A child's metaphysics is radically different from that which they shall develop later in life: a cosmogonic narrative where a toy, or the darkness of a room, is endowed with agency and entitled to constant negotiations, is an 'otherworld' to a cosmos where the boundaries of life and non-life, reality and un-reality are more harshly delineated. The child's experience of the present defines their perspective towards the future, setting the metaphysical parameters where all possible events are envisioned to take place. A child, like any subject, assumes that the world of the future will be metaphysically continuous with that of their present. Their every plan or decision is based on the idea of a predefined range and kind of the possible.

The embarrassment that typically accompanies the crumbling of a childhood world marks the experience of having somehow survived the End Time – only to find oneself in open sea, out of sight from a new segment of time. The old metaphysics no longer applies and there is no new narration as yet in place: the feeling of inadequacy of early teenage years points to a subject whose actions lack the support of a strong frame of sense, standing out as shameful inasmuch as they lack a 'legitimate' status within reality.

The young adolescent, as a post-apocalyptic subject, has to make do with any precarious form of worlding that they may be able to devise. They scavenge among the ruins of the lost world of childhood, searching for some inspiration; or they resort to imitating just about any available metaphysical narration, in the hope of a pseudomorphosis.[36] But post-apocalyptic subjects, too, live in a world and a time of sorts, although the contours of their

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[36]In mineralogy, a *pseudomorph* (false form) is a mineral or mineral compound that results from a substitution process, in which the appearance and dimensions remain constant, but the original mineral is replaced by another. Oswald Spengler adopted this term to describe 'those cases in which an older alien Culture lies so massively over the land that a young Culture, born in this land, cannot get its breath and fails not only to achieve pure and specific expression-forms, but even to develop fully its own self-consciousness'. See O. Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, vol. II, translated by C.F. Atkinson, New York, NY, Knopf, 1926, p. 189.

existential landscape remain fleeting and permeable to the incursions of the Real[37] beyond reality. Things become more unstable, while the inexplicable liveliness of each particle of reality emerges in a threatening fashion.

Like the silence of organs signals to their functioning, and noise to their crisis, so the end of a world takes our process of worlding out of its silence, turning it into an activity proper. The aftermath of an apocalypse is a shivering expanse, where reality itself requires constant mending.

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[37]The Real is one of the three registers of reality described by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, alongside the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic'. The Real is the ineffable, underlying bedrock of reality, from which humans are severed by their entrance into language. Although Lacan's notion of the Real has changed over the course of his philosophical investigation, it is possible to gain a fairly synoptic vision especially in J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959–1960*, Book VII, edited and translated by J.A. Miller, Cambridge, Polity, 1997.

THE AFTERLIFE OF CIVILIZATIONS
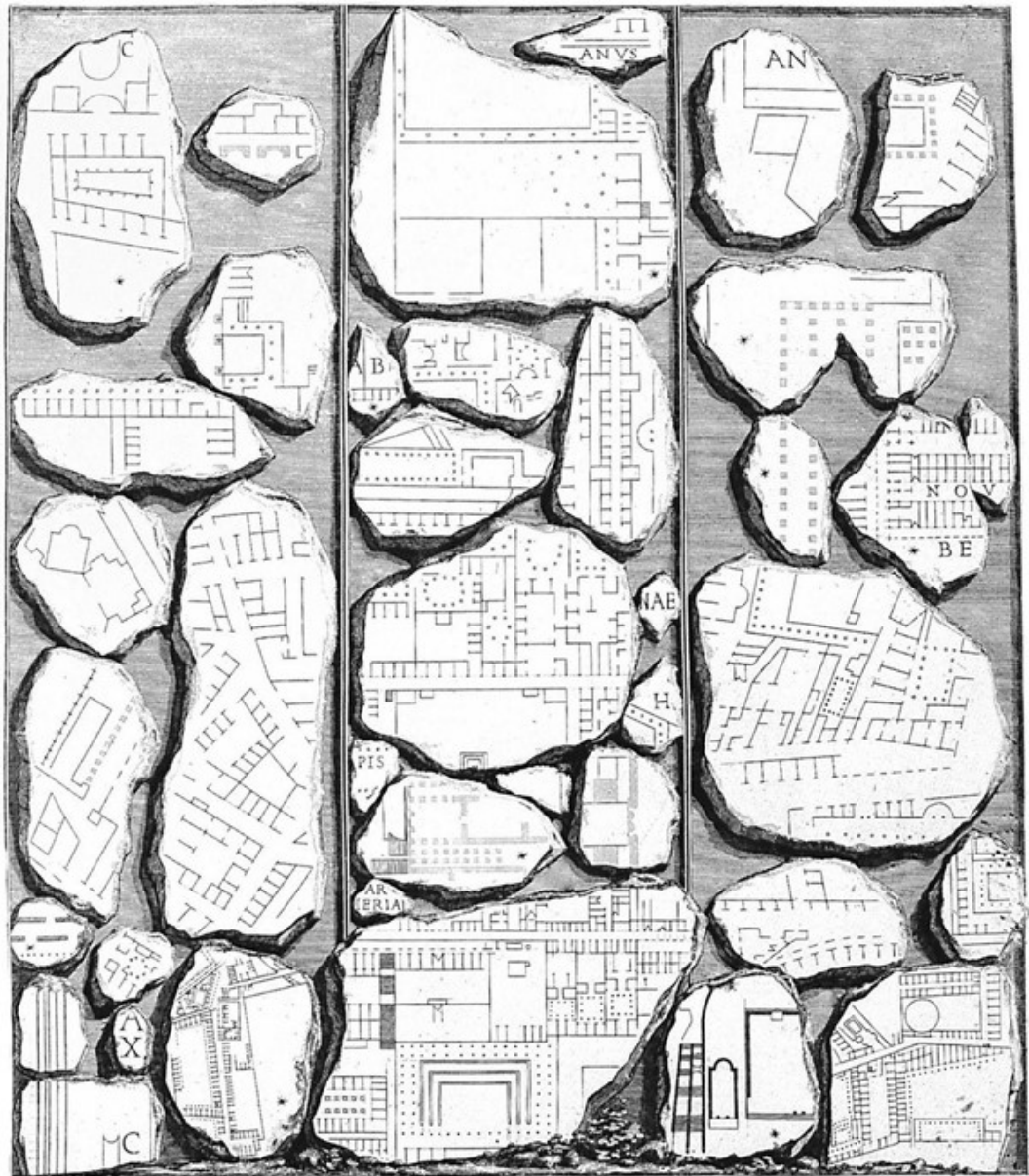
FIGURE 1.4 *Giovanni Battista Piranesi*, Map of Ancient Rome and Forma Urbis, *from* Le antichità romane *(Roman Antiquities), t. 1, Plate IV, 1756.*

Rising from the ruins
And facing the future.[38]

These traumatic moments of passage between worlds and times occur as often in the life of an individual, as in that of a collective.[39] When the closure of a world refers to the collapse of an entire civilization, historiography tends to define the following period as a 'Middle Age'. A scenario where life proceeds in the absence of a voice capable of narrating a stable world; a long winter when the material of history is in part congealed and, in part, slowly rots away. This is, of course, how these periods are seen and judged from the perspective of a more stable world – but such partiality is revealing of the difference between worlds with unequal narrative rootedness.

Instances of Middle Ages abound in the history of the past few thousand years. An early example is the so-called Hellenic Middle Age that followed the fall of Minoan and Mycenaean society in the twelfth century BC. Spanning for almost five centuries, the first recorded Medieval period in European history came at the close of a civilization that had flourished across a network of cities between the Argolis, Anatolia and Crete. The Minoan and Mycenaean era had been the time of Achilles, Hector, Minos, Orpheus, Herakles, Jason and all the heroes that populate Greek mythology. In his *Works and Days*, the poet Hesiod listed it as one of the five ages of the world: the Heroic Age.[40]

This spectacular society vanished suddenly, perhaps due to a series of environmental catastrophes,[41] and it was followed by

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[38]*Auferstanden aus Ruinen und der Zukunft zugewandt.* Incipit of the 1949 anthem of the German Democratic Republic – lyrics by Johannes R. Becher, music by Hanns Eisler.

[39]'The entire operation of a historical era is established by the sense assigned by that era to the being-thing on the part of things. Indeed, the sense of what we call a "thing" is not stable.' E. Severino, *La strada: La follia e la gioia*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2008, p. 57 – my translation.

[40]Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 156–75, translated by D. Wender, London, Penguin, 1973, pp. 63–4.

[41]For a critical overview of the existing scholarship on the collapse of Bronze-Age civilizations in the Eastern Mediterranean, see the 'systemic collapse' approach suggested by archaeologist Eric H. Cline, in E. Cline, *1177 B.C.: The Year Civilization Collapsed*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2015.

half a millennium when even basic material culture dramatically diminished. Its two writing systems were lost and nothing came to substitute them until the adoption of the Phoenician alphabet, in the eighth century BC. Long-distance seafaring, mythically inaugurated by the Argonauts, ground to a halt. Even metallurgy, which had given the name to the Age of Bronze, before that of the Heroes, was abandoned until ironworking arrived from Anatolia.

The people who lived in those territories during the centuries following this collapse saw their spatial and temporal horizons shrinking. As ever during a Middle Age, the categories of time and space barely emerged from the surface of reality – leading to a rapid divestment from the infrastructures that used to reach into the spatial–temporal elsewhere.

Medieval subjects receive the elsewhere mostly passively, and for this reason all the more intensely. Past and future haunt a Middle Age like ghostly entities, severed from the context of the present. Threats and promises from an other, disjointed time, which is simultaneously long-lost and as-yet to come. The inner turmoil of a Middle Age, not taking place within a stable rhythm of time, relentlessly spins without advancing towards a future. A Middle Age is a period that is truly 'contemporary': it is a compressed world, whose present is confined entirely within its own bounds; a time that is defined only by its own coincidence with itself. It is an 'idiotic' age, in that its familiarity extends only to what is already *idios* (particular, private) to itself.[42]

In the same way as the post-Minoan and post-Mycenaean people, also the magma of local kingdoms that followed the liquefaction of the Western Roman Empire lost access to the infrastructures of their predecessors. Already in the fifth century AD, while travelling through the Italian peninsula ravaged by the Goths, the poet Rutilus Namatianus noted:

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[42]As a corollary, we could add, encountering a civilization that calls itself Contemporary is a good indicator of a world at the tail end of its own narration, unconsciously readying itself for an incoming Middle Age – since trauma operates not only projectively, conditioning what happens afterwards, but also retrospectively: it already haunts a subject who is readying themselves to recognize it.

The monuments of an earlier age can no longer be recognised;
devouring time has wasted the mighty battlements away.
Traces only remain now among the crumbled walls:
under a wide stretch of rubble lie the buried homes.
Let us not chafe that human frames dissolve:
Here it is how cities too can die.[43]

By the eighth century AD, the material legacy of the Roman civilization had become so alien to the new Medieval landscape that an Anglo-Saxon poet could describe a minor complex of Roman public baths as 'the stones of giants', which had 'fallen to the ground broken into mounds' before their late discoverer could look at their 'treasure, at silver, at precious stones, at wealth, at prosperity, at jewellery, at this bright castle of a broad kingdom'.[44]

Not only public buildings were largely abandoned,[45] but also the inter-continental networks of roads and communications that used to supply the empire with people and materials rapidly fell into disuse.[46] Together with the infrastructures to expand through space,[47] the chronicling of life and history, to which Roman

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[43]*Agnosci nequeunt aevi monumenta prioris:/grandia consumpsit moenia tempus edax;/sola manent interceptis vestigial muris,/ruderibus latis tecta sepulta iacent./ Non indignemur mortalia corpora solvi:/cernimus exemplis oppida posse mori.* My own translation. For further reading, see Rutilius Namatianus, *De Reditu Suo*, 409– 14, in R. Namaziano, *Il Ritorno* (dual language edition), Turin, Einaudi, 1992, p. 30.
[44]Anonymous, *The Ruin*, in M. Alexander (ed.), *The Earliest English Poems*, London, Penguin, 1977, pp. 28–9.
[45]A prime example is the abandonment of aqueducts in the city of Rome for almost a millennium, from their destruction by the Ostrogoths in 537 AD until the Renaissance.
[46]'We choose [to travel by] sea, because all land routes/are flooded by rivers in the valleys and are covered by rocks on the mountains:/since the fields of Tuscia and the Aurelian road,/utterly devastated by the hordes of the Goths,/no longer tame the forests with inns, nor the rivers with bridges,/it is better to entrust the sails to the sea, however unpredictable it might be.' My own translation. For further reading, see Rutilius Namatianus, 'De Reditu Suo', 37–42, in *Il Ritorno* (dual language edition), Turin, Einaudi, 1992, p. 4.
[47]An emblematic case in point is the gradual but systematic destruction, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, of the *Forma Urbis Romae* (Severan Marble Plan), a massive marble map of ancient Rome, created under the emperor Septimius Severus between AD 203 and 211.

civilization had entrusted its own projection towards the future, also decreased significantly. Literacy became scarce and writing withdrew into the sanctuary of small circles of ecclesiasts. Like the Hellenic Middle Age, also the so-called European Dark Age – from the fifth century to the Carolingian renaissance in the ninth century – has left behind very few material traces.

Nonetheless, in both cases, in the midst of a seemingly endless collapse, something remained of those stable worlds that once existed.[48] The relics of those lost civilizations continued to survive within the folds of a frayed time.

Carried by the voice and the memory of itinerant rhapsodes and *aoidoi*, the stories of the Minoan and Mycenaean age crossed the 'long night of the five hundred years'[49] of the Hellenic Middle Age, until they were formalized in the cosmological epics of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Episodes like the combat between Achilles and the river Scamander, as recounted in the *Iliad*,[50] speak not only of the deeds of the heroes, but most importantly of the metaphysical settings of the world where they originally occurred. The Homeric cycle offers, not just the (inaccurate) description of a society, but more importantly a reproduction of the mind of a civilization in the act of constructing a fundamental frame of sense through which a world can take shape. Myths do not point to the hour of a civilization, but to its particular art of producing time. Like the three Moirai who spin the blank thread of a person's life, the voice of Homer unrolled

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[48]To paraphrase Pessoa, what remains are 'all the dreams in the world', contained within a certain world-narration. 'I am nothing./I'll never be anything./I couldn't want to be something./Apart from that, I have in me all the dreams in the world,' F. Pessoa, 'Tabacaria', in F. Pessoa, *Selected Poems*, edited and translated by J. Griffin, London, Penguin, 2000, p. 111.

[49]*La larga noche de los quinientos años* was Subcomandante Marcos's definition of the Middle Age that befell indigenous populations in Central America after the Spanish invasion – and which continues to this day. The violence of the colonial enterprise can be measured, among other things, also by the devastating impact that it had on indigenous metaphysics – that is, on the possibility for the indigenous populations to perform a stable 'worlding' (and thus to produce a 'time-segment') in which they could live and flourish.

[50]*Iliad*, book 21, 200–381.

the time-segment of the Mycenaean–Minoan civilization – not the portrait, but the *frame* of a world.[51]

The works attributed to Homer reached into the ruins of a dead world to recuperate the materials for the foundation of what will later become the Classical Greek age.[52] Starting from the eighth century BC, the new generations of Archaic Greeks adopted the Homeric narration both as their ethical paradigm – crystallized by the notion of *arete* (nobility)[53] – and as their metaphysical understanding of the stuff that makes up 'the world' – a tragic assembly of gods and mortals under the aegis of *Ananke* (Divine Necessity). Centuries later, philosophers of the Classical Age still embarked on their explorations with an eye to the Homeric world as the fundamental benchmark against which their *logos* would be judged. This is particularly evident in Plato's work, where archaic mythology is always an implicit interlocutor in the discussions between Socrates and his counterparts.

The same process occurred again at the end of the European Dark Age, around the ninth century AD – when, among the ghosts still haunting Roman ruins, a new civilization sought some inspiration to start its own world-making narration. The Church played a crucial

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[51]The Mycenaean and Minoan world, as sung by the rhapsodes, was a syncretic distortion both of the age past and of their own present. 'Homer and archaeology part company quickly. On the whole he knew where the Mycenaean civilization flourished, and his heroes lived in great Bronze Age palaces unknown in Homer's own day. And that is virtually all he knew about Mycenaean times, for the catalogue of his errors is very long. His arms bear a resemblance to the armour of his time, quite unlike the Mycenaean, although he persistently casts them in antiquated bronze, not iron. His gods had temples, and the Mycenaeans build none, whereas the latter constructed great vaulted tombs in which to bury their chieftains, and the poet cremates his. A neat little touch is provided by the battle chariots. Homer had heard of them, but he did not really visualize what one did with chariots in a war. So, his heroes normally drove from their tents a mile or less away, carefully dismounted, and then proceeded to battle on foot.' M.I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus*, New York, NY, New York Review of Books, 2002, pp. 39–40.

[52]For an examination of the foundational role of Mycenaean culture towards Greek Culture, see, for example, M.P. Nilsson, *The Mycenaean Origin of Greek Mythology*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1972.

[53]For an as-yet-unsurpassed account of the archaic notion of *arete* and of the role that it played in later in Greek culture, see W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. I, *Archaic Greece*, translated by G. Highet, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1965.

role in the survival of the world of Rome, comparable to those Hellenic rhapsodes who offered their own voice as a living vessel for the lost Heroic Age. Embodied in the very structure, language and references of the Church,[54] Roman cosmology remained available to be rediscovered and exploited by a young civilization in the process of commencing their own cosmogonic narration.

When Charlemagne was crowned by Pope Leo III, on Christmas day in the year 800, he took upon himself the name of *Imperator Romanorum* (Emperor of the Romans) – a title which had lost all meaning almost four centuries earlier. Already at the court of Charlemagne's predecessors, Merovingian scholars had created the story of Francus, a mythical ancestor who had left Troy together with Aeneas but had gone northwards, towards the Rheine, to establish the Frankish people.[55] In its reconstruction of a world in which they could live, Carolingian society recuperated the legacy of the Roman civilization as the mythical foundation of its own institutional settings – that is, of the 'legitimate' power that regulates and predetermines the possible forms of action and knowledge in a certain world.[56]

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[54]This is true also in the case of values that are at odds with Christian doctrine: it is mainly thanks to the extensive quotations reported in the works of early Christian polemicists, that substantial fragments of pagan theology managed to survive the fall of pagan society (a good example being Celsus's critique of Christianity, *On The True Doctrine*, which survived only thanks to its inclusion in the refutation written in AD 248 by the Christian theologian Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum*). To appreciate the Church's embodiment of the lost Roman world, it is worth noting the emphasis placed by the Church on the figure of Constantine, the first Christian emperor, who long remained as the mythical model of the rightful ruler (see A. Barbero, *Costantino il Vincitore*, Rome, Salerno Editrice, 2016). See also the connection between Imperial Roman rituals of power, and early Christian religious rituals: 'In the festivals of the saints, crowds "swarm like bees" around the tomb [of the saint]; and the saint himself makes his presence felt all the more strongly by a ceremonial closely modelled on the *adventus*, the "arrival in state" of a Late Roman emperor.' P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 1989, p. 7.

[55]The curious story of Francus was first presented in writing in the seventh-century *Chronicle of Fredegar*, and it was later developed in the eighth century in the *Liber Historiae Francorum*.

[56]I am adopting Michel Foucault's understanding of power and of institutions, as developed throughout his oeuvre, and particularly in M. Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, translated by J. Murphy and J. Khalfa, New York, NY, Vintage Books, 2006.

Cases of strange resurrections, like those of the Mycenaean and of the Roman worlds, don't stand as historical exceptions. To find them, let us move to the south-east of the Mediterranean basin, where the wise elder of the ancient world used to reside:[57] the civilization of Egypt, already millennia old in Plato's days. In the fourth century BC, when Egypt fell to Alexander the Great's gallop towards the final frontier of the world, the land around the Nile had already endured centuries of Persian rule. In historical terms, the Egyptian civilization was, by then, a spirit deprived of a body – like the shadows of the Heroic Age preserved in the *Iliad*, it survived only as the remnant of a past future. But when the Macedonian conquerors coalesced with their new subjects into one people, they looked among the ruins of these two vanquished worlds for inspiration to start their own new cosmogonic narration. Mixed with a second adoption of the Homeric narrative, Egypt's hieratic and magic metaphysics produced the soil out of which the age of Hellenism grew.

To be sure, the Hellenistic reincarnation of these long-lost cosmologies subjected them to a process of reinterpretation and betrayal that substantially disfigured them. Creations like Serapis – the divinity invented by Pharaoh Ptolemy I Soter, from the syncretic combination of various Greek and Egyptian gods – would have probably appeared unacceptable to people living at the time of the earlier Pharaohs and of the Mycenaeans.[58] And

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[57]'On one occasion, wanting to lead them [i.e. the Egyptian priests] on to talk about antiquity, he [i.e. Solon, one of the "seven sages" of Greece] broached the subject of our own ancient history. He started talking about Phoroneus – the first human being, it is said – and about Niobe, and then he told the story of how Deucalion and Pyrrha survived the flood. He went on to trace the lines of descent of their posterity and tried to compute their dates by calculating the number of years which had elapsed since the events of which he spoke. And then one of the priests, a very old man, said, "Ah Solon, Solon, you Greeks are ever children. There isn't an old man among you." On hearing this, Solon said, "What? What do you mean?" "You are young," the old priest replied, "young in soul, every one of you. Your souls are devoid of beliefs about antiquity handed down by ancient tradition. Your souls lack any learning made hoary by time."' Plato, 'Timaeus', 22 a-b, in J.M. Cooper (ed.), *Complete Works*, translated by D.J. Zeyl, Indianapolis/Cambridge, Hackett, 1997, p. 1230.
[58]By a fascinating coincidence, the head of Serapis was later adopted by Charlemagne as his own seal. See J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Thought and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1972, p. 55.

the monstrosity[59] of these recuperations was only destined to increase – as it happened in the fifteenth century, when Italian Renaissance scholars combined the remnants of Hellenistic metaphysics with Cabbalism to produce in turn their own, new narration of the world.[60]

But the case of Hellenism wasn't dissimilar to the disfigured reincarnations of the Mycenaean–Minoan and Roman worlds. The historical inaccuracy of the heroes sung by Homer was doubled by the Greek appropriation of their model as the cornerstone of a new, 'tragic' mentality. And what could there be of more incongruous than a trousers-wearing barbarian, unironically taking on the title of Roman Emperor!

Such is the afterlife of a metaphysical narrative issued by a dead world: like a print left on a path, a new foot comes to fill it and to betray its boundaries. Indeed, if a world is ever to survive the end of its own historical body, it is through syncretic disfigurement rather than in the efforts of archival conservation. As in the story of Malinche – the Aztec woman who served as Hernan Cortes's translator and who mothered one of the first Mestizos[61] – betrayal

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[59]I intend such monstrosity in the sense assigned to the figure of the monster by Georges Batailles. 'For Bataille, the monster is in some sense the very culmination of [Durkheim's notion of] the left-hand sacred – a formless figure that is paradoxically both useless waste and the mechanism of subversive operations, "uniting birth and death in the same rupture." Indeed, the very concept of monstrosity – with its contradictions, incompletions, and irrational effusions it implies – is itself monstrous; it is a tainted, wounded, maculate conception.' J. Biles, *Ecce Monstrum: Georges Bataille and the Sacrifice of Form*, New York, NY, Fordham University Press, 2007, p. 63.

[60]As it is well known, Italian Renaissance culture owed an enormous debt to the rediscovery of Hellenistic culture and especially to the re-introduction of Neoplatonism in Italy by Georgius Gemistus Plethon, via Marsilio Ficino. For an excellent account of the pervasive influence of Hellenistic and late-ancient Mediterranean thought on the Italian Renaissance, see R. Ebgi (ed.), *Umanisti Italiani: Pensiero e Destino*, Turin, Einaudi, 2016; and G. Busi and R. Ebgi, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: Mito, Magia, Qabbalah*, Turin, Einaudi, 2014 (where such 'Hellenism' reveals itself, in fact, as a form of philosophical pan-Mediterraneism).

[61]Born into Aztec high society, at a young age Malinche (also known as Malintzin or as Doña Marina) was sold into slavery by her stepfather. When she was a teenager, she was given as a gift to Hernán Cortés, whom she served as translator. She became Cortés's lover, and had with him a son and a daughter, who after Malinche's death

and translation, becoming-other and becoming-self are rendered indistinguishable in the twilight moment when a familiar world sets and an alien one begins to dawn.

This destiny might be hard to swallow for a civilization that still inhabits a living body. Whatever they might produce and however perfect their art might be, their only chance of transmitting their story to a living ear is by being misinterpreted, misunderstood, taken apart, pillaged and recomposed. Even then, though, something shall remain faithful to the original voice that sung out a world and its time-segment – a genetic echo, still resounding in their distant offspring. That 'something' is the small erotic detail, the *object petit a*,[62] that might catch the eye of those who shall live after the end of the future, and who might choose it as one among their own parents.[63]

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grew up with their father's family. It is interesting to note how Aztec emissaries would address as 'Malinche' both Cortés and Malinche proper – as if the one was unthinkable without the other. The figure of Malinche remains an important icon of Mexican culture, where she is presented alternatively as a victim, a traitor, or the mother of the nation. For two different interpretations of her figure, see O. Paz, 'The Sons of La Malinche', in O. Paz (ed.), *The Labyrinth of Solitude and Other Writings*, New York, NY, Grove Press, 1994, pp. 65–88; and C. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico*, Albuquerque, NM, University of New Mexico Press, 2006.

[62]See Jacques Lacan's discussion of the *object petit a* (where *a* stands for *autre*, 'other') as the unattainable object of desire, in his seminars *Les formations de l'inconscient* (1957 – in J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Formations of the Unconscious 1957–1958*, Book V, edited and translated by J.A. Miller, Cambridge, Polity, 2017); *Le transfert* (1960–1 – in J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Transference*, Book VIII, edited and translated by J.A. Miller, Cambridge, Polity, 2015); *L'angoisse (*1962–3 – in J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Anxiety*, Book X, edited and translated by J.A. Miller, Cambridge, Polity, 2016); *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (1969–70 – in J. Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Book XVII, edited and translated by R. Grigg, New York, NY, W. W. Norton, 2007).

[63]'Every great work of art has two faces: one toward its own time and one toward the future, toward eternity.' – Daniel Barenboim, in E. Said and D. Barenboim, *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society*, London, Bloomsbury, 2004, p. 52.

WESTERNIZED MODERNITY

FIGURE 1.5 *Mattheus Greuter,* Le Médecin guarissant Phantasie, purgeant aussi par drogues la folie, *1620. © Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Estampes et photographie.*

The end of culture should prepare us to the culture of the end.[64]

We have discussed how the form of 'the world' created by a civilization can fall in and out of darkness, in and out of a historical body. But this is not an automatic process, nor is rebirth assured to every form of worlding and every civilization. Countless cosmologies and metaphysical narratives have been lost in the course of history, either because their successors have shunned them as possible forefathers, or due to the rapid disappearance of their records. Many a world-form have failed to provide anything useful to the creation of a new world out of their ashes. Many others vanished together with the media to which they had entrusted their cultural output.

As seen from the standpoint of today's largest civilization on the planet – which we could call 'Westernized Modernity' – the possibility of an entire world-form being lost forever is cause for serious concern. Questions such as 'What will remain of us?' and 'What will stand the test of the end of our future?' are increasingly pressing on those – like the writer of these lines – who inhabit the world-song of Westernized Modernity. For an unfortunate coincidence, this civilization seems set to fail both the requirements of rebirth – and its world faces the prospect of an annihilation that isn't only historical, but absolute.

Before investigating its possible afterlife, however, let us gain a clearer idea of the traits of this civilization. I will start from the terms with which I have defined it. I used 'Westernized' – rather than the geographical 'Western' – to include all those areas of the world that have adopted a form of Modernity that has Western origins. By 'West', however, we shouldn't intend primarily Europe, with its old transatlantic colonies. The West is a specific concept, deriving from the geopolitical work of the US president James Monroe in the nineteenth century. As Carl Schmitt observed, the very emergence of the term 'the West' was a symptom of the United States' increasing hegemony over old Europe:

> *Strangely enough, the term 'Western Hemisphere' was opposed*
> *precisely to Europe, the old West, the old Occident. It was not*

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[64]*La fine della cultura deve prepararci alla cultura della fine*. From the Autonomist wall-journal *Robinud*, Sesto San Giovanni, MI, Re Nudo, 1974.

opposed to old Asia or to old Africa, but rather to the old West. The new West claimed to be the true West, the true Occident, the true Europe. The new West, America, would supersede the old West, would reorient the old world historical order, would become the center of the earth. The West, and all that belonged to it in the moral, civilizing, and political sense of the word 'Occident,' would neither be eliminated nor destroyed, nor even dethroned, but only displaced. International law ceased to have its center of gravity in old Europe. The center of civilization shifted further west, to America. Like old Asia and old Africa before her, old Europe had become the past.[65]

If 'Westernized' tries to typify a certain, global-American stylistic quality, the term 'Modernity' has to be clarified a little more in detail. Every age is, to its own sense, a 'modern' age. If we had asked a twelfth-century English peasant at which time he was living, he would have certainly answered *'modo'* ('at present', the root of *modernus*). The present is always modern to itself, and thus the definition of modernity seemingly applies to any segment of history – if considered through its own eyes. However, there is a difference between the notion of modernity of the twelfth-century peasant and that of a Westernized-Modern subject. In earlier societies, the present (and by extension, time itself) was understood as a partial aspect of reality. The universe of that peasant would have included his own time-bound modernity, but at the same time it would have placed it alongside the a-temporal eternity of the Divinity. Earlier moderns were moderns only to themselves. Westernized Moderns deem themselves modern *absolutely*. To their civilization, time doesn't only coincide with itself, but also with the totality of what takes place within reality. The Universe of Westernized Modernity doesn't contemplate eternity, and thus within its world-structure there is no room for anything escaping time. Its modernity is not an indexical notion (like the terms 'here' or 'now', which change

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[65]C. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth: In the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, part IV, translated by G.L. Ulmen, New York, NY, Telos Press, 2006, p. 290. For an insightful analysis of the distinction between Europe and the West, see C. Galli, 'Schmitt and the Global Era', in A. Minervini (trans.), *Janus's Gaze: Essays on Carl Schmitt*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2015, pp. 97–134 (especially pp. 108–9).

together with perspective), but it is the taxonomical definition of the only age whose time has conquered the Whole of reality.

To look more closely at the qualities of such an ambitious age, though, let us proceed beyond the level of definitions. Since we are observing it through the angle of worlding and of the type of metaphysics that characterize each world-song, let us consider the form of its *cosmos* – departing from the rules and parameters that govern its stage-machines.

Westernized Modernity has structured its mode of worlding around the principle of 'absolute language', acting as the basic benchmark for the totality of the existent. What holds together the civilization of Westernized Modernity, above and beyond its inner differences, is the axiom according to which what 'there is' in the world coincides with what falls neatly within the rules of linguistic classification.

As I have argued at length elsewhere,[66] the operating principles of 'absolute language' can be summarized as follows:

(1)   that language (of any kind, scientific, financial, etc.) is at least potentially capable of describing exhaustively all that there is;

(2)   that what exists is at least potentially describable through some form of language;

(3)   that what is impossible to describe exhaustively through language, does not exist;

(4)   that existence and language coincide, while outside language lies an abyss of pure nothingness.[67]

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[66]See F. Campagna, *Technic and Magic: The Reconstruction of Reality, Technic's Cosmogony*, London, Bloomsbury, 2018, pp. 57–101.

[67]'The conviction that entities come from nothingness and return to it, that is, the conviction that entities – not-nothings – are nothing, is both supreme Folly and extreme Violence. … [Such] Violence acts (or believes to be acting) on the basis of the conviction that it can annihilate and produce that which instead is impossible to annihilate, produce, or to create … Extreme Violence and Folly are the hidden roots out of which grew the history of the West. Based on the faith that entities oscillate between being and nothingness, entities make themselves available to any forces pushing them towards nothingness and towards being: entities are seen as

As structured around the principle of absolute language, Westernized Modernity has produced a world where existence is deprived of any ontological autonomy, becoming instead entirely dependent on the historical, economic and political dynamics of language.

If we wish to explore further the essential character of this civilization, however, we should move even beyond the irradiating force of its first principle, towards the inner motion that animates it. Coherently with its insistence on language, the heart of its mode of worlding can be found at the level of logic: the 'law of non-contradiction', which Westernized Modernity has raised to the status of cosmogonic standard.

According to its earliest formulations, the law of non-contradiction states that 'it is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect';[68] 'it is impossible to hold the same thing to be and not to be';[69] and that 'opposite assertions cannot be true at the same time'.[70] These were the rules for an 'orderly' way of thinking, and to this date they still constitute the bedrock of the philosophical discipline of Logic. If applied to existential possibilities, however, and not simply to the content of a proposition or to a concept, this injunction declares, for example, that a person cannot be at the same time human and non-human, female and male, local and foreign, worldly and otherworldly, alive and dead. Beings are arranged along a grid of clear-cut and mutually exclusive identities. It is on the basis of these butchered pieces of existence that Westernized Modernity has established the coincidence between what 'there is',

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themselves demanding to be violated … [Only on this basis] we can think of a limitless domination, production and destruction of entities; since, in their being dominated, their essence is not denied (that is, the essence assigned to entities by extreme Folly), while their most profound vocation is supposedly fulfilled. Nihilism is external Violence and Folly.' E. Severino, *Immortalità e Destino*, Milan, Rizzoli, 2008, p. 189 – I have partly used (and revised) the translation offered in E. Severino, *Nihilism and Destiny*, edited by N. Cusano, translated by K.W. Molin, Milan, Mimesis International, 2016, p. 21.

[68] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 3, 1005b19–20.

[69] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 3, 1005b24.

[70] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 6, 1011b13–20.

and what is linguistically classifiable. And, as a corollary, between resistance to classification and a lower intensity of existence.[71]

The law of non-contradiction is a much earlier invention than the onset of Westernized Modernity. But even though it was widely employed by pre-modern Mediterranean scholars, it is only after the sixteenth century that this specialistic element of logic begins to shape the general consensus about what kind of stuff 'there is' in the world. The adoption of this metaphysical principle at the level of common sense marked an epochal shift, comparable to those passages between world-ages sung by mythologists. Indeed, the imposition of the law of non-contradiction upon the existent reshaped the field of what was possible to think, to do and to imagine,

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[71]'A = A. That is the final answer. But this tautological formula, this life-less, thought-less, and therefore meaningless equality A = A, is, in fact, only a generalization of the self-identity that is inherent in every given ... The law of identity, which pretends to absolute universality, turns out to have a place nowhere at all. This law sees its right in its actual givenness, but every given actually rejects this law *toto genere* ... In excluding all other elements, every A is excluded by all of them, for if each of these elements is for A only not-A, then A over against not-A is only not-not-A. From the viewpoint of the law of identity, all being, in desiring to affirm itself, actually only destroys itself, becoming a combination of elements each of which is a center of negations, and *only* negations. Thus, all being is a total negation, one great "Not." The law of identity is the spirit of death, emptiness, and nothingness ... [The opposition between thing and person] consists in the fact that a thing is characterized through its outer unity, i.e., through the unity of the sum of its features, while a person has his essential character in an inner unity, i.e., in the unity of the activity of self-building, in that very same self-positing of I about which Fichte speaks ... But what is [the] thingness of a person? It is the vacuous self-equality of the person, giving to the person the unity of a *concept* that is self-confined in the combination of its attributes, i.e., the unity of a dead, fixed concept. In other words, it is nothing but the rationalistic "comprehensibility" of a person, i.e., the subordination of a person to the rationalistic law of identity. On the contrary, the personal character of a person, this living unity of his self-building activity, the creative transcending of his self-enclosedness, constitutes his nonsubsumability in any concept, his "incomprehensibility," and therefore his unacceptability for rationalism. It is the victory over the law of identity that raises a person above a lifeless thing and makes him a living center of activity.' P. Florensky, *The Pillar and Ground of the Truth: An Essay in Orthodox Theodicy in Twelve Letters*, translated by B. Jakim, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 22–3 and 58–60.

in a similar way to the passage from the kingdom of Chronos the Titan to the regime inaugurated by the Olympian Gods.[72]

To have a clearer sense of the scale of this transformation, let us eavesdrop on the dialogue between Nephele the Cloud and her human lover Ixion, on the eve of the end of the reign of Chronos – imagining instead that it had taken place at the time of the establishment of the law of non-contradiction as a world-ruling principle.

> Cloud: *There is a new law, Ixion. The clouds are gathered by a stronger hand. [...] You can no longer mix yourself with us, nymphs of the streams and the mountains, nor to the daughters of the wind or the goddesses of the earth. Destiny has changed. [...] You were born under the old destiny, for you there are no monsters, only comrades. For you, death is only something that happens, like day and night. [...] You are wholly in your acts. But for them, the immortals, your acts have a meaning that lingers on. They touch everything from afar with their eyes, their lips and nostrils. They are immortals and can't live on their own. [...] And if you disgust them, if by chance you bother them in their Olympus, they storm on you and give you death.*
> Ixion – *So, we can still die.*
> Cloud: *No, Ixion. They will make a shadow out of you, but a shadow that longs for the life it lost and that can never die.[73] – my translation.*

If we were to elect a specific moment for this transformation – and for the creation of a new category of 'monsters' – we could locate it together with the establishment of modern International Relations.

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[72]According to Greek mythology, the time of the Olympian Gods started after the end of two preceding ages. First came the kingdom of Ouranos, which came to a close when his son, the Titan Chronos, castrated and dethroned him. Then came the 'golden age', under the rule of Chronos, where illness and toil were unknown. The age of the Olympian Gods followed the battle between the Titans faithful to Chronos, and the Gods, Cyclops and Hecatoncheires (giants with one hundred hands) faithful to Zeus. The triumph of the Olympians and Chronos' exile effectively downgraded the world to the 'silver age' – only the first step, according to Greek mythology, in the world's descent towards the abyss of the present 'iron age', the last one before the final conflagration of the Universe and a new beginning.
[73]C. Pavese, 'La Nube', in *Dialoghi con Leucò*, Turin, Einaudi, 2014, pp. 9–11.

The date in question is as precise as only a mythic event: the year 1648, when the parties in the Thirty Years War assembled in the German region of Westphalia to put an end to the hostilities that had devastated the continent. Alongside the innovations introduced by the so-called scientific revolution, the new regime of international relations inaugurated in Westphalia managed to put an end to the turbulent period that followed the fall of the Theocratic Age[74] and to inaugurate a new form of worlding, which lasts to this day.

Among the principles affirmed by the treaties of the peace of Westphalia, central stage was given to the notion of sovereignty, which sanctioned the full autonomy of each state for matters concerning its own territory. On the basis of this principle, every state could advocate an exclusive power over its own subjects and denounce as interference any intervention in its own domestic

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[74]I call Theocratic Age what is still commonly named Low European Middle Ages – roughly placeable between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries. A re-evaluation of the Medieval period was already ongoing during the Romantic period, but it is only in the twentieth century (arguably since C. H. Haskins's 1927 book *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*) that many historians have started to challenge the denomination of 'Middle Ages', as applied to the whole period between the end of Late Antiquity and the beginning of Modernity. Consensus among contemporary historians is that the very definition of 'Middle Ages', which is supposed to cover an entire millennium, should be discarded in favour of a more complex understanding. While I have retained the notion of a Dark or Middle Age to characterize the period between the fifth and the ninth centuries AD, I think that the age that spanned between the Carolingian Renaissance and the Italian Renaissance could be better described, in terms of its form of worlding, as the Theocratic Age. The rationale behind this appellation resides in the two elements that made up that particular world-form: *Theos* (God) and *Cratos* (Power). The time-segment of Charlemagne and of Dante saw the world emerge inside a frame where Heaven and Earth, Justice and Law, God and Power, Pope and Emperor represented two distinct, often conflicting yet complementary metaphysical principles. A similar understanding also subtends Ernst Kantorowiwcz's, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1957, in that the king itself, like all elements in that world, was composed as much of an element of worldly power as of one of submission to, and continuity with, the utterly otherworldly. A clear examination by a contemporary can be found in Dante's 1313 political treatise *De Monarchia* – see Dante, *Monarchy*, translated and edited by P. Shaw, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996. The great massacres of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both in Europe and in its American colonies, marked the end of that age and the arrival over the same territories of another Medieval interregnum – until the establishment of a new hegemonic form of worlding, after the peace of Westphalia.

affairs.[75] Perhaps the clearest expression of this notion can be found in Hegel's philosophy of the state:

> *The nation state [das Volk als Staat] is the spirit in its substantial rationality and immediate actuality, and is therefore the absolute power on* earth; *each state is consequently a sovereign and independent entity in relation to others. The state has a primary and absolute entitlement to be a sovereign and independent power* in the eyes of others, *i.e.* to be recognized by them. [...] *The state is the actuality of the substantial* will, *an actuality which it possesses in the particular* self-consciousness *when this has been raised to its universality; as such, it is the* rational *in and for itself. This substantial unity is an absolute and unmoved end in itself, and in it, freedom enters into its highest right, just as this ultimate end possesses the highest right in relation to individuals [die Einzelnen], whose* highest duty *is to be members of the state ... Since the state is objective spirit, it is only through being a member of the state that the individual* [Individuum] *himself has objectivity, truth, and ethical life.*[76]

The absolute power of each state over its territory translated politically the principle of non-contradiction. It became possible – if not required – to conceive of sovereign entities as entirely unbound by any external influence (whether that of *Ananke*, the Divine Necessity that rules all things, or of the universalism of Renaissance Humanism, or of any otherworldly divinity). It became standard policy to punish as treason any claim to multiple allegiances, and to deride as superstition the belief in ineffable presences that might defy the laws imposed by worldly powers. Everything in its right place – where the only possible 'right place' is as a unique placeholder in a well-defined series.

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[75]The ham-fistedness with which supposedly universalist 'humanitarian' arguments have been instrumentalized to support various, recent military interventions testifies to the actual alienness of any universalist ethical notion to the politics of Westernized Modernity. For a critique of the contemporary pseudo-humanitarian arguments used to support military interventions, see E. Weizman, *The Least of All Possible Evils: Humanitarian Violence from Arendt to Gaza*, London/New York, Verso, 2011.

[76]G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Section 3, *The State*, 331 and 258, edited by A.W. Wood, translated by H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 366–7 and 275–6.

On the basis of the metaphysical principles outlined in 1648, the civilization of Westernized Modernity proceeded to create even more stringent entities – from the naturalization of the idea of nation, which binds the entire world to a metaphysical (and not just political) grid of belongings, to the classification of the most minute sets of sovereign identities, mutually exclusive in their respective fields. Even religion, as reinterpreted through this perspective, was made to abandon its mystical dimension and to transform God from an ineffable mystery to yet-another sovereign power sui generis.[77]

Thanks to this metaphysical agreement disguised as a political treaty, then-emerging capitalism could count on a well-suited system of cataloguing, organization and stock-management – while newly born police forces had at their disposal an effective method of profiling, selection and control.[78] In the course of the time-segment inaugurated in Westphalia, the societies that adopted this cosmology have traversed a historical arch replete with technological marvels and scientific breakthroughs, and occasionally blessed by advancements in the field of civil and political rights. At the same time, however, this form of worlding has created the conditions for modern colonialism, the prison-industrial system, totalitarianism, total warfare, nuclear weapons and, most evidently, for a devastation of the global biosphere that has already led to a wave of mass extinctions.

Everything works; only the human no longer does.[79]

Like any other metaphysical narration – and indeed like any form of storytelling – also that of Westernized Modernity is not destined

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[77]On the tension between Westernized Modernity and the ineffable notion of the divine, see in particular R. Guenon, *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, translated by Lord Northbourne, Hillsdale, NY, Sophia Perennis, 2002.

[78]The first centrally organized police force was created in 1667 by Louis XIV to control the city of Paris, while the first modern police force was inaugurated by the West Indies merchants in London in 1797. For a recent critical history of policing (in addition to the essential M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by A. Sheridan, London, Penguin, 1991), see M. Neocleous, *A Critical Theory of Police Power: The Fabrication of the Social Order*, London/New York, Verso, 2020.

[79]H. Ball, *Die Flucht aus der Zeit*, Munchen, Duncker & Humblot, 1927
– my translation from the Italian edition, H. Ball, *Fuga dal Tempo: fuga saeculi*, translated by R. Caldura, Milan, Mimesis, 2016, p. 125.

to last forever. The time-segment of its past–present–future is contained between a beginning and an end. For all its might and its hegemony over large parts of the globe, a multitude of elements seems to indicate that its historical arch might be reaching already the last stretch of its course. A feeling of the 'end of the future'[80] has already set the imaginative atmosphere of the past few decades of Westernized Modernity, while a growing number of global voices have soared to demand for its abolition. Among the more conservative strata of society, the awareness of an impending end has been phobically associated with phenomena such as the increasing technologization of the world, the loss of primacy of the human, the blurring of sexual and gender boundaries and the great movements of people crisscrossing the planet. It is worth considering these objects of concern – in part because there is some truth to their connection with the closure of this age and in part because of the disturbing political effects of such a conservative resistance to their arising.

Nostalgics of the heydays of industrialism often stress the risks posed to Westernized Modernity by the digitization of the economy, and by the substitution of robotic equipment to human workforce. Contrary to this view, however, these two phenomena in fact reinforce, rather than weakening, its metaphysical tenets. The replacement of the so-called physical sphere with digital environments falls perfectly in line with a world-structure that is faithful to the principle of absolute language. Likewise, the substitution of human agents with AI systems is merely the application of the notion of sovereignty to Capital – the successor on the same throne that used to be occupied by the State – and ensures that the autonomy of its dominion is guaranteed in every aspect.

The greatest imperilment to sovereignty, as elaborated after Westphalia, used to consist in the fractured form of human consciousness – always capable of doubting itself, questioning its allegiances, wishing its own annihilation and fleeing towards an implausible elsewhere. Substituting consciousnesses with the intelligence of artificial systems guarantees that today's hegemonic

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[80]For a wide-raging exploration of how the idea of the 'end of the future' took hold of Westernized history after the 1970s, see F. Berardi 'Bifo', *After the Future*, Edinburgh, AK Press, 2011; and F. Berardi 'Bifo', *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and the Horizon of Possibility*, London/New York, Verso, 2017.

power gains at last full sovereignty over its own subjects. The AI worker constitutes the ideal inhabitant of Westernized Modernity, in the same way that the armed drone, incapable of feeling the consequences of their actions, fulfils the role of Modern soldier much better than its defective human colleagues. Ultimately, the suspicion harboured by many self-declared defenders of Westernized Modernity towards the latest technological developments is misplaced. The establishment of an autonomous robotic police force and the expulsion of the ineffable spark of consciousness from the world constitute the accomplishment, not the denial, of the metaphysics of this civilization.

Two other conservative concerns, however, come closer to the target. Both the phenomena which they address, although not new in themselves, have only recently acquired a significant status within the social discourse. These are the opening of contemporary metaphysics to the idea of 'non-human people',[81] and the diffused social praxis of challenging ingrained binary notions – typically those referring to gender and sexual identity. The former cultural position is gaining traction thanks to a growing awareness of the effects of Climate Change and of the urgency of tackling a problem that seems insoluble within the current metaphysical parameters. The movement towards a fluid understanding of gender and sexual identity, for its part, has succeeded in exploding the inner contradiction between the metaphysics of Westernized Modernity and the ideal of 'freedom' which for a long time has been heralded as its ethical foundation.

These two phenomena authentically challenge today's hegemonic form of worlding, and they propose to break with the rhythm of its time-segment. Signs of this metaphysical friction abound in contemporary culture, and they may be epitomized by a question routinely asked by journalists to people who have transitioned between genders – 'did you already feel like a man/woman before transitioning?' Such a question assumes a form of temporality that is linear, non-contradictory, and a metaphysics that is based on the coincidence between events and facts. The phenomenon

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[81]I am borrowing this definition from Timothy Morton, currently the main theoretician in this field – see T. Morton, *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People*, London/New York, Verso, 2017.

of transition presents a form of worlding that is incompatible
with the one presently hegemonic, and thus it appears all the
more incomprehensible to those anchored to the world-form of
Westernized Modernity.

An equally strong blow to contemporary metaphysics comes
from the personification of non-humans, which transforms the idea
of person from a taxonomical notion (only such and such entities
are people), to an indexical one (to exist means to inhabit, as a
person, the centre of projection of a particular perspective towards
the rest of the existent). As in the cosmology of Amerindian tribes
like the Amazonian Yanomami:

> *Every existent being in the cosmos thus sees itself as a human,
> but does not see other species in the same way. (Needless to say,
> this also applies to our own species.) 'Humanity' is therefore
> at once a universal condition and strictly dietic, self-referential
> perspective. Different species cannot occupy the point of view
> of 'I' simultaneously, owing to deictic restrictions; in every
> confrontation here and now between two species, it is inevitable
> that one will finish by imposing its humanity on the other, that is,
> that it will finish by making the other 'forget' its own humanity.
> This entails that we humans (Amerindian humans, that is) do
> not see animals as humans. They are not human* for us; *but we
> know that they are humans* for themselves. *We know just as well
> that we are not humans* for them ... *Like all human beings – or
> more precisely: like all animals – Amerindians must eat or in
> some way destroy other forms of life in order to live. They know
> that human action inevitably leaves an ecological footprint.
> Differently to us, however, the ground on which they leave their
> footprints is* equally *alive and alert.*[82]

When non-contradictory identities cease to function as the absolute
denomination of things, and subjectivity spreads across boundaries

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[82]E. Viveiros de Castro and D. Danowski, *The Ends of the World*, translated by
R. Nunes, Cambridge, Polity, 2017, pp. 70–1. For an account of Perspectivism,
as read through an anthropological lens and in relation to the world-form of
Amerindian cosmology, see E. Viveiros de Castro, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, edited and
translated by P. Skafish, Minneapolis, MN, Minnesota University Press, 2014.

as the commonwealth of each and all, the cosmogonic narrative of Westernized Modernity progressively grinds to a halt.

Thus, there is some truth to those reactionary discourses that indicate (trans)gender theory and a post-anthropocentric sensitivity as the nemesis of the civilization of Westernized Modernity. And yet, their belonging to the sphere of culture touches conservative sensibilities less deeply than the prime object of today's political paranoia: the arrival of migrant 'others' from beyond the borders.

In political terms, this obsession with the danger of migrations discounts the lesson of history. If we observe previous instances of peaceful 'movements of people'[83] into the territory of a civilization, the risks associated with it infallibly derived from the failures and shortcomings of the civilization at the receiving end – rather than from an innate danger posed by migrants. To mention just the most renowned example, a dramatic event such as the battle of Adrianople in AD 378 – where 20,000 Roman soldiers and the emperor Valens himself were massacred by an organized group of migrant Goths – ensued from a period of cruel mismanagement of migration flows. For the first time after a long period of intermingling, Gothic migrants had been imprisoned within refugee zones along the borders of the empire, where over the course of months they had been exploited and starved to such an extent that they had started selling their own children and themselves into slavery (with great profit of the Roman merchants and landowners). The pressure of Hunnic raiders from the North, and the sheer desperation in which these people versed, led to rebellion and to the battle that inaugurated the final debacle of the Western Roman Empire. The Roman world collapsed from within, due to a series of internal economic and political failures, among which featured the erosion of a system of open migration that had been running for centuries.[84]

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[83] *Völkerwanderung*, 'movements of people' (German translation of the Latin *migratio gentium*), is the denomination assigned by German historians to the phenomenon most commonly defined in textbooks as the 'barbaric invasions'.

[84] For a discussion of the context of the Battle of Adrianople and of its political significance, see A. Barbero, *9 Agosto 378: Il Giorno dei Barbari*, Bari, Laterza, 2012.

Although the decline of Westernized Modernity cannot be attributed to the influence of migrants as a socio-political entity, the metaphysical impact on a civilization of other forms of worlding, arriving from beyond its frontiers, shouldn't be neglected. The increasing presence of people whose primary form of worlding is 'other' is already producing an early syncretic mix with the metaphysical model proposed by Westernized Modernity. In the long run, their combination will cause a dilution of both original forms – and this will constitute the best opportunity, for either civilization, to build a vessel on which to reach a new time after the end of their future.

The phenomena explored so far are all significant aspects of contemporary history, but their ability to prove the coming demise of Westernized Modernity remains limited. Ultimately, they reveal more of the phobic mindset of those who oppose them, than of the impending closure of the historical arc of an entire civilization. Unfortunately for those who have invested their paranoid energies towards them, the end of Westernized Modernity as a hegemonic form of worlding might occur much earlier than the full deployment of these cultural transformations.

The key to its collapse can be found in the symbiosis that this form of worlding has established with its own techno-economic system. If we listen to the voices singing out the cosmology of Westernized Modernity, we won't find them arising from the millions who suffer under its regime – and whose subservience to its metaphysics is not an endorsement, but a scar. For the reproduction of its narrative, Westernized Modernity relies entirely on a techno-economic system, spread across a planetary network of exchange, control and industry. The structure of its form of worlding, the specific separations which it imposes between things and the flow of its own particular time are embedded in the rhythm imposed on workers by the economic gatekeepers, on travellers by the controllers of the boundaries of citizenship and on all subjects of Modernity by the relentless cultural production of trainers and entertainers.

Such an enormous machine, bridling together countless energies into one complex mesh, is as hard to smash as it is easy to unravel. Was this techno-economic system ever to come to a long halt, the world-form which is presently hegemonic would rapidly find itself without rhapsodes singing its story: its spell over reality would remain orphan of a voice, and it would vanish together with the

time-segment that it has created. The sinews holding together its metaphysical broadcast span over oceans and continents, reaching into the depths of the Earth and in the recess of living consciousness. The power of extraction and recombination deployed by this system is impressive, but its extreme degree of intra-dependence makes apparent an element of fragility. Like an organism, it is sufficient that a single string of crucial connections becomes inoperative and the entire system rapidly slows down to the point of stalling.

An event of catastrophic proportions, massive enough to break or to suspend the infrastructures between the main nodes of today's socio-economic system, would be sufficient to take away the sustenance, not only of contemporary society, but also of its form of worlding. We had a very mild example of this in 2020, with the Coronavirus outbreak and its rippling effects on the economy and society.[85] But that pandemic shouldn't be held as a benchmark of future catastrophes. History teaches us that greater plagues are always in store, while worse threats are already looming on the horizon.

The new regime of scarcity inaugurated by climate change, combined with the widespread availability of nuclear weapons, already points to the growing probability of such an event in the foreseeable future. In the absence of functioning international mechanisms of mediation – a role at one point performed by the assembly of the United Nations – increasing scarcity will seamlessly turn into conflict, and this in turn will damage the infrastructures of the global economy; and then again, *da capo*. Once the extraction of materials necessary to keep going the world's technology and its cosmogonic narration will have been suspended and the infrastructure of its network broken, the desperate resort to nuclear weapons will damage irreparably what shall be left of the system of Westernized Modernity.

The metaphysical narrative of this civilization is destined to end simultaneously with its techno-economic prostheses – not despite, but precisely because of their impressive scale. And an interim period of feeble and unstable worlding shall ensue. Reality will

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[85]Both still ongoing at the time of writing.

show itself again in its rawest state: wordless, timeless, senseless, foreign. A new Dark Age shall cover the domains of Westernized Modernity, as widespread and distributed across the planet as these are today. Deprived of the technologies of the age of Westernized Modernity, the Dark Age to come will probably be a less destructive period than our present.

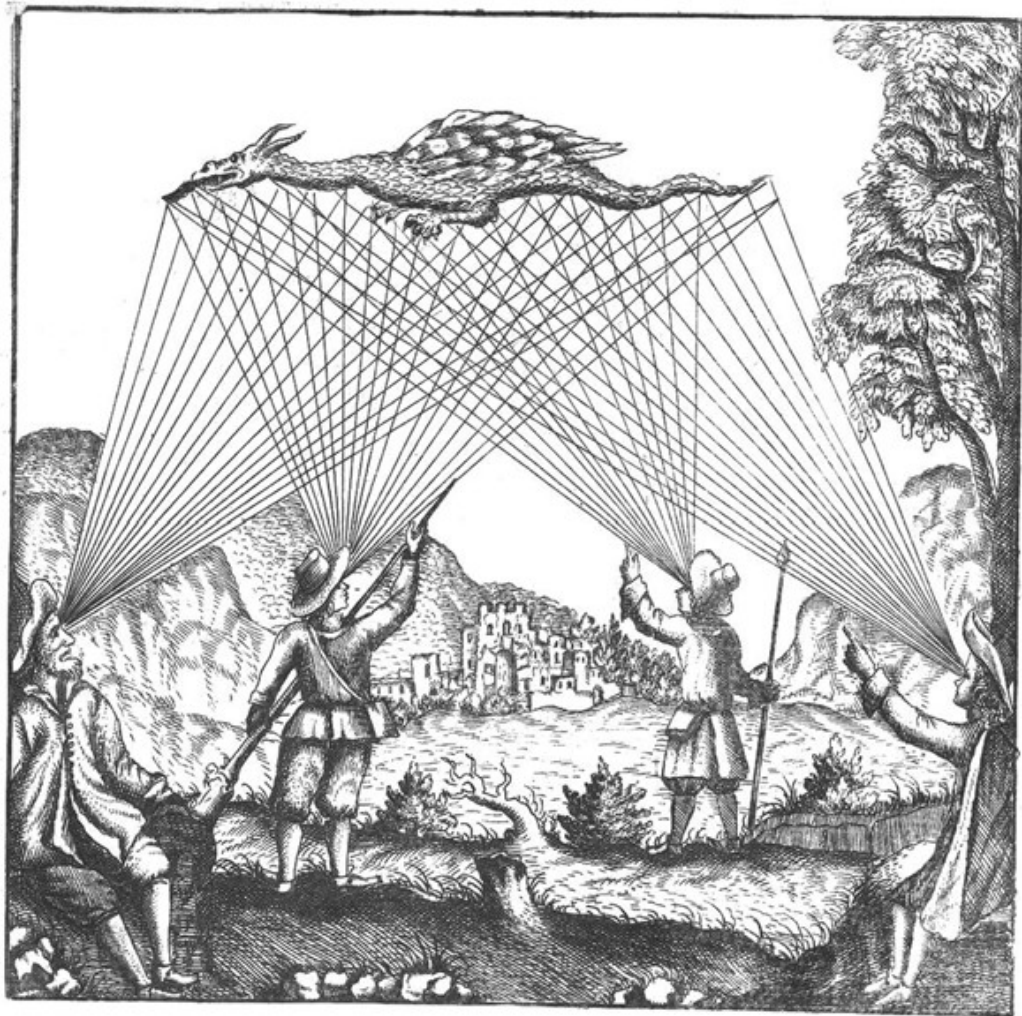Less destructive, perhaps, but certainly more terrifying.

CHAPTER TWO

OTHERWORLDS

FIGURE 2.1 *Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo*, Punchinello Carried off by a Centaur (Pulcinella rapito da un centauro), *1791–1804. © Trustees of the British Museum, The British Museum.*

PROLOGUE
ANAMORPHOSIS

FIGURE 2.2 *Johann Zahn, illustration from* Oculus Artificialis Teledioptricus Sive Telescopium *(The Long-Distance Artificial Eye, or Telescope), 1685.*

Shadow, properly understood, is the diminution of light applied to the surface of bodies, whose origin is in the end of light, and whose end is in darkness.[1]

At age twenty, Leonardo da Vinci was working as an assistant in the bottega of the Florentine artist Andrea del Verrocchio. Legend has it that upon seeing that young man paint so prodigiously, Verrocchio abandoned painting and dedicated himself only to sculpture. But Leonardo was still waiting to show his talents outside of his boss's workshop. When a commission finally arrived for him from a small church just outside Florence, it was his first chance to cast a light of his own. The object of the painting had to be the Annunciation, that is, the moment when the archangel Gabriel descends on Earth to tell the Virgin Mary that she is expecting the son of God. A few months later, the painting (now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence) was finally ready to be placed in a modest suburban church. As soon as it was raised to its assigned place, at mid-height on a side wall, Leonardo's painting suddenly lost a defect that had been visible throughout the stages of preparation: if seen frontally, the image of the Virgin Mary seemed deformed, with an arm too elongated and a broken wrist. Only when looked from below, and slightly to the right, the image acquires again natural proportions.

With his *Annunciation*, Leonardo recuperated a style of *anamorphosis* which had long remained an anecdotal oddity from ancient times. Roman author Pliny the Elder and medieval historian Ioannes Tzetzes spoke of a contest, which took place in the fifth century BC between the Greek sculptors Phidias and Alcamenes, to build a monumental statue of Athena. During the weeks of labour in the workshops, Alcamenes's statue had impressed the judges for its perfection, while Phidias's work had appeared monstrous in its grotesque proportions. Once both had been mounted on pillars, however, the decelerated perspective suddenly made Phidias's

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[1] *L'ombra, nominata per il suo proprio vocabolo, e' da esser chiamata alleviazione di lume applicato alla superficie de' corpi, della quale il principo e' nel fine della luce, ed il fine e' nelle tenebre.* My own translation. For further reading, see Leonardo da Vinci, *Trattato della Pittura*, Che cosa e' ombra, 533, Catania, Brancato, 1990, p. 237.

Athena beautiful, and Alcamenes's ugly.[2] Unlike his rival, Phidias understood that the Divinity's 'true' beauty would have become apparent to human onlookers, only on condition of sacrificing its 'actual' perfection.

Leonardo's recuperation ignited an explosion of anamorphic drawings, engravings and paintings – spanning from Han Holbein's *The Ambassadros*, through Andrea Pozzo's astounding ceiling for the church of St. Ignatius of Loyola at Campus Martius in Rome, to modern Surrealist art and beyond.

> *[An early example is] a* Vexierbild *(puzzle-picture) by Erhard Schön (1491–1552), [which] is formed of four trapezoidal rows in which striped hatchings are continued by landscapes peopled with living figures. Town and hills, men and animals are reabsorbed and engulfed in a tangle of lines, at first sight inexplicable. But by placing the eyes at the side and very close to the engraving one can see four superimposed heads inside rectilinear frames. Perspective causes the apparent images to disappear and at the same time the hidden outlines to appear. The human figures are perfectly identifiable: the Emperor Charles V, Ferdinand I of Austria, Francis I and Pope Clement VII. German and Latin inscriptions which are executed in the same way give their names. Clear, precise profiles emerge from linear chaos. While preserving a thematic unity, the design combines two different pictures in one …*
>
> *This superimposition causes a disconcerting phenomenon which takes on a symbolic meaning. The features of the hidden royal effigies disturb the topographical sites. They hover over countries and over scenes of historical vicissitudes like phantoms covering vast tracts of land. The vision takes place in an agitated landscape, marked by the sovereign power which it conceals. It is at once a drama and a piece of witchcraft.[3]*

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[2]This story is recounted in several modern accounts, including J.F. Niceron, *La Perspective Curieuse*, Paris, 1638, p. 12; A. Kircher, *Ars Magna*, Rome, 1646, p. 192; A. Kircher, *Ars Magna*, Rome, 1646, p. 192; F. Blondel, *Cours d'Architecture Enseigne dans l'Academie Royale*, Paris, 1675–83, pp. 709–10; J. Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, translated by W.J. Strachan, New York, NY, Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1977, p. 8.
[3]J. Baltrušaitis, *Anamorphic Art*, translated by W.J. Strachan, New York, NY, Harry N. Abrams, Inc, 1977, pp. 11–12.

AESTHETICS AND ANNIHILATION
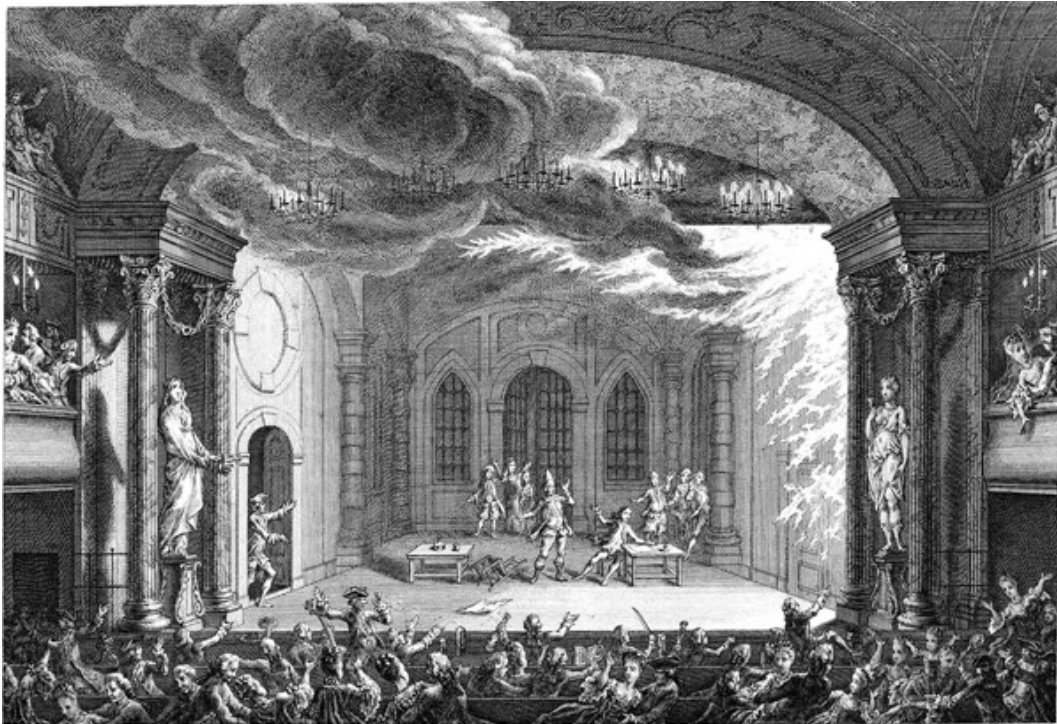
FIGURE 2.3 *Simon Fokke,* The First Flare in the Amsterdamschen Schouwburg, Happened on Monday the 11 May 1772 in the Evening Just after Half Past Eight, *1772. © Gemeente Amsterdam Stadsarchief.*

You are nobody mixed with nothing.[4]

A glitch is ignored; a disruption is co-opted within the system; a catastrophe devours everything beyond repair.

Delicate electronic hardware degrades fast, and its maintenance proves impossible without today's hyper-complex system of extraction and supply. Digital content corrupts even faster, dragging out of existence the possibility that any echoes might remain of the world from which it sprung. When the material conditions keeping its hardware operative will have collapsed, the digital archives to which this civilization has entrusted its cultural legacy will also vanish. As soon as the storages of contemporary culture will be deprived of a seamless supply of rare metals, electricity and skilled labour-force, they will become inaccessible once and for all – as absent as if they had never existed. More fragile than the papyri of the ancient world, the immense wealth of digitized culture hangs to a thread, depending for its survival on the continuation of the techno-economic settings of this civilization. The treasure of this society, obsessed with data, will be the first victim of annihilation, once its historical body will have exhaled its last breath.

More material media won't offer a safer shelter. The millions of books published in the past few decades won't be able to count on their paper for a long resilience. Already today, most paperback editions of the past century disintegrate at the touch. However well made, books will follow the typical destiny of their kind: in the best scenario, the survival rate of contemporary bookish culture will be comparable to the massacre that has befallen ancient culture.[5] After

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[4]*Tu sì nuddu mmiscatu cu' nienti,* Sicilian insult.

[5]Only a very small percentage of literary works from classical antiquity has survived to the present day. 'According to Gerstinger [H. Gerstinger, *Bestand und Überlieferung der Literaturwerke des griechisch-römischen Altertums*, Graz, Kienreich, 1948, p. 10], about 2000 Greek authors were known by name before the discovery of papyri. But the complete works of only 136 (6.8%) and fragments of another 127 (6.3%) were preserved. Gerstinger counted, however, only authors whose names were known, not works known by their titles. The numerical relation between these and the works that are preserved wholly or partially would certainly even be much worse.' R. Blum, *Kallimachos: The Alexandrian Library and the Origins of Bibliography*, translated by H.H. Wellisch, Madison, WI, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, f. 34, p. 13.

the end of Westernized Modernity, only a microscopic fraction of the words, images and sounds currently accessible via electronic or paper support will remain available to be rediscovered ever again.

Unlike the monumental civilizations of antiquity, the world of Westernized Modernity will leave behind itself very little architectural legacy. Under a secular capitalist system, the materials employed for construction have long abided to the lowest possible denominator of quality and endurance. Left without maintenance, the forests of apartment blocks in contemporary cities are destined to crumble rapidly into mounds of concrete, plastic and rust. Even the towers of glass and steel – today's surrogate for the lacking monuments – will soon collapse into unwalkable fields of shards and spikes. Of this civilization, little will remain but the scars that it has inflicted on the natural environment. Islands of plastic across the oceans, garbage dumps, nuclear spills, man-made deserts will be the only rhapsodes left to sing the life and the metaphysics of billions of people and to testify for their legacy. Once the waste and residues of material culture will have taken over the absence of any other form of culture, the vision that tormented Andy Warhol will have achieved at last its grim realization.

Possibly, some will be relieved by the prospect of this annihilation. Aside from its bold technical conquests and its timid ethical progress – they might object – was there ever much else, in the metaphysical narrative of this world, that deserved to survive its historical arch? Immense has been the price for the modest advancements towards happiness that have been achieved by this age. A weirdly inefficient cost for a society that is devoted to the principle of efficiency.

Others, again, might respond with Miles Davis: 'So What.' What exactly is the problem – they might contend – if the inhabitants of this civilization will fail to deliver anything of use to the creation of a new world? Every subject has the power to leave behind themselves a desert, and to 'call it peace'.[6] No bearded divinity enthroned in the sky can decree that it should have been done otherwise.

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[6]'They plunder, they butcher, they ravish and call it under the lying name of "empire". They make a desert and call it "peace".' Tacitus, 'Agricola', 30, in A. Birley (trans.), *Agricola and Germany*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 22.

The problem at hand, however, has little to do with the worthiness of Westernized Modernity, or with the possibility of opportunistic behaviours in the absence of punishment. The reduction of the cultural legacy of an entire civilization to environmental pollution and mass-extinctions should concern anyone who is somehow bound to its fortunes. Aside from a narcissistic wish to survive one's own death, our very experience of life is already being affected by the proximity of this scenario.

To appreciate the urgency of this problem, it is necessary that we trace back the steps that connect the legacy of one's own culture with the inner mechanisms of our everyday metaphysics. Let us return for a moment to the way in which every subject creates for themselves the landscape of a world out of the barrenness of pure existence.

Creating a world for oneself implies establishing a set of metaphysics declaring 'this' and 'that' to be real, and the rest to be unreal. Reality is created by filtering the avalanche of ineffable perceptions, and these in turn are translated linguistically into the form of the world. The ongoing act of world-creation pulls the encyclopaedia of the world out of a state in which there is no language and no 'things'. Every act of worlding is an instance of creation ex nihilo (out of nothing): as when a piece of music starts, it breaks the silence with a sound that lacks any comparative. In its fundamental primitiveness, the song of the world is *the* aesthetic act par excellence. It has no previous logic or ethics to which it can appeal – rather, it creates them as the harmonic consequence of its own melody. Before the *sequitur* of logic, before meta-ethics[7] has even

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[7]'[Metaethics] is not about what people ought to do. It is about what they are doing when they talk about what they ought to do.' W. Hudson, *Modern Moral Philosophy*, London, Macmillan, 1970, p. 1. On the distinction between ethics and metaethics, see this brief account by Alexander Miller: 'Normative ethics seeks to discover the general principles underlying moral practice, and in this way potentially impacts upon practical moral problems: different general principles may yield different verdicts in particular cases. [On the contrary, metaethics is] concerned with questions about the following: 1) Meaning: what is the semantic function of moral discourse? Is the function of moral discourse to state facts, or does it have some other non-fact-stating role?; 2) Metaphysics: do moral facts (or properties) exist? If so, what are they like? Are they identical or irreducible to natural facts (or properties) or are they irreducible ad *sui generis*?; 3) Epistemology: is there such

had a chance to cast its net, every system of sense requires an act of foundation that is axiomatic – and thus, aesthetic. The process that holds up a world, at any moment in our own life, is but an aesthetic endeavour. Like Euclid at the beginning of his discourse on geometry in the *Elements*, each of us at any moment bases the unfolding of their own cosmological narration over decisions taken by *arbitrium*.[8]

The act of foundation of the world – the *fiat lux* that brings a world out of the onslaught of raw perceptions – is not only the main aesthetic act, but also the most frequent. Repeated at each instant, it remains axiomatic in every distinction between things, subjects and landscapes. The process of worlding brings the subject to the immediate proximity of their own perceptions (*aisthetika*), and it allows them to reshape their landscape through intuition alone.

If living inside the phenomenon – cut away from the ungraspable 'thing itself' – amounts to a fall from grace, then aesthetics comes to our rescue like a benevolent demiurge. We owe aesthetics the substance of our days, and the metaphysics that we adopt to dissect them. And since aesthetics expresses itself through worlding, it endows this activity with the status of the ultimate ancestor of all tools.[9] Like an ancestor, the process of worlding demands to be

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a thing as moral knowledge? How can we know whether our moral judgements are true or false?; 4) Phenomenology: how are moral qualities represented in the experience of an agent making a moral judgement? Do they appear to be "out there" in the world?; 5) Moral Psychology: what can we say about the motivational state of someone making a moral judgement? What sort of connection is there between making a moral judgement and being motivated to act as that judgement prescribes?; 6) Objectivity: can moral judgements really be correct or incorrect? Can we work towards finding out the moral truth?' A. Miller, *Contemporary Metaethics*, Cambridge, Polity, 2017, p. 2.

[8]The sudden and brutal realization of this arbitrariness and axiomaticity of the world emerges during anxiety and panic attacks, as well as in moments of inactive boredom – as discussed by Heidegger in his 1929–30 lecture series 'The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics', see M. Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, translated by W. McNeill and N. Walker, Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2001.

[9]I use the term 'tool' here in the sense given by Georges Simondon to technology as a means to individuation – see G. Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, translated by C. Malaspina and J. Rogove, Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 2017; and G. Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, translated by T. Adkins, Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 2020.

acknowledged – and like a tool, it requires users to recognize its agency and to follow its inner rules. In the same way that we have to respect the requirements of logic to be able to proceed with our intra-worldly arguments, so in igniting at each instant the very form of 'the world' we are bound to consider the one wish that belongs to the Genie of aesthetics.

This is a simple demand, perfectly in line with those of any other system of sense: the *conatus*[10] of aesthetics is for its own reproduction. Logic demands that its flow is kept crystalline and uninterrupted; and aesthetics asks its adopters that the light of creation is not smothered after the death of each spark. Differently from linguistic systems like logic or ethics, however, aesthetics doesn't reclaim for itself an infinite proliferation. It only asks for one more: another chance, after the end of a story, to start a different story anew; another possibility for the world to start again over the settled ashes of a catastrophe.

A true catastrophe awaits those who fail the only demand of the aesthetic machine. Its threat is much worse than that waved by the process of logic, whose betrayal leads to the impossibility of linearly directing one's thought and action. When the aesthetic machine ceases to function, it is not the subject who vanishes, but the world around them. An awareness that has become incapable of suspending its disbelief in front of their own projection of the world, and that has lost the ability to extract a narrative meaning from its own intuition, has become the prisoner of a game turned into torture. It is, literally, in Hell.[11] Aesthetics' demand to a civilization

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[10]Intended in the sense of an innate wish of any agency to perpetuate its own being. 'Each thing, in so far as it lies in itself, endeavours to persevere in its being.' B. Spinoza, *Ethics*, part 3, prop. 6, translated by W.H. White and A.H. Stirling, Ware, Wordsworth Editions, 2001, p. 105.

[11]'[Julius asked his Master;] must not the Soul leave the Body at Death, and go either to Heaven or Hell?No, replied the venerable Theophorus … The Soul has Heaven and Hell within itself already …Here Julius said to his Master; This is difficult to understand. Doesn't it enter into Heaven or Hell, as a man enters into a House, does it not into another World?The Master spoke and said; No, there is no such kind of entering in; because Heaven and Hell are everywhere, and universally co-exist.' J. Boehme, 'Heaven and Hell', in *The Way to Christ*, translated by P.C. Erb, Mahwah, NJ, Paulist Press, 1977, p. 182.

and its inhabitants is utterly inescapable, lest the brief thrill of nihilism develops into catatonia. A world that was about to close its own story without an act of solidarity towards the world that will come would immediately unravel at its core. Like a tempest that's looming beyond anyone's reach, it would be impossible to inhabit it and unimaginable to escape it.

The wrath of aesthetics pushes its people towards a specific possibility of imagining the good. This is how aesthetics creates its own implicit ethics, and how the operational rules of its machine turn into existential directions. There is a term that has long been used to define this form of aesthetic ethics, although it has long lost that meaning: nobility (*aristeia*). To be aesthetically noble (*aristos*) doesn't mean turning one's own life into a closed work of art. As it happens to the adepts of spiritual chivalry,[12] living nobly consists in aiding the explosion of 'other' creations alongside and beyond one's own: to act as combustible in the aesthetic engine, out of which all possible worlds are projected.

At the time when a certain world-story still resounds strongly, aesthetic nobility demands that every subject sustaining that narration learns how to 'live well'. During such expansive stretches of time, the emergence of new stories is projected within the framework of a deep and wide future, where countless variations are still possible. Like the utopianists of mid-modernity, the noble living inside a strong world strive to keep the future open and to explore the canals that lead back to its reservoirs of dreams.

Upon those who live at the tail end of a world-form, however, nobility demands something a little more difficult. Aesthetics

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[12]For a discussion of the *futuwwah* (spiritual chivalry) in Shiism, see H. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, translated by L. Sherrard, Abingdon, Routledge, 2014, pp. 290–1, and 311–12; H. Corbin, *En Islam Iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. 3, *Les Fideles d'Amour, Shi'isme et Soufisme*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991; and P. Laude, *Pathways to an Inner Islam: Massignon, Corbin, Guenon, and Schuon*, Albany, NY, SUNY, 2010, pp. 156–8. A similar notion of spiritual chivalry animates also modern works such as R. Daumal, *Mount Analogue: An Authentic Narrative*, translated by R. Shattuck, San Francisco, CA, City Lights Books, 1971; H. Hesse, *The Journey to the East*, translated by H. Rosner, London, Peter Owen, 2007; and E. Jünger, *On the Marble Cliffs*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, among others.

imposes upon them the task of learning how to 'die well'. To master the art, not of opening the future, but of closing it.

As the world of Westernized Modernity moves to its final consumption – after a brief period of denial, disguised by the self-appellation of 'the contemporary'[13] – its story enters a stage where the only meaningful aspiration is to see beyond the approaching horizon of the end, towards that which shall come.

> *It is necessary to overcome the mournful situation – this is the command of the work of condolence. If this situation truly makes us prisoners, and the death of a loved one doesn't turn into our own choosing their death … then we begin to die ourselves, together with what is dead. And in the impossible alternative of rolling back historical time we end up losing that moral power, which, by deciding on alternatives, makes possible our being-in-the-world. Who is unable to overcome a critical situation becomes its prisoner, and suffers its tyranny: a presence that is left without any margin before the mournful situation loses the fluidity, operability and planning of mundane becoming … We become the dead, and our despair or our terror. The dead not killed by the living tend to return in an insolvent way, perhaps with a mask that makes them unrecognizable, and they contaminate the whole front of possible situations in real life.[14]*

To die well doesn't mean simply to abandon the stage of the world with the grace of someone who lets go: although a good medicine for those who can stomach it, this course of action is of little value to those who are left to keep on worlding. Learning how to die well requires the ability to mourn one's own death and to recognize, beyond the veil of time and of death, one same thread running through all forms of existence. It means including within one's own

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[13]In a 'contemporary' time, death is negated by the freezing of time into the un-passing, contemporary 'now'. Eternity is denied and history is frozen in a moment where everything passes, but which in itself does not pass – but that is nonetheless locked within the movement of history.

[14]E. de Martino, *La Fine del Mondo: contributo all'analisi delle apocalissi culturali*, Turin, Einaudi, 2002, pp. 263–4 – my translation.

vision also the invisible presence of those who live – or shall live – in altogether 'other' worlds and time-segments. 'Those who are about to die' dedicate to these others the care that is usually reserved to one's own kin. The nobility of the *morituri* rests in closing their story in such a way as to create a possible trampoline for those who will have to start narrating a world anew. Such an injunction to 'die well' is immediately apparent in its ecological dimension – where responsibility requests that the environmental balance in the biosphere is neither devastated nor frozen, but that it is allowed to keep on changing again and again. In the same way and with equal urgency, however, it applies also to the cultural legacy that we will leave behind ourselves.

The urgent necessity of creating new works of 'traditional' culture should be understood in this sense. Like its root *tradere* (to hand over), 'tradition' has more to do with movement than with an archival conservation of past practices. Its realm is the inter-generational bridge of solidarity, where people from different worlds can aid each other to experience reality anew and as if for the first time.[15] Tradition touches upon the bare thread of reality, out of which every subject draws the form of the world and the rhythm of each instant. By leaving a legacy that might support the creation of a new story over the ashes of the old, a helping hand is stretched to those who will have to create a world ex nihilo, without the ease of living within a pre-existing frame of sense.

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[15]A very important – although not unproblematic – work on the notion of tradition has been developed in the twentieth century by thinkers in the milieu of Perennial Philosophy. See in particular E. Zolla, *Che Cos'e' la Tradizione*, Milan, Adelphi, 1998; and R. Guenon, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*, translated by M. Pallis, Hillsdale, NY, Sophia Perennis, 2004. Following the example set by the organizers of the Eranos summit, who always shunned his work and his ideas, I also refuse to include the fascist theorist Julius Evola in the Perennialist movement. On the history of the Eranos 'perennialist' summit and the Evola controversy, see H.T. Hakl, *Eranos: An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, translated by C. McIntosh, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013.