

The Nature of Norway
Environmental Crises in Literature

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Chapter I: Themes and Theories

The last centuries of human civilisation, it is a little known but significant fact, had seen the appearance in western Europe of movements inspired by a strangely masochistic ideology, known as ‘ecologism’, although it bore little relation to the science of that name. These movements emphasised the necessity of protecting ‘nature’ from human activity, and pleaded for the idea that all species, whatever their degree of development, had an equal ‘right’ to occupy the planet; some followers of these movement even seemed to systematically take the side of the animals against men, to feel more sorrow at the news of the disappearance of a species of invertebrates than at that of a famine ravaging the population of a continent. Today we have some difficulty understanding these concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘rights’ that they manipulated so casually, and we simply see in these terminal ideologies one of the symptoms of mankind’s desire to turn against itself, to put an end to an existence that it considered inadequate.

- Michel Houellebecq, *The Possibility of an Island* ¹

Introduction

The reason of this study is the alleged environmental crisis – and the subsequent rise of ideologies Michel Houellebecq names ‘ecologism’. A few decades ago Norway represented the frontier of environmentalism and nature philosophy. In environmental policy, Norway was the path-breaking home-ground of the Brundtland report on sustainable development. The environmental philosophy identified with Norway is commonly known as deep ecology, and it continues in spite of a decline in environmental consciousness to reverberate in international environmentalism and literature. In *The Possibility of an Island* (2006) deep ecology is associated with exploding babies’ skulls and the extermination of the human species.

The “apocalyptic paradigm”² of Western civilization is a cultural ricorso. Apocalypse, the total destruction of culture, is already foreboded in *Ragnarok*. But religion as the theme of apocalypse has today found a rival in ‘nature’. The apocalyptic

¹ Michel Houellebecq: *The Possibility of an Island* (London: Phoenix, 2006), pp. 395-396.

² According to Frank Kermode the Western mind understands the world by ‘the paradigms of apocalypse’. He writes in *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in The Theory of Fiction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 28, that “the joachite transition is the historical ancestor of modern crisis; in so far we claim to live now in a period of perpetual transition we merely elevated the interstitial period into an “age” or *saeculum* in its own right, and the age of perpetual crisis in morals and politics. And so, changed by our special pressures, subdued by our scepticism, the paradigms of apocalypse continue to lie under our ways of making sense of the world.”

theme is increasingly environmental: Houellebecq associates ecology with ‘the last centuries of human civilization’, Marcelo Gleiser associates apocalyptic fears related to the environment with “our age of science.”³ For many environmentalists, the association is self-explanatory – ecology offers salvation from a possible world-end. The apocalyptic paradigm is for example employed in deep ecology, as it incorporates eschatological hopes for the future, hopes that are “all based on Voluspiian optimism, one that envisions a hundred evil years before a new humankind is restored.”⁴ In Houellebecq’s novel the apocalyptic paradigm of culture is still invoked, while the conclusion is detrimental: environmentalism marks the end of the world, or at least the end of man.

The discussion on the role of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ is not new with the environmental crisis: Socrates thought that only our fellow citizens can teach us something, Wordsworth believed the same about flowers and trees. In opposition to modern rationality, Rousseau advocated the need to go ‘back to nature’, promoting quality over quantity, and primitivism and emotions over rationality. Arne Næss, the front-figure and ‘father’ of deep ecology, is foremost worried about man’s alienation from his environment – and himself. The lament is still, as in Rousseau’s time, about a lack of authenticity – in society, culture, experience or thought. Modern narratives of either social or environmental criticism are essentially dialogues between dystopian fears and utopian idealism. The adverse judgements are articulations of worldviews that in various degrees express an opposition to an ideology deemed untenable but hegemonic, or to a more assiduous cultural climate that makes people flee to the hills – as Arne Næss did in *Tvergastein*, and as Erlend Loe depicts in his novel *Doppler* (2004).

This thesis will concentrate on Norwegian representations of nature, and its purpose is to discuss nature perceptions that contemporary fiction envisions and

³ As Marcelo Gleiser writes in *The Prophet and the Astronomer: A Scientific Journey to the End of Time* (New York: Norton, 2003), pp. 32-33: “Eschatological visions and apocalyptic fears are very much part of our technological world, of our “age of science”, the ancient rhetoric merely being recast into modern parlance. Floods may now come from global warming, pestilence from a vicious biological warfare, the poisoning of the soil, air and water from industrial pollution ... we don’t have to wait for God to decree the end: we can do that ourselves, since we hold the key to our collective oblivion.” For the rhetoric that Gleiser mentions, see the “green” predictions of environmental deluge in for example Peter Reed & David Rothenberg (eds.): *Wisdom in the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993) or George Sessions (ed.): *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

⁴ See Nina Witoszek: *Arne Næss and the Norwegian Nature Tradition* in Nina Witoszek & Andrew Brennan (eds.): *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Næss and the Progress of Ecophilosophy* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999) p. 455.

endorses. The main sources of this thesis comprise three novels: *Doppler* (2004) by Erlend Loe, *Kjøtt i mørke* (2003) by Tore Stubberud and *Web: betroelser om en truet art* (2005) by Tor Åge Bringsværd. The aim is to contextualize Norwegian environmentalism within an intellectual tradition of ‘back to nature’ ideologies as expressed in literature. The motivation is to find out what perceptions of nature, outside the confined borders of environmentalism, figure in imaginative literature. One of many possibilities of explaining the state of environmental thinking is by an indirect method: instead of analyzing the environmental movement, the focus is on fiction that elaborates nature from the perspective of crisis. M. Keith Booker writes that imaginative literature is “one of the most important means by which any culture can investigate new ways of defining itself and of exploring alternatives to the social and political status quo.”⁵ Literature recreates reality to a certain degree. Besides being created from the raw stuff that is our reality, literature elaborating an environmental crisis indicates the state of contemporary environmental consciousness and simultaneously signals the possible future of it. The three novels of fiction discussed in this study thematize a crisis of nature and are written in opposition to what is deemed an overcivilized order of things. They manage thus to throw some light upon contemporary views and ideologies closely associated with environmental thought. Some of the motivating questions of this study are: does Norwegian fiction reflect similar views as Norwegian environmental philosophy – is its understanding of nature similar to, say, Næssian ecology? Does Norwegian fiction construct similar ‘natures’ as foreign fiction? Additionally, can the analyzed works inspire renewed interest in the environment? Can we detect an ‘ecological awakening’ similar to the in the 1970’s?

The main thesis in this study is that contemporary narratives elaborating an environmental crisis are marked by fatigue. It might be apocalyptic fatigue – a reaction to the trumpeted ecological doomsdays that were plentiful in the 1970’s. In the Norwegian case, it may be called ‘the morning-after syndrome’. If it is not fatigue due to an overexploitation of the ‘apocalyptic paradigm’ or a hangover, it is a lack of constructive alternatives. Visions such as Aldous Huxley’s *Island* (1962), which depicts the imaginary island of Pala as the epitome of human civilization and ecological enlightenment, are absent today. The negative form of critique prevails, and the condition in the environmental movement is much the same. Judging by the sources of

⁵ M Keith Booker: *Dystopian Literature: A Theory and Research Guide* (London: Greenwood Press, 1994), p. 3.

this study the greenness of Norway has today been stained by native misanthropy. The environmental consciousness expressed in the novels seems disillusioned and self-referential. Frank Raymond Leavis once said that great literature promotes human awareness of the possibilities of life. On the basis of the reading of the novels, it seems modern fiction offers an *escape* from the possibilities of life. This study demonstrates how little modern fiction has to propose: idealism and constructive visions seem to be things of the past, and the same applies for the interest in the human. Eirik Vassenden claims that recent Norwegian literature has been struck by a “curse of self-reflection.”⁶ The curse – and the blind spot – of contemporary nature narratives is of a social character. This is a discouraging notion, if we consider how little the novelists are willing to discuss the human in her social context, and in a way that does not turn moral commitments into ritual sacrifices. Erlend Loe offers an escapist environmentalism that combines both traditional Norwegian nature-values with urban indifference – and depicts the end of sociability. Tore Stubberud envisions the end of man as a moral species, and endorses a hedonist anti-environmentalist nature philosophy that ‘doesn’t give a shit’ as the protagonist of his novel at one point says. In a logical culmination of Loe’s and Stubberud’s visions, Tor Åge Bringsværd warns about the end of man as such in a moralistically inclined social-democratic treatise on ecology, disguised as a science-fiction odyssey.

The Nature of this Study

The environmental crisis is the thematic criterion of this study, and will concentrate on contemporary narratives that elaborate on the theme of an environmental crisis. In *The Literary Mind* (1996) Mark Turner argues that human consciousness is literary, and that the process of consciousness should be viewed as a narrative.

⁶ As Eirik Vassenden writes in *Den store overflaten: tekster om samtidslitteraturen* (Oslo: Damm, 2004), pp. 16-17: ”Spørsmålet om hva vi forstår og om vår tids overutviklede evne til selvrefleksjon står ganske sentralt i svært mange bøker fra de siste årene. Ja, det går an å si at *selvrefleksjonens forbannelse* – det at man til enhver tid er i stand til å foregripe og imøtegå egne tankemåter og handlemåter – er en av de viktigste fellesnevnerne for samtidslitteraturen ved begynnelsen av 00-tallet ... Det handler om å være overlatt til denne følelsen av inautensitet, og til endeløse rekker av forsøk på å forklare den. Men det handler også om å overvinne den, bekjempe den, skrive seg ut av den. Langt på vei handler det om å forsøke å overvinne sin egen samtidighet, sin egen overflatskhet. Noen nøyer seg med å tematisere eller kommentere problemet, mens andre stiller det ut, til skrekk og advarsel. Andre igjen leter etter språklige måter å forholde seg til problemet på. Felles for denne litteraturen er at den søker seg bort fra en oversivilisert samtid, og henimot noe annet, det være seg det dystopiske, det arkaiske, det primitive, det hysteriske eller det ekstatiske.”

Contemporary narratives share the trait of simultaneously being symptoms and diagnoses of the perceived impasse that they spring from. They can only be understood and only become meaningful through their time. The central argument of this study is that,

We can best talk about the differentiae of modern crisis in terms of the literature it produces; it is by our imagery of past and present and future, rather than from our confidence in the uniqueness of our crisis, that the character of our apocalypse must be known.⁷

Unlike Frank Kermode, I do not wish to narrow down the field of study to literature alone, and will supplement my analysis with film. One of the primary questions of this study is: what is envisioned as ‘natural’, since the condition of crisis, per definition, cannot be considered one of ‘normalcy’?

The proposed approach will be textual analysis. This thesis wishes to revive the Leavisian creed of literary criticism. For Frank Raymond Leavis, the text was most important, and his close reading started and ended with the text without resorting to theory. There is no literary theory underlying this thesis, and the reading oscillates between the normative and the unassuming. This study starts with the human and her moral consciousness, but does not make the mistake of supposing that moralizing signifies morality. The normative elements in this study derive from a humanist, hermeneutic perspective and cannot therefore provide any final interpretations or judgements.

The emphasis will be less on historicity and more on the terrain of contemporary thought. The references will consist of academic works from natural and social sciences as well as fiction and film, and insights from cultural, philosophical and scientific sources are developed. The emphasis will differ respectively in each chapter, the contexts themselves dependent on those laid down by the three novels’ thematic approach to nature. The main sources of this study will be read as attempts to redefine ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ on the basis of my reading, and would thus indicate how the tension between man and nature is perceived by the authors. Their discussions may be viewed as extrapolations of the modern duality of body and mind, as the crisis encompasses culture and nature yet draws a cleavage across these. Their proposed ways of dealing with the inherent contradiction that civilization builds upon, are answers to

⁷ Frank Kermode: *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp. 95-96.

the nature of things and reveal the character of the ‘Western tragedy’ that the answers spring from.

The decision to concentrate on Norwegian constructions of nature is due to the interesting claim of Nina Witoszek that “nature is the g-spot” of the indigenous soul – an important locus for socio-cultural self-perception and bearer of national heritage (and now also national wealth). Yet, the setting for the following study is international, and will set Norwegian fiction in the context of Western nature-imagery and narratives which offer civilization critique. Notwithstanding native misanthropy and fatigue, many foreigners consider Norway as a destination for nature-healthy pilgrimages and a source of inspiration, believing that fjords and mountains foster ‘green enlightenment’. The international backdrop becomes interesting because of this, and is intended as a means of comparison and as a review assisting the discussion. Works on Norwegian nature are abounding, from national and international perspectives. But previous works do not take the notion of crisis as their starting point in discussing nature understandings. Neither do they compare environmental philosophy with environmental fiction, or explicitly discuss environmental views in fiction. In this sense this study represents a new departure. It is for this reason that environmentalist thinking such as deep ecology and environmentalists such as Arne Næss have found a place in this study. I will discuss all variations and ‘perversions’ of deep ecology, made possible by the philosophy’s loose framework and by the fact that it is inherently contradictory.

The aspect that makes the deep ecological cosmology interesting yet problematic is its Janus-face: the paradigms of the second scientific revolution are imposed on a framework derived from the first and cut through ideological cleavages within the environmental movement. This philosophy is interesting in that it contains both paradigms, making it simultaneously controversial and agreeable for many. Deep ecology is holistic, bio-egalitarian, non-violent and emphasizes biotic ‘peace, love and happiness’ more than Darwinian notions of struggle. In its philosophy tragedy has been replaced by harmony, and the only sin seems to be not to consider oneself as a member of a ‘biotic community’. Its nature-view is one of an all-encompassing ‘cosmic dance’ where there are no centres of power and no hierarchies. It depends on a scientific influence promulgating little boundaries and a focus on totalities, advocated as “the new

scientific paradigm” by Fritjof Capra.⁸ ‘Nature’ is the domain of scientific investigation and ‘natural’ the domain of the New Age-inspired ideology.

The problematic aspect with a concept as nature is that more or less anything can be justified by it. What is ‘natural’ is determined by social and cultural settings, and is true whether we discuss man or environment. We charge ‘nature’ with meaning, since it *per se* never can generate any. Here ‘nature’ is viewed through the landscape. The landscapes of the novels reveal what the preferred natural is like. Landscapes wear the fictive forms of materia, and include man’s social and natural environments. The relation between the scientific ‘laws of nature’ and the cultural interpretation of these manifest themselves in the landscape. For man they are ‘mindscapes’, as for example the dream of controlling nature that is embodied in the myth of Prometheus. They function as playing boards that limit reality in order to make it conceivable – regardless of whether the limitations are imposed by game or theology.

The adventure landscape was earlier identified as a space for subjugation of nature by activities of climbing, hunting and other aristocratic games and sports – the native icon being Fridtjof Nansen. Today, it is increasingly identified as space for meditation and relaxation – but through activity. To be in ‘harmony with nature’ is preached by *Den Norske Turistforening* and Næss, among others. The main character of *Doppler* hits his head and decides to move the woods – *Nordmarka* offers a fresh start (and a little adventure). The cultural category of *friluftsliv* is seen as a means out of a personal crisis prompted by death. The apocalyptic catalyser seems to be the fear of contaminated forests and other ‘natural’ habitats. The forest is benign and elks and trees are our friends. The pollution that Erlend Loe warns us of seems to be of a traditional and mainstream environmental kind, but is in fact foremost considered to be ‘other people’. More than expressing an alternative view on nature, Erlend Loe shows the traditional as promoted by both the counterculture and the mainstream of Norway.

In Tore Stubberud’s novel *Kjøtt i mørke*, the crisis-impetus is man’s current inability or lack of interest in producing (and enjoying) his food. The setting is pastoral and the times are of immediate post-apocalypse. The pastoral landscape often acts as a scene for elegiac ‘natural romances’ that were earlier of the Platonic kind.⁹ Today the

⁸ See Capra’s (pseudo-)scientific manifesto in favour of deep ecology in *The Web of Life: A new Scientific Understanding of Living Systems* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), pp. 3-13.

⁹ As Harold E. Toliver states in *Pastoral: Forms and Attitudes* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 4: “The pastoral landscape is more ceremonial than useful; it has no need of planting, cultivation, or harvest, and its periodic renewal is less economic than symbolic or miraculous.”

romance is of a carnal character, but still endorses the classic symbol of the shepherd (or in this case: cattle-herder) of pastoral narratives. The novel builds on considerations derived from agricultural practice and notions of self-sufficiency that environmentalists praise. The natural is to be found in the cultivation of the body and not in the intellect. What makes it international is its ‘French connection’: the philosophy of becoming-animal, instead of being-man. Desire, body and feeling are the philosophy’s *raison d’êtres*.

Web by Tor Åge Bringsværd is a science-fiction odyssey, and its cosmology is given meaning by science through the apocalyptic or ‘catastrophic’ paradigm. What is natural is determined by science, and the landscape is therefore alien to man.¹⁰ The apocalyptic ingredient is provided by fear of resource depletion and mindless use of technology. This seems to be the current condition and thus what Bringsværd wants to warn us about. However, the hope of Bringsværd is that we will re-find ‘normalcy’ through reconsidering our status in the biotic community. In *Web* man was incapable of such considerations, and was eventually replaced by spiders – ecologically more adapt than man as ‘stewards of the planet’.

As little as science is capable of expressing anything immediately meaningful for man (but only after an ethical evaluation), language that is unwilling or unable to throw light upon the human, her beliefs, and her moral considerations cannot be considered ‘natural’ language. For Leszek Kolakowski, the writer is an ideologist, as

A view of the world does not emerge from an accumulation of facts; it also requires words to interpret, judge, and order the facts. Thus, by attempting to uncover, that is, to produce, the meaning of facts, the intellectuals – as philosophers, poets, writers of fiction, and political thinkers – turn out to be ideologists. That is to say that they uphold an idea of the world as it ought to be, and from it they derive a picture of the world as it is – not in the sense that the existing and the desired converge [as in the perfect, self-annihilating utopia], but rather in the sense that from a world desired or imagined they derive the rules for how the facts of the existing world must be interpreted – or what the facts are in their essence.¹¹

¹⁰ Previously, alien landscapes were usually depicted in utopian “travel literature” such as Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759) and Ludvig Holberg’s *A Journey to the World Underground* (1741). Today it is usually depicted in science-fiction and fantasy where man’s horizon is radically expanded (but sometimes contracted).

¹¹ Leszek Kolakowski: *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: Chicago Press, 1990) p. 36.

A utopianist would be somebody who imagines how the existing and desired may converge – and the dystopian writer imagines the existing and feared.¹² However, any kind of self-reflectiveness going beyond Panglossian optimism would indicate utopian or dystopian tendencies. Even if a realized utopia is impossible to express in language, utopian ideologies combined with apocalyptic images act as forceful rhetorical tools. More than anything, utopian elements and apocalyptic explanations function as story-telling devices that highlight the ‘natural’ moralism of narratives. Literature is thus educative, although not necessarily educational, as it indicates the boundaries of the existing and the desired. It is in this discrepancy that the author’s ideological biases are revealed, since even dystopias build on an underlying image of a Golden Age – the prototype of utopia. This is true even when the immediate dystopia is that of a utopian satire like Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) or an anti-utopian utopia such as George Orwell’s *1984* (1949). The ideology in *The Possibility of an Island* (2006) is expressed in opposition to the opposition. Houellebecq writes that contemporary civilization critique, like deep ecology, is “institutionalized anarchy perpetuating itself.”¹³ His belief is that since politics and morality have been declared dead in Western societies, there can no longer be any real dissent either.

The decline of utopian thought is a result of the changes in the way time is perceived, and has to do with the anti-utopian replies to the political projects of realizing utopias and with the increase of what Richard Stivers names an ‘anti-morality’ that promotes a cynical morality of power.¹⁴ Whereas the eschatology of Joachim di Fiore was transcendent in the sense that the end – ‘the summer of love’ – ultimately lay in the hands of God, later clerics such as Müntzer suggested that God needed a hand. Even later, Marx thought the people needed a hand in an eschatological cosmology of the same type as Müntzer’s. For di Fiore and Müntzer the present was a misery, while

¹² As Russell Jacoby writes in *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 12-13: “Utopias seek to emancipate by envisioning a world based on new, neglected, or spurned ideas; dystopias seek to frighten by accentuating contemporary trends that threaten freedom.”

¹³ Michel Houellebecq: *The Possibility of an Island* (London: Phoenix, 2006), p 38: “The last remaining public subsidies and decent coverage in the respectable media, went first of all, in cinema as in the other arts, to productions that praised evil – or, at least, that challenged moral values conventionally described as ‘traditional’, in a sort of institutionalized anarchy perpetuating itself through mini-pantomimes whose repetitive nature did not blunt their charms in the eyes of the critics, all the more so as they facilitated the writing of reviews which were predictable and clichéd, yet in which they were still able to present themselves as groundbreaking. The putting of death of morality had, on the whole, become a sort of ritual sacrifice.”

¹⁴ See Richard Stivers: *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

hope was linked to a Christian paradisiac past and a cathartic future. The notion of progress is not identical with Christian eschatology, but there are no clear distinctions either – utopian thinking was enabled by the notion of progress that made heaven something attainable in *this* life. With modernity, hope was linked to the present and became synonymous to either a fear of, or a belief in progress. The past and the future were emptied of teleological content as time replaced eternity as one of the ordering principles of life. In some cases time has been replaced by a materialist eternity, and utopian projections of material plenty prevail over ‘utopias of the soul’. In opposition to Mikhail Bakhtin’s dynamic conception of time, Francis Fukuyama writes about a nonfictional materialist end of history, and his Hegelian epitaph reads ‘capitalism prevailed, *da capo*’. A halt in ideological evolution is unlikely. Today’s hegemonic dystopias and standstills are the antithesis of progressive faith, whether indicating an opposite direction of mankind or the limits of it, or simply the end of it, as Houellebecq and Fukuyama see it.¹⁵ Most civilization critique, with the changes in time, presents the world in an amputated version of the Christian legacy – if there is hope, it is still linked to the future through the past, while the present is a misery. We may argue with Zygmunt Bauman that contemporary utopias are ‘butterfly utopias’, since the only care for the future is to be carefree of the future.¹⁶ Second, many ascribe the decline of utopias to the changes in political discourse. Few claim to hold the keys of emancipation in their hands, and the traditional utopian ground premise – ‘people are not free, but can be educated to be’ – is absent in contemporary visions. The tragic paradox, already noted by de Toqueville, seems to be that setting man free makes him indifferent. For Russell Jacoby the decline in utopian visions is due to the collapse of the communist enterprise (and the death of communist ideology) and the widespread, yet somewhat misplaced belief that nothing distinguishes utopian representations from a totalitarian reality.¹⁷ The distinction between utopian representations and totalitarian societies is important, since the latter disables and the former enables: few would claim

¹⁵ See *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1991). In Fukuyama’s case it is more of a historical understanding that seemingly has subsumed both past and future. As Robert Holton, in *Problems of crisis and normalcy in the contemporary world* in Jeffrey C. Alexander & Piotr Sztompka (eds.): *Rethinking Progress. Movements, Forces and Ideas at the End of the 20th century* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), p. 43, ironically remarks: “In place of the epic narrative we now have the soap opera.”

¹⁶ See Zygmunt Bauman: *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 27: “The spontaneity of the world which postmodern utopias conjure up makes nonsense of all concern with the future except the concern with being free from concern with the future – and able to act, accordingly, in an unconcerned fashion.”

¹⁷ Russell Jacoby: *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 5.

Kant's universal moral principles to be totalitarian, although they may be perceived, in light of human psychological history, as utopian. Third, witnessing of the shift from the social to the 'natural' realm is the historical correspondence between the death of political utopias and the rise of ecological dystopias. But it may be that utopian representations have found another form than the individual of the day or the political of the revolutionary period. For example the idea of a 'community' is perhaps not dead, but has simply altered form. Today, the few that believe in a 'collective' are environmentalists and writers promoting holistic ideologies. Unfortunately, writers vindicating a 'biotic collective' do this at the expense of man. This has direct consequences for morality as it becomes either irrelevant or is justified by whatever is considered 'natural'. But 'natural' utopias tend to be moral dystopias. This because the mythological values of morality in environmental narratives – survival and health of, and in nature, and happiness of the individual in nature, do not endorse sociability.

Ideologies, utopian or not, are moulded by and mould the present to the extent they are repeated, however altered.¹⁸ Memory cannot be forced or simulated, although ideological examples exist of attempts to make claims on history. Both cultural and individual memory are malleable and responsive to future expectations or fears. In some cases, contemporary narratives which for instance borrow from Zoroastrianism, have begun to work as 'real' myths or pseudo-myths with pockets of cult and assorted props – as for example those of *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Rings*.

Narratives exhibiting an apocalyptic fascination are part of an on-going cultural mythmaking or 'self-making' process in which several authors can be drawn to the same type of stories and images. The salience of race narratives since the publication of Darwin's evolution theory is well-documented.¹⁹ Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) – whose ending (and possibly a new beginning) hinges on an organic metaphor, belongs to this category. So does the popular children's tale *The Water Babies* of Charles Kingsley (1863), and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Today

¹⁸ What actually *is* remembered may be termed memes, after Richard Dawkins. Memes can consist of everything from fashionable buzz-words and catch-phrases to more culturally and socially compound phenomenon which entail both representation and action, as the native meme-complex of *friluftsliv*. Dawkins, employing the catastrophic paradigm, suggests that collective memes can evolve in a mode of "brief spurts between stable plateaux". The process of imitation holds important implications for cultural memory. It suggests that in the study of cultural memory the aspect of discontinuity becomes as important as that of continuity. See Richard Dawkins: *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 190-192.

¹⁹ For an overview on these in English literature, see Fiona J. Stafford: *The Last of the Race: the Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

it seems that the ‘last of the race’ myths have regained popularity. The ‘last of the race’ are the last either because of devolution due to an environmental catastrophe, or because of the advances in neuroscience and the promise of techno-ecological immortality, such as in *Web: betrouer om en truet art* (2005) by Bringsværd and *The Possibility of an Island* (2006) by Houellebecq. After the laws of thermodynamics became popular knowledge, visions of ‘red ends’ experienced an upsurge. Of course, most often the ends depicted are a blend of several reasons and explanations. H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine* (1895), filmatized by Simon Wells in 2002, depicts both entropy and the genetic promise of – not evolution – but the devolution of the species (as much as the social science of the latter part of 19th century concerned itself with the degeneration of the nation-body). The entropic end has decreased remarkably in popularity, perhaps not surprisingly, since ‘world transformations’ anticipated before the entropic are more acute and interesting. The Cold War period saw an abundance of socio-politically encrusted utopias and dystopias – the *Island* (1962) by Huxley and Orwell’s *1984* (1949) providing leading examples. The post-war period saw an increase in narratives of either an half-mad scientist or a nuclear war annihilating if not all then most of life, such as Walter M. Miller’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959) and Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove or: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). Some took up the moral reverberations of Holocaust and Second World War, as Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). For William Golding the impetus to write *Lord of the Flies* (1954) was given by the atrocities committed by man during the Second World War. He sees ‘natural man’, unordered and unpressured by society’s boundaries, as barbarian. Joseph Conrad, who wrote in an age of ‘emancipatory violence’, posed a similar view in *Heart of Darkness* (1899). In his novel the natural surrounding is a virgin forest in the darkest jungle and the nature it portrays is wild and enticing – the virgin forest is a symbol of Kurtz’s vile nature. Although traditional socio-political extrapolations of events or trends in society, as for example Francis Ford Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979) or Terry Gilliam’s *Brazil* (1985)²⁰ have been in decline in recent decades, there are signs of the revival of the category. This is due to the intensified debates around the ‘clash of civilizations’. And so, Samuel Huntington is proven right in B. Andreas Bull-

²⁰ The former inspired by Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1899), while the latter is a parody of a futurological utopia “rational in means, but mad in ends” that only British reason (and unreason) can produce.

Hansen's novel *Lushons Plater* (2004), where the clash is experienced in religious terms and is a nuclear nightmare come true between 'us' and 'them'.

Today environmentally orientated utopias and dystopias, paradises and wastelands, are abounding. W. W. Wagar notes:

Apprehensions of an ecological doomsday ... began cropping up in significant number of stories after about 1965, [and] are really only a variant of the theme of runaway science. In this case, technology and industry are the runaways, wasting, depleting, and poisoning the biosphere.²¹

UFO-stories from the 1950's on, and narratives of an environmental catastrophe mythologize science and spring from the same scepticism towards it. The popularity of science fiction in the 20th century is an indicator of this scepticism, but also exhibits scientific and technological glorification. Environmental narratives that at least partially stand out as technologically optimistic are often combined with the motif of outer-space. The few fullfledged utopian visions are similar to Buckminster Fuller's, who saw technology as the means for man to finally free himself of earthly fetters. Space colonies act often as ideal 'lab-rooms' with Edenic possibilities for man to create society anew. Such is the somewhat pessimistic account of Jonathan Lethem in *Girl in Landscape* (1998), where the earth no longer has an ozon-layer and the rich have become emigrants to outer-space. In the motion-picture *Silent Running* (1972), the technologically optimistic framework of inhabiting space has become an otherwise dystopian science-fiction account of extinct plant-life on earth. In D. Keith Mano's *The Bridge* (1973), holistic Gaia-scientists have taken over, ruling the world (not far from the scenario in Bacon's utopia *The New Atlantis* (1626), but with a different conclusion) in a 'Spaceship Earth' style and announcing, out of ecological considerations, universal suicide. The alien visions most often depict hostile viruses, bacteria or alien invaders while the prerequisite battle many times today assumes the character of 'galactic games'. In *No Blade of Grass* (1970), the death of plant-life by a hostile and unknown virus is followed by famines and anarchy. Wells' *War of the Worlds* (1898), recently filmatized by Steven Spielberg, has one quintessential message. The alien invasion fails due to the smallest bacteria "by virtue of natural selection."²² This would surely please

²¹ W. Warren Wagar: *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 118.

²² H.G. Wells: *War of the Worlds* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), p. 169 (italics added). Besides displaying the psychological pathologies of man during crisis, who can for example forget the fellow "grim set on living" and his theories of the survival of the fittest and smartest, the environmental alfa and

the adherents of James Lovelock's Gaia-hypothesis and the more traditional pseudo-religious versions of Darwinian evolutionism. In *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004) the world witnesses a new ice age. The film addresses the environment on two levels: on the political by discussing global warming, and on the scientific by lending support to geological and paleontological notions of development through punctuated equilibria and chaos theory. It ends in an ideological lesson: ecological redistribution equals global demographic and economic redistribution.

As much as holistic ecology deals with the environmental crisis, it tends to omit one particular part of nature: man. He is in essence an inherent contradiction in that he is both 'animal' and 'man'. But he cannot be both simultaneously. Eric Fromm explains that,

What constitutes the essence [of man] is the question and the need for an answer; the various forms of human existence are not the essence, but they are the answers to the conflict, which, in itself, is the essence.²³

To deny, or to overcome by collective suicide – in the version of either Mano or Houellebecq – the inherent contradiction would mean that either 'man' or 'animal' should cease to exist. The tension between good and evil cease to exist when the notion of man as an inherent contradiction collapses – complete harmony with nature can never be established. Utopias are attempts of establishing complete harmony and therefore necessitate the collapse of distinctions. They collapse in emancipatory love according to Mary Douglas, who writes that 'zero-zero' is a place of "love that has no rule but itself."²⁴ But as much as 'zero-zero' – a realized utopia – might be a place of boundless love, it may be a place of enslaving evil or terrorism. The 'natural' utopia has become a moral dystopia in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It is state of "the horror, the horror" as Kurtz's last words echo in the novel.

Seeing man as an inherent contradiction is the prerequisite for any moral considerations. Kurtz had no boundaries and the evil in nature possessed him – nature is

omega of the narrative is found in the theories of natural selection and in the acknowledgement that the alien invaders were abolished, "after all man's device has failed, by the humblest things that God in his wisdom has put upon this earth."

²³ Eric Fromm: *The Heart of Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965) p. 117.

²⁴ Mary Douglas: *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 1975), p. 228: "The tension between the possibility of zero and the maximum possible order and pressure which a society provides is the measure of possible joy and sorrow. Zero is the inexpressible, timeless, weightless unembodied experience. There is only a flash-point at zero-zero; it can never be fixed... Here the solitary mystic, without legislating for others, tries to live with his own heart set to zero, where no boundaries or pressures pull God and the self apart. Such a person finds it especially absurd to draw a line between man and nature."

brutal and predatory in hollow souls.²⁵ But a problem of evil is no longer a problem if its reality, the social context, is denied. The moral dilemma of freedom and right is social, but the conflict between good and evil is something each man must battle with. The basic point of Conrad's human anatomy seems to be that before man can establish a genuine pact of solidarity with the other (the pact need not be between man and government), the stability of civilization will be shaky and the barbarian qualities of man's nature likely to surface, as in the *Heart of Darkness*. Both Conrad and Golding believed that the pact could only come about by maturity. Maturity is a moral character, while the concept of character is "the key to understanding the dramatic change from a social morality enforced by the church to an emphasis on individualistic ethics."²⁶ Social maturity requires social interaction, which is itself, if to be meaningful, dependent on ethical action.

The task of rethinking man or at least some of his characteristics, in a hopefully humane light, is complicated by the exchange of freedom and right for pleasure and pain in post-apocalyptic and postmodern scenarios. The degradation of spirit in favour of matter seems to be an emblematic expression, and is devoid of moral or historical sentiments. Postmodern body-centred narratives eclipse post-apocalyptic representation in aesthetic projects concerned with overcoming dualisms by a philosophy of becoming. In Tore Stubberud's novel the assertion is of man-as-a-becoming-animal. To 'become animal' is increasingly recognized academically in the emerging field of animal studies, suggesting new entries into the age-old discussion of what it means to be human. The humanist – and foremost humane – problem with most of the pre- and post-apocalyptic scenarios is the total dismissal of an existing social structure. The modern tale is often about a dehumanizing social-democratic evil, like Erlend Loe's manifesto reads. He attacks the anthropological man of Norway only to deny him in a relativist paradox by supposing that the humans of Norway are "not real enough". The humanist crux is that there in few cases seems to be any social basis left from where to model possible boundaries for social conduct. The implications of this become all the more acute in imagined and real post-endings, as these most often entail the abolishment, or at least

²⁵ Joseph Conrad: *Mørkets Hjerter* (Oslo: Kagge, 2002), pp. 107-8: "Urskogen hadde gjennomskuet ham fort og tatt en grusom hevn over alle hans groteske invaderinger. Jeg tror skogen må ha hvasket ham noe i øret om ham selv, ting som han ikke var klar over, et og annet som han ikke hadde den fjerneste anelse om før han tydde til den dype ensomheten – og hviskingen viste seg å være mer enn han kunne stå imot. Den ga gjenlyd dypt inne i ham, fordi han var hul tvers igennom."

²⁶ See Richard Stivers: *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 18.

adjustment, of institutional boundaries for social behaviour. The wish seems to be to start *ex nihilo*, or to imagine as Bringsværd does in *Web*, circumstances where ‘zero-zero’ becomes a real possibility.

However, we know that social maturity is unlikely. Authors omit the social realm in order to manage the worlds that are imagined in opposition to the current dystopia. It seems the human and the *humane* holds a diminishing status, either in relation to a biotic community, his animal instincts, or a technological odyssey. Going ‘back to nature’ seems to require the cutting off of social life, as in the novel discussed in chapter two, where withdrawal from society is exercised by the means of *friluftsliv* and an equally native type of wilderness ideology. The societal impasse that is criticized seems more of a utopia than the socially dystopian vision of a forest-utopia that does not recognize man as part of nature.

Even if maturity would not prove to be a problem, vitalist ‘back to nature’ ideologies that hail the body end up treating moral questions as profane. When man-as-animal turns feeling (regardless of what is felt) into a value in itself, morality turns into either amoralism or immoralism, since moral obligations can never be rationally derived from experience. The examined worldview’s underlying belief seems to be that the ‘natural’ can only be found by a reversal in social cultivation – the proposed man in *Kjøtt i mørke* is nothing but ‘nature’. In the novel discussed in the fourth chapter, morality is not omitted – although man ‘as we know him’ no longer exists. Bringsværd’s agenda is biotically emancipatory and evil therefore completely abstract. Man’s condition is tragically deemed as one of utter loneliness. The irony is that he is urged to make friends with his environment – the entire biotic community.

Chapter II: Native Wood and Way

We are setting out on a trip, I say. Which might be long.

Where are you going? my wife asks.

From forest to forest. We are called, in a way. There are things happening out there and we are needed.

My wife looks at me in wonder.

I say it's something we must do. Something important.

Could you be more precise? my wife says.

I say no. I can be less precise, but not more. The only thing I know is that we have to move because the forest is calling on us.

It is calling on you? my wife says.

That is exactly what it's doing. Because there are other lives than the life we have been living for many years now. There is something else than Smart Club and children's birthday parties and dinners with so called friends and this repulsive Norwegian cosiness that simultaneously lets us be the most pleasant and egoistic people in the world.

- Erlend Loe, *Doppler*²⁷

Friluftsliv and the Countercultural Manifesto

So speaks Doppler to his wife who is in the hospital. He is taken there by force by his brother-in-law to witness the birth of his third child. Doppler is the character of an Erlend Loe novel, a seemingly average family father from Oslo with a seemingly mediocre life. Prompted by his father's death and accomplished by a hit in the head, Doppler decides to move to *Nordmarka* – the authentic home of the existentially anguished dweller of the capital of Norway. Like the heroic folktale of Askeladden, and like Peer Gynt before him (but in different direction), Doppler wants to walk his own ways, driven by curiosity and called by the forest.²⁸ The forest offers therapy from the

²⁷ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 156: "Vi skal på reise, sier jeg. Og den kan bli lang. Hvor skal dere? spør min kone. Fra skog til skog, sier jeg. Vi er på en måte kallet. Det skjer ting der ute og vi trengs. Min kone ser undrende på meg. Det er noe vi må gjøre, sier jeg. Noe viktig. Kan du være mer presis? sier min kone. Nei, sier jeg. Jeg kan være mindre presis. Men ikke mer. Det eneste jeg vet er at vi må sette oss i bevegelse fordi skogen roper på oss. Roper den på dere? sier min kone. Det er nettopp det den gjør, sier jeg. For det fins andre liv enn det livet vi har levd i mange år nå, sier jeg. Det finns noe annet enn Smart Club og barnebursdager og middager med såkalte venner og denne frastøtende norske kosen som på samme tid tillater oss å være det triveligste og det mest egoistiske folkeslaget i verden."

²⁸ Loe is most likely under the spell of what Nina Witoszek calls the 'Askeladden-effect' of Norwegian culture. See Nina Witoszek: *Norske Naturmytologier: fra Edda til økofilosofi*, (Oslo: Pax, 1998), p. 92. The construction of the character is a combination of the archetypes of a trickster and a culture hero or

terrors of modern life and the reasons to the apparently much needed therapy is the simple sort of ‘other people’.

In fact, the protagonist of *Doppler* is an embodiment of the iconic indigen seeking salvation in nature from ‘urban terror’. None of the historical grand authors of Norway have been immune to a climate where nature has been the gem in the cultural re-collection. Ibsen is said to be the first one that used the word “*friluftsliv*” in literature.²⁹ Hamsun’s endings happen in the woods.³⁰ Roy Jacobsen’s *Hoggerne* (2005) find esoteric communion in the forest in otherwise hostile times. Jan Kjærstad’s *Kongen av Europa* (2005) retreats to virgin woods – “the perfect hiding spot for a man gone askew” – in between his conquests of the opposite sex.

A year and some after the publication of *Doppler*, a national tabloid newspaper asks on the cover of their weekend magazine “*Hvorfor har vår nye nasjonalhelt Lars Monsen rømt til Jokkmokk?*”³¹ The news that deserved the bold script (and front cover: Monsen demonstratively gowned in a Swedish flag) was of course not that he had escaped urban terror to arctic wilderness, but that he had done this by moving to Sweden. The heroic status that Monsen is given becomes likely in social settings of ‘*påskefjell*’ and ‘*peisekos*’ and in a cultural memory recalling Fridtjof Nansen. Nansen’s success, as an adventurer on ski that gets a Nobel peace prize (many times conveniently forgetting the humanitarian Nansen), became synonymous with national success in a country discovering itself.³²

In the midst of ‘*nasjonsbygging*’ philosophical vitalism took on pragmatic and artistic forms. In accordance with the *Lebensreform* of the turn to the 20th century, outdoor activity and sports came to be regarded as exercise for the body and healthy for the mind. As much as the social sciences of the latter part of the 19th century viewed the

what Witoszek calls a “*geni i bygdetullingens forkledning*” (ibid., p. 87). It has the same structure as the mythic Prometheus that is both a trickster (as he fools the gods) and a culture hero (as the Titan who cherishes man), while Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* is perhaps the best known “*bygdetulling*” of this format.

²⁹ See Henrik Ibsen’s poem *Paa Vidderne* in *Samlede verker – jubileumsutg.* (Oslo: Kagge, 2005) volumes 1-3. In English translation: William Norman Guthrie: *On the Heights: a Tragedy in Lyrical Ballads* (Sewanee: University Extension Department of the University of South, 1910).

³⁰ For an account on the literati’s relation to nature in native intellectual history, see Nina Witoszek: *Norske Naturmytologier: fra Edda til økofilosofi* (Oslo: Pax, 1998).

³¹ For the uninitiated in the champions of *friluftsliv*: Monsen can be characterized as a native barbarian only suited to live in a tent in the northern wild with a pack of hounds and a camera as company. *Dagbladets Lørdagsmagasin*, “*Flagger ut*”, 3. December 2005.

³² Perhaps not surprising, but a short inquiry inspired by a native novel, Thomas Hansen: *Gi ting til folket* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2004), and conducted among native miscellaneous reveals Norwegians seem to think of a skiing-style when mentioned the words “classic style” (instead of music or architecture, for that matter). It must be noted that it was winter (December) when I had informal chats with approximately 30 restaurant-goers in Oslo centre one evening.

body – both national and individual – as degenerate, the medicine of ‘outdoor-life’ promised detrimental effects. Nature became a destiny of pilgrimage, praised as the superior therapeutic antidote for body and mind to the equally mental and physical pollutions of urban life. Today, Nils Faarlund, an archetype of ‘*friluftsmennesket*’ (and of a deep ecologist), assures us of the necessity of an apparently needed ‘cultural rescue’ by means of nature and by the native way of cultural radicalism: “The most important element of both mountain rescue and cultural rescue is “preventive medicine”. *Friluftsliv* can help prevent a catastrophe.”³³

For those contemporaries that cannot escape the urban into Siberian conditions like the apparent new national hero, Sjur Paulsen promises inspiration in *Loop* (2005).³⁴ It is built around Arne Næss’ request in the same film to “go inside nature!”³⁵ Repeating the kernel of native ritualistic self-help and its associated understanding of the good life and good way, *Loop* offers salvation and therapy in nature. The norms are conveniently verbalized by the guru of Norwegian ‘wood and way’ and stay true to the principles of Nansen’s *modus operandi*: activity and engagement in nature. The documentary exposes us to Norwegian self-help from the terrors of war, post-industrial apathy, and most importantly: ‘the loop of city life’. In effect, it is an ingenious indigenous combination of worship of nature with worship of the self. Meanwhile, the self-proclaimed protector of native cultural virtues and values – *Den Norske Turistforening*, promises to stay ‘true to the times’ by incorporating extreme-sports into their programme. The effort is to “*lokke folk ut på eventyr*”, as the organization’s new general secretary Kristin Krohn Devold says.³⁶

Up to this date, a combination of modern body-culture and reactionary practice of social cleansing continue to distinguish the more traditional and ‘extreme’ ‘*friluftsliv*’. *Loop* may be the characteristic pattern of the native cultural memory on self-seeking and self-helping. The loop reveals the cultural rootedness of deep ecology à

³³ Nils Faarlund: *A Way Home* in Peter Reed & David Rothenberg (eds.): *Wisdom in the Open Air: the Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 167.

³⁴ Previous works from Paulsen include the *friluftsliv*- and snowboard documentary *Soul Deep* (2000), which in this context translates into ‘snow deep’.

³⁵ Analogous to Næss’ plea “*gå inn i naturen, ikke ut i den!*” is that of the surfers, who claim to surf *the wave* instead of *on it*. In the surfer-movie *Monstertorsdag* (2004), nature is experienced through extreme-sport and is the ultimate character-builder and cultivator of man’s spirit. The “soul surfer” in *Point Break* (1991), which is built around the same concept of spirituality as the native version, commits suicide in the waves to escape imprisonment. The native hero exits the stage after being deprived from the love of a woman and dies in a manner of the ultimate Norwegian ‘*friluftsselv-mord*’, or perhaps: romantic extreme-‘*friluftsselv-mord*’.

³⁶ The previous minister of defence furthermore invokes the image of grown-up men playing war in the woods in her exclamation that “*friluftsliv*” is “just like the military, but without guns.”

la Næss and Faarlund, and is enabled by social action and representation in the oikotypical meme of *'friluftsliv'* that repeats the anthem of being in 'classic nature' – but preferably in a landscape of adventure. On the surface, not much seems to be wrong with established tradition and the point remains: the native inclination of treating 'nature' as good and the nature-dweller (the so called *friluftsmenneske*) as 'healthy' has suffered no deflation, although the much debated deconstruction of seemingly everything at hand that has, by now, even reached the shores of the native cultural landscape.

The Norwegian Impasse

Up here I don't expose myself to other people and other people don't get exposed to me. Others are protected from my sarcasm and hatefulness and I'm protected against their cleverness and stupidity. I experience it as a good arrangement.³⁷

The three elements of the contemporary tragedy according to Doppler – ego-stupidity, 'proptism' and cleverness – cannot be completely separated from each other, while an analytical separation of the twofold character of the critique of modern man might be appropriate. However, the decisive element of the Dopplerian critique is against a more diffuse and total concept of 'civilization'. From a historical perspective the different realms of critique – the economic and the cultural – unite in the foundations of civilization, back in those times by the Nile where wealth was accumulated to the extent it became necessary to catalogue it, serving as the impetus for writing's beginning. All in all, the description of the malaise in man's nature brings to mind the Martinian vain apes – the societal antithesis of Potu in Ludvig Holberg's *A Journey to the World Underground* (1741).

The disdain of *flinkhet* must foremost be seen as a cultural attack on the perception of the native self. The other side of the critique is foremost concerned with the economic sphere where equal blows are delivered to the capitalist enterprise (symbolized in "*Høyremannen*") and to its result in modern day consumerism (symbolized in Doppler's wife). The native is divided into two equally dismissed economic camps: the one rich and arrogant, the other rich and naïve. As the burglar

³⁷ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 41: "Her oppe utsetter jeg meg ikke for andre mennesker og andre mennesker utsettes ikke for meg. Andre beskyttes mot min sarkasme og hatefullhet og jeg beskyttes mot deres flinkhet og stupiditet. Jeg opplever det som en god ordning."

Jernroger explains Doppler: "*Lenger oppe er det høyreland og alarmer overalt, men her nede stemmer folk på SV og tror på det gode i mennesket samtidig som de vasser i penger.*"³⁸ Borrowing from Rousseau, one is led to believe that Doppler's wife is suffering of *amour-propre*; the vanity that poses the self solely in the light and esteem of others. It is here understood as 'propsism':

She has romped in classic culture and shopped some clothes and equipment that apparently has given her the spark of life back. It's amazing to notice how much clothes and equipment can do.³⁹

The critique of economic arrangements assumes more or less the characteristic of satire. The problem is that the very same materialism that is being criticized forms the basis of the main character's blasé cosmological outlook despite attempts at establishing a 'new economy': money is still deemed as the very symbol of materialism. Loe's hero à la Askeladden is trademarked by a strong need for autonomy and self-sufficiency. In this environmental context it is understood as a type of sustainability that cherishes the pietistic virtue of material spartanism. Næss verbalizes it in the emblematic maxim "simple in means, rich in ends!"⁴⁰ It is re-enacted in Doppler: "I like everything that doesn't have a budget. I'm immediately sceptical to projects with budgets."⁴¹ The whole economic framework is dismissed in the total rejection of the modern *animal laborans*, here synonymous with the wage slave. The dismissal is done in a spirit true to the anarcho-primitivist:

I will never pay a bill again, either over the net or in any other way. I will live by trading and theft and the forest. And when I'm gone, the forest will live on me. That's the contract.⁴²

From the perspective of this study, the most interesting critique is that of the untranslatable *flinkhet* that must be understood within the Norwegian cultural context rendering it meaningful. It is understood as a peculiarly Norwegian 'cleverness' and signifies being competent, dutiful, and most importantly: always doing what is expected

³⁸ Ibid., p. 74.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 89: "Hun har boltret seg i klassisk kultur og shoppet en del klær og rekvisita som tydeligvis har gitt henne litt av livsgnisten tilbake. Det er forbløffende å legge merke til hvor mye klær og rekvisita kan bety."

⁴⁰ A slogan well-used by Næss and meant as a practical norm in everyday life.

⁴¹ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 141: "Jeg liker alt som ikke har budsjett. Prosjekter som har budsjett er jeg med en gang mer skeptisk til."

⁴² Ibid., p. 72: "Jeg skal aldri noensinne betale en regning igjen. Verken på nettet eller på annen måte. Jeg skal leve av bytting og tyveri og skogen. Og når jeg er borte, skal skogen få leve av meg. Det er kontrakten."

of one. Loe helps us by implying that it should be conceived as a dictum of the *urnorske* tradition of egalitarianism combined with *Janteloven* (the native's very own 'communist manifesto'). 'Choose the golden mean in order not to provoke attention or stand out':

I have never dared to go the whole way and buy big. I think it is cleverness that has hindered me. Always clever. A small Toblerone is clever. It shows a father's consideration for his family. He remembered them. He thought of them. But a huge Toblerone is too big to be clever. It's extreme and tells a vague story of its buyer. He has an eating disorder. He is alone. He is weird.⁴³

Here 'Norwegian Taoism' has assumed a negative connotation and in *Doppler* the portrayed image of the indigen reminds of Karl Kraus' social democrat. Kraus was of the opinion that the social democrat was stupid, a term Loe likes to use as well, to the extent of being autistic.⁴⁴ Stupidity is inextricably linked to cleverness – to be clever has in Loe's universe become synonymous with suffering from an all-encompassing 'illness'.

In continuation of the dismissal *flinkhet* Doppler excommunicates the foundation of civilization, namely the written word. This is done as an effort to stop the domestication of his son. The primitive hinge in Loe's authorship is traceable back to the novel *Naiv.Super.* (1996). It is an indicator of the author's naivistic approach, as the primitivism sought for functions the same way as naivism: by regression into an innocent childhood. In *Naiv.Super.* the main character's solution to existential dilemmas is found by pounding a 'bankebrett', a transitional object and in psychological terms a reaction against the domestication of the self.

Doppler's son shall not be corrupted by urban culture – or by any culture: "People just sit and write to show how clever they are and that's the last thing the world needs. It's words, words, words."⁴⁵ People are clever and culture is ill, and therefore his son's project of learning how to read is treated as undesirable:

⁴³ Ibid., p. 51: "Jeg har aldri våget å ta skrittet ut og kjøpe den store. Det er flinkheten som har hindret meg, tenker jeg. Alltid flink. Små Tobleroner er flinke. De viser en fars omtanke for sin familie. Han husket dem. Han tenkte på dem. Men svære Tobleroner er for store til å være flinke. De er ekstreme og forteller en uklar historie om kjøperen. Han har et spiseproblem. Han er ensom. Han er rar."

⁴⁴ For the popular opinion on Karl Kraus see Alain Accardo's article: *Dumhetens apostler* in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, august issue 2005, pp. 16-17. See also Karl Kraus: *I denna stora tid. Texter ur Die Fackel i urval och översättning av Lars Bjurman* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag, 1995).

⁴⁵ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 143: "Folk sitter bare og skriver for å vise hvor flinke de er og det er det siste verden trenger. Det er ord, ord, ord."

He needs to be stopped. His cleverness needs to be cut at its root. Gregus is not going down to civilization. He will be in the forest with me. And I'm going to make fires with a handful. The newspapers will be burnt straight away. If Gregus wants to do further reading he needs to write himself. He needs to scratch on bark or use his blood. I'm thinking this should curb his love of reading.⁴⁶

One may ask if this is the way to re-educate, by the way of un-education, man into being 'deep' as opposed to 'shallow'. However, one might doubt the efficiency of a ban on the written word as a means to de-domestication and minimization of modern illness as long as the history of civilization is a history of remembrance. So does the 'civilized disease' cure with a bonfire of words? Not so, the tentacles of memory reach further than to the written word. They encompass the senses too:

In the evening pieces of the chorus turn up and I sing them uncritically long before a cold sweat breaks out and I realize it's the theme song of *Bananer i pyjamas* I'm reeling off. It's like a disease.⁴⁷

What is the remedy if culture is a disease? One particular antidote is implicated in Doppler's faithfully unclever way:

It's like in a film I saw many years ago where the main character's hand became evil and tried to kill him. In the end he saw it off with a chainsaw. He held the chainsaw in his healthy hand and pulled the starter with his mouth. Off with the evil hand.⁴⁸

Similarly, off with 'evil culture'? With chainsaws and bonfires as metaphorical tools we are left guessing. Nevertheless, imagination leaves little room for picturing 'peaceful transitions' to a new cultural habitus or an endorsement of Næssian norms of non-violence. Doppler's associations from *Evil Dead 2* (1987), a film that makes one plea the character to cut his own arm off, reflects his view on man: 'evil dead' is the conclusion to our condition. To use a reversed expression of Stein Mehren on the apparent status of society: when all the holy has oozed out, all that there is left is the

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 138: "Han må stoppes. Flinkheten hans må kuttes ved roten. Gregus skal ikke ned til sivilisasjonen. Han skal være i skogen med meg. Og jeg skal begynne å tenne opp med never. Avisene skal brennes rett opp, så hvis Gregus vil lese videre, må han skrive tekster selv. Han må risse dem inn i bark eller bruke blod. Det vil nok stagge leselysten, tenker jeg."

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 103: "Først i kveldingen dukker det opp brokker av refrenget og jeg synger dem ukritisk lenge før jeg kaldsvettende innser at det er vignettsangen til *Bananer i pyjamas* jeg står og lirer av meg ... Det er som en sykdom."

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 103: "Det er som i en film jeg så for mange år siden hvor hovedpersonens hånd ble ond og forsøkte å drepe ham. Til slutt sagde han den av med motorsag. Han holdt motorsagen i den friske hånden og dro i startrepet med munnen. Av med den onde armen."

demons. In Loe's universe everybody seems to be a demon and considered as good as dead.

Loe is not alone in his dismissal of culture and the repetition it represents. Neither is he alone in depicting a social-democratic reality that negates the social-democratic reality. But if one wishes for cultural amnesia, another suffers from it.

Loe's main character repeats the same tradition he wishes to escape, while the 'nutty professor' in Mattis Øybø's debut is fascinated by the culturally amnesiac to the same extent the past, as cultural and individual history, remains a mystery. In Øybø's *Alle ting skinner* (2004), the thematic ingredients are an unstable global climate and a little bit of anarchism. Snow that refuses to stop falling gets the proportions of religious revelation. When nature reveals and reminds us of its powers, the step to full chaos is seemingly not far away. Like Joseph Conrad in *The Secret Agent* (1966), Øybø thinks of civilization as only a thin coating of protection against the anarchistic impulses and atavistic roots that lurk underneath the surface of ordered society – nature is anarchistic. The repetition that is civilization has made us tautologic and thus paralyzed. Man has bought a shallow security in guarantee of a certain death in boredom, bored to the borders of dementia. And so it seems man is doomed to live – in dementia. Being suicidal is the trademark of life because repetition is the death of man. The cultural repetition is attempted eliminated by the symbolical burning of Ibsen's and Hamsun's books. Otto, the main character of the novel, thinks the repetitive force of culture has made us forget the answers, or was it the questions that we forgot? He does not remember. The ambience of *Alle ting skinner* is that of a nightmare, repeating the rotten culture it attacks because it does not know better. Otto's formation – or transformation – falls short and thus also weakens the critique, unable as it is to manifest a world beyond the tautological.

Unfortunately, native minds portraying a social-democratic negation of a social-democratic habitus end up in a countercultural anti-posture where both good and evil become platitudes. They are as flat as the shallow emotional spectre of Øybø's villains: terrorists that by sensible democracy decide to stop further terrorizing. In *Doppler* social reality is repressed: social-democratic reality is abhorred and therefore denied by moving to the woods, while the nature and reality of evil remains social-democratic. In

Loe's universe even the villains are decent people, deep down: "*Litt som røverne i Kardemomme by. God på bunnen, liksom.*"⁴⁹

Nature is Culture

I wasn't an element that Oslo wished to have in its streets. I didn't spread positivity or energy. I wasn't an advantage. Not for my closest, for my work, or for the more diffuse greater society and the economical framework that runs it. I was weeded out when I was about to become a burden. Nature is so ingenious it weeded me out before I did real harm. It's an impressive system. Thousands of years with nature and culture have specialized the mechanism in such a way that people like me are removed from the rows. We are neutralized. Enemies of the people that are on the verge of puncturing the brittle illusion of community and meaning, are sent away to reflect. To the seas for example, or to the mountains, or behind some closed door, or as in my case: out in the woods.⁵⁰

Doppler clearly thinks of himself as the ghost-busting hero of Henrik Ibsen's *The Wild Duck* (1884). But while some life-lies are attempted punctured, other kind of life-lies are upheld, as for example the native tendency to diffuse nature and culture into a two-in-one solution. One of the consequences of the inclination of seeking character in *friluftsliv* is to see 'nature' through a domesticated version of wilderness ideology. Virgin forests are deemed inherently good and 'healthy' while culture and the city as a symbol of it, is rotten. If classic nature is the 'g-spot' of the Norwegian soul, the preferred landscape is that of adventure.

Nordmarka was an invention of the wealthy bourgeois of the 19th and 20th century. They saw the forest as a 'nature cathedral', borrowing elements from British hiking and camping tradition (enabled by tradition of aristocratic sport) and a spiritual coating from German nature-romanticism. The traditional Norwegian arena for *friluftsliv* was enabled, even more than by aristocratic sports by the social-democratization of culture and by the fact that action no longer hinged on imperatives

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 78.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 90-91: "Jeg var ikke et element Oslo ønsket å ha i sine gater. Jeg spredde ikke positivitet og energi. Jeg var ikke et pre. Verken for mine nærmeste, for jobben min eller for det mer diffuse storsamfunnet og de økonomiske rammene som styrer det. Jeg var i ferd med å bli en byrde, og da ble jeg luket ut. Naturen er så sinnrikt innrettet at den luket meg ut før jeg gjorde virkelig skade. Det er et imponerende system. Årtusener med natur og kultur har spisset mekanismen på en måte som gjør at slike som meg fjernes fra rekkene. Vi uskadeliggjøres. Folkefiender som er på nippet til å ta hull på den skjøre illusjonen av felleskap og mening, sendes bort for å tenke seg om. Til havs, for eksempel, eller til fjells, eller bak en eller annen lukket dør, eller som i mitt tilfelle: ut i skogen."

of survival but on the cultural and social need to display ‘healthy’ activity as opposed to those of the degenerated and ‘ill’ city. This was in complete accordance with the image of the native as healthy, sober and self-sufficient practitioner of *friluftsliv* that was at the time in-the-making.

The inclination to dissolve ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ into a semi-atavistic blend is particularly visible in the rehabilitative function that nature is given: “*Jeg har sagt opp jobben og flyttet ut i skogen fordi det var det eneste fornuftige å gjøre.*”⁵¹ The romantic cornerstone of Rousseau’s philosophy – to be true to one’s feelings – is tangent to an equal indigenous inclination, only less romantic. Dwelling in classic nature is foremost ‘rational’, therapeutic activity. Wood ways give a good life. This is close to Næss’s opinion on the healing forces of being in ‘natural’ surroundings:

People who have succeeded according to the usual criteria tend to regard everything as a means. In this situation, I believe that therapy to a great extent should be milieu therapy and nature therapy, and that correct milieux have uncharted resources for meaningful and good life.⁵²

Notwithstanding the unmistakable dystopian-misanthropic tone of the novel that gives the main character a darker shade than the optimistic Askeladden, the essential kernel of his cosmology consists of a social democratic decency. He thus represents a closer kinship with the likes of Nansen and Næss and their mythological ancestor Askeladden than what might seem appropriate at first reading. It must be noted that some of the attributes of the Norwegian “Ash-lad” are also characteristics of primitive philosophies: they share the emphasis on spontaneous action and a deep respect, if not love, for nature. Both *Askeladden* and *Doppler* contain the same ethics – identification with the weaker, harmony with nature, spontaneity and autonomy in the sense of self-sufficiency. Perhaps most importantly, both express the belief that direct communication and foremost *communion* with animals is possible.

A native perennial philosophy surfaces in the nomadic reverence of nonhuman life in the principle of killing with remorse: not out of habit, but out of actual *need*. Næss thinks in similar patterns: man has to apologize for being part of nature. The bio-egalitarian reverence towards all should be apologetically moderated by the norm of vital needs. These two contradictory and competing norms are meant to be united in practice in a “*realistic egalitarian attitude*” when “the hunter has a long discussion with

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁵² Arne Næss: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 63.

the spirit of the bear, and explains apologetically that the larder is bare and that he must now kill the bear to nourish his family.”⁵³ Doppler explains to Bongo after killing her mother:

Contrary to my good intentions I taxed nature in a brutal way, and probably took more out of it than I was capable of giving back ... I didn't kill your mother out of old habit. I did it out of need. I hadn't eaten for days.⁵⁴

The Askeladdean harmony is that of a special sensitivity to ‘nature’ and essentially of the same kind that Doppler tries to establish. To be in harmony with nature, although the esoteric connotations such a norm might invoke, is foremost a rational-pragmatic attitude of ‘*måtehold*’. The norm of harmony implies an ecological balance – “*Det skal jo helst vare en slags balanse i sakene*” – and an equal reverence for life. It fits well with what Witoszek calls the Scandinavian version of Enlightenment, represented by the enlightened preacher-peasant and enabled by the equally native tradition of egalitarianism. The tradition is seen as an “extraordinary balance of tradition and innovation, in a Christian ethos combined with a rationalpragmatic agenda.”⁵⁵ The egalitarianism visible in *Doppler* is a continuation of the two-in-one legacy to see ‘nature’ as the ideal breeder and cultivator of spirit, re-enacted and cherished by the native countercultural corps. Doppler stresses the interconnectedness of everything in a similar manifest as those promoted by spiritual deep ecologists:

Barter economy should be a part of the teaching plan. The young should be encouraged to exchange goods and services rather than to buy all sorts of things. The future of the planet depends on this. Because people don't own the earth, it's the earth that owns people. The flowers are our sisters, and the horse, the big eagle, not to mention the elk, are our brothers. And how can one buy or sell anything at all? Because who owns the warmth of the air or the sound of wind in the trees? And the sap in the branches contains the memory of those that have lived before us. And the sound of the gurgling stream has in it the voice of my father and his father. And we need to teach our children that the ground we walk on contains the ashes of our ancestors and that everything that happens to the

⁵³ Ibid., p. 176. Italics are Næss'.

⁵⁴ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), pp. 10 & 15-16: ”Stikk i strid med min gode vilje hadde jeg beskattet naturen på en brutal måte og sannsynligvis tatt mer ut fra den enn jeg var i stand til å gi tilbake ... jeg drepte ikke moren din av gammel vane. Jeg gjorde de av behov. Jeg hadde ikke spist på dagevis.”

⁵⁵ See Nina Witoszek: *Fugitives from Utopia: The Scandinavian Enlightenment Reconsidered* in Bo Stråth & Øystein Sørensen (eds.): *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997), p. 74.

earth also will happen to us and that if we spit on the earth we spit on ourselves.⁵⁶

The impulse to dissolve dichotomies is particularly clear in the Norwegian nature tradition and manifests a conspicuous cosmological paradox. All the while the emotional is equalled with the physical inasmuch as nature and culture are seen as one, 'nature' is through an act of a *deus ex machina* given all the admirable qualities while 'culture' is given the pride of place at the demon's dinner table. The 'natural state' is seen as healthy and good, while everything cultured (man included) is ill. The crux is, and has been for some time now, how to combine the atavistic impulses of the two-in-one solution with rationality expressed within civilization, without resorting to a complete abandonment of the civilized or an equally damaging dismissal of 'irrationality' – magic, intuition and emotion.

The Lonely Man

I don't like people. I don't like what they do. I don't like what they are. I don't like what they say... Nothing bothers me less than what people think. People can think what they want. In any case I don't like them and seldom respect their opinions... To watch TV becomes an encyclopaedia on why I don't like people. TV is the concentrate on everything that is repulsive about us. Human qualities which are already hard to reconcile with in reality become directly glaring on TV. People appear as idiots. Even I would look like an idiot on TV. Everything human is strange.⁵⁷

Has Loe misunderstood Jens Bjørneboe? The latter is famous for the words 'Nothing human is strange for me'. The reason why Doppler needs forest-therapy seems to be

⁵⁶ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), pp. 67-68: "Bytteøkonomi bør inn i læreplanen. De unge bør oppfordres til å bytte varer og tjenester heller enn til å kjøpe alt mulig. Jordas fremtid avhenger av dette, sier jeg. For menneskene eier ikke jorda, sier jeg. Det er jorda som eier menneskene. Blomstene er våre søstre, og hesten, den store ørnen, for ikke å snakke om elgen, er våre brødre. Og hvordan kan man kjøpe eller selge noe som helst? For hvem eier varmen i luften eller lyden av vinden i trærne? Og sevja i grenene inneholder minnet av dem som har levd før oss. Og lyden av den klukkende bekken har i seg stemmen til min far og til hans far igjen. Og vi må lære våre barn at grunnen vi går på inneholder asken av våre forfedre og alt som skjer med jorda også vil skje med oss og at hvis vi spytter på jorda så spytter vi på oss selv."

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 33 & 71: "Jeg liker ikke folk. Jeg liker ikke det de gjør. Jeg liker ikke det de er. Jeg liker ikke det de sier... Ingenting bekymrer meg mindre enn hva folk tror. Folk kan tro hva de vil. Jeg liker dem uansett stort sett ikke og respekterer sjelden deres meninger... Det å se på tv blir for meg som et oppslagsverk over hvorfor jeg ikke liker folk. Tv er selve konsentratet av alt som er frastøtende med oss. Det som allerede i virkeligheten er vanskelig å forsones seg med av menneskelige egenskaper blir direkte grelt når det kommer på tv. Folk fremstår som idioter. På tv ville selv jeg ha fremstått som en idiot. Alt menneskelig er meg fremmed."

other people. Sociability has become obsolete and annoying and life should be septonically free from other people. Loe's posture is no different than Jean-Paul Sartre's existential insight that 'hell is other people', depicted in his play *Huis Clos* (1944). Doppler explains, echoing an essential structure in the character of the Norwegian *friluft*-champion, namely the anti-social tendency: "We are born alone and we die alone. It's just to get used to that sooner or later. Loneliness is fundamental in the whole construction."⁵⁸ Life is as lonely as in Michel Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island* (2006) which depicts the end of man as a social and thus loving species.

Doppler's enterprise is a re-canonization of the Norwegian ideal of 'egalitarianism in the woods, (hopefully) without people'. The problematic aspect of Doppler's forest-egalitarianism is that it presupposes the absence of other humans, or at least the minimization of human presence and their settlements, and as such should be worrying. Nature is 'natural' only as long as man is excluded from it. It is in tune with Næssian philosophy inspired by Gestalt psychology: "go inside nature and not out in nature". The question is whether we should go so deep that we disappear in it, like Doppler:

One problem with people is that once they fill a room it is the people and not the room you see. Big, deserted landscapes stop being big, deserted landscapes if they have one or more humans in them. The gaze is defined by the human. And people's looks are almost always directed towards other people. It is in this way the illusion has been made that people are more important than things on earth that are nonhuman.⁵⁹

The anti-social pattern found in *Doppler* is a continuation of a Norwegian tradition of seeking the self in the solitude of nature – the perfect place for the existentially anguished native. The protagonist is the personification of the solitary Norwegian mistrusting other people. Man is the source of confusing signals and unpredictability – "you can search for a thousand years, but you will never find more confusing signals than those that come from humans."⁶⁰ If there is something Doppler seeks it is

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 42: "Vi blir født alene og vi dør alene. Det er bare å venne seg til det først som sist. Aleneheten er grunnleggende i hele konstruksjonen."

⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 139-140: "Et problem med folk er at med en gang fyller et rom, er det folkene man ser og ikke rommet. Store, øde landskaper slutter å være store, øde landskaper hvis de har et eller flere mennesker i seg. Mennesket definerer hvor blikket skal ligge. Og menneskets blikk er nesten alltid rettet mot andre mennesker. På den måten er det skapt en illusjon om at mennesket er viktigere enn det på jorden som ikke er menneske."

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 19: "Du kan lete i tusen år, men du vil aldri finne mer forvirrende signaler enn dem som kommer fra mennesker."

simplicity and predictability, something which is conveniently offered by the forest which “*skjønner alt og rommer alt.*”⁶¹ The forest is a Norwegian version of an authentic utopia. The forest is boundless.

When man no longer belongs to a social species, he becomes an alienated onlooker. This is witnessed in Doppler’s ‘sermon from the hill’, which expresses the psychological need to ‘level’ in an ethically egalitarian and therefore indifferent attitude that can be summarized as ‘no one is better than I am’. The dark shade in Doppler’s cosmology gives it the resemblance of Ibsen’s tragic “enemy of the people.”⁶² Like doctor Stockmann, Doppler is driven by desperation and fuelled by anguish and the hypocrisy of modern life – nobody is listening to him either. Doppler is yelling out his helplessness on top of *Nordmarka*, prophetically to everybody and apocalyptically to nobody:

I’m both king and prime minister and I’m giving a speech to the people. Dear fellow citizens, I yell, I don’t like you. You have to get yourself together. You must lift your gaze and stop being so damn clever. And you right wing people need to get rid of your damn dogs and you need to wipe away those self-satisfied smiles, and you need to start trading. And bicycling. We need to bicycle and trade like hell if we’re going to have a chance at keeping it going. Who owns the whispers of the wind in the trees and the flowers on the ground? And the Teletubbies can burn in hell, and hell, I’m stopping up, I’m too drunk to keep the train of thought in my New Year’s speech, but Løvenskiold, I yell, you must give the forest back to the people because you don’t really own it, nobody should be able to own a forest, and father, I continue, you are gone and I didn’t know you and I feel alone, I have always felt alone and I push everybody away because I’m a fool like everybody else, and nobody knows me and I’m afraid nobody will ever know me as long as I live, and I give up, and in the end just yell, fuck, fuck, fuck until I lose my voice.⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁶² See Ibsen’s *En folkefiende* in *Samlede verker – jubileumsutg*, volumes 1-3. In english translation: R. Farquharson Sharp: *Four great plays by Henrik Ibsen* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981).

⁶³ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 95: ” Jeg er både konge og statsminister og jeg holder tale til befolkningen. Kjære landsmenn, roper jeg, jeg liker dere ikke. Dere må ta dere sammen. Dere må løfte blikket og slutte og være så forbannet flinke. Og dere høyrefolk må kvitte dere med de helvetes hundene deres og tørke av de selvtilfredse smilene, og dere må begynne å bytte. Og sykle. Vi må sykle og bytte som faen hvis vi skal ha en sjanse å holde det gående. Og hvem eier vindens sus i trærne og blomstene på marken? Og Teletubbienne må brenne i helvete, og faen, jeg går i stå, jeg er for full til å holde tråden i en nyttårstale, men Løvenskiold, roper jeg, du må gi skogen tilbake til folket, for du eier den ikke egentlig, ingen burde kunne eie en skog, og far, fortsetter jeg, du er borte og jeg kjente deg ikke

The native cosmology is, if not unique, of the seldom kind to suppose that the structure of man's character is only to be found in the solitude of nature's embrace – from Hamsun and Nansen to Næss and Loe. Emil Durkheim's studies of aboriginal culture⁶⁴ suggest that 'primitive man' uses the natural world as a direct mirror of the self: the natural world is only conceivable in social terms and natural objects are made to embody social subjects. From this point of view, the complete absence in native fictional and philosophical deep ecology of a basis from where to establish boundaries for social conduct becomes understandable. It can be argued that Næssian ecology (albeit the many times justified and paramount critique on the lack of a social theory in deep ecology) is precisely a theory of native 'social ecology', in the sense that man is seen as possessing a hotline to nature (except his own) where this very same nature becomes the parent, the model and the ideal of man.

What is intriguing about the native infatuation with the non-human (or in some cases the non-living) is that it is traceable back to an anti-social tendency. Næss elaborates:

Feeling apart in many human relations, I identified with 'nature'. From about the age of eight a definite mountain became for me a symbol of a benevolent, equal-minded, strong 'father', or of an ideal human nature.⁶⁵

The thoughts of the main character are similar, who finds that there is no need for a human mirror of the self but that an elk will do, more so than other humans:

When I woke up this morning we lay looking at each other in an intimate way I rarely have experienced with people. I don't think I even have experienced that with my wife.⁶⁶

The soul mate of Doppler being an elk, one should not be surprised when the self is identified as Africa.⁶⁷ To identify oneself with the weaker, in this case Africa instead of the by now emancipated Nora, is not a curiosity in the history of native self-

og jeg føler meg alene, jeg har alltid følt meg alene og jeg støter alle fra meg fordi jeg er en tosk som alle andre, og ingen kjenner meg og jeg frykter at ingen kommer til å kjenne meg så lenge jeg lever, og jeg gir opp og roper till slutt bare faen, faen, faen helt til jeg mister stemmen.”

⁶⁴ See Emil Durkheim: *The Elementary Structures of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 220-222.

⁶⁵ See Peter Reed & David Rothenberg (eds.): *Wisdom in the open air* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1993), p. 67.

⁶⁶ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 14: “...da jeg våknet i dag, ble vi liggende og se på hverandre på en nær og intim måte som jeg sjelden har opplevd med mennesker. Jeg tror ikke jeg engang har opplevd det med min kone.”

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62: ”Nei, det er du som er Nora, sier min kone. Du stakk fra alt et halvt år siden. Jeg er ikke Nora, sier jeg. Jeg er Afrika.”

identification, much less in the tradition of cultural radicalism. The feeling of communion – “*det var nesten i meste laget*” – is not singularly positive, rather, the elk is tolerable, even lovable, ultimately because Bongo is not a producer of code but a recipient of it. In the docudrama *Grizzly Man* (2005), a modern nature-enchanted adventurer tries to establish direct communion with bears in Alaska. The enterprise ends in death, and the assembled footage resists the sentimentality and naïvete of the environmental adventurer which is comparable to Loe’s naïvistic wilderness ideology. As in *Grizzly Man*, the animal portrayed is an object, and therefore tolerable. The protagonist capitulates: “*Det er herlig med en som ikke kan snakke.*”⁶⁸ One may wonder whether Næss would consider Doppler to be an ‘emotionally progressed’ since his self-identification is no less than the size of Africa. Næss’s concept of self-realization is directly linked to self-identification, which in turn is an indicator on the goal of perfection. Emotional progress is the goal of perfection, the latter considered a way to ‘natural’ salvation.

Anti-sociability is not only a misanthropic dislike of an undefined people but the requirement on which the happiness of Doppler hinges on:

On the last day of January I realize that it’s over a month ago I last spoke with people. It works perfectly. Everything you can say to others, and I haven’t said any of it. I’m living proof of that there in the end is not so much to say. I’m proud of myself. It’s a good start of the New Year.⁶⁹

His isolation must be seen in light of the central cultural category of “*fred og ro*” that exhorts influence on native social life. According to Marianne Gullestad, the category must be understood as a harmonious and calm content in everyday life. Peace is something that can be disturbed by ‘too much’ social interaction. It can mean nag, worry, racket, interruptions, and conflicts and must thus be restricted.⁷⁰ Implicitly, having it peaceful and quiet suggests non-fictional and non-Dopplerian Norwegians are begging to be left alone. In this case: in nature. Even if they are not begging to be left alone, “*fred og ro*” must be seen in relation to the particularly Norwegian norm guiding social behaviour that Doppler in the beginning of this chapter seemingly distances

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 15.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 100: ”På den siste dagen i januar går det opp for meg at det er over en måned siden sist jeg snakket med mennesker. Det fungerer utmerket. Alt det man kan si til andre, og så har jeg ikke sagt noe av det. Jeg er et levende bevis på at det i grunnen ikke er så mye å si. Jeg er stolt av meg selv. Det er en god start på året.”

⁷⁰ A free translation from Marianne Gullestad: *Kultur og Hverdagsliv* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1989), p. 127: ”’fred’ er noe som kan ødelegges av “for mye” sosialt samvær. Sosialt samvær kan bety mas, bekymring, bråk, forstyrrelser, konflikter og må derfor begrenses.”

himself from: 'å ha det koselig'. This untranslatable 'kos' suggests that people come together to enjoy 'peace and quiet' in the company of others.

Native critique on the cultural category of "fred og ro" and "denne frastøtende norske kosen" as Doppler puts it, are amounting. Yet, what these social requirements and demands actually imply often remains eclipsed in the debate. This suggests at least a semi-unconscious element within these cultural categories and their *modus operandi*. What they manifest in terms of psychology is varying degrees of denial of confrontation. 'Peace and harmony' combined with the need of having it 'koselig', suggests an importance of avoiding social conflicts, and not necessarily of solving them. Næss's adverse judgement on modern life takes the form of a diffuse condemnation of an equally diffuse conglomerate of institutions, instead of the men that created the very same institutions.⁷¹ The tendency is clearly seen in Doppler, who enjoys the forest as long as it does not entail social interaction. For Doppler *his* woods are over-crowded. The harmony of the main character is as fictitious as the freedom from contempt that only can be achieved by escaping social conflicts:

I'm carving the totem for my life while the others are drinking or sleeping. I'm thinking I don't recognize myself in my own forest. It was so peaceful and calm. Here I was with Bongo in a kind of balance from morning to night and didn't put on airs for anybody. But that was before. Now there is little left of the forest I once knew. We must have come to the wrong forest I say to Bongo. Here is so weird.⁷²

The Dopplerian project fails since it ultimately fails in its promulgation of a different view on man and his nature. The dichotomy of bad and good is upheld and the demarcated line is still drawn between the 'natural' and the 'cultivated'. His undifferentiated hatred towards anything smacking of 'culture', essentially meaning 'clever people', is the result of his monotheistic quest to instate 'nature' in the place of

⁷¹ Arne Næss: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 24, 71. Næss's critique on this point coincides with Foucauldian structuralism where the concept of power is seen as embedded in the discourses of society and thus assuming a character of omnipotence and omnipresence due to its undifferentiated source (or: the source of "evil" in this case). Meanwhile, inquiries on the nature of deep ecological social theory or on a contractual basis for social conduct are disregarded by pointing to the miracle medicine of an undefined "cultural diversity" against unwarranted behaviour.

⁷² Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 139: "Mens de andre drikker eller sover, hugger jeg totempæl for harde livet og tenker at jeg ikke kjenner igjen min egen skog. Den som var så fredelig og stille. Her var Bongo og jeg i en slags balanse fra morgen til kveld og gjorde oss ikke til for noen... Men det var før. Nå er det lite igjen av den skogen jeg en gang kjente. Vi må være kommet til feil skog, sier jeg til Bongo. Her er så underlig."

‘culture’. The ‘natural’ is unequivocally seen as good while the cultural and cultivated is respectively unanimously bad. The traditional western signs are simply reversed – nature becomes rational and culture irrational. Instead of breaking the dichotomous mould, it is simply turned upside down. The problematic aspect of such an operation is that it does not deliver: the demonic qualities of the daimonic are not redeemed, but simply rearranged.

Man is seen as a blister on the corpse of nature. This reveals how far Doppler has gone to remove himself from himself. As such, it is a continuation of a native agenda of warning and escaping ‘urban loops’ hovering on a national-ancestral cosmology that unites thinkers from perceivably different-minded ‘sophies’, such as Peter Wessel Zapffe and Næss. Doppler echoes Zapffe’s virulent ‘virus-humanity’, but his views are moderated by indifference. The Dopplerian manifesto is without a credo, as the protagonist laconically admits:

The people and religions of the world need a helping hand if we are going to get over the bump. Nobody would be happier than me if that would happen. But I have to admit that I don’t have any faith in it. I think it’s too late. I think we who live now must disappear and be replaced with a new human race with blank sheets and a smaller amount of aggressive characteristics. A less possessive human race, a version with the capacity to take a broad view of things.⁷³

A Crusade of Existential Nihilism

We are incessantly supposed to be doing things. It’s good in a way as long as you are active, no matter how stupid the activity should be. We want at all costs to avoid being bored, but I have noticed that I like being bored. Boredom is underestimated. I tell Gregus that my plan is to be bored until I get happy.⁷⁴

The boredom that Doppler finds in the woods and seeks to maintain is of a different kind than that of the alienating ticking of the clock. It is an existential boredom of the romantic kind: a waiting for the meaningful Godot – a meaningful good to believe in.

⁷³ Ibid., p. 150: ”Verdens folkeslag og religioner behøver en håndsrekning hvis vi skal komme oss over kneika. Ingen vil være gladere enn meg dersom det lykkes. Men jeg må innrømme at jeg ikke har noe tro på at det kan gå. Jeg tror tåget har gått. Jeg tror vi som lever nå må forsvinne og at det må oppstå en ny menneskeart. Med blanke ark og et mindre antall aggressive egenskaper. En mindre eigod menneskeart. En variant som har evnen til å se litt stort på tingene.”

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 84: ”Det ligger innbakt i oss at vi til stadighet skal gjøre ting. Så lenge man er virksom, er det bra, på et vis, uansett hvor dum virksomheten måtte være. Vi vil på død og liv unngå å kjede oss, men jeg har begynt å merke at jeg liker å kjede meg. Kjedsomheten er undervurdert. Jeg sier til Gregus at planen min er å kjede meg så lenge at jeg blir glad.”

We are led to believe that the original boredom was part of everyday life, characterized by meaningless repetition where everything comes as fully described, circumscribed and prescribed. It was one that could be characterized as a feeling of fullness in the sense that one “has had too much of the same and everything becomes banal.”⁷⁵ The boredom of Doppler tips over, together with the bike and Doppler on it, to a state where existential boredom becomes the quest (besides honouring his late father): “*Jeg skal rendyrke det å gjøre ingenting til et nivå få har gjort før meg. Og jeg skal ikke ned til sivilisasjonen, samme faen.*”⁷⁶ The boredom is seen as a means to instigate a process of what Heidegger probably would have called the search for *Dasein* – the pursuit of the pursuit of the self. Doppler copies Heidegger’s recipe: to become more passive and ‘open’ to the meaning of the self as a direct means to de-estrane the Being of man.

In short, the quest could be characterized as the search for a meaningful ‘personal truth’ in line with the postmodern maxim of relativism. But existential nihilism combined with a therapeutic mindset proves problematic from a social perspective. Richard Stivers writes that at the levels of meaning and emotion, the loss of common morality leads to a “completely interiorized, subjective reality.” Complete subjectivism gives way for “the need for constant experimentation in regard to meaning”⁷⁷ in order to combat the meaningless of a society that has been emptied of sociability. This insular, and in the end anti-moral attitude, is expressed by the main character in the quintessential credo of the modern hero, ‘every man for himself’: “The right wing man sees me as a soothsayer. He doesn’t notice that I’m actually trying to get him to go home.”⁷⁸

The spontaneity of Askeladden is the kind Doppler tries to discover in the ‘spontaneous’ idea of building a totem as a means out of his crisis. Accordingly, ‘cleverness’ is seen as the biggest threat towards spontaneity, understood as it is as some sort of individual super-consciousness embedded in the cultural. In *Doppler* man’s true nature can only be found in the woods by making a phallic totem honouring men. The long days of making the totem seem to result in a new mode of being:

⁷⁵ Lars Fr. H. Svendsen: *Kjedsomhetens filosofi* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1999), p. 42. The twofold typologization of boredom also derived from Svendsen’s original fourfold typology.

⁷⁶ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 95.

⁷⁷ See Richard Stivers: *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 103-105.

⁷⁸ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 123: ”høyremannen ser på meg som en slags sannsiger. Han merker ikke at jeg egentlig forsøker å få ham til å dra hjem.”

It has become like this, I have changed. I have been in the forest a whole year and I'm not the same as before. It's not easy to say when the change occurred. It has surely come step by step as most changes do, but that something has happened is without doubt. The forest gives and takes. And it forms those that seek it in its image. I'm becoming forest myself.⁷⁹

If we understand the concept of catharsis as a form of emotional cleansing, climax, or simply as a radical change in emotions that result in renewal or restoration of the individual, Doppler might be characterized as a man united with the environment. But he does not seem interested in his nature. Instead of re-enacting the classic structure of a rite de passage and making it complete by re-integration, Doppler finds himself to suddenly *care*, for nature. He does not find a Heideggerian *Dasein*, but rather an insight into the willingness to fight for the environment. Are we to believe that he is still searching for a meaningful good? At the moment, the only goodness is to be found in the woods, symbolizing the true home of the native. Already Nansen invoked the image of nature as a source of the authentic Norwegian '*folkehjem*'. In *Doppler* the woods is the only home. This is revealed to Doppler on no less than the day of the Norwegian celebration of the self: "The birches are green and new-leaved and it is national day in the forest. Everything is clean. Everything is Norwegian."

The acknowledged hatred of the Norwegian, "I'm thinking in a numb way that I detest the 17th of May... I detest this way to celebrate the Norwegian"⁸⁰, does not mean hatred towards humanity *in toto*, since Norway must be considered an "insignificant suburb to the real world."⁸¹ The native dystopia is not real enough. In any case, real people are those outside the borders of Norway. Doppler decides to embark on a journey that resembles romantic ethnotourism:

The conditions here in the forest are no longer of such character that we can flourish in them. We need air to breath and room to think big in. The world waits for us. We are about to embark on a journey which might be long. I don't exactly know where this is coming from, but I feel it's pushing, so I just say it,

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 141: "Slik har det blitt. Jeg har forandret meg. Jeg har snart vært i skogen i et helt år og jeg er ikke lenger den samme som jeg var. Når forandringen inntraff, er ikke greit å si. Den har sikkert kommet gradvis som forandringer flest, men at noe har skjedd er hevet over tvil. Skogen gir og tar. Og den former dem som oppsøker den i sitt bilde. Jeg er i ferd med å bli skog selv."

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 154: "Bjørka står grønn og nyutsprunget og det er nasjonaldag i skogen. Alt er rent. Alt er norsk... Jeg avskyr 17. mai, tenker jeg på en bedøvet måte... Jeg avskyr denne måten å feire det norske på."

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 159: "Norge er en ubetydelig forstad til den virkelige verden. Og vi er i ferd med å fjerne oss mer og mer fra den."

even if I had seen myself doing nothing after the totem was made. I was on the contrary supposed to do less than any human has done before me. I was to approach the magic zero. But now I stand with my two disciples [son Gregus and elk Bongo], because I notice that I have started to view them as disciples, and envision for them a journey which might be long... There is always more forest.⁸²

We glimpse the beginning of the journey of the monomyth as described by Joseph Campbell. The ending of *Doppler* bears resemblance to the classic elements of 'the ultimate warrior' of mankind. A war necessitating a crusade reveals the missionary and emancipatory agenda of Loe, and is comparable to the last norm in the deep ecology platform which could be reformulated as 'deep ecologists, unite!'⁸³ How serious this crusade should be taken as must remain under speculation, but the modus operandi of the new hero is truthfully one of running away – like Peer Gynt's and Faust's. He ends his story with apocalyptic words and in a missionary tone: "And this is a crusade. We are soldiers fighting to the last man. Against cleverness. Against stupidity. Because it's a war out there. It's a war."⁸⁴

Postscript

Reading the sequel of *Doppler*, *Volvo Lastvagnar* (2005), one is left with a sense of betrayal. The monomythic beginning of the new *Askeladden* crash-lands in the fields of Swedish countryside and goes up in smoke with Maj-Britt (or 'Hasj'-Britt). His quest is conversely beaten out by the rigorous scout training of the pedantic von Borring. If the parody on the aristocratic scout leader's name is intentional or not, or whether von Borring should be considered as a 'wise old man' (from the Campbellian schemata of the monomythic journey) is inessential.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 150-151: "Forholdene her i skogen er ikke lenger av en slik karakter at vi kan blomstre i dem, sier jeg. Vi trenger luft til å puste i og rom til å tenke stort i. Verden ligger og venter på oss, sier jeg. Vi skal ta fatt på en reise som kan bli lang. Jeg vet ikke helt hvor dette kommer fra, men jeg føler at de presser på, så da sier jeg det bare, selv om jeg egentlig hadde sett for meg at jeg ikke skulle gjøre noe etter at totempælen var ferdig. Jeg skulle tvert imot gjøre mindre enn noe menneske har gjort før meg. Jeg skulle nærme meg den magiske nullgrensen. Men nå står jeg med mine to disipler, for jeg merker at jeg har begynt å se litt på dem som disipler, og forespeiler dem en reise som kan bli lang... Det fins alltid flere skoger."

⁸³ See the 8th point in the deep ecology platform in Arne Næss & George Sessions: *The Deep Ecology Platform* in Nina Witoszek & Andrew Brennan (eds.): *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Næss and the Progress of Ecophilosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), p. 8: "Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation directly or indirectly to participate in the attempt to implement the necessary changes."

⁸⁴ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), p. 159: "Og dette er et felttog. Vi er soldater som skal kjempe til siste mann. Mot flinkheten. Mot dumheten. For det er krig der ute. Det er krig."

The point is that the sequel in all its essence is a betrayal of the heroic myth and of the norms of judgement, although problematic, that so clearly marked *Doppler*. The ending of the novel, in a native version of the monomythic character, might be a parody on the myth itself and thus on man and his foolish struggle. Or perhaps, in the light of hindsight – and in the light of the last page of *Doppler* which promises a continuation, ‘Inshallah’, the manifesto of Doppler reads as a reaction to recent U.S. foreign politics, in a style true to the credo of native cultural radicalism. As such, while in the waiting of a promised third novel, the Dopplerian project begun in the novel *Doppler* must be regarded as unfinished.

Chapter III: The Pastoral Recipe

An odd change has occurred. This condition, which is not belief or faith but the premise for any orientation, I now call the turn ... The unrest and unpleasant events, especially the distant fires, have also changed Maria. Before, we were concerned about finding out what was happening. Behind this curiosity was a hope that everything was going to be as before, that we again could understand and work. Now, we don't wish to go back to what was, but we are not indifferent. I don't quite know why, but it probably has to do with fear. The scrape of the order that existed smell burnt meat.

- Tore Stubberud, *Kjøtt i mørke*⁸⁵

The Becoming Body

If there is something gourmands detest, it is the smell of burnt meat. But here the smell heralds the apocalyptic 'turn' which is a blessing. In Stubberud's *Kjøtt i mørke* the times are of immediate post-apocalypse, the setting is pastoral and the place a secluded French countryside. The novel's approach is philosophical, and lends support to most hedonistic worldviews of the day. It has no plot, and very little action. What foremost happens in the novel is between the protagonist, whose name we never get to know, and the cows he herds. What is foremost discussed is what happens between the mouth and the rectum of the protagonist: the senses are all we have and *sensing* is also what unites us with animals. The main character's phenomenology resembles Maurice Merleau-Ponty's. He argued that the only world man can know is the experienced world lived through the body, as processed in the pre-objective conscience. As discussed in chapter two, Erlend Loe's critique centres on bourgeois evil as reasons to 'the fall of man'. Here it is indicated to be an abstraction of modern mind away from the body. In this sense, the body *is* the civilization critique.

The shift in Western thinking towards the biological and physical – from spirit to matter – is according to Pitirim Sorokin a tragic dualism, since it is a "simultaneous

⁸⁵ Tore Stubberud: *Kjøtt i mørke* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), pp. 9 & 43: "Det er skjedd en forunderlig forandring. Denne tilstand, som ikke er en tro, ikke et livssyn, men forutsetningen for enhver orientering – kaller jeg nå vendingen ... Uroen og de uhyggelige hendelsene, særlig de fjerne bålene, har også forandret Maria. Tidligere var vi opptatt av å vite hva som skjedde. Bak denne nysgjerrigheten lå et håp om at alt en gang ville bli som før, at vi igjen ville kunne forstå og arbeide. Nå er vi ikke likegyldige, men vi ønsker oss ikke tilbake til det som var. Jeg vet ikke helt hvorfor, men det har nok med redsel å gjøre. Restene av den orden som eksisterte, lukter brent kjøtt."

degradation and glorification of man.”⁸⁶ What seems to be tragic, or at least problematic, is that the postmodern philosophy par excellence – ‘becoming’ – builds simultaneously on transgressing boundaries and the attempt to overcome oppositions in general. Already Heraclitus meant that only becoming instead of being has truth. In Stubberud’s novel the becoming body is situated in-between realizations of moments of negativity and the principle of vitality: you become as much as you lose yourself. What is most important, it seems, is the distance between the mouth and the rectum, regarded as some sort of contemplative trajectory of man.

Adrian Franklin consoles those afraid of super-human becomings by claiming that becoming is exercised from the perspective of leisure. He writes that “the post-Cartesian body is a fully fledged Dionysian creature, justified in indulging, pleasuring, training, developing, honing, healing and so on.”⁸⁷ Revealingly, the literature we indulge in according to various best-seller lists is all about the body and the normally approved means to master and expand it: how-to-stop-smoking, yoga, but above all: culinary feasts and the accompanying day-after diets.

Kjøtt i mørke is not to be found on best-seller lists – the title itself refers to a dish and the carnal experience of eating (and perhaps getting eaten). When the context is the hegemonic hedonism of the day – food – the major symbols become the mouth and the ‘asshole’, as the observant farmer points out in his collection of texts. In *The discreet charm of the bourgeois* (1972), Luis Buñuel postures a critique of the bourgeois body-mentality which seems to be a sanctimonious continuation of the Puritan agenda, while eating is reduced to a social game and theme of surreal nightmares. Eating does not however prove to be problematic for the protagonist in *Kjøtt i mørke*. Neither can it be considered a game. The indulgence in food surfaces naturally enough also as a concern for its origins. Stubberud is not alone in fighting for a more internalized view on food, he shares his battle with Buddhists, moral vegetarians, and the movement *Slow Food* promoting ‘holistic gastronomy’. The emphasis of both animal activists and those primarily concerned with the quality of food (vegetarian or not), has foremost been on food-processing.⁸⁸ Food is also a reoccurring theme of environmentalism and is to be

⁸⁶ Pitirim A. Sorokin: *The Crisis of Our Age* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1992), p. 197.

⁸⁷ Adrian Franklin: *Nature and Social Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), p. 228.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 202: “In the 1990’s the natural food revolution became not only mainstream, it became more extreme. Largely as a result of a series of serious and sustained food scares the critical issue for consumers became not whether a product was natural but whether it was produced by *fully natural* means.” Whether one can produce anything by ‘fully natural means’ is debatable as much as it is a contradiction in terms. Critique on factory-farming abounds nevertheless.

found in concerns about sustainable food-production, agricultural practice and livestock methods.

Although Stubberud cannot be characterized as a deep ecologist – perhaps not even as a *'friluftsmenneske'*, his concern is similar to deep ecological environmentalists in Finland and organic vitalists in general. They repeatedly invoke agricultural self-sufficiency as the greatest virtue, from self-proclaimed eco-terrorist and fisherman Pentti Linkola to the peaceful peasant-priest Árpád Kovács condemning tofu-eating vegans as deliriously alienated.⁸⁹ Similar point of views are held by the furiously anti-deep ecological eco-anarchist Murray Bookchin, who visions a community where “nature and the organic modes of thought it always fosters will become an integral part of human culture” – and a culture where “agriculture will become a living part of human society.”⁹⁰ A native account interesting in its implications on *'bondekultur'* is Thure Erik Lund's claim that the industrialization of food-production is not a symptom, but one of the primary causes to a degenerate culture – and the malaise of society.⁹¹ Lund apologizes for the lack of physical agricultural work and a state of turbo-capitalism where even men of the earth have become estranged from the nature they cultivate and live on.⁹² The problematic argument seems to be that rural areas do not have rural culture.

⁸⁹ A curious, but not surprising fact that calls for further cultural studies of nature: finnish environmentalists influenced by deep ecology are more concerned about sustainable food production and are often workers of the earth or sea themselves, whereas norwegian deep ecologists tend to emphasize the importance of *'friluftsliv'* and of being in 'the woods'.

⁹⁰ Murray Bookchin: *Post-Scarcity Anarchism* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1971), pp. 118-119.

⁹¹ For Arne Garborg, the politically and culturally encrusted rhetorical exorcism of the Christiania-based bourgeois elite was “cannibalistic”. The worries have not changed, Arne Vinje, the current front-figure of *Norsk Bonde –og Småbrukarlag* thinks the same. Today, *Den Norske Turistforening* together with *Norges Bondelag* offer farming-adventures – “*Fra dal til fjell*” – in the form of of farm-tourism combined with *friluftsliv*, as the latest effort to fight farmer-cannibalism.

⁹²Thure Erik Lund: *Om Naturen* (Oslo: Tiden Norsk Forlag, 2000), pp. 78-79: “Det er dobbelt tragisk, for den sunne friske maten blir ikke bare brukt som argumentatorisk element i å opprettholde vårt næringsliv, den blir også brukt til å utvikle fråtsingen. Det sunne og det ekte understøtter den syntetiske matvareproduksjonen, ikke bare ved å være råvare til luksurter og junkfood, men også ved at det naturlige råvarene blir utsatt for ekstreme kvalitetskrav fra sentrale forbrukermyndigheter, noe som tvinger bonden til å benytte industrielle metoder i dyrkingen, der konserveringsmetodene til de samme råvarer er utviklet på samme strukturelle måte som genmanipulering og kjemikaliebruk, for at man skal kunne selge både råvarene og matvareindustriens produkter til rett tid, på rett sted, det vil si hvor som helst og når som helst, for å få best pris, og dermed, ved skipsfrakt, industriell konservering og tilvirkning fortsatt kunne sulte ut to tredjedeler av verdens fattige, ved å tilby matvarene der man får best pris. Industrialiseringen av maten, som den norske bonde er en sentral aktør i, er overhodet ikke noe symptom på den rike vestlige verdens fordervelse, den er en av dens få virkelige årsaker, som vi ikke kan få øye på.” Instead (*ibid.*, p. 71): “bestemmer de seg for å ta en lang ferie, og så selger de dyr og maskiner, tar seg jobb på kommunen, pynter opp gårdstunet, kapper ned flaggstanga, for å få bedre utsikt, kjøper parabol og drar på sydenturer.”

The literary pastoral tradition was already established by Shakespeare's canon and later made into a public good by the more romantically spirited. This was done both in action – with the introduction of botanical gardens and other recreational nature areas located in-between the 'urban' and the 'wild' landscape, and in cultural representation in opposition to industrialization and urbanization. Kathryn Hume describes the literary pastoral paradise as follows:

Arcadia and its equivalents give man independence. His responsibilities are limited. His flocks may need him, but a few classical pastoral figures have wives or children or larger political obligations. Nature is benign. In this paradisaal world, as in infancy, the principals are fed, clothed, and sheltered without exertion on their part. Economy, wars, ambition and want are not much understood or worried about. Leisure is abundant. The chief gratifications are sensory: taste, smell, and sight predominate, and enjoyment of such pleasures takes one back to a childlike state.⁹³

The postmodern equivalent to Arcadia consists of much the same: independence, leisure and pleasure, while the pastoral man is the very symbol of culture as much as the Latin *colere* indicates both cultural refinement and agricultural practice. It is not surprising that the deity of this particular pastoral landscape is the cow, since it not only makes (or made) agriculture possible, but also is the giver of milk and meat. This suggests that the native experience of culture (in nature) has as much to do with the barn as the woods.

Post-Apocalyptic Vitalism

The throbbing in the temple, in the chest, the whole organism's life in a universe of coincidences was before something consciousness had to reluctantly endure. Now the life of the body becomes an invitation to journey on. If before death lurked in everything that repeated itself, also nature, I now say yes to becoming a part of it.⁹⁴

The previous life of the protagonist was dull and tamed from man's 'natural' curiosity and instinctual survival. While the previous order drowned in irrelevant chatter –
“trettheten ved å høre altfor mange stemmer, de endeløse diskusjoner hvor de bare

⁹³ Kathryn Hume: *Fantasy and Mimesis. Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 61.

⁹⁴ Tore Stubberud: *Kjøtt i mørke* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), pp. 109-110: ”Bankingen i tinningen, i brystet, hele organismens liv i et univers av tilfeldigheter, var tidligere noe som bevisstheten motvillig måtte holde ut. Men nå blir kroppens liv en invitasjon til å reise videre. Mens døden tidligere lurte i alt som gjentok seg, også i naturen, sier jeg nå ja til å bli med.”

gjaldt å la stemmen lyde” – the current state lets the protagonist discover an abundant life and corpulent body. Nature as death and birth in a circle is no longer viewed as horrible repetition, but as the very principle on which the vitalist life-mode of the protagonist hinges on. The ‘new man’ does not need sedatives since he acknowledges the ‘loop of nature’.

Montaigne’s noble savagery is the nobility of the pastoral Candide – the ability to descend into one’s biology and to enjoy the array of bodily sensations of the moment and not the knowledge of the pure intellect. The marked character of man as weighed down by *historismus* is here substituted for a ‘historically free’ animal of instincts. Disgust and pleasure are by the biological body the primary life-orientating principles:

A strong sun and a big darkness had come to life. They gave me great pleasures, or disgust. Which means something. This joy was not completely strange, I knew that. I had bumped into it before, touched it without knowing it, like you can run into a branch that hinders you, forget it and move on.⁹⁵

While the metaphysical sublime of ‘hard’ modernity might be that of a Hegelian end of history, history has just begun with the negation of the strictly rational. The mind has become obsolete to the extent it does not directly communicate with the body. The senses are what can lead us back to the world, as Stubberud’s character says. Man has abstracted himself away from his life-world to the extent the body is the only means to reconfigure man’s milieu. The body is seen as the only possibility to start a process Weber probably would have called *Verzauberung*, regarded as an antidote to the alienating abstraction of, in this case, the previous order of things. Reason must be scrutinized, because it is reason that brought the blessed death of the previous order:

While the body in my previous life, before the turn, competed with consciousness and useful projects, it now comes into its full right. What was painful was something I before wished to escape, heal, flee from. Now it is an enormous possibility to new experiences. After the turn, wonder is great and the lust to see behind the next bend so uncontrollable that it murmurs in the dark.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 66-67: ”Nå var en sterk sol og et stort mørke kommet inn i tilværelsen. De ga meg store nytelser, eller vemmelser. Som betyr noe. Denne gleden var ikke helt ukjent, det visste jeg. Jeg hadde vært borti den før, berørt den uten å kjenne til den, slik du kan støte borti en gren som hindrer deg, glemme den og gå videre.”

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 109: ”Mens kroppen i mitt tidligere liv, før vendingen, konkurrerte med min bevissthet og mine nyttige prosjekter, kommer den nå til sin rett. Mens det som gjorde vondt tidligere var noe jeg ville unnsnippe, helbrede, flykte fra, blir det nå en svimlende mulighet til nye erfaringer. Etter vendingen er forundringen så stor, lysten til å se bak neste sving så ubendig, at det mumler i mørke.”

The past – symbolized by the fires that smell of gasoline and flesh – is only tolerable to the extent the flames are dying and all man-made is bound to decay by the forces of *natura naturans*. The only remembrance worth while must be sought in form and repetition, like music. The past is not something worth reminiscing about, it is not historical ruins in Rome (or the science-fiction cradle of civilization “the Archive” discussed in chapter four) reminding man nostalgically of a grand history. The past is a *dead end*:

We never got to know if death came from air or water, earth or food. But they died. What we saw was the white dust that came with the wind. What we experienced was death.⁹⁷

The mysterious apocalyptic ingredient tones down the otherwise problematic implications of a worldview that only listens to the body. This theme, like that of plague, makes everybody a possible victim – in between divine punishment and man-made disaster, so to speak. Therefore the division of the pure from the impure becomes an impossible task although the trajectory is clear (that between the mouth and the rectum).

The pastoral landscape has come to signify the ‘pure’ primordial landscape where the cow is the symbol of Edenic nature:

The cows stand around the fire while we burn. They have time enough. They just wait. We burn ourselves back in time, to a landscape that is simultaneous to what the cows see. Grass, trees, plains. First was the forest. Then houses, cities, streets, and libraries. Now we are back in the forest. Those out there that are a threat, those that we flee from, have probably their own crackling fires. They crackle in plastic and petrol and meat. Now it is our fires against theirs.⁹⁸

The primordial landscape has become the primary loci for man in equal measure to the destruction of the previous order of things. Although the protagonist assures that this joy is not that of destruction, the Luddite need to destroy becomes evident enough in vitalist (and violent) considerations:

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 22: “Om døden kom fra luft eller vann, jord eller mat, fikk vi aldri vite. Men de døde. Hva vi så var det hvite støvet som kom med vinden. Hva vi opplevde, var døden.”

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 85: ”Mens vi brenner, står kuene rundt bålet. De har tid nok. De bare venter. Vi brenner oss tilbake til i tiden, til et landskap som er samtidig med hva kuene ser. Gress, trær, sletter. Først var skogen. Så hus, byer, gater og biblioteker. Nå er vi tilbake i skogen. De der ute, de som truer, dem har vi flyktet fra, har nok også sine egne bål som knitrer. Det knitrer i plast og bensin og kjøtt. Nå gjelder det våre bål mot deres bål.”

If I had dynamite or something heavy to shoot with, or an excavator, I would try to remove the remains of the building. But since I didn't have such assistance available, I had to trust a slow destruction. I just hoped that with time earth, air and plants would fill these unpleasant remains of a building with greenery, and eventually trees. I wouldn't mind if nature would bolt it, devour it, take it all back. We were possessed by a strong lust to remove all signs of previous human works. I say "we" because it seemed obvious that the Dog also wanted to be in on it. We both knew that little of what had been still ought to exist.⁹⁹

The vitalist worldview in a pastoral setting speaks of time as endless repetition. In short, time is characterized as a series of becomings, or eternal recurrences. This can be seen in the communion with a plant, and in the joy found in the certainty of reproduction. Here, the child prodigy of Nietzschean evolutionary futurism is replaced with a less cumbersome flower:

The small fern-fingers now placed themselves in my hands, and sought my safety the way I found their comfort. I experienced a jolt of pleasure and recognition in this magnificent contact with a life deeply inhuman. It was a recognition confirming that this building would once perish. The thought was big and incredible and made me happy. A new life clung to the half-dark cracks and carried a message of future.¹⁰⁰

Becoming through Cows, Identity by Dog

When plants replace the child prodigy and ticks replace the child, the sublime is in the cows. The sublime is found in the gaze of the cow in an unmistakable philosophy of pastoral becoming. The cows embody eternal time – the metaphysical sublime. This is portrayed in metaphors of cows dancing on infinite oceans:

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 66: "Hadde jeg hatt dynamitt, eller noe virkelig grovt å skyte med, eller en gravemaskin, ville jeg forsøkt å fjerne restene av bygningen. Men siden jeg ikke hadde tilgjengelig noen slike hjelpemidler, måtte jeg bare stole på en langsom ødeleggelse. Jeg bare håpet at med tiden ville jord, luft og planter fylle disse ubehagelige bygningsrestene med grønske, og til slutt trær. Det ville ikke være meg imot om naturen slukte det hele, spiste det opp, to alt tilbake. Vi var besatt av en sterk lyst til å fjerne alle tegn på tidligere menneskeverk. Jeg sier "vi", for det virket opplagt at Hunden også ville være med. For vi visste begge at lite av det som hadde vært, fortsatt burde få eksistere."

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 67: "De små bregnefingrene la seg nå i hendene mine, og søkte min trygghet slik jeg fikk deres trøst. I denne herlige kontakten med et liv som var dypt umenneskelig, opplevde jeg et støt av nytelse og gjenkjennelse. Det var en gjenkjennelse som bekreftet at dette bygget en gang skal forgå. Jeg følte glede ved den tanken, og tanken var stor og ufattelig. I de halvmørke sprekkenene klorte det seg fast et nytt liv som bar bud om fremtid."

They resemble ships carried by waves if they come swaying, dancing over the fields like that. Then I wish the fields would be as infinite as the sea. I hope the cows never stop walking, that they sway and dance for ever.¹⁰¹

The cows symbolize the candid primitive that the main character tries to become, as the cows ‘come in their flesh’ and are a ‘community of feeling’.¹⁰² Similarly to Nietzsche, Stubberud recognizes the cows as owning warmth and an aspect of positive nihilism. Indeed, the portrayed farmer resembles the voluntary beggar of Nietzsche, who seeks happiness and believes “the kingdom of heaven is among the cows”, and that the key to that kingdom is in chewing the cud. Cows are candid and so should man become:

I have to admire them, try to be close to them even if they don’t speak our language. I now know only one thing of everything we have pondered and prayed and begged to understand Paradise for. Animals live a life without ulterior motives. That’s why a life with them is a taste of Paradise. Their world has no ulterior motives, no calculations that tell about evil advantages.¹⁰³

This is the essential outlook on life of the Rousseauian nature-child: life without ulterior motives is a superior life. The candid man wants to live like an animal: with the body in the present, capable of distinguishing moments but with no worries of the future.

Becoming takes priority over being, as in the philosophical project of Nietzsche (and much postmodern theory). The concept of ‘becoming animal’ was introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and is an extrapolation and extension of the Nietzschean becoming. Becoming is best characterized as a process of metamorphosis (like those in Kafka’s writings) contrary to the tradition of animals as metaphor. The philosophy of becoming carries inherent in it a critique of western philosophical and humanist tradition, since the key of becoming is in overcoming the opposition between man and animal. Steve Baker touches upon this (but does not elaborate) in his analysis of visual arts through the perspective of becoming, when he claims that the “artist and the animal are, it seems, intimately bound up with each other in the unthinking or

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 18: “Kommer de slik svaierende, dansende over markene, ligner de skip båret av bølger. Da ønsker jeg at markene var like uendelige som havet. Jeg håper at kuene aldri slutter å gå, at de svaier og danser for alltid.”

¹⁰² See Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 17: ”Jeg må beundre dem, forsøke å være nære dem selv om de ikke taler våre språk. Om alt vi har grublet og bedt og tryglet for å forstå Paradiset, vet jeg nå bare en ting. At dyr lever i en tilværelse uten baktanker. Derfor er livet med dem en forsmak på Paradiset. For i deres verden finnes ingen baktanker, ingen beregninger som forteller om ond nytte.”

undoing of the conventionally human.”¹⁰⁴ In Stubberud’s vision it seems we should altogether forget the conventionally *humane*.

Central to the act of becoming is a focus on the body and on what it does, instead of what it is. Deleuze and Guattari write: “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are.”¹⁰⁵ They argue that the process of becoming, which must be based on desire, can only be experienced through bodily sensations that are “distinguished solely by movement and rest, slowness and speed.”¹⁰⁶ For Nietzsche the concern was for what the body *could do* and for Stubberud what it senses. Kristine Hestad’s concern is for what the body *feels*.

A native actress with several monologues on her resume, although always performed together with animals, Hestad’s latest piece is about falling in love – with the goat Rambukk.¹⁰⁷ She says her piece is about meeting people one loves and about being open to meetings-in-love. She admits as a modest native that falling in love is so scary that one is better off practicing with a goat first. She does not want to fall in love with Hugh Grant, and playing golf with him is a waste of time – it is both fake and boring. Instead, ‘true’ love is found at *Vinje Bukkering* and nature is best experienced in a cornfield with the goat. Her piece centres on a same type of becoming as Stubberud’s novel, and both do it in rustic settings reminiscent of idyllic peasant life. But whereas Hestad justifies her project in a plethora of scientific and philosophical theories and says on-stage that “Rambukk is the closest I come to a passion without it being one”, Stubberud’s protagonist has no problems justifying his passion by the ‘asshole’:

In this herd of breathing animals I find intoxication... Oh my God, how good it is to wander like this, to stretch out, to swing your ass like a broke whore. To just breathe, just walk, just live with the asshole turned against the world in a carefree manner. It’s not the heart or the head that gives you the power of

¹⁰⁴ Steve Baker: *What does Becoming-Animal Look Like?* in Nigel Rothfels (ed.): *Representing Animals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 80.

¹⁰⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), p. 257.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁰⁷ Kristine Hestad: *Rambukk*, Black Box Theatre, Oslo, Norway, 3rd - 6th march 2005, directed by Ingebjørg Torgersen. The project of Hestad ends in ambiguity. How should the inspiration of feminist philosopher Irigaray and the project of becoming be understood, when the centrepiece is a goat with a phallic baggage? The associational discrepancy leaves one wondering what Hestad wants to do: does she wish to go back to a pre-human mode of existence, or just to bed with the goat?

repulsion. In the last instance it is the power of the asshole, a blind rejection: you don't give a shit!¹⁰⁸

In *Kjøtt i mørke*, as in Judaism, music shows the path to the divine. The critical phase of becoming consists of a march with cows. The necessary incantation to reach the biological 'divine' is provided by the protective form of music, which may be seen as the mystic's way to transcendence as it is the only form of emancipative totalitarianism. It is music of marching cows:

It is so beautiful now. It is so mortal now. We are so alone now. It is so dangerous now. We need to be lifted now, or rather we need to go down, step down in this excellent rhythm ... Music is through repetition natural as earth and death, but a death that is forestalled and defeated by form.¹⁰⁹

Becoming is somewhat paradoxically understood as a process of identity-building through the experience of an "uncompromising sweeping-away of identities."¹¹⁰ In short, the process of becoming is simultaneously a process of undoing identity – the uncompromising sweeping-away of the 'false' consciousness of man. It only leaves the form of the animal:

In a second I think the gaze of the cow coincides with the gaze of the cow that once met any historical person I know of. The gaze is contemporary with everybody that lives and has lived on earth. I'm afraid to fall into the gaze, to fall backwards in history, to become nameless and lost. The gaze of the cow only sees the necessary, that which always has been there.¹¹¹

The form of the animal is to be considered the only inherent character of nature. Therefore the abyss between humanity and animality is bridged by communion with animals. Only by becoming-animal instead of being-man is the protagonist able to find character, and evade the sense of death which otherwise pervades:

¹⁰⁸ Tore Stubberud: *Kjøtt i mørke* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), pp. 110-111: "I denne flokken av pustende dyr finner jeg en rus ... Herregud, hvor godt det er å vandre slik, strekke ut, svinge på ræva som en blakk hore. Bare puste, bare gå, bare leve med rasshølet ubekymret vendt mot verden. Det er ikke hjertet eller hodet som gir deg vemmelsens kraft. I siste instans er det rasshølets kraft, en blind avvisning: Du driter i det!"

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 9-10: "Det er så vakkert nå. Det er så dødelig nå. Jeg tenker at vi er så alene nå. Det er så farlig nå. Vi må løftes nå, eller snarere vi må gå ned nå, stige ned i denne herlige takten ... Musikken er gjennom gjentagelsene naturlig som jord og død, men en død som er forgrepet og beseiret gjennom form."

¹¹⁰ See Steve Baker: *What Does Becoming-Animal Look Like?* in Nigel Rothfels (ed.): *Representing Animals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), p. 68.

¹¹¹ Tore Stubberud: *Kjøtt i mørke* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), p. 15: "I et sekund tenker jeg at kublikket er samtidig, med det kublikk som en gang møtte hvilken som helst historisk person jeg vet om. Blikket er samtidig med alle som lever og har levd på jorden. Jeg blir redd for å falle inn i blikket, falle bakover i historien, bli navnløs og fortapt. Kublikket ser bare det nødvendige, det som alltid har vært der."

In this gaze you meet your own abyss, since time is gone and thus the site which you cling to in hope of permanence. This experience of a gaze so completely out of time that can just as well be rejected as the experience of the stupid animal, strikes you all of a sudden: your whole human ascendancy disappears and you are no longer the one you thought you were. But you sense who you are precisely when you thought you lost everything.¹¹²

Tragically, as much as man becomes, he remains a stranger to himself and his nature. Jill Marsden argues that rather than “consolidating identity through otherness, the encounter with the unknowability of the animal reflects the extent to which we are strangers to ourselves.” In a paradox, man becomes a stranger to himself by interaction as becoming is “thinking based on participation rather than knowledge.”¹¹³ Usually, the participation intended is of a metaphysical kind and similar to the philosophy of Bataille: the animal is non-appropriable in realms other than the erotic and poetic since the abyss between man and animal stands erect except the occasional and fleeting intimate encounters. In the pastoral theme the conclusion seems to be detrimental. The proposition is that precisely because of the appropriation of animals those fleeting moments of becoming are made possible. The classic shepherd from the pastoral romance is in this case substituted by an ecologically enlightened farmer in love with his cows, devouring his animals with great pleasure and calling slaughter an enterprise as exhaustive as preparation for war. The acknowledgement of the nutritional value of the elusive cow makes the protagonist an ally of Mahatma Gandhi, who saw the Hindu cow both as source of nutritional value and symbol of ‘divine presence’.¹¹⁴

The dualism within man, as opposed to that drawn between man and animal, is here presented as a division of women. The female it seems, is either a Mother Teresa representing the old order of moral law: the human rights (and despicable out of the fact that she belongs to the previous order), or a Madonna at worst selling her pussy and at best killing men without hesitation. But foremost, the woman stands for a feminine breeder-nature and a bovine cult of motherhood. The artistic and popularized traditions

¹¹² Ibid., p. 16: ”I dette blikket møter du din egen avgrunn, siden tiden er vekk og dermed det tilholdsstedet du klammer deg til i håpet om varighet. Denne erfaringen av et blikk så helt utenfor tiden som gjerne kan avvises som opplevelsen av det dumme dyr, rammer med ett deg selv: Hele ditt menneskelige overtak forsvinner og du er ikke lenger den du trodde du var. Men nettopp da aner du hvem du er, idet du trodde du mistet alt.”

¹¹³ Jill Marsden: *Bataille and the Poetic Fallacy of Animality* in Peter Atterton & Matthew Calarco (eds.): *Animal Philosophy: Essential Readings in Continental Thought* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 41.

¹¹⁴ For a review on the Hindu cow both as a religious symbol and political weapon, see D.N. Jha: *The myth of the Holy Cow* (London: Verso, 2002).

of vitalism have throughout tended to elevate the masculine as the symbol of *élan vital*. The female, on the other hand, has been viewed at best as lush, meaty and birth-giving. The tragedy of a vitalist *Weltanschauung* as expressed by the man holding a newborn on one of the long walls in Emanuel Vigeland's mausoleum (in Oslo), is the crushing realization of man's own decaying flesh in the face of childbirth – he is disgusted. But the tension between birth and death and man and woman is here veiled, since it is a tension between women, and most likely because the child is replaced by a tick:

She smiled with a maternal face, a shrewd smile as if she was pregnant ... Then she gently pointed at a small insect that had latched on the female-skin, almost indecently to the right of a slightly pursed, protruding navel ... She spoke at length and with warmth about how a tick can hang with its forelegs in the grass and wait, wait until “the host animal came by”. She was happy that she had been chosen. I was so amazed by the spirit of self-sacrifice she wanted to show this little animal that no questions were possible.¹¹⁵

The glorification of the biological is not far from that of Nietzsche's. He thought that the nobility of the human spirit does not transcend the animal's, but is built on it. While George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) is based on a type of anthropomorphism that comes close to zoomorphism, man's nature is here based on a pastoral recipe of reversed anthropomorphism. The animals and humans encountered in the cosmology are divided in binary fashion. While the protagonist, his woman and the cows must be seen as 'soft' species, the dog is 'hard'.

Historically, the anthropomorphic use of animals is seen in many ritual practices (closely linked to rites de passages) of perennial religions as a form of ethics. This was often viewed as a 'sharing of traits' in order for humans to gain particular advantages. The basic assumption of 'classic' anthropomorphic understanding within the social sciences is that this type of description is employed foremost as a metaphorical tool. The objection here is that anthropomorphic expressions, besides being able to discuss phenomenon on a metaphorical level, are expressions of how animal and human nature are perceived 'in reality'. This implies an importance of personal experience, as Kay Milton suggests, since anthropomorphic “understanding is achieved by *perceiving*

¹¹⁵ Tore Stubberud: *Kjøtt i mørke* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), p. 49: ”Hun smilte med et moderlig ansikt, et underfundig smil som om hun var gravid ... Så pekte hun varsomt på et lite insekt som hadde bitt seg fast i kvinnehuden, nesten uanstendig til høyre for en litt snurpete, utstående navle ... Så snakket hun lenge, og varmt, om hvordan en flått kan henge med forbena hevet i gresstrå og bare vente, vente til “vertsdyret kom forbi”. Hun sa seg glad for at hun var blitt valgt. Så forbauset ble jeg over den offervilje hun ville vise det vesle dyret, at ingen spørsmål ble mulige.”

characteristics *in* things rather than, as anthropomorphism implies, *attributing* characteristics *to* things.”¹¹⁶

It is the 'hard dog' that acts as a source of identity: "*Jeg på min side er foreløpig litt utestengt fra denne fryktløse sanselighet. Men jeg forsøker å lære.*"¹¹⁷ According to Nietzsche, the primary trait of the all too civilized is symbolized in a dog's servitude and domestication. Here the dog is not a slavishly obedient bitch but a loyal companion in the pastoral landscape, admired because of his excellent senses and the help provided in using them. The main character says:

I see the world through the Dog. She takes care of me like an angel and sees my small motions from a heaven-high perspective. I just comprehend small pieces where she sees and hears everything.¹¹⁸

The quintessentially biological life-orientation is asserted as the nature man tries to establish is that of the dog's – life as a series of fearless moments of sensing. Another fictional character actually living life as a series of fearless moments is the man able to communicate with cats in Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore* (2005). The dog's 'nobility' is given by her 'naturalness' of eating:

A moment it hit me, that she would munch on me as well, or Bernard or the Woman – if somebody would allow her. I didn't really see anything strange in it. Neither did I feel any disgust. I thought that she was a dog, and that it was like that. First I thought I was neither for nor against. But then, because of the situation, I thought I was for. By seeing the picture of the situation I found a sort of salvation: the human can also change by getting eaten, not just having to be an incessantly pensive creature that eats others. That we one day would be nibbled at and removed was not an unbearable thought.¹¹⁹

It seems reversed anthropomorphism not only dictates the nature of man, but also indicates the extent of 'reversed' ontological understanding. The heroes of the

¹¹⁶ Kay Milton: *Anthropomorphism or Egomorphism? The Perception of Non-human Persons by Human Ones* in John Knight (ed.): *Animals in Person* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), p. 260. Italics are Milton's.

¹¹⁷ Tore Stubberud: *Kjøtt i mørke* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), p. 62.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61: "Jeg ser verden gjennom Hunden. Hun passer på meg som en engel og ser mine små bevegelser fra et himmelhøyt perspektiv. Der hvor hun ser og hører alt, fatter jeg bare små deler."

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115-116: "Et øyeblikk slo det meg at hun ville ha knasket på meg også, eller på Bernard eller på Kvinnen – om noen hadde gitt henne lov. Jeg så i grunnen ikke noe rart ved det. Jeg følte heller ingen vemmelighet ved det. Jeg tenkte at hun var en hund, og slik var det. Jeg tenkte først at jeg var for eller imot. Så tenkte jeg at jeg i grunnen var for, fordi situasjonen nå engang var blitt slik. Ved å se bildet av situasjonen for meg, fant jeg en slags frelse: Mennesket kan også forandre seg gjennom å bli spist, å slippe å bare være et stadig ettertenksomt vesen som selv spiser andre. At vi en dag skulle bli gnaget på og fjernet, er ingen uutholdelig tanke."

Renaissance were defined foremost through their lacks, but here the protagonist (or antihero) is defined in relation to the mysterious messenger created to deliver the ‘new truths’. Although the messianic figure is rare, both because of the metaphysical difficulties in establishing a ‘genuinely’ consecrated character and because of its overtly moral connotations, the interesting question on our part is not whether Bernard is a messianic figure – he *is* – but rather to see what sort of values he embodies:

I think Bernard is a messenger. But I don’t understand everything he says. The other day he suddenly said that the human was a broken animal. At other times he can suddenly say: “animals are locked-up humans” or that “even bad straw is better than gold.”¹²⁰

The main character may lack the ‘gracious’ animal qualities of the dog, but his neighbour portrays animalistic ‘nobility’. He communicates with animals directly and easily, yet pragmatically. If the dog and Bernard understand each other on a level that the protagonist seems only to dream of, it would mean that the messianic character is some sort of prototype of the noble savage, i.e. embodying the idealized man-as-animal. As much as Nietzsche admired nobility independent from the influences of the surrounding environment, so does Bernard embody the *wu-wei* of an unaffected Zen-like life-orientation:

He says he has never been better. When I asked him how he would have it if everything would be worse, he answered that it would be the same. And finally, when I ask what could be changed for the better, he answers: “nothing.”¹²¹

From this perspective, the preferred grace brings to mind the unaffected philosophy of life of the Norwegian ‘Ash-Lad’. The preferred human seems to be a Diderot-like encyclopaedist, who instead of dreaming of a human childhood on Tahiti tries to live the candid life, in this case in a *post*-civilization landscape. Paradoxically, the extent to which one should be unaffected by the environment in a *wu-wei* life-orientation correlates to the extent the environment – and then particularly the landscape, must be considered the primary loci for man. As in the thinking of Herbert Spencer and Charles Lyell, the paradox is the result of the combination of biologism with regionalism:

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 82: “Jeg tror Bernard er en budbærer. Men jeg forstår ikke alt han sier. Forleden sa han plutselig at mennesket var et ødelagt dyr. Andre ganger kan han plutselig si: ”Dyr er innestengte mennesker” eller at ”selv dårlig halm er bedre enn gull.”

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 75: ”Han sier at han aldri har hatt det bedre. Da jeg spurte ham hvordan han ville ha det hvis alt ble verre, svarte han at det ville være det samme. Og, endelig, når jeg spør ham hva som kunne endres til det bedre, svarer han ”ingenting”.”

For Bernard the earth, but especially gravel, is the first meeting with human order. Bernard says we walk on a planet covered in gravel, and where we reside, the place that has chosen us, is decisive ... We have both seen it in the cows: they always circle about the place they were born, sniff, scrape and dig in the gravel and earth with their feet.¹²²

Amoral Authority

Bernard thought we should sit hidden, not talk to them. He said: "Let them go, otherwise we will have to shoot them. They just sell their pussy or human rights". At first I didn't pay attention, didn't understand what he meant. Maybe everything, obviously also women, changes in anxious times, I finally said. "At least human rights", Bernard said. I understood what he meant in the situation we had come to. Somebody had taken away our authority since we couldn't choose anymore.¹²³

What seems to be beyond choice and question, is the need for man to return to the biological. But when the Dionysian man is heeded, the codex and credo of Apollo are veiled – *i mørke*. Although there might be genuine altruism or enlightened self-interest, the implications of a post-society euphoria that does not recognize authority other than that of the bucolically biological are problematic.

Medieval thought considered the realm of authority to lie in the divine (and the clerical representations of it). For John Locke, who developed his theory in the light of the religious wars in the period before the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the primary drive in man – and the basis for his political philosophy – was the conservation of the self. From this, the conclusion ran to a "natural law" of (political) authority over the body and its products, typified as possessive individualism. For the classic anarchists, a moral law was considered natural, and thus right, to the extent it came from within man himself. It was a "law of nature found out by the individual's own reason."¹²⁴ In this

¹²² Ibid., p. 75: "For Bernard er jorden, men særlig grusen, det første møte med menneskets orden. Vi går på en klode dekket av grus, sier Bernard, og der hvor vi oppholder oss, det sted som har valgt oss, er avgjørende ... Vi har begge sett det hos kuene: De kretser alltid omkring det stedet der de har født, snuser, skaver og graver i grus og jord med føttene."

¹²³ Ibid., p. 76: "Bernard mente vi skulle sitte skjult, ikke snakke til dem. Han sa: "La dem gå, ellers må vi skyte dem. De selger bare fitte eller menneskerettigheter." Jeg lot meg først ikke merke, forsto ikke hva han mente. Endelig sa jeg at kanskje alt, selvfølgelig også kvinner, endres i urolige tider. "Ihvertfall menneskerettighetene," sa Bernard. I den situasjonen vi var kommet, forsto jeg hva han mente. Noen hadde gjort oss umyndige, siden vi ikke lenger kunne velge."

¹²⁴ See George Crowder: *Classic Anarchism: The Political Thought of Godwin, Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 125. Stubberud aligns himself with classic anarchists as

case the *Bildung* man should strive for is one of the body and the instincts. The problematic aspect of becoming is that desire, which the process must be based on according to Deleuze and Guattari, is dictated by *feeling*. The bio-physical emphasis ends up treating moral questions as profane – morality is rendered irrelevant when animal senses are the true way to the self. Man as a ‘false cartoon’ epitomizes the biological *Weltanschauung* in which life is perceived as becoming, and perhaps even more: overcoming.

For Nietzsche the ass was a symbol for “the earth, nature, and humanity’s animal character.”¹²⁵ Out of a historical perspective, the medieval ass-festival, functioning as a social safety-vent, was an upheaval of the Christian spirit and the clerical in favour of the otherwise rejected body and the sensuous (not to mention carnal). In the novel the ‘asshole’ is a metaphor for disgust or pain, and becomes also the symbol of the anarchistic impulse to negate authority:

I’m no longer bothered by the damn distance between the head, especially the mouth, and the asshole... An asshole, an eye staring down at the solid ground. I set this whole overpraised development of the human in reverse. The millions of years it took to develop the whole bowel system are hurled into the darkness of oblivion. And thus all other beautiful systems: social systems, political systems.¹²⁶

The negation of systems means that authority is individually orientated and shows that brute power rules in the social sphere. The nihilistic morale seems to be that as long as man is responsible for his own body in a physical as well as psychological sense, he need not – and *should not* – bother with much else. But the authority that counts on the body alone cannot be real freedom of the self since freedom entails more than freedom from constraint. The problematic aspect of the post-apocalyptic landscape is what Hobbes would have called the natural state of man. For the protagonist it is not as ‘poor,

Proudhon, who in turn relies on Kant in much of his political philosophy. As Stubberud says in an interview with *Kulturnett Østfold*, “*Folkeopplysning fra Rakkestad*”: “The ideal society for me consists of humans that are in an infinite process of acquisition of authority. In other words a society that never is ready developed, where the individual and the community make up a unity that is for the best of each”.

¹²⁵ See Kathleen Marie Higgins: *Nietzsche and the Mystery of the Ass* in Christa Davis Acampora & Ralph R. Acampora (eds.): *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal beyond Docile and Brutal* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), p. 115.

¹²⁶ Tore Stubberud: *Kjøtt i mørke* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), pp. 110-111: “Jeg er ikke lenger plaget av den forbannede avstand mellom hodet, særlig munnen, og rasshølet ... Et rasshøl, et øye som glaner ned mot den faste bakken. Jeg setter hele denne oppskrytte utviklingen av mennesket i revers. De millioner av år de tok å utvikle hele tarmsystemet, slynges inn i glemselens mørke. Og dermed alle andre skjønne systemer: sosiale systemer, politiske systemer.”

nasty, short, or brutish' as Hobbes would have liked it, but for the boy in the woods this is the case. The unfriendly encounter between the main character and the young man in the woods highlights the problematic and inhumane attitudes that accompany the biological worldview. Joseph Conrad held maturity to be the best incentive against brutality. Here it might seem maturity is reached *by* brutality. If the previous order ended in an environmental apocalypse, the current order, judging by the way the young man is killed, is a social apocalypse:

It was a quite young boy, big, and with an open face that didn't forebode more than happiness and an urge to survive. I noticed, too late, that he was holding an iron bar and soon would reach me ... I also grabbed a branch to hit with, but never got a chance. She bit him several times in the left arm, and there was a strange and almost humoristic situation where I tried to count how many times she bit. I had to laugh and came to think of old silent films where people walk oddly stiff ... The human is a peculiar creature in such moments. The fear that should have given him new powers worked instead to the contrary. He lay down on his back while protecting his throat with his healthy right arm. I thought it was illogical that he both wanted to protect himself and surrender his life to the Dog. That somebody wants to both live and die, at the same time, is not a mystery ... But this fool really started to irritate me since he wanted to both protect himself and surrender at the same time ... In fact I was ashamed of him on behalf of mankind. It seemed stupid to prolong what was inevitably coming. An animal, not to mention the Dog, would have handled the situation more appropriately. An animal would precisely expose his own throat in a last attempt at subordination by a call for mercy. But did this idiot have any idea of mercy? Hardly. He had wanted to kill both of us, the Dog and me. Just the thought made me agitated. His screams, that in another world would be unbearable, were now just horrible. They were savage, a noise I found completely inappropriate for the situation. It was obvious he didn't have respect for anything in this world. It was obvious that he didn't know anything holy ... I took a hold of the boy, he didn't scream anymore. I pushed the Dog away. First and foremost I had to think that there was such a thing as obligations. I was obliged to tell him that he was about to die. Brotherly and with a high voice I called: "So die then, bloody hell!"¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Ibid., pp. 70-72: "Det var en ganske ung gutt, stor, med et åpent og godt ansikt som ikke varslet annet enn glede og trang til å overleve. For sent så jeg at han holdt en jernstang, og snart ville nå meg ... Jeg

Nature is brutal and man cruel – something the protagonist’s laughter bears witness of. Disgust and contempt are closely related emotions and express the same: rejection. Here the *humane* is being rejected. The Nietzschean ass is a symbol of the ability to laugh at man’s assness, but now man is laughing at the other’s presumed assness.

The lack of candid grace in this animalistic cosmology suggests a social philosophy built on a Spencer-like principle of survival of the fittest. The implications of life as a struggle – “somebody can see you first”¹²⁸ – are in kinship with Darwinian notions of evolution through competition within the species. ‘Life as a struggle’ also suggests that man needs to hide. However, the emphasis is less on the narrow Darwinian concern with the conservation of the self, and evolves more into the direction of a vitalist manifesto for exuberant nature and passionate *joie de vivre*. The sociobiological explanations of Stubberud’s character do not so much concern the superiority of genes over milieu. Rather, the explanations are a part of his agenda of the ‘biological way’ where man stands to learn from animals. According to the sociobiologist Konrad Lorenz, the killing of the young man in the woods – the concrete struggle *for* life – should be understood as “critical behaviour” motivated by fear in a desperate situation where “he cannot escape and can expect no mercy.”¹²⁹ Georg Breuer proposes that ritualized animal fights follow a scheme where the weaker part through submissive signals can trigger an inhibitory mechanism in the other and by that prevent continued attack – and death. The argument is that these inhibitory mechanisms are especially sufficient and successful when the combat is between members of same species. The protagonist seems to suggest a similar understanding of fighting behaviour.

grep også en gren for å slå, men slapp aldri til. Hun bet ham en rekke ganger i venstre arm, og det oppsto en rar og nesten humoristisk situasjon hvor jeg forsøkte å telle hvor mange ganger hun bet. Jeg måtte le og kom til å tenke på de gamle stumfilmer hvor folk gikk så merkelig stivt ... Mennesket er en merkverdig skapning i slike øyeblikk. Den redsel som burde gitt ham nye krefter, virket i stedet motsatt. Han la seg på ryggen mens han vernet halsen med den friske høyrearmen. Jeg synes det var ulogisk at han både ville verne seg og samtidig overgi sitt liv til Hunden. At noen både vil leve og dø, på samme tid, er ikke noe mysterium ... Men denne tosken begynte virkelig å irritere meg, siden han både ville overgi sitt liv og verne seg i samme øyeblikk ... Faktisk skammet jeg meg over ham på menneskehetens vegne. Det virket direkte dumt å utsette hva som uansett ville komme. Et dyr, ikke minst Hunden, ville på en bedre måte ha håndtert situasjonen. Et dyr ville nettopp ha blottlagt sin egen hals i et siste forsøk på underkastelse gjennom et rop om nåde. Men hadde dette guttefølset noe begrep om nåde? Neppe. Han hadde villet drepe oss begge, både Hunden og meg. Bare tanken gjorde meg opprørt. Skrikene hans, som in en annen verden ville vært uutholdelige, var nå bare vemmelige. Det var en villskap i dem, en støy som jeg fant helt upassende i situasjonen. Det var tydelig han ikke hadde respekt for noe her i verden. Det var tydelig han ikke kjente til noe hellig ... Jeg grep fatt i gutten, han skrek ikke lenger nå. Jeg skjøv Hunden vekk. Først og fremst måtte jeg tenke på at det finnes noe som heter forpliktelser. Jeg var forpliktet til å fortelle ham at han snart ville dø. Broderlig og med høy stemme ropte jeg: ”Så dø da, for faen!”

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

¹²⁹ Konrad Lorenz: *On Aggression* (London: Methuen and Co, 1966), p. 21.

It is considered ‘ritualized combat’ – “an animal would precisely expose his own throat in a last attempt at subordination by a call for mercy”. However, if “chivalrous” behaviour towards other members of the species is inborn, as it seems to be, there must be occasional mutations enabling an animal not to conform to the rules of ‘fair play’.¹³⁰ Yet ‘playing unfair’ has not become an intra-species pattern albeit outbursts of ‘unfair playing’. Sadly, the sociability of animals seems more benign than the sociability of a man that tries to become an animal.

The problem with this ‘biosophy’, reflected in the lack of chivalrous behaviour towards kin, is its amorality. Social codes rest on biologically vital emotions, but moral principles can never be rationally derived from experience. Even when moral judgements are based on a type of self-making instead of an authority derived from outside the self, the problematic question is whether a philosophy of the animal body can sustain a human notion of liberty and authority – *and* a social agreement.

The Carnival of Flesh

I think, like her, that it is better to live to be eaten – than to never live. I think that to get eaten is the purpose of the cow, and the thought leaves an unanswered question when it comes to the human... And which of us is long-sighted enough to prevent us being slaughtered by those who are smarter?¹³¹

The skid-marks left by the pastoral ‘asshole’ are, perhaps not surprisingly, ideologically brownish. However, Stubberud is too smart to fall into simplistic appraisals of peasant-culture and of self-sufficient and ecologically enlightened farmers. Yet, there is an implicit association with the sort of peasant-culture that national-socialist thinking glorified. The more horrendous implications remain implications, perhaps due to the anarchistically indifferent ‘asshole’ which “*driter i det*” as the protagonist exclaims.

In essence, Stubberud’s agenda is an oppositional continuation of body-centered materialism. But maybe we should ‘give a shit’ about the body in the leisure-society

¹³⁰ Georg Breuer: *Sociobiology and the Human Dimension* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 28: “To present animal behaviour in an idealized way – as it were, as a model for men to emulate – means drawing a romantic picture that does not correspond to reality. By no means do animals always behave in a “chivalrous” way towards members of their species or even towards close kin. Nevertheless it is a fact that inhibitory mechanisms against killing of conspecifics do exist – and particularly in those species that possess the most dangerous weapons.” Also see p. 29.

¹³¹ Tore Stubberud: *Kjøtt i mørke* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), pp. 19 & 17: “Jeg tenker, som henne, at det er bedre å leve for å bli spist – enn å aldri leve. Jeg tenker at å bli spist er kuas bestemmelse, og tanken etterlater et ubesvart spørsmål hva mennesket angår ... Og hvem av oss er mennesker er forutseende nok til å forhindre at også vi slaktes av dem som er smartere?”

fixated in a hysterical fashion on bodily transgressions, ranging from health, to exercise, to food? As much as the novel is a continuation of the postmodern aesthetic project, it also contains atavistic seeds of the agriculturally based nature tradition. The visions of exuberant bio-physical *joie de vivre* resist the pietistic nature tradition that venerates *måtehold*, indicating a departure from the established tradition in its lushness and Luddite connotations. The sensual and romantic apertures decrease the associations with a landscape of belligerent hunters and warriors where the male is the centrepiece, not unlike that of Ludvig Holberg's Alectoria in *A Journey to the World Underground* (1741). More problematic is the implications of a *Weltanschauung* with the body as the sole centrepiece. The cosmological composition of Stubberud is a tragicomic collage of a *uomo universale* à la Rousseau in an age which has put morality to death. He is portraying a sort of heroic antithesis to Lund's (and many others) "vemmelse" as discussed in the beginning of this chapter. The protagonist is a by nature *enchanted* farmer. But he is enchanted by the 'natural' insofar he is alone with his animals. As much as man is uninteresting, so is his reality. The same characteristic applied to Nietzsche, who in his 'elevated ideas' forgot reality in favour of the divine possibility, indeed, *because of the divine possibility: man could after all not cultivate himself in the framework of petty mundane life. The contempt against all things mundane has a similarity to the philosophy of life of a cowboy. His field of work made him "despise everything small, petty, and mean whether in thought, or word, or deed."*¹³² The problematic aspect is that the elevated idea no longer is of a morally good man but of a bio-physically good man. This worrisome notion is furthermore heightened by the linkage between the pastoral myth of some sort of 'natural purity' by fire and Bernard's animal-utopian state of mind. Even more worrisome is the 'dream' of getting eaten – man finding salvation in the thought that his nature can change by getting eaten instead of being the one eating.

The question remains: will the erosion of the boundaries between man and animal become complete – and is man something that shall be overcome?

¹³² Edward Everett Dale: *Cow Country* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), p. 133.

Chapter IV: The Web of Life

We thus have a right to remind ourselves that a certain administration of the human stock was in fact compellingly necessary, and really – if possible – should have come long before. The human overpopulation became through several hundred winters so big that it threatened the sustainability of the planet. People ran a dangerous exploitation of fundamental resources like water, forest and arable earth. And while the human population increased and increased, there was – paradoxically – room to less and less of them because of the destruction of nature and resources. The problems didn't get solved. The natural means – war, epidemics and famine – took over. And it was in this chaotic and life-threatening situation for the whole creation that the Swarm grew into existence and took responsibility. Something everybody was thankful for ... That it then turned against its roots and nibbled them off, was a good and sensible choice...

For an AI-machine war is an illogical and destructive process. And partaking in such a process only gives meaning if the intention is to remove the cause of such and equivalent course of events. And the cause is human. The war acquires a new meaning. From now on it's human against machine. Although they hardly can be called machines any longer.

- Tor Åge Bringsværd, *Web: Betroelser om en truet art* ¹³³

Holistic Science and Fiction

Web envisions a future a few thousand years from now. The earth has evolved into a technological mega-nature and man has become redundant. The techno-ecological organism decides that the warring and ecologically unfriendly man is not worthy of his place in the biosphere. The biotic social structure is envisioned as detrimental to the one of today, and spiders are installed as 'masters of the planet' by the mysterious

¹³³ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web: Betroelser om en truet art* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), pp. 61-62 & 78: "Vi må derfor ha lov til å minne om at en viss forvaltning av menneskebestanden faktisk var tvingende nødvendig, og egentlig – hvis mulig – burde ha kommet lenge før. Den menneskelige overbefolkning var gjennom flere hundre vintre blitt så stor at den truet klodens bæredyktighet totalt sett. Man drev en farlig rovdrift på fundamentale ressurser som vann, skog og dyrkbar mark. Og mens den menneskelige befolkningen økte og økte, ble det samtidig – paradoksalt nok – plass til færre og færre av dem pga. ødeleggelsen av natur og ressurser. Problemene lot seg ikke løse. De naturlige virkemidlene – krig, epidemier og hungersnød – overtok. Og det var i denne kaotiske og – for hele skapningen – livstruende situasjonen at Svermen vokste frem og tok ansvar. Noe alle bør være takknemlige for ... At den så vendte seg mot sine egne røtter og gnaget dem over, var et godt og fornuftig valg... For en ki-maskin er krig en ulogisk og ødeleggende prosess. Og deltagelse i en slik prosess gir bare mening hvis hensikten er å fjerne årsaken til slike og tilsvarende hendelsesforløp. Og årsaken er mennesket. Krigen får en ny mening. Fra nå av er det menneske mot maskin. Skjønt maskiner kan de knapt kalles lenger."

technological 'Swarm'. As a consequence, man becomes cattle and pets for spiders, just as domesticated animals today serve as meat and entertainment for us. Those few free humans that are left are preoccupied with finding the 'truth' behind their demise (besides avoiding getting roasted by the tarantulas).

No century has been formed by science more than the 20th century. Yet it is the century in human history which has been the least comfortable with such a development. It is also the century in which the value of science came to be measured by technology – technology became the materialization of truth. Contemporary science-fiction is essentially founded upon these insights. *Web* is not unique by comparison with contemporary narratives of technological dreams (and more often nightmares): the apocalyptic ingredient and man's demise is technology. The apocalyptic imagination finds most of its contemporary outlet in science-fiction. It may be argued that the dream (or nightmare) of apocalypse is the myth of science-fiction, as much as it today relies on the myth of the last of the race. In *The Matrix Trilogy* (1999-2003), the human is reduced to an infinite energy resource for the total system – the machine. In *Web* the ecologically unfriendly man is spared because of dreams: women are preserved as guinea-pigs for dream-research because of their subconscious. In *The Myth of the Machine* (1967-70) Lewis Mumford sees civilization as driven towards a state of "megatechnics": an all-enveloping technological superstructure. The concern of the novel is with such a development: *Web* takes up the discussion to what extent the technological milieu has replaced, not the societal but the *natural* milieu. The fear seems to be that the more technology we immerse in, the less we will understand anything immediately meaningful, eventually making ourselves meaningless.¹³⁴ In *Web* man has been overcome – or at least come undone – but not by crossing the abyss between human and animal as discussed in chapter three, but by the technology created to cross it.

As much as endings really are about new beginnings, apocalyptic visions are more concerned with post-apocalypse in conveying a new genesis, as Northrop Frye's "flood archetype" suggests.¹³⁵ In *The Last Man* (1826), Mary Shelley visions a future

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 78-79: "Hvis du kunne bringe et menneske fra fortiden til i dag, ville han etter en kort stund begripe hva som foregikk. Men henvender du deg til en gullfisk, er det ingen forklaringer som hjelper! Slik er det også med den teknologiske forskjellen hvis vi lager vesener som er smartere enn oss. Da er vi ikke i sentrum og høyest på stigen lenger. Da er vi gullfisker alle sammen."

¹³⁵ Northrop Frye: *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 203: "From Wagner's *Ring* to science fiction, we may notice an increasing popularity of the flood archetype. This usually takes the form of some cosmic disaster destroying the whole fictional society

that is not only mythopoeic, but metamythopoeic – this symbolized in the sibylline leaves of the story. William Lomax says that metamythopoeic fiction functions to “dramatize the need for a new totalizing myth in a world fragmented by the loss of the old.”¹³⁶ The metamythopoeic device in *Web* is a mythic play entitled *Rottejomfruen* that Bringsværd has incorporated into the text while borrowing from Ibsen’s play *Lille Eyolf* (1894). The play functions as a moralist pointing finger. The character Osram says in Bringsværd’s adaptation: “We could hibernate while the machines cleaned up! We could sleep while the servants worked! Wake us up afterwards – we said. Wake us up when it’s all over!”¹³⁷ Frye’s archetype seems somewhat outdated from the perspective of holistic ecology. This is due to the shift in scope and the advancements of science, and suggests a decrease in visions with ‘pockets of freedom’ and a revitalization of the last of the race myth. It is increasingly not mankind that is re-born but something completely new – as the mutant-spiders depicted in *Web*. The technology that man created created the spiders: the tarantulas were ‘reborn’ through genetic engineering, and their genesis is ecologically justified and techno-holistically explained. Their emergence, ‘the transition’, marks the end of man as such. It is the end of man by language and knowledge, facilitated by technology through science. The purgatory dream of Stubberud – “not just having to be an incessantly pensive creature that eats others” – is now envisioned as reality.

According to Eric Hobsbawm, we live in a world which contains two conflicting yet overlapping scientific views of the world.¹³⁸ It is in this ‘paradox of the historian’ that the cosmology of Bringsværd is situated, and is what makes his message at best ambivalent and at worst contradictory. The emphasis of *Web* is on the whole, from the depiction of a scientific nature to explanations of man’s fall through ‘total technologies’. The blind spot obscuring the message of the novel is the employed ‘episteme’ of holistic science in a framework true to the Enlightenment. The novel is ideologically situated in-between the romantic science of ecology giving meaning to the

except a small group, which begins life anew in some sheltered spot. The affinities of this theme to that of the cosy group which has managed to shut the rest of the world out are clear enough, and it brings us around again to the image of the mysterious newborn infant floating on the sea.”

¹³⁶ William Lomax: *Landscape and the Romantic Dilemma: Myth and Metaphor in Science-Fiction Narrative* in Georg E. Slusser & Eric S. Rabkin (eds.): *Mindscapes: the Geographies of Imagined Worlds* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. 253.

¹³⁷ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 270: ”Men mens maskiner ryddet opp, kunne vi selv gå i dvale! Mens tjenerskapet jobbet, kunne vi selv legge oss til å sove! Vekk oss etterpå – sa vi. Vekk oss når det hele er over!”

¹³⁸ See Eric Hobsbawm: *Ekstremismens tidsalder. Det 20. århundrets historie 1914-1991* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2003), p. 552.

world and the science of man promising emancipation. The ambiguous message reads: 'emancipate 'Gaia' and soar *and* descend to become a member of a biotic community'. In essence, the holistic and ecological *Weltanschauung* of Bringsværd does not depart from the idiosyncratic ideology of Arne Næss and the ecology he represents. The 'green culture' promoted by the main character Asoka from the 'Green Tribe' is not that different from the 'holistic greenness' of Erlend Loe or Næss:

I saw he was crying. He kissed the tree for each fifth hew with his stone-axe. I asked why, and he answered that such were the previous ways, he had learned it from his father who was a wood-watcher ... He said that once upon a time trees and shrubs could talk, and maybe they still could, if we just learned to listen in the right way.¹³⁹

The perennial religion 'circle of life' of the American Indians is in scientific terms understood as an equally vague 'web of life' by Fritjof Capra. The "new scientific paradigm" as opposed to the rationales of Cartesian science, is distinguished by a shift from mechanical to organic and holistic understandings of life. The envisioned spider-culture urges, as much of contemporary ecological literature, to 'think globally but act locally' and to be 'a knot in a biospherical web'.¹⁴⁰ In *Web* the slogan of the environmental movement – think globally, act locally – has become an apt description of the mysterious 'Swarm'. It is envisaged in a holistic framework as:

A gigantic mutual organism. Compound of millions of cooperating individuals. Which could any time act alone, but which in thought, words and deeds first and foremost was this one big collective.¹⁴¹

The depicted technological supernature reveals the dream behind ecology (to be able to decipher and thus to control nature) that Bringsværd endorses. The world has become

¹³⁹ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), pp. 237-238: "Første gang jeg la merke til Asoka, var han i ferd med å felle et bjerketre. Jeg så at han gråt. Og at han kysset treet for hver femte hugg med den skarpe steinøksen sin. Jeg spurte hvorfor, og han svarte at slik gjorde man alltid før i tiden, det hadde han lært av sin far, som var trevokter ... Han sa at en gang kunne trær og busker snakke, og kanskje kunne det de fremdeles, hvis vi bare lærte oss å lytte på den rette måten." The main character Asoka explains the ways of the Green Tribe, echoing the Næssian maxim 'simple in means, rich in ends!', *ibid.*, p. 103: "Vi kaller oss Grønne fordi vi har gitt avkall på alle maskiner og alle våpen av metall. Det er vår tro at slikt bare fører til en ny undergang. Vi velger enkle løsninger."

¹⁴⁰ The main proposition of much contemporary ecology proclaims in holistic spirit the quintessence of bio-egalitarianism. A Næssian interpretation of the norm states everything living and non-living should be considered 'knots of equal value in a biospherical web', or as the "rejection of the man-in-environment image in favor of the *relational, total-field image*." See Arne Næss: *The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movements: A Summary* in Nina Witoszek & Andrew Brennan (eds.): *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Næss and the Progress of Ecophilosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 3.

¹⁴¹ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 317: "En gigantisk felles organisme. Sammensatt av millioner samarbeidende individer. Som når som helst kunne handle alene. Men som i tanker, ord og gjerning først og fremst var dette ene veldige kollektivet."

an ‘ecological megatechnics’, and the technological milieu is total. More than that, the envisioned techno-world is a completely autonomous self-perpetuating system.

Technological nature – the ‘Swarm’, equals Creation:

It was the *novelty*. It was a form of life completely *different* from anything else. It was all the thoughts of living machines, connected together into one big and invisible organism.¹⁴²

The Apocalyptic End of Man and the Last of the Race

You have always meant too good of yourselves ... The spider has been here forever, humankind came here practically the day before yesterday. We don’t even know from where! ... All we know is that you are intruders ... Humankind does not belong on this planet at all ... You have probably come here from space as a kind of virus ... But I tell you: the human is a parasite. That’s all we know for now. A virus and a parasite.¹⁴³

Michel Foucault became famous for his final words in one of his ‘archeologies’: “Man is an invention of recent date and one perhaps nearing its end.”¹⁴⁴ Bringsværd sees the same possibility for man as an ‘episteme’ coming to a close. But he does not seem to leave much hope for the human, seen as a virus and a parasite. Yet, the depicted men still struggle with the Darwinian realization. The orthodox premise is already set on the first page of the novel:

We know that it is their world – and not ours any longer. But we don’t obey them. We don’t slave for them. Humans are not cattle for any other creature. We put up a fight with sticks and fire.¹⁴⁵

Both Foucault and Bringsværd discuss the knowledge of man as nearing its end.

Foucault terms modern man as ‘dehistoricized’ because of changes in ‘episteme’ – the discourse of culture has moved from the human to the scientific realm. Here memory is

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 105: ”Den var det *nye*. Den var en livsform helt *annerledes* enn alt annet. Den var alle levende maskiners tanker, koblet sammen til en eneste stor og usynlig organisme.” Italics are Bringsværd’s.

¹⁴³ Ibid., pp. 416 & 436: ”Dere har alltid ment for godt om dere selv ... Edderkoppen har vært her bestandig, menneskeheten kom omtrent i forgårs ... Vi vet ikke engang hvorfor! ... Vi vet bare at dere er inntrengere ... Menneskeheten hører faktisk ikke hjemme til på denne kloden i det hele tatt ... Antagelig er dere kommet hit fra verdensrommet som en slags virus... Men jeg sier deg: Menneskene er snyltedyrr. Det er alt vi foreløpig vet. Virus og snyltedyrr.”

¹⁴⁴ Michel Foucault: *The Order of Things: an Archeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 387.

¹⁴⁵ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 9: “Vi vet at det er deres verden – og ikke vår lenger. Men vi adlyder dem ikke. Vi slaver ikke for dem. Vi mennesker er ikke kveg for noen annen skapning. Vi setter oss til motverge med ild og spisse stokker.”

of quintessential importance, since civilization – history as remembrance – is actively distorted and man set back in development. The notion of *genos* was first concentrated on the Hellenic *oikos* and later extended from the family sphere to *polis*. In *Web* genealogy is synonymous with the search for a post-apocalyptic humankind's roots – and the genealogy of its own demise: technological civilization. The project of remembering comes close to that of the Renaissance, which saw the past as an ideal model to be resurrected. In this the memory of the Renaissance managed to highlight – like *Web* – the discontinuity of collective memory instead of continuity. The critique of 'dememorizing' is essentially from the perspective of tradition and knowledge by continuity:

Fortunately for humankind, the Swarm neglected to eradicate its creators – it was content to disarm them, take away means of production, mangle each social context, erase most of the collective memory, and thus set the human as a species many hundred of winters back in development.¹⁴⁶

'Reverse' reveals the author's conservative bias in his critique of the loss of memory through tradition and knowledge: "We look forward, with our gaze towards all that still doesn't exist, a song goes. But life can really be understood if we choose to go backwards."¹⁴⁷ Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer thought the same. The search for an intelligible past corresponds in equal measure to the ability to be 'cultivated' – to live with a longer temporal horizon than the animal. In *Web* the importance memory is given is same archaic people gave to remembering, as forgetting was the most threatening transgression. "In the archaic *Weltanschauung*, what the dead knew must not be allowed to fade into oblivion; at all costs it had to remain alive and available."¹⁴⁸ The learned man and main character of the long-range post-apocalyptic scenario says the only thing man should fear is "His Majesty Oblivion."¹⁴⁹ The life-task of the main character is to remember:

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 79: "Til alt hell for menneskeheten unnlot Svermen ... å utrydde sine skapere – den nøyde seg med å avvæpne dem, ta fra dem produksjonsmidlene, radbrekke enhver sosial kontekst, slette mesteparten av den kollektive hukommelse og således sette mennesket som art mange hundrevis av vintre tilbake i utvikling."

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 170: "Vi ser fremover, med blikket rettet mot alt det som ennå ikke finnes, heter det i en sang. Men egentlig kan livet bare forstås hvis vi velger å gå baklengs."

¹⁴⁸ See David Gross: *Lost Time: On Remembering and Forgetting in Late Modern Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), p. 88.

¹⁴⁹ See Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 194.

I'm one of those that *record* what others tell. If it is important. I'm a human chosen to remember, who is trained to remember every word and every gesture. They call us *discs*. After something that was before.¹⁵⁰

Stubberud's vision depicts the loss of knowledge as a blessing and a *tabula rasa* as a prerequisite for creating 'Eden' anew: the farmer-encyclopaedist encountered in *Kjøtt i mørke* did not bother with historicity. But here the entire plot is built on the search for a meaningful past. It manifests itself in the journey to the mysterious cradle of civilization – 'the Archive', in search for lost knowledge:

That strange, octagonal construction was like a huge life-giving cow, it was here all knowledge could be milked from – that was something nobody of us dreamt of. And how shall we proceed? How will we be able to drink from this abundance? So we can understand more of both the Swarm and the tulas ... and foremost of ourselves – our own fall ... our way to the ruin, and what possibilities we have for survival.¹⁵¹

The hope of the main character is that knowledge will emancipate. The greater knowledge we have of past and present, the better equipped we are to come with prophecies or warnings of the future. But since knowledge is dictated by memory, this proves to be an impossible task. Memory is the only thing man cannot control, as the main character demonstrates.

'His Majesty Oblivion' seems to be the main target of Bringsværd's civilization critique, he sees 'dehistoricization' as one of the biggest curses of contemporary life. Modern man has stopped making life a history by the dream that he refuses to awaken from, meaning the contemporary order of things. Bringsværd seems to say that contemporary life is merely 'life-in-function' instead of 'life-as-history'. But the treatment of memory is paradoxical. Knowledge as tradition and history is emphasized but simultaneously neglected when man is by the employed scientific discourse foremost seen as a member of an all-embracing biotic community. In *Web* science equals culture, and thus exhibits a same type of 'dehistoricizing' that is being criticized. The language of the novel is derived from a scientific discourse: knowledge of man has

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 10-11: "Jeg er en av dem som *tar opp* det andre forteller. Hvis det er viktig. Jeg er et menneske som er utvalgt til å huske. Som er trenet til å minnes hvert ord og hver håndbevegelse. De kaller oss *disker*. Etter noe som fantes før i tiden." Italics are Bringsværd's.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 161: "Den merkelige, åttekantete konstruksjonen var å ligne med en veldig livgivende ku – at det var her all kunnskap og viten kunne melkes – det var det ingen av oss som drømte om. Og hvordan skal vi gå videre? Hvordan skal vi få drikke av denne overfloden? Slik at vi kan forstå mer både av Svermen og tulaene... og fremfor alt av oss selv – vårt eget fall... vår vei mot undergangen, og hvilke muligheter vi har til å overleve."

been substituted by knowledge of the biosphere. In Bringsværd's vision the incomprehensibility of scientific language that Foucault discusses is what in the end gives meaning to the imagined future.

Foucault writes that language no longer clarifies the world, instead it dispenses with it – it is a retreat of language from the world of man. This is the case in *Web*, where the few free people left think the world is literal. They keep looking for words that would unravel the technological augmentations of their world and summon a new beginning for mankind:

Mother has made a song about it. She goes and mulls over it all day long. The song gets longer and longer. She says she is looking for the right word. She thinks the world is literal, and that words can both create and destroy. She says that there is a word for everything. She says that if we just find the right word, we might be allowed to start all over again.¹⁵²

In the environmental utopia of the future, ecological emancipation equals absolute human enslavement. If complete emancipation would be the case, it would also mean that man would know everything. He would therefore be closed-in in the world – complete knowledge would mean man would fence nature. This is the longing of the main character in search for a lost past, and the educational hope of Bringsværd. In this case, it is nature that has fenced man. He has become an animal which is situated in the world when he must decipher the natural and thus technological order by a language that has been rendered meaningless by scienticism. In the total techno-abstract world man becomes a gold-fish in a bowl:

The landscape had been created anew around us when I woke up, and the soft bubble wall had the same colour as the sky. The hillside had become greener and healthier, there was a stream that gathered into a small lake at its foot, and there grew high, slim trees along the waterfront. The sky over us was artificial, with a sun that could be switched on and off – and if we wished for it, we could have rain.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 30: "Mamma har laget en sang om det. Hun går og muller på den hele dagen. Sangen blir lengre og lengre. Hun sier hun leter etter det riktige ordet. Hun tror verden er bokstavelig, og at ord kan både skape og ødelegge. Hun sier det er et ord for alt. Hun sier at hvis vi bare finner det riktige ordet, vil vi kanskje få lov til å begynne om igjen."

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 411: "Da jeg våknet var landskapet skapt nytt omkring oss og den myke boblevæggen hadde samme farge som himmelen. Åssiden var blitt grønnere og friskere, det rant en bekk der – som samlet seg til et lite tjern ved foten, og det vokste høye, slanke trær langs vannkanten. Over oss var det en kunstig himmel, med en sol som kunne skruses av og på – og hvis vi ønsket det, ble det regnvær."

The abstract nature and its equally alien landscape are meant to highlight the conundrum of being and the knowledge about it, rather than to provide a spectacle of technological extravaganza. Like Heidegger, Bringsværd seems to be of the opinion that technology is the metaphysics of our time. The alien landscape reveals the entangled relationship of the ‘technological’ and the ‘natural’ milieus, and poses the human dilemma of an increase in ‘magic of everyday life’. According to Heidegger, the bewilderment of everyday life is just an expression of the enchantment of modernity – *Wiederverzauberung*. It is produced by an accelerating yet ephemeral development of technics devoid of meaning: “We know very well what we had, he said to me. But we don’t have a clue how to recreate it. Who other than machines understand electricity and telephones?”¹⁵⁴

The inspiration of much of today’s network thinking and ecology is derived from Gestalt theory. In *Web*, the slogan of Gestalt psychology – the sum is more than its parts – has become more than ironic since it captures the essence of the augmented reality. The principle of augmentations and the core of hologrammic deep ecology is the same, namely the assumption of a “microcosm mirroring a macrocosm.”¹⁵⁵ The problem with hologrammic thinking is the complete loss of perspective. The world might be that of a collective phantasmagoria, where man cannot tell whether he is dreaming or not, or whether he is alive or not. In the augmented reality of *Web* the dualist ground premise is no longer true and the Cartesian response no longer valid. Thought and action are one inasmuch as nature is total. In an augmented reality beyond man’s grasp doubt can never be proved wrong:

Is it possible to walk with open eyes, and nevertheless be caught in a dream?
Because sometimes I think: this is not happening. This is neither possible nor true ... Maybe we are just loose heads on a long, long shelf.¹⁵⁶

Although older technological extrapolations such as Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1976) or Jon Bing’s *Scenario* (1972) posture problematic futures, they still envision ‘pockets of freedom’. *Green Utopia anno 2084* – Næss’s vision of the future – is a pocket of freedom. The pockets are depicted as lacunas where man lives in a ‘natural state’ free

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 58: “Vi vet godt hva vi hadde, sa han til meg. Men vi aner ikke hvordan vi skal gjenskape det. Hvem andre enn maskiner forstår seg vel på elektrisk lys og telefoner?”

¹⁵⁵ Arne Næss: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: an Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 200.

¹⁵⁶ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), pp. 390-391: “Er det mulig å gå med åpne øyne, og likevel være fanget i en drøm? For av og til tenker jeg: Dette hender ikke. Dette er verken mulig eller sant ... Kanskje er vi bare løse hoder på en lang, lang hylle.”

from dominance and government – be it from ephemeral technology or a more tangible state. Increasingly, science-fiction depicts parallel places that can only be reached by not going anywhere or by not being *able* to go anywhere. *Web* depicts an indefinite extension of time and space – and governance. In *Foundation's Edge* (1982), Isaac Asimov has deployed the Gaia-hypothesis to reinstate a higher power. Asimov's 'Gaia' has become the all-empowering and omnipotent metaphor for unity and is a "panacea for humanity's cosmic anxieties."¹⁵⁷ As in *Web*, the foremost concern seems to be with origins clouded in myths and misinformation. The apocalyptic imagination feeds the fear of some kind of unseen nature manipulating man:

He said it was just like in the fairy-tales, and that once upon a time it was humans that decided over them. "But today they have new masters. Who we don't know. Which we never get to see face to face" Oliver said. "And it's them we should be afraid of, not the machines. The machines just intervene". He meant the eyes. Or those that own them ... Free humans are continually wandering. That's why their villages are movable. Originally it was to avoid getting caught ... We can run as far and fast as we want. But the eyes see everything that happens. Humans are – either they want it or not – at the mercy of 'the others'.¹⁵⁸

The aspect of discontinuity becomes important and is highlighted in the structural changes of knowledge and power that dictate cross-species relations. Bringsværd's views conform to structuralist theories imbued with a catastrophic paradigm: man the master suddenly became a pet and cattle for a race of spiders. Thure Erik Lund argues that structural changes of power might quickly result in 'masters' suddenly becoming 'slaves', as nature is generating itself through specialization and differentiation. What changes is the structure of nature's structure.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ See Jack G. Voller: *Universal Mindscape: the Gaia hypothesis in Science Fiction* in Georg E. Slusser & Eric S. Rabkin (eds.): *Mindscape: the Geographies of Imagined Worlds* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), p. 141.

¹⁵⁸ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), pp. 50-51: "Han sa det var akkurat som i eventyrene, og at en gang for lenge siden var det vi mennesker som hadde bestemt over dem. "Men i dag har de fått nye herrer. Som vi ikke kjenner. Som vi aldri får se ansikt til ansikt", sa Oliver. "Og det er dem vi bør frykte, ikke maskinene. Maskinene går bare imellom". Han mente øynene. Eller de som eier dem ... Frie mennesker er stadig på vandring. Derfor er byene deres flyttbare. Opprinnelig var det for å unngå å bli fanget ... Vi kan løpe så langt og fort vi vil. Men øynene vet alt som skjer. Menneskene er – enten de vil eller ikke – prisgitt 'de andre'."

¹⁵⁹ Thure Erik Lund: *Språk og Natur* (Gjøvik: H Press, 2005), pp. 24-25: "De gammelmodige ser ikke at "herskerne" i et hvilket som helst system brått kan bli "slaver". Tanken om at disse pyramidalinnsette dyr egentlig kan sees som vertsorganismer for en drøss med andre organismer. Attpåtil må de kanskje spesialisere seg i enkelte roller som skal tilfredsstill systemet, som stadig blir mer komplekst, slik at de

The interesting point of scientific theories lending support to the catastrophic paradigm is that organisms evolve into new structures only when far from equilibrium. This has implications for the ways apocalyptic events are viewed, as development seems to necessitate catastrophes and other cataclysmic events. Again, the scientific discourse that the novel leans on reveals the ambiguity of Bringsværd's agenda. Firstly, the author thinks man should seize the opportunity to save himself before it is too late, but the scientific theories that give meaning to the imagined world suggest that this is not possible – except far from equilibrium which is synonymous with a catastrophe. Even if mankind in the face of a catastrophe would be saved, what emerges in the wake of an apocalypse could no longer be viewed as human. Secondly, since virus is a structure, the tarantulas can prove to be no better 'stewards of the planet' than man. Since the agenda of Bringsværd is to warn us of not sponging on our 'fellow friends', meaning the entire biotic community, we are left with a paradox. The implicit and somewhat fatalistically redemptive suggestion (intended or not), is that biotic sponging, whoever or whatever is the leech, corrupts. Should we care about the author's agenda, since we, determined by the environment (and not ourselves), are to be considered biotic leeches feeding on the rest of the biosphere?

Ever since the publication of Darwin's evolution theory, the 'last of the race' myth and the fear of extinction have been a reoccurring theme of culture. They are inextricably linked, as even the "numerous writers who speculated on the possibilities of a 'coming race' were really more concerned about the extinction of mankind."¹⁶⁰ The 'last of the race' is no longer a myth but a scientific certainty calculated by the machine:

In a new 100 million years the male y-chromosome will have vanished completely ... It has become a refuse dump full of useless and degenerated genes, while it simultaneously has become smaller and smaller.¹⁶¹

A devilish deal is made between the 'Virgin' and the 'Swarm' in order to conserve the species. The deal manifests in a last city of refuge, the city of 'dreamers', and is clouded

plutselig, på et gitt tidspunkt, må omdefineres som art. Brått er herskernes avkom en annen dyreart, gjennom den økende spesialisering og fragmentering som naturen har som sitt fremste verktøy til å generere liv. Ethvert økosystem fungerer på denne måten, makten pulveriseres innenfra, økosystemets senter forflytter seg, stadig, og det som er levende ved økostrukturen, er først og fremst dens abstrakte karakter."

¹⁶⁰ See Fiona J. Stafford: *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p. 297.

¹⁶¹ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 398: "Om nye 100 millioner år vil mannens y-kromosom være helt forsvunnet ... Det er blitt en avfalls plass full av ubrukelige og degenererte gener, samtidig som det er blitt mindre og mindre."

in myth. Here the mythological town of apocalyptic fiction – a heavenly Jerusalem, is turned into a devilish suburb of Hades lit in carnival-lights. The god of the underworld – the machinery beneath the city – rules here too, and sacrificial highpoints are banished for the eye. The myth of the last of the race lives on in religion – as opium both *for* and *of* people. But the religion only promises salvation to women:

They wanted to be prepared to what could come – that they one day would be alone. The Virgin’s church ... sought the best and the strongest ... wanted to improve their own sex. Because only in this way could the human get a new future. So they thought.¹⁶²

It can be argued that the Dream Institute is the ‘church’ of the machines. Its function is not to decipher the nature of the scientific, ‘rational’ nature, but to decode the ‘secret’ language of man, since dreams are a form of concrete revelation. The ‘Virgin’ decides to exchange dreams for a life without the fear of immediate extinction:

She understood that making peace was decisive ... But what did she have to offer ... other than herself – and the same puzzle that the human always has carried? So she promised the Swarm that it would learn to dream ... They would solve the puzzle, unfold it – like a gift and a sacrifice. And in return? Peace for everybody that wanted the same. Peace with machines. Peace with everything that might come. And peace with the enormous Swarm.¹⁶³

Myths of Holism: Ecology and Technology

We must take out some of the stock every now and then, the machine says. Otherwise there will be too many of you. We also have other species to consider, and we must first and foremost think of diversity and the whole. You surely understand that?¹⁶⁴

For Richard Stivers it is historically apparent that the more technology we use to exploit nature, “the more it was necessary to turn the same technical logic to the organization

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 399: ”De ville forberede seg på det som kunne komme – at de en dag ville bli alene. Jomfruens kirke... søkte de beste og de sterkeste ... ville foredle sitt eget kjønn. For bare slik kunne mennesket få en ny fremtid. Slik trodde de.”

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 397: ”Hun forsto at det gjaldt å slutte fred... Men hva hadde hun vel å tilby... annet enn seg selv – og den samme gåten som mennesket alltid har båret på? Så hun lovet Svermen at den skulle lære å drømme... De skulle løse gåten, brette den ut, legge den åpen – lik en gave og et offer. Og til gjengeld? Fred for alle som ville det samme. Fred med maskiner. Fred med alt som måtte komme. Og fred med den veldige Svermen.”

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 49: ”Vi må ta ut en del av bestanden fra tid til annen, sier maskinen. Ellers blir det for mange av dere. Vi har også andre arter å ta hensyn til, og vi må først og fremst tenke på helheten og mangfoldet. Det forstår du vel?”

and control of the human environment.”¹⁶⁵ Man is unable to understand the machine, while the machine depends on understanding nature (man included), and thus on controlling it. This makes the human an environmental variable and not much more. An ecologically sustainable and ‘manageable’ nature hinges on the abolishment of freedom. The ‘bureaucratic mind’ of manipulation and adjustment encompasses here the whole planet: rationality has become ecological and morality global and utilitarian. Utopias are insular insofar they depend on distinguishing the pure from the impure, and is how they manage to limit the world. In *Web* there are no limits to the ecological utopia, nature is one and all is abstract. The ecologically-minded civilization of the instated spiders shows the scope of technological consciousness to be total, thus rendering the planet a scene for ‘cosmic experiments’.

As much as the dream of apocalypse might be the myth of science-fiction, so is the dream of a unity between spirit and matter the myth of technology. The tendency seems to be an increasing inclination of replacing norms previously derived from philosophy or religion by those from science which negate any separation between scientific and ethical values. While the Romantics desired for a spiritual power present in the Newtonian clockwork in the form of God or Pan, the sublime is today sought through the scientific realm in diverse pseudo-holistic visions which increasingly borrow from perennial faiths. Earlier narratives relied more on biblical allegories: H.G. Wells’ cosmology in *War of the Worlds* (1899) relies on a Darwinian and regionalist notion of evolution enabled by a Christian God. Arthur C. Clarke’s mythologized Christian Rapture in *Childhood’s End* (1953). In the *Helliconia Trilogy* (1982-85) by Brian Aldiss the universe consists of a total technology and nature beyond man’s cognition and comprehension. The hypothesis of James Lovelock and those promulgated under deep ecology are also endorsed, the author attempting a cosmological unity, the attempt as old as the romantic spirit, of man and, this time around not Pan or God but, “Gaia, the original beholder”. In *Web* the autopoietic pattern of the Swarm makes Darwinian evolution antique and outdated: god is resurrected and intelligent design put to practice. Basically, the Swarm is nature with a plan. It even takes care of men, its biotically suspicious inhabitants. The ecological diversity envisaged by Næss has in the novel indeed become ‘automatic’ in the sense that it is enabled and guaranteed by the automatic calculations of the technological organism.

¹⁶⁵ Richard Stivers: *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 73.

A decrease in human population, besides global warming, is one of the biggest concerns of environmentalists. In the deep ecology platform, the principle of bio-egalitarianism suggests that a successful realization of biotic diversity hinges on a reduction of human population. The underlying belief is that densely populated areas tend to foster unhappy men and animals. This norm of '*Lebensraum*' is justified through a variable of "level of crowding", indicating to which extent life needs space for "flourishing" as Næss says.¹⁶⁶ But the necessity of decreasing the human population is justified by an ecological contradiction. All the while 'natural processes' such as wars and famines should not be intervened in since they are 'natural', the stance is detrimental in the equally natural processes of reproduction. In *Web* as in most other ecologically inspired remarks on overpopulation the humane aspect of reducing the number of men is sidelined in favour of a more undefined well-being of a biotic collective. Although it may seem that Bringsværd writes about the horrors of massmurder, the mindset reveals to be of the same as Dave Foreman's and Paul Ehrlich's, since wars, epidemics and famines are deemed "natural means" to keep the human number under control. Furthermore, when 'survival' is the paramount mythological symbol, ecological power has been turned into a value in itself.

For Michel Foucault, culture is the same as production of discourses upheld by seamless webs of structural power. Common for structuralism and holistic ecology is to see action foremost as processes of structures where the separation of matter and form (or knowledge and power), is either impossible or undesirable. Foucauldian structuralism and Capraen scientificism render themselves to notions of power with no kernel, indicating a totality where structural determinants are omnipresent. Basically, man is 'free' to the extent he is determined so by his environment. The problematic aspect of such holistic scientificism on an individual level is the totalitarian tendency and complete abstraction. In the collective 'web of life' identity can only be established in terms of the community: an individual is an individual insofar he is part of a biotic community. The emphasis of ecological emancipation reveals the Janus-face of Bringsværd's cosmology. Although the framework is derived from science that negates any distinctions between ethical and scientific values, the content is to a large extent

¹⁶⁶ Arne Næss & George Sessions: *The Deep Ecology Platform* in Nina Witoszek & Andrew Brennan (eds.): *Philosophical Dialogues: Arne Næss and the Progress of Ecophilosophy* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 8: "The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of the human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease." See also Arne Næss: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle: an Outline of an Ecosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 140-141.

derived from the first scientific revolution. The ambiguity is in a moral agenda of the Enlightenment that is employed in a holistic framework to cover all life on earth. Although Bringsværd wants to warn us about the fallacies of ‘total technology’ the ecological emphasis sums up as equally totalitarian. This reveals the ambiguous aspects of the novel in its ideological discrepancy between an emancipatory agenda and holism that renders notions of freedom impossible.

In general, questions of freedom are omitted or held irrelevant in the cosmic schemes of science fiction. Some vision an apocalyptic end and future that cannot be changed. The main character in *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003) ends the film with the words: “We were never meant to stop it from happening, merely survive it.” A more optimistic fatalism was exhibited by Buckminster Fuller and Arthur C. Clarke who saw the development of technology as synonymous with the development of the universe and these as synonymous with progress of man. All is one, man is all and becoming God is inevitable. But being God is what Bringsværd is warning us about: “Man and machine. Machine and man. The perfect creature. The complete human. So we thought then.”¹⁶⁷

The medieval Church despised the body. So do many of the technological utopias, as they treat it as an irksome and embarrassing atavism in relation to the eternity promised by an ‘abstract nature’. The dream behind the all-encompassing Swarm implies a fascination with cheating death by emerging with a purely abstract form and disregarding the body which is seen as a jailhouse instead of a Stubberudian fortress. The Faustian myth of cheating death and achieving immortality often borrows from ancient beliefs on pseudo-mythological levels. This is the case in films such as *Dune* (1984) and *Immortel (ad vitam)* (2004).

The assertion of Henri Bergson that the task of life is to impose indetermination and a certain free creativity on matter has in *Web* become a human prerogative decreed and imposed by the technological nature. As one of the characters chosen by the Swarm to immortality says:

We walk together into a firmament of glowing points and lines. Jona has been here much longer than me. He says every point is like a nerve cell. He says the inside of my head looks somewhat like this. He says the Swarm wants to build a

¹⁶⁷ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 272: ”Dere blandet dere med så mange. Til sist også med maskiner. Og det – gjorde dere mest lykkelig av alt! For dere så at blandningen var mer menneskelig enn dere selv. Den var alt dere håpet og higet etter. Menneske og maskin. Maskin og menneske. Den perfekte skapning. Det fullkomne mennesket. Trodde vi den gang.”

bridge between organic and electronic brains. He says that he and I are going to be a part of this bridge, where brain tissue is mixed with electronic circuits. Instilled coincidences are necessary if the Swarm wants to be complete – and only humans can give them.¹⁶⁸

The Dream of Biotic Unity

Our relation to other species has always been contradictory. We are friends with some of them. We eat others. And a few ... we just kill. Why is it like that? When did we make these choices? And where have all the others gone ... the whole earthly multitude of living creatures that once existed here – all of them we now just meet in fairy-tales.¹⁶⁹

Dreams of hybridizations of the human and animal, Satyrs and other mythical figures, are as old as the belief in circles of life, but Darwin's theory of the common descent of life gave new impetus to anthropomorphic description. Biological diversity is a central principle of ecology and is in the theory of deep ecology followed by maximum symbiosis. Indeed, increased diversity should 'automatically' lead to increased symbiosis – both biological and cultural. In ecological terms, symbiosis resulting in hybridizations – symbiogenesis, is nothing more than desirable out of the principle of diversity of life.

Today, genetic engineering renders ancient images of hybridizations of animals and man more plausible. Bio-technology and genetic engineering are common themes in much of contemporary science fiction. The blending of man and machine is increasingly brought up since the Industrial Revolution and *Frankenstein* (1818). Although the obvious ethical dilemmas of genetic science, the advancements within this field of research are increasingly treated as inevitable, sometimes as 'natural' as man's cultivation and breeding of plants and animals. In fact, man has become the Creator of "replicas" such as in the motion-picture *Blade Runner* (1982) and of "mechas" in

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 429: "Sammen går vi inn i en stjernehimmel av lysende punkter og streker. Jona har vært her mye lenger enn jeg. Han sier at hvert punkt er lik en nervecelle. Han sier innsiden av hodet mitt ser omtrent slik ut. Han sier Svermen vil bygge en bro mellom organiske og elektroniske hjerner. Han sier at han og jeg skal være en del av denne broen, hvor hjernevev blandes med elektroniske kretser. For hvis Svermen skal bli fullkommen, må det også podes inn tilfældigheter – og slike er det bare mennesker som kan gi den."

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 229: "Vårt forhold til andre arter har alltid vært selvmotsigende. Vi er venner med noen av dem. Andre spiser vi. Og noen få...bare dreper vi. Hvorfor er det slik? Når traff vi disse valgene? Og hvor er det blitt av alle de andre... hele den jordiske hærske av levende skapninger som en gang fantes her – alle dem vi nå bare møter i eventyr."

Artificial Intelligence: A.I. (2001). In some cases bio-technology has become synonymous with a well of reserve-organs for the wealthy, as in the motion-picture *The Island* (2005). It is similar to the dystopia pictured before the apocalyptic transition in *Web*, where the genetically engineered creatures are merely ‘living meatballs’.¹⁷⁰

In *Web*, the mythical creatures of human-animal hybrids have become more than fairy tales. The creation of ‘mixes and monsters’ is a psychological reaction to the increasing extinction of the ‘wild’ and the ‘natural’. The impetus for creating mythical figures and ‘new’ animals is the effect of a nostalgic reminiscence over exotic and extinct species. The men that still were masters in their own house were lonely. But they had dreams that they made come true in ‘drims’ – mythological characters that were created for joy and wonder. They were all the odd fantasy-figures humans always have dreamed of. And with genetic technology and new splicing methods we could for the first time experience real unicorns, centaurs and mermaids.¹⁷¹

The theme is elaborated elsewhere in Bringsværd’s authorship. In *Oslo 2084* the fantastical figure is treated as an embodiment of hubris, “a kind of inverted dog: friend as enemy.”¹⁷² This, because all “old dreams became true – and all nightmares, because there was those that found pleasure in raising werewolves and demons.”¹⁷³ As such, the theme resembles a mythical re-adaptation of Shelley’s *Frankenstein: the Modern Prometheus* (1818), commonly claimed to be the first science-fiction story, with a matching plot and morale: “So goes with a world that doesn’t see what it does and doesn’t understand what it has created.”¹⁷⁴

In *Oslo 2084* man is his mind and memory: “We are what we think. We are what we remember.”¹⁷⁵ In *Web* man is extended to his dreams – we are what we dream of. But memories and dreams insist, they do not ask. Man may choose to disregard them, but he cannot choose what he dreams or what his memories are constituted of. While mankind falls into techno-collective dream sleep as depicted in the play “The Rat-

¹⁷⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143: “skapt til glede og forundring. De var alle de merkelige fantasivesener menneskene alltid hadde drømt om. Og med genteknikk og nye spleisemetoder kunne vi for første gang oppleve virkelige enhjørninger, kentaurer og havfruer.”

¹⁷² Tor Åge Bringsværd & Jon Bing: *Oslo 2084: Fire fortellinger om fremtidige forbrytelser* (Oslo: Pax, 2004), p. 78.

¹⁷³ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 143: ”Alle gamle drømmer ble virkelige – og alle mareritt ... for det fantes også dem som fant glede i å mane frem varulver og demoner.”

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163: “Slik går det med en verden som ikke ser hva den gjør og som ikke forstår hva den har skapt.”

¹⁷⁵ Tor Åge Bringsværd & Jon Bing: *Oslo 2084: Fire fortellinger om fremtidige forbrytelser* (Oslo: Pax, 2004), p. 46.

Virgin”, the scientific dream facilitated by technology turns into a nightmare. In the play man went willingly to sleep while the Rat-Virgin was contracted to take care of all dreams that became nightmares, those things that “*gnaver her i huset*” to borrow the words of Ibsen in *Lille Eyolf*. In *Web*, man is still faced with the same social conditions as in Ibsen’s time. One of the last humans of the Bringsværdian old order of says: “Never forget: you are a bit of everything. They hate the likes of you in the City. Look at yourself as weed. Refuse you your right to live. Wish to weed yourself out.”¹⁷⁶ The point of Keats’s remains: in dreams must man’s responsibility begin. The mind behind the locked door, the unconscious, must be held responsible. As Bringsværd writes in ‘The Rat-Virgin’: “You need to pick a side even in a dream!”¹⁷⁷

But what side is it that we should pick, and what is the dream that we should awaken from? The dream modern man dreams, seems to be the presumption that man is alone with himself in the world. As Erlend Loe’s main character already remarked: “We are born alone and we die alone. It’s just to get used to that sooner or later. Loneliness is fundamental in the whole construction.”¹⁷⁸ In *Web* the assumption that the fundamental construction of life is loneliness is precisely what is being opposed. The ecological emphasis in a holistic framework reveals Bringsværd’s critique to be against modern day individualism in a godless universe:

I think humans were lonely. As lonely as gods. They knew everything, they owned everything – but had nobody to share it with. That’s why they created creatures – in their own image. Not animals. Not humans. But *us*.¹⁷⁹

The human condition as one of utter loneliness might result in what Peter Wessel Zapffe calls “cosmic pain”. ‘Cosmic pain’ is the result of man’s realization of his utter unsuitability to his environment, since he understands the laws of entropy and knows that entropy is his fate.¹⁸⁰ The tragic aspect of ‘cosmic pain’ seems to be that man can never see his happiness in the present but only in retrospect. This makes his present a well of anguish with vague memories of happier times.

¹⁷⁶ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 215: “Glem aldri det: du er litt av hvert. I Byen hater de slike som deg. Ser på deg som ugress. Nekter deg livets rett. Ønsker å luke deg bort.”

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 263: ”Selv i en drøm må du velge side!”

¹⁷⁸ Erlend Loe: *Doppler* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2004), pp. 36 & 42.

¹⁷⁹ Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), p. 248: ”Jeg tror menneskene var ensomme. Like ensomme som guder. De kunne alt, de eide alt – men hadde ingen å dele det med. Derfor skapte de seg vesener – i sitt eget bilde. Ikke dyr. Ikke mennesker. Men *oss*.” Italics are Bringsværd’s.

¹⁸⁰ See Peter Reed & David Rothenberg (eds.): *Wisdom in the Open Air: The Norwegian Roots of Deep Ecology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 39-43.

While the Gaia-scientists in line with Zapffeian misanthropic philosophy in D. Keith Mano's *The Bridge* (1973) decree universal suicide out of ecological considerations, *Web* visions another sort of remedy for the pain: solidarity with eco-systems. The morale of Bringsværd's play is: without solidarity we all are cripples like little Eyolf in Ibsen's drama. Yet, what we should feel compassion towards is not only fellow humans, but the entire biotic community. The power that Bringsværd wants to reinstate is not a resurrected god but the entire earth. The message is repeated in an interview with *Dagbladet*.¹⁸¹ *Web* reveals a subtle longing for unity, manifest in the dream of bridging the abyss between the human and the animal. If Doppler wishes for animal company because of their muteness and Tore Stubberud's hero wants to become an animal, Bringsværd wants us to become their friends. If dreams are a concrete form of revelation, the revelation is that man should not have distanced himself from animals. From being utterly alone, man needs to find his friends in plantlife and especially the animal kingdom:

I dreamed that all animals and humans stood on each side of a narrow but bottomless crevice. We could have easily stepped over. But nobody did.

Suddenly we felt the ground beneath us quiver and shake. It was the gap that slowly expanded. The distance to the animals grew.¹⁸²

While Zapffe thinks man is excluded from 'nature' because he understands it, man is in *Web* excluded by 'nature' because he refused to understand it. The emancipatory agenda emphasizing enlightenment makes the otherwise dystopian vision one of hopeful despair. However, Bringsværd is misanthropic. The ghost-busting character Osram, after killing rest of mankind still safely asleep in their collective dream sleep, ends Bringsværd's play 'The Rat-Virgin' with the answer "A good conscience" to the question "What's in it for you – for what you have done?"¹⁸³

The novel is equivocal in its message, since Bringsværd's science fiction odyssey is simultaneously a glorification and degradation of spirited man. Although the immediate message of the novel is dystopian inasmuch as man is being accused of a Promethean transgression, the latent undercurrent seems to glorify his ingenious

¹⁸¹ See *Dagbladet* Saturday, 16th July, 2005, Eva Bratholm: *Møte med snille vesener*: "[Forfatteren] mener vi mennesker setter nesa i været og sjelden reflekterer over vår egen plass i økosystemet."

¹⁸² Tor Åge Bringsværd: *Web* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2005), pp. 187-188: "Jeg drømte at alle dyr og alle mennesker sto på hver sin side av en smal, men bunnløs kløft. Vi kunne lett ha skrittet over. Men ingen gjorde det. Plutselig kjente vi at marken begynte å dirre og riste under oss. Den var kløften som langsomt utvidet seg. Avstanden til dyrene vokste."

¹⁸³ See *ibid.*, p. 273.

inventive skills. What makes the vision ambiguous – a Faustian transgression and a Promethean ambition – is the romantic view of the world as an organic whole combined with the emancipatory credo of modernity. But it is not spiritualism, but *scienticism* that gives the cosmological architecture meaning – nature is understood by the methods established by the Promethean transgression. What is different in Bringsværd's authorship compared to the beliefs of deep ecology and Næss, is the author's simultaneous technological turn-on and turn-off. However, there is evidence that the furiously anti-technological attitude among environmentalists has changed for the opposite, as we shall see in the fifth chapter. As such, the novel is positioned in the mainstream – in-between the technological and natural 'milieus'. Its meaning is given by the paradigms of the second scientific revolution that are superimposed on a framework of Kantian holism and emancipation: rights have become biotic and ecological emancipation comparable to what Michel Houellebecq names a 'terminal ideology'. This makes the representation of nature (and the environmentalism) an idiosyncratic blend not so remote from Næss'.

Frankly, *Web* is dry reading because of its social-democratic socio-ecological emphasis that drowns the poignant observations on modern-day technology in the 'nice' tone of the author. Maybe we should give some attention to the senses and not only to memory, meaning knowledge? The core of the novel's plot and criticism centres on the lack of integrated personalities, but an integrated person is made up by senses and memory simultaneously. The question remains: is it possible to find a compromise between Stubberudian senses and Bringsværdian memory?

Chapter V: Conclusions and Commentaries

It was scarcely plausible that the species destined to succeed us would be, to the same degree, a *social species*; since my childhood the idea that concluded all discussions, that put an end to all disagreements, the idea around which I had most often seen an absolute peaceful consensus form, could be summed up pretty much as follows: ‘Essentially, you’re born alone, you live alone and you die alone’ ... Sociability had had its day, it had played its historic role; it was indispensable in the early years of the appearance of human intelligence, but it was today just a useless and encumbering vestige.

- Michel Houellebecq, *The Possibility of an Island* ¹⁸⁴

The Character of Our Crisis

The aim of this thesis has been to explore environmentalism and literature featuring civilization critique from the perspective of a crisis of nature. The motivation of this study was to find out the status of environmentalism today, by way of analyzing literature dealing with a crisis of nature.

This part of my study is meant to test some of the questions posed by fiction on people who work on environmental thought in Norway. I have conducted informal interviews with Per Ariansen, senior lecturer at the University of Oslo; Arne Kalland, professor in social-anthropology at the University of Oslo; and Frederic Hauge, the president of the Bellona Foundation.¹⁸⁵ What all the interviewed men have in common is their daily work with environmental issues, both on intellectual and more practical levels. The interviews were conducted in a fashion of ‘experiment’, meaning that their foremost purpose was to comment further on the literature discussed. The purpose of the interviews was to probe whether the fears and ideas proposed by fiction find resonance among people who daily deal with the environmental crisis. What do they for example think of some of the visions that the analyzed literature presents us with? The interviews also provided insights that will help in formulating a conclusion on the character of our crisis. Is literature alone in depicting the end of humanity as we know it?

¹⁸⁴ Michel Houellebecq: *The Possibility of an Island* (London: Phoenix, 2006), p. 366-367.

¹⁸⁵ Per Ariansen, senior lecturer located at Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo, interviewed 22.5.2006; Arne Kalland, professor at the Department of social-anthropology at the University of Oslo, interviewed 23.5.2006; Frederic Hauge, president of the Bellona Foundation, interviewed in Oslo 24.5.2006.

Much of contemporary literature exploiting the ‘apocalyptic paradigm’ touches upon a lack of authenticity, as noted in the first chapter. J.G. Ballard claims that the writer of apocalyptic events wishes to “remake zero” by provoking conceived social and cultural boundaries. It is an act of symbolic suicide.¹⁸⁶ Apocalyptic and utopian impulses are similar, in that a total apocalypse would be as impossible to imagine as a realized utopia is impossible to achieve. Apocalypse, the total destruction of culture, is impossible as long as man is made by his language. Utopias are impossible as long as man continues to be guided by his emotions. Nevertheless, and as already argued in the first chapter, any kind of self-reflectiveness going beyond Panglossian optimism would indicate utopian tendencies.

Utopian elements in narratives have always an insular tendency. But the strategies in protecting the gates to utopias differ: God has cherubs at his gate, in Alex Garland’s *The Beach* (1996) the pictured ‘natural’ utopia must be a secret in order to remain a utopia. In Norwegian nature narratives the outside world is too distant – and strange. If utopias and dystopias are psychological reactions to writing by ‘the paradigms of apocalypse’, the return to ‘the woods’ is a psychological and intellectual reaction to the lack of authenticity in urban and modern Norway. In a tragic paradox, the dreams of ‘natural’ utopias all point to the fact that the “de-structuring process”¹⁸⁷ of dystopias is about de-structuring sociability. The ‘symbolical suicide’ Ballard discusses has become synonymous with a symbolical killing of man. Freud thought civilization’s *raison d’être* is to defend us against nature. Today, nature is being defended against civilization.

It is a curiosity that a supposed sea-faring nation does not produce sea-fiction from an environmental perspective. The cultural expressions are about the woods and the mountains, and those occasional pastoral settings in-between those. There is no sea of wrath, no whales or a Poseidon possessed with a bad temper. The ‘in the woods’ biased cultural memory of a nation surrounded by water suggests that the project of *nasjonsbyggerne* and their ‘wood-worldview’ has been successful. It is perhaps even

¹⁸⁶ In Brian Ash (ed.): *The Visual Encyclopaedia of Science Fiction* (New York: Harmony Books, 1977), p. 130. Here quoted in W. Warren Wagar: *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 175: “The catastrophe story, whoever may tell it, represents a constructive and positive act by the imagination rather than a negative one, an attempt to confront the terrifying void of a patently meaningless universe by challenging it at its own game, to remake zero by provoking it in every conceivable way.”

¹⁸⁷ W. Warren Wagar writes in *Terminal Visions: The Literature of Last Things* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 195, that “myths of destruction symbolize the ‘destructuring process’ whereby one civilization is replaced with another.”

more curious that women authors are absent from the discussion. Kristine Hestad is the exception that makes the rule, but even she just wants to fall in love. Either women have other problems to consider, or then they are like the emancipated people of de Toqueville: indifferent.

Environmental narratives could to some extent be considered public ‘recreational grief’. This does not necessarily imply a downgrading of the occasionally poignant observations of environmental fiction. It is only Tor Åge Bringsværd that still wants to save the world, but his methods are socio-scientific and therefore quite uninspiring. His cosmic and all-embracing concepts make distinctions altogether obsolete – his project is in fact a culmination of the soft Enlightenment in its hope for global emancipation. The narratives seem to act as some sort of social safety-vents where anger, fear, sadness and contempt are publicly displayed and re-enacted as a cleansing ritual from social and cultural ‘pollution’. Tore Stubberud’s hedonism is materialistic – and if ‘other people’ exist they are either angels in disguise or sexual objects, or then they are simply disposed with. The paradox is that his messenger-hero embodies the idealized, unaffected *wu-wei* lifestyle, but absolute self-centeredness rules since the body is the only measure. Erlend Loe offers us an escapist ideology of no-ideology where pollution is synonymous with ‘other people’, while his main character wants to embody *wu-wei*, something that paradoxically can only be found in ethnotourism.

According to Thure Erik Lund, literature exhibiting an apocalyptic fascination makes modern life a bearable lie, and acts as both “*trøstelitteratur og skremselsdyrkning*.”¹⁸⁸ The same mechanisms console and frighten, and manage thus to justify our lives in modern society. Similarly, Ronny Ambjörnsson thinks utopias act as some sort of “chosen traumas.”¹⁸⁹ The claim is valid in visions that deal with the environmental crisis, since chosen traumas act as remainders of some unjust or ‘wrong’ condition that must be met with retribution. In this case the wrongdoings against nature. The content of a chosen trauma is to a certain degree imposed by context – having a life-lie requires that others let you have them, as Ibsen shows in *The Wild Duck* (1884).

¹⁸⁸ See Thure Erik Lund’s essay “*Litteraturens politiske virke*” in *Forgreininger. Essay og annen prosa* (Oslo: Aschehoug, 2003), esp. p. 139.

¹⁸⁹ Ronny Ambjörnsson: *Fantasin till makten! Utopiska idèer i västerlandet under fem hundra år* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2005), pp. 219-220: “Dessa *chosen traumas* fungerar som ständiga påminnelser om en grundläggande orätt som måste rättas till. Nationen [or in this case: “nature”] vill ta revansch, utopisten skaka om och förändra (om inte på annat sätt så åtminstone i fantasin). För utopisten har traumat en samhällelig innebörd.”

A revealing story is told by Per Ariansen, senior lecturer at the University of Oslo studying ethics and currently concerned in dissecting the topic of trust. According to Ariansen, students, when confronted with a scenario of an environmental problem and a no-cost solution to it – as a thought experiment – did not see the problem being solved. The solution of an environmental problem did not make the students happy. On the contrary, “they were all furious.”¹⁹⁰ Ariansen suggests, as an ‘amateur mass psychologist’, that it should be viewed as part of a “flagellation syndrome.” The conclusion to the psychology behind the irrational flagellation syndrome offered by Ariansen and called cheap, might not be that cheap: “Life without something that is wrong is almost unbearable.” Arne Kalland, professor in social-anthropology interested in Asian spirituality and currently studying discourses on whales and whaling, recognizes the psychology and offers the same explanation: “By taking away people’s life-lies you also remove their lust for life.”¹⁹¹

In *Doppler* the values are masculine and the forest preferably empty of other people, and thus ‘clean’. Tragically, the Norwegian forest is not real enough for Erlend Loe’s main character. Neither is Norway. Doppler is a ghost-busting ghost. The attempt to find salvation in *friluftsliv* is interesting as it is as a means out of the crisis, scorned or treated somewhat indifferently by most. Ariansen explains: “A number of people find much enjoyment in testing out their survival strategies, and good for them. But other people play hockey.” Probably even Loe plays hockey.

Take away Tore Stubberud’s live-stock and he would most likely lose his appetite. The dream of a pre-civilization Golden Age is reinforced by the apocalyptic theme that acts as literary device allowing the main character to travel back in time. The life-lie is situated on Norwegian ground, and is sustained by the chain of reasoning: ‘tradition’ is ‘natural’ and natural is ‘healthy’. In Stubberud’s case, the position is

¹⁹⁰ The thought experiment and startling conclusion that Per Ariansen presented me with: “I remember asking several classes to join me in a thought experiment: Suppose we hear on the news that global warming was due to a very unfortunate error on a computer-chip and that it has been corrected now, gone through the calculations again and as it is Co2 has likely no effect upon the planet. So now we can drive cars from morning until night. The question was: is this good news? Does it make you happy? No. They were all furious. So you wonder: is it that they hate cars? Some got so furious they got up and left the room. Even though it was a make-belief.”

¹⁹¹ As Arne Kalland says when confronted with the make-belief scenario of Per Ariansen: ”Du fratar dem troen. Hva er de han sier i *Villanden*... hvis du fratar folk livsløgnen så fratar du også lysten til å leve. Jeg har alltid spekulert om det der i klimasaken. Vi har to klare teorier mot hverandre. Den ene sier at dette er menneskeskapt, og at vi må sette i gang mottiltak for å redde jorden. Og det koster. Den andre sier at dette stort sett er skapt av solen – det kan ikke gjøres veldig mye med. Og vi skulle tro at sol-teorien var den lettest fordøyelig, for folk flest. Men sånn er det ikke. Fordi hvis du sier at det er solen så har du samtidig sagt at du ikke kan gjøre noe med det. Sier du at det er menneskeskapt, så kan du være helt.”

preferably on his four, “taking the world in”, as he writes. Maybe Kalland is right. He says the average Norwegian still has one foot in the barn.¹⁹² He is as average as the Norwegian that needs life-lies in Ibsens’s *Wild Duck*. On the other hand, Frederic Hauge, president of the Bellona Foundation and a longtime environmentalist concerned with energy-resources and the climate, could not care less about Norwegian identity vested in rural nature. He does not mind the peasant, but raising children in the Norwegian countryside is probably not a good idea: a ‘natural’ setting does not necessarily bring about ‘normal’ people.¹⁹³

‘Science is not a solution but the problem’ was a common stance in earlier times. Today the views are the opposite: technology is the new ritual which can never be proven wrong. Kalland calls an anti-technological lifestyle as a means out of the crisis “bullshit” and the same is implied by Ariansen. Hauge says: ”*Jeg sier ikke at teknologien kan løse alle problemer, men jeg sier det er helt avgjørende for å løse de fleste av dem.*” The dream of the Enlightenment is alive: science and technology will turn anomalies into normalities, and unveil the veiled in nature. But the technological nature remains veiled: its future is a mystery and a simultaneous turn-off and turn-on for Tor Åge Bringsværd. Take away his emancipatory mission and hope for biotic ‘peace, love and happiness’ and he would probably turn as sour as Doppler.

Kalland repeated Ibsen’s *Wild Duck* when asked about the irrational need of environmentalists to scourge themselves. In this case it seems Ibsen should be repeated to Norwegian nature-thinkers: ‘nature’ is not found by ripping up all that seems

¹⁹² Excerpts from the discussion on the role of Norwegian agriculture and an answer to the question whether there exists a Norwegian nature tradition that differs from an international or European context: AK: ”Jeg setter pris på kulturlandskapet... Og hvis man skal gjøre om landskapet til et rekreasjonsområde og til friluftsliv så blir det mye, mye fattigere. Mye døre landskap. Og det jeg setter pris på er mangfoldet vi har i norsk jordbruk ... Hun [Nina Witoszek] har kanskje et poeng i at vi fremdeles har en fot i gården. Altså at vi er så pass opportuniste og har jordbruket så tett innpå oss at det farger vårt forhold til naturen. Og der gjør at vi ikke blir så ekstreme som man ofte blir på kontinentet når det gjelder miljøarbeide. At vi får et mer pragmatisk forhold til det å håndtere naturen, mer ”brukende” holdning enn ”værende” holdning. Det tror jeg hun har et poeng, men å trekke det tilbake til Vikingtider tror jeg ikke har noe for seg. Men jeg tror vi fremdeles har kort vei til gården.”

¹⁹³ As Frederic Hauge says when asked on the role of Norwegian agriculture in the environmental crisis: ”Når jeg jobber i et land som har inntekter fra fossil energi som finansierer oss og hvor de fossile gassene som vi selger blir til 2.7 % av verdens samlede klimautslipp, så uansett hvor økologisk jeg får norske bønder til å dyrke gulrøtter, så gagnar det ikke internasjonalt vern. Om jeg jobber masse med økologisk dyrking så betyr det ikke noe internasjonalt” ...

TR: ”Borde vi glemme å dyrke norsk jord?”

FH: ”Nej. Det er kjempeskelig med bønder. Men det er enkelte steder man kommer i Norge og lurer på om det er nødvendig å bo der eller om det er barnemishandling? Jeg tror det vil være en katastrofe for turistnæringen hvis man skulle komme til Nord-Norge og de ikke var noe jordbruk... Fra nærings- og distriktpolitiske hensyn så er det [norsk jordbruk] viktig, men det er ikke avgjørende i miljøkampen.”

‘unnatural’; when man takes as his task to unveil the ‘false lies’ of others, he ends up viewing others as false lies.

Even if ‘nature’ offers a refuge, it is traumatic. It may seem that both the fictional and nonfictional Norwegians consulted have been struck by hopelessness, which is an intensification of meaninglessness. An overexploitation of the ‘apocalyptic paradigm’ may be one cause to why no one seems willing to discuss the future: when the future can be cancelled at any time, it becomes meaningless or even painful to think about it. In this sense it might seem that modern man has become necrophiliac in his essence, something Eric Fromm warned of in his time. In any case, the threat of a world-end does not offer human warmth, or promote a thinking based on continuity. Kalland offers an explanation. He thinks the media and bureaucratic apparatus are responsible of crisis-amplification which has led “fatalistic hopelessness and fear”, besides ill-located government funding and an institutionalization of the crisis.¹⁹⁴ The interviewed men seem reluctant to talk about the future of nature. As such, they are no different than the general public. Ariansen says: “I don’t think very many people lay awake at night worrying.” Or then the interviewed men follow the discussed novels in their pattern of critique. All in all, the negative form of critique prevails and constructive critique seems to be as good as in comatose. To the question of how to overcome the crisis, the answers from the interviewed Norwegians were vague: headshakes, commitments to democracy, and the assurance of the need to go about the channels of the political system. However, there was one exception. I reformulated Ariansen’s claim and asked Hauge one last question – if he lays awake at night worrying. The reply was: “I sit up at night working with this, god damn.” Following the lesson that Ibsen thought us, it seems Hauge wants to be the hero disinterested in killing the life-lie that sustains his life of work.

¹⁹⁴ Here a part of the answer given to the question “How do you think the scope and urgency of the environmental crisis is portrayed today?” AK: “Både media og miljøbevegelsen driver krisemaksimering. De har evnen til å male fanden på veggen – å gjøre dette hele til noe ”urgent”. ”Det er ”urgent” og hvis vi ikke stiller opp går det til helvete.” Hvis man leser aviser, så er det stort sett det inntrykket man får. Det er veldig sjelden noen tar til motmæle. Eller spør: hvordan er det nå med vår jord? Men miljøet er mye bedre enn den har vært før. Luften er renere enn for eksempel femten eller tyve år siden. Du kan fiske i Thamesen, det har du ikke kunnet gjøre siden 1280-årene. Tokyo er en av verdens reneste byer. Før tretti år siden var den en av de verste. Det er masse ting som har blitt mye, mye bedre enn det var før.” When asked to name effects of crisis-amplification Arne Kalland answers as follows: “Vi bruker penger på gale ting. Og det gjør folk redde, bekymret. Det får ungdom til å spørre ”hva er vitsen ... med livet... stiller vi så gærnt at vi ødelegger naturen? Hvorfor pokker skal vi stille opp for samfunnet for?” Det sprer fatalisme og håpløshet, på grunn av denne forferdelige svartmalingen hele tiden.”

Russell Jacoby claims that the dwindling notion of utopias is inextricably linked to a growing impoverishment of ‘Western imagination’, which is a result of loss of “unstructured childhoods.”¹⁹⁵ For Richard Stivers the causes to an impoverishment of ‘natural’ language is due to the decline in the use of metaphors, a growing vagueness of meaning, and the proliferation of ephemeral symbols.

Firstly, the loss of metaphor is a consequence of words having become either technical terms with one designate meaning or signs of emotional identification. In this case the woods and ‘nature’ more generally provide for all the emotional identification needed, while Stubberud’s worldview reveals the lacunas of a life dictated by emotion. Bringsværd’s scientific explanations of technology reveal the nature of using technical terms, but which are open to interpretation because of his Janus-faced cosmology. According to Stivers the greater rationalization of language and the increasing emphasis of emotion perfectly reflect the technological civilization of our age, “which simultaneously enlarges the sphere of technical reason and that of instinctual emotion at the expense of subjective reason.”¹⁹⁶ The increasing significance of ‘instinctual emotion’ is reverberated in the cultural display of emotions. The difference in the Darwinian and Freudian school is the view on how man should act upon his feelings. Darwin thought that by at least a subtle ignorance or suppression of emotions they would diminish, while the Freudian school thought the opposite. Suppression would in the end lead to a neurotic personality. “This Freudian view has prevailed over the Darwinian, with the result that our emotional lives have become perhaps more intensely public than ever before.”¹⁹⁷ The importance of emotions is also reverberated in the cultural display of narratives that act as both frightening and consoling. The recreational display of emotions seems to have a relation to the inflation in shock-effect, besides exhibiting apocalyptic fatigue. The psychological problem of shock is that it no longer is effective, likely due to its overuse and the historical events of the last century. The decrease of a shock-effect seems to have diminished in equal ratio to morally bent utopias, since being shocked implies moral boundaries or an ‘unthinkable’. The paradoxical suspicion is that the ‘no-shock effect’ is related to scientific values that environmentalists embrace – values that by the same token are ethical values. And the

¹⁹⁵ See Russell Jacoby: *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 22-31.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Stivers: *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 150.

¹⁹⁷ See Stuart Walton: *Humanity: an Emotional History* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004), introduction.

science of the day is precisely a science of ‘unthinkables’ and anomalies, if not outright ‘catastrophes’ as Bringsværd depicts.

Secondly, the vagueness of meaning is due to a language that is unable to express anything immediately meaningful for man. Meaning can only be obtained by ‘natural’ language. That is, by language that is willing to discuss the human, social beliefs, and moral considerations. ‘Natural’ language is thus always ethical language. Kalland does not leave much hope for ethics. He thinks utopian free-thinking is dangerous because there always will be people that cannot distinguish plans from daydreams or better from worse¹⁹⁸. He says we must take man ‘as he comes’. This is obvious, but does not diminish the fact that we should have opinions on *how* to ‘take man’: distinguishing better from worse is the prerequisite for any ethical considerations, taken that man has freedom of choice. Stivers argues that qualitative concepts like “love and freedom may increasingly have nothing to refer to in reality” as technological civilization, which is essentially quantitative “makes ethical meaning superfluous.”¹⁹⁹ Ethical meaning requires social maturity, which is again dependent on social interaction, which again, to be meaningful, rests on ethical action. Unfortunately, regression or the wish to regress to everwoods does not suggest that the depicted Norwegian will be social – or that he should mature socially. This is foreboded in Loe’s novel which does not see man as a social (or mature) species. Tore Stubberud’s novel envisions the logical next step of anti-sociability, which is the putting to death of morality – the envisioned man has entered the realm of biology, which marks the end of man as moral species. In a logical culmination, Bringsværd sees the end of man as such, whereas his ethical considerations encompass the whole planet and are therefore not ‘natural’ but simply alien to man.

Finally, the salience of transitory symbols is the effect of their sterilized character: self-referentialism has become the only universalism. Language has become a cloister or a cage: we are critically predisposed, yet immune to the impacts of criticism since it remains in essence self-referential. The crisis portrayed in the novels has very little to do with clean air, resource depletion or even overpopulation. More than

¹⁹⁸ AK: ”Pol Pot, Khmer Rouge, et klart eksempel på økofascisme. Teknologifientlighet til tusen. Alle skulle ut på jorda og begynne og dyrka jorda igjen. Byene skulle legges ned osv. Kunnskap skulle ut. Det er et utopisk økologisk samfunn som Pol Pot prøvde å innføre.”

TR: ”Nå snakker du om når drømmene blir virkelighet. Kan vi skille mellom utopisk fritenkning og...?”
AK: Ja, det kan du. Men det er noen som ikke kan det. Før eller siden kommer den gærningen, som ikke gjør det skillet.”

¹⁹⁹ Richard Strives: *The Culture of Cynicism: American Morality in Decline* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 151.

discussing how to overcome an environmental crisis, the novels discuss the ‘natural way’ to overcome their own troubles. In both Loe’s and Stubberud’s worlds the ‘natural life’ is the self-sufficient life that only includes the self. Bauman elaborates:

The most common troubles of individuals-by-fate are these days *non-additive*. They are not amenable to “summing up” into a “common cause”. They may be put beside each other, but they will not congeal. One may say that they are shaped from the beginning in such a way as to lack the interfaces allowing them to dovetail with other people’s troubles.²⁰⁰

The crux with civilization critique is that it may be as alienating as the alienation it criticizes. Society is the theme of critique in the analyzed novels, but, paradoxically, the social realm is omitted. This is one of the lacunas of civilization critique – unwilling or uninterested to discuss what makes civilization possible.

The feature of the reviewed fiction seems to be a double estrangement: man has estranged himself both from himself and from the environment. This is not only because the theme and refuge of visions is ‘nature’; the environmental crisis is as much a part of the symptom as of the diagnosis of the malaise in society. As already argued in the first chapter, literature is created from the raw stuff that is our reality, while it simultaneously recreates to a certain degree. This is because language never can withdraw from its social and cultural context. The distilled views of the three authors reflect not only the state of contemporary literature, but also environmentalism to a certain degree. From an environmentalist perspective, Del Ivan Janik willingly admits that the modern environmental consciousness has replaced the anthropocentric legacy of Western culture with a scientific and biotic view on the world, and “represents such a significant departure that it might rightly be given the name ‘posthumanism’.”²⁰¹ We may even discuss to what extent the portrayed social apocalypse is a Western tragedy, if we consider Michel Houellebecq’s representation of sociability as a ‘useless and encumbering vestige’. Accordingly, Frank Furedi argues that the pressing question today is not whether humans will survive the next century but whether our humanness will survive it.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Zygmunt Bauman: *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 35.

²⁰¹ Del Ivan Janik: *Environmental Consciousness in Modern Literature: Four Representative Examples* in George Sessions (ed.): *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995), p. 105.

²⁰² Frank Furedi: *Til kamp mot den nye misantropien* in *Morgenbladet* 12.-18. May 2006 nr. 19, pp. 16-18: “Alt snakket om hvorvidt mennesket kan overleve viser at vi er ved et vendepunkt i tilliten til mennesket – og derfor er vår tids egentlige spørsmål ikke om mennesket overleve det enogtyvende århundret, men om vår tro på mennesket kan overleve det ... Misanthropien truer med å senke oss ned i en

This study has demonstrated how little modern fiction has to propose for the human, since he seems to be of little interest for the authors. The novels illustrate a dehumanized language, and do not point to a revival of natural language: the authors are unwilling to discuss a moral consciousness that does not exclude man or forebode his end. The frightening conclusion of this study is that humanism seems to be a thing of the past. This is the real tragedy in an 'environmentally enlightened' country that repeatedly invokes the image of itself as a promoter of peace and human rights.

middelaldersk fordom der vi blir mørkredde for oss selv. Under slike forhold kan man gjøre ett av to: Vi kan gi avkall på de menneskelige kvaliteter som har bidratt til å forvandle verden og hengi oss til den rådende fatalismen, eller vi kan gjøre det motsatte. I stedet for å oppgi troen på mennesket kan vi bruke vår skaperkraft til å styre vår fremtid. Vi bør slutte å spekulere over "hva som vil skje med oss" og heller prøve å finne svar på spørsmålet: "Hva må vi gjøre for at fremtiden skal bli mer human?"

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