just society ensures that"

But when we stepped out of the realm of values and asked people whether they believe that the rich in Bulgaria owe their wealth to personal merit, the consensus breaks down and people are split: 46.6% believe that wealth is not the result of hard work and ability, versus the total of 47.5% of those who believe it:

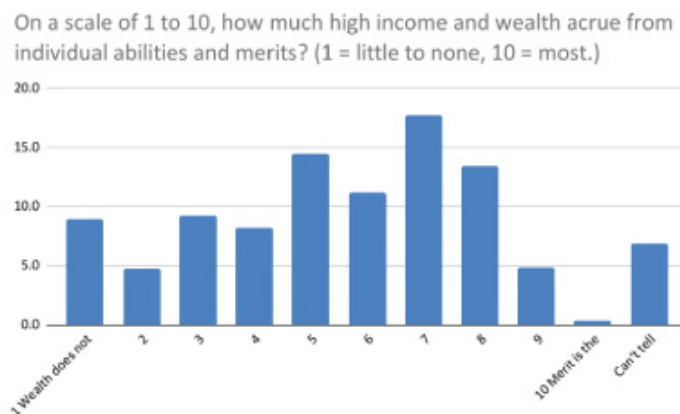


Fig. 19: Merit vs corruption.

In other words, while people profess a belief (at least in theory) in the abstract possibility of wealth honestly earned through hard work, when related to concrete examples of the Bulgarian rich, almost half of respondents deem empirically existing wealth illegitimate. Here we can use the Bulgarian sociologist Deyan Deyanov's beloved synonymous twin construct of *everyone* and *everybody*, which in Deyanov's work becomes an antinomy: while in theory everyone can sit in the chair, not everyone will in practice. While in theory every rich person may have earned their wealth through honest work, in practice not all rich (perhaps none) do.

Given Bulgaria's pronounced inequality—boasting the highest Gini index in the EU—it is unsurprising that our egalitarian respondents view Bulgarian society as fundamentally unfair. When asked to rate societal fairness on a scale from 1 (completely unfair) to 10 (very fair), the results were striking. The majority of responses clustered at the lower end of the scale, with 27% assigning a score of 4, followed closely by those selecting 3. Only 9.9% rated society as somewhat or very fair (scores of 6 to 10). In contrast, 21% gave the lowest possible scores of 1 or 2, and when combined with those choosing 3 or 4, the proportion swells to a whopping 67%. In short, most respondents perceive Bulgarian society as deeply unfair.

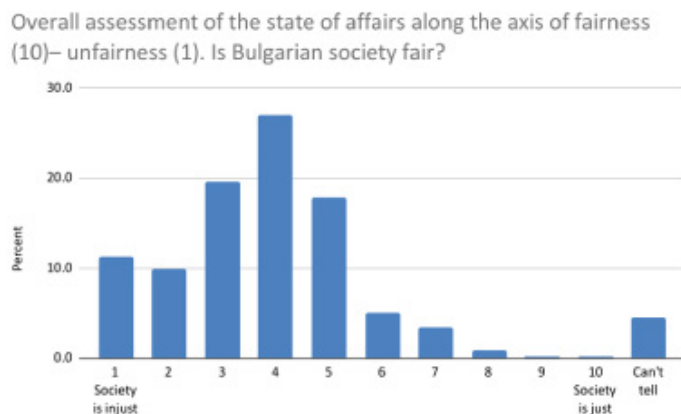


Fig. 20: Is society fair?

We asked the same question about inequalities (1 = too high; 10 = too low) and obtained an almost identical distribution of scores at the low end of the scale (i.e., more unequal), only with a greater clustering of scores. In other words, the sum of all responses giving a score up to 5 is a full 88.8, i.e. almost everyone agrees society is strongly unequal:

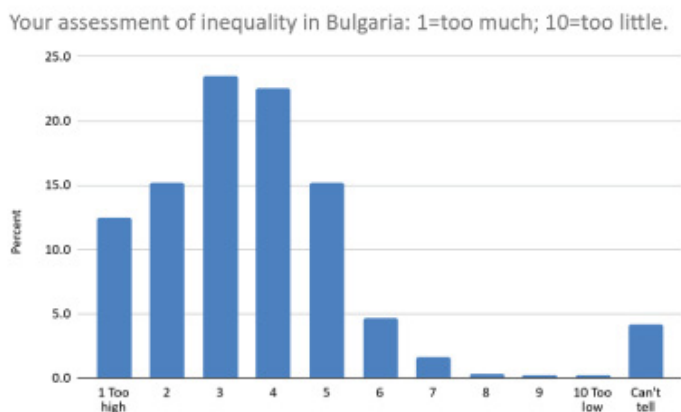


Fig. 11: How unequal is society? 1 = very unequal, 10 = very equal.

Superimposed on each other, the two graphs show an almost perfect correlation:



Fig. 12: a perfect correlation of responses.

The results shifted noticeably when respondents assessed the transparency of decision-making in society: over 46% gave positive ratings. This suggests a society that is unequal and unfair, yet relatively transparent. In short, the data paints a picture of a cynical society. I understand cynicism, following Žižek, as the open and conscious enactment of wrong or immoral actions (1989). In this context, inequalities and injustices are plainly visible, and those who enable, benefit from, or defend them do so without denial or pretense.

In the wake of this disappointing public diagnosis, let's revisit the Green Energy Transition to explore societal expectations of it.

Expected effects of the Green Transition

We asked respondents about their expectations of the effects of the Green Transition on a range of issues important to society (but not politicians) such as poverty, inequality, the cost of energy and the quality of jobs. 63.1% expect poverty to increase a lot or significantly, and together with the 13.3% who expect no noticeable effect (which is also a negative expectation insofar as people consider poverty levels in the country to be worryingly high), negative expectations about Green Transition and poverty prevail for over 2/3 of respondents. The situation is identical for expectations about inequalities, the quality and quantity of jobs and access to energy.

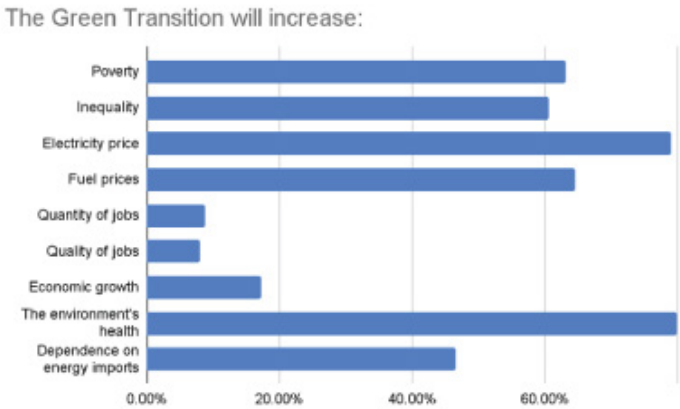


Fig. 13: Negative expectations

However, this does not mean that people reject the Green transition out of hand. The vast majority of citizens, for example, fully agree with the statement that households should be encouraged to produce green energy for themselves: nearly 90%!

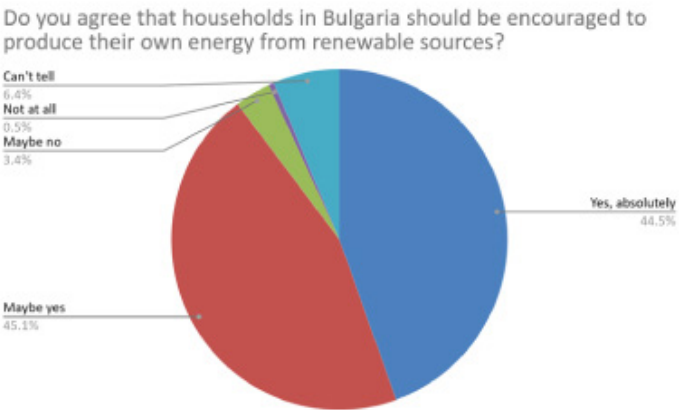


Fig. 14: Are personal renewable energy sources desirable?

We found a similar consensus with regard to energy co-operatives: this is when a residential block or neighboring houses install and run together shared renewable energy capacity such as common roof solar panels. Energy coops rake in an impressive 91.3% approval rate:

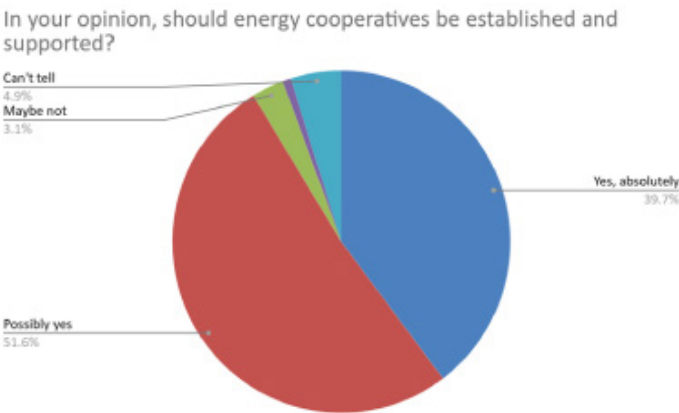


Fig. 15: Energy coops

But when it came to personal involvement, however, we encountered the already identified gap between abstract beliefs and the concrete actions of putting them into practice. For example, when we asked whether people were willing to install their own solar panels or participate in an energy cooperative, 61% and 73% respectively answered in the negative. Those firmly convinced not only in the practical benefit of owning solar panels, but also expressed a desire to put it into practice, are a negligible minority at 9.8% and 7.3%, respectively.

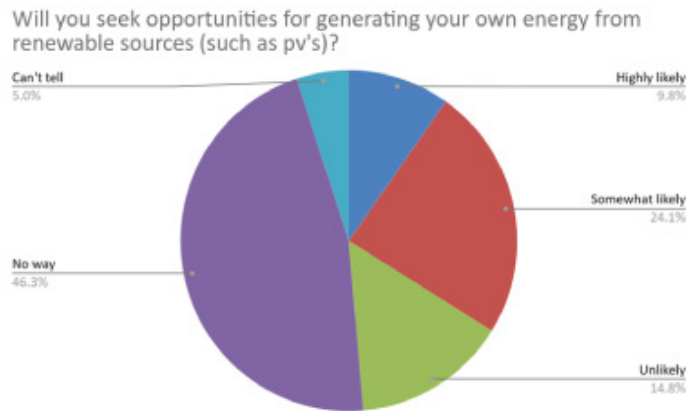


Fig. 16: No way!

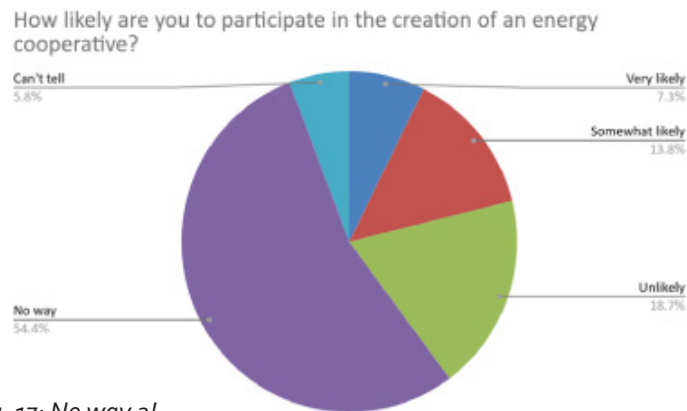


Fig. 17: No way 2!

Here an obvious scissors has opened between what people believe "in theory" to be good for them and society and "practice". The situation is reminiscent of a popular TV street poll conducted around a referendum in Bulgaria held in 2016 at the behest of a nationalist political party that sprang up from "Slavi's show": a popular political talking show (and not the first to demonstrate the existence of a media-governmental nexus in the far-right end of the political spectrum). When a reporter polled a random citizen if he voted, he responded with "I wanted to, but I didn't have desire."³ One crucial thing to note is that the voter is of Roma descent and it is something of a tradition in racist Bulgarian media electoral coverage to poll Roma and then laugh at what is perceived as an uneducated or uncouth response on viral videos online. In fact, the voter became the subject of many a meme, but let me explain why the deep significance of what can be called "spontaneous Lacanianism" of the voter and his disjunction between want and desire is lost on those laughing. I deem it perfectly applicable to the survey results. While participants in our survey expressed high levels of token approval for the citizen-led energy transition, their stated intentions to participate were strikingly low. This paradox - desire without willingness - invites a psychoanalytic reading via Lacan's distinction between need and want. Need is articulated and conscious, subject to social conventions; desire, by contrast, is unconscious, shaped by lack, fantasy, and the desire for recognition by the Other. For Lacan, desire is always the desire of the Other, which is to say: we do not desire mere objects, but to be recognized as desirable by

³ I was later told this punchline comes from the popular TV show "Friends". I have not been able to independently verify the alternative genealogy. The poll video can be watched here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGA_rKwqZ8Q

the Other (1998: 235). In political life this translates into a desire to be noticed by the powers that be, to be included, to count and to matter. So, far

In this case, the lack of libidinal investment may reflect a deeper democratic malaise: the widespread belief that individual or collective gestures are ultimately ineffective because they are structurally overtaken by elite capture. This absence of desire should not be interpreted as apathy, but as a morbid symptom of the democracy in a society that no longer believes it can be recognised as a political factor. This libidinal withdrawal suggests that belief in the necessity of the green transition is not enough. Where recognition is rejected, desire atrophies, and symbolic approval masks a deeper despair. Similarly, Maurizio Lazarato (2009), and especially Franco Berardi, argue that neoliberalism has exhausted libidinal economics. Today, the subject is overexposed to demands but devoid of symbolic efficacy, leading to what Berardi calls “the agony of the social body”: a collective paralysis, even in the face of professed belief (2011). “We believe but do not will. We approve but cannot act.” In political science this is often referred to as the hollowing out of politics. As Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev likes to quip, elections lead to changing the politicians but not the politics.

This is no longer an ideological mystification (as in classical Marxism) but a libidinal detachment: a collapse of political desire because recognition is foreclosed. In Butler and Honneth’s theories, recognition is fundamental to action. When subjects feel they will not be noticed their desire recedes. In this light, Green transition initiatives that

are symbolically progressive but structurally captured by elites produce recognition without reciprocity. The subject affirms but cannot invest nor act.

What is to be done?

Given the high levels of approval for citizens’ pv installations and a mounting consensus for the closure of polluting enterprises, it seems that people are not against the transition, but they do not believe that it will be done fairly because their desires and agenda are not reflected in those of the elites. Since the mass assessment of the fairness of the current transition is rather negative, low expectations for the coming one are both reasonable and understandable. But let us not end on an overly pessimistic note. There are still ways to save the Green Transition, at least in theory. The inquiry itself points the way to ensuring its fairness and, equally, the public legitimacy for it. In the final part of this article, I turn to some options that can help avoid a repeat of the injustices of the 1990s. The final series of questions in the survey polled public opinion on measures that can (could have been?) be taken to make the Green transition fair. For the most part, these relate to the socio-economic dimensions and costs of transition, but we started by asking whether polluting industries should be closed down. Most answers were in the affirmative, indicating that despite concerning levels of minimization of climate and environmental crises, most people realize that industries worsening air purity and damaging nature should shut down. This shows that despite the negative expectations of the Green Transition, there is still an underlying consensus that it is inevitable.

To make it fair, the Green transition must ensure:

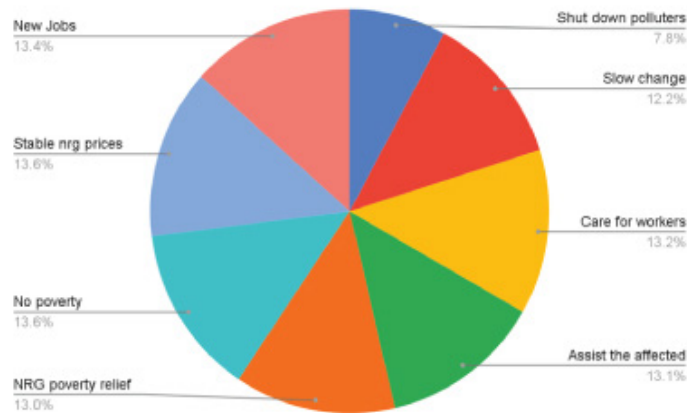


Fig. 18: Conditions for a Just energy transition 1

Conditions for Just transition continued:

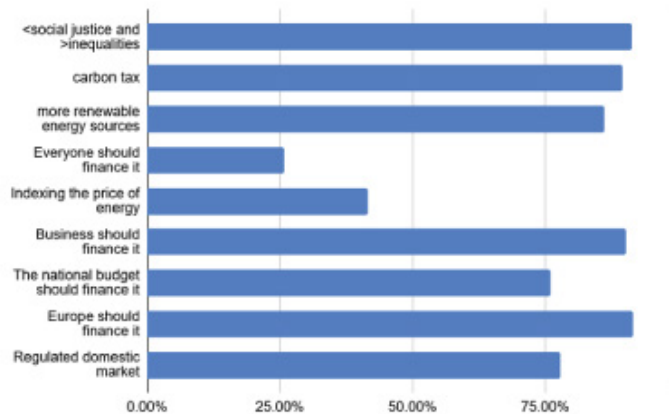


Fig. 19: Conditions for a just energy transition 2.

People want not only guarantees against poverty and energy price hikes, but also more jobs in the new Green Ener-

gy sector to make the transition just: 96.8%. Unfortunately, new energy capacity is not quite as labour intensive as conventional capacity (at least at the level of operation, if not production). While in classical fossil combustion power plants an industry standard of 1 employee per MW is still operative, the new power plants employ up to 13 times as little workers, and mostly in maintenance and installation, as opposed to the highly qualified jobs required for the old plants. We also detected expectations for a fair distribution of the cost of the transition: it is mostly the EU and the companies that will benefit from the energy transformation that are expected to pay its price, not the workers.

Conclusion

If the Green Transition is to avoid becoming yet another iteration of the post-1989 transition, it must meet certain conditions. Based on the survey, we can distill the following conditions for the transition to be just and equitable, according to the majority of Bulgarians:

- An active state policy to protect workers and communities dependent on fossil energy;
- Active social policies that mitigate the economic shocks of transformation;
- Measures against increasing inequalities and privileges of the rich classes;
- Investment in new jobs so that people are not left without an adequate alternative;
- Measures against depopulation and the looming demographic crisis in the coal regions;
- Affordable energy for all: both through direct

transfer and price caps (electricity market regulations for household consumers);

- Development of quality jobs in new industries - with decent pay, good working conditions and long-term stability;
- Transparency by involving citizens in planning and decision-making processes to reduce the perception that transition is happening top-down and for the benefits of the elites.

The green energy transition is necessary but poses serious social and economic challenges. Our research shows that despite scepticism, people understand the need for green measures. But they are worried about poverty, inequality, electricity price hikes and job insecurity. The need for a **just transition** that does not burden the most vulnerable is self-evident.

Historically, energy transitions have not just ignored the social cost, but have been a lever to oppress workers (Malm 2016). If there are no protections for people now, the transition will lose support and legitimacy. A new social contract is needed in which the burden is shared equally.

As is evident from the survey, a scissor has opened between values and readiness for action, between expectations of the transition and the “really existing transition”. At first glance, our survey caught a positive signal: a large majority of people understand the need for environmental and climate mitigation such as reducing fossil fuel extraction/combustion or PVs. But this consensus breaks down sharply when these ideas need to be implemented. Where is this contradiction rooted? This is a classic exam-

ple of a discrepancy between stated values and practical readiness for change, and in the Bulgarian case this scissors is particularly deep. The reason is not the supposed hypocrisy of the people, but in the deep disillusionment and distrust that Bulgarian society has carried since the beginning of the Transition. After 1989 the Bulgarian society were sold on the idea of democracy and market economy believing that after a short suffering, they would catch up with the West - not only economically, but institutionally and culturally. This was the great promise of the Transition: after a period of costly sacrifices, freedom would pay off and bring prosperity, development, modernity, justice. But this promise did not come true, at least not for everyone. Economic transformation has led to deindustrialisation, mass poverty, social exclusion and insecurity, and democracy has degenerated from a system of real participation and political equality before the law, into an oligarchic rule by and in the interests of the rich. As a result, people have almost stopped voting. Meanwhile, popular trust in the democratic institutions was undermined by corruption, clientelism and nominal legality. As a result, much of society today views any idea of transition with deep scepticism. This creates a paradox: people accept the stakes of a green transition, but do not believe in the claims and abilities of the system that is supposed to implement it, that it will do so in a fair way, or that it will improve their lives. This leads to apathy and self-elimination from participation: I firmly believe in the need for energy cooperatives, but no chance I'll take initiative and participate. To paraphrase Freud, *wo Kohle war, soll Sonne werden, aber noch nicht*.⁴

⁴ Where coal was, solar shall be but not yet.

Therefore, if we want the green transition to be just and democratic, we need to address the democratic deficit enveloping it. This means concrete, visible improvements in people's daily lives such as cheap, convenient alternatives to private cars, better public transport, affordable energy, better education and healthcare, better paying jobs and more social support. We also need a fairer distribution of burdens: the transition cannot happen on the backs of the poor, in the dark, without information, without levers for participation and dialogue. If people become part of the solution, they will be more inclined to bear the inconveniences. Last but not least, we need a rethinking of the transition model itself - the green transformation cannot be carried out adequately if society has not yet metabolized its old disappointments with the old (instead these routinely get dismissed by experts as populism, socialist nostalgia, Russian propaganda, etc.). This is why the green transition in Bulgaria must also be a red or *social* one - towards a more solidary society and a social state in which sustainability is not only environmental but also social. Otherwise we will not achieve a green transition, but a deeper – if greener – inequality.

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Katarina Kolozova

About Gilles Grelet's latest book and all related

Review essay

It is not an easy task to write a review of anything written by Gilles Grelet, and it is an even harder one when attempting to write an academic review of his *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* published by Urbanomic in 2022. Grelet invites complete honesty when engaging with him, your most vulnerable naked "self" (whatever that might be). This is a prerequisite to meaningfully engage with both Gilles the man and the author Gilles Grelet, Doctor of Philosophy and a sailor of many years.

Our first misunderstandings as to how much "authenticity" is possible began when years ago, maybe decades ago, he demanded my contribution to "Les sans philosophie" be more of an ultimatum. I was unable to write an ultimatum to the World, as I did not think I was better than "the world," nor that I knew what was most beneficial for me and the other bodies populating "the world." Both Gilles and I use the term "the world" in the Laruellean sense – it is the universe of constant chatter that cannot help itself but being philosophical.

The world is always philosophy, insists Laruelle, and the terms philosophy and "the world" (le monde) are synonymous. There is no need to cite any particular work by Laruelle to support this claim, because this has always been the thesis in his entire opus of non-philosophy as well as that of the stage of non-standard philosophy. The axiom is: the real is always already foreclosed but it inevitably invites

thought to produce language of it; in that process, philosophy seeks to establish perfect unity between thought and the real in the form of Truth, whereas non-philosophy does not decide (in advance) of the real but rather correlates to it while seeking to follow its syntax. Non-philosophy establishes knowledge of the real not in an absolute sense and not with a full certainty, but "as good as it gets," as John Ó Maoilearca [puts it](#).

To pose an ultimatum to the world presumes completed detachment from the world or from philosophy, i.e., speaking from a position of purity with respect to "world's chatter" (a concept Gilles Grelet mentions often in his *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*). This impossible position would be that of choosing to be with the real, presupposing one can speak from that most truthful position which precedes language that stemming from the real itself. That is why, once he begins his life journey of a sailor, Grelet commits himself to silence, allowing the elemental force of the sea to be the "language" or the manifestation of the real itself. After a while, or exactly two years of such silence, Grelet concludes that this empty position is empty in the most banal sense – one becomes simply obtuse or rather hollowed out from within where the soul is supposed to be.

In the little cell of light which, far from the stereoscopic gaudiness of the world, I had made my home, everything began to resonate hollowly; to reason flabbily. My face-to-face with the sea became a brainwashing, my soul flushed out and swallowed up. (G. Grelet, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* [2.12])

So, Gilles Grelet comes to the realization that has been François Laruelle's presupposition or perhaps the foundation stone of his project of non-philosophy: one can operate with negativity on philosophy and suspend its ambition to become the voice of the real, but one can never fully exit philosophy. Also, one can never fully abandon the need to produce an account of the real, albeit one must admit and submit one's account to the voiceless real. Real does produce sound or noise and perhaps has "its voice" but it is not one to share anything with us, it is not a sound of communication, and it is not a language in any sense. However, the field of immanence, as Laruelle explains in his *Introduction to Non-Marxism* (Univocal, 2014), does have its own syntax as does the material world whose "language" sciences constantly seek to decipher. The non-philosopher and non-Marxist (which is Laruelle's term for a Marxist practicing non-philosophy) produces language attuned to that syntax, never reaching perfection, but always as good as it gets, as John puts it.

However, "as good as it gets" has never been good enough for Gilles. Many years ago, as the heretic within the Laruealleian heresy, Gilles Grelet wrote of "proletarian gnosis" (Gilles Grelet "Proletarian Gnosis," Angelaki 19, no. 2 (2014): 93-98). One could obviously no longer be a Marxian (too much philosophy) but one could have pure knowledge of the proletarian cause, which would be called gnosis (in line with Laruelle's Philosophie III) enabled by removing oneself from the world as much as possible:

How can we be neither living (client or agent of this whore-house-world), nor dead (or too quickly lethal, particular-

ly for oneself)? Proletarian gnosis offers a solution to this problem: be a living-suicide. A saint without any glory except some ravaged intensity much like the sovereign in his act of being. Go to the sea. (Grelet "Proletarian Gnosis," [16])

Gilles seeks a language unadulterated by language. Yes, language is always of the world. Gilles seeks to hear the real speak: the real does not speak to us, we speak of it or to it as madmen screaming in the desert. Maybe real leaves traces and clues that we may recreate as "syntax of the real" but they are in the world, and they are made of philosophical material. Gnosis may lead one to their own individual transcendence, spiritual elevation and social salvation. The proletarian however is a collective self, and one needs to speak from within or to the world if one seeks to create and share "proletarian gnosis."

True, class consciousness is too polluted with philosophy, and some distance from it or a certain *epoché* is indispensable to build class consciousness as closely attuned to the real as possible, understood, as Gilles puts it as both "angelic" and "materialist." Let us quote from the book of the Solitary Sailor to illustrate what is meant here: "Angelism is materialism and radicalism (of the real and not of the worldly) is angelism."

It seems that in his *Theory of the Solitary Sailor* Grelet finally admits to François that indeed "some language" or "some philosophy" is nonetheless necessary. After so many years, I read Gilles ceding to the non-absolute and submitting to the real. Nonetheless, he does not fall back

into the trap of poststructuralist dogma, the episteme ruling our era, on the left and on the ideological both caught up in culturalist constructivism, the latter unwittingly so. He resists the postmodern inertia and proposes a formulaic language:

It is in this way that the speech of silence, as abundant as there are points to hold to, is on every occasion a minimal speech, in the most compact form possible: a formula; formulaic speech.

Formulaic, the speech of solitude is silence held, held back from making world: *theoria* rather than *logos* and the void of *logos*. An anti-dialectic of which, often, the writing of light is more capable than that of words. (Grelet, *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*, [3.13])

Let us restate: the theory of proletarian gnosis or that of the solitary sailor is both materialist and angelic, and in doing so Grelet remains a non-philosopher or his version of it – an anti-philosopher. Philosophy is still somehow there – as it is in Laruelle's non-philosophy – but Grelet poses a challenge or in fact enacts an opposition to it, the "non-" is replaced by "anti-." He opposes dialectics as too much of the world or philosophical. Instead he proposes a view and a political stance he calls "theorrorism," theory as silent being with the sea witnessing the horror of the real and a radical opposition to the madness of "worldly chatter."

Finally, it does not make sense to debate Gilles. You can either love him or hate him. In spite of the disagreement

I carefully present above, I have always loved Gilles, as I love his *Theory of the Solitary Sailor*. Gilles, I still disagree with the discourse of ultimatums, and I still think your ideal position of solitude is an intended idealism. Nonetheless, I cannot but agree with you when you say "angelism is materialism and radicalism (of the real and not of the worldly) is angelism."

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