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How might critique respond to the urgency of climate change?

A challenge for environmental communication.

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Abstract

Scientists, journalists, politicians and academics regularly describe climate change as both urgent and a crisis. During times that demand urgent action academic disciplines, like communication, also need to take critique more seriously. In contrast to accepting the one-dimensional premise that crisis simply demands action, this thesis also proposes that crisis demands critique. Starting with an assessment of the current shape of critique and critical theories in environmental communication as a distinct sub-field of communications studies, this project addresses the broader prospect for critique by examining the work of four key scholars who have spent significant time addressing climate change.

First, the study contrasts Peter Sloterdijk's trilogy of books on spheres that highlights the spatiality of the humans living in an atmosphere, with his anthropotechnic work on how humans go beyond themselves through practice, training and other technologies. Next, the study examines the role of ecological crisis in the work of Slavoj Žižek with special emphasis on his theorising of climate change as one of four existential threats to the world, which necessitates a communist response. The third theorist, Timothy Morton, interrogates how ecological texts privilege the essentialised concept of nature and the subjectivity of the 'beautiful soul' in a manner that undermines the politics of adequately responding to climate crisis. Finally, the study considers Bruno Latour's insights into how climate change is communicated when the tools of critique have been appropriated by those who seek to use doubt to prevent action.

Bringing these theorists together, the study concludes by highlighting four key themes that add critical depth to discussions within environmental communication: the topics of anthropocentrism in the Anthropocene, the global scale of climate change, the role of communism in political responses, and the (mis)use of the concept of nature. The study ends by bringing these themes back to the sub-field of environmental communication, making a series of recommendations to renew the relationship of doubt and scepticism to critique.

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Chapter One

Introduction

The impetus to begin this project was personal: my recognition and experience of tensions occasioned by claims about an urgent climate crisis. These claims were intimate like breathing in that they arose from interactions with friends and family, as well as experts and politicians. These claims were also vast in that they demanded the extraordinary task of transforming how our societies satisfy our needs for energy. I realised that though I was convinced of the need for action required to address this crisis—reducing my carbon footprint through public transport and a non-meat diet, for example—I did not know, nor did those who informed me, the exact science behind these claims. At best I could argue something along the lines of ‘if we put a billion units of carbon into the atmosphere something is bound to change – I don’t know exactly what will change, but wouldn’t it be preferable not to risk it?’ The concepts of risk, urgency, and science were tangled up with the need for political and institutional change.

My acceptance of climate change as caused by global warming went against much of my training in critical thinking. To be critical – to live and breathe critique – at least in my mind, was to be perpetually self-reflexive and to doubt received wisdom. To be critical was to question the instrumentality of the sciences and offer dissenting views as to the dehumanising aspects of a rationality that ruled over all human life. To be critical was to unmask the dogma that masquerades as truth and inevitability. But when confronted with the urgency of climate change, a critical reading seemed to be at best a form of folly and at worst to be actively complicit with the worst of fossil fuel profiteers.

The current project will explore the tensions I felt when confronted with the urgency of climate change and the feelings of redundancy toward my critical impulse towards doubt. My research question is: *how might insights on climate change drawn from key critical theorists influence the sub-field of environmental communication?* There are a number of tasks that need to be completed to begin such a study. First, I need to

establish and delimit exactly what I mean by ‘the sub-field of environmental communication’. Second, I will have to show how and why I have chosen which ‘key critical theorists’ best help to influence environmental communication. Though the thesis focuses on what key critical thinkers’ ideas on climate change can offer environmental communication, I also intend to use this analysis to reflect back on what critique could mean when faced with a phenomenon on the scale of climate change.

The study begins by situating the tensions that led to this study in the interdisciplinary sub-field of environmental communication. Specifically, I will focus on the debate in environmental communication as to whether the sub-field should be underwritten by an appeal to crisis. I will discuss how the term ‘critical’ has been deployed in this debate and describe some of the ways that writers in environmental communication have attempted to solve, or dissolve, the tensions described above.

I will then offer the argument that environmental communication could become a stronger interdisciplinary sub-field through a broader understanding and deployment of critical theories, or critique. That work requires I go into more depth on just what I mean by critical theories, including a discussion of the aims of critical theory as elaborated by the Frankfurt School and, more generally of a critique caught between doubt and emancipatory political struggles

Though I suggest that environmental communication can strengthen its position as an interdisciplinary sub-field by considering these critical theories, I will also show how divides within environmental communication have mirrored more general divides within critique and critical theories. That is to say, the tensions within environmental communication are not unique to that sub-field or a focus on ecological concerns.

The bulk of the theoretical and analytical work on this project consists of a study of the writings on climate and ecological crisis of four different thinkers who I describe as critical or coming from a tradition of critique. None of these thinkers – Peter Sloterdijk, Bruno Latour, Slavoj Žižek and Timothy Morton – are scientific experts on climate change, and they only occasionally make appeals to scientific evidence in their writings on climate and ecology. Despite that, over the last ten to twenty years each of

them has spent considerable energy writing about climate, crisis and locating it within their wider intellectual and critical projects.

Each of these thinkers has also dealt, to some extent, with the struggles between belief and doubt around climate change and the burgeoning urgency of acting to confront this ecological crisis. Each of these thinkers has, at some point, noted that climate is a—if not *the*—defining challenge for the contemporary world. An analysis of the discourses of these thinkers, then, will offer four case studies in the negotiation between the impulse to doubt, which might lead to inaction, and the impulse to action, which might lead to prematurely accepted beliefs.

These thinkers' reliance on external expertise is particularly interesting given that much of that which has been labelled critique has questioned the topics of rationality, instrumentality, enlightenment and scientism that underlie scientific knowledge of climate change. People interested in delaying responses to climate change – including groups funded by those with a lot to lose in any move away from a carbon-based economy – have appropriated tools of critique such as scepticism in enough numbers that these groups have been labeled the postmodern right. As such, those interested in critique as well as responding to climate change find themselves in a new, unique position where the doubt and language of critique is used against them (see Latour, 2004b).

The importance of this study resides in its development of the concept of critique and the critical in environmental communication. This development will benefit the relatively new sub-field of environmental communication by helping to ensure that questions already debated and tensions tentatively reconciled can help with the present, urgent task of communicating climate change. In contrast to the critical theory of the Frankfurt School this interdisciplinary sub-field spans not only a range the humanities and social sciences, but also aims to include the sciences. Where Frankfurt School critical theory treated capitalism as the master object of critique, this study grounds critique in climate crisis, but at the same time holds to a strong form of philosophical scepticism. The particularities of climate change as an urgent crisis offer fresh and unique terrain for the consideration of questions within the critical traditions.

Finally, I reflect back on how these thinkers' approach to climate and critique can help shape studies of environmental communication. These insights are focused on four sets of tensions between: (i) humans and others; subjects and objects; (ii) the global scale of global warming (and the local); (iii) climate crisis and class politics; and (iv) nature and its uses.

Environmental Communication: the Crisis and the Critical

Communication was popularised as a distinct field of study beginning in the mid-West of the United States in response to the needs of servicemen who – supported by the 1944 GI Bill – sought a more pragmatic form of study than what was offered at the time in English and Rhetorics departments (Redding, 1985). Environmental communication emerged as a distinct sub-field of communication in the 1990s (Milstein, 2009a) as part of an epistemological upheaval that led from the study of communication being framed at the *level* at which communication took place – such as interpersonal communication or mass communication – towards the study of specific *topics* of communication (see Gerbner and Siefert, 1983). Alongside other sub-fields such as health communication and development communication, scholars who identified with environmental communication sought to legitimate their sub-field by making a range of claims for the validity of the knowledge central to their study. Senecah (2007) offers a short background to the emergence of the sub-field through a 'layering of signification' (p. 22) including the difficulties of getting recognition for the environment as a distinctive topic of study and the progression of the field from a seminar at the annual Speech, then National, Communication Association conference to an appeal to the legislative council of the same conference.

This section will consider two of the main claims to legitimation for environmental communication – the interdisciplinary connection to the sciences as well as arts, and the urgency of being a crisis discipline (see Cox, 2007; Meisner, 2015) – as well as some of the problems that come along with such framing. In assessing these claims I am setting up a two-fold reading of environmental communication: first, I am taking the sub-field seriously as an established body of knowledge; second, I am also

attempting to untangle the claims for legitimation that underwrite much of the scholarship in the sub-field. By making environmental communication into an object of study I make particular concessions to the centrality of the institutional frame of the discipline, particularly as it functions in the United States (see, Ganesh, 2008 for broad discussions of communication studies' North American character). But at the same time I am suggesting that the claims for legitimacy must also be open to contestation if the sub-field is to maintain a strong connection to other communication disciplines. Establishing the legitimacy of these claims is not to suggest that focus on crisis at the level of climate is the only legitimate type of work being done in environmental communication. While I find that environmental communication can gain strength from considering critical theories that is not to say that all environmental communication needs to adhere to the criticality that the key thinkers in this study deploy. The study seeks to offer better tools for those in environmental communication to describe urgency, crisis and doubt rather than to raise the sub-field and rebuild it anew

Environmental communication is an interdisciplinary sub-field that attempts to situate itself between the sciences and humanities. As Milstein (2012) summarises, it is both a sub-field of the communication discipline as well as 'a meta-field that necessarily cuts cross disciplines' (p.161). I will look at the sub-field of environmental communication through two moments of reflection in the journal *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture*. The two points are the inception of the journal and a publication of a series of reflections on the sub-field that were initiated in 2013 and published in 2015. While a wide range of discourses around ecology could be described as forms of environmental communication, the object named 'environmental communication' in this study is limited to the sub-field within the discipline of communication and a scholarly habitus that purposefully aligns itself with the field. This limitation is due to a primary intent to challenge that specific sub-field while any attempt to engage with a more nebulous and open-ended category of environmental communication would require far more discussion of the myriad of political, sociological, anthropological and literary approaches to talking about ecology.

Depoe (2007), in the first editorial of the journal *Environmental Communication*, aims to create a 'productive nexus' between (i) a range of methods, perspectives and academic traditions that are (ii) brought together by a diverse editorial board so that (iii) scholars and practitioners can all be included in the sub-field. In environmental communication, I found a site where the tensions around my personal understanding of the need for action tempered by scepticism played out. Environmental communication is a sub-field that is also struggling over the same questions of whether a crisis frame could lead to emancipatory and ethical responses.

In this section I will assess how critical thinking forms part of the disciplinary identity of environmental communication. It is worth noting that though I focus on articles that offer a meta view of the discipline, in doing so this tends to obscure some of the work that takes place at the edges of the discipline or that occupy the interdisciplinary spaces described by some of these meta analyses. The purpose of this study is not to offer a total overview of every part of environmental communication, but to suggest there is a gap in both the depth and breadth of what counts as criticality in environmental communication. Hence, this is not going to be a critique of the conduct of particular studies but an investigation into the ethos and rationale of the sub-field. Criticality is also not posited as an end in and of itself – the benefits of considering a critical environmental communication will be established later in this chapter when I describe exactly what I mean by critical theories and why the four thinkers I have chosen will add to the richness of environmental communication.

I will begin by considering the debate around Cox's structuring of the sub-field as a crisis discipline, based on conservation biology, which has an ethical duty. I will show how some thinkers have cast doubt on this mission using a range of critical theories and how these theories relate back to broader conceptions of what it might mean to do critique. These discussions will be framed in terms of (a) those who primarily see the role of environmental communication as based on the need to respond to an ethical duty and (b) those who, while not necessarily disputing the need for a response to crisis, tend to offer a sceptical view of the primacy and rationality of Cox's position.

A crisis discipline

Robert Cox's 2005 keynote address at the Conference on Communication and the Environment, and the subsequent publication of those notes (Cox, 2007) as the basis of the first edition of the journal *Environmental Communication*, have asserted a disciplinary identity for the environmental communication sub-field. Cox's keynote is broad, with his prescription supplemented with references to both primary and secondary environmental communication work on the consensus/dissensus debates of Habermas and Mouffe, the work of geographer Jared Diamond in his popular book *Collapse*, as well as reports from the Union of Concerned Scientists and a passing reference to Luhmann's (1989) *Ecological Communication*.

The basis of Cox's (2007) argument is that environmental communication should draw on Michael Soulé's work in conservation biology and establish an impetus for researchers' ethical duty based on the frame of a crisis discipline. Environmental communication, in this scenario, 'arises at a moment of conjunctural crisis' (p.7) where inaction has become a potentially greater threat than inappropriate action. Reading across a range of works by Soulé, Cox notes that a crisis discipline is mission-oriented, normative and responds to crisis of ecological collapse and mass extinction. There are four shared beliefs that those within a crisis discipline, according to Cox's (2007) reading of Soulé, are committed to: (i) climate change is a human induced crisis; (ii) it is not too late to respond to the climate crisis; (iii) humans are responsible for averting climate crisis through ecological intervention and management; and (iv) there is a particular responsibility for those researching in directly applicable areas such as conservation biology to lead the response to climate crisis. Researchers within a crisis discipline 'must offer recommendations for management or intervention to protect imperilled species, biological communities, or ecosystems, under conditions of urgency and often without theoretical or empirical guarantees' (p.6).

Cox's essay goes on to outline the crisis of biodiversity and the role of crisis as it presently sits in environmental communication. This foundation allows him to set up three functional postulates – 'broad agreements or working hypothesis of a field' (p. 12) defined by articulations of 'environmental' and 'communication'. These shared understandings, Cox suggests, 'imply a set of basic values or ethical premises that invite us to align our work with other so-called crisis disciplines' (p. 12). Cox notes

that while the notion of a crisis discipline is not definitive, there are authors who embrace normative approaches that indicate, if not urgent crisis, the need for reform. Additionally, he writes: 'like perturbations in biological systems, distortions, ineptitudes, and system pathologies occur in our communication about the environment' (p.10). He gives examples of both the politicisation and restriction of information, particularly that coming from the federal government, which shows a crisis of communication. From showing a crisis of information access, Cox then suggests that the true test of whether environmental communication is a crisis discipline is if it meets the eclecticism of interdisciplinary approaches such as conservation biology and, if so, whether this eclecticism is merely happenstance. His answer takes the form of four tenets of the sub-field and from these postulates Cox asserts that normative tenets necessarily follow. Drawing on Habermas and discourse ethics he argues that the very basis of the word 'communication' is normative. To back this up he offers four norms that he sees as implicit in the emerging sub-field of environmental communication and that, implicit in the sub-field, entail 'a principal ethical duty' (p.5). In the last of his four norms, is his first reference to an academic work that is critical. Alongside the duty to educate and speak in appropriate forums, he suggests that scholars, teachers and practitioners of environmental communication have a duty to 'critically evaluate' (p. 16). Critical evaluation focuses upon the ethical duty of researchers if their research points to dangers.

The rest of the first issue of *Environmental Communication* is dedicated to responses to Cox's outline. What is interesting for this study in these responses is the range of representations of what it means to be critical which, I would argue, broadly reflects the work going on in the sub-field. In the following section I highlight a range of uses of the terms critique and critical in the sub-field of environmental communication. The very ubiquity of the term 'critical' in work that spans the humanities and social sciences makes it worthy of renewed attention, though I will argue that there is a dearth of reflection within environmental communication on exactly what might be meant by critique or critical theory.

Of all the responses to Cox (2007), Peterson, Peterson and Peterson (2007) are the most in favour of environmental communication's self-articulation as a crisis discipline and a 'platform for action'. They offer a 'critical response' to both the

functional tenets of Cox and to his normative commitments. To be critical for Peterson et al (2007) involves embracing the paradox of participatory democracy but also requires being resolutely against the ‘magical worldview’ of social constructivism that would both ‘endanger conservation’ and ‘equate to accepting today’s dominant powers as truth’ (p.76). At heart, the critical, ethical duty in Peterson et al (2007) is a set of normative commitments, more fine-tuned to recent work in the humanities and social sciences (such as Mouffe, 2000) than the kind of focus on conservation biology and crisis in Cox (2007).

The critical side of a normative discipline for Peterson (2007) comes with the final caveat that ‘representing another community member, human or otherwise, is a political, not a revelatory act’ (p. 84). This focus on the political as a contestable terrain, as opposed to one requiring empirical revelation, goes a long way towards rendering the mention of ‘critical’ in Cox as more than a nod to disciplines outside of conservation biology.

Though Peterson, et al (2007) add a number of caveats to the framing of environmental communication as a crisis discipline, most other scholars (for example Plec, 2007; Schwarze, 2007; Senecah, 2007) responded with more emphasis on the doubting, self-reflexive and sceptical lines of thought without a need to emphasise crisis or normative commitments to ethical duties. To suggest that they responded with a sceptical line of thought is not to say that they will be *sceptical of* what Cox wrote – all were very supportive of Cox’s arguments – but that they will emphasise the importance of doubt in environmental communication as a way of producing more rigorous knowledge that may eventually lead to a stronger understanding of the role of crisis in the sub-field

Responses to Cox

Cox is not alone in positing that environmental communication is a crisis discipline. For example, the website for the International Environmental Communication Association features Meisner (2015) discussing ‘Environmental Communication: What it is and Why it Matters’ with reference to both the interdisciplinary connection to conservation biology and to the ecological crisis. A broader reading is offered in the

encyclopedia entry by Milstein (2009a) which notes the interdisciplinary and crisis claims but also points to how critical rhetoric theory and critical discourse theory and post-structuralist theories, have begun to be used in environmental communication. The encyclopaedic form means that these claims are not backed up with specific references, though the 'Further Readings' section makes reference to critical works such as DeLuca (1999), Peterson, Peterson and Peterson (2007) and Schwarze (2006).

There were four direct responses to Cox from the original publication of *Environmental Communication* that might act as a rejoinder to Mathur's suggestion that environmental communication lacks rigour or a critical stance. The purpose of including these responses is not simply to redeem environmental communication, but to suggest that the sub-field is not as 'collegially bound' or as unwelcoming of critique (or at the least, the possibility of critique) as has been claimed. While the responses to Cox published in the first volume of *Environmental Communication* are not as singularly dismissive of the promise of environmental communication as Mathur, the three articles I consider do question what it means to participate in a crisis discipline from a critical framework.

Plec's (2007) use of 'critical rhetoric', in her response to Cox, is informed by a broader allegiance to critical discourses. She lists six features of this critical rhetoric that overlap with environmental communication, noting her commitment to 'constructing an approach to environmental communication that is ethically grounded and motivated' (p.50). This commitment is not just a façade, nor the specious or uncritical position described by Mathur. In fact, Plec almost mirrors Mathur's position when she states that environmental communication can learn from critical rhetoric as the latter has already 'wage[d] a long war of journal articles to determine which critical tools enable consideration of a postmodern text (or fragment)' (p.51). She notes that due to such an overwhelming focus on materiality in environmental communication – 'painfully' material, she suggests – the sub-field has not had to ask questions of the real and the symbolic, or the function of power in these representations. So while Plec expresses a commitment to the materialist philosophies that she sees as making up both environmental communication and critical rhetoric (for example, both are motivated by situational exigencies), she also welcomes the type of questions posed by critical rhetoric that do not immediately seek reconciliation. She quotes McKerrow (1989, in

Plec, 2007) in situating the telos of critical rhetoric as ‘one of never ending scepticism, hence permanent criticism’ (p. 53). The permanent criticism and scepticism of critical rhetoric stands in sharp contrast to the decisive action suggested by Cox’s focus on ethical duty, though I would like to know more about what such a bold stance of never ending scepticism looks like when faced with arguments grounded in urgency.

Perhaps the strongest use of the term critical as a corrective to Cox’s focus on an ethical duty comes in Steve Schwarze’s (2007) essay that draws on the tradition of ‘ideological criticism’. Though he begins with a collegial affirmation of the framing of Cox’s position around conservation biology and crisis, the bulk of his article focuses on how a consideration of ideological criticism could work as a necessary corrective to a framing centred outside of traditional communication scholarship. For example, consider the following: ‘the vision of communication simply as a means for scientists to ‘go public’ reinforces the early Platonic assumption that public communication is a fundamentally *instrumental* enterprise for conveying received truths’ (emphasis in original, p. 93). Given this opposition to scientific instrumentalism one might wonder if Schwarze’s vision for environmental communication really could coexist with the conservation biology approach. In the same paragraph Schwarze also notes that a crisis-oriented environmental communication would end up privileging the study of practices over structural issues, to the detriment of ‘a robust and reflexive discipline’ (p. 93).

Schwarze’s paper argues that those who study environmental communication need to be more sceptical of the types of answers accepted in environmental communication. If they do not, he suggests, those from outside the discipline will doubt the rigour of this new sub-field of study. Schwarze concludes with a focus on critical judgment which ends up critiquing the very possibilities for such judgement, as well as crisis-oriented endeavours, in the present academic climate of increasing workloads and specialisation. Despite this pessimism he suggests that the weighing of alternatives enacted by the task of judgment would ‘help move from conditions of crisis to conditions of sustainability’ (p. 97).

Two final responses to consider are not as robust as Plec and Schwarze’s, but nonetheless offer a critique of Cox and a range of conceptual and theoretical suggestions. First, Senecah’s (2007) argues that Cox misfocuses on the crisis of

ecology when the real crisis is that people have become ‘increasingly cynical about all levels of civic life’ (p. 27). As such, the lack of ethical action on climate change – as well as more broadly on other ecological challenges – is a symptom of a general scepticism manifested as inaction. Though the collegiality that Mathur sees as unproductive is evident here – see Senecah’s concluding paragraph that starts ‘Thank you, Robbie’, in reference to Cox (2007) – and there is no real articulation of a framework outside present environmental communication writings, the more expansive reframing of crisis in terms of tensions with a will to doubt means her analysis offers some interesting meditations on the limits of the term ‘crisis’ to engender action.

A similar mistrust in the efficacy of crisis – as well as collegial familiarity – is evident in Killingsworth’s (2007) response to Cox. He suggests that the crisis of ecology is only a crisis when it is the most pressing of all possible concerns; when oil prices rise, or the financial system is under threat for example, environmental issues suddenly drop from the status of a crisis to something that can wait. In the more in-depth of the two points he brings to the discussion, Killingsworth invokes phenomenology as a perspective that will help to combat the forgetfulness of the connections between the environment and humans that he sees as consistently reoccurring and undermining environmental communication. The short article tends to skip between theorists (McLuhan, Freud, Burke), and subjects (media theory, phenomenology, literary ecocriticism) in a way that touches on but does not delve into critical themes. Killingsworth uses ‘critical’ theorists to make a point about environmental communication without seeking to develop the work of these theorists or to pit their ideas against one another.

Critical work in both Senecah and Killingsworth is situated at the level of a sceptical response: to be critical is to use ‘critical thinking skills’ (Senecah, 2007, p. 26). The critical thinking skills described are a broad set, that also include advocacy and participating in multi-stakeholder processes, and are not so far off the kind of engaged ethical practice suggested by Cox.

In contrast to Cox’s emphasis on environmental communication as a crisis discipline, the authors described above have offered a range of suggestions for how critical theories might inform the framing of the sub-field. Some of these thinkers, such as

Peterson, Peterson and Peterson (2007) saw a critical approach as a supplement to the fundamental normative position of the sub-field. Others, such as Senecah, were not so willing to accept a crisis discipline based in conservation biology as the guiding framework. I will return to a broader overview of how critique has been positioned in environmental communication, but first I want to pursue Mathur's (2005; 2008) polemical critiques of the disciplinary framing and identity of environmental communication.

An uncritical, discipline in-crisis?

Mathur (2005) argues that academics working in environmental communication need to be more aware of the differences between the subject as a 'field of study' and as a 'conceptual phenomenon'. He suggests that almost all of the work in the sub-field tends towards the former and hence leads academics to function like journalists alongside those doing environmental communication within a tradition akin to the public understanding of science, rather than seeing these communication practitioners, and the conditions of their practice, as a phenomenon to be studied. The criticisms of environmental communication from Mathur's (2005) earlier paper are three: (i) the spirit of collegial familiarity leaves little incentive for robust critique; (ii) a drive to institutionalise the discourse as an academic sub-field has put cosmopolitan voices and globally informed intellectual traditions to one side; (iii) there remains a focus on a limiting empiricism. These criticisms lead to four recommendations, the third of which is most salient to this project: the need for critical engagement with 'philosophical and political practices and ideologies' (p. 359).

In a similar paper three years on, Mathur (2008) engages but roundly rejects the very formula of environmental communication as a crisis discipline, accusing the move of being 'fashionable', 'aggrandizing', and offering 'little incentive for environmental communication contributors to develop robust critiques' (p. 153). For Mathur, this means that 'raising genuine questions for the sake of invoking genuine responses is replaced—as if a matter of rhetorical, inspirational ritualism performed by a clique—with raising only questions whose answers are already known' (p.153). To Mathur (2008) environmental communication is 'strikingly uncritical... intellectually non-

rigorous' (p.152) and 'comes out more as a discipline-in-crisis than as a crisis discipline (-to-be)!' (p. 153).

From his critique of the sub-field, Mathur (2008) sets up the conditions to invoke the work of Gregory Bateson as an example of 'perspectives that are not part of (environmental communication's) promotional scheme – even if only to reject them after all - in order to situate itself' (p. 153). Mathur has shown a gap in the sub-field, and established his preferred, non-empirical theoretical lineage via Bateson and Luhmann to fill that gap (if Bateson and Luhmann had lived into the age of discussing climate change, both would have been likely candidates for being the focus of this study). This juncture – the move from the pillars of the crisis discipline to the search for alternative frameworks – could also be the point at which my own project diverges from the majority of texts in environmental communication. As with Mathur, I also want to suggest that there is a lack of explication as to what it means to be critical in environmental communication, and this could align with Mathur's polemic against the 'strikingly uncritical', and bring in some writers who I consider to expertly ford this critical breach. But before attempting such a divergence I want to (a) draw out a little more on the discussion around environmental communication as a crisis discipline and (b) counter some of Mathur's rejection of the critical spirit in the *Environmental Communication* responses to Cox.

Mathur (2008), as quoted earlier, jokes that environmental communication is a discipline in-crisis rather than a crisis discipline. Though the crisis he refers to is more based on what he sees as a lack of theoretical logic in Cox's work, we might rather use his jest to ask other questions about the relationship between 'the state of the field in study' and 'the state of those studying this field'. This split parallels Mathur's (2005) earlier reflections on environmental communication. There, he used a distinction between environmental communication as a sub-field of study and as a conceptual phenomenon to try to help clarify definitional questions of the sub-field. Might being-in-crisis, despite Mathur's joke, be a welcome methodological comportment for environmental communication? I would be willing to say that the urgency of the crisis being dealt with by those scholars of environmental communication should lead to a state of crisis in those investigating the sub-field. If environmental communication

does aim to be an interdisciplinary subject then the positioning of the authority of the scientist might need the addition of some existentialist dread from other disciplines.

Instead of replying to a discipline in-crisis, this study is more interested in how the acceptance of environmental communication as a crisis discipline can lead into a disciplining of crisis. By *disciplining of crisis*, I mean to invoke a concept that has saturated much of the humanities and social sciences but which has not been used in the crisis-discipline related literature of environmental communication: Foucault's (1977) concept of disciplinary power. Disciplinary power, as opposed to sovereign power, refers to the subtle and multifarious ways that power constitutes knowledge. For example, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault shows the way that modern prisons control the prisoner as much by working to create and normalise subjectivities of criminality in contrast to the sovereign power which controls through direct imprisoning, restraint and often more grisly attacks on the body of the prisoner. My interest in the disciplinary power of a crisis discipline is in how an urgency to respond to situations framed as a crisis may tend to privilege action over inaction and a short-term praxis over careful theorising. My consideration of thinkers not within the current canon of environmental communication will show how thinkers in other disciplines have attempted to deal with these problems of crisis and urgency while also being aware of the way that privileging a concept of crisis may create a concept that is overused and ends up lacking efficacy.

The tendency towards empirical pragmatism and realism that Mathur observes in environmental communication may come from scholars registering the urgency of crisis. Peterson, Peterson and Peterson (2007) put it well when, accepting the frame of a crisis discipline, they state, 'the urgency associated with crisis gives those disciplines both an excuse and a responsibility to break normative boundaries to avert impending disaster' (p. 75). Though Mathur might see this as emblematic of the substitution of environmental communication as a sub-field of study for a conceptual phenomenon, I would suggest they offer an analysis of crisis that is also strongly reflexive.

Critique and critical theories in environmental communication

What does the adjective critical mean with reference to scholars of environmental communication? Is it even necessary? Mathur's (2008) accusation that environmental communication was strikingly uncritical was a way of saying that the sub-field lacked philosophical and political rigour. I have shown that despite his claims, writers within environmental communication, such as Schwarze (2007) and Plec (2007) have offered rigorous philosophical responses to the foundational questions in the sub-field. To others, such as Cox (2007), Senecah (2007), and Killingsworth (2007) the draw to be critical required doubts as well as commitments to critical thinking skills. While the concept of critique will be drawn out in sections below it is worth noting that there is no necessarily self-evident role for critique in environmental communication. The task, then, of considering the key critical thinkers in this study will be to show the kinds of tensions, topics and frames that critical thinkers can develop to buttress the rationales for environmental communication as a site of knowledge.

It is worth repeating that this study seeks to expand the kind of themes studied in the sub-field of environmental communication. There are many scholars writing about ecology from a critical perspective in other disciplines such as media ecology and political ecology, many of whom cover topics similar to the writers considered in this study. However, the ambit of this study is to make a specific challenge to a specific scholarly sub-field and that is why I focus on two key moments from *Environmental Communication*. Environmental communication as a sub-field of the discipline of communication can also be found in many handbooks (Hansen and for example, Cox, 2015; Cox and Pezullo, 2016), conference proceedings, encyclopedic entries and even a special Palgrave series on Media and Environmental Communication (see Schneider et al, 2016, for a critical take on coal rhetoric). While the concept of critique sometimes registers brightly in these texts, at other times it is only casually alluded to or mentioned in passing.

As a relatively new sub-field of study, having had only twenty years acknowledged within the National Communication Association and ten with *Environmental Communication* as a house journal, perhaps environmental communication has not yet had enough time to spawn further sub-fields that have affixed the term critical ahead of the traditional subject. For there to be a *critical* environmental communication,

would there need to be a substantial body of environmental communication literature to be critiqued? Regardless of its relatively recent status, the power of the signifier critical has emerged in Milstein (2012) as a phrase to group together scholars who share the goal to ‘identify, critique, and raise awareness about the ways in which environmental discourses reflect and reproduce a particular political economy of interests (p.162)’.

The ubiquitous use of critical in a casual, offhand way may speak to the contemporary scholastic value of work considered critical, whether that be the critical theory of the Frankfurt School or of other, related sub-fields such as critical management studies (for example, Bridgman and Stephens, 2008). The point to take is that often these offhand references to critical work do not articulate any wider critical project, but invoke the term as if there were a singular project that is broadly agreed upon as critical. In many cases the large body of work that has ‘critical’ affixed to it has very little to do with the aims of the Frankfurt School or any of the critiques of capitalism and culture that came from that grouping. While some might see the implication of the casual use of the term as detrimental to work that strives to ground itself in the emancipatory and doubting struggles of critical theory, I do not. Instead, I think that the appeal to criticality provides an entry point to ask the authors who use ‘critical’, what it means to them. For example, references to critical theories arise in Hofreiter, Monroe and Stein (2007) with regard to teaching and evaluating critical thinking in an environmental context, in Milstein’s (2009b) discussion of ‘critical zoo professionals’, and in Depoe’s (2008) editorial that suggests future work on ‘critical policy debates’. All of these studies raise the potential of questions on what is critical about the way they approach their subjects. While many of these studies pay tribute to critical work they can also be lumped in with the empiricism that Mathur (2008) sees as uniting and undermining the worth of environmental communication. Yet, if the alternative were to simply not use the word critical then we would hardly be in a better place for the kind of more rigorous scholarship suggested by Schwarze (2007).

In 2015 *Environmental Communication* published a series of responses to the challenges of the sub-field that were drawn from a meeting at the 2013 International Communication Association conference in London. The guest editors’ introduction to the section noted that the sub-field of environmental communication had become

institutionalised but the question for the respondents was whether there was a ‘parallel formation of an integrated and organised body of knowledge’ (Katz-Kimchi and Goodwin, 2015, p. 368). I will use this reflection as a way to ground an understanding of environmental communication not because it set out to be a way of determining the sub-field but because explicit reflections on the sub-field are relatively rare. For this meeting, five leading researchers were asked to reflect on environmental communication by considering the four conceptual groups of (i) theories, (ii) knowledge, (iii) actors and (iv) future challenges to the sub-field outlined (though it is unclear from the introduction who exactly decided that these four topics should structure the discussion). If Cox’s introduction to the first issue of *Environmental Communication*, and the responses to it that I have detailed so far, have set the stage for what the sub-field was to be, then this forum functions as a more recent reflection on environmental communication as a crisis discipline as well as a chance to discern the role of critique in more recent writings in the sub-field.

Critique is, as per the 2007 reflection, invoked in an ad-hoc manner. For Lester (2015) we see critique through the ‘critical stand’ of the academic who is confronted with flak from big business. For Anderson (2015) the emancipatory struggles for social change are also central to criticality. The critical dimension is twofold: to be critical is to be engaged as well as to show how knowledge can challenge practice. While Anders (2015) frames his analysis in terms of academics – including critical communication researchers – in environmental communication belatedly coming to knowledge about communication practices, and Besley (2015) offers a ‘think piece’ centred on the pragmatics of things that work, neither give any explicit discussion of critical theories on environmental communication. While most authors offer a soft version of criticality to frame their work, Besley is the only one to speak against it:

The richness and depth of the environmental communication researchers’ community are a source of strength but, ultimately, it may also need to focus a little less on critique and theory generation and more on developing and testing ideas that lead to useful guidance. (p. 402)

The irony, perhaps, of Besley’s paper is that he does not cite any papers from the journal *Environmental Communication* in coming to his conclusion. The same lack is true for both Lester (2015) and Anderson (2015), also. Of the six references to the

journal across the six papers (including the editor's introduction), four are cited in Robert Cox's analysis. It is perhaps also worth noting that the constitutive focus on conservation biology and a crisis discipline as defining features of environmental communication - does not feature in Cox's (2015) analysis.

Of all the papers, it is Cox (2015) that captures a sense of critical theory in his analysis of the state of environmental communication. It is a shame that some of the more critically inclined respondents to Cox's (2007) original work – such as Schwarze and Plec – did not also have responses included. Cox suggests three 'generative frames or heuristics' (p. 371) to guide his thoughts, including scale, complexity and communicative systems. In the first heuristic, scale, he notes the increase in scale that comes with a focus on climate change over environmentalism. He argues that this focus on scale will also require an analysis of the human-nature relationships that are discursively maintained in discrete, local elements, but which will need to be thought of as part of larger communicative and material systems.

Cox argues, along with Crompton and Rolde-Redding (2012), that communication researchers have vastly underestimated the communication practices and challenges of working on an object of such global and atmospheric scope. This complexity makes up the second of his points as he introduces other, specific sub-fields of media ecology and interpretation of culture to suggest the need for an emphasis on 'articulation theory and the discourses constituting forms of the social' in Laclau and Mouffe (1985). This heuristic of complexity, though he does not go into more depth on this, is far closer to the critical theories one might hope for in parsing the challenges of urgent climate change and ecological crisis. While Cox's two suggestions for processes to follow do not go significantly deeper into these first two heuristics, focusing instead on bringing a range of actors and thinkers together, his analysis is the most in keeping with the aims of this study.

In addition to these meta-analyses that position environmental communication in relation to critique, we might also want to take a closer look at a few examples of how work that identifies as critical is deployed within the sub-field. Ytterstad (2014), for example, uses Antonio Gramsci to challenge the communicative notion of framing. Instead of looking at how one might frame climate change, Ytterstad shows how the very notion of framing leads to three problems: anthropocentrism, a strategic

relationship to truth and an underestimation of other ways that meaning is made. His paper performs criticality not by advocating for a different type of framing, but by exposing these three consequences of attempts to ‘reframe’ climate change narratives. This exposing is tied to what he describes as a Gramscian realist position: a sort of half-way point between ontological realism and historical constructionism where the ‘good sense’ of the people is viewed as both politically purposeful and as potentially true. I’ll not go too far into what Ytterstad means by this except to note that the criticality of his work comes from a timely questioning of the concept of framing.

Salvador and Clarke (2011) offer another example of a critical approach – in this case via critical rhetoric – where they draw together a set of dualisms they see in much of the Environmental Communication literature. Foremost amongst these dualisms are ‘two persistent aspirations [that] govern scholarship’ within Environmental Communication: (1) a focus on ‘the enormous environmental devastation wrought by human action’ (p.243) and (2) a suspicion that the previous tools used by Environmental Communication, and related disciplines, are insufficient, if not complicit, in the problems of the first aspiration. Their analysis culminates in a discussion of how critique and praxis can realign ‘to engage the materiality and meaning of our embodied existence with-in nature’ (p. 245) listing four approaches before emphasizing their own project. That project is an emphasis on embodied listening and introducing resonant tensions into critical rhetoric through a consideration of the Nez Perce (a Native American tribe from North Idaho) concept of *weyekin*, a type of spiritual strength from a guardian spirit.

These two examples show that critique is deployed in service of at least two different ends. For Ytterstad (2014) critique is used to challenge some of the dominant tools deployed in environmental communication: the notion of the frame. His critique exposes the assumptions that accompany that tool, and then makes a suggestion for an alternative tool – Gramscian realism – that might offer a stronger analytic approach. In contrast, the critical work in Salvador and Clarke (2011) allows them to expose a contradiction that they see under the surface of much environmental communication. Exposing these contradictions does not create a synthesis but opens up a space for their introduction of non-Western philosophical and metaphysical themes into the space of environmental communication.

Breathing critique: inhaling and exhaling theory

I opened this study by noting the contrast of personal and political motivations for exploring the way critique operates in relation to climate change. I then focused on how the scholarly sub-field of environmental communication has been framed as a legitimate and necessary space of knowledge. But this study is not solely aimed at making something like an environmental communication version 2.0 with the addition of the most up to date critical theory. I am also interested in the way that critique is changed as a result of the global phenomenon of climate change.

In this section I will elaborate on the metaphor of the breathing critique in the title of this study. I am attracted to the idea of a breathing critique as the inhaling and exhaling mimics the process of inductive and deductive ways of knowing described by Tracey (2013). Breathing is not so much the synthesis of inhaling and exhaling but the description of a process of persisting in life. This is not to suggest that the balance of breathing is an essential framework of thinking about critique and ecology. Instead, it is to gesture at some points that will be developed in this study: the contrast between the local and the global, the role of anthropocentrism in an age some suggest to be defined as the Anthropocene and the will towards an emancipatory subject to challenge climate crisis.

There are many scholarly writings that situate their approach as critical thinking, critical theory and critique. Some of these writings are more generic forms of criticality that are based on challenging received wisdom, operating in the same way as a music critic might challenge the popularity of a new album by an established musician. That kind of criticality is based on a judgement conducted by the critic as an arbiter of taste, morality or fashion. The critique considered by this study also participates in the task of assessing but, I would argue, also goes well beyond making judgements.

For the present study I situate critique as caught between impulses to doubt and the impulse towards emancipatory political projects. I set up this binary not to favour either of the two impulses but to show that these two approaches underscore the rigour I associate with critical theory. Many of the terms invoked loosely thus far –

‘ethical duty’, ‘crisis’ and ‘judgment’, for example – have been central to the sensibility of critical theories over the last century. Indications of these types of critique have been mentioned already with Cox (2007) being emblematic of a theory more geared to the emancipatory politics we see in his work on ethical duty, while Schwarze (2007) and Plec’s (2007) responses are more in line with questioning and doubt. As Schwarze and Plec are responding to Cox’s affirmation of a particular direction for environmental communication it is not surprising that their work focuses more on questioning. To take a broad view of what a critical environmental communication might look like it is necessary to step back and consider this history of critical trajectories.

I will begin by inhaling a discussion of critique and critical theory by digging deeper into what I mean by scepticism and doubt. I focus on scepticism first because of the deriding of the role of scepticism in thinking about climate change. My aim in that first section is to offer a description of a strong form of philosophical scepticism that can’t be collapsed into a scientific method or deployed by an actor fully in control of the doubt inherent to scepticism.

I follow this deep breath of scepticism with another breath that draws from the specific critical theory of the Frankfurt School. The influence of these thinkers in bringing together the cultural insights of psychoanalysis as well as a certain style of Western Marxism turned the words critical theory from a description of a particular kind of theory into something more concrete like a proper noun that scholars now capitalize as Critical Theory.

Finally I’ll fill in the background to my placing of critique as caught between scepticism and emancipatory politics. That background consists of a discussion of the role of poststructuralist theory and paradox contrasting both Mouffe’s political approach between democracy and liberalism and Mumby’s work between suspicion and vulnerability. Having established an approach that is also caught between two impulses – scepticism and emancipatory politics in my case – I’ll then show a few approaches that have been used to try to deny the tensions embedded in this pairing, before discussing Levinas’ writings as a strong way to show how scepticism can’t be dissolved into a tool of evaluation that is simply deployed when needed but which doesn’t fundamentally trouble critical theories.

Inhaling critique: Scepticism and doubt

The division between emancipatory and doubting critique mirrors the division I noted at the outset of this project: the tension between my desire to engage in political actions to prevent or limit climate change in contrast to questions I have around how much I know about climate change and what its effects will be. The purpose of the division is not to suggest the impulses are mutually exclusive as, indeed, in many of the environmental communication articles discussed thus far the aim is to draw together critical approaches that doubt to then allow a better ethical response to the sub-field. These two types of critique might, at their simplest, be seen as two different critical tools that should be used for two different jobs: just as some jobs require a wrecking ball, others require scaffolding (see, for example, the similar way that McKerrow (1989) frames these different forms of critique). But this simple metaphor of critical tools misses aspects of critique and critical theories that are not so functionalist or even rational. For example, to frame doubt as a tool that is deployed misses the way that doubt plays out over time, returning to us even when we thought it might have left. In a similar manner we might highlight how other less than rational forces can intensify our political actions into rage, or stretch them out over time in a way that it is difficult to reconcile with the metaphor of a tool. So the form of scepticism and doubt are less methods in themselves, but are identifiable in a wider set of theories and tools of post-structural thought.

The scepticism I draw on in this study is of a general philosophical tradition that stretches back to the Ancient Greeks. I have chosen to use the term scepticism as the term that the doubt and self-reflexive work of critical theory points to for two reasons. First, scepticism refers exclusively to doubts over belief and disbelief, and offers no suggestion of an action that necessarily follows. Second, the tradition of scepticism allows for a discussion of both the particular and general scepticism (see Hookway, 1990; Honderich, 1995).

The general form of scepticism is much closer to the idea of the denier and the contrarian than the particular sceptic. The mindset of a general scepticism can't be dismissed by more or better proofs as it is drawn from deep epistemological questions about how people claim to know about the world. This general form of scepticism can be contrasted to a particular sceptical position that focuses on a

singular instance of contention, in contrast to the overarching doubt of philosophical scepticism. The particular sceptical position must focus on the issues of communicating evidence verified to the best ability of whatever measure of truth is proposed (Hookway, 1990; Honderich, 1995). Here the term ‘scepticism’ is less applicable. Instead, we speak of someone being ‘sceptical of’ something else. The particular ‘sceptical of’ position does not endure in and of itself – it is the kind of disbelief to which all knowing creatures are privy.

I use the term ‘doubt’ in a couple of ways in this study. First, doubt is not in contrast to scepticism, but as a synonym for it. I use doubt in places where the more formal philosophical grounds of scepticism haven’t been developed or where they seem inappropriate. In its strongest form we might compare doubt to the undecidability of Derrida (1992) on the limits of the ethical. In Derrida’s case this undecidability was a precondition for the possibility of ethics for if one does not doubt, if one is not caught up in the experience of not being able to decide, then one is executing a programme rather than practicing moral agency. Second, doubt is a good way to describe the individual who has, or values, a general sceptical worldview rather than a particular one. Doubt allows for a particularisation of scepticism without slipping into the language of particular scepticism. Doubt allows for a more personalised and self-reflexive relationship to knowledge than scepticism. People doubt themselves, but it would be odd to say that we are sceptical of ourselves.

My general approach to scepticism and doubt is not the same as some within climate change communication. Washington and Cook (2011), for example, discuss sceptics from a particular viewpoint that sees doubt as a tool to parse complexity on the path to truth. They write that ‘we should all be skeptics in many ways, as we should all seek the truth’ (p. 1) framing scepticism as a preliminary tool which will eventually be done away with, like the working on a mathematics problem. This view is powered by what they describe as a scientific approach to knowledge, closely tied to enlightenment notions of truth seeking, and in opposition to the psychoanalytic and pathologised complexity of denial. I won’t go too much into their analysis of denial suffice to note that they cite an eclectic range of theorists and theories, placing R.D. Laing before the parable of the Emperor’s New Clothes and then Holocaust denial.

Where Washington and Cook (2011) cite the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) definition of sceptic they only note the particular view that they cite as ‘A seeker after truth; an inquirer who has not yet arrived at definite conclusions’ (OED, cited in Washington and Cook, 2011) though they don’t cite which version. In the tenth edition of the Oxford Concise English Dictionary – still a hefty seventeen hundred pages – the full definition includes two versions:

a person inclined to question or doubt accepted opinions.

Philosophy. a philosopher who denies the possibility of knowledge, or even rational belief, in certain spheres. (p. 1279)

For this study I will hold to the value of scepticism from a philosophical point of view and won’t collapse it into the particularities of denial or as solely a part of a rigorous scientific process.

One way of doing away with the tensions between emancipatory politics and the philosophical form of scepticism comes from Latour (2004), who equates academic work with emancipating people from prematurely naturalised facts. Scepticism is emancipation! And why not? The problem with Latour’s approach is not that there is anything wrong with extending emancipation to the realms of thought and doubt, but that Latour himself only introduces the concept of emancipation from ‘prematurely naturalised facts’ so as to show how insufficient that form of critique is in the face of climate change and the appropriation of techniques of critique by people and industries seeking to create uncertainty for ulterior motives. Latour’s doubt-as-emancipation from prenatalised facts is not the final destination for critique, but it is an illustration of the role of doubting received wisdom in achieving emancipatory ends.

There is a temporal manner in which what I have described as a paradox might also be wished away. This approach suggests that the role of doubt is limited to the preliminary stages of critique: we are to doubt something exterior to the thinker but then we go beyond doubt to assert a direction that, in itself, was never really challenged by doubt. At some point in our contemplation, this approach suggests, we are to take stock of where we’re at and at that point – wherever it may be – we make a decision on how to act, drop the scepticism and let ourselves be guided by the push

to engage in emancipatory politics that has been hovering around us all the while in which we doubted and interrogated. Saul (1995) takes this approach when he positions doubt as sandwiched between first recognising the reality that faces us and thirdly, applying an idea that we have decided upon. Where Saul writes that ‘doubt is thus the space between reality and the application of an idea’ (p. 110) we might also observe that it is the time between recognition and a reaction. Doubt is a tool that, in this conception, we deploy so as to improve the subsequent application of an idea into a practice.

The temporal limiting of doubt assumes that the deploying of doubt is, in itself, a rational act. But as we see in Levinas’ (1981) discussion of scepticism, it is anything but rational:

Philosophy is not separable from scepticism, which follows it like a shadow it drives off by refuting it again at once on its footsteps. Does not the last word belong to philosophy? Yes, in a certain sense, since for Western philosophy the saying is exhausted in things said. But scepticism in fact makes a difference, and puts an interval between saying and the said. Scepticism is refutable, but it returns. (p. 166)

The kind of scepticism described by Levinas is not a tool to be deployed by critique in the spirit of coming to the best decision possible. This scepticism is, instead, allied to the critic who cannot refuse the return of scepticism through reference to reason or refutation, pragmatism or any other claim for the time to be ‘getting serious, now’. As Levinas goes on to say, if human memory was infallible and total then there would be no path for scepticism to return, but since humans are irrational animals, then our fallibility demands the return of doubt. The history of Western philosophy and the state, he argues, is one of the determination to shut down this doubt, and yet looking at it from today ‘the history of Western philosophy has not been the refutation of the scepticism as much as the refutation of transcendence’ (p. 167). Scepticism in Levinas’ is a doubt that perpetually returns to a person, state or field of inquiry denying any attempts to set a critic or thinker apart from the world in which they live.

Scepticism and doubt can be thought of as both tools deployed by critique as per Latour or an irrepressible part of consciousness and thought as per Levinas. Those who attempt to do away with doubt as a tool are just as susceptible to it returning as those who deploy it – there is nothing about this doubt that can be controlled ahead of time. It is this undermining, recurring and irrepressible aspect of doubt that is both necessary and troubling for critique. And even if thinkers suggest that doubt can be controlled by buffering our claims about climate with the invocation of contingency this can not determine when, if or how doubt will return as a spectre to erode our firmament. The invocation of the necessity of contingency, which once sought to undermine certainties, can as quickly become a transcendent figure that is used to limit or determine how scepticism will return. But scepticism, as Levinas has shown, can't be controlled by merely acknowledging the impossibility of closing down meaning. Scepticism is more active than this and less predictable – the very rational act of describing something as contingent doesn't fend off the shadowing of scepticism.

Inhaling critique: Frankfurt School

The critical theory of the Frankfurt School has been broadly conceived of as the dominant school of Western Marxism. Held (1980) sums up the school's successes as 'recasting the terms of reference of critique and reinforcing the emancipatory intent of Marx's enterprise' (p. 35). For the Frankfurt School critique and critical theory was very specifically responding to the historical forms of capitalism. Fenton (2006) notes that the Frankfurt School is one of the first examples of merging critiques of culture with an analysis of modes of production. Held (1980) expands this interdisciplinary focus by also noting their work in psychoanalysis, sociology and law.

Geuss (1981) contrasts Frankfurt School style critical theory with the positivism of the natural sciences and those disciplines' commitment to objective, value-free attempts at knowledge. Geuss goes on to note three core differences between critical and scientific theories: (i) a difference in aim: science seeks to be of instrumental use, whereas critique seeks to be emancipatory; (ii) a difference in logical/cognitive

structure: where science objectifies – distinguishes between theories and objects of study – critique sees a theory as always a part of the ‘object-domain’, and always self-reflexive; (iii) a difference in acceptable evidence. Science requires empirical confirmation, while critique requires a ‘more complicated process of evaluation, the central part of which is a demonstration that they are ‘reflectively acceptable’ ‘ (p. 55-6). As with the focus on crisis in environmental communication, Horkheimer (1972), claimed that the need for an emancipatory critical theory came from a capitalist crisis. That crisis was the fact that ‘the world now has more raw materials, machines, and skilled workers, and better methods of production than ever before, but they are not profiting mankind as they ought’ (p. 4). This economic crisis is also a scientific crisis, as science requires the proper, or instrumental, application of knowledge. These crises, Horkheimer concludes, are because ‘science, too, is determined in the scope and direction of its work not by its own tendencies alone but, by the necessities of social life as well’ (p. 8). In short, science was in crisis because the economic and social elements of life were also in disorder. Habermas, in the third iteration of the Frankfurt School, developed the focus on crisis from the economic to the political and socio-cultural, dividing crisis into four types, in two categories across these three spheres: (a) system crisis which could be economic or in terms of political rationality and (b) identity crisis which could be a crisis of legitimation of political institutions or motivations in a socio-cultural frame (Held, 1980).

Though some of the writers considered so far in environmental communication do touch on thinkers from the Frankfurt school – for example Cox (2007) makes a nod towards a normative theory of ‘communication’ in Habermas’s ‘discourse ethics’, his use of quotation marks around both terms indicates a certain weariness – it would be hard to claim that most references to ‘critical’ work in environmental communication are aligned with the aims or methods of, for example, Adorno or Horkheimer’s work. While Habermas’ writings have been mainstreamed in some strands of communication studies – for example, see Deetz’s (1992) work in organisation communication – he is not yet a touchstone for the kind of critical references made in environmental communication (see Brulle, 2010 for an exception). Nor can the ‘critical’ work on the framing of environmental communication as a crisis discipline be said to align with the instrumental, scientific method described by Geuss.

Similarly, the Frankfurt School impetus of economic crisis does not correspond to the notions of a crisis discipline such as is invoked by the privileging of conservation biology in environmental communication. The crises for the Frankfurt scholars generally derives from contradictions in political economy and culture which lead to the systems crises originating in economy or politics, or identity crises originating in politics and socio-cultural fields. For the crisis of conservation biology, the case is much more urgent and bleak in that it threatens to irreversibly undermine the very reproduction of life. Where Horkheimer noted that the economic crisis led to social disorder that would also put science in crisis, for the crisis disciplines the ecological crisis would lead to social disorder and economic crises.

If we accept that the ‘critical’ in environmental communication is not the critical theory of the Frankfurt School but a more general critique, it is worth taking a moment to ask what the relationship is between critical theory and critique. My formulation of this relationship is in line with the description of critical theory articulated above by Held (1980) when he noted that critical theory recast the terms of reference for critique. Critique, then, is a broader, more flexible tradition, of which the critical theory of the Frankfurt School was one manifestation. That which is critique today is informed, but not wholly informed, by the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory.

Inhaling critique: occlusive constitutions

A generalised form of critique involves a broad, heterogeneous tradition which can be summed up in Butler (2001) as follows: ‘Critique is always a critique of some instituted practice, discourse, episteme, institution’ (p. 212; italics in original). This form of critique, as discussed earlier, speaks to the critic as an authority who surveys a particular practice and passes judgement on it. For environmental communication this generalised critique passes judgement on the success or otherwise of a communicative practice. Butler goes on to show how critique differs from judgment: ‘Judgments operate for both thinkers [Raymond Williams and Theodor Adorno] as ways to subsume a particular under an already constituted category, whereas critique asks after the occlusive constitution of the field of categories themselves (p.213)’.

And yet, as Butler notes, judgment remains the default setting of that which puts itself forward as critique but which rarely looks at its own preconditions. Critique is a term often claimed by authors who make judgments but that claim rarely lives up to the potential of critique to highlight how thought, and the ossified categories that much thought relies on, come into being. That is not to say that critique as judgment is an illegitimate form of scholarly activity, but that these evaluations shouldn't be seen as all there is to the projects that carry the name critique.

In the papers discussed in environmental communication so far the difference between judgment and critique is also the difference in the way the category of crisis discipline is invoked. For Cox (2007) the question for the constitution of environmental communication invites a judgment as to whether environmental communication is a crisis discipline. In contrast, Schwarze (2007) asks what are the conditions of possibility for the constitution of a crisis discipline, or discipline of crisis. Judgment lends itself to the empirical work maligned by Mathur as uncritical; critique is at once Mathur and Schwarze's questioning of Cox's 'provocative heuristic' (Cox, 2007; p. 7) as well as their introduction of alternative frameworks.

In seeking to affirm the potential of critique, Butler (2001) describes going beyond judgment as a process of intervening in the nexus of power and knowledge that, in quoting Foucault, is 'condemned to dispersion, dependency and pure heteronymy' (in Butler, 2001). Critique, according to Foucault, seeks out a firm ground to launch from, but is condemned to being a reflection of the object that is being critiqued. This form of critique must be both self-reflexive and doubting: it is always seeking to undermine the constellations of knowledge and power that lead to the world being one way, while foreclosing possibilities that it will be any other way. But despite this attempt to prevent foreclosure, critique relies on some object as the basis for critique to exist. This leads to a key point in Butler's analysis, where she writes

Of course, we may think that we need epistemological certainty in order to state for sure that the world is and ought to be ordered a given way. To what extent, however, is that certainty orchestrated by forms of knowledge precisely in order to foreclose the possibility of thinking otherwise? Now, one might wisely ask, what good is thinking otherwise, if we don't know in advance that thinking otherwise will produce a better world? (p. 213)

For Butler, critique not only offers no guarantee of what political outcomes will result from the deploying of a critique, but moreover that what we have deployed as critique may come to be seen as deriving from unsubstantiated categories of folly or error. Any attempt to give a guarantee that critique will make the world better founders on the impossibility of giving a definitive answer to whether critique will fulfill emancipatory or moral ends. Butler suggests that many commentators see these questions as an impasse that undermines Foucault, and by extension the entire moral and ethical dimension of post-structuralism. For her, these questions simply allow us to take the task of critique more seriously as an undeterminable task, and to embrace ethics as that which is conditional and becoming, rather than as an identity bestowed upon critic for the simple act of performing criticality.

I have introduced Butler's work to highlight the tensions that exist between critical work that seeks known and defined political outcomes and those that seek to question, including questioning what is occluded and excluded in the constitution of any phenomena. Neither of these stylised categories – which I call critique as emancipatory politics and critique as doubting or scepticism – are reducible to one another, nor can either be dismissed. They are also not stable: the lexicons employed to speak to the range of sub-fields and inter-disciplines are broad and heteronymous. In the following section I will look at the way that Dennis Mumby and Chantal Mouffe also work between two categories that inform their critiques – one focused on hermeneutics, the other on politics.

Exhaling critique: paradox and poststructuralism

The discussions in the three previous sections have highlighted scepticism and doubt, the Frankfurt School and Butler's occlusive constitutions under the concept of inhaling critique. I now turn to exhaling by offering a section that is less a survey of a field of knowledge and more an assertion of my own position on critique. While it might seem too early in the study to shift from exhaling to inhaling, I want to ensure those who would prefer a waiting to exhale approach that – a tact that ignores the rhythms of breathing – the inhalations and exhalations of this study are nested in all sorts of parenthetical and digressive manners.

My view of climate change rests on a summation that is open to debate: while the traditional understanding of how media communicates science has made some small gains in communicating climate change and its complexities, it has not nearly done enough. I see this failure to communicate issues of climate change as partly due to two aspects of a reliance on rationalist understandings of communication: first, there is an assumption that because climate change is based on scientific observation that this must be met with a rationalist interpretation of audiences. Second, a rationalist interpretation of climate change communication focuses too much on anthropocentric explanations of the world and gives very little credence to the manner in which humans and non-humans are intertwined not only at a molecular level, but also at an atmospheric level.

The best approach to challenge this overly rationalist approach to climate change and communication comes from both poststructuralist thinkers and Critical Theorists. These thinkers are not new to the broad discipline of communication studies – particularly so with their saturation in the field of critical communications. In differentiating four approaches to communication studies, Mumby (1997) positions a poststructuralist or postmodernist approach in tension with critical theory in constructing his own subject position (which is also in contrast to positivist and interpretivist approaches). There are strong parallels with Mumby's (1997) articulation of a discourse of suspicion and of vulnerability with my own articulations of critique as linked to emancipatory politics and doubting. Mumby highlights discourses of suspicion that draw from both post-Marxism and Frankfurt scholars and frames these as ultimately modernist in that they, eventually, are oriented towards achieving specific outcomes (though this might be challenged for some Frankfurt thinkers such as Adorno and Horkheimer). He contrasts that strand of suspicious thinkers with the decentring of postmodern approaches to communication that reveal the vulnerability of both authors and discourses. It is perhaps ironic that the discourses of suspicion in Mumby meet their parallel in my critique as emancipatory politics, while his discourses of vulnerability are more akin to the critique as scepticism or doubt. In concord with Mumby's own reckoning of his own position as the communication studies author caught in tension between suspicion and vulnerability, I see the most value for this work in teasing out the tensions

between scepticism and emancipatory politics, or suspicion and vulnerability, rather than seeking to ultimately side with either.

Drawing on the approach to scepticism in a previous section, I ground my approach broadly in a poststructuralist approach that does not seek to reduce complexity or paradox through the need for judgement. This form of critique is exemplified in the manner in which Chantal Mouffe (2000) introduces *The Democratic Paradox*. At the end of her foreword to that book she writes:

It was while reading these texts again for publication that I realized that, albeit in different ways, all of them were highlighting the paradoxical nature of modern liberal democracy. Since the distaste for paradoxes is widespread among the rationalist thinkers with whom I am arguing, I decided that this was the aspect of my current work worth emphasizing. (p. xii)

The paradox of democracy is concerned with the tensions between a democracy populated by citizens that is also inextricably tied to the other great political ideal of the day, liberalism. Liberalism, in an irreducible contrast with democracy, is characterised by a rejection of borders and the inclusion/exclusion dynamics that are the basis of forming the demos of a citizenry. And yet despite the opposition between these two concepts, the countries considered by Mouffe (2000) are often known as liberal-democracies. Hence, the democratic paradox.

Poststructuralist thought is often parodied along similar lines: terms are bracketed with their negation in an all too easy simulation of an irresolvable tension between an assertion and its constitutive a lack, for example the use of a term like '(im)possibility'. For me, it is neither the word games nor some dated sense of the fashionable that attracts me to poststructuralist thought. Instead it is the commitment to finding these paradoxes and tensions within the language of our own received cultures. For Mouffe those paradoxes necessitated the wrenching apart of the oft-hyphenated term 'liberal-democracy'. For this study it is as much about highlighting the relationship and tensions between two words that perhaps could use a hyphen, such as 'natural' and 'cultural'. The point of digging deeper into these concepts to find the tensions and paradoxes is to illustrate the limits of the language and concepts that we regularly deploy as if they were unproblematic.

The paradox at the heart of this study is of a critique based on the irreconcilable impulses towards doubting and emancipating. Doubting undermines the basis for the language that we use to form allegiances with others to pursue collective freedoms. This process is not a problem if we simply doubt the ideological assumptions of those who we have already decided are our opponents. But when the tools of critique are used to challenge the language, logic and reason behind our own commitments then we run up against the paradox of critique: how to doubt enough to be philosophically rigorous but at the same time believe enough to be politically active? On top of this we also need to be wary of doubt becoming an unthinking or programmatic pose that is seen as legitimate in and of itself without asking how doubt and a concomitant inaction might affect the object of study. Where Mumby (1997) was able to come down on the side of a discourse of suspicion that, he noted, ultimately resided in a modernist project, the pull to respond to climate crisis makes for a similar urge. And yet because that urge is so strong in both popular discourses as well as environmental communication I am also tempted towards emphasizing the need for the decentering of authority that Mumby describes as a discourse of vulnerability.

The lopsidedness of inhaling critique over exhaling critique will be revisited in the final chapter of this study where the influence of climate change on both doubt and emancipatory politics can be revisited with the four authors of this study having been considered. For now all that remains of the setting of the stage of this first chapter to introduce the four thinkers of critique and offer my apologia for the inclusion of each one given the already established parameters of critique.

Overview of the Four Authors

My study of these four thinkers – Peter Sloterdijk, Slavoj Žižek, Timothy Morton and Bruno Latour – will introduce and expand their presence in the environmental communication literature. This presence represents a distinctly theoretical, or meta-theoretical, turn and would undermine any ease of invoking a critical approach. These thinkers will also offer a set of theoretical tools for researchers within the

environmental communication sub-field such as Morton's concept of hyperobjects and Žižek's analysis of the psychology behind three common responses to ecological crisis.

I chose the writers to focus on for this study by reading widely on critical theorists who had written significant quantities on climate change and ecology, but at the same time had given some significant place to doubt, belief or disbelief and scepticism or cynicism in their philosophical, cultural or political writings. For each thinker that I will focus on, I will study all of their key texts that deal with ecology, supplementing these readings by including secondary texts commenting on their thought. To study their texts is to study their thought rather than the biographical analysis that would occasion the study of an individual. That is, I am less interested in whether Žižek recycles or not, than I am in his thoughts on whether people should recycle or not and what those choices represent.

The problem of translating between the specific lexicons of these thinkers is not to be underestimated. Consider the vast range of concepts and theories I touch on in just a preliminary description of each of these four writers. Those four are as follows: first, Peter Sloterdijk, whose mix of anthropotechnic posthumanism offers an orientation to practice in an age of spheres and atmospheres. Second, Slavoj Žižek, whose 'soft-apocalyptic' take on ecological crisis can be compared to his Lacanian view of ideology and the real. Third, Timothy Morton, whose aesthetic theory of ecology and ecocriticism has turned into claims about ontology and speculative realism. Finally, Bruno Latour, whose critiques of the separation and reconnection needed between the sciences and politics has turned into a focus on actor-network theory and assemblages.

The thinkers I identified have required the delimiting of the scope of this study in two ways: first, I chose just four contemporary thinkers from the libraries of contemporary thought. Those thinkers had to not only have written work on ecology and climate change, but also had to have a robust sense of having produced critical theories that treat doubt and scepticism as concepts that are either central to critique, or at the least, recurring problems that cannot be sidelined. While the latter commitments are almost synonymous with critical theories, the former restricted my choices to the last two decades. I was searching for critical theories where a certain tension about knowing and doing collided and where that collision could assist the way we might think of critical theory today. The rethinking of critical theories would also assist those in

environmental communication deal with their own difficult task of studying, and perhaps even practising, environmental communication.

If the thinkers that inform this study are limited either by those who I have characterized as inside a narrowly defined sub-field of environmental communication as a sub-field of communication, particularly those who publish and reflect on the task in *Environmental Communication*, and four select outside thinkers, then there are surely dozens of other thinkers who sit outside the sub-field who I could easily have included. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009), for example, wrote the influential ‘The Climate of History: Four theses’ which I describe in my chapter on Slavoj Žižek. Felix Guattari’s (2005) *The Three Ecologies* would be a useful addition to any critical review of ecology as would a range of works by Andre Gorz (1994; 2010a; 2010b). I also considered including Donna Haraway’s work, but while some recent articles have started to focus on climate change and crisis, it was only in late 2016 that she published a text – *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Haraway, 2016) – that I felt did justice to the critical tensions. In the opening chapter on communication scholars I also identified with Mathur’s attempt to import thinkers like Gregory Bateson and Niklas Luhmann into the conversations in environmental communication. For many of these thinkers – Bateson, Luhmann, Guattari – their thought has undoubtedly influenced contemporary critical conceptions of ecology, but each of them passed away prior to this century when so much of the debate on climate change has taken place. While there is a sense of the enormity of ecological issues in reading their works, none speaks directly enough to the framing concerns of this project.

The thinkers I chose might be surprising to scholars and eco-activists for they are not, apart from perhaps Timothy Morton, immediately recognisable as thinkers directly focused on ecology. I make no claims to offer a total overview of what critique has to say about ecology, the environment or climate change. I have focussed on the four authors because each of them represent someone committed to the doubt and action that underpins this study. I considered writing about someone who is very much considered a thinker of ecology – Val Plumwood – but in researching her work I got the sense that she was already too committed to ecological movements to represent the kind of unease of scepticism that led me to this study and that I was looking to pair to a feeling of urgent ecological crisis. If the primacy of Plumwood’s feminist ecology

prevented me from seeing her representing the tensions I was interested in, the same holds for writers like John Bellamy Foster whose study of ecology is nested within a Marxist framework. While Žižek's thinking might be said to be similarly Marxist, his analysis of climate change is more open to the potential for ecological issues to be of equal importance to class, rather than reading ecology through Marx.

I have also had to exclude texts that are fascinating but which are not a part of a wider body of writing that links to ecology. The most useful of those texts is McKenzie Wark and his 2015 book *Molecular Red*. Each chapter in Wark (2015) is based on one author who has a large number of writings that address either ecology or climate change. Wark's project is very similar to my own: he studies four authors, bringing out insights from each for theory in the age of the Anthropocene. Not having enough from Wark for a chapter of his own, I have left him to one side with only the odd reference to his work in the conclusion.

It is in the conclusion where a number of other critical thinkers are also brought to bear on four different tensions that could structure future studies in environmental communication. At that point some of the thinkers with a stronger grounding in political theory, psychoanalysis and literature are brought to bear on the specific concepts drawn more broadly from the four key thinkers. For example, I use the concept of risk society from Ulrich Beck to contrast with the range of political answers to climate change that Žižek proposes.

Though this project is a study of texts, as noted at the outset of this section, these texts are ordered around authors. By focusing on authors as the point by which discussions are structured I do not intend to set them up for demands of internal consistency. The focus on authors is precisely because I see a disjoint in their perspectives, not because I am seeking a perfect harmony of internal consistency. This point bears underlining: the focus on four authors was intended to allow for the consistencies and inconsistencies of their discourses to come to the surface. This thesis is as much a study of how four contemporary thinkers come to know about climate change in spite of their critical stance as it is based on their critique informing their knowledge. If I had structured each chapter around a concept rather than a thinker I would have missed out on the kind of in-depth reading of critique and climate change across multiple texts of one author. This is, as Foucault (1984) explains, what critique does to the name of the

author permitting ‘one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others.’ (p.107). Some of these disjoints might initially stand as a result of my provisional understanding of their works and could be resolved through closer consideration. The aim is not to seek fallacies or fissures that would allow the work of these authors to be dispensed with. It is in these fissures that some of the more interesting and least resolvable questions around scepticism and emancipatory political aims will lurk.

It is also worth noting that these thinkers were chosen because of their relative lack of engagement with the science behind climate change, not because they are exemplars of critical scholars who are able to command the facts and figures like a climate scientist. The point of the study is not to make critical thinkers more literate in scientific theories, but to show how such thinkers can participate in discussions of climate change without drawing on the legitimacy of scientific facts or statistical risk assessments.

1. Sloterdijk – from asceticism and anthropotechnics to an ontology of climate construction

Just before the end of the cold war, Peter Sloterdijk (1988) defined the spirit of the times as one of cynicism, or ‘enlightened false consciousness’ (p.5). It is worth quoting extensively from Sloterdijk: cynicism ‘is that modernized, unhappy consciousness on which enlightenment has laboured both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice’ (p.5). For Sloterdijk cynicism is the enlightened disbelief of scepticism paired with an inability or unwillingness to create a life that matches that lack of belief. As Žižek (1989) elaborates, the cynical subject knows the falseness of the ideology that demands an action but they act nevertheless.

While Sloterdijk’s (1988) *Critique of Cynical Reason* focused so intently on unmaskings of ideology, laying bare the illusions that structured belief, when it came to the threat of nuclear weapons and other environmental catastrophes, he was less convincing. He suggested, but did not develop the idea, that the asceticism of Diogenes the Kynic and the hermits who escaped to the solitude in the hills, could not be much

of a solution in a time of global environmental threats. Sloterdijk suggests that modern humans, who have learnt the threats to the atmosphere posed by nuclear weapons, must see escape as no option. Sloterdijk's position today is more difficult: where the cold war stratagem of restraint known as mutually assured destruction meant that inaction was the aim, today humans need to change the actions we are currently undertaking if we are to avoid climate catastrophe. The early Sloterdijk's response to urgent calls for ecological action was a more prudent version of cynical inaction: restraint. 'Those who can let things be', he writes, 'are not pursued from behind by projects that have taken on a life of their own' (p. 541).

Though Sloterdijk is perhaps still best known for this early work, more than a dozen of his books have been published in the last ten years. My interest in his work for this project stems from two broad themes in these texts: spherology and anthropotechnics. In his overview of Sloterdijk's work, Couture (2016) includes these two themes, along with three others: psychopolitics, controversy and therapy.

Sloterdijk's *Spheres* (2011b, 2014, 2016) project places an emphasis on the climate, or atmosphere, as the contemporary global space in which humans dwell. His analysis in *Terror from the Air* (2009) also shows the trajectory of thought in the 20th century from attacking others based on the air they need to breathe, to trying to construct climates that can be controlled. The tone of these books differs markedly from the Žižek: where Žižek explores the kind of political action to radically reformulate what is leading us towards climate crisis, Sloterdijk offers few considerations of any kind of preventative action, focusing instead on how people can respond to changes that are likely to happen whether people like it or not. The human project of living in spheres is synonymous with the production of controlled climates. These shared, protected climates, he jokes, are spaces for co-immunisation, as opposed to what he sees as the defunct world-creating project of communism.

The second point of interest that draws this project to consider Sloterdijk is anthropotechnics: techniques of human self-creation and invention. If his work on climates was a response to the scientific problems of the *Critique of Cynical Reason*, then his work on anthropotechnics is his response to the lived problems of asceticism. Where others see collective or political action as the point where the challenges of being in the world are taken up, Sloterdijk (2013a) enumerates the variegated ways in

which humans have sought to change themselves. This work follows on from Foucauldian and Nietzschean interests in projects of self-knowledge and self-creation. In contrast to the other thinkers in this project, Sloterdijk's focus on the individual evades ethical questions of what it means to demand action and change from others. This evasion, however, flounders when the long term implications of this individualism start to become obvious: consider the scandal around his discussion of eugenics (Sloterdijk, 2011a) and the more general questions of posthumanism in contrast to the values of liberalism (2013a).

Sloterdijk's focus on posthumanism and techniques of the self, if not an outright individualism, is often seen as antithetical to the concerns of most who seek urgent ecological action through collective means. The task for my analysis of Sloterdijk is to show whether combining his two responses – theorising on climate as sphere and delving into anthropotechnic methods – can offer anything to thinkers of collective action. Does his work on climate offer those within the object oriented ontology tradition a richer basis for their considerations of climates and spheres? Could his anthropotechnics offer a critical framework of the subject in the same manner as Foucault, which would help critical theorists understand the relationship of the subject to wider issues of ecological epistemes and action?

2. Žižek - Between Lacanian ontology and radical politics

Slavoj Žižek is an intriguing focus for this thesis for the contrast between his Lacanian understanding of psychoanalysis and his radical Marxist politics that uses ecological threats as a key antagonism to justify anti-capitalist politics. The chapter on Žižek will ask how the Lacanian worldview of his earlier works on ideology fit with his more recent invocation of ecological apocalypse. How does Žižek's invocation of ecological urgency differ from his view on ideology? And if ecology is the predominant ideology of the day, as he has argued, how does that fit with his 2009 invocation of the four threats to the planet? Given the quantity of secondary literature on Žižek – the *International Journal of Žižek Studies* is into its eighth volume, for example – it is surprising that there is such a lack of work on his ecological views.

Žižek's psychoanalytic approach, particularly in his early works, relies on an elaboration of the works of Lacan through popular media examples such as Hollywood films or bleak Soviet-era humour. The use of pop culture is not just to make his work more accessible, but is to show how ideology works as a concept in mass media. Ideology, in Žižek, shows how 'our deepest commitments bind us to practices of domination' (Dean, 2010, p. 5). These practices of domination are the equivalent of the actions that do not follow on from cherished beliefs. Cynicism, then, is also a useful concept to Žižek (1989) as it shows a disconnect between action and belief. Importing the concept from Sloterdijk, he cites a ruling ideology that no longer expects people to believe in it: the very function of belief is premised on ironic distance. And yet, in more recent works, Žižek (2001) has also stressed the impossibility of a complete lack of belief.

If Lacan is the theorist who structures Žižek's views on belief, then Marxism is the theory to which he turns when conceiving of emancipatory politics. Žižek (2009) embraces the idea that climate change, as well as other ecological catastrophes, will lead to terrible consequences 'up to and including the annihilation of humanity itself' (p. 91). The reasons for this annihilation are the expansionist drives of capitalism. He notes a few of these challenges when he lists the four great antagonisms that humans face in the present age. Alongside inequality and copyrighting of genetic code, he lists ecological threats based on climate change and threats to diversity of species on the planet. The release of carbon dioxide and its radical change to the earth's atmosphere is one amongst many in a long list of environmental waste issues that humans have faced since industrialisation.

Žižek (2009) sees these three antagonistic sites as informing struggles over three commons - culture, external nature and internal nature – which will determine the direction of the species over the coming century. For Žižek, the ecological clash is the same clash as humans have always fought against capital, but this time theorised as the need to fight against attempts to privatise each of these commons. The urgency of this action is much louder in Žižek's more recent works where he observes: 'what unites us is that, in contrast to the classic image of proletariat who have 'nothing to lose but their chains,' we are in danger of losing *everything*' (p. 92).

Žižek's (2009) response to the urgency of climate change is underwritten by a politics of anti-capitalism: 'it is not enough simply to remain faithful to the communist Idea; one has to locate within historical reality antagonisms which give this Idea practical urgency' (p. 90). Just because ecology gives urgency to calls for a political system that is not based on capitalism it does not follow that Žižek's use of ecology is simply the means to other ends. It is entirely possible that his invocation of ecological catastrophe is consistent with his other understandings of the social and the real. For example, Žižek also cites widespread inequality as an antagonism that lends urgency to communism. This clash between class politics and ecology will become a defining feature of the chapter on Žižek

My focus on Žižek will seek moments when his own view of ecological catastrophe starts to fray: when he stakes his views on the threat of climate change, as opposed to the cynical, obsessional or moral approach of others, how does he justify this politics? Similarly, if climate change is the threat that he claims that it is – that the proletariat has more to lose than their chains, as he writes – and he can envision capitalist, socialist and communist responses to it, then why does *First as Tragedy, then as Farce* (Žižek, 2009) skip so quickly over the potential solutions that he labels and lumps together as capitalist and socialist (though this more resembles a kind of soft social-democratic) approaches.

3. Morton - From ecocriticism against nature to hyperobjects

Timothy Morton is of interest to this study as he is much more direct than the other three authors in his consideration of the reluctance of those in ecological disciplines, particularly ecocriticism, to engage in non-empirical work. Morton's work begins with an analysis of ecocritical texts – a discipline based on the analysis of representations of the environment in literature. Morton's early work, for example, considers the ecological thought of early Romantic Percy Shelley as well as other Romantic themes related to the body and spice trade. For Morton, the urgent call to ecological action resonates with most environmental scholars as a call to abandon theory and focus on facts that create action. Caricaturing those within his field who focus on immediate action on ecological issues he writes 'ecocriticism needs what it calls 'theory' like it

needs a hole in the head,' (2007, p. 10). Morton considers his preference for theory and a slowing down to be in opposition to the pervasiveness of discourses of urgency and crisis.

Morton's position contends that theory must be made welcome in a time of crisis, suggesting that perhaps an 'aeration' of the ideological determinants behind ideas of ecology is 'exactly what is needed' (p.10). This aeration has taken the form of a critique of the concept of nature in literary writing (2007) and then, more generally (and for a general audience), in ecological thought (2010). In trying to disarticulate the grounding narrative of nature from an ecocentrist approach, Morton directs his writings against some of the quietism and complicity in ecological collapse of deep ecology. Much of this early work leaves the reader with substantial questions about how Morton relates to the invoked concepts such as faith, critique and doubt, as well as to the 'aeration' produced by contrasting such a range of thinkers on belief: Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and Žižek.

In more recent works this aeration has taken the form of something more solid: a project drawing inspiration from object-oriented ontology based on, as he formulates in a book of the same name, *Hyperobjects* (2013). A hyperobject is something that exists outside of the usual time and space perceptions that guide human life. For example plutonium, which will exist long after any living animal is dead. The most urgent hyperobject demanding comprehension in their uniquely 'realist and nonanthropocentric' (p.3) fashion is global warming.

After defining hyperobjects, Morton (2013) bridges the gap between a sceptical critical theory and ethics by offering a series of questions about certainty, rationality and action when trying to find sufficient political justifications to address global warming. He labels global warming a *super wicked problem*, which is 'a wicked problem for which time is running out, for which there is no central authority, where those seeking the solution to it are also creating it, and where policies discount the future irrationally' (p. 135). A human response to this super wicked problem can only ever be hypocritical as humans are inside the very problem that they're looking to fix. Hypocrisy, then, begins to form a theory of entanglement which, in contrast to deep ecology, Morton names dark ecology.

Taking objects seriously is a common theme not only across Morton and Latour, but also more widely in contemporary critical theory. We might trace this revival to the focus on objects and layout (panopticons, desks, the layout of a court room) in Foucault's various analyses of institutions, but it has really only been a specific focus when named as object oriented ontology. Though *Hyperobjects* offers a number of curious reflections about the ontological status of objects, in particular Morton's claim that 'quantum theory is the only existing theory to establish firmly that things really do exist beyond our mind (or any mind)' (p.39), it is in *Realist Magic* (2013) that Morton really explores his relationship to object oriented ontology. In contrast to Latour, Morton has made attempts to explicitly specify a material ontological basis that he accepts as firm rather than the less direct work of redeploying critique on the side of science as a method, which is Latour's approach. Though he does not go into much depth on just how quantum theory has established that things really do exist, and how generalisable he sees this, such a claim marks an important point for further study on how critical theory responds to the urgency of ecological issues.

4. Latour - From a critique of science to a theory of ontology

In contrast to Žižek, Bruno Latour's view of scepticism, doubt and action are not based on psychoanalysis and communism. Instead, his writing, particularly the work on matters of care, evinces a thinker whose epistemological doubts are derived from his own attempts to bring the sciences into democracies. Having studied authors like Nietzsche, Freud and Marx that formed much of the theory behind post-structuralist thought, Latour's early work, particularly *Laboratory Life* (1986) with Steve Woolgar, offered an ethnographic analysis of the day-to-day workings of a laboratory that intended to show the social basis of scientific knowledge but it also offered a complex view of scientific thought not readily documented by other critical thinkers. They report that 'depending on the argument, the laboratory, the time of year, and the currency of controversy, investigators will variously take the stand of realist, relativist, idealist, transcendental relativist, sceptic, and so on' (p. 179). However, far from being an attack on the legitimacy of science as method, Latour affirms the legitimacy of hard sciences in the face of attempts from outside to debunk the transcendence of its knowledge.

Politics of Nature (1999) is the grounding text of Latour's ecological thinking that continues to be a focal point of contemporary research. In that work, he sets out to show how the natural is not a non-human field but is a category that erases the possibility of contestation around what the natural thing is. If something is natural, he writes, it is not that it is non-human, but that it is unquestionable. As such, things go from being natural to cultural and back, depending on the core concerns of the day.

A focus on what is presented as contestable and that which is not lead to his essay 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?' (2004) at which point he considers whether conservative political groups, who he also opposed, had appropriated the methods of critique - which had grounded his earlier work in critiquing science - to impede discussions on climate change. In studying Latour I wish to clearly articulate his justifications for this move and how he has grounded his subsequent work that attempts to bridge gaps between critique and science, especially through an attempt to highlight the agency of non-human actors in assemblages.

Latour's critique of critique and doubt from this essay, and his full-length book (2005) on Actor-Network Theory, addresses the clash between science and the political thought, including his own work that has been based in a critique of science, and concludes that a new relationship needs to be forged between science and other disciplines. In this more recent work he offers the concession that science operates from a stronger philosophical basis than his own traditions of critique. This led him to suggest that the future role of critical theory was to reconsider its own relationship to scepticism and doubt, and move from a search for matters of fact, to matters of concern. From a sociology of science, Latour has moved to something closer to a sociology of sociology: 'we have to free matters of fact from their reduction by 'Nature' exactly as we should liberate objects and things from their 'explanation' by society. Without this double move, our argument is nothing more than a return to classical materialism that closely resembles a 'sociology of engineers'' (2005, p.109).

Latour's later work, which I consider mostly through a series of essays that link him to various attempts to represent ecological crisis through film, literature and theatre, is almost exclusively based on an acceptance of the urgency for action on climate change. The philosophical justification for this comes when he states that critique needs to take objects seriously. Though he falls short of taking on all of the logics of object-oriented

ontologists like Graham Harman, there are overlaps, especially with Latour's attempts to describe a non-human agency in his network writings.

By 2013 Latour notes that attempts to overcome the divisions between the sciences and what he now calls the 'digital humanities' (p. xx) – an evolving style of thought combining the social sciences and philosophy in the twenty-first century - continued to flounder. This floundering, he argues, has occurred because the sciences were coming under increasing pressure from anti-global warming groups. This pressure led to the scientists discussed in his book also looking to the digital humanities for ways of communicating issues of climate change to a sceptical public. Latour opens the book with the description of a meeting where a senior climate change academic, frustrated by an industry that is unwilling to acknowledge scientific evidence as actionable fact, says, 'if people don't trust the institution of science, we're in serious trouble' (p. 3). For Latour this is a key admission: a scientist has said that trust plays a key role in accepting scientific evidence. The facts *do not* speak for themselves, and so one scientist, at this point, has shown that the move from matters of fact to matters of concern is a task for the sciences as well as for critical theorists.

And then?

After four chapters – one on each author – I will summarise the insights, both for the sub-field of environmental communication as well as for a critique founded on tensions between doubt and emancipatory action. While the object of the study has most explicitly been on the constitution of environmental communication as a discipline and more specifically on the role of critique within that discipline, I am also interested in how the urgency of climate change challenges some of the assumptions of what it means to do critique. Every chapter, then, will reflect both on what the critical theorist in question has to say to environmental communication but it will also reflect on what critique means to the particular author and how the urgency of climate change might also change what it means to do critique.

The structure of this study – where an introduction fans out to four separate chapters on an author, which then funnels back into a final chapter – was chosen as it allows for

each author's unique authorial voice to be heard. That structural preference, however, also works to delimit the exploration of the similarities and common language between each of these thinkers. For example, an alternative structure might have tried from the start to have explored the way environmental communication approaches climate change and critique through looking at four themes such as global and local, or where class meets climate. Though I have chosen the approach that lets all four voices come out, the final chapter will bring together some of the most prominent and promising themes of the previous four chapters. The task of bringing together four authors, most of whom are highly idiosyncratic in their rhetorical styles and philosophical interests, is difficult. Indeed, each of the four has already been selected for some unique insight that their theory attempts to provide.

In addition to assessing the state of critique in an age of climate change, the final chapter of this study will also return to the sub-field of environmental communication to suggest that after a decade it is worthwhile reconsidering to the original questions. I will argue that the insights from my study, as well as the questions raised by those responding to Cox (2007) and Mathur, indicate that environmental communication ought to reconsider the value of critical approaches to climate change that foreground doubt rather than the empirical, case studies or disseminating ideas from the sciences. I also take time to reflect as to what my study of critical approach means for critique itself. Ultimately, the task of critical theory and environmental communication will need to work as much on descriptions of what climate change is and means as it does on normative theories of how to challenge it. The deficiency, as most of the authors I consider show, is in our ability to think through all of the implications of living in an atmosphere that requires both care and control.

Chapter Two

Critique and Climate Change in Sloterdijk

Environmental communication can take two main lessons from the work of Peter Sloterdijk: first, an example of a macro-level analysis of the globe, atmosphere and climate as a man-made entity; and second, a form of critique that engages with doubt but which pays constant attention to the social mood created by critique. While much of environmental communication is focussed on the local environment, Sloterdijk offers a kind of new grand, global narrative. That narrative recognises contingency but does not let that indecision lead to inaction. While the analysis of cynicism as leading to inaction is the most common use of Sloterdijk's work in other disciplines, for this study that work is considered to be the juvenalia that has led to more pragmatic relations of ascetics to action and humans to their places in the world.

Background

Published in 1983 in German, then in English in 1987, Peter Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason* has become the best-selling work of German philosophy since World War Two. In that work Sloterdijk (1987) defined the spirit of the times as one of cynicism, which he considered to be, paradoxically, both enlightened as well as labouring under false consciousness. Cynicism is 'that modernized, unhappy consciousness on which enlightenment has laboured both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was not able to, put them into practice' (p.5). For Sloterdijk cynicism is the pairing of the sceptic's enlightened disbelief with an inability or unwillingness to create a life that matches their lack of belief. While the *Critique of Cynical Reason* focussed intently on unmaskings of ideology, laying bare the illusions that structured belief, when it came to the threat of nuclear weapons and other catastrophes that might befall the environment, he was less convincing. He suggested that the asceticism of Diogenes the Kynic and the hermits, who escaped to the solitude in the hills, could not be much of

a solution in a time of global environmental catastrophe. Once upon a time the disillusioned human could always escape to a solitary life as a hermit. Modern humans, Sloterdijk argues, have learnt that taking to higher ground or other less populated zones cannot help the individual cope with the threats posed by nuclear weapons.

Between 1989 and 2008, Sloterdijk had no major books published in English. During those years, however, he was becoming well known in Germany as a public commentator and professor, publishing on average a book per year. Since 2009, more than a dozen of his books have been translated in English, including his *Spheres* trilogy. Couture (2016) divides his analysis of Sloterdijk into five chapters – psychopolitics, anthropotechnics, spherology, controversy and therapy. For this study I consider Sloterdijk's richest ecologically themed texts within one of two camps: first, books that focus on how humans have come to shape themselves through ascetic practices such as training, or anthropotechnics, and second, books that focus on spatial theory and atmospheres which go by the term spherology. The other three categories will be touched on in my discussion of Sloterdijk's approach to critique including the sometimes championing of his own work as the true third wave of critical theory, and his dismissal of those typically considered the flag bearers of the Frankfurt School.

The first style of book that Sloterdijk produces that deal with ecological themes can be linked to the anthropotechnic, or techniques of human self-creation, practice and improvement. If his work since the 1980s on climates and spheres was a response to our collective nuclear problems that emerged in the *Critique of Cynical Reason*, then his work on anthropotechnics is his response to the lived problems of asceticism for the individual. The self-changing of anthropotechnics can take many different forms: the ascetic training of the ancient Greek Kynics in his early work, through to the vast cataloguing of the history of these attempts in *You Must Change Your Life*, through to the subtle inflection on that major work – but with a focus on academic work as training – in *The Art of Philosophy*. My reading of anthropotechnics gives a better understanding of the way that Sloterdijk has thought through the myriad techniques through which one might change their life. This cataloguing will navigate the vast historical analysis of *You Must Change Your Life* with an eye towards finding the island in which this self-creation merges with concerns about the world in which the person comes to be. That island – the geographical metaphor Sloterdijk (2006b; 2016b)

uses for an encapsulated macrosphere that is closest to our present societies – hints at the sociality and communities of Sloterdijk's *Spheres* trilogy against a simple reading of these texts as an apology for individual self-aggrandisement.

The second style of Sloterdijk's books that links to ecological issues is the spherological, exemplified by *Spheres* trilogy (first published in Germany between 1998-2004) that places an emphasis on the ways that people dwell in space from the most intimate micro-spheres (*Bubbles*, 2011b) through to the largest globes and atmospheres (*Globes*, 2014), as well as the way that these spaces interact with one another (*Foams* 2016b). The *Spheres* trilogy was conceived as being-and-space, offering a way for Sloterdijk to rebalance what he sees as a temporal obsession founded in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. By focusing on space, he also sees his work as limiting the post-structuralist tendency towards 'infinitisms' (p. 47). In clarifying his position in discussion with Royoux he makes the point that the ontology of spheres is one of rootlessness and exile, where 'the inhabitants of the modern world have certainly lost their cosmic home' (p. 233). The *Spheres* project, then, is as much about reconnecting people to place in a post-Nietzschean world as it is about overturning theories of time. In particular, *Terror from the Air* (2009) - a book-length excerpt from *Foams* (2016b) - makes explicit the connection between product design, terrorism and environmental movements to focus humans on understanding their precarity in the atmosphere in which they dwell.

Let's return to the basic question of this study: how might critique respond to the urgency of environmental crisis? Sloterdijk's relationship to critique is fraught, from his earlier work that detailed the challenges of cynical reason for modern consciousness to a later series of studies where the spectre of lurking doubt and pessimism is much less present. I detail his ambivalent description of his own relationship to the Frankfurt School thinkers, including an attempt to posit his own theory of movement as an alternative to Habermas' version of contemporary Frankfurt critique. I also describe how Sloterdijk diagnoses the Frankfurt School, and other contemporary left and critical thinkers, via the concept of resentment: a melancholic disaffection which, at most, he seeks at best to cure and, at least, to resist infection. By understanding Sloterdijk's relationship to other critical thinkers we can also understand why he is particularly prone to avoid some potential thematic areas that seek to remedy

climate change and why he focuses on anthropotechnics and spherology that might at first seem like an exceedingly distanced manner of writing on ecology.

Though I will mostly write of Sloterdijk's approach to critique and climate change as it is expressed in particular texts, I will also speak more broadly of Sloterdijk as a writer. This Sloterdijk is not the most consistent character: consider the title of his new collection of interviews, *Selected Exaggerations* (2016a). These exaggeration procedures, as well as his other rhetorical flourishes, might make some wary of trying to speak of a single, coherent Sloterdijk. And yet to try to speak of a contingent and multitudinous author or to be cautious with words such as 'Sloterdijk' also does a disservice to his thought that stands against the current strain of critical writings that inhabit and inhibit the academy. My claims in the name of Sloterdijk are built from a reading of the similarities across his range of books, interviews and articles available in English. When I invoke his name it is because the theme I speak of is one that transcends the boundaries of singular texts as per Foucault's (1984) analysis of the author function.

If we are at once concerned with what I do to Sloterdijk by invoking his name, we must also be concerned with what Sloterdijk does to me given my choice to study him. At the most basic level the tone of Sloterdijk's books differs markedly from the other thinkers: where others implore action, Sloterdijk seems to hold no hope for collective action, focussing instead on how people can respond to changes that are likely to happen whether people like it or not. To read and to write in response to Sloterdijk's works is to be wrapped up with a set of his rhetorical ploys that cannot simply be utilised. Hence, as much as this chapter involves me crafting Sloterdijk's works on atmospheres and anthropotechnics to help me explain one way that environmental communication might better go about speaking to a public, it also involves Sloterdijk's works crafting this study into a particular reproduction of his very specific lexicon.

Sloterdijk's power as a writer of self-creation can be linked to the main influence on his thought, Friederich Nietzsche. We might expect no less from an author who, in marking the 100th anniversary of Nietzsche's death, delivered a lecture that became the book *Nietzsche Apostle*. This connection to the readings of Nietzsche is well supplemented with a wide connection to both contemporary and ancient thinkers such as Michel Foucault (on biopower, technologies of the self), Gaston Bachelard (on

spheres and space), Elias Canetti (on crowd psychology), Martin Heidegger (on being-in- and other concepts in Sloterdijk, 2016c) and Georges Bataille (on heretic thought). These connections are handily catalogued, along with Sloterdijk's Nietzschean-filtered views of other philosophers, in *Philosophical Temperaments* (2013d).

Sloterdijk on climate change and ecological crisis

For a writer not afraid of scandal, Sloterdijk has been wary of hurrying into the politics of global warming, preferring to dwell upon the task of human created atmospheres in a philosophical, even metaphysical, context. Instead of polemic he approaches the concerned reader with invention such as the following from *Globes* (2014a):

What remains common to all earth-dwellers for the time being is the planet's active weather shell, the atmosphere in the meteorological sense, which, for well known reasons, has become a source of concern for contemporaries. (p. 961)

These 'well known reasons' are not described in any of the preceding 960 pages, which are instead dissertations on the metaphysical and sociological history of the world as a globe in which humans have sought security. Concluding with links to contemporary concerns is not a particularly odd move, but the reliance on things that are well known does seem to be a rhetorical strategy aimed at avoiding discussion of the validity of those reasons. He continues:

The trends on the market of climate technology have long indicated that whoever can afford to work on exiting the bad air shared by everyone does so. The residential cultures of the future will assume increasingly explicitly that liveable internal climates must be created by technical means. Air conditioning, in the literal sense, will establish itself as the main space-political theme of the coming era. Thus the spheric imperative will emerge from latency and manifest itself exoterically as the centre of all political and cultural creations of unity. (p. 961)

A specific commentary on climate change comes slightly further down the page, when drawing on these arguments, Sloterdijk addresses the policy makers: ‘explicit climate policy will be the foundation of the new ecumene, just as explicit climate technology will form the basis of concrete community formations’ (p. 961). If he had stated the latter, without creating a broad vocabulary of collective air-conditioning and earth-dwelling, we could perhaps mistake him for a thinker with far too much faith in the potential of technologies to remedy all of man’s present and future woes. As it stands the focus on technologies is not limited to a narrow conception of cars that run on renewable energy but is generalised to a theory of climate that is already practised in tasks such as central heating.

In a telling interview with Sloterdijk (2005) by Jean-Christophe Royoux, framed as a ‘Foreword to the theory of spheres’, this reluctance to speak directly to a politics of ecology is laid bare. Responding to Royoux’s question as to whether ‘ecology is the fundamental thought of the twenty-first century?’ Sloterdijk first places the question in terms of the root term of ecology as ‘oikos’ or house. ‘Modern ecology’, Sloterdijk notes, ‘would be a science of general domestication. But as this mode of thought contains a large potential for reductive naturalism, it should always be used with the utmost caution’ (p.231). For Sloterdijk, talk of ecology is dangerous as this talk splits the environment from the perceiving subject. Later in the same interview Sloterdijk clarifies the point: ‘If we presuppose an exterior nature, we will never get around to assuming full responsibility for the environment’ (p. 236). The point for Sloterdijk is not about taking an external nature and bringing it inside. Instead, we should see that humans have always been curating and domesticating their own environments, and to take that attitude of house-maintenance to the outside.

For Sloterdijk, the present epoch marks the coming together of humans and atmospheres in a way that previous metaphysics only gestured towards. Older civilisations were freer to exist with a gap between nature and man for the simple reason that humans were not as powerful as they are today to influence their environment. In contrast to a historical exemption for those who could live with gods and cultivate intense connections to an outside, which Sloterdijk sees as based on the impotence of those civilisations to destroy the world in which they dwelt, he offers the example of the space station as an ‘absolutely artificial environment’ in which ‘not

even tiny mistakes are pardonable' (p. 237). The space station is not just the isolated island in the sense of a horizontal terrain, but is also vertical, taking into consideration the air above the island. In *Foams* (2016b) he outlines three types of islands, from the absolute isolation of the space station to the atmospheric isolation of hot houses and biodomes, through to the anthropogenic island represented by people living in what he reluctantly calls societies, but with the focus on the range of procedures and mechanisms that have humans exercising their abilities with one another.

In a time when humans have the ability to make changes on a grand scale – 'an entirely new and scarcely comprehensible historical experience: the release of energy through explosions' says Sloterdijk (2011a, p. 319) referencing the internal combustion engine – much more caution about how we think of our relation to atmosphere is warranted. Filed under military history, one might think that the terror in the title of Sloterdijk's (2009a) book *Terror from the Air* (as noted earlier, this book forms the majority of the 'Introduction' to *Foams*; I have chosen to refer here to the first book in which this material was published in English) is only a reference to the change in warfare that occurred during World War One: a focus on targeting the enemy's body with a projectile or blow changes to one based on making all life in a particular environment impossible by the use of gas. But this terror in military history is also an introduction to atmospheric history. The air as a site of terror also hints at uninhabitable environments after the horror of climate change as a slow-motion catastrophe.

Chapter Three of *Terror from the Air*, 'Air/Condition' begins with a discussion of Surrealist artist Salvador Dali's near death from asphyxiation after addressing a crowd while within a diver's helmet. Sloterdijk uses Dali's returning to the shared air of the art gallery as a metaphor for contemporary conditions where life will only be sustained by the piping in of air to create the conditions of an independent atmosphere. The chapter builds to the following description of the conditions that make generalised survival in an unconditioned space look less and less likely:

The challenge that has been thrown out to modern man's climatic power of judgment, on the macro-level, is primarily the result of a phenomenon that is known in public debate as the anthropogenic greenhouse effect. This latter can be defined as the cumulative effects of climate-modifying emissions from human cultural and technical activities, such as the operation of power plants,

industrial facilities, private heaters, automobiles, airplanes, and countless other types of fume discharge and exhaust into the ambient air. This secondary greenhouse effect, which has been noted in a diffuse way for barely two hundred years, and in an explicit formulation for just under three decades, is an historical fact that reflects the energy-consumption style of the 'industrial age': it is the climatic trace of a civilizing project based on facilitated access to great quantities of fossil fuels thanks to coal mining and oil production. (p. 89-90)

Note the realist descriptions of the historical age as fact. This description of global warming not only eschews questions of doubt but also frames these greenhouse factors as necessary for any life to exist on earth. The terror of mustard gas in the atmosphere of World War One trench warfare meets the product design of mass consumer culture and ends up with a connection to the environmental movement of the end of the twentieth century. He continues:

Access to fossil energy is the objective linchpin of frivolity, without it there would be no global consumer society, no automobile tourism, no world market for meat and fashion. In the evolving mass demand for energy-rich carbons, the Palaeozoic 'subterranean forest' was drawn to the earth's surface in solid and liquid form and converted by thermal engines. As a consequence, the combustion product that is carbon dioxide has (along with methane, carbon monoxide, fluorocarbons and various nitrogen oxides, etc.) quantitatively played the most significant role in enriching the atmosphere with second-order greenhouse factors. These gases reinforce the primary greenhouse effect in a way that will likely lead to catastrophe, but earth climate science cannot ever overly stress the importance of this effect, without which life on earth would be impossible. (p.90)

I quote at length from these sections for examples of both the particular manner in which Sloterdijk articulates human relations to the worlds in which they live, and also to show how he sets claims to fact alongside theorisation on humans as a luxury, pampering-centred society (see Chapter 3 in *Foams*, 'Uplift and Pampering: On the Critique of Pure Whim'). Some ambiguity over the facticity of his claims comes slightly later as Sloterdijk counters the risk of global warming with other projections of climate change:

The signature of the fossil energy age is shown in the fact that the spoiled jeopardize their spoiledness by running the risk of anthropogenic overheating (or, according to other mathematical projections, of an intermediary ice age). (p.91)

The talk of climate change and global warming, then, is not so much about the specifics of the particular changes to conditions, but about a fundamental change in the relationship of humans to the world in which they live. Designing solutions to climate change may well be the struggle of the present generation, but from Sloterdijk's view this is just the greatest challenge so far in creating secure atmospheres in which humans can comfortably dwell. But things are not all so aspirational: *Terror from the Air* places the indiscriminate use of chlorine gas at Ypres in Northern France as the atmospheric assault that inaugurated the twentieth century. While technological responses to climate change are simply the first steps towards humans taking more control over the precondition of their own survival it also heralds the potential for some societies to use this knowledge of atmospheres to the detriment of their enemies. The language Sloterdijk uses to describe these changes is of a loss that cannot be mourned. On the one hand 'we are condemned to being-in' (p.108) at the same time as recognising that 'living and breathing under open skies can no longer hold the same meaning as before' (p. 109). But this loss of meaning is not simply a loss of our naïveté and venturing into enlightenment: there are many ways that Sloterdijk notes humans are able to forge new meanings such as nationalism. As I will discuss in a following section on Sloterdijk's sphereology, the present age will be radically different and this may recapture some of our sense of assurance - even if it is contingent on paying the oxygen bill:

This paves the way for a new motif of thought without which the modern economy of ideas would be inchoate: namely, the idea according to which life insists less in its being-there, by its participation in the whole, but instead by its stabilization through self-closure and the selective refusal of participation. To describe this as the fundamental thought for a post-metaphysical or differently-metaphysical civilization is not saying too little. (p. 110)

What would this fundamental change look like? Some authors have sought to align this change to geology by using the term Anthropocene to denote a world-era where human action is changing the fundamental conditions of existence on earth. Sloterdijk (2015)

addresses this concept in an essay where he highlights its shortcomings based on its disguising of a moral-political urgency as scientific neutrality. For him the narrative trick of pleading neutrality to the moral imperative behind the use of the term Anthropocene tends to occlude the mission to create more stable climates. By feigning neutrality in the descriptions of the Anthropocene, Sloterdijk imagines those who use the term are participating more in the intellectual programmes of the great epoch and era makers rather than acknowledging the understanding of knowledge as self-referential and feeding back on itself. And yet, despite the moral tone of the concept, Sloterdijk concludes that the Anthropocene:

implies concern regarding the cohabitation of the citizens of Earth in human and nonhuman forms. It prompts us to cooperate in the network of simple and higher-level life cycles, in which the actors of today's world generate their existence in the mode of a co-immunity. (p. 338-9)

After colouring the concept of the Anthropocene with the political and historical weight of his own reading of climate change, I argue that Sloterdijk succeeds in drawing out what the concept implies and prompts without fully embracing the apocalyptic language of the concept. His reading takes in not only his own concept of immunity, which will be discussed in terms of sphereology, but also Bruno Latour's work on the intersection of the human and the nonhuman. Indeed, in a footnote in *Foams* (2016b) Sloterdijk refers to Latour as the 'most perceptive analyst of modern scientific culture' (p. 845, n. 116), communicating back to Latour some of the affirmations around spheres and design that we will see in this study's chapter on Latour.

These discussions of the future of humanity offer a mix of urgency and straightforwardness about the likelihood of climate catastrophe. But to understand how Sloterdijk comes to this position in *Terror from the Air* we need to understand some of the broader terminology that is used in these descriptions. As noted at the outset, these terminologies primarily come from two strands of Sloterdijk's work: anthropotechnics and sphereology. The following two sections will go into depth on these two strands, articulating the core parts of this thought as well as linking them to specific examples of their ecological application.

(i) *Anthropotechnics: from ascetic Kynics to life changes*

With reference to the challenges of living in a global climate, Sloterdijk (2010b) has suggested humanity needs a form of action based on restraint, rather than solely on luxury. (Though at first glance a paper dealing explicitly with climate change might seem central to this study, Sloterdijk (2010b) is more of a simplification of his work on anthropotechnics with some reference to climate change.) But this restraint, for Sloterdijk, must come about through practices of the self that he strongly doubts humanity can muster. The aim of the section is to show that Sloterdijk's doubts around the ability of humans to live lives of restraint are linked to the change in his thought on ascetics. Sloterdijk (2013a) uses the term 'anthropotechnic' to describe techniques humans have employed to change their life habits. This type of change represents a movement from the heroic asceticism of the Ancient Greek Kynics described in Sloterdijk (1987) to a philosophy of world design through practice. While this section will focus on the individual side of self-creation, the anthropotechnic theory is most applicable to issues of ecology when it is tied to discussions of how collectives of people create and live in spaces that are intentionally designed for comfort.

The key figure in Sloterdijk's first major work *Critique of Cynical Reason* (1987) is Diogenes of Sinope, the arch-cynic, and dog philosopher. Diogenes', and indeed all of the Kynic philosophers', radical ascetic practices were one of the most vital tactical responses Sloterdijk might have offered to contemporary cynics reading his first book and looking for models of resistance. So as not to be at the mercy of the changeable weather, the Kynic would roll in the snow in winter and hot sand in summer, inuring his (for they were almost exclusively male) body against the extremes. Though asceticism is often associated with religious practices of self-flagellation and penance, the term also refers to any technique of severe or repetitive self-discipline. The asceticism of the Kynics was less focussed on penance for moral impurity and more focussed on an attempt to free the practitioner from the banality of everyday repetitions. The form of these attempts is documented in Sloterdijk's 'Physiognomic Main Text' where he first describes embodied forms of cheekiness that were the intellectual equivalent of the embodied resistance of the Kynics. Following this he offers his 'Cabinet of Cynics', beginning with Diogenes of Sinope as the human dog

whose ‘theory and praxis are incalculably interwoven in his philosophy’ (Sloterdijk, 1987, p. 157) and where ‘there is no room for mere theoretical agreement’ (p. 157)

Sloterdijk only accepts the label of asceticism for Diogenes once he has cleansed the term from its ‘thousand-year-long masochistic misunderstandings’ (p. 158). A clarification is added: if Diogenes could have been well off without sacrificing his freedom he would not have objected. Instead of pursuing the well-off life in a manner normal for the time, Diogenes sought a life with as little as possible. Legends tell of how he would always try to simplify and move away from dependence, or ‘false weights’. If there is any ideology that might be claimed to be represented by Diogenes it is that of simplicity in the world. This simplicity is based on satisfying those few needs and appetites that he is unable to do away with: food from begging, shelter in a barrel, sex with anyone who might assist, and a sociability that prevents him from decamping to the hills like a hermit or a young Zarathustra.

Sloterdijk’s early identification with Diogenes is made perfectly clear in the last pages of his work detailing a ‘Cabinet of Cynics’. There he describes a Professor X, not unlike Sloterdijk, who charts his own course out of the academy and into a Kynic relation to the world:

Diogenes probably will resign one day from his professorship; soon after, we will find a notice on the bulletin board saying that Professor X’s lectures are cancelled until further notice. Rumour has it that he was seen in an army surplus store where he bought himself a sleeping bag. He was last reported seen sitting on a garbage bin, pretty drunk and giggling to himself like someone whose head is not quite in order. (p. 210)

The conclusion of that same book sees a curious first appearance of restraint as a factor that might have since convinced Sloterdijk that he ought not to be in too much of a haste to become Professor X. Once more describing Diogenes, Sloterdijk praises those who hold off from actions, even if they have fully prepared themselves for the requirements of the action. As he puts it ‘those who can let things be are not pursued from behind by projects that have taken on a life of their own; those who exercise the praxis of abstention do not get caught in the self-continuation automatism of unleashed activism’ (p. 541). If the modern cynic is characterised by acting even though he does

not believe, then Sloterdijk guesses that there might be some efficacy in also restraining from action.

So why did Sloterdijk not become Professor X? Why did he not drop out like Diogenes? I see the ascetic embodiment of Diogenes as a ribald, carefree sage tempered by two considerations: one, a fondness for the world he has found himself in – the sun that happens to shine on him – and for the truth of his sense perceptions that this world gratifies; two, a weariness about following through with strategies of action which are suggested to him as projects of living. These two considerations were probably enough to keep Sloterdijk-as-Professor X interested in his research on the ways that people have attempted to radically merge their ideas with how life should be with their everyday activities and the bodies that make those activities possible.

Originally published in German in 2009 (and in English in 2013) *You Must Change Your Life* is the history of self-help of which Sloterdijk suggested Diogenes was the original practitioner. The language of asceticism that was so central to his earlier work has found a bevy of synonyms, all of which imply Sloterdijk has moved on from the themes of struggle and twilight melancholy. The focus on the intense ascetic trials of Diogenes as a response to cynicism persists only in small doses. Instead *You Must Change Your Life* takes up the prospect of training and techniques of the self, broadly framed as anthropotechnics, in a book that owes as much to Foucault's notion of subjectivity as it does to Nietzsche's post-Schopenhauer turn to joy. These trainings are feats of embodied endurance beginning with the contrast between two twentieth century revivals: the return to the Olympic spirit of competition and the rise of L Ron Hubbard's Scientology. Sloterdijk (2013a) uses both of these texts to describe the spectre of religion that is haunting the West. Religion for Sloterdijk is formulated as the 'immunitary constitution of human beings' (p. 3) that is required for continued secure existence. Creating these immunities is a two-fold process: a local self is protected and all threats are expelled to an anonymous external sphere.

It is worth quoting Sloterdijk (2013a) at length here to show how his conception of the ascetic has changed:

The ethical programme of the present came into view for a moment when Marx and the Young Hegelians articulated the theory that man himself produces man.

The true meaning of this statement was immediately obscured, however, by another chatter that presented work as the only essential human act. But if man genuinely produces man, it is precisely not through work and its concrete results, not even the 'work on oneself' so widely praised in recent times, let alone through the alternatively invoked phenomena of 'interaction' or 'communication'; it is through life in forms of practice. Practice is defined here as any operation that provides or improves the actor's qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared as practice or not. (p. 4)

Sloterdijk's concern with the restrained ethics of a solo Diogenes has morphed into a concern with a collective ethics which has become banal through framing work as the only sphere connected to practice and training. How would Diogenes' restraint be viewed here? In foregrounding the concept of operation and performance, the public-facing life of Diogenes would be considered of value, whereas the hidden and restrained forms of asceticism fade into the background.

Sloterdijk is very clear about a contest between forms of ascetics and practice in the slim introductory chapter on Nietzsche in *You Must Change Your Life*, titled 'Remote view of the ascetic planet'. The following section helps describe how Sloterdijk (2013a) sees his own work in succession to the attempt made by Nietzsche to split from his earlier pessimism:

One cannot deny a marked one-sidedness in Nietzsche's late writings: he did not pursue the positive side of his ascetological discoveries with the same emphasis as that he displayed in his exploration of the morbid pole – undoubtedly because of a stronger inclination towards examining the therapeutic purpose of a negative ascetic ideals than the ascetic, dietological, aesthetic and also 'biopolitical' purpose of positive practice programmes. (p. 37)

In this framing of positive and negative ascetics we also see the binary suggested by Van Der Hout (2014) between restraint and design. On the one side a morbid ascetic, locked away and inactive; on the other side a positive programme, intention and the spirit of the athlete. But where does the thought, or wisdom as practice, of *The Art of*

Philosophy sit in this split? If the Cynics are the ascetic philosophers who deny the positive ascetic ideals, where does Sloterdijk's own thought as a practice of suspended animation sit? To answer these questions I will turn to Sloterdijk's treatment of two other thinkers in *You Must Change Your Life*: Wittgenstein and Foucault. Considering these thinkers will help explain what Sloterdijk sees as an intermediary role for the scholar, including the environmental communication scholar, in relation to their critique and programmes to deal with climate change. Invoking Wittgenstein and Foucault, is also meant to help Sloterdijk show how 'the shift from a theory of class society (with vertical differentiation through dominance, repression and privilege) to a theory of discipline society (with vertical differentiation through asceticism, virtuosity and achievement) can take place' (p. 132). This movement recalls how one of the main aims of *You Must Change Your Life* was to move from the singular focus on work as the site of training and ascetics to a broader study of all attempts at self-improvement.

Sloterdijk's use of Wittgenstein begins with what the former considers to be an out of character comment from the latter: 'Culture is a monastic rule. Or it at least presupposes a monastic rule' (Wittgenstein, 1980, cited in Sloterdijk p. 132). Sloterdijk summarises this monastic life, as opposed to regular life, with observations on the need for positive consent to enter the monastery. One must be constantly vigilant – as suggested by the readiness implicit in the concepts of piety and obedience and, though he never explicitly notes it as the final point, there is no longer the division of the sexes within the commune and hence no focus on transferring life to 'the little barbarians who emerge from the intercourse between sexes' (p. 136). The focus on the monastery as a place of practice that secedes from the world offers Sloterdijk evidence of Wittgenstein's consideration of philosophy as a practice, or training regime, in contrast to its institutionalisation in schooling. Hence, Sloterdijk concludes that the basis of later Wittgenstein is an affirmation of language games as 'verbally articulated practical exercises whose performance is usually acquired via imitation' (p. 140).

Though Sloterdijk (2013a) goes on to discuss how Wittgenstein's practice fits in with the idea that all cultures are secessionist and monastic, the most important detail is how the framing of Wittgenstein's thought as practice-oriented offers a bridge to Foucault's work on discourse. This connection frames both of these thinkers within a positive ascetic that reaches beyond the negative ascetics of restraint as well as a form of

practice and training located exclusively in work. Foucault post-1978 (Sloterdijk's dating) is now situated as the stoic Bataille or the man 'who unimpeded by the ubiquitous barriers of critical kitsch, which sees domination in every form of 'self-control', and immediately suspects any discipline in one's way of life of being a self-repression that doubles an external repression' (p. 152). The Foucault being referred to here is not the one who studied institutions, but the one who wrote on authorship and technologies of the self. This Foucault, Sloterdijk notes, could not be identified as the man who had critiqued the practices of power in institutions, but who instead sought the way humans created themselves through discourse and self-discipline. Hence, we arrive at a version of both Wittgenstein and Foucault as forefathers to Sloterdijk's attempt at affirmatory ascetics that is very different from the inactive, tub-dwelling Cynic.

As Van Der Hout (2014) has pointed out, this Sloterdijk is not one who has much faith in the ability of a generalised ascetic practice of restraint - the 'reduce' in the holy trinity of 'reduce, reuse and recycle' - to prevent ecological crises. If *You Must Change Your Life* was striving to be a broad history of positive ascetics, we also find that this history remains an exclusive club of the striving. Even if the love of sports and religion permeate large segments of the population, such dedication does not extend to secessionist cultural practices. Nor does this positive ascetic extend to the other domains of self-creation that temper striving with a consideration of what is required for the same games to be played tomorrow, in the same spheres as today.

(ii) *Spherology: Designed Ecology as Immunity*

Sloterdijk's description of climate change from *Terror from the Air* included a reliance on a lexicon - air conditioning, climates, atmospheres - that is at the core of his macro and plural spherology work in the *Spheres* trilogy. This section will connect the figure of the sphere, and in particular the globe-as-sphere, to pressing contemporary concerns about ecology. It will also go into more depth on the relationship between spheres and anthropotechnics to explain how they connect to Sloterdijk's conception of design and the importance of immunity as a way of understanding society.

A study of ecology can learn the most from the history of globes, not only as a path to a fresh consideration of the history of globalisation, but also as a consideration of air and water as spatial forms as important as terrain. Once connected to the anthropotechnic conception of ascetics from the previous section, his study of space offers a way to understand the sustainability of lived, collective spaces. Humans are seen as both inhabitants and creators of these spaces, which leads to the emphasis on design that we see in Van Der Hout's appraisal of the ecological potential of Sloterdijk's writings as well as throughout Chapter Two of *Foams* (2016b) discussion of interior architecture and more specifically the transcribed lecture 'Inspiration' (2009c). Before entering into his work on macro spheres it is also important to recall the interview with Royoux (Sloterdijk, 2005) in which Sloterdijk warns of the tendency towards reductive naturalism. I have already discussed how *Globes* and *Foams* offers a number of comments on atmospheres in the present age: I will return to those themes here, offering more depth and context on their relation to ecology, contrasting the immediacy of those claims with previous readings of Sloterdijk on anthropotechnics and asceticism.

The warrant for his history of spheres has been questioned by Sloterdijk's first translator, Michael Eldred (see his comments on Elden, 2014), who has distanced himself from Sloterdijk, claiming his popular success is a result of this flattening of ontological difference. What is this 'flattening' of ontological difference? Though Elden doesn't go into depth, it seems he is critiquing the lack of ambiguity at the ontological level in Sloterdijk's trilogy. That is, Sloterdijk may appear too convinced of his own view of the world. But at the same time, Sloterdijk does use irony and exaggeration to show undermine any sense that his ontology is flat. Consider how he writes 'This serious history is the history of being, hence being is not simply some time or other but rather the time it takes to understand what space is: the realest of orbs' (Sloterdijk, 2014a, p. 47). It is difficult to tell how Sloterdijk relates this language of the 'realest' to ontological matters or whether the rhetoric is designed to infuriate other theorists who he feels are too concerned with questions of authenticity and being.

Sloterdijk's proposing of this world-historical theory of spatiality is best described in the opening to *In the World Interior of Capital* (2013b) where he defends the need for grand narratives of history and being, not by defending the Euro-centrism and colonial-

conspiracy of the previous grand narratives, but by claiming the present as a thoroughly different epoch. In the present he notes that the vanity of the past projects of universalising historical enquiry are obvious in their absurdity. But has the ‘intolerable simplifications’ (p. 4) that lead to a rejection of grand narratives ‘not already hardened into a comfortable meta-grand narrative itself?’ (p. 4) Sloterdijk’s answer, which Eldred rejects, is to foreground the exuberant mood of his study as well as its difference to those grand narratives in which seizing power was always the musk left behind from a reading of their texts.

Attempts to find some ontological grounding, whether that is a metaphor for earthliness, an essence of being or simply a contingent anchorage, will be a persistent feature of most thinkers considered by this study. Sloterdijk, at the least, provides a rich account of an approach to ontology divorced from the hardness of words and things: he is interested in reclaiming the air from the ephemeral. This approach is most explicit in *Globes* (2014a) where he accounts for past failures to understand the air as a thing:

The nineteenth century did attempt to grasp this subtle third element when it spoke of *milieu* or *ambiente*, while the twentieth provided its own version by translating it into *Umwelt* and *environment*; none of these concepts succeeded in capturing the atmospheric component, however, and the sole progress was from dull to duller. (p. 137)

If evaluated from the perspective of dullness (as well as, one assumes, its opposite: fascination or interest) rather than a functionalist perspective where truth claims need hard evidence, Sloterdijk’s introduction of atmospheres and return to the spheric theological obsessions of past metaphysics passes the test. For a description of how water is another concern in a similar vein see ten Bos (2009).

Introducing *Bubbles: Spheres I*, Sloterdijk (2011b) offers an overview of the ontological task ahead, presenting his work as a hypothesis on ‘geometric vitalism’ (p.11). The geometric sphere concerns an avowedly magical and radical will to envision the spaces in which humans dwell as concerned with, and limited by, an orb as a spatial enclosure. The sphere is vital for it concerns not just the way that these orbs have come to be, but the way that humans have concocted, travelled with and attempted

to expand these spaces. A bubble, Sloterdijk (2014a) explains, is ‘the delicately walled little world billowed by gentle internal pressure’ (p. 151). Though the spheres of *Bubbles* are less relevant than those of *Globes* to this project, the focus on shared spaces – which are as diverse as considerations of eggs, mothers, twins, angels, and facial connections – the former text paves the way to de-individualise humans from their own singularly encapsulated bodies. Also, he notes, *Bubbles* avoids the simplest of intimate spheres – the love relationship – for that is the space where there are already sufficient theorists of being together. Expanding on that being-together as the basic form of sphereological research, Sloterdijk’s (2016b) diagnosis of the present is of the plurality of foams. Foams represent the way humans in the modern technological society have been able to replace the intimacy of a love relationship or a connection to a big Other, or even nationalisms and totalitarianisms, with the capacity to self-support. That self-support – which we might as well call individuation and that links to his anthropotechnic work – is always as a part of other collectives, both spatial and historical (even if the rhetoric of self-support is more regularly geared towards isolation). As he describes in conversation with Royoux, ‘I describe a sort of *curriculum vitae* of the modern bachelor who displays his will to live alone in his apartment. Very often this isn’t an involuntary state but a desired solitude’ (Sloterdijk, 2005, p. 235). These apartments may be based on walls but they’re not absolute islands.

The focus on ecology, to the extent that Sloterdijk believes this might be achieved through collective work, involves the desequestering of this modern bachelor through the growth of microspheres into macrospheric participation. This movement represents an important amalgam of works, such as Elias Canetti’s (1962) *Crowds and Power*, which shows how a crowd forms through momentums and persistence: ‘Microspheres grow into macrospheres to the extent that they manage to incorporate the stressful external forces into their own radius. One could thus describe the growth of spheres as a stress course during which external elements are neutralized by being included in the spheric interior’ (p. 158). The sphere is not simply a geometric space in which humans have lived, but is the force over which ideology and politics strives to forge shared understandings. The language is not one of colonisation or appropriation, which we might be more familiar with if we think of spatiality as a form of geography, but – at least at this descriptive point – seeks to offer only descriptions of morals, rather than moral imperatives.

The descriptive project of spheres continues through *Globes* (2014a) and the linked text *In the World Interior of Capital* (2013b), which contains the last 200 pages of the former as well as the grounding work on grand narratives. Sloterdijk proposes a history of globalisation that begins with the metaphysical enclosing of people within the theological domes that was once thought to cover a flat earth. He takes the theme of globes through the Copernican discovery of the world as the globe that floats in space, then through to the circumnavigation of that globe by explorers. Along the way a broad lexicon is developed to describe how humans relate to one another and threats to the spheres in which they dwell. Visions of sacrifice proliferate - as do considerations of the threat to the world through contaminations.

The focus on threats crosses over into Sloterdijk's (2013a) book on positive ascetics that, in its conclusion, describe how collectives gain strength through immunisation: all benefits are localised, all threats are pushed to 'anonymous environment for which no one takes responsibility' (p. 451). In the present age of the terrestrial globe (2013a), Sloterdijk notes, we have come up against the boundary of the world in a manner not only not seen before, but also not understood as clearly - where humans have made changes to their ecosystems in the past they've never had equipment and measurement as sophisticated as today to try to comprehend those changes at the same time as they are going on There is no longer an outside that can be populated by our refuse. Collective responses to this crisis require 'a horizon of universal co-operative asceticisms' (p. 452). These asceticisms are framed in terms of luxury: of a communism replaced by co-immunism, which he defines as a macro-structure of global immunizations. Whether these global immunities can flourish is not a point he wishes to speculate on, leaving the reader with a simple call to take on 'good habits of shared survival in daily exercises' (p. 452). In a fascinating exchange in *Le Monde* from 2010 Sloterdijk and Žižek debate their various positions on politics and philosophy. When Žižek notes that he likes to use the word communism 'to provoke upper-class types' (2016a, p. 258) he also notes that for him the big questions are really relating to 'communal' properties such as biogenetics and ecology' (p. 258). Sloterdijk takes this admission as the basis to introduce his own discussion of the structures of being-together throughout history that he names co-immunity. Co-immunity includes but is not limited to communism and extends to all primal hordes

and world empires, but in the contemporary context is provoked into new forms by the shattering crisis of our lack of vision for shared futures.

Immunities are the result of the striving that Sloterdijk, in other texts, refers to as positive ascetics or anthropotechnics. At this point we have come to the point where Sloterdijk's spatial theory meets his ascetic, anthropotechnic concerns. This meeting culminates in Sloterdijk's question for the present age, repeating the introduction to those posed in his ascetic texts. Is today:

a post-metaphysical age, as is proclaimed from every corner of academia, or a differently metaphysical one that does not yet fully understand itself? Has ontology in general become impossible in it, as quick thinkers of the transcendentalist and constructivist camps tirelessly state or has a historical type of ontological thought merely completed its service? (Sloterdijk, 2013a, p. 450)

The answer for Sloterdijk is always the latter. He sees the postmodern and post-structural periods as offering a temporary cessation of metaphysical enquiry caused by the Nietzschean final rupture of the heavenly sphere that encircled the earth. Metaphysics and ontology would no longer be the purview of philosophers but would be claimed by those interested in terrestrial globalization, which he sees as a problem that will be addressed by 'economic politicians, climatologists, ecologists, terror specialists and other experts in the uneven and entangled' (Sloterdijk, 2014a. p. 769). These experts as designers of modernity are governed by a security impulse: the desire to reflect upon what conditions are needed for today's sphere to exist and even expand into tomorrow. These spheres are no longer pre-given, but are matters for creation:

The real macrospherological challenge of the Global Age [...] lies in the fact the weakening of container immunities must not be dealt with simply as decadence and loss of form, that is to say as an ambivalent cynical abetment of self-destruction. What is truly at stake for the postmoderns are successful new designs for liveable immune relationships, and these are precisely what can and will develop anew in manifold ways precisely in societies with permeable walls-albeit, as has always been the case, not among all and not for all. (p. 958)

By the concluding chapters of *Globes* the descriptive approach to world history slowly turns into a normative imperative that is aligned to the self-creating drive present in *You Must Change Your Life*: ‘Humans create their own climate-not of their own free will, however, under self-chosen circumstances, but under found, given and handed down ones. The tradition of all dead climates burdens the moods of the living like a nightmare’ (p. 965). With this nod to Marx, Sloterdijk (2014a) completes the work of showing his view of human co-immunism – not a socialism that extends to internationalism without end, but ‘the first product of human cooperations’ (p. 966) which requires resonances that enable co-existence. These somewhat ephemeral resonances are the sites in which Sloterdijk has attempted to imagine what a post-human world would look like. See, for example, the scandal around his attempt to discuss biotechnology and humans in a German public sphere that immediately cries eugenics (see Sloterdijk, 2011b or Sloterdijk and Alliez, 2007). Or, see his attempt to describe a political economy that would not lead to resentment, but in which the well-off actively celebrate gifting (also see Sloterdijk, 2011b or Sloterdijk and Alliez, 2007).

Climate change and global warming function within this co-immunism as harbingers of a generalised air conditioning. This process of air conditioning, as established in *Terror from the Air* and *Foams: Spheres 3* allow humans to survive and, beyond that, to flourish. By locating the climate as atmosphere, Sloterdijk is able to make the spatially and temporally ephemeral into a more tangible concern with a localisable and historicised connection. He does this very specifically in *Terror from the Air* by showing how humans have moved from living in a military environment where only bodies penetrated one another to one in which it is environments that humans try to make uninhabitable. By connecting this military technology to the changes in the climate outside of wartime, we are offered an understanding of the world as a place where the security of our atmospheres was at first a happy coincidence. Initially humans lacked the ability to change our macrospheres, apart from through theological imaginings, but after the industrial revolution this is no longer the case.

The age of spheres has become the age of ecological design. Ecology for Sloterdijk (2016b) is not about a distance from the world but the study of outgrown balances and imbalances that are beyond human perspectives. Ecology, he writes, is ‘the only true innovation in the cognitive landscape of our time alongside cybernetics and polyvalent

logic' (p. 434). And as he showed earlier in the same book, this thought of ecology is also tied to work on product design, and the lethal inversion of these two fields in atmospheric warfare. Sloterdijk's positioning of design as related to climate change stands in stark contrast to the negative ascetics of restraint. There is a genuine wavering between his first description of the need for restraint in the tradition of ascetic practices, and his suggestion that humans do not have the capability to change, en masse, against the pursuit of luxuries or pampering. This leaves open the question of the relationship between the positive ascetics such as sports training that he sees as the more common ascetic practices and the way that designing atmospheres might come about.

From *The Art of Philosophy* (2012) we have a description of how some philosophers have sought to train through a kind of ascetics so as to put themselves outside their bodies, a movement that is supposed to allow them to look at the world unencumbered. It is better to think of this kind of move as a limit experience oriented towards the extremity rather than some ideal that can be captured. Sloterdijk's cabinet of philosophers is not full of idealists who think they've seen the truth because they have abandoned body for mind, but of those who are all too cogniscent of their selves being tied to a body.

A question for Sloterdijk might be whether he sees a similar regimen as useful for scientists and designers of new atmospheres. If so, could we then make a definitive link between design and ascetic practices? What would this design look like? Part of Sloterdijk's optimism for a design solution to climate crisis is his view that humanity has just reached a point where we can create technology in imitation of the natural world. This process is known as mimesis: 'this form of technology does not so much break with the *modus operandi* of nature, but ties on to it, cooperates with it, smuggles itself into the indigenous population of living beings which are set in motion on the basis of a long-term, proven pattern of evolutionary success' (Sloterdijk, 2011a, p. 135). He christens this strategy homeotechnology and contrasts it with allotechnology such as the straight cut of the knife or the perfect circle of the wheel.

To better understand how Sloterdijk sees this design functioning in a different way to what has occurred previously it is worthwhile considering the limitations on Sloterdijk's use of mimesis in Van Der Hout's (2014) critique of his homeotechnological solutions. Perhaps the first important point to note in Van Der

Hout's (2014) critique is that she frames crisis as broadly ecological rather than climate-based. Drawing from Sloterdijk's (2010b) speech 'How big is big?' in which the German philosopher rather obliquely addressed the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) in Copenhagen, Van Der Hout frames his work as proposing a homeotechnological response to ecology that works based on biomimesis. Sloterdijk's argument runs as follows: humans need to realign how we think of technological solutions to move away from environmental destruction that tricks nature (heterotechnology) and towards a technosphere based on co-production (homeotechnology). This coproduction is achieved by copying processes observed in our environment rather than attempting to disrupt other processes. Doing so, he argues, will allow humans to survive and flourish in greater numbers than we seem presently able to given the scale of environmental destruction.

Though Sloterdijk does not go much more into the homeotechnological turn than this outline, it is interesting to see that a decade after the first of his *Spheres* trilogy was published he maintains both his allegiance to the potential of design to expand life spaces on earth as well as the hothouse rhetoric of exaggeration that he employs to describe those processes. It is left to Van Der Hout to offer the counter argument that 'the conviction that we (already) understand nature's principles of operation sufficiently to imitate them appears to be fairly hubristic' (p.425). To illustrate this hubris she challenges the ability of present existing homeotechnology to imitate environmental processes. She asks if we do not completely understand ecological processes, why would this technological approach support non-domination and co-operation any more than the technological changes that came about during the industrial revolution?

I tend to agree with Van Der Hout's critique: political solutions need to be found alongside design solutions. By completely relegating negative ascetic practices based on restraint we draw too strong a division between critique as a form of judgment and as emancipatory practice. For example, to forgo the use of motorised transport in favour of bicycling can be conceived of in both positive and negative ascetic lineage: to forgo the car is a sacrifice worthy of Diogenes, but it is also worth noting that Sloterdijk (2008) has also taken up the sporting challenge of the bicycle as transport and training.

The coming together of spherology and anthropotechnics can be borne out in more attention to homeotechnological solutions to climate change. But, equally, there is no need to limit those two areas of study to a view of climate change that sees a technological solution as the only way forward. As we will see in the next section, Sloterdijk's conception of critique and what it could be, has as much to say about how human lifeworlds will progress through the coming century, primarily through the uplifting discourses of a field very close to this study: communication.

Sloterdijk on critique

The aim of this study has been to show how a range of thinkers' positioning of climate change functions when contrasted with their framing of critique and critical theories. In the previous sections I have shown how Sloterdijk has directly discussed climate change as well as describing how his broader concerns with spheres and anthropotechnics come together to offer an indication of his position on how humans must change to avoid catastrophe. I now turn to Sloterdijk's thinking on critique and critical theories, including his early work on the gap between belief and action known as cynicism, his discussion of the importance of mood for a critical stance and the curiously large role played by communication in his theoretical framework.

Of the four thinkers considered in this study, Sloterdijk is the most antagonistic to Critical Theory in the Frankfurt tradition. Sloterdijk intended his *Critique of Cynical Reason* to be a concluding bookend to the Frankfurt School, broadly citing the cynicism of the age as the culmination of the project of critical theory. In later writings (2011a), however, he reflected back on that book and his early works:

From the viewpoint of ideology critique, I was full of vim and vigor, psychologised and fully excited. This corresponded to the spirit of the times; I was a more or less typical adept of the old Frankfurt School and the alternative scene of the 1970s, a participant in the depressant-aggressive complex that at the time presented itself as the Left. (p.16)

Today, Sloterdijk distances himself from the Frankfurt School and yet he sees their influence both in the popularity of Jürgen Habermas and in the spirit and style of most contemporary Western Marxists. Sloterdijk claims that Habermas is part of an unsuccessful third-wave of the Frankfurt School that can be characterised as both depressed and militant, and which has refused any role in creating an affirmative social mood. He goes even further by noting ‘we could claim that the whole left-liberal block [...] comprises vague adepts of this School, that is to say, people who want to arrogate to themselves the advantage of being more critical than the affirmative rest’ (2011a, p.61). The critical, for Sloterdijk, has slid into the reactively negative. That morbidity spans both critique that doubts truth claims or which seeks emancipatory change.

Through his focus on how humans design a world to buffer against and beyond any presently conceived crisis we might infer that Sloterdijk is more aligned with critique as a form of emancipatory potential than as a form of doubt. The spherology and anthropotechnics discussed so far may have been rooted in a historical analysis but that was based more on building a case for a particular view of the world rather than against others’ theories. His earlier writings, however, offered a theory centred on doubt, as a *critique* of cynical reason which had not yet been re-born into the optimism of his later works (see his self-analysis in Sloterdijk, 2016a). The cynical form of reason was posited as a zeitgeist that was reflexivity buffered (Sloterdijk, 1987). This buffering – a concept that endures in his sphereological work as a type of insulation – meant that critique was rendered useless in undermining the doubting spirit of the cynic. The spirit of cynicism heralded the end of good faith in the enlightenment as an open and disinterested enquiry, reminiscent of the legend of Diogenes with his lamp on in the daytime looking for an honest man. Sloterdijk’s critique of this form of reason proceeded not with the discredited tools of the enlightenment but, as I will show, via a more intimate analysis of moods and communication, as well as the interests and drives I have already discussed as linked to climate and atmosphere.

The following section will go into more depth on this first critique-as-unmasking and will discuss how Sloterdijk sees his present work relating to the idea of critique. I then examine Sloterdijk’s complicated and ambiguous rejection of the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School and his own attempt at positing a third iteration of that school. I then discuss his observations about a lack of care for mood in what he describes as the

resentment-heavy rhetoric of the contemporary critical left. I conclude the section by describing how Sloterdijk sees communication as embodying a Nietzschean turn to joy, away from a critique that both ignores the social mood and that universalises humanism.

(i) Unmaskings and a review of critiques

Sloterdijk (1987) argues how previously held beliefs had been undermined by the progressive human enquiry known as the enlightenment which led to cynicism becoming the dominant worldview in the late twentieth century. He enlists the metaphor of unmasking to document the attempted removal of eight masks that had been created by humans in the attempt to describe themselves. But that unmasking was only successful in the stark logic of the enlightenment, whereas in more psychological realms these unmaskings had not been so successful. Instead the unmaskings created a ‘backlog of ‘false consciousness’ that learn from their critics’ (p. 22). The point Sloterdijk makes is that sunlight does not disinfect; enlightenment never totally penetrates into a social space to do away with illusions. Expanding the authorship to a ‘we’ that includes his readers, he writes, ‘we want to see how, here and there, in the critique itself, the germs of a new dogmatism are formed’ (p. 22). The effect of critique, he surmises, is an ambivalent, cynical twilight of disbelief. The masks have not come off, but are askew, and the very process of unmaskings has left humanity with leery vision.

To see where critique has gone wrong it is necessary to describe at least some of these unmaskings. While we might be tempted to see his later work as antithetical to his early critique, I would argue that the work in *Critique of Cynical Reason* performs the kind of preliminary ‘negative’ critique that makes the later work possible – think of the similar process in Nietzsche’s work. Though a reading of all the unmaskings and their attendant problems would be fruitful, this study will be limited to those most connected to the unmaskings related to humans in their environment that is the core focus of this study. The unmaskings begin with metaphysics and religion: critique of revelation, religious illusion, and metaphysical illusion. These are standard enlightenment themes of undermining religious dogma and a discussion of them does

not add to the aim of the project. The same is true for critiques four through six where Sloterdijk describes the work of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as, respectively, a critique of idealistic superstructure, moral illusion and transparency of the conscious mind. The main point to understand is that Sloterdijk's consideration of critique as a contemporary phenomenon exists in concord with a series of moves to emancipate humans from particular understandings about themselves and their place in the world.

The final two critiques are the critique of natural illusion and the critique of the illusion of privacy. These final two critiques deserve further comment due to their clear relevance to the project and their central place in Sloterdijk's move beyond well-established critiques. The critique of natural illusion is the unmasking of claims to nature as a justification for cultural and moral norms. The critique of the illusion of privacy, or the critique of egoism, seeks to undermine the surety of the personality that can reflect on its own experiences in the world. I will explain these both in more depth.

It is worth dwelling on the changes Sloterdijk (1987) observes in relation to the critique of natural illusion. The natural illusion refers to how the concept of the natural held sway as long as there was a conception of the 'good Nature' at the bottom of all conceptions of the world. This good nature could be perverted by any of a series of second-class actions, but those actions were always only committed by criminals, the mentally unwell and born sinners. Underneath these man-made ills as a moral base was always recourse to a good and Godly nature. Much of this natural illusion was eroded when Darwinian evolution gained status and the political emblem of nature became the animal of prey.

The eighth critique - the critique of the illusion of privacy - leads to unsureness about how and why self-reflection takes place within an individual. The illusion of privacy focuses on the protected or buffered action of thinking to one self about one self. Where the Freudian critique sought to show the truth underneath conscious thought, this critique abandons any search for structured explanations for behaviour. After humans have realised that there is nothing about their selves that can't be explained by acculturation, Sloterdijk says 'there can be logically no other *uncovering* critique, but only 'praxis' conscious life' (1987, p. 60). Humans can't know if their thoughts are autonomous or self-led, or merely a function of the culture they have grown up in, so the notion of a private, concealed individual becomes absurd. By undermining the

autonomy and distinctiveness of human cognition, we get a clearer image of critique that places humans as beings in the world, constructed and without an originary point to which we might return. That critique also helps to undermine any arguments that would distinguish between humans and nature based on the undiluted agency of the former (see, for example, a history of philosophical approaches that use these arguments in Lippett, 2000). After the unmaskings we are not left with some brightly lit masquerade of transparent beings, but a life that ‘knows itself to be at the mercy of a continuum of crisis’ (p. 76). We both know and cannot fully know, and that which we suppose we know does not have the force of belief required to transform the world into that which we suppose it should be. This period, he states, is the twilight of cynicism.

Cynicism is described by Sloterdijk (1987) – one amongst many descriptions – as resulting from a consciousness that was not able or willing to put its ideas into practice. Here we have a keen split between ideas and practice, mind and body. The binary is a discursive starting point aimed at showing a disjuncture that already exists where the critical thinker might have expected a continuance from belief to plan to implementation of a project. The disjuncture is between an idea that the subject of enlightenment thought that he could bring to action, but which when confronted with practice was not able to or was unwilling to bring about. Cynicism is a particular symptom of the well-off who expected that with all of their resources and education that they would be able to move the world beyond illusion. But as we have also seen, as a spirit of the time, it is also present in those who may not seem so well off, the impoverished, where compromises are not short-term sacrifices but a way of life. Here I am referring to the cynic painted by Fleming and Spicer (2003) as the McDonalds worker who wears a McShit t-shirt beneath his uniform. The McDonalds worker is a long way off of the Sloterdijkian view of the cynic as being well-off and depressed at the same time. The well-off cynic has some relatively easy options to act differently, while the poor – such as the McDonalds worker in Fleming and Spicer (2003) - makes a tactical choice to take the work that they must. That said, given the formulation of the person who self-identifies with their poor circumstances, we could also see that there is cause for a cynicism of the poor, where a tactical employment against their beliefs becomes a dull, long-term strategic compromise.

Cynicism, then, is not the function of a singular standoff between a believer and an act. We might call such a singular act of hypocrisy cynical but for the spirit of the times to be created – for the *-ism* to be affixed – repetitions are required. A publisher does not become a cynic from allowing a singular sacrifice of editorial independence in the same manner as a punk does not become a cynic from dressing in a suit for graduation. The temporal accumulation of disconnectedness between our beliefs and how we act in the world is enlightenment as this ‘melancholic science’.

Sloterdijk’s reading of contemporary critical theory sees only the stale remnants of the Frankfurt School as ‘a bunch of cronies aiming to exercise power over mentalities and a couple of academic old-boys networks’ (p. 60-61). Habermas is the key target of this criticism and in a more even-handed appraisal is praised for bringing some coherence to the social sciences, but is ultimately dismissed as a ‘theory diplomat and a manager of discourse, endowed with a real sense of historical compromise’ (p. 64). What is useful from this spat is not so much the accusations, but the way Sloterdijk positions his own writing as opposed to what he ultimately sees as a form of critique denuded by cynicism. In addition, he opposes Habermas partly because he sees his own thought as rescuing the intellectual spirit of the second Frankfurt generation of Adorno and Horkheimer. This rescue would require a substantial change in focus that would accord Sloterdijk’s work the right to be called the third iteration of Critical Theory. The third Critical Theory would not be based on cynicism or compromise, nor exactly on the ‘temperaments’ at the beginning of his work on cynicism, but on movement and mobility. Or as Sloterdijk frames it, ‘if after the debacle of Marxism and after the ambiguous fading away of the Frankfurt School, there is the possibility of a third version of an ambitious critical theory, it will probably only be in the form of a critical theory of movement.’ (p. 42).

Though in the *Critique of Cynical Reason* Sloterdijk (1987) is at pains to suggest he is not seeking to ‘save’ enlightenment or Critical Theory, his interest in picking up the abandoned flame of that tradition becomes clearer in later work. This philosophy is sketched in another of his short essays ‘Mobilization of the Planet from the Spirit of Self-Intensification’ (2006a, originally published in German in 1989) that is an early attempt to articulate spherology with anthropotechnics. Movement is critical in an ethical sense, he notes, as it is the sum of all kinetic interplay between humans and the

planet in modernity where humans have more influence over the earth's processes than ever before.

The criticality of this movement or kinetic approach, if we consider it in line with the framing of this study, dispenses with all doubts and takes the threatened crisis as self-evident. This self-evidence is an interplay between ethics and kinetics. This 'action' is the result of what he refers to as subjectivity, 'the mysterious initial force that expresses itself as the ability to ignite new chains of movement' (p. 37). The enlightenment process of creating human subjectivity through reason has failed and the psychopolitical description of how (dis) belief connects to (in)action is no longer a study of entrenched cynicism, but is mired in mystery. It is worth considering a little more closely exactly what kind of movements Sloterdijk (2006a) suggests would be at the centre of this form of critique. Movement is the philosophy of the present based on three axioms:

first, that we are moving in a world that is moving itself; second, that the self-movements of the world include our own self-movements and affect them; and third, that in modernity, the self-movements of the world originate from our self-movements, which are cumulatively added to world-movements. (p.36)

Sloterdijk soon moves into a less certain terrain when linking this movement to a method of critique: 'A theory can only be critical, no matter what critical semantics it transports, if it annuls in the worst of all possible directions its kinetic complicity with the movement of world processes' (Sloterdijk, 2006a, p. 42). These descriptions hold quite closely to the weariness of movement and action outlined in the closing chapter of *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Consider the following:

only as a tranquil theory of movement, only as a quiet theory of loud mobilization can a critique of modernity be different from that which is criticized – everything else is the rational makeup of complicity, giving the train that is already running a push, consciously or unconsciously, mimesis of the basic process in the process of reflection. (p. 42)

To cast doubt, with a critical theory based on movement, is to be reflexively against the current direction of the world even if that 'against' is inaction, 'to be still in the midst of the storm' (2006a, p. 42). Given that Sloterdijk's (2006a) theory of movement

was first published in 1988 it is may be wise to see these remarks as preliminary to his more recent work on the grand narratives of spheres and anthropotechnics. Regardless of how much of a pit-stop his 1988/2006 essay was, it speaks to the attempts of Sloterdijk to escape from the binds of cynicism by rejecting the recipe of ethics as a necessary correspondence between a positive belief and a corresponding action, or a lack of belief and a corresponding inaction.

Sloterdijk's more recent critique has cast aside the radical doubts of his earlier work to offer intuitions and assertions. The following section will go into some of the reasons why he has made this change. The strength of his rhetoric comes not least from the boldness of his attempts to offer new grand narratives such as his theory on atmosphere. If on the one hand he offers a bold claim about reality as it really is, or facts or truths, he just as quickly rails against the same claims as others. His critique may not be the third wave of the Frankfurt School, but as a critical theorist he is both willing and able to put doubt to one side in the aid of emancipatory projects. These doubts, to Sloterdijk, are the psychological remains of a melancholic left – inheritors of the enlightenment - that have not succeeded in their mission. Whether this assessment justifies Sloterdijk's own relationship to truth claims all depends on how one values the efficacy of Sloterdijk's own project.

(ii) Psychopolitics: the critical melancholic mood and a departure from doubt

In his early work, Sloterdijk was still fixed upon the difficulty between a critique that knows very well what was wrong with the grand beliefs of the world and the ensuing actions of individuals that could never live up to those (dis)beliefs. The way he described this move was the change from the focus on the negative ascetics of self-denial to the positive ascetics of training. What was Sloterdijk's justification for such positive programmes? He does not so much offer a normative reason beyond situating positive ascetics as a continuation of the practices he described as having constituted human self-creation from the past. I am going to put aside the question of critique as the doubting associated with unmasking and cynicism so as to go into more depth on a form of theory that not only studies mood but in tone and substance seeks to enlighten the social mood. Moving beyond doubt as a constitutive part of critique is an admission

that the problems of critique, as I have framed it, have not been dealt with in the way I was looking for by Sloterdijk. While improving the social mood might have significant points where it could co-exist with doubt and scepticism, it would be difficult to imagine a critique that privileged a light social mood over doubt when they did clash. Sloterdijk's work on movement is his first proposal for a revitalisation of the Frankfurt School, but such approaches were abandoned in his later work. In these more recent texts, movement became just one aspect of a spatial understanding of the world that could be described as self-evident if it were not so esoteric; see, for example, the focus on angels over love as demonstrative of an intimate sphere.

Sloterdijk's main charge against critique is that it does nothing to enlighten the social mood as quoted in the opening to this section where he describes the Frankfurt School as adepts of a depressant-aggressive complex. In articulating arguments in this melancholic form, he argues, that critique distances itself from links to an actual social and political change that we might assume to flow from critique. Instead, Sloterdijk positions himself as performing a type of positive critique that takes into consideration the likely outcome of a critique. In his study of spheres this is the point where he goes from the creation of literal spaces that are buffered against the coldness of the climate to the anthropogenic creation of communities-as-islands.

The content of this focus on moods is less apparent in the theories that Sloterdijk argues for or about, and more in the tone that he takes in making these arguments. For example, consider his witticisms in discussing intimate spheres with imagined others in *Bubbles* (2011b),

Even those who do not believe in angels or doppelgangers can rehearse the secrets of pre-personal friendship with their closest of sleep-helpers, and whoever has no friend can at least have a blanket. The theory of With-projections will not least permit a psycho-historical deduction of bed cultures. (p. 361)

The erototope (to use Sloterdijk's, 2016b, term for the space of human produced intimacies) has not been so well alluded to since Voltaire made Cunegonde a witness to Dr Pangloss' lessons in experimental natural philosophy. But while Sloterdijk's rhetoric is awash with the joy of clever humour, in his actual analysis of mood he has

focussed much more on forms of rage and monotheistic clashes than on explicating his theory of mood enhancement. The few exceptions tend to come from moments of reflection such as interviews where others bring up his style and where theory and how it is conveyed team up as an academic's praxis. For example, consider the beginning of a theory of effervescence in the education focussed interview with Reinhard Kahl titled 'Learning is Joyful Anticipation of Oneself' (Sloterdijk, 2016b) or the conversations on his scandals (Sloterdijk, 2011a).

Much of the recent mood-related work by Sloterdijk has broadened his focus from resentment-tinged cynicism to all manner of psychopolitics. Couture (2016) describes psychopolitics as based on the idea that 'psychological moods are qualities that can be transferred from individuals to collectives and vice versa' (p. 8). Psychopolitics is at once a method of going beyond the historical focus of German philosophy in the twentieth century as well as the specific psychological states that he emphasises. A psychopolitical analysis can be best seen in books such as *Rage and Time* (subtitled: a psychopolitical investigation) as well as articles on lightening the mood through the tensile spaces interior to spheres. It suggests that a response to cynicism should not be focussed on an abandonment of a weighed-down thought in favour of a loosely-defined, pragmatism disguised as praxis, but instead embodied in an attempt to surpass cynicism by looking more deeply into melancholia as a symptom of critique. As Van Tuinen (2010) puts it, this position 'after-theory' was not recognised in his first works as those works were considered to be an antidote to the stagnation of Western Marxism's revolutionary sentiment. In his later works Sloterdijk has turned the work of critique back on itself – a critique or critical reason, perhaps – in an attempt to enlighten the social mood. And yet while he wishes to enlighten the mood, rage is also a part of this psychopolitical project that intensifies and operationalises the oppositional feeling of cynicism, but in a manner which is controlled by he or she who rages. Rage has been both under-theorised as a psychopolitical mood as well as poorly utilised by those wishing to utilise psychopolitical analysis. Hence, psychopolitics can be theorised well or badly, as well as practiced well or badly: it is an analytical tool as well as a method of political behaviour

Van Tuinen (2010) sees Sloterdijk's work against leftist resentment not in the sense of an exclusive warming of the mood, but also in terms of its thymotic quality - a practiced

and controlled rage known to the Ancients - that is at the centre of *Rage and Time*. His focus on rage offers a counterpoint to any critique that might see Sloterdijk's suggestion on the need for a new mood as a type of new age phenomena. Van Tuinen shows how the term *ressentiment* is flung back at Sloterdijk and how care needs to be taken to consider whether the term fits. He positions Sloterdijk's anti-resentment ethos in line with both Nietzsche, who saw resentment at work in the priesthood, and Deleuze and Guattari, who spotted it in the psychoanalyst. 'Each of these personae' Van Tuinen (2010) notes, referring to the priest, the psychoanalyst and the critical theorist, 'in turn, is perfectly capable of wielding the concept of *ressentiment* himself. But this is usually done in a trivial and moralizing way... reducing it to something that can and must be repressed' (p. 62). The thymotic mood is not only praised by Sloterdijk but is also embodied in practice by Sloterdijk's rhetoric and public personae and it is this, according to Van Tuinen, that is what we should use to judge the 'integrity of our relations to our values' (p. 63). These relations and values are, more or less, the equivalent of the actions and beliefs outlined in Sloterdijk's original critique of cynicism. Hence, while there is a divergence in Sloterdijk's work from the melancholia infused *Critique of Cynical Reason* there is also a common thread through the boisterous fidelity of Diogenes through to the thymos of the positive ascetic.

(iii) *Communication outside of humanism*

It is difficult to discuss Sloterdijk's theory of mood – in both the themes of gregarity and rage – without also noting that Sloterdijk's view of humanity is nowhere near as inclusive as we have come to expect from the egalitarianism of other forms of critical theory. Grounding being in space makes Sloterdijk place more stock in the ways particular communities come together as qualitatively different from other communities. We can take an example from *God's Zeal* (2009b) where he steps back from claims of equality amongst all people that he sees originated in Rousseau's work:

with its growing self-assurance the Enlightenment not only broke away from historically developed monotheism; it in fact produced a higher-level monotheism in which various universal articles of faith attained dogmatic value. These include the a-priori unity of the species, the indispensability of the

state under the rule of law, the destiny of humans to control nature, solidarity with the disadvantaged and the disabling of natural selection for *Homo sapiens*. (p. 135)

A similar anti-humanism – though he might prefer the term post-humanism – arises when we consider what spheres are likely to be air-conditioned and what happens to those people who are outside of these spheres. Though Sloterdijk is at pains to distance himself from coming across as an individualist – recall the framing of spheres as about collective projects – it is difficult to imagine his approach to design climate solutions as necessarily being available to one and all. Sloterdijk’s enlightening of mood, we might then assume, may well be limited to those who are protected inside the newly designed spheres. For those who are outside of the air-conditioned spheres, whether due to national or economic barriers, the mood may not be so bright. Hence, we can return to Van Der Hout’s (2013) critique of Sloterdijk’s tendency to abandon social or political struggles alongside technological developments. At the same time, Sloterdijk, or any number of others focussed on technological solutions, could still make the case that the crisis of climate change is so urgent that we cannot wait for egalitarian or democratic solutions.

For Sloterdijk communication – the coming together of people in cooperation and community – stands in for the political struggles that Van Der Hout (2013) suggests are lacking in his work. Sloterdijk’s communication is somewhat different from basic transactional and pragmatic theories of communication that praxis-oriented scholars of environmental communication might be used to. Though he claims the overarching thesis that ‘all media history is the history of the transmission of thought’ (2014b, p. 637) thereby locating his approach within what he describes as a rational inquiry into interpersonal relations, the aim of his communication theory is to show how people have transmitted their thoughts, at both an interpersonal and cultural level, across time and space. Given such parameters, and Sloterdijk’s love for exaggeration, it is not surprising that he draws on myth and parapsychology, archaisms and metaphysics in his wide-ranging discussions of the transmission function of language.

For this study, I see the field and practice of communication as the site whereby a critique that seeks to participate in an emancipatory political alignment speaks, or writes, with a focus on a specific audience that it wishes to change. Sloterdijk’s theory

of communication (though he thinks little of how pervasive the word ‘communication’, like ‘society’ has become - see Sloterdijk and Funcke, 2005 and Sloterdijk, 2014b) also helps us to think about his emphasis on enlightening the social mood as it offers a perspective on how understanding is created and extended. As he writes in *Nietzsche Apostle* (2013c):

Languages are not primarily used for what is today called the passing on of information, but serve to form communicating group-bodies. People possess language so that they can speak of their own merits [Vorziigen]-and not least of the unsurpassable merit of being able to talk up these merits in their own language. First, and for the most part, people are not concerned to draw each other's attention to states of affairs, but aim instead to incorporate states of affairs into a glory. (p. 8-9)

Notice that as with his focus on moods, communication is first and foremost an affirmation of a specific collective. This collective of people is not a universal humanism, but is made up of a linguistic in-group. The key point is the reversal in the last sentence: language does not exist to enlighten, but to praise one's self and one as a member of a group. On the same page, Sloterdijk (2013c) also notes that this praise is not limited to the mood enhancers that might commonly be reserved for praise – happiness and joy for example – but is a complex arrangement of critique and veneration:

Languages of self-criticism are also borne by a function of self enhancement. And even masochism works to announce the distinctiveness of the tortured individual. When used in accordance with its constitutive function of primary narcissism, language says one and the same thing over and again: that nothing better could have happened to the speaker than, precisely, to have been who he is, to have been who he is at this place and in this language, and to bear witness to the merit of his being in his own skin. (p. 9)

Given this view of communication, to speak of climate catastrophe might be more aligned to either promoting the expertise of the self who speaks, or attempting to promote the group who might benefit from particular responses that would ameliorate

climate change. Recall how he saw the concept of the Anthropocene as the dressing up of a moral and political urgency in the garb of scientific neutrality (Sloterdijk, 2015).

Environmental communication that stands a chance of creating spheres that will flourish and offer a continuance of these exemplary will project this self-praise into the future. Anything else – a negation, a cautionary tale or a fiery polemic against capitalism – would fulfil ‘the constitutive function of primary narcissism’ but would not have the power to alter the make up of our spheres of co-existence. Whether humans are prepared to accept such a reductive account of our psychological make-up is the core challenge for Sloterdijk. We saw in his ambivalence in the UNCCC as to whether a negative ascetics, which we might team with a self-criticism as described above, could function as an anthropotechnic challenge to climate change. In answering that it cannot, Sloterdijk has accepted that it is only these primary narcissisms that drive our behaviour. These primary narcissisms do not nullify the affirmative potential of his theory of communication, but do call into question the ability for intercultural communication to be based on any kind of shared egalitarianism.

Directions in environmental communication from Sloterdijk

As a critical theorist who does his very best to disassociate himself from the mood of the theorists who most readily identify with critique, Sloterdijk might be dismissed as a hyperbolic contrarian. The problem with such a conclusion is that it discounts the value of the strains of thought that Sloterdijk does develop in terms of both his work on the tensions between forms of anthropotechnic asceticism, his development of a lexicon on spherology and the tone of his uplifting, joyful rhetoric. Though these concepts are mature in Sloterdijk’s work they are all but inchoate in secondary literature. *Environmental Communication* has no references to Sloterdijk’s work and where articles in other communication affiliated journals draw on his work it is usually for a reference to cynicism as the zeitgeist of the times (if the journal is grounded in critical theory) or a skeletal reference to the *Spheres* trilogy (such as in some design and geography journals) which can be seen in Elden (2012) and Schinkel and Noordegraaf-Eelens (2011) as well as the special issues on his work in *Cultural*

Politics in 2007 and *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* in 2009. Though he has not had his work adopted by any of these fields, given the recent translation of the *Spheres* trilogy into English his influence is likely yet to be fully measured.

There are two main areas that Sloterdijk can be useful for a consideration of environmental communication. First, Sloterdijk's reframing of globalisation and climate as both historical and related to the spatiality of spheres offers a rich discourse for theorists to defamiliarise environmentalists from the subject of their studies. Each introduction to the three volumes of *Spheres* foments a phenomenological narrative of being in the world that can move the discussion of climate change from the dominant frames of scientism and green political strategising. These narratives are necessary to create a sense of the place of humans in the world so as to move environmental communication to the global and atmospheric level needed to adequately engage with the struggles of climate change. It might be easy to say 'think global, act local' but *Globes* and *Foams*, as well as *Terror from the Air*, do work at placing those global thoughts in a history of world making. This world making, in turn, is premised on the expansion of the sphere from the smallest of domestic sites, like the hearth, to the air conditioning of large interiors to the atmosphere as a place of dwelling. Environmental communication, as Cox (2015) noted (though Lester, 2015 disagrees) has focussed too much on the local without introducing concepts like the grand narratives of the globe that Sloterdijk articulates.

Second, Sloterdijk's difficult relationship with other critical theorists and his promotion of a positive critique that pays attention to the social mood it creates offers a useful middle ground to those who are interested in environmental communication but who are put off by the doubting or sceptical side of critique. Critique that doubts was an important focus for the earlier works of Sloterdijk, and though the ascetic, embodied responses of the Ancient Greek Kynics resonate with his later focus on anthropotechnics, he has abandoned all focus on belief and disbelief. His study of cynicism as the prevailing mood of the times has been made but then put to one side. In its place he has focused on the attempt of people to go beyond the given state of their embodied lives through training and practice. As with his descriptions of the grand narratives of globes there is more attention here to the psychopolitical drives that have humans go beyond themselves than those which have them critique their selves.

In terms of ecology, these practices have been outlined as restraint, or inaction. But Sloterdijk is unable or unwilling to develop that part of his thought: other than his early work on the various cynics, the closest he comes to a theory of restraint is his conclusion to *You Must Change Your Life* where he describes the survival of the world as depending on accepting that we have come up against the limits of the earth as a sphere. Critique, he notes, was once at the forefront of man-made attempts to control the course of history. But as those attempts failed the ‘militant world-improvers withdrew from their self-induced debacles and attributed whatever was too much for them to disastrous fate’ (p. 445-6). His criticism of critique may ring true for a certain segment of critical theorists, but is most valuable for this study when accompanied with his self-described exuberance and exaggerated attention to anthropotechnic practices and the projects entailed by his spherology.

Chapter Three

Critique and Climate Change in Žižek

It would be easy enough for scholars within environmental communication to reject any worth from a consideration of Žižek based on any number of excessive comments about ecology made by Žižek. As we will see, for those committed to genuine political change, Žižek sees environmentalism as an opiate: people think they've saved the world, but have just prologned its suffering and prevented systemic change. However, a closer reading of the texts of Žižek throw up a number of potential theoretical bases for studying how people think, dispute and act as environmentalists. Of particular interest is the way that discourses of catastrophe and crisis exist temporally, anticipating changes that they seek to prevent coming into being.

Background

Across three decades of writing, Slavoj Žižek has drawn on a large range of thought and study. Discussions of ecology and climate change come out across many of his texts, though few go into deep descriptions of what climate change will look like, or the causes and solutions to it. Apart from *Living In The End Times*, none of his books are explicitly framed on ecology or climate change, and the majority of the noted text only deals with these concerns sporadically. Žižek's work offers accounts of how different types of political organisation could make claims about their compatibility with ecological thought. One particularly fascinating part of Žižek's work is matching this focus on politics, and particularly the rethinking of communism as a way of addressing climate change, with the kinds of doubts and ontology that come from his use of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Žižek's (1989) first major book outside of his native Slovenia, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, achieved significant popularity as it wove Lacanian psychoanalysis with a

Marxist concept of ideology by focusing on their shared understanding of the symptom and role of the dream. Marx and Lacan, he announced, can be read together because both are theorists of the secret. Ernesto Laclau used his preface to describe the text as essential reading for people seeking 'to address the problems of constructing a democratic-socialist project in a post-Marxist age' (Žižek, 1989, p. xv).

In releasing thirty-nine books in English since 1989, a strategy that Terry Eagleton (2014) describes as based around one popular and accessible tome alongside a longer, more-philosophically inclined text, Žižek has also established himself as an academic celebrity. He regularly has essays reproduced in *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*, fills lectures in large auditoriums (trying to see him speak in a 500 person room in Portland State University in 2014 was a futile endeavour even queuing up an hour ahead of the event), has been the subject of three films, and had books published of his jokes (2014) and his letters to Nadya Tolokonnikova (2014), jailed member of Russian punk band Pussy Riot.

Žižek has become one of the most popular philosophers of the present age as much through his reading of Marx and Lacan as through the pleasure of indulging in popular culture when one is supposed to be reading philosophy. The eclecticism of Žižek's influences is one of the first things noted by the casual reader, if not solely from the marketing of his books, then from a glance at any of his book's indexes. The main non-philosophical sources for his earlier works are Soviet humour and pop culture references from Hollywood. In the introduction to *Looking Awry* (1991), for example, he praises the collision of high culture with pop culture. As with Lacan's 'Kant with Sade' he sees popular culture as allowing him to highlight aspects of Lacan's work not generally spotted by academia (hence the awry look in the book's title) and at the same time can revel in the 'idiotic enjoyment of popular culture' (1991, p. viii).

This popular acclaim is mirrored by a large number of articles, books and other secondary literature focusing on his work. The *International Journal of Žižek Studies* is into its ninth volume and there are more than twenty secondary books on Žižek's work, from his influence on film (Flisfeder, 2012) and media (Taylor, 2010; Flisfeder and Willis, 2014)), to a series of critical overviews (Parker, 2004; Sharpe, 2004; Boucher, Glynos and Sharpe, 2005; Pound, 2008), introductions (Myers, 2003; Butler, 2005; Wood, 2012), relations to politics (Dean, 2006; Johnston, 2009) and ontology (Johnston,

2008). I will tend to only draw on these texts in a tangential way, but mostly where Žižek has used them as an occasion to speak back to the way criticism of, and in, his work have functioned. For example, Boucher, Glynos and Sharpe's *Traversing the Fantasy* includes a response from Žižek as he reflects, not only on misreadings of his work but also on how his thought has changed through time. While no one has yet written an in-depth account of the range of Žižek's ecological positioning, the most cited point of analysis on ecology seems to be his reference to ecology as a new 'opium of the masses' (see Swyngedouw, 2009 and 2011 for examples).

Žižek's eclecticism, combined with his effusive rhetorical flourishes and calls for reappraising the role of violence and Stalinism, has led commentators, such as Eagleton (2014), to question the authenticity of Žižek's proclamations. 'Is he just out to scandalise?' Eagleton asks. Where Eagleton is left ambivalent about Žižek's intentions, this study will not seek to assess Žižek work in toto, but will zoom in on the parts of Žižek's work on ecological crisis and critique. While Žižek revels in provocative positions in the delivery of some of his work – see, for example his assertion on a panel with Julian Assange, that Assange is indeed a terrorist, 'but if you are a terrorist, my god what are they?' (see Stopes, 2011) – if his work on ecology is considered provocative it also has specific political ends in mind. It is an assessment of those ends, and the contest between ecological commitments and his other political commitments that structure my reading of the valence of his work.

This first section will contrast the wide range of functions that climate change and ecology represent in Žižek's texts across three schemas, or triads. The first schema consists of three approaches to the ecological challenges of our time – from crisis, to catastrophe, to apocalypse. The second schema considers the way that the coming importance of ecology may interact or influence three types of political systems. The third and final schema considers three types of subjects that are concerned with ecology: the cynical, obsessional and the moral.

The second section will focus on the place of critique within Žižek's work. I begin by contrasting his discussion of ideology critique with his reading of cynicism as the contemporary ideological formulation. As with Sloterdijk, Žižek sees disbelief and cynicism as central to contemporary understandings of ideology. But while Sloterdijk diagnosed a particular constituency as being within a cynical zeitgeist, Žižek looks at

cynicism as a modern form of self-expression and looks to the practices of the so-called cynic to undermine generalised claims to disbelief. I contrast that reading of critique with the relation to belief found in Žižek's Lacanian analysis of the symbolic processes that give rise to meaning, with particular emphasis on the role of an ontology of lack. Given this ontological positioning, I consider how Žižek justifies the knowledge that informs his emancipatory politics and whether this might also hold for his understanding of struggles around climate change.

In the final section I bring together Žižek on climate change with Žižek's critique to suggest what environmental communication could take from his work. Two clear outcomes follow: (1) an analysis of the different versions of the real and how they relate to ecology (2) an analysis on the role of ecological crisis as urgent, or merely as an antagonism that could help towards ultimate goals of a new version of the communist idea.

Žižek on climate change and ecological crisis

Žižek's writings on ecology and climate change can be divided into three main types. The first type involves debates about the level of seriousness of ecological crisis. The second considers the appropriate political formations that will respond to the crisis. The third considers a range of individual psychological responses to environmental crisis. Under each of these three types Žižek offers three possible readings

Levels of crisis

Across Žižek's work ecology is invoked at a range of levels of urgency. Ecological crisis is, in his early work, one antagonism that is equivalent to many others and is rarely invoked on its own, always nestled in a chain of examples. More recently, however, ecology has starred as both one of four threats that could lead to catastrophe but also, with climate change, as the most apocalyptic of all threats to human survival.

(1) Ecological crisis – one amongst many, but not urgent

In *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) ecology features as one of a series of terms – alongside, for example, feminism and racial politics – which come together to form a quilt of political antagonisms. That concept of quilting, as a verb, is borrowed from Lacan's *point de capiton* and is used as a way of fixing social meaning to sustain the identity of a given ideological field. Through this process of quilting meaning is contingently created by drawing on one discourse – feminism, racial politics, and ecology for example – amongst a range of signifiers that are otherwise free floating. Žižek (1989) gives the example of communism as a technique of quilting, where 'class struggle gives a precise and fixed signification to all' (p. 87) and at the same time subsumes other antagonisms such as ecology beneath the logic of class.

Ecology is alongside these other antagonisms as an equivalent, but never that which quilts: it is not a privileged site of contest, but is invoked in a parenthesised block, separated by semi-colons, trailing off into an *et cetera* (Žižek, 1989). Consider this framing of ecology amongst parenthesised others that indicate similar struggles: '(workers are striking for better wages, feminists are fighting for the rights of women, democrats for political and social freedoms, ecologists against the exploitation of nature, participants in the peace movements against the danger of war, and so on)' (p. 4). Ecological threats and their concomitant struggles are used to bolster the post-Marxist positioning of Žižek's text, aligning his approach with the drive for radical democracy of Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

The significance of ecology in this early text is barely developed and is not entertained as a potential term that would structure all others. Ecology is also not used as a category to discuss the threat of climate change – which is still at least a decade away from popular consciousness – but is focussed on what Žižek (1991) comes to describe as a pre-modern naiveté. Ecology in these early works is concerned with localised struggles against pollution: ecology might be in a crisis, but to suggest it is catastrophic would be overplaying the significance of the threat.

(2) Ecological catastrophe – one amongst four

Žižek's work on climate change as the defining ecological crisis comes to the fore in *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (2009) where he describes the present age as confronted by four powerful antagonisms: ecological collapse, new intellectual property barriers, biogenetic developments and new forms of apartheid. The process of articulating these antagonisms fits with Žižek's earlier work on quilting a range of concerns that structure a broad understanding of the social. However, in the more recent work ecology has become one of four potentially apocalyptic concerns for the present age. In *The (Mis)uses of Catastrophe* Žižek (2005a) discusses a general invocation of catastrophe. He writes:

One of the favoured exercises of intellectuals throughout the twentieth century was the urge to 'catastrophise' the situation: whatever the actual situation, it *had* to be denounced as 'catastrophic' and the better it appeared the more it solicited this exercise. (p. 35)

Amongst these intellectuals, Žižek (2005a) counts Heidegger with reference to the catastrophic potential of nihilism, and Horkheimer, with the threat of the administrative world. Žižek is not so much denouncing catastrophe as he is describing the misuse of catastrophe. If there is anyone he is critiquing in this section it is those thinkers who, even as life is actually getting better, denounce the catastrophic nature of the times.

As with the gap between knowing and believing in *In Defense of Lost Causes*, Žižek (2005) states that while 'we *know* the catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not *believe* it will really happen' (p. 39). Only after the event takes place are we able to consider it as both real, possible and, indeed, necessary all along. And yet in all these discussions there is not too much reflection on whether Žižek's opinion extends to his own use of catastrophisation. As his work on catastrophe was published in 2005, and his framing of the four antagonisms came after this, we can only suggest Žižek feels that today – for the reasons behind the four antagonisms he shows - there truly is ground for his invocation of this kind of plural, heightened threat of catastrophe.

Žižek cites Jean-Pierre Dupuy's (2014) *Mark of the Sacred* to describe the difficulty of temporally maintaining a rhetoric of catastrophe as a means to avoid that very catastrophe. From the viewpoint of the present a catastrophe seems to hold the promise of an impossible difference. But from the perspective of after the catastrophe, the past

moment is retroactively reinterpreted as holding all the hallmarks of the necessary future. From the viewpoint of the present all of the past can be seen as necessarily leading to the very present moment. The contingency of the past is vanished and the potential alternative today's are impossible to imagine. The problem with this retrospective view is that it displaces all political agency to the broad category of history. Žižek gives the example of the Y2K Millennium Bug: was it never going to affect us at all, or did the intervening work of computer scientists stop its catastrophic effects? The efficacy of intervening to prevent catastrophe is never rewarded if it is successful; and if the catastrophe does occur, then perhaps it was always going to occur, regardless of human intervention. But what if despite, all we know and attempt, a catastrophe still occurs. This is the question Žižek (2005a) notes that we face with regards to ecology:

If we do nothing it will occur, and if we do all we can do, it will not occur, *except for some imprevisible accident*. This 'imprevisible factor e' is precisely the remainder of the Real which disturbs the perfect self-closure of the 'time of the project' – if we write this time as a circle, it is a cut which prevents the full closure of the circle (exactly the way Lacan writes *l'objet petit a*). (p. 40)

The *objet petit a* is the impossibility of the symbolic ever representing the Real - or in other words the fundamental impossibility of a situation which would see the full closure of meaning, whereby human expression of a situation perfectly agrees with the Real. This concept is perhaps the most similar in Lacan's work to the Derridean and post-Marxist understanding of the social as a space that cannot be closed off or absolutely sewn up. Žižek (2005a) explains that:

one should thus invert the existentialist commonplace according to which when we are engaged in a present historical process, we perceive it as full of possibilities and ourselves as agents free to choose among them, while for a retroactive view, the same process appears as fully determined and necessary. (p. 45)

The opposite approach is one where in order to see oneself as the agent of destiny in the present, we must see all that has come before as full of alternatives and possibilities for things to have turned out in very different manners. The value of catastrophisation, despite Žižek's (2005a) apparent antipathy to it in the opening of the essay, is that in

which a terrible future is foretold, but human emancipation from its catastrophic potential is also imagined through the political struggles of the present.

(3) Ecological apocalypse – singular greatest threat

The four antagonisms described in Žižek (2009) reappear in *Living in the End Times*, in an interlude between the final two chapters on Depression and Acceptance. In contrast to *First as Tragedy, then as Farce*, the four antagonisms quickly become focused on the becoming real of ecological catastrophe. It is worth quoting Žižek, once more, at length again to show his exact framing. The following quote comes just after a discussion of how big business and government are beginning to see ‘green industry’ as a profitable industry, for example, the dubiously ‘green’ process of claiming territory in the Arctic with the view to extract oil once climate change has melted the ice as a site of profits. Žižek (2010) writes:

While it is difficult to estimate the soundness of these predictions, one thing is sure: an extraordinary social and psychological change is taking place in front of our eyes – the impossible is becoming possible. An event first experienced as real but impossible (the prospect of a forthcoming catastrophe which, however probable it may be, is effectively dismissed as impossible) becomes real and no longer impossible (once the catastrophe occurs, it is ‘renormalized’, perceived as part of the normal run of things, as always already having been possible). The gap which makes these paradoxes possible is that between knowledge and belief: we *know* the (ecological) catastrophe is possible, probable even, yet we do not *believe* it will really happen. (p. 328)

Though Žižek’s point has more to do with ideology than ecology, his use of the ecological antagonism as the most imminent of the four antagonisms to a potential catastrophe makes the ecological crisis stand out above the other three. If earlier he was at pains to present the quilt of social fabric as unfixed, plural and contingent, his more recent writings have first pointed out four nodes on the quilt that describe present crises. And now it is ecology that is taking the place of the apocalyptic threat par excellence. The exceptionalism of ecology as an antagonism is reinforced by his claims that ‘perhaps the forthcoming ecological crisis, far from undermining capitalism, will serve as its

greatest boost' (p. 329). With great environmental destruction come opportunities for nations to rid themselves of the old social constraints that prevented the privatization and profiting from such presumed natural facts as clean air and sunlight.

Žižek has explained that ecological catastrophe is one of the four major antagonisms that could lead to an apocalypse, but he also returns to the idea that radical responses to ecological threats might, in themselves, have effects that cannot be imagined ahead of time. He writes: 'what gets lost in this shift is any proper sense of what is going on, of all the unexpected traps the catastrophe hides. For example, one of the unpleasant features of our predicament is that the very attempt to counteract certain ecological threats may contribute to the worsening of others' (p. 329/30). He gives the example of a hole in the ozone layer that had shielded the interior of Antarctica from global warming. What if the fixing of that one ecological threat accelerates the speed at which climate change takes place? Instead of fidelity to an ecological idea, his argument places doubt about the outcomes of situating any singular ecological solution in a more central position.

Žižek's stated doubt about what is to be done (which is interesting in that the chapter sits between his analysis framed as Depression and Acceptance), combined with a commitment to the antagonism of ecological catastrophe, leads him to a longer consideration of Dipesh Chakrabarty's analysis of the historico-philosophical shift that means humans can change nature – commonly known as the Anthropocene. The main argument about the Anthropocene for Chakrabarty (and Žižek) is whether to conceive of this as a point in time where humans are powerful because of their ability to change the world, or whether this power to self-destruction actually constitutes a type of determinacy outside of the human subject. These conflicting positions lead to the question: 'how are we to think the link between the social history of Capital and the much larger geological changes of the conditions for life on earth?' (p. 331). The question is left more as an instigation for readers to ponder rather than posed as a question to which Žižek has the answer.

Žižek's response to the tensions between ecology, geology and capital plays off Chakrabarty's work to offer insights into the current ecological crisis, with a much more specific focus on climate change as an apocalyptic threat. Rather than playing geology and capital against one another in the search for something like a subduction point where

agency meets determinism, Žižek doubles down on catastrophising the situation. A couple of examples: climate change is contrasted with nuclear war as an unintended consequence, rather than an agentic, conscious decision. That lack of intention, in turn, sets about to communalise human subjects into a new we that he describes as a species. So the second insight is that a species can only truly come about as a unified entity when it is threatened in its entirety. He writes:

phenomena like global warming make us aware that, with all the universality of our theoretical and practical activity, we are at a certain basic level just another living species on planet Earth. Our survival depends on certain natural parameters which we automatically take for granted. (p. 332)

The lesson for Žižek is clear: humans can only consider themselves natural so long ‘as they remain marginal enough so as not to seriously perturb natural preconditions’ (p. 333). Whether this position makes humans into cyborgs, like Haraway (1991) suggests, or some other kind of compromised subject is not fully articulated by Žižek.

For two whole pages, Žižek (2010) reproduces Chakrabarty’s views as if they are his own. But Žižek wishes to go beyond Chakrabarty’s Anthropocene and to turn back to the communist hypothesis. In contrast to the other antagonisms, specifically the other two that allow for exclusions to still occur, global warming is now theorised at the level of affecting all humans due to its atmospheric scale. Where the social exclusions of new walls and slums are the only antagonism with universal application, (as he does in *First as Tragedy then as Farce*) climate change now also occupies a similar space, with capitalism described as the particular challenge that will solve the universalism of climate change. He writes:

This is why we have to accept the paradox that, in the relation between universal antagonism (the threatened parameters of the conditions of life) and the particular antagonism (the deadlock of capitalism), the key struggle is the particular one: one can solve the universal problem (of the survival of the human species) only by first resolving the particular deadlock of the capitalist mode of production. In other words, the commonsense reasoning which tells us that, independently of our class position or our political orientation, we will all have to tackle the

ecological crisis if we are to survive, is deeply misleading: the key to the ecological crisis does not reside in ecology as such. (p. 333/4)

It is difficult for me to tell whether the switch in Žižek's work around what is the universal and the particular in terms of ecology and capitalism reveals ambivalence or whether the description of the ecological as the universal is more of a description of the immediacy and immensity of the problem. This point is key because the very basis of Žižek's privileging of a communist hypothesis is based on the idea that it is the only system that will not exclude any people from a solution to climate change. It is also worth noting that Žižek's (2009, 2010) work in the more recent books I have discussed show a tendency towards wanting to write as a participant in political struggles – defining what is to be done – in contrast to the earlier work that focuses upon the field of contestation and antagonism. In the following section I will show how Žižek uses these antagonisms as a warrant for a reaffirmation of communism as the only way that climate change will be addressed without excluding the least well off.

Political Systems

So far we have seen considerations of ecology from crisis through to catastrophe to possible apocalypse. But Žižek is not the dispassionate observer of these ecological distinctions. If the previous section described the body of his ecological observations then this section locates the heart of his political project as the ventricular – an empty organ in and of itself – to his ontological position, but with the function of pumping life-giving blood through the corpus. In the previous section I showed how Žižek (2009) sees the crisis of climate change, along with the other four contemporary antagonisms, as necessitating a move from the privatisation of the commons towards new forms of collective ownership.

The process of determining which system will emerge as the response to, and through, ecology is decided by which of the nodal points 'will totalize, include in its series of equivalences, these free floating elements' (Žižek, 1989, p. 88). The first two political systems that he considers as capable of responding to ecological crisis are communist and socialist. However, he also sees the potential for this crisis to serve as an opportunity

for a capitalist political system to sell products, expand markets and, for example, trade in carbon credits. All three of these systems will be considered.

(1) Communist

While Žižek (2009) sees ecology as a contemporary antagonism that demands political change, he also prefigures his politics with an allegiance to a history of Marxism and, more specifically, to the communist hypothesis. The communist hypothesis is a theoretical repositioning influenced by Alain Badiou, that Žižek situates as the bedrock for collective action. This project is described as a return to the very beginning of communism, stripping away attachment to other failures such as the Soviet Union. This communism, he notes, will not be the theory of a 'big One' that dominates all else, but will come about when a constellation of antagonisms generates the re-emergence of the communist idea as the only solution to all antagonisms.

The difference between this form of communism and other forms is that it will not be a revolution of the big One or of a big 'C' Communism, but will occur when a set of circumstances 'synergetically combine their power' (2009, p.89). Revolution 'no longer rides on the train of History' (p. 89) as a foregone conclusion of capitalism's contradictions. Instead, the revolutionary has to be a reader of the present, waiting for the ripe moment when circumstances combine and allow them to make revolution against the grain.

The question of the power of contemporary antagonisms is posed as the choice between accepting and rejecting the idea that capitalism is a naturalised phenomenon. As Žižek phrases it:

Thus again, it is not enough simply to remain faithful to the communist Idea; one has to locate within historical reality antagonisms which give this Idea a practical urgency. The only *true* question today is: do we endorse the predominant naturalization of capitalism, or does today's global capitalism contain antagonisms which are sufficiently strong to prevent its indefinite reproduction? (p. 90/91)

Having already quoted Badiou saying that ‘without the perspective of communism, without this Idea, nothing in the historical and political future is of such a kind as to interest the philosopher’ (Badiou, 2008, cited in Žižek, 2009, p. 87) it might be odd to imagine Žižek not drawing out enough antagonisms to make for the ‘interesting times’ required by the thinker that seeks to oppose capitalism. This point is important in that it underwrites the seriousness of the crisis-framing at the heart of this study. As I mentioned earlier, Žižek characterised the critical pose of the 20th century as one of catastrophisation. What, we need to ask, qualitatively differentiates the four crises listed here from earlier ones? Though the previous section offered suggestions for the global scale of the current climate crisis, Žižek’s own analysis does not seek to point to a change in his underlying theory of antagonism and so, as suggested earlier, we might read Žižek (2009) as more in line with a different kind of writing more focused on involving himself in directing which antagonisms should be brought to the fore and less on continuing to theorise the basis of this broader reading of the political.

(2) Socialist

Alongside ecology, Žižek sees two of the other crises - new intellectual property barriers, biogenetic developments – as potentially being solved within a non-communist system. That solving would be based on not addressing the fourth antagonism: new slums and walls, which he also designates as ‘new apartheid’ (p. 89) without going into any depth on historical uses or similarities of this term to the current political situation. The centrality of these new walls and slums to his thought comes from the potential of the increasingly threatening world protecting only those who can be on the privileged sides of these barriers.

Žižek sees that fixing these three problems – new intellectual property barriers, misuses of biogenetic developments and climate change – without addressing the new inequalities might lead to a socialist outcome whereby exclusions remain. His question becomes ‘socialism or communism?’ – it is not that socialism is used as a synonym for communism but is articulated more along the lines of a democratic socialism. At this point it is worth noting that Žižek does not see solving the antagonism of climate change

as mutually exclusive of global capitalism but as most likely to embody some variation of socialism. In fact, all that is required for:

the global capitalist system to survive its long-term antagonism and simultaneously avoid the communist solution, will be for it to reinvent some kind of socialism-in the guise of communitarianism, or populism, or capitalism with Asian values, or some other configuration. The future will thus be communist . . . or socialist. (p. 95)

The socialism that Žižek (2009) describes and differentiates from the communist hypothesis is elaborated upon in the first half of *First as Tragedy, then as Farce*: where government (the public or commons) is needed not for questions of justice or liberty but to clean up after the excesses of capitalism. He offers the examples of capitalist countries being rescued after the global financial crisis by mass injections of government support and contrasts that to the communist government of China having their authority rescued by the similarly contradictory influx of capitalist trade. The socialism that Žižek describes is also a nationalistic strain. The fourth antagonism of new walls is what keeps the poor out of the rich homes, but also the poor nations excluded from the rich ones.

If the three antagonisms are dealt with under a socialist response, people may also tend towards new forms of xenophobia that explain environmental destruction through the behaviours of outsiders. This relationship between the Included and Excluded, between who is blamed and who gets to choose lead Žižek back to a familiar theme for political philosophy: ‘we have a name for the intrusion of the Excluded into the socio-political space: democracy. Our question today is whether democracy is still an appropriate name for this egalitarian explosion’ (p. 99).

Climate change is presented by Žižek as both an urgent ecological crisis, but also as one more point on the quilt - as an antagonism that necessitates struggle against capitalism. If climate change is addressed within a socialist system, as described by Žižek - whereby the environment as commons is not privatised, but strengthened - it will not necessarily offer protection for all people. Žižek’s claim that a communist response to these antagonisms will exclude no-one is less an observation of how a communist response to climate change would work and more about posing challenges to the development of a new communist hypothesis.

Žižek's own fidelity to the communist hypothesis to come, as opposed to what was once called actually existing communism, is reminiscent of the Lacanian joke he likes to repeat, 'My fiancée never misses the rendezvous, because as soon as she misses it, she would no longer be my fiancée' (Žižek, 1999, p. 149). The salient point is that this hypothetical version of communism never excludes any communities because as soon as it does, it is no longer worthy of being called communist. The irony is that Žižek brings up this form of logic to show how a subject – the fiancée in the original joke – can only have their degradation justified by originally being denied agency through the joke. The lesson for his framing of communism and socialism matches this demonisation - socialism is always suspect because it represents an illicit rendezvous with capitalism; the only bride worth imagining is the communist one who will never betray the revolutionary event.

Two points remain to be made about socialism, communism and Žižek: first, Žižek's dismissal of socialism comes within a year of the global financial crisis and must be seen within the logic of quilting. *First as Tragedy, then as Farce* is one of those popular books described by Eagleton (2014) as populist. If we accept Žižek's logic of quilting and the need to rally around particular antagonisms as they present themselves, then perhaps his affirmation of the universality of communism can be read as tactical rather than an enduring change to his political commitments. Second, regardless of his denigration of the possibilities in socialism his point is important. How can those interested in the emancipatory politics of climate change prevent solutions that only protect the rich or the West, while consigning the poor to having to deal with the outcomes of catastrophic ecological changes? While Žižek's answer to this is communism, and there is a certain sense in his work that this had to be the answer, this also begs the question asked in the next section: what if a capitalist response to climate change could, at the least, extend the time available before ecological catastrophe for the political organising of communism to take place?

(3) Capitalist

Despite his preference for holding the communist hypothesis as the idea that would solve all four of the world's contemporary threats, including ecological crisis, we have also

seen that Žižek fears that solving some of these threats might be achieved by excluding more and more people from the benefits of that problem solving. While he suggests that would look like a socialist compromise as these common threats are met with public action, he is also weary of the way that ecology might also be used as an ideology of catastrophe in a similar way to Naomi Klein's (2007) shock doctrine theory. The crisis, in that theory, is the cut in the social fabric that allows for radical political changes that would not be accepted otherwise.

In *In Defense of Lost Causes* Žižek (2008b) continues with the end of nature theme from his earlier works such as *Looking Awry* (1991). He writes, 'nature is no longer 'natural,' the reliable 'dense' background of our lives; it now appears as a fragile mechanism which, at any point, can explode in a catastrophic manner' (p. 435). Ecology, for this Žižek (2008b), is predominantly composed of an ideological fear of catastrophe. Casting his eye over the previous two decades, he notes how the dying of the trees, which had been a topic of all the popular weekly magazines, was no longer a concern. Even though 'concerns about global warming explode from time to time and are gaining more and more scientific credibility, ecology as an organized socio-political movement has to a large degree disappeared' (p. 439). At this point Žižek is perhaps a little too pessimistic, missing out on some of the large scale international organisations that have emerged in the last decade as well as the persistence, if not electoral dominance of Green parties from around the world. He goes on to note that the ideological function of ecology lives on through 'ideological mystifications' (p. 439) such as the praise of pre-modern New Age paradigms, an honourable cause for liberals or as a form of paternalistic neo-colonisation of countries undergoing 'fast development' (p. 439).

The grounding lesson that Žižek takes from his study of ecological ideology is that humans are finite animals living on an earth that must ultimately be treated as sacred and inviolable if we are to continue to dwell upon it. Humans are caught in the bind of being required to undergo radical change to continue to live, but also needing such radical change to be tempered because of the potential for unimagined consequences from even the slightest change. Ecology, then, is beset by fears of both action and inaction and that 'makes ecology the ideal candidate for the hegemonic ideology, since it echoes the anti-totalitarian post-political distrust of large collective acts' (Žižek, 2008b, p. 440).

Through this plethora of ideological functions ecology ‘has every chance of developing into the predominant form of ideology of global capitalism, a new opium for the masses replacing declining religion’ (p. 440). It is this reading of ecology as the opium of the masses that is seen in many of the offhand references to Žižek’s ecology. In that opioid metaphor, ecological thought is not understood as one of the antagonisms that would structure a social fabric that would result in a renewed communism but is in reactionary competition with communism as the structuring concept. Where a socialist response to climate change would both invest in technology to diminish climate change as well as redistribute and deploy resources of the state to ameliorate the effects of the negative outcomes, a capitalist response would use the ideological mystifications of ecology to individualise the responsibility for dealing with the ramifications of climate change all the while commodifying and marketing parts of the environment that were previously resistant to commercialisation. This commercialisation could be achieved through global-liberal logics, as per the current logics accepted in the West, or through authoritarian nationalisms such as ‘capitalism with Asian values’ that he described in *First as Tragedy, then as Farce*.

So while a collective response to ecological crisis would lead to a socialist or communist future, if ecology is rendered as a problem of access to resources for the individual or nation then any actions to counter it might reinforce the present system rather than challenge it. As we saw in his analysis of the three contemporary antagonisms to capitalism, that reinforcement is achieved by a fourth antagonism: implementing new walls between the included and excluded.

Ecological subjects: cynical, obsessional, and moral

So far ecology has featured in Žižek’s analysis in a range of intensities of crisis and as interlinked to three political systems. Both of these overviews were triads with ecology and climate change described less in terms of some measured or observed change to the world, and more as an instigation to think about the function of catastrophe in political systems. A third triad to complete the matrix – *omne trium perfectum* – focuses on the manner in which Žižek (1991) uses ecology to illustrate psychological responses from a subject who is confronted with ecological crisis. Though this is some of his earliest work

on ecology, I see it as some of the freshest in that it doesn't end up with difficult relations between socialism/capitalism or crisis as one among many or one on its own. He frames ecology as in crisis not to necessarily suggest organizing against the crisis (as he does when describing it as an antagonism or part of the quilt of symbolic meaning) but to illustrate how three responses indicate different mind-sets of a contemporary subject attempting to deal with crisis. The schema is Lacanian and the challenge is dealing with the symbolisation of the real (or the Real or reality, each having a place in Žižek's reading of Lacan) and the role of the libidinal impulses that Žižek sees as governing each response.

The first and predominant reaction to ecological crisis is disavowal and cynicism. At one level the subject knows that there is an ecological crisis and that survival is at stake but nevertheless nothing comes from this observation as the subject also answers 'I'm not really prepared to integrate it into my symbolic universe, and that is why I continue to act as if ecology is of no lasting consequence for my everyday life' (p. 35). Cynicism, Žižek has noted, replaying the definition of Sloterdijk (1987) is the contemporary form that ideology takes as a disavowal of any belief that protects the subject from having to respond to disparities between their beliefs and actions that do not correspond. The ecological cynic knows very well that his diet or petrol consumption is linked to global warming but is unwilling, or unable, to find alternatives.

Second, Žižek (1991) adds to this cynical disavowal of crisis the obsessional subject who bases frenetic activity on an ultimatum: 'If I don't do this (the compulsive ritual), some unspeakably horrible X will take place' (p. 35). While Žižek describes what the X is for this example, the ecological crisis, he is unwilling to fill in the 'this' that would be the compulsive ritual. Whatever the act is, Žižek notes that the important outcome of the obsessional is that 'the inconsistency of the symbolic order is not disturbed; in this case, it refers to the disturbance of the established rhythm of nature' (p. 35). The very relentlessness of the obsessional response occludes and stands in the way of any dealing with root causes of the crisis.

The final response to ecological crisis is that of seeing a moral message in the events, he notes, in the same way that AIDS functioned as divine judgment for the 'moral majority'. The ecological crisis, if it is accepted at all by moralists, tends to be read as punishment 'for our ruthless exploitation of nature, for the fact that we have treated nature as a stack

of disposable objects and materials, not as a partner in dialogue or the foundation of our being' (p. 35). The lesson, as Žižek (1991) sees it, in this moral response, is to repent and return to the natural. But as I have noted above, Žižek sees that the attempt at a return to the natural relies on a misguided view of nature as a regular and rhythmic process.

Žižek's response to each of these three ecological subjectivities – cynical, obsessional, and moral – is the same: 'we must learn to accept the real of the ecological crisis in its senseless actuality, without charging it with some message or meaning' (p. 35). Žižek goes on to suggest that the split evidenced by the cynical response is a fetishistic split between the real and the modes of its symbolization. This split is the result of a crisis of symbolic efficacy that also explains the obsessional and moral relations to ecological crisis. The obsessional activity distracts the individual from the crisis of symbolic efficacy, while the moralist projects a message into the meaningless real. For Žižek, this crisis of symbolic efficacy is the *condition humaine* – the gap between the human who attempts to represent the world through speech and the occasional, but spectacular, rupture of that representation.

The example Žižek (1991) uses for such a rupture is Chernobyl – where a 'thoroughly unrepresentable' (p. 36) danger with 'no image adequate to the threat' (p. 36) nevertheless saw the discourse of science mobilized to challenge the commonsense observation of locals that nothing had changed and there was no cause for alarm (see, for example, Alexievich, 2015). The point for Žižek is that the Chernobyl crisis – where an invisible threat (in this case radioactive waves) extinguish life – exemplifies a fundamental disconnect between humans and the world in which they live, undermining any attempts by humans to feel like they are part of, or could return to, an ordered nature.

The basic weakness of the usual ecological response is thus its obsessive libidinal economy: we must do all in order that the equilibrium of the natural circuit will be maintained, in order that some horrifying turbulence will not derail the established regularity of nature's ways. To rid ourselves of this predominant obsessive economy, we must take a further step and renounce the very idea of a 'natural balance' supposedly upset by the intervention of man as 'nature sick unto death.' Homologous to the Lacanian proposition 'Woman does not exist,' we should perhaps assert that Nature does not exist: it does not exist as a periodic, balanced circuit, thrown off its track by man's inadvertence. (p. 37-8)

From this position Žižek (1991) uses his rejection of nature-as-rhythm to expand into a more general analysis of the opposition between order and chaos, where chaos is regulated by an attractor and disruption becomes repetitive with known forms.

Is there a coherent ecological position in Žižek's work?

Humans can go on living in a state of catastrophe, but is there room for humanity after an apocalypse? For Žižek, a socialist response to the ecological crisis will probably still lead to catastrophe, while only fidelity to the communist idea will lead to a response that will avoid apocalypse. In the first, a communal response on the level of each threat will allow humanity to survive, but only a communist response will also address the problem of who is included and excluded in these responses. Furthermore, a communist response is necessary to avoid these catastrophes slowly reaching a zero-point where they equal apocalypse. Contrasted with his earlier framing of crisis, the language from Žižek (2009, 2010) embraces that which he had once critiqued and accepts catastrophisation as a tool for politicisation.

Žižek's views on climate change are characterized by both ambiguity and paradox. While he has no doubt that ecological concerns are now much more important than the fate of a few trees – ignoring, for the sake of his narrative, the political organising around the ozone layer and nascent political movements concerned with climate change – he seems less certain about the crisis of climate change. That uncertainty is, to my mind, why he slips between the broad concern for ecological crisis, which could include other antagonisms such as the biogenetic crisis, and the more specific claims around the impact of climate change and global warming. As he writes in *Living in the End Times*, climate sceptics may well have a good point about limiting carbon-dioxide emissions, particularly if methane releases end up causing more harm. And, he notes, who knows what inventions and opportunities may arise serendipitously to radically alter the atmospheres of the debate?

Curiously in *Living in the End Times* Žižek (2010) repeats and deepens claims that hold to a climate change sceptic's view of just what is happening in the earth's ecology. First he describes the radical potential for life systems on earth to change, for example carbon dioxide starting global warming, which then unthaws peat bog leading to massive

methane emissions. Then he notes how unpredictable new technologies can be, such as the finding of a new fungus that flourishes off of radioactive material. Perhaps it is these unknown possibilities that lead Žižek to often be much more cautious about normative proclamations on global warming and climate change, preferring instead to focus on the broader category of ecology and the emancipatory potential of political organizing.

Žižek notes that it is ‘wrong to dismiss environmentalism’ (p. 352) as a fundamentalist religion used by atheists to combat spiritual gap, but also that ‘there is no reason to treat the eco-sceptics as being similar to Holocaust deniers’ (p. 352). He continues with, given more recent works do not go into ecological catastrophe, two ideas that might be his concluding thoughts on ecology and climate change: ‘there is a double lesson to be learnt from eco-sceptics about global warming: (1) how much ideology is indeed invested in ecological concerns; (2) how little we really know about the actual consequences of our activity in the natural environment’ (p. 352). So where does his more recent thought take Žižek? There is an indication at the end of his most explicit chapter on ecology: he reiterates the need for the kind (but not type) of militant fundamentalism of Christianity. In focusing on militancy of belief he connects to two other thinkers of political philosophy, Habermas and Mouffe, who both, in a broad reading, wanted to work out how passion can return to political beliefs. Habermas, in particular, made a start on this in his later works studying, as Žižek (2010) puts it – and which I also noted earlier – ‘people who *really* fundamentally believe and are ready to put their lives at stake for that belief’ (p. 352).

The paradoxes of Žižek’s thought have only briefly been touched on in this consideration of his thought on climate change, crisis and ecology, and will be drawn out more in the following section on his critique. Climate change has become the most compelling ecological crisis, however by more broadly speaking of ecological crisis he is able to gesture towards other threats such as species extinction, loss of biodiversity, and super weeds (Žižek, 2009). But what we have seen is a fascination with climate change as an example of a contemporary secular belief – the much quoted ecology as the ‘opium of the people’ that struggles to be reconciled with the kind of acts that would actually limit climate crisis. We *know* that a climate apocalypse is probable, he writes, and yet at the same time we do not *believe* it will actually take place. To parody that formula, the works I have considered show that Žižek *knows* that climate change will be a significant site

for political antagonism, and yet at the same time he does not *believe* it will actually challenge capitalism.

Despite these ambiguities and paradoxes, Žižek has consistently posed ecological crisis as one of four antagonisms that threaten the world today and which may lead to a zero-point of apocalypse. It would be interesting to have the Žižek of ‘The (Mis)Uses of Catastrophe’ as a reader of the Žižek of *Living in the End Times*. In the former he chides the tendency towards making every political struggle into a catastrophe, while in the latter he repeats and intensifies the same formula, bringing ecological catastrophe out from the pack of the four antagonisms and citing it as the major challenge of the times. The unchanging dimension across both works, which unites the Žižek who critiques catastrophic announcements with the Žižek who embraces them is the outcome of the critique: a revitalised communism that demands a collective solution.

Žižek on critique

By reading Žižek through his writings on climate change we have already seen some of his approach to this study’s larger concern: critical theories. We have seen his commitment to the emancipatory potential of the communist hypothesis as a form of belief in a more radically inclusive future, as well as numerous comments about what it means to believe in or be sceptical of ecological crisis.

The focus of this section is the way Žižek’s critique forges a link between Lacanian psychoanalysis and a Marxist critique of political economy. I begin by considering the way that Žižek sees ideology as straddling these two fields and how the concept of cynicism helps to describe the contemporary form of ideology. In his attempt to bring these two fields of knowledge together the terms real and reality are used at different times to first unproblematically signify a physical reality, but then also to refer to the symbolic construction of those conditions. These varied approaches to the real and ontology makes for confusion when attempting to ascertain how Žižek views ecological crisis. A second sub-section will look closer at the place of ontology in Žižek’s reading of Lacan. Through these two enquiries I aim to show both the potentials and problems of articulating a form of doubt as critique that fits with Žižek’s psychoanalysis and, in

turn, the articulation of an emancipatory politics of critique as articulated through Žižek's Marxism. A third section seeks to show that though his critique is multifarious and has changed through time, there is a self-reflective part to Žižek's work.

For a thinker with so many influences, and such mastery over turning theory back on itself and who often seems keen to be contrary, it might seem unlikely that we will find a straight or singular answer as to what criticality means to Žižek. He opens *Tarrying with the Negative* - described by Butler (2005) as Žižek's most philosophically complex - with a statement on what it means to do critique. For this Žižek (1993), those who wish to be critics must be content with the negation of the present, and finding in that negation the opening of a possibility for some other political formation. For example, he begins the book with the sublime image of a Romanian flag with the communist star literally cut out of its cloth. Žižek sees the enthusiasm of the anti-Ceausescu movement as embodied by that hole in the cloth, or lack - there was no positive ideological project that the protesters were in search of, he claims. The protesters simply wanted to be done with the current regime. The critical intellectual - if such a thing still exists, Žižek hedges - 'is precisely *to occupy all the time*, even when the new order (the new 'harmony') stabilizes itself and again renders invisible the hole as such, *the place of the hole*, i.e. to maintain a distance toward every reigning Master-Signifier' (p. 2). This occupying the place of negation, of a criticism that never settles on the specifics of an emancipatory project, Žižek claims, should be characteristic of the basic attitude of philosophy. Žižek goes on to consider Socrates as refusing to be identified with the Master's charisma, as persisting in a relationship to the void and stepping back from actuality to possibility. And yet Žižek, as we have seen in his work on the communist hypothesis is not just content with the philosopher's relation to the void. Consider his definition of the task of contemporary theory from the more recent *Less Than Nothing*:

The task of contemporary theory is thus double: on the one hand, to repeat the Marxist 'critique of political economy' without the utopian-ideological notion of communism as its inherent standard; on the other hand, to imagine really breaking out of the capitalist horizon without falling into the trap of returning to the eminently premodern notion of a balanced, (self-)restrained society (the 'pre-Cartesian' temptation to which most contemporary ecology succumbs). (Žižek, 2012, p. 257/8)

The role of theory is at first to continue to challenge the existing power structure of political economy, with the less utopian end point of actually existing communism in mind. And, at the same time, since we no longer have a vision of exactly what this post-capitalist world will look like, theory must also challenge fantasies over a return to something that has been lost. In these descriptions we have both the need to doubt our previous answers to what constituted criticality – i.e. a particular form of state communism as the culmination of Marxism – as well as a retained focus on the emancipatory in the language of ‘really breaking out’. Both of these formulations of critique align to Žižek’s earlier theorisation of the communist hypothesis: the retaining of an idea, even if its future form is not known, without sliding back into the historical necessity of either a particular kind of class struggle or inevitable harmony.

(i) *Žižek on critique and cynicism*

For Žižek critique requires an understanding of the present circumstances, both of a post-Soviet communism and a reconnection to psychoanalysis. In short, critique is ideology-critique and in that framing it is a tool to undermine fixed formulations of what ideas and relations structure an individual’s view of the world. While many of his later books focused on just one theoretical source (i.e. Hegel, Marx, Christianity, Lacan), it is in his first English text *The Sublime Object of Ideology* that he lays the foundations of his theoretical marrying of Marxism and psychoanalysis.

In the opening chapter of *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Žižek (1989) ties Marx to psychoanalysis (which is generally signified by Lacan, but sometimes through Freud) via a reading of Marx as the inventor of the symptom. The symptom is explained as a common denominator between a Marxist analysis of the commodity and the Freudian analysis of dreams. Both of these categories feature a secret that occludes a reality – in the Marxist case, the commodity hides the human relations behind production, in the psychoanalytic case, the dream hides the true desire of the dreamer. But Žižek goes a step further claiming that this secret is not tied to what the specific dream represents, but to the answer to the question of why the thought became articulated as a dream rather than as something more conscious. The same prognosis is made for the commodity: why does work, and indeed our whole economic system, take the form of wage relations

hidden in a commodity? Žižek (1989) shows how an understanding of Marxist thought is not simply supplemented by psychoanalysis, but that the two fields comprise similar theoretical ground: uncoverings, inversions, transcendentals and significations. The commodity form, and in particular money as the medium that allows for exchange, gives lie to the social symptom by undermining the universalism of bourgeois rights and duties. In the movement from a feudal to a bourgeois society the relations of domination are repressed, according to Žižek, and all subjects are interpellated as free. But beneath this sense of freedom, the same commodity relations exist, but they're no longer as obvious as they were in a feudal situation where it was quite clear that the rulers ruled and the serfs were subjugated.

The useful point about this introduction on Marx and the symptom is that it provides a basis for Žižek's investigation into contemporary forms of ideology in democratic societies that profess liberal values. Ideology in these democratic societies, he argues, has begun to mirror that of totalitarian states in that there is no longer an expectation that beliefs are fervently held, enduring or coalesce into more or less fixed identities. In contrasting his views with Umberto Eco's description of anti-totalitarian laughter and ironic distance, Žižek comes to describe his view of cynicism as a form of ideology: 'in contemporary societies, democratic or totalitarian, that cynical distance, laughter, irony, are, so to speak, part of the game. The ruling ideology is not meant to be taken seriously or literally' (p. 28). 'Does this mean,' Žižek asks, 'that we now live in a post-ideological society?' (p. 28). His answer is neither a yes nor a no, but is deferred until he can describe in more depth what ideology means today, and in particular how one can have an ideological system based on a lack of belief.

The basic definition of ideology for Žižek (1989) is Marx's 'they do not know it but they are doing it' (p. 28) which echoes, from Luke 22:34, Jesus' words to God during his crucifixion 'forgive them father for they know not what they do'. Žižek echoes Marx's riff on Christ in both content and as seeing a basic naiveté in the gap between belief and action. The traditional approach of ideology critique was revelation: you do not know that you are exploited, but here is how you are. The knowledge of exploitation was supposed to rid the subject of their incorrect belief and crystallise into a new, correct belief. Žižek outlines how the Frankfurt School moved beyond the basic thesis of ideology as a falsity to the idea that 'reality itself cannot reproduce itself with this so-

called ideological mystification' (p. 28). Ideology critique as removing a mask is no longer a tenable theory: the mask is not separate from the subject that wears it. The contemporary post-Frankfurt view of ideology sees it as a paradox: a being can only reproduce itself inasmuch as it misrecognises itself and 'the moment we see it 'as it really is', this being dissolves itself into nothingness or, more precisely, it changes into another kind of reality' (p. 28).

Žižek doubts that there remain naïve forms of ideological adherence today. He invokes Sloterdijk's (1988) *Critique of Cynical Reason* to argue that contemporary proponents of critique already know that few naïve adherents of ideology remain. Žižek agrees with Sloterdijk that instead of adherence to a set of beliefs, it is a wide-ranging disbelief that mostly characterises contemporary human views of the world. The cynical position 'renders impossible – or, more precisely, vain – the classic critical-ideological procedure. The cynical subject is quite aware of the distance between the ideological mask and the social reality, but he none the less still insists upon the mask' (p. 29). With cynical reason now dominant through knowing expressions like 'yes, but what did you really expect?' following any call to morality, Žižek sees the traditional critique of ideology as no longer functional.

To rescue critique and critical theory from a cynical dead-end – from an all-too-knowing malaise – Žižek suggests turning back to the example of commodity fetishism. He argues for locating ideological illusion less in the process of knowing and more in the doing. 'When individuals use money they know very well that there is nothing magical about it – that money, in its materiality, is simply an expression of social relations' (p. 31), but it is in the using, and in the way of using, that the fantastical relations come to life and that fetishism can be located. At this point, Žižek has not gone beyond Sloterdijk's description of cynicism but has refocused it on (in)action as opposed to (dis)belief.

By locating cynicism as a problem of how people behave rather than how they know, Žižek sees our present condition as something other than the post-ideological. He writes:

Cynical distance is just one way – one of many ways – to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them.* (p.33)

This formulation of cynicism pushes two concepts to the fore that have remained emphatic in Žižek's work: first, that ideological fantasy is pervasive and impossible to evade while, second, nevertheless there is a real world of doing that is both knowable, representable and in which beliefs are fixed. These two forms are not separate domains, but intertwined – the real world of capitalist modernity can only continue thanks to the presence of ideological fantasy.

Žižek's reading of belief as an exteriorised phenomenon is, once more, linked to both Marx and Lacan. For Marx, Žižek notes that instead of people believing, it is the things themselves – the commodities – that believe in their place. This is an important point as it emphasises both the agentic role of the commodity in Marx, but also moves the agent of critique away from believing-subjects to a wider realm of a relation between things that includes the category of subjects. This reversal is also backed up in Lacan who, Žižek suggests, also sees belief as 'radically exterior, embodied in the practical, effective procedure of people' (p. 34). To clarify his position Žižek (1989) gives an example:

It is similar to Tibetan prayer wheels: you write a prayer on a paper, put the rolled paper into a wheel, and turn it automatically without thinking (or, if you want to proceed according to the Hegelian 'cunning of reason,' you attach it to the windmill, so that it is moved around by the wind). In this way, the wheel itself is praying for me, instead of me – or, more precisely, I myself am praying through the medium of the wheel. The beauty of it all is that in my psychological interiority I can think about whatever I want, I can yield to the most dirty and obscene fantasies, and it does not matter because – to use a good old Stalinist expression – whatever I am thinking, *objectively* I am praying. (p. 34)

Though Žižek's phrase 'or more precisely' backtracks a little from presenting belief as radically exterior a few pages after an important lesson emerges: 'belief, far from being an 'intimate', purely mental state, is always *materialised* in our effective reality: belief supports the fantasy which regulates social reality' (p. 35). The making of belief into something that is not in utterances or language but in the body and the objects, and in particular, commodities that the body uses begins to establish Žižek's relation – from an Althusserian theory of ideology – to a materialized world outside of pure ideology. So instead of seeing belief and action as opposed, Žižek fuses the two concepts, leaving ideology as the fantastical form of knowing, expressing what is really believed.

From his 2001 book, *On Belief*, Žižek takes up similar questions but offers more of a practical stance for how to perform critique in the face of cynicism. There he suggests that when we are presented with the post-ideological idea that no one really believes any more, the response should be: ‘OK, but where is the fetish which enables you to (pretend to) accept reality ‘the way it is’? (p. 15). He gives the example of Western forms of Buddhism that enable people to split their internal and external selves so that the person can continue to function within the sped up world of contemporary competitive capitalism but which also allows people to feel they can withdraw to the real place of internal peace. For Žižek belief isn’t something that is the result of knowledge hitting some sort of pre-requisite. In contrast, belief augments knowledge, making up for the impossibility of full knowledge through the sheer assertion that something is so. People believe, not because they have sufficient knowledge, but because they do not. Belief makes up for a lack, rather than being merely descriptive: for example, if I was convinced of climate change then I would not need to state my belief in it.

(ii) Žižek on the Real and the political implications of a negative ontology

What we have seen so far – both in Žižek’s communist hypothesis and his focus on ideology critique – is a thinker with an explicit commitment to critique as a form of emancipatory politics and, in particular, to new potential forms of communism. But he has also been shown to be a thinker who embraces paradoxes and inversions of logic, and so is at least somewhat aligned to critique as a form of doubting and judgment. Specifically, Žižek showed that it was the absences and the secrets that wed Marx to Lacan in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.

In this section I am going to consider Žižek’s use of the Real, which in the previous section, lurked behind the secret: just as the commodity hid the human relations behind production, the dream hid the true desire of the dreamer. The focus on the Real is important for two reasons: the first reason relates to the perhaps tactical assertions about the reality of climate change in the previous section. While the real discussed here comes from his discussion of Lacan and is not the same as a – if we are to read him forgivingly – casual reference to reality, both concepts concern the second reason this discussion is important: Žižek’s ontology. A discussion of ontology and the Real provides a

background to how the kind of emancipatory political activities of communism might be both justified and communicated, even as a tactic rather than an enduring position.

What is the basis of this real and what is Žižek's basis for knowing it? I argue that many of his assertions slip a little too easily between terms such as 'real', 'the Real' and 'reality' as justifications for why certain political directions ought to be followed. For example, a brash form of realism can be found in many framings of his commitment to political struggle, such as earlier where he wrote of 'the only *true* question today' being between naturalised capitalism and its antagonisms. This concept of the true could be brushed off merely as a rhetorical trick of a big brother of theory, our elder sibling who we take on faith, at face value. But are these insistences on true questions and the reality behind things all that unrelated to his ontological framing of the flag with a hole in it where a star used to be? That central hole – ontological grounding as a lack which is also the presence of a whirling desire that threatens to obliterate all else – is barely mentioned in his more populist political tracts. Might Žižek's bristly rhetoric have taken the place of the star in the flag? As I will show in this section, whatever he considers as the centre ground, today his slipping between concepts of the Real highlight wider difficulties that are harder to explain away as phrasings in passing.

At heart this section is revisiting the relationship between an emancipatory Marxism in Žižek's more recent writings and the discussions of the place of the ontology as a lack that buffers this action, in contrast to less certain forms of the Real in his early work on Lacan. To focus on Žižek's use of Lacan to describe the Real I will mostly draw on Žižek's (1991) *Looking Awry: An introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*. Doing so will highlight some of the indeterminacy and contingency around Žižek's critical project. This complicating of his concept of the Real will also return some significance to the concept of belief, which more recent writings of Žižek downplayed when contrasted with action. The importance of this change is that Žižek highlighted a move away from thinking of belief as located within what people say they believe, towards being found in what people actually do. But if we accept that move, what would this suggest for the status of knowledge, including self-knowledge, and the ability to reflect on circumstances, change views, and offer a depiction of the Real that does not diverge from our actions?

To begin to understand the ontology of Žižek it is necessary to consider how he uses Lacanian psychoanalysis, both to discuss the Real as well as to make claims about ontology. I am not going to give a long overview of Lacan's schema of the three vectors of the Real, the imaginary and the symbolic, as those are discussed in depth in both Žižek (1989, 1991) as well as other commentators such as Marchart (2006). I will begin just by noting the point where Žižek starts to discuss the central lack of ontological ground both in Lacan and how this effects his work. In *Looking Awry* Žižek writes, 'the three objects on the sides of the triangle are perhaps nothing but the three ways to maintain a kind of distance towards this traumatic central abyss' (p. 135). The core of Lacan's psychoanalysis is defined as an emptiness. That emptiness drives the psyche in its continued pursuit of an unattainable desire.

Much more could be, and has been, written about Lacan's schema as well as Žižek's interpretation of it. But for this study what is most interesting is how the constitutive lack in Lacan's ontology relates to Žižek's attempts to justify political commitments. Here I am not talking about his political commitments as in his critique of the commodity that hides human relations behind production – which is less a positive commitment and more of a critique – but of his commitments to communism, made in *First as Tragedy then as Farce*, some twenty years later, which frame his understanding of climate crisis. In terms of critique as a process of doubt and a rigorous form of self-reflection, it is difficult to tally Žižek's commitments to the communist hypothesis – however removed that is – with his belief in the Real as either the empty kernel of desire, or as a vector alongside, and in relation to the imaginary and the symbolic.

The challenge of theorising the political from this negative ontology has been the subject of much work in recent years, with particularly insightful work from Tønder and Thomassen (2005), who frame the issue around the contrast between ontologies of lack and abundance, in what they describe as a contrast between 'imaginaries', and the place of radical democracy. They write that in adding theories of abundance, primarily through Gilles Deleuze's work, to theories of lack, there is 'potential for empowerment of alternative modes of life' (p. 7). Marchart (2007) goes further, and is more specific, in seeking to both historicise and contextualise the ontological lack in a post-foundational politics by asserting the difference between the abyss and grounding: it is not that *all* grounding is impossible, just a final grounding. Perhaps the best

description of this process comes from Marchart (2005) who begins with background of just how an ontology of lack came to be at the heart of some contemporary political thought, beginning with Kojève, and reaching Lacan via Sartre. Marchart then considers how Žižek – in addition to Badiou, Laclau and Mouffe and Lefort – uses this ontology to produce a theory of radical democracy. He writes:

According to Žižek, it is the duty of critical intellectuals, and of emancipatory politics in general, to try to keep this empty place open, and to defend it against any ideology promising once and for all to fill up this place. Democracy then is nothing else than the - impossible, but necessary - attempt to institutionalise lack. (p. 23-4)

It is important to note that the Žižek featured in Marchart's discussion is that of his first book in English as well as Žižek (1993), and so does not deal with his subsequent communist positioning (2009; 2010). Marchart (2005) is circumspect about just which Žižek should be read, noting him to be sometimes a Leninist and sometimes a radical democrat. He concludes by noting, 'even where lack, abundance and difference come to be accepted by emancipatory political projects, there is no guarantee that these projects will necessarily be radical democratic' (Marchart, 2005, p. 28).

In terms of the concepts of critical theory considered in this study, the empty kernel at the centre of the Real – which has also been discussed above as an ontology of lack – makes for an awkward bedfellow with philosophical concepts of doubt and scepticism, when also paired with the emancipatory side of politics. Terminologically, Žižek's Lacanian lexicon make the terms doubt and disbelief seem like relics of a positivist era: doubt might only exist as the minor shadow of Truth; scepticism as a plot device to make Knowledge a worthy goal. But underlying the terminological differences is a similarity in the stronger readings of the concepts of critique as a form of philosophical scepticism. The philosophical form of scepticism, as with the Lacanian empty core of the ontological, are unable to provide any ground from which to launch an emancipatory political project. But as Tønder and Thomassen (2005) argue, it does offer a theory of lack that could subsequently be combined with theories of abundance that might, contingently, offer a theory of the social for subsequent ideological projects to fill. But even if we construe an ontology as a lack which allows political formations to

subsequently fill this lack, there is still no explanation for Žižek's commitment to a particular kind of communist form, especially if this is used as a reason for avoiding non-communist ways of minimising or challenging climate change.

The empty core of the ontological means that politics emerging with a metalanguage cannot be fixed or guaranteed. I see that Žižek's ontology leads more to a politics that contests that which already exists, and theorises on the manner in which politics might emerge from a lack, rather than reinvigorates something specific like communism (or even some non-specific like the communist hypothesis). The striving to bridge a gap between an emancipatory politics and a negative ontology that I have shown in Žižek's work is not so far from the gap framing critique in this study between a philosophical scepticism and an emancipatory politics. The next section on Žižek and critique will draw on one other aspect of critique – self-reflection – to consider if Žižek has attempted to understand and mitigate this seeming paradox between his emancipatory political project and his use and understanding of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

(iii) Žižek as critic; Žižek as criticised

The final section on Žižek and critique will seek to bring some clarity to the picture by considering how he has responded to some of the secondary criticism levelled at him, as well as some consideration of one crucial moment that divides his own work into two periods of thought. In 'Concesso non Dato' Žižek (2005b) begins by offering responses to some standard criticisms of his work. I will address two of them here. First, there is the criticism that Žižek oscillates between positions: 'between democracy and pseudo-revolutionary fundamentalism, between postmodernism and traditional Marxism, between critique of totalitarianisms and its ambiguous embracing' (p. 219). His first response is that he does not oscillate but has made a number of simple shifts in his position between earlier and more recent thinking. He gives the example of a 2002 shift from his allegiance to an earlier reading of Lacan as focussed on castration to one focussed on drives that parallels a shift from a focus on democracy to a focus on post-democratic politics.

The second standard reproach made against Žižek is that his political stance is vacuous – he argues for a down to earth anti-capitalism, but never formulates it in concrete terms.

Žižek again rejects the claim, arguing, ‘in today’s constellation, the primary focus should not be on anti-capitalism, but on undermining the fetishist status of democracy as a master signifier’ (p. 222). Whether that 2005 position holds true today in the post global financial crisis world – where he has returned to anti-capitalist themes and to the communist hypothesis – is unclear.

These two responses from Žižek to critiques of his work show that he does see himself, or at least has seen himself, as having enduring philosophical positions that are grounded enough in politics for a change to be registered. If we take a closer look at his framing in ‘Foreword to the Second Edition’ (2002) we see the rare spectacle of Žižek critiquing Žižek. He begins by lamenting that all those readers who preferred his *Sublime Object of Ideology* to *For they know not what they do* ‘obviously missed the crucial argument of both books’ (p. xi). The failure of *The Sublime Object* (as he abbreviates it) was, according to him, that it was still infused with the bourgeois ideology of democracy and only occasionally accepted ‘Marxism proper’ (p. xviii). *The Sublime Object* also, he notes, radically misread the Lacanian triad of the Real-Imaginary-Symbolic and turned the central abyss of the Real into a kind of heroism that revelled in its own failure. His reflection on escaping from his error is worth quoting: ‘It took me years of hard work to identify and liquidate these dangerous residues of bourgeois ideology clearly’ after which he points to the three levels that needed clarification around his reading of Lacan, democracy and the act, which later becomes his adherence to Badiou’s notion of the event (see Žižek, 2014). Replacing this revelling in failure, I argue, is his commitment to the kind of militancy he cites in Christian fundamentalism and which is celebrated in Žižek (2010). The militancy he argues for does not have the same commitment to Lacan’s work as his pre-2002 writings.

The aim of this study on Žižek and critique has been to consider how Žižek negotiates between pulls to side with the critical emancipatory projects of climate change (or communism for that matter) or to side with a Lacanian view that highlights desire as a political factor and allows for theorising of the political terrain, but which is a long way from stating or justifying a particular political project.. This is not to suggest psychoanalysis is pessimistic, that it lacks the kind of critical urgency required to respond to political problems. Rather than coming to a moment where he would reject doubt or politics, Žižek links the faculties of psychoanalysis, politics and philosophy but crowns

neither/nor as the faculty to rule all others. That holding at arm's length sometimes looks like an unwillingness to reflect on his own claims on and commitment to the communist idea.

Critique, given these tensions between ontology and political commitments, might congeal into a third form: of extrapolating upon the paradoxes that construct our myriad forms of knowing that are neither reducible to one another, nor happily co-existent. This form of critique – not wholly dissimilar to Butler (2002) – would describe paradoxes but would not see the resolution of them as the necessary or just role of critique: describing the paradox would be productive enough and in and of itself might offer new insights into theoretical or practical problems.

Directions in environmental communication from Žižek

In my analysis of how Žižek sees ecological crisis, I have shown how he frames critical-emancipatory politics via a range of antagonisms that support a central structuring anti-capitalist imaginary. These antagonisms offer fresh approaches that could help those in environmental communication to play off a range of scenarios about how capitalism and politics may or may not challenge climate crisis. To recap, we saw Žižek's critique as lending itself to the greater task of enabling people to become emancipated from capitalism. Antagonisms such as ecological crisis were what motivated individuals to rise up and challenge existing power structures. Expanding the commons could solve three of these antagonisms. However there remained one antagonism that was based on the very inclusion of people within spaces that benefit from these reforms: the new apartheid of walls and slums. For Žižek, the only way that this final antagonism could be addressed would be with a properly anti-capitalist strategy that held true to the communist idea.

Collective forms of emancipatory action would come about structured around a contingent real – in this case the four antagonisms - that contingently or otherwise holds the ontological ground of the centre, or the quilting point. For Žižek, this connection between what we believe or have access to as the Real, and the corresponding actions, are not necessary and are radically split. Beliefs do not derive from knowledge in a rational manner – they are held tightly, for the very reason that belief makes up for the

gap between what we know and what total knowledge might be required for a belief to be justified. The actions we take, such as protesting against government inaction on climate change, aren't connected to a rational outline of our beliefs as derived from knowledge. Instead they're connected to drives and desires, most centrally the vortex of *jouissance* at the centre of attempts to understand our world through the interactions between the imaginary, symbolic and real.

It might be tempting to see the breadth of the topics covered by Žižek as indicating that perhaps he really offers nothing substantial to say to environmental communication. While he oscillates between many views of our ecological future, I see this as a strength rather than a weakness. In bringing Žižek's politics together with his psychoanalytic theory we find an unwieldy influence of critical theories that are powerful for casting doubt on ecological crisis, and yet at the same time suggest a way forward for participating in political struggles around such crisis. Hence, ecology is at once one of the most powerful ideologies of the age and potentially the site of capitalism's greatest profits, while also being one of a range of apocalyptic antagonisms that could ground a collective response to the end of times.

Given these diverse possibilities I want to conclude this section on Žižek, drawing environmental communication to critique with four ideas on what use Žižek could be for scholars in the sub-field. First, Žižek offers a counterpoint to the tendency for people talking about the environment to speak to an original or enduring view of nature as orderly and something to which humans need to return. There are echoes in this thought of a Nietzschean rejection of a search for origins as a way to give meaning to human existence: if there is no ordered and rhythmic nature to return to, then humans must think more deeply about what future they are creating rather than fighting against a future that looks different from today. Second, his focus on the manner in which ecological antagonisms might be dissolved by creating more social exclusions offers an important factor to be considered when environmental communicators read and create potential solutions. There is no discussion of how many people would be on which side of the walls, but if that is seen as a comfort to some who perceive new walls to not be such a problem, then they should consider the possible biggest walls between functioning ecologies and themselves. That biggest wall could be something as extensive as the atmospheric and space gap between a ravaged earth and an outer space or Mars that

houses the 0.1% of the wealthiest. The ecological crisis of, for example, rising oceans could be solved by buying a home on a hill but that excludes the poorest who will bear the greatest brunt of ecological catastrophe. Alternatively, a more just, though more difficult, approach to ecological crisis will see the need to expand commons-based solutions that reject these barriers. In short, the question of a communist response to climate change needs to be taken seriously, otherwise there is potential for what Žižek calls a merely socialist response that might defuse ecological crises for the West by ensuring the burden is felt by others, such as low lying nations.

The third insight from a reading of Žižek for environmental communication is the seductive capacity of catastrophisation. As I have shown, Žižek first describes how this process works to imbue a problematic urgency into an issue, while just a few years later using the same tactic himself to heighten the tensions around the four antagonisms that may lead to catastrophe or apocalypse. The lesson for environmental communication is one of both understanding where we are catastrophising but at the same time being prepared to offer these views of what a future might look like without changes to the way that we organise production and consumption. At other points Žižek (2000) is skilled at rejecting just such false choices and attempting to offer political solutions that are not dependent on naivety or bad faith.

A final insight offered by Žižek is a complication of how political movements are to be understood in relation to ontologies of lack. As with Marchart (2005) it is difficult to agree that Žižek's earlier Lacanian oriented work has a correspondence to his more recent work on the communist hypothesis. Does this mean that ontologies both of lack and abundance will be mostly irrelevant to those in the subfield of environmental communication? Or does it just mean that theorists of this area need to be aware of these discussions and use them to undermine the bad arguments and grounding made by other theorists who try to ground their worldview in nature or the natural order? The next theorist that I will consider – Timothy Morton – uses some of Žižek's work, alongside literary theory, to do just this kind of critical work on challenging the interconnection between nature and ecology. And yet, as we will see, there are also attempts to rethink and reposition ontology in this work that also do not sit comfortably alongside a critical theory linked to political action and emancipation, albeit from a very different angle than Žižek's communist hypothesis.

Chapter Four

Critique and Climate Change in Morton

If crisis is central to environmental, as well as climate, communication then Timothy Morton's work offers an example that refuses to privilege thought and theory to urgency. His earliest writings on narrative tropes from environmentalism describe many of the techniques used by environmental writers and activists to privilege their voices, but which may have problematic long term implications for those wanting to address ecological crisis. Morton's more recent work offers a rich theory of complexity - in the name of the hyperobject and hypocrisy - that parses conflicts between knowledge and doubt that environmental communication scholars should benefit from. While it might seem that Morton undermines the strength of some of the strongest rhetorical tools of those communicating for an environment, he leaves us with the question of whether that sense of strength is really so strong or functional.

Background

Timothy Morton approaches the field of critique not from the political economy or psychoanalytic perspectives that characterised earlier Critical Theory but from the literary tradition of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is a field of study that considers both the rhetorical and political implications of ecological writings, in particular literary texts. Morton's aim, at least in his initial work *Ecology without Nature* (2007), is to use a range of tools from philosophy, art and psychoanalysis to critique strains of romanticism that he sees as tightly bound to most contemporary ecocriticism.

Morton's thought, especially in *Ecology without Nature*, is wary of succumbing to the urgency of crisis. In later work, however, he also attempts to break with the type of criticality that leads him to the ecological awareness he seeks to champion. As a reader and a student of Morton's writings I want to give his object-oriented ontology the

benefit of a hearing despite the zealous – and almost overzealous – attempts to claim that an object-orientation marks a break with a millennia of thought (Morton, 2013b).

This chapter begins by describing the manner in which Morton discusses climate change and global warming. As with other theorists I have considered, I then step back and look at the theoretical context in which Morton positions ecology and, in this case, Nature. This section is split into three parts with the more specific depictions of climate change and global warming coming first, and then two separate analyses of how ecology is treated by Morton. The first of these depictions of ecology is as a critique of, and a critique with, the field of ecocriticism. There I focus on Morton's (2007) elaborations on the concepts of ecomimesis, dark ecology and other literary responses to Romantic literature and ecology. In the third section of this chapter I then make two separate analyses of Morton's treatment of ecology based on his work on the hyperobject that defies the usual forms of human cognition and requires new ways of thinking about the relationship between humans and the world in which we dwell (Morton, 2013). These two versions of ecology may at first appear as a progression of thought from early Morton to a more mature Morton, however, with the appearance of Morton's (2016) *Dark Ecology* – the published version of 2014's Wellesley lecture series – any idea that he has moved on or broken with his earlier work needs to be suspended.

The second sub-section of this chapter begins by considering what Morton means when he invokes the concept of critique and critical thinking. I argue that there is a difference between the kind of critique advanced in Morton's (2007) first ecocritique and where that critique has ended up in Morton's (2013a, 2013b) more recent work, in particular with texts on object-oriented ontology. In his earlier work Morton positioned a form of dark ecology as allied with deconstructionism but against postmodernism. This alliance was based on his extensive use of Derrida against a form of relativistic thinking that is only ever grounded in opposition to postmodernism. Critique was valorised as opposed to both a relativistic postmodernism and a pragmatic positivism. In his two 2013 books, critique-as-theory is abandoned for a new allegiance to an ontological positioning that speaks of a much bolder project: of overturning hundreds, if not thousands, of years of Western philosophy in favour of the 'cool fizz' of the object oriented theory. Specifically, Morton draws on aesthetics and rhetoric to reframe how humans consider causality to operate in the natural sciences. He also

challenges thinkers like Graham Harman (Morton, 2013b) to include deconstructionist accounts in contrast to phenomenology in their descriptions of object oriented ontologies.

I conclude the section with some thoughts on the relevance of Morton's criticisms for the sub-field of environmental communication. As of late 2016, despite the thousand citations for *Ecology without Nature* measured by Google Scholar, only one has been made in the journal *Environmental Communication* – see Hodgins and Thompson's (2011) study of the Romantic and Extractive Gaze. I am most interested in the way that Morton's critique of romanticism, his parsing of the meaning of hypocrisy and his use of an object orientation to discuss rhetoric, as well as ontology, could resonate with this audience. His influence in the sub-field of ecocriticism gives some hope for a project with interests and loyalties in both ecological/environmental thought and practice as well as critical theory.

Morton on climate change and ecological crisis

Morton's two earlier works – now almost a decade old – that most explicitly deal with ecology are *Ecology without Nature* (2007) and *The Ecological Thought* (2010a). These books deal less with specifics on global warming and climate change than they do with a challenge to the rhetoric deployed in ecocriticism, with a particular focus on a lineage of Romanticism. Though *Hyperobjects* (2013a) takes global warming as a far more central concern this does not mean that the text features a more urgent tone. This section will first be an elaboration on how Morton discusses global warming and climate change across his major texts. The section will focus on *Hyperobjects* whilst also drawing from some of his earlier work. I will then step back and describe three areas of thought that Morton has devised around ecology: ecocritical romanticism, hyperobjects and object-oriented ontology.

(i) *Global warming caused by climate change*

In *Ecology Without Nature* (Morton, 2007) there are many uses of the term global warming, but none of them go beyond an overt assertion that global warming is happening. Similarly *The Ecological Thought* (2010a) contains some reference to global warming, but most of the time the term functions as an intensifier, heightening the threat which humans face from an ecology that we do not understand. For example, Morton (2010a) writes, ‘We’re responsible for global warming. Formally responsible, whether or not we caused it. We’re responsible for global warming simply because we’re sentient. No more elaborate reason is required’ (p. 98). Global warming scepticism is dealt with in a similarly abrupt manner where Morton (2010a) lists the contradictory views that appear on websites opposed to the concept of global warming. This plethora of contradictory views – it is not happening, it is happening but we did not cause it, it is happening and we caused it but we cannot do anything about it – leads Morton to reject all opposition to global warming because there is no single, coherent voice that critiques global warming. The audience for both of these earlier texts are not expected to need the reasoning one might explore with a more diverse group of readers, despite *The Ecological Thought* being an attempt at writing a mainstream version of *Ecology without Nature*.

In contrast to these texts, Morton’s (2013) *Hyperobjects* does take up the challenge of presenting a case for global warming. In a book that draws from aesthetic theory and makes sharp use of contemporary art, it is ironic that the first image the reader encounters is a simple line graph. In contrast to the sublime sun-dappled iceberg of the book’s cover, the graph draws its authority from a stark representation of 130 years of data (1880-2010) of global temperature changes. The graph is decisive, despite fluctuations: temperatures have been on the increase for at least one hundred years. The graph as the book’s Figure 1 is the archetype of a bloodied hatchet presented on the first day in a murder trial: it is the conclusive evidence around which the rest of the case is built. With a singular reference to Figure 1 in the text, Morton moves on to describe the age as the Anthropocene, an age where humans are geological in our ability to influence the direction of the planet.

Morton (2013) is very deliberate about his usage of the terms *climate change* and *global warming* in contrast to the direct and assertive, though cursory, treatment of the

debate around global warming, anthropogenic causes and the science of CO2 emissions. He spells this out early on,

Throughout *Hyperobjects* I shall be calling it *global warming* and not *climate change*. Why? Whatever the scientific and social reasons for the predominance of the term *climate change* over *global warming* for naming this particular hyperobject the effect in social and political discourse is plain enough. There has been a decrease in appropriate levels of concern. (p.7)

The naming of the phenomena as global warming, he argues, heightens concern, while climate change decreases concern. The ‘plain enough’ of his argument gives escape path for the causal link he insinuates between the use of climate change and a decrease in concern over climate change. A page after he notes that while he prefers global warming as shorthand, ‘logically it is correct to say ‘global warming as a result of climate change’’ (p.8). If we simply say climate change, he notes, we allow the cynics from the right and the left to claim that the climate has always been changing. This is not entirely convincing and there could certainly be an argument made that the complexity of discussing the variabilities in climate is as important as the one-sidedness of a warming.

In contrast to the world-weariness of those he calls cynics, Morton thinks humans need to be both shocked and anxious about the ecological changes facing the age ahead. The need for these newer rhetorical methods of responding to global warming derives from it presenting a different, altogether more difficult task:

Global warming is what some philosophers have called *a wicked problem*: this is a problem that one can understand perfectly, but which there is no rational solution. Global warming has now been labelled a *super wicked problem*: a wicked problem for which time is running out, for which there is no central authority, where those seeking the solution to it are also creating it, and where policies discount the future irrationally. (p. 135)

The concept of a wicked problem hints at the difficulties of a response to climate change that is simply the transmission of scientific knowledge to a populace: the problem may be ‘perfectly understood’ but that understanding does not automatically lead to the adoption of a solution. The *super* wicked problem ups the stakes by adding

two temporal factors – urgency and a future that is irrationally discounted – as well as the hypocrisy of those who are inextricably connected to the problem.

One of the more intriguing moments in the wider discussion of *Hyperobjects* is Morton's reframing of the term hypocrisy. As with cynicism, which Morton opposed earlier in the text, hypocrisy is a disconnect between what somebody says and/or believes and what they do. The hypocrisy of global warming as a hyperobject is not some affectation of a moral agent as we might usually mean when we use the word hypocrisy. The problem is not that someone claims too much, but that their claims are inextricable from an impotence to solve super wicked problems. Hypocrisy, he writes, 'results from the conditions of the impossibility of a metalanguage' (p.4) with which hyperobjects could be adequately represented. The gap between utterances and acts is impossible to bridge and so every attempt to name and explain the hyperobject comes up short. Note the difference between the super wicked problem and the wicked problem: Morton claims that the wicked problem is understood perfectly, but with the super wicked problem, the lack of a central authority makes similar claims impossible.

Hypocrisy for Morton (2013) is a term without a moral judgment on the gap between actions and stated beliefs, but with a sense of awe pitted against the scale of the crisis and the size of ourselves as observers. As Morton explains 'the overall aesthetic 'feel' of the time of hyperobjects is a sense of *asymmetry* between the infinite power of cognition and the infinite being of things. There occurs a crazy arms race between *what we know and what is*, in which the technology of what we know is turned against itself' (p.22). Global warming becomes a hypocritical phenomenon in *Hyperobjects* moving away from judgments of right and wrong and towards first attempts to adequately describe the scale of the concept of a hyperobject and the challenge of super wicked problems

Global warming as a part of Morton's later work on object-oriented philosophy begins to interrogate the notion of causality in his other 2013 book *Realist Magic*. Though Morton does not go into as much depth explaining climate change in *Realist Magic*, relying on the reader's knowledge and willingness to go with his arguments as per the earlier work, he does elaborate in some more depth on the object that is global warming. 'Consider global warming,' he writes,

an entity that is made up of sunlight, carbon dioxide, fossil fuel burning engines and so on. Seven percent of global warming effects will still be manifest a hundred thousand years from now, slowly being absorbed by igneous rocks. That's more than ten times all of recorded history so far, a preposterously high number. It's almost inconceivable. Yet we see the effects of global warming all around us: we see charts from NASA that plot temperature rises; we feel rain on our heads at strange times of the year; we witness drought. None of these experiences are directly global warming: they are its aesthetic effects. (2013b, p. 57)

While these kinds of observations as to how global warming might appear went unwritten in his earlier works, in *Realist Magic* Morton's focus has turned specifically to objects. There is little of the sense of doom or responsibility in the tone of this text compared to that which accompanied his earlier works. In *Realist Magic*, global warming functions as a foil to discuss objects rather than a challenge to describe in and of itself.

For Morton, the climate is changing – and the most damaging effect is global warming – but humans do not have the ability to understand and communicate effectively on movements at such a massive scale. His first attempt to address this weakness was to reframe how ecocriticism talks about the world and humans. In that attempt global warming was one symptom of a rapidly degrading ecosystem. His second attempt to communicate about these changes was by describing a new form of object – the hyperobject – and what differentiates these objects from more understandable phenomena. In that attempt, global warming – because it is represented by a climate that changes - is the arch hyperobject that needs understanding and responding to. Finally, Morton tried to synthesise some of his broader thoughts by communicating on an entirely different ontological framework – object-oriented ontology. In that attempt, global warming was a distributed object manifesting in many different ways and with a complex causal system. The two elaborations that follow draw out these three attempts to address our difficulty communicating about these phenomena within a broader context of ecological thought.

(ii) *Ecology and Romanticism*

The crisis of ecology in *Ecology without Nature* (Morton, 2007) is as much a failure to represent ecology as it is a crisis on the atmospheric level of temperatures rising. The idea of language not doing its job for ecology might seem an obvious one: of course there has been a failure to communicate what is really going on in the world around us. But Morton digs deeper than this. It is not only that humans have not had enough interest, discussion or media commentary on ecological crisis, but the very language that has been used to describe the crisis is part of the problem. Before analysing how Morton frames a new form of ecocriticism, I want to give some background to ecomimesis and the beautiful soul syndrome, the literary devices and concepts that Morton identifies as central to the problem. I then describe the dark ecology he would like to see replace the current array of representations.

If this section seems a little too far removed from questions of crisis, I would suggest a consideration of Morton's (2007) own discussion of the question of urgency and timing: 'From an environmentalist point of view, this is not a good time. So why undertake a project that criticizes ecocriticism at all?' (p.10) After citing his bad timing he contrasts the pondering of theory with a wide range of urgent problems facing the world such as global warming, destruction of coral reefs, radiation poisoning and the persistence of other toxins. 'What a perfect opportunity to sit back and reflect on ideas of space, subjectivity, and poetics', (p. 10) Morton responds, concluding that perhaps there is no better time than when pressured from all sides by the demands of urgency to draw on theory.

What is the point of reflecting like this? Some think that ecocriticism needs what it calls 'theory' like it needs a hole in the head. Others contend that this aeration is exactly what ecocriticism needs. In the name of ecocriticism itself, scholarship must reflect—theorize, in the broadest sense. Since ecology and ecological politics are beginning to frame other kinds of science, politics and culture, we must take a step back and examine some of the ecology's ideological determinants. (p. 10)

Ecocriticism, Morton asserts, tries to be closer to nature than a text permits. This process of being in nature and reflecting nature back to an audience derives from

conceptions of nature that he traces through Romanticist writings. The Romantics, though not the first to do so, led to the popularity of contemporary discourses that separate humans from the environment and then venerates the latter. Morton argues that even though Romanticism was a specific period of writings, the relationship of the Romanticist author to nature persists in an occluded manner in contemporary ecocriticism. This relationship between romanticist writing and contemporary ecocriticism is most clearly found in the persistence of the literary device of ecomimesis.

Ecomimesis is a style of writing that describes the surroundings of the author who is writing the text, and hence to locate the author as being in an environment. To offer an example, Morton opens Chapter One of *Ecology without Nature* with three versions of what he observed around him as he began to write the book. This is the first:

As I write this I am sitting on the seashore. The gentle sound of waves lapping against my deck chair coincides with the sound of my fingers typing away at the laptop. Overhead the cry of a gull pierces the twilit sky, conjuring up a sensation of distance. (p. 29)

After every time he gives the ecomimetic description he pulls back from the scene, rejecting the pull of ecomimesis: ‘that was pure fiction; just a tease’ (p. 29). Ecomimesis, he notes, appears with ‘astonishing frequency’ (p. 30) in all manner of ecological texts. As a rhetorical strategy that evokes a sense of reality, the use of ecomimesis suggests not only that reality is solid and independent but that the technique of writing – and its pair, reading – is a poor substitute for actually being there. In attempting to evoke something beyond the text, ecomimesis is still irrevocably connected to the diminished powers and limitations of the text.

The theory of ecomimesis confesses the weakness of the text by explaining how the author steps outside, or above, to say what’s *really* happening as well as seeking to go beyond a mere saying. If ecocriticism needs theory like it needs a hole in the head, we might suggest nature has a similar relationship to literature. Ecomimesis thus involves the process of disavowing the text successfully through text, like a teacher seeking credibility by repeating the maxim ‘those who can, do; those who can’t, teach’. Morton

also notes ecomimetic attempts from other art forms: a minimalist painter who hangs just a frame, or John Cage's composition of silence.

The achievement of ecomimesis is to evoke a surrounding, or as Morton calls it, 'a poetics of ambience' (p. 33). He describes a *strong* form of ecomimesis that purports to evoke the here and now of writing through being situated. This is a postmodern device, he notes, inasmuch as strong ecomimesis draws on the author also describing their own role in the writing process. For example, see Morton's example indented above: 'as I write this' it begins. A *weak* ecomimesis by contrast, can be seen 'whenever writing evokes an environment' (p. 33). Situatedness is the decisive factor, and in an age of ecological peril, the strong form of ecomimesis 'raises its lone voice in the jaws of general doom' (p. 33).

Morton emphasises that ecomimesis is not just a common opening rhetorical gambit of literature and poetry but is regularly employed as a technique in ecocriticism, citing the work of Lawrence Buell and James McKusick. The intention of using ecomimesis is to slough off some of the ambience of the world as an authenticating device for the authorial voice. The authentication is not just for a narrative, but for 'a vast and complex ideological network of beliefs, practices and processes in and around the idea of a natural world' (p.33). For example, Morton contrasts the Romanticism of most ecomimesis with an alternative ecomimesis of the Orient: a land that is not our environment, but is nevertheless evoked to speak of a people and their customs.

The second useful theory for thinking of ecological crisis from Morton's *Ecology without Nature* is his elaboration on Hegel's idea of the beautiful soul. Where I have already shown how he used the critique of ecomimesis to turn the surrounding environment into something stranger than it had been, the theory of the beautiful soul moves from a critique of ambience to that of the subjectivity produced by a close identification with nature. Morton (2007) describes the beautiful soul as the person who:

washes his or her hands of the corrupt world, refusing to admit how in this very abstemiousness and distaste he or she participates in the creation of that world. The world-weary soul holds all beliefs and ideas at a distance. (p. 13)

Morton begins his study of the beautiful soul from an unusual place: a consideration of Margaret Thatcher's plan to get Britain 'really tidy' (p. 109). The beautiful soul, he writes, is not just the abstracted dandy who does nothing, but also the person who actively constructs a sense of identity around lifestyle choices. Though he cautions against universalising the present day's consumerism into ahistorical truth, he makes note of the role that consumerism as an ideology-of-curation also played in the rise of Romanticism. Morton claims that today, 'environmentalisms *in general* are consumerist' (p. 114) citing the role of both National Parks as specific, enclosed sites for legitimating the everyday industrial world while environmentalist poetry is another balm to soothe the hurt minds and bodies of those afflicted by the realities of work. Though he is often hyperbolic Morton claims, 'without doubt, the discovery of the beautiful soul as the form of ecological consumerism is the most important concept in this book' (p. 121). The concept of the beautiful soul is, to Morton, the clearest formulation of the subjective dimension of ecocritique. While the beautiful soul seems untainted by the muckiness of the world, it is not without the ability to intercede. Referencing Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Morton describes the consciousness of the beautiful soul as holding to the moment of decision and treasuring the power inherent in not making a choice about how to be in the world. And yet, by seeing itself as free and independent to make the choice on how to be in the world, the beautiful soul lacks all reflexivity at the same time as universalising its own incomplete knowledge to be sufficient. How is that knowledge sufficient? Simply because it is the knowledge possessed by the beautiful soul, which is always already aware of its own perfection against the world.

The beautiful soul wishes to transcend the messiness of politics by rejecting left and right and claiming the space of a deep, or deeper (or deepest) ecology. As opposed to a third way politics – one contemporary discourse for getting beyond left and right – the beautiful soul's technique is to abandon politics for purity. For example, though the beautiful soul would like to see deep ecological thought at the centre of life, the idea of working with local councils or even voting is seen as tainting the purity of the awoken individual.

Having surveyed and rejected the ecocritical reliance on the beautiful soul, Morton (2007) also does away with the political project of deep ecology. Deep ecology is a

theory that assumes a connection between an ecological subject and the world as one of ‘love and light’ (p. 198) without elaborating on the manner in which ‘love and light’ might involve any compromise or plan for change. Instead of a deepness that takes the form of ultimate reconciliation – deep ecology runs still, we might say – Morton proposes a murky, dark form of ecological thinking:

The ecological thought, the thinking of interconnectedness, has a dark side embodied not in a hippie aesthetic of life over death, or a sadistic-sentimental Bambification of sentient beings, but in a ‘goth’ assertion of the contingent and necessarily queer idea that we want to stay with a dying world: *dark ecology*. (p. 184-5)

Dark ecology is a relationship to the world that recognises that we, humans, have caused the environmental crises that we also oppose. It does not reduce subjectivity to a mind/body dualism, but neither does it seem satisfied by a construction that transcends such a dualism. Morton prefers, at least in *Ecology without Nature*, to see the subjectivity of dark ecology as dancing with the dualism, reliant on contingency rather than on an identification with the deepness of objective nature. As opposed to the apoliticism of deep ecology, he finds space within a theory of dark ecology for human desires and passion that he sees opposed in the theory of the beautiful soul.

Something of a reconciliation with the aims and efforts of deep ecology appears at the conclusions of *Ecology without Nature* where Morton describes the book as an attempt to do a ‘really deep ecology’ (p. 202) that lets go of the concept of nature. The influence of darkness over this really deep ecology would come through maintaining a presence at the fringes, and a distance towards the rush to unite with the nonhuman. In this attempt at a reconciliation, in the setting of terms for a theoretical negotiation, Morton lays out his bottom line with reference to Walter Benjamin’s theory of fascism: ecology must not become aestheticised as that would be the end of ecology and the rise of totalitarianism. Instead ‘ecological criticism must politicize the aesthetic’ (p. 205). That politicisation is of accepting the textures of an ecological subjectivity that is neither tidy nor clean, but muddy and murky. Aestheticisation, on the other hand, stands for the use of ecology at a temporary and surface level to disguise other motives. For Benjamin (1968) that was the threat of the Nazi Party – ‘the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life’ (p. 241) – whereas today

the idea of a politics without those kinds of aesthetics is almost unthinkable. A really deep ecology, as Morton seeks, would not be apolitical, but would first work on a critique of the means of communicating about politics. To be deep would not be to resist communicating with friends and foes, but would be to investigate the means by which first we know and second by which that knowledge is shared.

Three years after publishing *Ecology without Nature* Morton released *The Ecological Thought*, which he describes as both a prequel to the thought needed to be able to write the first book, but also a text that had noticeably been written afterwards. In that sense it is a little like the Derridean form of the preface from *Of Grammatology* – the preface that is written afterwards, but which is formed as if it precedes the text. As a preface, I am going to set *The Ecological Thought* aside – indeed, Morton notes that the 2010 text does not deal explicitly with theory except in the footnotes. He notes that this is not to dumb down the argument, but because the language of theory puts off non-specialists. So while I do not go into the theories discussed in *The Ecological Thought*, most of which are covered in *Ecology Without Nature*, it is perhaps the first port of call, alongside essays and reviews such as ‘Queer Ecology’ (Morton, 2010b), for those within environmental communication who might be interested in whetting their own appetite for Morton’s school of dark ecology and for helping non-academics and students access his critique of deep ecology.

(c) Hyperobjects and object-oriented ontology

The concluding pages of *The Ecological Thought* (Morton, 2010a) are devoted to the first elaborations of the ecological concept of the hyperobject. The hyperobject became the theme of Morton’s following book *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World* (2013) that, like Žižek’s *Living in the End Times* presents the reader a cover with an iceberg as a blunt signal of coming catastrophe. In *Hyperobjects* Morton offers a definition of hyperobjects as ‘things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans’ (p. 1). The hyperobject is difficult to comprehend as the endurance of the object is beyond the normal realms of experience in both time and space. Items like polystyrene will endure long after anyone alive today will have died. Similarly, objects such as the Florida Everglades exist at multiple systemic levels

across a huge swathe of land. And while the hyperobject is massive in relation to humans, for Morton it is important to emphasise that their existence does not come from human knowledge of them. He is keen to ground their relative size and duration in contrast to other relatively less-hyper objects, citing worms, lemons and ultraviolet rays, and so, even from the start, he keeps humans away from the nexus of their ontology.

A focus on the hyperobject as an object in and of itself occupies the first half of the text as Morton begins to make links between his thought and the object-oriented ontology that he comes to focus on in a subsequent text. While Morton focuses on explicating hyperobjects on their own terms, he also spends the second half of the book analysing the place of humans enmeshed with these phenomena. This was, to recall from earlier, the book where Figure 1 announced in a no-nonsense fashion that the globe is warming and we – humans – are responsible. To demonstrate the hyperobject and its political salience, Morton explains that ‘global warming cannot be directly seen, but it can be thought and computed’ (p. 3) as demonstrated by the Figure 1 graph.

The hyperobject, according to Morton (2013) has five properties. I will quote Morton at length in his introduction that goes on to make up the five sub-sections of the first part of the book. Hyperobjects are:

viscous, which means that they ‘stick’ to beings that are involved with them. They are *nonlocal*; in other words, any ‘local manifestation’ of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject. They involve profoundly different temporalities than the human-scale ones we are used to. In particular, some very large hyperobjects, such as planes, have genuinely *Gaussian* temporality: they generate spacetime vortices, due to general relativity. Hyperobjects occupy a high-dimensional phase space that results in their being invisible to humans for stretches of time. And they exhibit their effects *interobjectively*; that is, they can be detected in a space that consists of interrelationships between aesthetic properties of objects. (p.1)

The role of these properties, Morton argues, is to establish a new kind of understanding of the world – rendered inside quote marks as ‘world’ – in the absence of a meaningful world. It is that lack of meaning in our attempts to understand our current situation that

both makes for the book's subtitle 'Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World' as well as condemning the previous philosophical projects Morton had drawn on. That prior philosophical project is described in *Hyperobjects* as post-structuralism. For Morton the failure of post-structuralism is that it could not complete the job of abolishing metalanguages from the human vocabulary. The function of the book is asserted at the same time as this switch in focus: objects must be rendered meta, but languages will be micro.

I will leave the quote and examples from above as a sufficient description of what a hyperobject is: this is not to diminish the concept, rather it is because I think it is a fairly simple, albeit insightful, discussion of a contemporary problem. For this study – where critique is to dart between emancipatory politics and doubt – what I find most interesting is the description of what the age of hyperobjects does to humans. When put in contrast to the relatively large and enduring hyperobject, humans begin to reflect on their own size. In doing so three concepts have come to the fore:

Hypocrisy results from the conditions of the impossibility of a metalanguage (and as I shall explain we are freshly aware of these conditions because of the ecological emergency); *weakness* from the gap between phenomena and thing, which the hyperobject makes disturbingly visible; and *lameness* from the fact that all entities are fragile (as a condition of possibility for their existence), and hyperobjects makes this fragility conspicuous. (p. 2)

The rise of the hyperobjects as things that are in the world, but not accessible to human use, also marks a movement away from the strength of the human. The concept of the hyperobject speaks to the power of that both created by humans, but also that which is outside of our influence and ability to control. That weakness multiplies out to the lameness of the ensuing fragility and the realisation that we are hypocrites, not because we do not live up to our language, but because our language does not and cannot match up to the objects around us.

Just as the final pages of *The Ecological Thought* introduced the concept of hyperobjects – which was at the core of the book that Morton subsequently published – the final pages of *Hyperobjects* leads to the topic of the book that followed from it: the ontology of objects:

hyperobjects profoundly change how we think about any object. In a strange way, every object is a hyperobject. But we can only think this thought in the light of the ecological emergency inside of which we have now woken up. Heidegger said that only a god can save us now. As we find ourselves waking up within a series of gigantic objects, we realize that he forgot to add: *We just don't know what sort of god.* (Morton, 2013a, p. 201)

The metaphysical turn signalled at the end of this passage underwrites the themes in *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* and connects that book to a series published by Graham Harman and Bruno Latour known as 'New Metaphysics'. Though *Realist Magic* also takes its impetus from ecological and climate crises, it is less focussed on explaining objects and ontology in terms of an ecology or ecosystem than the preceding three books I have considered. But what *Realist Magic* lacks in terms of an explicit ecological orientation, it makes up for in terms of an attempt to ground much of Morton's preceding thought in a specific philosophical history and the project of work grouped under the banner of object-oriented ontology. While I will focus on what *Realist Magic* has to say about ecology and crisis, the bulk of my thinking on this text will appear later in the section where I contrast the style of critique in this book with that in his earlier and more explicitly ecological texts.

If, we recall from *Hyperobjects*, Morton's preferred notion was framed as global warming as a result of climate change then *Realist Magic* sees this as a result at the loci of his attention. What, he is asking, does causality look like for the hyperobject of climate change? For example, Morton uses global warming, along with the broader theory of hyperobjects, as the example to reject a form of object causality that he calls 'clunking':

Tobacco companies and global warming deniers rely on the common resistance to the nothingness inherent in the realization that there are cracks in the real. There is no 'proven link' between smoking and cancer—but that's evidently not the point. Likewise, global warming denial takes a leaf out of the determinist notebook. Since there is no obvious link between the rain falling on my head and global warming, it must be untrue. Or my theory of causality is out of whack. Large complex systems require causality theories that are non-deterministic just like very small quantum scale ones. Clunking is an illusion

that seems to happen to medium-sized objects such as billiard balls, but only when we isolate the clunk amidst a welter of other phenomena. (p. 68)

The clunking described by Morton is a crude form of determinism. It is crude because it is overly obvious like a thump in the night; it is deterministic because as a theory of causality it excludes chance, the unknown and delayed or diffuse effects. The theory is also crude in Morton doesn't mean to imply that this clunking causality is all there is to science, but that a popular science drawn on by global warming deniers rely on such versions of how the world works.

Morton's attempt to write in an orientation geared towards objects and causality leads to some curious rhetorical flourishes on just how ecology functions. Consider the following: 'The photon photons about the electron. And weather weathers about global warming' (p. 24). These phrases come at the end of Morton's attempt to move away from a 'language of translation' that he considers to be grounded in metaphor, but where the metaphorical is often unconsidered and is construed as literal. Morton's attempted move to a new type of description for enmeshed relations is based on the ineffectiveness of our present language – specifically in the aesthetic and literary texts – for promoting ecological awareness. Here there is an interesting split: we are in an age of awareness but it is not language doing or sustaining this awareness-work. It is also a short leap from humans tuning things in our subject-oriented world to objects also participating in this tuning, and thus having a kind of human-like agency. Hence the justification for the notion that 'weather weathers about global warming'.

To help the reader understand how awareness comes about without 'direct' communication in language, Morton settles on the concept of tuning. Tuning is a process where people interact with the world and create something else – an object – that is independent: 'when you tune, real things happen. You are affecting causality. You are establishing a link with at least one other actually existing entity' (p. 23). Tuning is a process of one item resonating with another and for the inside/outside distinction between these things to either disappear or evaporate for a moment. One is tuned when one is in tune:

When you tune you are making another object. Tuning is the birth of another object: a tune, a reading, an interpretation. A rhapsodic rap about listening to

Spandau Ballet and remembering your ex-lover. Every tune becomes an elegy for the disappearance, that is, the fundamental ontological secrecy, of an object or objects. (p.23)

The disappearance and secrecy of tuning is described on following pages in *Realist Magic* as the moment when a tuning fork matches the pitch of a vase and the vase explodes. The outside of the vase becomes one with the inside, all caused by the vibration of a tuning fork that we know caused the explosion but which we cannot view as being a clunking cause of it. Morton becomes Leary: ‘turn on, tune in, drop out’ for the ecological generation.

As we now have an understanding of the world where ecology is not just a text, but also tunes itself independent of human subjects, the concept of nature must be reconsidered. It is not so much that *Realist Magic* sees Morton rewrite the nature of *Ecology with Nature* but that nature returns as a useful term at a meta-level, alongside other ‘without’ terms like *Universe* and *environment*:

Nature likewise is ‘discovered in the use of useful things.’ I take use here to apply not only to humans, but also to bees with their flowers and hives, chimpanzees with their digging sticks, slime molds with their wet pavements. This is not an argument about how humans impose meaning on mute things. It’s an argument about the fact that what humans call matter and Nature are ontologically secondary to something else. A sort of backward glance confers the material status of matter and the natural status of Nature: the backward glance not of a cognizing being, necessarily, but of a task accomplished. The key turns in the lock: ‘Oh, that’s what the key was for.’ There must, then, be something ‘behind’ or ‘beyond’ matter— and OOO (object-oriented ontology) gives us a term for this: simply, what is behind matter is an object. (p. 43)

The focus away from matter and onto objects does not make Morton a materialist in the sense of a clunking causality associated with physicalism. Instead, he rejects contemporary forms of materialism because of their seeking a common base beneath the appearances of the world. For Morton, realism is a better frame for describing his project because it allows for both the pluralism of forms as well as a focus on how these forms are used rather than theorised.

To conclude, as *Hyperobjects* moved more towards an attempt at a new ontology, his work becomes less useful for a directly political response to climate change and towards, if it continues to have a resonance that could be called emancipatory, a much grander – though necessary – task of rethinking the relation of humans to the world around them. The vigour of the rhetoric that begins this rethinking can sustain a reader who is deeply interested in his work, but can become difficult for those who are not already convinced. For example, though I see great value in his discussion around humans being in a world where the climate is already changing, and where we need to accept the viscosity, or mugginess, of our place in an atmosphere, his reading of the world we are surrounded by convinces me less.

Much of the storytelling and description that characterises *Hyperobjects* comes too close to the weak ecomimesis elaborated on in *Ecology without Nature*: descriptions of the world serve to describe the hyperobject on which the author and reader dwell at the same time as securing the authority of Morton's argument. I am particularly wary of his tendency to adopt the language of vortices and general relativity, not because of the incoherence of the metaphors, but because it recalls a form of cosmic ecomimesis that he rejects elsewhere. My wariness might simply be a lack of connection to the rhetorical project that Morton embarks upon, fusing philosophy, film and pop culture in a way that would make Žižek proud ('Outstanding' is the assessment Žižek offers on the back of *Ecology without Nature*). However, claims such as 'quantum theory is the only existing theory to establish firmly that things really do exist beyond our mind (or any mind)' (p. 39) attempt to position a firmness and surety that is at odds with his earlier approach that was convincing because it was so self-reflexive and cautious. For this study, the most useful and interesting work from Morton came via those earlier critiques that had not become distanced from the tensions and paradoxes of what he later disavows as theory or post-structuralism.

Morton on critique

So far I have traced how Morton's focus has moved from a critique of nature writing and deep ecology to a theory of the hyperobjects and object-oriented ontology. This

shift is also marked by a movement from a focus on humans as the agents of critique to a study of, and argument for, the prominence of non-human actors. While my descriptions so far might offer useful tools for an environmental communication scholar to offer a similar critique of the discourses or relations to objects within their own discipline, I have also steered clear of a discussion over how Morton frames these ideas within the broader realm of critical theory, or theories. In this section critique now becomes the lens through which I assess Morton's work.

In this section I discuss how Morton moves from an initial identification with deconstructionist style readings of ecological texts, alongside a healthy smattering of Žižek-flavoured Lacanian thought, to object-oriented ontology and its concomitant rejection of hundreds, and thousands, of years of philosophical thought. Morton is very explicit about this change in direction and yet his reading of object-oriented ontology comes from a place that is also quite different from other object-oriented thinkers. Where he sees many object-oriented ontology thinkers as coming to the discipline with an affinity for phenomenology, Morton traces his own movement from an initial allegiance to post-structuralist thought. Given the stark changes in his thought away from post-structuralism it is important to keep in mind which texts I am writing of in each section: where he sounds deeply Derridean in 2007, and almost Marxist with his invocation of praxis, much of his work from 2011 onwards steers away, at least at first, from what might be called post-structuralism. I end the section by considering Morton's descriptions of an object-oriented rhetoric and how such an approach to rhetoric develops out of object-oriented ontology.

There are a number of important questions that are raised by Morton's move to object-oriented ontology: did his shift come about due to growing pressures he felt from ecological crisis? How does Morton deal with some of the common concerns of thinkers who he had previously identified with, such as Žižek, who have articulated weaknesses of the object-oriented ontology approach? I address these questions from the positions outlined so far in this study of the tensions between critical theory that seeks to emancipate and critical theory that is sceptical. However, I also hold open the possibility that, as Morton claims, object-oriented ontology really does represent an important and necessary break with tradition and should not be submitted to previous notions of philosophy. While this might seem like writing off the potential of object

oriented ontology before the fact, I would say that the extraordinary claims and breaks with philosophical tradition urged by this new approach should be treated with scepticism until they are able to convince us otherwise.

(i) A deconstructionist amongst the ecocritics?

A cursory reading of Morton might lead some to suspect that his bold claims, antitheses and inversions, as well as heady rhetoric, were not based on any coherent theory. By drawing out his commitments – first to deconstructionist writers, next to object-oriented ontology – it will help place him more firmly in traditions that are part of a broader attempt to think critically. His work comes from a tradition of literary studies that is highly influenced by the adoption of many English literature departments of the continental philosophy of deconstruction. Along with the introduction of this type of theory to the United States through the publisher Semiotext(e)s connection to art and aesthetics, English literature departments were one of the most welcoming spaces of these theories in the 1980s (see Kraus and Lotringer, 2001, for example). Rather than in philosophy departments, which tend to be dominated by analytic philosophers, English departments such as the University of California which appointed Derrida to a professorship, embraced deconstructionist thinking. Because of this admittedly potted history of critique and literature, one might expect that the sub-field of ecocriticism – which sits within English literature - to be au fait with deconstructionism. But according to Morton the criticality of the ecocriticism is limited to a form of critique that is much closer to aesthetic judgment. *Ecology Without Nature* represents Morton's attempts at a sweeping critique of the field of ecocritical thought, noting and dismissing the primary focus on a romanticist split between the author and nature. This romanticist focus, as I showed in the previous section, can be characterised by an identification with the beautiful soul and the use of ecomimesis to show that the author is at one with their surroundings.

Beyond the critique of Romanticists that characterised his earliest monographs, Morton's (2007) advocacy for a new kind of ecocritique is laid out as a challenge to scientism. By scientism he does not mean the scientific method *per se* but the popular media that surrounds science such as *Time* and *Newsweek* which, he notes, 'take the

journal *Nature* more seriously than scientists' (Morton, 2007, p. 7). So while Morton believes science could benefit from more grounding in philosophy, science as an academic discipline is not his object of critique. The worship of science in scientism owes less to actual scientists disavowing a sceptical practice and more to the rhetorical techniques deployed by popular science writers who, he notes, harbour the goal of bringing representations of nature to the public.

Morton's critique also strives to be reflexive about the role and function of critique. His attempt at replacing the foundations of ecocritique reaches a zenith when, in response to Timothy Luke's connection of the sub-field with 'left ecological criticism' (p. 13), he writes,

I use the term in a more self-reflexive way than Luke. Ecocritique is critical and self-critical. This is the proper sense of critique, a dialectical form of criticism that bends back upon itself. It was the Frankfurt School that established this notion of *kritik*. As well as pointing, in a highly politicized way, to society, critique points toward itself. There is always further to go. Ecocritique is permeated with considerations common to other areas in the humanities such as race, class, and gender, which it knows to be deeply intertwined with environmental issues. Ecocritique fearlessly employs the ideas of deconstruction in the service of ecology, rather than, as is all too frequent, flogging the dead horse of 'postmodern theory'. (p. 13)

Just which ecocritics are gaining from their flogging, or flogging off of, postmodern theory is unclear. Morton's description seems like an attempt to separate a good kind of reflexiveness from a cartoonish version without going into who or what is attached to the maligned version.

Morton's answer to the two types of unworthy critique – ecocritique and postmodernism – draws heavily from the work of Jacques Derrida and a deconstructionist tradition. At the beginning of *Ecology without Nature*, he attempts to make a firm distinction between the postmodernism he opposes and a deconstruction that he endorses:

I do, however, distinguish between postmodernism, as a cultural and ideological form, and *deconstruction*. *Ecology without Nature* is inspired by

the way in which deconstruction searches out, with ruthless and brilliant intensity, points of contradiction and deep hesitation in systems of meaning. (p. 6)

Derrida is cited throughout the text to elaborate, for example, on the intention of the term ‘without’ in the book’s title as a type of negative theological thinking, and the term’s re-mark as ‘the fundamental property of ambience, its basic gesture’ (p. 48). This Derridean critique is supplemented by texts from two other philosophical traditions: the aesthetic tradition of Western Marxism in both Adorno and Benjamin that forms the basis of his critique of ecomimesis; and the psychoanalysis of Freud, Lacan, and Žižek that allows for a more complex relationship between the ecological self and what is outside of it, leading to an attempt at revealing human desires behind our representations of Nature. We can conclude that, at least in his early work, his deconstructivism combines the literary side of Derrida’s work with aesthetics and psychoanalysis and pits the authors in this tradition against a fleeting version of postmodernism.

If we consider Morton’s more general publishing around the time of *Ecology without Nature* we also see his focus on two other deconstructive texts that draw from Derrida’s work. An example of the kind of work Morton would like to see more widely adopted in ecocriticism comes from his 2010 essay ‘Ecology as Text, Text as Ecology’ in which he seeks to show similarities in the way Darwin writes of the limits of a species and how language functions through entanglement. But, he writes, ‘there is more than a neat chiasmic symmetry here’ (Morton, 2010c, p. 3) between the idea that texts have environments and environments are made of signs. What is more important is the similar impossibility in texts and the environment to find an outside: there is no outside text; there is no outside ecology. Ecology, we should recall, derives from the logic of the *oikos*, or house, or the place of dwelling. Both text and ecology - deconstruction and Morton’s ecocritique-worthy-of-the-name – are limitless systems. The role of ecology is to think this system, with no reliance on the spatial essentialism of the centre or the edge.

Morton (2008) draws from Derrida’s thinking on how the relationship of the animal to man helps to undo the general category of the animal, and describes how this should be extended further to undo the relationship of the human to ecology. In that sense he

describes deconstruction as ‘the secret best friend of ecology’ (p. 74) and the way that collectives can spatially think of difference and deferment. He suggests adapting the term *ecologocentrism* as the environmental corollary to deconstructionist’s use of logocentrism: a term to represent the grounding of meaning in an essential form. With no markable difference between human and animal extended to human and the earth on which it dwells, Morton sets out to provide a dark ecological variant to the deep ecology concepts of friendship with animals and with Gaian holism. Respectively, he finds a suitably murky theory via Agamben’s writings on animality and then through the novel and film *Solaris*.

Near the conclusion of Morton’s (2008) critique of ecologocentrism he makes one more distinction between his deconstructive, dark ecological critique and a clichéd, discredited version of postmodern relativism, which he sequesters between quote marks. At first glance it appears that the difference between his approach and the flimsier one he denounces is that he believes ‘entities such as coral reefs do exist’ (p. 92). However, the more nuanced critique he offers is against both the simple reading of postmodernism and unrelated panic of the current age as an age of crisis: ‘crisis makes us panic, and panic wants us to act, and act fast’ (p. 92). Resisting panic, and instead of continuing with a spatial critique of ecology, Morton offers us a temporal critique that values hesitation. He writes, ‘Ecology without Nature is itself a form of the ontological hesitation with which the political animal confronts us’ (p. 92). Hesitation is paired with irony and ambiguity as the portions of Romantic literature that are worth keeping. It is in this hesitation as a response to demands for urgent action that the earliest writing of Morton is most different from a form of ecocriticism that over-identifies with that which it studies.

Perhaps the most interesting discussion of what deconstruction can do for critique and ecology comes as Morton moves his focus away from deconstructionist readings and towards object-oriented ontology. In his essay ‘Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object-Oriented Ontology’ (Morton, 2011), he sets up a series of contrasts between a regular form of ecocriticism (described as normative and naturalist) and a fizzing, effervescent form labelled speculative realism:

The ecological crisis stimulated two flavors of reaction: regular (normative ecophilosophy) and cool (the effervescent philosophical movement known

‘speculative realism’). The regular flavor conjures up the good old days when things meant what they said and said what they meant. Initial forays into literary ecocriticism were Trojan horses for a replay of 1970s and 1980s theory wars. For theory, read Derrida. The cool flavor fizzes with future-- the bliss of new thinking, more at home with the shock of ecological reality. The regular flavor is somewhat theistic, while the cool flavor is somewhat nihilistic. The regular flavor establishes Nature as an object of reverent admiration; the cool flavor asserts the deep mystery of a Non-Nature. (p. 163)

Morton tries to make a definitive break with a deconstructive approach with the words ‘for theory, read Derrida’. For the fizz of something less nihilistic, he writes, see the work of Graham Harman and the object-oriented ontology writers. Morton lumps Derrida in with Žižek as promoting an ontology based on the ‘realism of the remainder’ (p. 164), which is the idea that reality cannot be articulated so why should people try. Other thinkers, Levi Bryant for example, have been more explicit about linking thinkers like Deleuze (Bryant, 2011) and Derrida (2014) to the concerns of object oriented ontology. The unarticulated real is no longer useful to Morton as it spends too much time delving into the paradoxes of (im)possibility of language and the symbolic.

While deconstructionism is no longer the stated core of Morton’s new project, it is a background trace that remains visible in his orientation. Morton invokes this background to indicate his uniqueness compared to other object-oriented ontology writers who often came from the sciences and if they found any intellectual harmony in continental philosophy it was more often than not explicitly linked with phenomenology. To advocate for the value of his lineage via thinkers like Derrida, Morton offers a defense of his version of what deconstruction is, as opposed to readings he sees by fellow object-oriented ontology thinkers who mistake deconstructionism for nominalism, subjectivism and correlationism.

In arguing for an object-orientation in his own intellectual tradition, Morton rejects the phenomenological accounts of ecology, or ecophenomenology, as ultimately underwritten by a machismo of the real. The response of this phenomenological machismo sidelines Morton’s preferred influences through reference to a physical refutation of all ideas – including the deconstruction of ideas – as a form of idealism. Morton gives the example of Doctor Johnson refuting Berkley’s idealism by kicking a

stone and claiming ‘I refute it THUS’ (Morton, 2011, p. 166) as the sort of macho realism to which he is opposed. That is not to say that Morton is an idealist, but that the materiality of Morton’s work is not such a clunking physicalism but is hidden.

As a deconstructionist surrounded by ecocritics in his *Ecology against Nature* years the subject of his critique was the texts of ecologically inclined, romantic literature. But in recent years, as a self-declared deconstructionist among the object-oriented ontologists, his place and the object of his critique and place is less clear. His aim with both ecocriticism and object-oriented ontology has involved both identification and an attempt to change the field of study through the inclusion of a deconstructivist informed world view. But whereas it felt as if Morton was leading the work of the ecocritics, his studies of object-oriented ontology are not yet at a point where the influence of his approach is obvious or can be felt.

(ii) Urgency and belief in ecocritique

The framing of critique in the broader context of this study has been based on challenges to sceptical positions related to scientific truth claims when confronted by the urgency of a crisis. At the very beginning of the study I was fascinated by how rare it was for this unwieldy concoction of belief and action to be studied or described by the authors who write of ecology. I was drawn to Timothy Morton’s work because of his willingness to cite the temporal pressures of crisis in *Ecology without Nature* and his clear refusal to side with the heady impulse of crisis to privilege any form of action. His positing of the problem in *Ecology without Nature* as ecocritique needing theory ‘like it needs a hole in the head’ expresses the tensions faced by a critique that at once relies on some form of theory but also valorises the emancipatory politics of climate activism.

Delaying conclusions and avoiding calls to immediacy is also a recurring theme of Morton’s search for a new type of ecocritique in *Ecology without Nature*. Consider the following framing of his relationship to the field with a nod to Derrida’s (1993) ‘democracy to come’:

I wish to advance ecocritical thinking, not make it impossible. My work is about an ‘ecology to come,’ not about no ecology at all. One should view it as a contribution, albeit a long-range one, to the debate opened up by environmental justice ecocriticism. (p. 6)

We might see in this long-range attempt at a new form of eco-criticism the seeds of his turn to the fizz of object-oriented ontology. If critique is to be world-making then it may need some distance from its sources. As with Latour’s reaching out to a range of disciplines (as discussed in Chapter Five), Morton has also participated in numerous interventions, dedicating much of his recent time to working with artists and musicians, such as his collaboration with Björk (2015) and the journalism of adBusters (Morton, 2012).

Morton is not the first person to respond to the urgency of calls for action by suggesting we slow down: think of the slow food movement, where diners are supposed to relax, take off their shoes, lie back and think of the Mediterranean. Morton is quite aware of the critiques that might come of his challenge to the urgency at the heart of much ecological rhetoric and he insists his project is different from simply calming down and smelling the flowers. For example, he describes the way that people have often aestheticised resistance to urgent ecological action as a form of meditation. Morton suggests that one ecocritic – who fears the broad swathe of possible eco-calamities and responds by suggesting parents take their kids out the back of their house to show them the water striders in the stream – as using the aesthetics of nature as an anaesthetic. It is also worth noting that this meditation is not a throwaway reference in Morton’s work but has received its own treatment in his third of the co-authored book *Nothing: Three Inquiries in Buddhism* (Cazdyn, Boon and Morton, 2013).

The aestheticised figure of the monkey-wrenching activist, Morton notes, wields Romanticism in the same manner as the deep ecology primitivist. In both the deep ecologist and the radical activist, Morton sees a lack of cautious reflection on the connection between the human and that which the human fights for, described as nature. The radical activist and the romantic are the same side of a different coin, with the deep ecologist worshipping nature and being content with inaction by humans, and the activist focussed on their own struggle in the name of the same idealised nature. Both the deep ecologist and the activist are manifestations of the romanticist subject

of the beautiful soul described earlier. These positions stand in stark contrast to Morton's focus on 'darkness, weakness and the negative' (p. 119) as the unwelcome side of an ugly ecology. Or, as he writes: 'Ecology talks about areas of life that we find annoying, boring and embarrassing' (p. 10).

Morton's challenge to the romanticists and activists who insist on the need for immediate action as resistance is not supposed to be a disavowal of politics. Nor is Morton's challenge embracing an ascetic struggle either against (as per Nietzsche) or beside nature (as per Schopenhauer), but offering a critique of the kinds of subjectivities that settle into any of those ways of being. As he explains:

The problem resides not so much in the beautiful soul's noble ideas, but in the form of its relationship to them. The beautiful soul distinguishes between *theory and practice* so strongly that reflection and hesitation are seen as inane cloud-castle building, and 'pure' action becomes solidly material and absolutely, guilt-inducingly vital. Or it comes to the same conclusion in reverse: reflection becomes ethereal transcendence, action a rather grimy thing that other less enlightened people do. The notion of *praxis*, in contrast, is that reflection can be a form of action; and that action-such as nonviolent protest-can be theoretical, reflexive. (p. 122)

Though *praxis*, italicised in Morton to denote the concept as both singular and concise, appears as the synthesis of so many opposing possibilities, he does not rely on the concept as a single answer to the struggle to reconcile theory and practice. The term *praxis* does not come to stand in for the ultimate reconciliation of theory and practice in *Ecology Without Nature*, but sits as a description of what happens when the activist reflects on her project or the theorist puts experiments into practice.

In the sentence that follows the above quote, Morton sees that the theoretical terrain he's covered is sufficient to posit a reborn ecocritique that inverts the beautiful soul syndrome (earlier, it was noted how the Romanticism of the beautiful soul was at the heart of the ideology of ecocritique). This new ecocriticism is one that acknowledges enjoyment as central to ideology – a lesson learnt from Lacan:

If ideology relies on enjoyment as well as disguised truth claims, one could adopt a paradoxical strategy towards ideology's fantasy spaces, images, and

objects. Instead of spitting them out, or refusing to inhabit them, one could instead identify, overidentify, or inhabit them differently, like the Latinos/as who have begun to transform cities such as Los Angeles. (p. 122)

Morton rejects the urgent call to action of ecological crisis, but he does not base his rejection on an embracing of scepticism or doubt. Consider the way he positions postmodernism and post-structuralism as lacking belief, in contrast to an ecocriticism that he is also critiquing:

The real problem is not the debate between postmodernism and ecocriticism, which sounds like two sides of the same warped record. The trouble is that as intoxicants go, clichéd post-structuralist relativism, even chic nihilism, is no match for something more religious: it is indeed religion's inverted form. Believing in nothing, while strictly untenable, is still a form of belief. Both sides miss seeing that it is not so much technology and language that are the issue as oppression and suffering. Both bypass earthly conditions: one by cancelling it, the other by preserving the mere idea of it, in however compelling and squidgy a form. (p. 123)

Ignoring the strawman critique of post-structuralism I will consider what Morton's assertions mean for (dis)belief. The focus on belief is crucial for an understanding against scepticism as an inversion of belief. There always exists a remainder or a trace of belief in the rejection of belief, as Morton shows with his inversion of religion.

What are the qualities of his disbelief? On the one hand a generalised disbelief is untenable; on the other it is just as much belief as any other asserted belief, like a religious creed. For Morton there is a positive content in the subject who insists that they believe in nothing. The believing for Morton is the same as that for Žižek's cynical subject in Chapter Three – even the assertion of disbelief locates a person within a social milieu of other non-believers. These non-believers may not articulate a set of beliefs but nevertheless there is something about their inversion and reluctance to participate in the status quo that has the quality of a belief. 'You're either for us or against us' and if you do not say, the unspoken addition goes, we are going to assume you're against us.

The disbelief in ecological crisis also has a positive content in that it explicitly rejects the belief that climate change is happening. This positive content – emerging through opposition and antagonism to the Other – is similar to the positive content of the (in)action of the deep ecologist who sides with a quietism that is content to see humans destroy ourselves. Scepticism, in short, is always tainted by the trace of an other's belief. But, as Morton notes, while scepticism by default registers a position on belief, 'scepticism does not imagine alternatives' (p. 161).

In Morton's eyes, ecocritique, and by extension scientism, has refused the prospect of dealing with any theory that might discuss doubt, such as deconstruction, so as not to be drawn into the morass of having to defend belief. The ecocritique that is at the centre of Morton's critique has, instead, used the urgency of ecological crisis to prevent interrogation of concepts of ideology and belief. Consider the way Morton overidentified with the politics of global warming in response to the impetus to total belief and immediate action:

Critical choice is a precarious leap. We will need to act on global warming, *even if* we are not strictly 'responsible' for it, *even if* it will not come about. Critical choice is the way in which the beautiful soul grasps the world it has shunned. (p. 183)

The foresight Morton is pointing to draws from Žižek's work in *Looking Awry*. For this Žižek-flavoured reading, action does not proceed from a one-dimensional temporal relation to the immediate, it requires people to project themselves into the future and look back as if global warming were real. This concept of critical choice focuses less on what we might typically understand as agented 'choice' and more on the precarity of a leap of imagination. That precarity of choice is an ethical notion as Morton emphasises near the end of *Ecology Without Nature* where he writes:

To introduce doubt about Descartes is a Cartesian manoeuvre. To be truly theoretical is to doubt. This is not the same as saying, with the opponents of solutions to global warming, that 'we need more evidence.' The only firm ethical option in the current catastrophe, as I observed before, is admitting to the ecological catastrophic in all its meaningless contingency, accepting

responsibility groundlessly, whether or not ‘we ourselves’ can be proved responsible. (p. 204)

Morton’s theoretical commitment to taking responsibility and acting in spite of the potential for doubt and hesitation take an interesting turn when matched with the (dis)belief of the global warming denier. While we might agree that to be truly theoretical is to doubt, it seems that when we are talking with those genuinely opposed to global warming, then we also need theory like we need, as he suggests in other places, a hole in the head. Doubt, he writes, will be able to coexist with action if there is an environmentalism of passion:

Can we be environmentalists, and environmentalist writers without a haemorrhage of irony, sense of humour, and sensitivity to the illusory play of language? As long as there is environmental passion, there also lives more faith in honest doubt about the environment, and environmental art and aesthetics, than in the outworn creeds of nature. (p. 204)

The foe in question is the beautiful soul who is unwilling to be ironic, humorous or sensitive but valorises a distance from both public spheres of the political and cultural. If I agree, which I do, that the beautiful soul is the foe, then who is the friend? In the following section I discuss the hypocrite as this friend: a figure of entanglement who at least attempts ‘more faith in honest doubt’ even though that doubt is at a level that is impossible to reconcile with their lived experience.

(iii) The hypocritical and the cynical

One of the first imagined possibilities of this study of critique and ecology was based on establishing a list of denotations and differences between all the variant relations between belief and action. Near the top of that list was an attempt at distinguishing between the concepts of hypocrisy and cynicism. In Timothy Morton’s (2013a) *Hyperobjects* these two concepts are paired and parsed, and while he does not go into the depth that Žižek or Sloterdijk does on what it means to be cynical, Morton’s work is a useful addition to clarifying the lexicon of terms that link belief to action.

Hypocrisy has already been explained as one of the outcomes of living in the age of hyperobjects. Recall that Morton wrote that hypocrisy *results* from the conditions of impossibility of a pure and unsullied metalanguage. Hypocrisy has not been defined except as an outcome of a situation whereby language is unable to fully *suture* – seal off, complete, close – itself into a self-realising system. The closest that we get to a definition of hypocrisy from Morton (2013a) is his claim that hyperobjects make hypocrites of us all now that ‘every position is ‘wrong’; every position including and especially the knowing-it-all cynicism that thinks that it knows better than anything else’ (p. 136).

One significant shortcoming of the concept of the hyperobject as requiring a hypocrisy that offers political and ethical hope is that we are required to believe in a generalised hypocrisy itself. If hypocrisy, or the strength of weakness, turns on itself then it becomes the generalised negativity of cynicism. This is where cynicism can derail the weakness that Morton champions. Where hypocrisy is theorised as a positive in a limited dose – something like an inoculation against an all too human egotism – if we are hypocritical about our hypocrisy then we are in trouble:

Each political and ethical decision is made inside of a hyperobject, caught in the resonance of the zones that spell doom. Even cynicism becomes a species of hypocrisy in the grinding roar of the hyperobject. Cynicism is the worst hypocrisy: hypocrisy squared, since cynicism is hypocritical about its hypocrisy. The hypocrite understands that she is caught in her own failure. The cynic still hopes that if he vomits disgustingly enough, things will change. The cynic hopes: he is not beyond hope - he is a hypocrite. He is trying to escape doom. (Morton, 2013a, p. 148)

Hypocrisy, Morton goes on to explain is made of *hypo* (under, hidden, secret) and *krisis* (judgement, determination, discernment). Whereas in *The Ecological Thought* he noted that environmentalism needed to ‘transcend the language of apocalypticism’ (2010a, p. 19) three years later he sees his investigation as mapping the ‘contours of doom’ (Morton, 2013a, p. 148). Instead of focussing on the incongruence of that which is hidden and that which is said, Morton considers hypocrisy as a form of delivery or utterance and what this can reveal about the hyperobject.

In terms of a theory of cynicism, it is fascinating that while hypocrisy is described as both a necessary limitation on knowledge and also one that delivers secrets and lies, cynicism lacks any theoretical potential for Morton. If hypocrisy is a delivery device that gives us some form of knowledge about the world, then why is cynicism so surely the worst hypocrisy? For Morton the answer lies in the hope of a future change that he sees in the cynic who claims to have a belief about their belief as being impossible to change, but which Morton thinks hides a hope for a better future. This does seem to relate to a cynic who is both ironic and depressed, rather than the kind who might embrace the positive asceticism noted by Sloterdijk (2013) in an earlier chapter.

I would suggest that Morton's antipathy to cynicism comes from two fronts. First, he agrees with Žižek that cynicism is the contemporary default form of ideology. As the default form of ideology in a time that Morton sees as requiring a radical rethinking of the relation of human and world, subject and object, then of course cynicism must be irredeemable. But more tellingly, cynicism is an excess of belief for Morton, at the same time as it is maintaining a distance from the world like that of the beautiful soul. In the voice of a cynic he opines:

But it is I who believes, more than they. I believe in my distance, I believe in the poor fools, I believe they are deluded. I have a *belief about belief*: I believe that belief means gripping something as tightly as possible with my mind. Unlike the poor fool, I am undeluded-either I truly believe that I have exited from delusion, or I know that no one can, including myself, and I take pride in this disillusionment. (p. 155)

If hypocrisy is a type of vulnerability that is strong because of its weakness – a hesitation before gripping onto things – then the very certainty of disbelief, either in others or things, makes cynicism weak. The potency of hypocrisy is not in its temporal endurance, like the hyperobject, but as a form of delivery and a particular kind of disposition towards uncertain knowledge. In contrast, cynicism is wholly certain in the same way as Sloterdijk describes it as reflexively buffered. No amount of new information or theoretical enquiry can loosen the cynic's grip on the truth of his doubt. Morton's solution is not to best the cynic at being hard to the world but to embrace the softness and weakness of human subjectivity when confronted by hyperobjects.

(iv) *Object-orientated ontology and Morton*

Though *Hyperobjects* and *Realist Magic* were both published in 2013, the relationship to critique in the two books is quite different. Specifically, Morton's slow turn to object-oriented ontology in the former is fully explained in the latter. For those interested in the chronology of his movement to an interest in object-oriented ontology it is worth noting that his 2011 essay 'Here Comes Everything: The Promise of Object Oriented Ontology' was published just one year after *The Ecological Thought*. In this section I will consider how Morton's description and use of object-oriented ontology fits with the schema of critique I have put forward in this study and Morton had developed in previous works. When I refer to object-oriented ontology works or related works I am referring to sections of *Hyperobjects*, all of his 2011 essay plus *Realist Magic*.

Where *Ecology Without Nature* focused on the paradoxes and murkiness of ecology, hoping that deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis would forge a path to a new consciousness about ecological crisis, *Realist Magic* is an entirely different book coming from an entirely different set of theoretical insights. The theories in *Realist Magic* are of a kind that demand a break with almost all of the history of philosophy, rejecting so much of what had come before that it is both difficult to consider it as critique within any recognisable tradition as well as ascertaining how Morton arrived at this position.

A clue as to Morton's transition comes from the title *Hyperobjects*: where the two prior books looked at how ecocriticism was flawed through its romantic essentialism and ecomimetic prose, this book was the first where he fully developed his view of a dark ecology. Part of that process was an attempt to speak clearly to the murky, difficult substances of the world. But that attempt also required Morton to move away from a sceptical approach. He writes 'Despite the refreshing and necessary scepticism and ruthless doubt of science, scientific discoveries are necessarily based on a decision about what real things are' (p. 15). The invoking of the real is also an acceptance that some kind of ontology is required for him to speak of hyperobjects. The choice in favour of ontology is as much an attraction to the potential of ontology that he sees as

having been neglected by traditional philosophy, as it is a distrust of what happens when people do not talk about metaphysical ontology for fear of sounding hokey: ‘we really shouldn’t leave ontology to scientism. Otherwise we end up with some New Age head-shop lava-lamp ontology that defaults to a reductionist atomism’ (p. 150).

The attraction of object-oriented ontology is explained in Morton (2011) as part of a new attempt to think realism in contrast to ‘the distinctly anti-realist philosophies that have held sway for some decades’ (p. 164). The realism of Morton’s object-oriented ontology is not the kind of materialism that he has critiqued elsewhere – it is far from Doctor Johnson’s assertion of machismo materialist common sense by kicking a rock referred to earlier. Instead, Morton advocates a speculative realism that requires ontology to reinforce an anti-anthropocentric worldview based on object-oriented ontology’s rejection of correlationism. Correlationism is ‘the belief that things can only exist in relation to (human) minds or language’ (p. 164). By combining this anti-correlationist position with his critique of Nature and non-Nature, Morton suggests that he offers ‘a genuine way out of the recent philosophical impasse of essentialism versus nihilism’ (p. 164). Though Morton goes into a little depth on object-oriented ontology in *Hyperobjects*, he still was not able to write a text that performed his actual belief in the ontology he desires. On the one hand he is trying to assert a commitment to the physicality of the world – most forcefully through his argument that *quanta* from quantum theory really do exist. On the other hand is also strategising against both the denialist scepticism of global warming based on a gap in mankind’s knowledge and against those who see the humanities and social sciences as the public relations arm of ecology and science.

The concerns of *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality* are much further away from the questions of critique that inform this study. Instead of applying the contradiction and paradoxes drawn from Žižek and Derrida’s writings onto the sub-field of ecocritique, Morton (2013b) is rejecting the relation of philosophers to the physical world for hundreds and thousands of years:

object-oriented ontology has a long row to hoe in this regard, since it must tackle not only two centuries of post-Kantian correlationism, but also five centuries of Cartesian fumbling— fumbling, moreover, a ball that is more than

two millennia old: the rather bland ball of substance decorated with accidents.
(p. 79)

This long road, at least in Morton's eyes, amounts to:

a return to a weird non-theistic Aristotle, less preoccupied with final causes and the Law of Noncontradiction. This Aristotle is summoned at the moment at which humans become aware of their ecological impact on Earth. (p. 102-3)

This introduction of object-oriented ontology to his work on ecocritique is a fascinating attempt to try to realign humans and non-human entities in the age of the Anthropocene. And yet this realigning is more theological than a result of the praxis he invoked earlier: human struggles for awareness of ecological impact are not the agents of this work, but a less certain 'summoning' of a non-theistic Aristotle.

Noting how Morton's critical attachments changed from *Ecology without Nature* to his object-oriented ontology work it is clear that this later work, and possibly the earlier, was adopted to address the political and ethical struggles that he found deconstruction simply unable to solve. As he wrote in 'Here Comes Everything', if you want theory then stick with deconstruction, but if you want the cool fizz of a more immediate theory then object-oriented ontology is the place to be. As he writes: 'It's not about adopting some position outside of the universe, some perfect meta position, some perfect attitude. That is just impossible, in an object-oriented universe, and in the current ecological emergency, just unfeasible' (p. 23). So while ontology, cool fizz and deconstruction seem to have been at the core of his critique, it is – once more – the ethical and political compulsion of responding to ecological emergency that sways him.

I consider *Realist Magic* to be a work that is the result of Morton's ultimate dissatisfaction with the way critical projects that attempt to deal with ecology and climate change have focused on epistemology. Even if Morton's object-oriented ontology work is not explicitly within a critical tradition, I do think it remains *interested in* critique and perhaps that is not such a bad thing, especially considering his return to the concept of dark ecology in his 2016 text. His setting up of arguments and trajectories in object-oriented ontology related works do speak to critical themes of doubt and disbelief, though they do not over-identify with them or with a critical

project. What I am most interested in from these works are the ways that doubt and disbelief are described within Morton's object-oriented ontology work in a twist on how object-oriented ontology is usually approached. Morton's work can offer an alternate reading of object-oriented ontology focused on a consideration of object-oriented ontology as both a *subject-decentred* ontology as well as an object-oriented one.

In his attempt to erase the space between the subject who is focused on language to the detriment of the self-evident truths of an objective world, Morton (2013b) sets out to theorise objects as having something like agency. Recall an earlier quote: 'The photon photons about the electron. And weather weathers about global warming' (p. 25). But for every clever insight or rhetorically clever repositioning of objects in *Realist Magic* there are also phrases like 'reality is real' (p. 31) (but encrypted) that makes his argument seem more dogmatic than cool and fizzy. The aspect of secretness or hiddenness that came from the *hypo-* in hypocrisy now stands not just as a difficulty in communicating about things, but becomes the very basis of everything as withdrawn. That Morton as the author has access to this encrypted world in enough depth to make sense of these relations is a sometimes-frustrating situation that often requires more faith than the reader might be willing to expend. Consider the following description of the objects at the centre of his ontology

If objects are irreducibly secret, causality must reside somewhere in the realm of relations between objects, along with things like number, qualities, time, space and so on. This is congruent with the last century of physics. For Einstein, space and time are also emergent properties of objects: objects don't float in a neutral void but emanate waves and ripples of spacetime. (p. 30)

In Morton (2011) there is also a brief mention of Žižek and Woodward's (2010) conversation where Žižek finds that the philosophy of object-oriented ontology would have a hard time talking about subjects. I contend that Morton has not quite articulated Žižek's argument fully: it is not just talking *about* subjects that are difficult, but talking *as* subjects, as authors. Morton's answer is that object-oriented ontology does offer a theory of subjectivity as much as it offers a theory of objects. In his words 'this subjectivity is profoundly ecological, and it departs from normative Western ideas of the subject as transcendence. Thus we see off Nature and its correlate, the (human)

subject' (p. 168). A similar argument is made in *Hyperobjects* where Morton expands on the idea of interobjectivity, equating it with intersubjectivity, so as to show the multifarious ways that things happen in the world without human input. Morton (2013b) puts this theory of interobjectivity at the centre of his descriptions of a reality that is not just of hyperobjects but all objects: 'Interobjective reality is just the sum total of all these footprints, crisscrossing everywhere. It's nonlocal by definition and temporally molten' (p. 71).

While Morton takes on the mammoth task of breaking with hundreds and thousands of years of Western philosophy, he does so not just in the name of object-oriented ontology but also with reference to non-Western thought, particularly Buddhism and the Arabic philosophy of al-Kindi. These thinkers help Morton's object-oriented ontology claim a theory of the subject that rejects anthropocentrism via rejecting the Euro-centrism of Western philosophy. At the core of these critiques of subjectivity is a theory of causality that is much more complex than what he describes as the 'clunk causality' of popular accounts of science, where relations between things is thought of like one billiard ball striking another. As with Sloterdijk's focus on atmospheres in Chapter Two, Morton's descriptions of a complex world allow for more imaginative understandings of the places in which humans find themselves. From those complex systems what we might call a subject-disoriented ontology emerges. This disorientation need not be confusing or riven: it could instead replicate some of the moves of ideology critique away from a subjectivity riveted to out-dated grand narratives. That is not to say we don't need new grand narratives – Sloterdijk argues convincingly for that – but that the grandness of these narratives ought not to be based on their universality.

While the core of *Realist Magic* focuses on an ontological relationship of objects to one another (which implicitly includes subjects as objects), there is also significant development around an object-oriented rhetoric. The aim of object-oriented rhetoric is to use the focus on the object to liberate rhetoric from being seen by other object oriented ontologists as a 'decorative candy on the surface of meaning'. Real meaning – as opposed to Morton's object-oriented rhetoric – is framed as being a grey, impenetrable lump. Object oriented rhetoric would accept that just as subjectivity is a

kind of object and therefore worthy of consideration, so too is the rhetorical which cannot be rejected as decorative.

Object-oriented rhetoric draws on the argument made in *Hyperobjects* about hypocrisy as a form of delivery. But now it is not just people made weak by the space-time immensity of a hyperobject, because all objects are split – like a hypocrite – from within. These moves are not so different from the problematising and paradoxes advanced by other post-structuralist writers and should lead us to consider the similarity between the decentred subject and the oriented objects that emerge in his work.

In *Dark Ecology* Morton (2016) reiterates a connection to object-oriented ontology, refining his position and attempting to mitigate the ‘provocative use of the word object’ (p. 30). Morton sees himself connected to the humanistic account of culture, politics and philosophy due to their correlationism: humans can’t ever access the objects of the world – the thing in itself, to put it in Kantian terms – but instead we grasp data about how things exist. The success of object-oriented ontology is that it ‘doesn’t tell you exactly what exists but *how* things exist’ (p. 16). Things exist as withdrawn, mysterious and magical object – as opposed to the drive to demystification in contemporary humanism and scientism.

Where Morton (2016) chooses to stand apart from others who have been linked to an object-oriented ontology – Ray Brassier and Quentin Meillassoux are noted – is in his rejection of the sharpness of mathematics to cut through the mysteriousness of the world. The metaphor of cutting through the real is intentional and contrasted with the drilling into the world of oil prospectors and the resulting Anthropocene: ‘at the very moment at which philosophy says you can’t directly access the real, humans are drilling down ever deeper into it, and the two phenomena are deeply, weirdly intertwined’ (p. 18). This intertwining is central to the process of returning humans to an understanding of their place in the world by critiquing ‘Marx-Engels dogma that all history is the history of class struggles’ (p. 27) in favour of Sloterdijk’s ‘all narratives about the changes in the human condition are narratives about the changing exploitation of energy sources’ (cited in Morton, p. 27). Consequently, the task of *Dark Ecology* is to reformulate ecological thought by showing how the human is sutured with the non-human: biologically (humans as covered in bacteria) and socially

(humans as animals that get along) but also in our structure of thought and logic. This ‘but also’ of thought and logic refers to agrilogistics – the algorithm behind the rise of humans into a sedentary, seasonal life premised on the rationalisation and mechanisation of our food supply. But, for Morton, instead of focussing on the agency of humans in fostering this system (as per more populist science writers who he cites such as Jared Diamond), he seeks to bring out the agentic forces of objects to direct humans towards a life that expands on these agricultural systems. It is not merely that he sees humans as the organism hosting a parasitic other, but that we are entangled in enumerable relationships with non-human entities looping back twelve thousand years to the beginning of sedentary societies.

For all the (withdrawn) object-orientation, a large number of sources for Morton’s (2016) *Dark Ecology* come from thinkers discussed in his earlier works: Derrida is never far from the footnotes, while Sloterdijk, Agamben, Haraway and Bennett all make an appearance. Freud is also central to a framing of an ecological mind becoming aware of its entanglement in something of a pastiche of Žižek’s use of Kübler Ross’s five stages of dealing with a terminal illness. And though the book has many examples of the kind of entanglement, the best remains his framing of hyperobjects as a way to think through the super wicked problem of global ecological crisis. Though *Dark Ecology* was released in 2016 it was the written version of a lecture he delivered around the same time as *Realist Magic* and *Hyperobjects*. As such it might be best considered as a text from a parallel era and not one that radically updates the focus of the two texts published in 2013.

Object-oriented ontology offers a theory that tries to go beyond what I have set up as an irreducible tension between doubt and emancipatory politics. Doubt is rejected as an anthropocentric remainder while the closeness of temporal urgency is replaced by the immanence of speculative realism. Throughout *Realist Magic* it is difficult to tell whether Morton’s turn to object-oriented ontology was occasioned by the need for an urgent response to the ecological crisis that had coloured his earlier works, or whether his adherence to this form of ontology is more of a strategic turn that would as soon be discarded if somehow a genuine ecological détente took place. With the forthcoming *Humankind: Solidarity with Non-Human People*, Morton appears likely to return to some theories of critique and emancipatory politics in a stronger effort to bridge the

thought that separates the object-oriented ontologists from the critical theorists of the past.

Directions in environmental communication from Morton

At the start of this chapter I noted that Morton's attempt to address the type of critique prevalent in ecocriticism was the most similar to my own interest in expanding what could count as critique within environmental communication. In *Ecology Without Nature* I found exactly this sort of critique with his study on ecomimesis and the beautiful soul rendered as consumerist. But as Morton's critique has progressed into an attempt to go beyond the theory of deconstruction I found less that would help me with the tensions between critique as doubt and critique as emancipatory politics. Indeed, by *Realist Magic* though there is still some discussion of politics, the focus on speculative realism seems to have solved the problems of critique by rejecting the very techniques and history of philosophy that had led to this form of critique. Critique has been replaced by a speculative realism that is focused on an attempt to break from the subject-object distinction more than directly addressing the ways that ecocriticism has been constructed. In concluding I will revisit three key insights that Morton's work can have for scholars of environmental communication.

First, Morton's work in *Ecology Without Nature* shows how authors use ecomimesis to make themselves seem close to the nature of which they write and identify. Understanding where these naturalist, ecomimetic discourses come from, and how they underwrite deep ecology's potential quietism and activism, allows for the pursuit of a murkier and less whimsical discourse around the environment. Morton's suggestion that a new discourse models itself on themes of a dark ecology could be fruitful for environmental communication: while the world provides moments of the sublime and the beautiful, only focussing on an idealised aesthetic that forms a Disney view of Nature will never help address ecological damage nor will it help avert catastrophe. An awareness of the beautiful soul as a trope will also encourage scholars of environmental communication to be more reflexive about their own advocacy and some of the soft heroism that permeates the self-sacrificing love of nature.

A more complex subject position for the ecologically minded critic is put forward in *Hyperobjects* under the name of hypocrisy. Everyone is a hypocrite when set next to the unknowable spatial and temporal scale of the hyperobject. But this generalised hypocrisy in Morton's text is not the *ad hominem* that demands a speaker shuts up, but a recognition of the fragility of the speaker and their claims to knowledge. This fragility is based on the lack of a metalanguage that allows people to fully see and understand their place in the world. When compared to hyperobjects, people are hypocrites, weak and lame, but this is not a bad thing – it simply is, and as such is the condition for all emancipatory politics. The typical subject position of environmental communication could use just such an overhaul – humans are cast as the despots ruining it for other species, and that will eventually destroy itself – and there is little of the play or joy of Morton's texts. Morton's theory of hypocrisy allows people to ignore the discourses that stress the need for the purity and coherence of belief and action. Instead, environmental communicators can place renewed emphasis on humans making the world, just not from conditions of their own choosing or control. Morton's theory of hypocrisy, paradoxically, strengthens the position of the critic in environmental communication by refusing strength, purity and morality as a position to speak from.

Finally, environmental communication could be open to the type of object-oriented rhetoric and ontological investigations offered in Morton's most recent writing. A consideration of Morton's rhetoric could take current discussions of rhetoric in the sub-field beyond NeoAristotelianism, ideological criticism and Foucauldian discourse-inspired views. Considering Morton's work may help environmental communication to craft a kind of ecocriticism that goes beyond reliance's on both Nature as well as oppositions between Nature and humans. If environmental communicators can read object-oriented ontology texts in the spirit of an orientation rather than a fixation, perhaps more imaginative and challenging discourses on ecological crisis can be found. If communicating about the environment requires imagination and enthusiastic rhetoric then Morton's achievements in his object-oriented ontology related works is worthy of consideration.

Chapter Five

Critique and Climate Change in Latour

The three authors considered so far have brought unique views on emancipation and doubt to the issue of climate change and environmental communication. None of those thinkers have been included in any depth within discussions within the sub-field of environmental communication. In contrast, there have been a number of mentions of Bruno Latour in the sub-field – this chapter seeks to move from those initial considerations and expand the kinds of questions derived from Latour's work. While much of Latour's actor network theory that is applicable to studies of humans and the environment it is not particularly focussed on crisis or urgency. This study will find more use in Latour's more recent analysis on religion, film and literature as well as his reflection on the worth of critique itself in a time of climate change.

Background

I will start a consideration of Bruno Latour's thought by considering how he discusses the particular urgency of climate change and ecological crisis through a crisis of objectivity. The crisis of objectivity underscores critical difficulties in responding to ecology. This crisis also allows Latour to foreground the role of design in forming new collectives that can exist within changing atmospheres. That first section will be followed by an outline of Latour's relationship to critical theories and critique. Latour can be placed between his work on Serres and science studies and his theoretical grounding in a form of critique as suspicion that he seeks to go beyond, but which continues to frame, how he perceives the relationship of science to critique. I finish with some suggestions on how the ideas from this chapter could help thinkers of environmental communication move beyond the methods of actor network theory.

Latour's earliest studies in France led to anthropological work in the Ivory Coast before turning his attention back onto his own society with a series of investigations into the

ways scientists produce knowledge. Both *Science in Action* (1987) and, with Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life* (1979) offered a sympathetic reading of the role of scientific knowledge production at a time when postmodernist and post-structuralist writers were starting to challenge how scientific discourses represented the world. Though his work was coming from a tradition – both methodologically and rhetorically - of suspicion towards knowledge (see Serres and Latour, 1995) it also treated science with the studied respect and curiosity that was not always present in other writers' work. The object of his studies was formalised by Latour as Science Studies (although more recently it has been reframed as Science and Technology Studies) at around the same time as he moved towards a focus on fields of more traditional interest to the humanities.

While the sciences remain central to his work after these early studies, with *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993) the anthropological investigations are relegated to supporting material for a series of writings on knowledge, method and ecology. If his earliest work was an anthropology of the Other, and his science work was an anthropology of the technical administration of science, then this new work could be seen as a broader anthropology of modernity. Harman (2014) has produced a useful biography of Latour's journey from anthropology to an anthropology of science through to a focus on an inter-disciplinarity that is difficult to locate in a singular field, and which still directs his thinking today.

Reflection on his early studies led to Latour formalising his approach for study under the name 'Actor Network Theory'. This approach, which suggests people follow the network instead of codifying the theory as a method, offers a way of working with the range of scientific and technical objects that had escaped the language of the social and theories in which he was accustomed. Actor Network Theory is described in depth in *Reassembling the Social* (2005) though much of the book has significant overlaps with themes touched on in earlier work. For example, the first half of the book lists and explains five kinds of uncertainties that can be used by social science researchers to delve into associations between actors and networks that help explain social phenomena. The two most important uncertainties described in the first half of *Reassembling the Social* – the relation of objects to agency, and between matters of fact and matters of concern – are described in works published in the preceding year

(see Latour 2004a; 2004b). These texts – *Politics of Nature* (2004a) read alongside the more critically focussed ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?’ (2004b) – are of particular relevance to the intersection of critique, ecology and climate change that frames my study.

Politics of Nature sets the stage for Latour’s continued concern about ecological issues and the complex interplay between thought described as ‘political’ and the opposed thought described as ‘natural’. The aim of that book is to more thoroughly introduce the concerns of ecology into politics without thinking of ecology as the sphere of life outside of, or excluding, the human. ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?’ (2004b) takes Latour’s thinking on ecology and pairs it to climate denial and critique. The article rejects contemporary work as programmatic, if not ‘barbarous’ (p. 237) and suggests of all the scholarship that goes by the name critical ‘90%’ (p. 237) is of that form. In more recent works he has also paired ecological thought with theology (2011) and new descriptions of the present time as ‘the Anthropocene’ (2014; 2015a). A forthcoming book, *Facing Gaia* (forthcoming), collects eight lectures that suggest a new climatic regime – a theme also developed in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013).

Latour’s relationship to critique and critical theories is complex. When he is confronted with what he describes as deconstructionism’s tendency to break down ideas and networks, he is resolutely opposed to critique. But Latour never really gets into a discussion of the particular authors or the ideas that he suggests are part of this deconstructionism. In contrast, when paired with a thinker that has not come from an archetypal critical tradition – such as Michael Serres (see Serres and Latour, 1995) – Latour is much more at home defending the suspicion and questioning of what might at other times be associated with critique or other framings, such as deconstructionism. Latour is caught between two theoretical traditions: his thought is reliant on, and grounded in, the language of a history of continental philosophy and suspicion, but he is also interested in the kind of strong rhetoric and certainty that he observes in the sciences and which he reproduces in his studies of the sciences. If his later work relies on the tools of suspicion, it is also suspicious of the tools of suspicion.

To place Latour’s work in a critical canon would require us to pin down just what Latour’s work is. But if we wanted to do justice to him, we might need to take him on

his own terms: as an assembled thinker as much as a thinker of assemblage. The assemblage ‘Latour’ – the son of his parts, if you will – is comprised of forefathers such as Michael Serres, Peter Sloterdijk and Gabriel Tarde. Though the debt is rarely acknowledged, his metaphysical leanings also owe a lot to Deleuzian work on multiplicity.

If we are to think of Latour on his own terms – as an assemblage – then he needs to be considered in relation to the things or objects of his labour. In particular, he forged connections to art and aesthetics through the *Iconoclash* exhibition at Karlsruhe in Germany, in collaboration with Peter Weibel, which led to the publication of both *Making Things Public: atmospheres of democracy* (2005) and an essay in *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods* (2009). The *Iconoclash* exhibition led to Latour’s increasing interest in the work of Sloterdijk that has come to frame much of his thoughts on design and ecology. In 2011 Latour also collaborated with his daughter, Chloé, and Frédérique Ait-Touati to write the climate change focussed play ‘Kosmokolos’ (Latour, Ait-Touati and Latour, 2011). Secondary material on Latour has also proliferated in recent years and through this we can see how his thought and work have influenced others and how they position him. Though Harman (2009) and Harman, Latour and Erdelyi (2011) link Latour’s thought to Harman (see 2014), a key thinker of object oriented ontology, the studies focus on neither of the two main aspects – critique and ecology – of which this study is concerned. Similarly, Schmidgen’s (2015) intellectual biography of Latour focuses on questions of how knowledge, time, and society relate to one another, rather than on the specifics of political ecology or critique.

Of the four authors considered in this study, Bruno Latour has been the most cited in the journal *Environmental Communication*, across twenty articles between 2007-2016 with a panel of papers dedicated to him at the 2015 conference on Environmental Communication in Boulder, Colorado. However, only three of these articles go into his work in any depth, with Sun, Deluca and Seegert (2015) offering an excellent overview of environmental groups in Utah via three conceptions of the collective, including a Latourian consideration of networks. By contrasting Latour with Deleuze they offer an incisive treatment of each thinker and a depth of analysis on the environmental groups they study. Peterson, Peterson and Peterson (2007) also use

Latour, especially *Politics of Nature*, for a variety of ends in their response to Robert Cox's assertion that environmental communication is a crisis discipline in the styling of conservation biology. Finally, Drake (forthcoming) uses Latour to frame non-anthropocentric relations in Indonesia that he suggests would allow for new communicative insights especially in composing post-disaster narratives.

Latour on climate change and ecological crisis

Latour has often despaired that those within scientific disciplines see his science studies as an attack by a postmodern philosopher on the legitimacy of their knowledge (see Harman 2014 for a range of examples). To the contrary, he claims his work was never intended as an attack, but as praise for the arduous work that is required in the laboratory to come to know anything through a scientific method. It is this tension between science and knowledge that underwrites much of Latour's work on ecology. In this section I will show how Latour's earliest discussions of global warming went from being one concern among other ecological concerns, such as aerosol use and asbestos-causing cancer, to the prime example of a threat to human survival. Alongside that move to a focus on the enormity of the threat of changes to the climate, I will show how the field of ecology, alongside nature, came to represent the key site of contestation in a crisis of objectivity.

(i) On climate change/global warming

Unlike most of the other authors in this study, Latour has been discussing climate as long as he has been writing books. In *Science In Action* (1987) he makes use of 'the climate' as a site for talking more generally about how a populace comes to be seen as irrational, or unknowing, through the institutionalisation of climate science as meteorology. 'Every day, often several times a day, many millions of people talk about the weather, make predictions, cite proverbs, inspect the sky,' (1987, p. 180) he writes, contrasting these people with the 'thousand-odd' (p. 180) people who have access to the network of weather instruments that guide the meteorologists. While those

meteorologists often inform weather talk, he notes, they are also often the butt of jokes and dismissals: ‘the weatherman is always wrong!’ the folk exclaim. The meteorologists are inside a network that has the power to internally arbitrate over what actually happened, dismissing others’ feelings that it was a hot summer, if their statistical analysis suggests that it was no hotter than usual. From this change in the way people know about climate Latour sets up an opposition between believing about the world and knowing about it. The antagonism of those who know and those who believe at the site of climate is also the first time in his book that the subjective and the objective are contrasted. As he goes on,

Even if beliefs happen sometimes to be in accordance with knowledge, this is an accident and does not make them less subjective. In the eyes of the people inside the networks, the only way for someone to know about climates and their evolution is to *learn* what the climatologists have discovered. People who still hold beliefs about the climate are simply unlearned. (Latour, 1987; p. 182)

The arc of Latour’s work of the following thirty-five years does not drift so far from an attempt to unravel the oppositions between belief and knowledge. The subject is turned into he-who-knows through an assemblage of measuring instruments, all of which includes the measurers themselves. This, Latour notes, is a radical change whereby access to the truth about a situation is not defined by whether someone is inside or outside of a group of truth tellers, but is based more precisely on whether the person speaking has access to a whole network of tools that are able to mediate and pronounce on what is fact.

Between 1999 and 2004 Latour had observed that discussion on climate change, or global warming (he preferred the latter, but saw more contemporary cultural use in the former) was proliferating. His seminal 2004 article ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?’ (Latour, 2004b) uses an editorial on global warming in *The New York Times* as the way into a discussion over how science relates to the social sciences and vice versa. *The New York Times*, he notes, – without a sense of the ‘pathological relation’ (p. 226) of their own deliberations – quotes a Republican insider on the need to prevent people from deciding on global warming. If they decide global warming is happening then they might act on it. The knowledge of global warming – which *The New York*

Times noted scientists were in consensus about – is contrasted with the Republican strategist who wanted to make the ‘lack of scientific certainty’ the primary issue.

These clashes between belief, knowledge and action illustrate the tension that is at the heart of this study. Latour sees the need for firm knowledge so that one can act and encourage others to act with some ability to defend our judgments. In contrast, he also notes with the worth, but also seemingly indefatigable return, of scepticism. Latour’s expression of doubt in his own work mirrors much of what led me to want to see how critical theorists had approached climate change:

Do you see why I am worried? I myself have spent some time in the past trying to show “the lack of scientific certainty” inherent in the construction of facts. I too made it a “primary issue.” But I did not exactly aim at fooling the public by obscuring the certainty of a closed argument—or did I? After all, I have been accused of just that sin. Still, I’d like to believe that, on the contrary, I intended to emancipate the public from prematurely naturalized objectified facts. Was I foolishly mistaken? Have things changed so fast? (Latour, 2004b, p. 227)

While we might see a large gulf between a philosophical form of scepticism and having that uncertainty strategically deployed by a postmodern right, Latour still feels complicit in the misuse of doubt. The article quickly moves on from global warming but the tone has been set. Latour (2004b) is writing of an issue with global ramifications, and in invoking the discussion – if not debate – about global warming he is reflexive about the strategic value of his own work in books such as *Science In Action* where he tried to demystify the process whereby those conducting/performing science come to know. After the use of global warming as the foil for opening his paper, the only other mention of the phenomena is subsumed within a list of other biological and ecological conflicts such as studies of hormone replacement and the behaviour of hyenas. The point of those comparisons for Latour was not to equate hyenas and global warming in terms of the relative threats of the issues, but to show that the objects involved in any study are linked together in networks that require an agent or institution to unfold them.

The existential threat of global warming – though he just as often calls them climate disruptions – plays a similar role in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013): Latour heightens the stakes of his inquiry by sketching the scene of fifteen industrialists debating whether current ‘climate disturbances’ are anthropogenic. A Professor of Climatology is asked to explain why the industrialists should take his advice over anyone else’s. Latour is, in his own words, astonished:

I wonder how the professor is going to respond. Will he put the meddler in his place by reminding him that it’s not a matter of belief but of fact? Will he once again summarize the ‘indisputable data’ that leave scarcely any room for doubt? But no, to my great surprise, he responds, after a long, drawn-out sigh: ‘If people don’t trust the institution of science, we’re in serious trouble.’ And he begins to lay out before his audience the large number of researchers involved in climate analysis, the complex system for verifying data, the articles and reports, the principle of peer evaluation, the vast network of weather stations, floating weather buoys, satellites, and computers that ensure the flow of information—and then, standing at the blackboard, he starts to explain the pitfalls of the models that are needed to correct the data as well as the series of doubts that have had to be addressed on each of these points. ‘And, in the other camp,’ he adds, ‘what do we find? No competent researcher in the field who has the appropriate equipment.’ To answer the question raised, the professor thus uses the notion of institution as the best instrument for measuring the respective weight of the positions. He sees no higher court of appeals. And this is why he adds that ‘losing trust’ in this resource would be, for him, a very serious matter. (p.3)

Latour’s introduction to the book is a continuation of his earlier work on how facts are created through the scientific process. Research, in his framing, is contrasted with the arbitrariness of an implied ‘both sides’ journalistic approach where we have to also consider ‘the other camp’ (see Boykoff and Boykoff, 2004 for an environmental communication view of this). Latour goes on to note that though the Professor of Climatology’s answer seems reasonable on the surface, he is surprised:

Five or ten years ago, I don’t believe that a researcher—especially a French researcher—would have spoken, in a situation of controversy, about ‘trust in the institution of science.’ He might possibly have pointed to ‘confidence intervals,’

in the scientific sense of the term, but he would have appealed to certainty, a certainty whose origin he would not have had to discuss in detail before such an audience; this certainty would have allowed him to treat his interlocutor as an ignoramus and his adversaries as irrational. No institution would have been made visible; no appeal to trust would have been necessary. He would have addressed himself to a higher agency, Science with a capital S. (p. 3)

The observation of a scientist appealing to trust is a fascinating one for Latour and allows him to suggest that the risk of climate change is so great that even scientists are beginning to realise that their appeals to scientific authority – especially the breadth of the networks involved in this authority no longer match the public's need for assurances. For Latour these claims are an important moment: science has been bought into the immanent world of trust and away from any claim to an authority that stands alone. A stark distance between the authority of the scientist and the enactment of their knowledge is narrowed by the scientist when he is confronted by the both urgency of climate change and the immovability of those questioning him. Latour goes on to make a comparison to theology:

It is a little as though, responding to a catechumen who doubts the existence of God, a priest were to sketch out the organizational chart of the Vatican, the bureaucratic history of the Councils, and the countless glosses on treatises of canon law. In our day, it seems that pointing one's finger at institutions might work as a weapon to criticize them, but surely not as a tool for reestablishing confidence in established truths. And yet this is actually how the professor chose to defend himself against these sceptical industrialists. (p. 4)

Despite his astonishment at the attempt to re-establish confidence with an appeal to institutions, Latour goes on to claim that the Professor was right to appeal to a distinct kind of mediated authority, and that 'in a situation of heated controversy' (p. 4) it is safer to rely on institutions and their complexities and heterogeneity than to avoid those details and insist on epistemological certainties in a way that might be more reminiscent of theology. That said, Latour was not sure that the Professor was making a choice over how to respond, but that he no longer had a choice: highlighting the perspicacity of his institution and the vacuity of others was his best way to advance his case when his interlocutors were so willing to sit on their hands.

In keeping with his focus on the complexity of how scientists arrive at their understanding of the world, Latour's way of speaking about global warming is to locate himself within conversations around the phenomenon. The method for speaking about global warming is in the sub-title of the book: 'an anthropology for the moderns'. Instead of making an appeal to greenhouse gas or carbon emissions, Latour speaks to the controversy as established in an institutional round table discussion. That the discussion is of a network of actors coming together to tease out the question of whether, and to what extent, climate change is happening is not a matter of concern for him in this book. And yet that focus on networks provides the warrant for why the institutional questions are so important.

The institutions that research climate change that are mentioned by the Professor of Climatology are discussed in more depth in two recent papers that deal with the Climategate scandal and the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). In 'Steps toward the writing of a Compositionist Manifesto', Latour (2010a) clears his voice for a somewhat ironic war-cry, via a manifesto – as he puts it 'an outmoded genre in the grand style of old' (p. 473) – that attempts to pull together a collection of issues without annulling their heterogeneity. As such, this compositionist manifesto places more emphasis on the content inherent in a method of coming together rather than having the content (class war, ecology or the nation might be other examples of content) determine the method of coming together. Though I am not particularly interested in the manifesto (given it is not much of a departure from previously published thoughts) there is an interesting moment where Latour writes of the Climategate scandal where a cache of emails, which climate sceptics claimed showed a scientific conspiracy around climate change data and reporting, were taken from the University of East Anglia Climate Research Unit:

In the fall of 2009, critics and proponents of anthropogenic climate change realized, by sifting through the thousands of emails of climate scientists stolen by activists of dubious pedigree, that the scientific facts of the matter had to be constructed, and by whom? By humans! Squabbling humans assembling data, refining instruments to make the climate speak (instruments! can you believe that!), and spotty data sets (data sets! imagine that . . .), and these scientists had money problems (grants!), and they had to massage, write, correct, and rewrite

humble texts and articles (what? texts to be written? is science really made of texts, how shocking!). . . . What I found so ironic in the hysterical reactions of scientists and the press was the almost complete agreement of both opponents and proponents of the anthropogenic origin of climate change. They all seem to share the same idealistic view of Science (capital S): ‘If it slowly composed, it cannot be true,’ said the sceptics; ‘if we reveal how it is composed,’ said the proponents, ‘it will be discussed, thus disputable, thus it cannot be true either!’ (p. 477-78)

There is a vast gap between the scientist quoted earlier who made an appeal to the institution of science and those that defend Science as an authoritative ideal. The fear of a public knowing what is going on as scientists come to know about climate change may well be justified, not because it would open their workings up to valid questions, but because in a tense mediatised environment the workings of science could – in the eyes of some - easily link consensus-building to conspiracy.

Climategate had particular resonance for Nordhaus and Shllenberger (2012) who said that the insights vindicated Latour’s work as it showed precisely the kinds of conversations about including and excluding data that is at the heart of Latour’s project. Through this discussion Latour places himself in contrast to both the academics defending their research leaked in Climategate but also those at the Copenhagen Climate Summit, which he dubs a ‘non-event’ and ‘a total (and largely predictable) failure’ (p. 479). In contrast to the surety of both the Climategate researchers and their opponents’ ability to transcend deliberation and get to the facts, Latour wanted to open up space at the Copenhagen Climate Summit for the non-human in the guise of Gaia, or at the very least a representative of Gaia. The interplay between the non-human and their representatives is a theme that I will return to in attempting to explain Latour’s critical project.

In ‘War and Peace In An Age of Ecological Conflicts’, Latour (2014b) again places himself on the side of the scientists in terms of the content of their concerns, but not with their methods. And despite the one reference from a scientist in *Modes of Existence* to institutions and how they come to know, there are no other strong examples offered of a scientist aptly communicating their work that also understand the cultural politics associated with coming to agreement. In this text there is another

variant term to describe global warming – the quickened pace of global climate variations – which is buttressed by the institutional assurances of the IPCC. Latour writes:

Let me start by drawing the first front line. Consider the key issue: that of the facts about the anthropic – that is the human – origin of the quickened pace of global climate variations. Such a fact is not a divisive topic among climate scientists. That is, among those who really work to assemble data on the matter - since, as you know, there is not much remaining controversy on the general picture (and the soon to be released ‘fifth I.P.C.C. assessment report’ will confirm the existence of this consensus among experts). Yet there exist two immensely troubling dividing lines that have recently come to define the entire world-view of many people, and not only in the developed world. (p. 52)

The two dividing lines that he points to, we learn in the course of his essay, are actually manifested over three areas and involve questions of (1) whether agreement need come of its own accord or be decided upon, (2) the relation of climate change to the kind of actions required and that are possible to challenge it and (3) even if we do not see a higher authority, is it up to humans to act as that authority or should they accept disagreement as in the normal run of life? If we consider these three issues as those that define the tensions around how Latour relates to the science and/or Science of climate change, we see a slight shift in this more recent work towards citing assessment reports and other scientific works that work from and rely upon capital S science. Though he may feel like he is at war with the thinkers of capital S science, he also recognizes that they are united against a common enemy: those who use capital S science to embolden a scepticism that he feels cannot and must not be retained.

The difficulty with his framing, as Latour notes, is that if we ‘throw our lot in’ with the IPCC as the ideological incarnation of traditional scientific authority we still do not have the ability to transform our role in relation to climate change. In that sense Latour claims that everyone is a ‘climatosceptic’ because ‘knowledge, even if widely shared, does not trigger as much action as is necessary. As the Chinese proverb says: ‘To know and not to act, is not to know.’’ (p. 54). Latour is in the difficult relationship to climate change of having a partial knowledge make it impossible to be anything other than complicit in the changing of the atmosphere.

Given that Latour's framing of a necessity-based approach to climate change is a tactic, it suggests a person can take any position on climate change as long as it will offer the outcome that is 'the action that is necessary' for the planet. To put it another way: the climate ends justify the scientific means. If this were truly a fair representation of Latour, it would be fair to ask what kinds of action, or ends, on climate change results from his militarised position? Latour's uncovering of the messy processes that go into deciding on climate change bear resemblance to Morton's attempt to reformulate hypocrisy as both a weakness as well as a positive trait. Latour notes that this messiness is profoundly weak when confronted with the strength of appeals to idealized forms of Science that can be made both by advocates of a robust response to climate change and its opponents.

(ii) Designing a political ecology in a time of crisis

While Latour sometimes uses climate change and global warming to open up discussions between experts on climate and either critics (2004b) or industrialists (2013), it is the broader field of political ecology that receives far more theoretical attention in his work as a site of crisis. I split this following section into two parts which accord, more or less, to a change that occurred around 2005 in Latour's writing on ecology from a focus on describing a political ecology that does not take nature as a shortcut to truth, to one that seeks a solution to climate disturbances focussed around ideas of design in the Anthropocene.

(a) Political ecology and a crisis of objectivity

Though many of Latour's works since 2004 start with the animating antagonism of global warming, it is the role of political ecology between the social sciences, the humanities and sciences that quickly becomes the focus of these works. For his part Latour rejects the concept of the humanities as being no longer current in France. For him, the same notion can be captured in a range of words that 'French people would call *'littérature'*, *'écriture'*, *'style'*, *'texte'*, *'textualité'* in their relation to thought and

politics' (2016, p.1). If he uses the term humanities, it is often prefaced with 'digital' as a way to describe a discursive field to come (Latour, 2013).

To understand Latour's continual return to the questions of global warming it is not enough to just look at what sources and institutions he refers to or decides to put his faith in. Latour's (2004a) opening paragraph of *Politics of Nature* stakes an interest in ecology that we have not seen waver in all the years since. He writes:

What is to be done with political ecology? Nothing. What is to be done? Political ecology! All those who have hoped that the politics of nature would bring about a renewal of public life have asked the first question, while noting the stagnation of the so-called 'green' movements. (p. 1)

What could be a stronger assertion of both his doubts and commitment to the central role of ecology in contemporary political and philosophical circles than a reclaiming of the title of Lenin's *What is to be done?* The most urgent task – the thing to be done – once was the economic reordering of society along class lines. Latour is the least likely Leninist: he uses a comparison with communism to dismiss deep ecology later in the same book: 'deep ecology fascinates political ecology, as communism fascinated socialism' (p.26). For Latour (2004a) what is to be done is still collective work but this time it is to challenge ecological crisis: society must be reassembled along sustainable lines. A page on Latour offers a rejoinder to his declarative opening by stating that even though political ecology already exists, it has not yet done the work of combining the terms 'politics' and 'ecology' into something that is genuinely a new kind of thought on how to address ecological issues. Instead, he suggests – and it is worth recalling this was written in 1999 - those who have laid claim to the term have just affixed one word to the other, with the term 'nature' often taking the place of the ecological.

A new political ecology is also not just a parliamentary task for green parties, which he dismisses in an earlier article that contrasts modernization with ecologisation, for he does not believe that there is likely to be a prolonged success for green parties (Latour, 1998). Or the very success of those green parties will be in making all other political parties align to green values in the same way that the nineteenth century hygiene movement was not solidified into a political party but held great sway over

what it meant to do politics: ‘All political parties, all governments and all citizens will simply *add* this new layer of behaviour and regulations to their everyday concerns’ (p. 250). The evidence Latour finds for a broader political domain for ecology is in the specialized administrative bodies that administer regional ecological imperatives such as waterways protection boards. A response to ecological crisis will occur via the increasing alignment of directives and powers for these administrative apparatuses with ecological ends.

Latour (1998) – drawing on Boltanski and Thevenot’s (2006) work on regimes of justification – argues that there is nothing particularly new about political ecology, because the justifications it relies on to settle disputes are similar to other spheres of civil justification. These spheres of civil justification are overarching and contradictory techniques by which people ground justifications that seek to resolve disputes. Is there the potential for something new here or, he asks, will ecology as a conceptual framework prove short-lived when up against the entrenchment of politics-as-usual? Ecology, he concludes, is not an original regime in the sense discussed by Boltanski and Thevenot, and any aspect of the domestic regime of organizing can be accounted for by other regimes. (It is worth noting that the subtitle to Latour (forthcoming) *Facing Gaia* takes the opposite approach and announces climate – though not ecology – as a new regime).

Despite rejecting the originality of ecological regimes of understanding and organizing the world – and by proxy, of the deep ecological movement – Latour sees some potential for a radical rethinking of political ecology. The aim of *Politics of Nature*, in short, is to argue ‘the belief that political ecology is interested in nature as the childhood illness of the field, keeping it in a state of impotence by preventing it from ever understanding its own practice’ (Latour, 2004a, p. 6). For the field to have the self-awareness Latour requires he proposes three theoretical tasks: first, putting the scientific process of coming to know about the world at the centre of ecological concerns; next, abandoning the concept of nature; finally, the rearticulation of what politics is when science, rather than an ossified nature, is central to the urgent task of countering ecological crisis. These three tasks, and the reflexivity that is required for each task to be realised, are dissected in a section beginning with the question of whether we are living in an age of ecological crisis, or whether the ecological crisis is

really just a symptom of a crisis of objectivity. Political ecology as that sphere of life interested in nature is rendered powerless from the very beginning because it is based on what Latour describes as a two-house politics. This two-house politics shares methodological similarities to Plato's allegory of the cave – those who return to the cave to share news of the real outside world can only do so with an appeal to things *as they truly are outside* which, without rhetorical persuasion, fails to convince. For Latour it is clear that the ecological crisis is indeed, at heart, this crisis of knowing and communicating about the things and objects that make up the world. Hence we need to approach his three tasks: embracing scientific tools, rejecting the concept of the natural, and reinvigorating politics from a place of ecology.

For Latour the distinction between the natural and the constructed can only be overcome through ecologists resisting the use of the rhetorical short-cut of the natural to bolster both scientists' and political ecologists' claims. Political ecology is not problematic to the status quo because it introduces nature into politics – the problem of wetlands, dolphin conservation and so on – but because it '*continues, alas, to use nature to abort politics*' (p. 19). Latour offers a useful insight when by describing how the use of the term nature aborts, or precludes the possibility of politics. The concept of nature is deterministic so politics can only ever be an ephemeral gloss adopted by egoists rather than the manner in which humans go about negotiating conflicts and coalitions to mould their world. Latour goes on to show the elision between the natural as that which goes without question and that which is the object of ecology. As he writes, 'political ecology thus does not reveal itself owing to a crisis of ecological objects, but through a generalized constitutional crisis that bears on *all objects*' (p. 20). Just as politics involves much more than the clash of parties in parliament, ecology involves much more than the relationship of the pure and natural to the rest of the debased world.

This crisis of all objects is the basis of Latour's (2004a) suggestion that political ecologists need to move from a militant reliance on *matters of fact* where objects are risk free – they just *are* – to a murkier, riskier matter based on concern. Matters of fact are objects that Latour links to modernity and are characterized by having clear boundaries between those who produce them and the end outcomes, and where the producers (such as engineers and technicians) are invisible once the object is finished.

Matters of concern, in contrast, have no clear boundaries and so the producers of these matters are no longer invisible. These objects have no impact on the world outside of themselves because they never came to this world from outside. Our understanding of matters of concern is irrevocably connected to the unexpected events that they may have on the world around them. The difference between these two forms of matter is a more productive contrast than that between the social and the natural that Latour sees as usually structuring our understanding of objects and objectivity. Instead of seeing political ecology as the movement from a focus on humans to a focus on nature, Latour suggests:

it shifts from *certainty* about the production of risk-free objects (with their clear separation between things and people) to *uncertainty* about the relations whose unintended consequences threaten to disrupt all orderings, all plans, all impacts. (p. 25)

The idea of an end of nature is to be taken seriously, but as a definitive end to the signifier, not the unwelcome risk of the signified. Nature he assures, is not the first grand signifier to die. The end of nature follows on from the death of God and the death of man – each signifier must ‘die’ at the conceptual level so that which they stood in for can continue in all their messy ambiguity.

Despite having a very clear understanding of what needs to change, Latour (2004a) does not think that this riskier political ecology will be welcomed because, in his words, people have tended to mistake its theory for practice – people mistake the opposition to the term ‘nature’ as an opposition to nature as a phenomenon. In contrast, people have welcomed deep ecology because it projects a rhetoric of nature as if that rhetoric would lead to the desired outcome. To me this is like believing that waste is all recycled in a seamless process because rubbish trucks are painted green. Deep ecology has not succeeded at protecting the world from climate change because it is not a movement of politics and risk, but of assertions of facts. Those facts, Latour asserts, no longer have the sway that they had in a time before the crisis of objectivity. A political ecology worthy of its name will need to get by without believing its function is to protect nature because that approach will:

focus on the wrong objective as often as on the right one. Even more perversely, it is going to let itself be intimidated by deep ecology, which, because it defends the largest beings arranged in the most rigid and incontrovertible fashion possible, will always seem to have the high ground. (p. 27)

Global warming in this framing is just the most urgent of a series of ecological crises that challenges the concept of nature as a 'particular sphere of reality' (p. 231) when the concept of nature is really 'the result of a political division, of a Constitution that separates what is objective and indisputable from what is subjective and disputable' (p. 231). The paradoxes of the thought that underlie the urgency of climate change have been set out through Latour's positing of a political ecology caught between the fading efficacy of grand narratives and the uncertain future of a self-aware political ecology. The task for Latour from this point on is to follow up his critique of nature and its corollary 'the natural' with an analysis of how ecology can succeed in offering strong justifications without relying on the easy out of objectivity.

(b) From the End of Nature to ecologising

The field of Latour's studies have expanded in recent years, moving from a study of ontology and epistemology to an assemblage of disciplines, each of which he sees as central to creating a mature kind of ecological thinking. This section will explain this work by considering three key terms, concepts and approaches that have found a place in Latour's writing on ecology: the spheres and design of Sloterdijk, ecotheological anti-modernist thought, and the Anthropocene. I see each of these three ideas as attempts by Latour to build a network between his work and other fields. If considered as part of a search for which is the best conceptual tool that would challenge ecological crisis by forming a political ecology that goes beyond deep ecology, the end point would have to an assertion: 'all of them at once!' However, if we were to gradate his interests then the ordering of these topics would match a chronological shifting of interest from spheres (with publishing circa 2008) to ecotheology (c. 2010) to the Anthropocene (c. 2014/15). This change can also be seen in the movement from the 2013 Gifford lectures titled 'Facing Gaia: a new inquiry into natural religion' to, four years later, the subtitle to the book *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic*

Regime (Latour, forthcoming). The description of the more recent version of *Facing Gaia* includes reference to the Anthropocene as well as ‘natural religion’, which suggests it will be a return to a framing of the issue in correspondence with Boltanski and Thevenot’s (2006) regimes of justification.

Each of the three areas considered in this chapter also brings Latour into contact with three other areas of the social sciences: design (spheres), theology (ecothology) and literature (the Anthropocene). Again, it is not that Latour is looking to find the best field to challenge climate change or ecological crisis, but is looking to draw into his network a range of thought and thinkers that are also addressing similar questions in disparate subject fields. This drawing in of other thinkers and fields matches his interest in networks of associations and interdisciplinarity, at the same time as allowing him to move beyond the tensions between the subjective and objective forms of knowledge detailed in *Politics of Nature*.

Latour’s use of the phrase ‘a particular sphere of reality’ at the end of the previous section was not a casual one, but an allusion to Sloterdijk’s *Spheres* trilogy including the metaphysical and immunological aspects of the same work. A survey of Latour’s more recent writing sees numerous engagements with Sloterdijk: Latour calls his work ‘daring’ in an early use of atmospheres; this is followed by his paean to Sloterdijk from his ‘A Cautious Prometheus?’ (2008) lecture to a group of design educators with the subtitle ‘A Few Steps Towards a Philosophy of Design (with Special Attention to Peter Sloterdijk)’; followed by a description of his time at Sloterdijk’s Karlsruhe in his ‘Coming out as a philosopher’ (2010b); and his comments in 2009 around a shared speaking platform with the German, ‘I was born a Sloterdijkian’ (p. 139). I would argue that while Latour’s effusiveness is welcome, he may well be more Sloterdijkian in the content of his concerns than in the philosophical grounding of his work.

Of particular interest to this study is how Latour (2008) has adapted and emphasised the concept of design when dealing with ecological challenges. The challenge of ecology is not just a lack of certainty over facts, but is in the hyper-complexity of the political process and the need to match this complexity with the normative aims of ecology. Design ties ecology to politics – the air to its conditioning – through a post-hoc evaluation of success in the question ‘does it work well or badly?’ (p. 11). This method of asserting normative standards seems to be as a result of the stakes in play

during these times. As Latour (2013) notes in a later work: ‘castles in the air have to be judged by the only test worth its salt: would the potential inhabitant feel more comfortable there? Is it more habitable?’ (p. 23) Design in this later text is that which bridges the two worlds of economy and ecology, providing a sustainable path from one world to another. This test of worth is a fairly narrow analysis based on the practicality of design rather than issues such as equality of access.

With an emphasis on good or bad design, Latour has found fully committed to a pragmatics type of ecological emancipation based on effectiveness. As he noted in 2009, ‘to be emancipated and to be attached are two incarnations of the same event, provided you draw your attention to how artificial atmospheres are well or badly designed’ (Latour, 2009a, p. 8). It is tough to reconcile this special role for a design with Latour’s starting point of an ecological thought that did not have the characteristics to set it aside from the domestic regime of justification. On the one hand political ecology can be accounted for in the present theories of domesticity, on the other, its aim is to provide the groundwork for a future emancipation of those same domesticated beings. That is why, as noted earlier, Latour’s latest book seeks to reframe ecology as – indeed – a new regime. As is the problem with all projects that speak of the present, we sometimes have a preview of what arguments are to come and yet to conclude our own work we have to set those possibilities to one side and move on.

It is not surprising that alongside these thoughts on design that Latour has also attempted to forge an ecotheology – for which field of knowledge knows more about design than that based on a Creator? Having gone from matters of fact to matters of concern it is not too much of a stretch to imagine that theology is to be drawn into Latour’s network and that, in turn, Latour would be drawn into a theological orbit. Hence, in 2012 we have Latour (2012) linking the ecological crisis that horrifies contemporary humans to Dr Frankenstein and his monstrous creation. Humans need to love their monsters, he writes. Linking the master of the technology that creates an unknown monster is the Christian God who is both attached and dependent upon his own creation, humanity.

Similarly, in ‘Will Non-humans be saved? An argument in Ecotheology’ Latour (2009c) attempts to reclaim the concept of creation and link it to the agentic efforts of

a designer. Religion is praised for two of its non-modernist leanings: for (1) its ability to take the radically far away and make it proximate and understandable; and (2) having ‘a positive view of artificial transformations’ (p. 473). From theology he also hopes to borrow the concept of the revival through creation and recreation:

‘Creation’ could instead be the word to designate what we get when Reproduction and Reference are seized by the religious urge radically to transform that which is given into that which has to be fully renewed. (p. 473)

The role of Creation for Latour – and he does capitalise the term – extends beyond a metaphysical beginning to an ecological transformation that can be contrasted with an enduring naturalism that is outside of human’s ability to influence. Creation is not to be thought of as Creationism, though he defends the latter with comparison to the way that Darwinism (or ‘Saint Darwin’ (p. 473) as Latour jokes) ‘was transformed into an ideology of nature, understood as the bearer of indisputable necessities’ (p. 468). Though his theology focuses on that which he is most connected to – Christianity – he concludes with a rejection of one of the central tenets of that religion: rejecting the projection of a heaven beyond as a ‘deep sin’ (p. 473). And while religion features in Latour’s (2013) study on the modes of existence, otherwise described as a project in interactive metaphysics, a specific reincarnation of his ecotheological theory does not.

Latour’s (2011) starts considering theology from a more ecopolitical lens – rather than ecology through a theological lens – in ‘Science Religion Ecology’ via the acknowledgement that some see that ecological movements are at risk of becoming a ‘new religion’ (p.1). I showed in chapter three how Slavoj Žižek’s assertion that ecology was becoming a new opium of the people received the most attention of any of his analyses of ecology and climate change. Latour (2011) seeks new ways of reading science, religion and ecology in a time where, he asserts, ecology is making a claim to be the most important site that brings humans and non-human forms together. The document ends with comments that this is a ‘highly tentative’ project, but that the author is convinced that it offers a new possibility at reading into a politics of environment. It is difficult to tell what will become of this study given both that it remains on Latour’s website, but only as a draft, while work once described as world creation is replaced with more recent works that investigate how humans have become agents of an era.

The final of three recent conceptual tools Latour uses to hew ecology is the Anthropocene. He describes the Anthropocene as a geological age defined by the effect of humans that ‘offers a powerful way, if used wisely, to avoid the danger of naturalization while ensuring that the former domain of the social, or that of the ‘human’, is reconfigured as being the land of the Earthlings or of the Earthbound’ (2015a, p. 145). The role of the Anthropocene, he notes, is similar to that of theology: ‘What they have in common is that, in the same way as they propose a different *spatial* grounding for each warring camp, they offer another *temporal* rhythm for action’ (p. 152). So while Latour notes that humans have always been changing the world in which they live, the concept of the Anthropocene is the best at getting at the modification of both bifurcated fields of an unpredictable ‘politics’ and unwavering ‘nature’. In the time of the Anthropocene, Latour (2014b) suggests that the question that draws together the bifurcated fields of politics and nature is of a literary type: how do people tell the story of ecological crisis? The story of ecological crisis adds the field of literature (as well as rhetoric and communication) to the philosophy and science that has so far been the purview of Latour’s ecopolitical writings. The story of the Anthropocene is told by distributing our understanding of agency away from the human subject as far as possible. One way to do that is through retelling stories such as in Latour (2010a; 2012; 2014b; 2015b) where James Cameron (*Avatar*), James Lovelock (*Gaia*), Alfonso Cuarón (*Gravity*) and Byron Shelley (*Frankenstein*) animate other worlds, monsters, earth and gravity in an attempt to export agency away from a purely anthropocentric base. In recent years Latour was also the recipient of a European Research Council grant that saw him once more collaborate with a large number of researchers from many fields for the ‘Modes of Existence’ digital platform (the focus of the 2013 book *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*). These exhibitions and platforms are most fascinating in this study as exemplars of how Latour’s focus on networks and interdisciplinary is made manifest in his own research methods and epistemologies in the Anthropocene. While it is fascinating to see how religion, literature and film can bring together understanding about the new climate regime, at times it feels like Latour is testing out these domains as sites for climate communication rather than having come to them after a deep consideration.

The Anthropocene at once puts attention on humans as the cause of global warming, but at the same time allows Latour to defend those who speak of the Earth as alive.

Rather than talk of Gaia being a backwards form of animism, Latour thinks we should consider it as that forward-looking, coming together of many parts of the human and the non-human in the space between nature and the machine. The earth is not as unchangeable as nature would suggest, nor as programmatic as machinery. The Anthropocene may have come from geology, but also allows theology and design logics to coalesce around a narrative of agency.

The concepts of scepticism, emancipation, and critique have already emerged in this section. The following section will take a longer look at what critique means for Latour so that our reading of his ecological and climate writings can be placed against the tensions that structure this project.

Latour on Critique

Climate change and global warming have functioned as the opening act for many of Latour's recent works. This 'opening act' sets the stakes of the paper or book as urgent and global. But once the first pages of the text are out of the way, this threatened ecology is revealed as the stake but not focus of the text. Especially given the lack of focus on ecology and climate change in his *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013), a critical reader might begin to wonder about what sort of commitments Latour has to ecological issues. As per this study's writ, this section will look at how Latour conceives of critical theory and critique, not just in terms of ecology, but more specifically, in terms of the relationship between doubt and emancipatory politics.

My reading of the role of critique in Latour will begin with a reading of critique in the first section of Latour's early work through conversations with Michael Serres that centre on critique as suspicion. A second focus will be on his text 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?' (Latour, 2004b), which includes a suggestion of how critique might begin to construct thought based on matters of concern, which I have already raised as a response to ecological crisis. Finally, I turn to Latour's Actor Network Theory to discuss whether that approach embodies tensions with critical theory and whether, like Morton's claims about his object-oriented work, it really breaks with a critical tradition.

(i) *From Nietzsche to Science studies*

After a period of ethnographic work in the Ivory Coast, Latour's first two books, *Science In Action* and *Laboratory Life*, set about creating a disciplinary field he has called Science Studies, or Science and Technology Studies (STS). The aim of STS was to treat Western forms of knowledge and practice with the same kind of anthropological rigour and distanced observation as Latour had seen anthropologists applied to other societies. Those texts are not as self-reflexive or self-referential as his more recent books, where he often refers to the impact and misreading of these early works. See, for example, Latour (2009b) where he writes:

The truth in science and religion is not, for me, in question. Contrary to what some of you, who might know my work on science (most probably by hearsay), might be led to believe, I am interested mainly in the practical conditions of truth-telling and *not* in debunking religion, after having disputed the claims of science (so it is said). (p. 100)

So to really understand how Latour frames critique in his more recent work we need to consider why and how he got into Science Studies and where his affiliation to those studies, and his claimed interest in science, begins and ends.

One of the best texts for understanding how Latour places himself in the space between the sciences and a tradition of critical thinking, which is sometimes referred to broadly as the humanities, is a series of interviews with Michael Serres. Serres is a philosopher of Science who, unlike Latour, does not come from a background of what Latour describes as 'philosophies of suspicion' (Serres and Latour, 1995). Serres' dogged refusal to engage with Latour on critique offers a fascinating view of Latour having to defend his methods of study as well as pushing his good faith in dealing with scientists to its limit. Their fourth conversation 'The End of Criticism' is based on what Latour describes as 'questions you will not like' (p. 127) which represent Latour trying to understand Serres' philosophy and interpret it for an audience grounded in critical theory. In defending his own view of Science Studies, Latour aligns it to Serres' demand that those who perform critique must work inside of laboratories and alongside scientists. In those labs Latour finds a rebuttal to the idea that science is a domain of cold rationality. He writes:

There are at least two types of critique of science. First there is that of the epistemologists, who criticize it because it is not rational enough. Once science is in their hands, they say, it will be even more rational—finally purged of all traces of the collective. On the other hand, there are critiques of science that attribute to it what you deny in it: the capacity to be cold and rational. (p. 141)

These two types of critiques must deal with each other at the same time as dealing with the objects and instruments used by scientists to come to know the world. The task of Science Studies, then, is not just to pit a warm humanism against a cold science, or a serious critique against a naïve scientism, but also to pit the humanist attacks on science against the critical derision of scientific method. Latour's own approach consists of neither of these two critiques, but of trying to get as close as possible to the work of science, showing the workings of the instruments and the processes scientists go through so as to show how strong conclusions emerge out of the messiness hidden by the plain white of the lab coat.

The debate between the two thinkers often returns to Latour's idea that philosophy and critique is fundamentally based on the agility of the suspicious mind. Serres replies that this makes philosophers something like a professional snoop – always looking over the shoulder of others and judging them from a comfortable, unrisky position. Latour replies:

But it is likewise for moral reasons, for reasons of professional ethics, that other philosophers don't like you – or, rather, that they ignore you. For them, philosophy's entire work, both intellectual and political, consists of exposing, of denouncing. If you remove the weapon of suspicion, the weapon of criticism, there is no further terrain for their intellectual work – for denouncing, for exposing, even for explication. For this reason you appear naive. Your work is not a critique; it's not an exposure; it's not even an explication. (p. 147)

Naiveté is contrasted with suspicion; if suspicion is a tool that takes the form of a weapon, the naïve are naked in their exposure to the world. In this play off between the two thinkers, Latour is also able to claim common ground within the histories and hierarchies of critique by projecting his thoughts onto Serres. Much of the interview reads like Latour is striving to understand his own feelings of antithesis towards

critique but not yet having the theoretical tools to go beyond himself to some point that is not naïve. Consider how much of Latour is represented by the second person in the following quote, supposedly outlining Serres' position:

You make criticism obscure by implicating it in an archaism it thought itself rid of forever. What's more, you mix things (the most unpardonable crime in criticism); you mix the pole of objects and the pole of the collective. So, all this work of purification that defies criticism and defines the two hundred years of philosophy since Kant has never interested you. You have never believed in the modern world – in the modern philosophical task, in exposing, in denouncing – even though, for you, this means that you have been truly modern, this time in the sense of contemporary, current. (p. 148)

Is Latour describing himself or Serres? Or is he simply offering a range of descriptions to Serres searching for an affirmation of common ground? I see the discussions with Serres as making overt what is often unstated in Latour's early anthropologies of the sciences: Latour has arrived at his anthropology of science by way of a gradual disidentification with the philosophies of suspicion. Continuing with the conversation, Latour seems certain that what sets Serres apart is his refusal to treat cultures as a collective and natures as scientific singularities, and keep the two forever apart. These thoughts turn into the themes that would, four years on, populate *Politics of Nature* and investigate the split between the two houses described earlier.

Even though Latour seeks to keep a reflexive distance from thinkers such as Nietzsche – who he names as an archetype of suspicion in the Serres discussion – when paired with someone from outside the suspicious disciplines – those moored to a pedagogical anchorage of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche – he returns to his grounding assumptions and interrogative methods that come from critique. Here we have an important connection: the suspicion of Nietzsche has some similarities with the methodological scepticism of the sciences, but the two cannot be mistaken for one another. A philosopher of science, like Serres, uses doubt as one tool amongst many with the aim of coming to a positive knowledge. In contrast to a critical tradition – of which these thinkers of suspicion are a central part – this approach seeks to nurture doubt into a method that is less of a tool and more of an atmosphere: enduring, sustaining, enveloping. Despite these differences, Latour seems at home paired in this

conversation with Serres. Where Serres comes off as agitated, refusing to make himself understandable in the tradition that both ground Latour and from which he seeks to escape, Latour seems at ease in stretching the limits of critique to something that could accommodate Serres.

Any casual eavesdropper on the conversation between Serres and Latour might be left with the feeling that Latour is an exile of critique: not one forced to be abroad, but a prodigal son who, while adrift, keenly reads the émigré papers from his former home. Latour seeks a change in the circumstances that he could champion, that might see him and the learning from his adventures, bought home in aid of some new beginning, some new constitution.

(ii) Has critique run out of steam?

Politics of Nature (2004a) and to a lesser extent *Pandora's Hope* (1999) marked Latour's move to meta-considerations of the role of Science Studies and philosophy. However, neither of those books spoke as directly about the role of critique as Latour's 2004 essay, 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern'. The seeds for the subtitle of that paper had been rising from the soil since the early 1990s, in the papers that made up *Pandora's Hope* and throughout *Politics of Nature*. And yet the specific challenges of critique were not addressed in either book with as much candour or self-reflection as in 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?'. That article presents Latour's critique of contemporary critical tactics which undermine both the beliefs of people in the generating potential of objects as well as undermining people's belief in the efficacy of their own agency. In this section I will discuss that critical positioning as well as Latour's tendency to frame critique through a language of wars before discussing his attempt at framing a fair kind of critique with a realist reading of the thing at the centre of his analysis.

It is also in the 2004 essay – which was a text written for a Stanford presidential lecture to the humanities a year earlier and dedicated to Graham Harman – that Latour takes the framing of the Science Wars discussed in *Pandora's Hope* and makes it the lead in to his talk of critique. Latour feels no compunction about invoking war, at least as a metaphor for struggle between different forms of knowledge. It is hard to imagine other

authors with a strong relationship to the theories of critical thinking, writing like Latour:

Wars. So many wars. Wars outside and wars inside. Cultural wars, science wars, and wars against terrorism. Wars against poverty and wars against the poor. Wars against ignorance and wars out of ignorance. My question is simple: Should we be at war, too, we, the scholars, the intellectuals? Is it really our duty to add fresh ruins to fields of ruins? (2004b, p. 225)

Notice that Latour hints at an answer to his questions, but never asserts it. Should scholars be engaged in war? He answers with a question that suggests we should not, but makes sure not to be definitive. Though Latour does not explicitly conclude by saying that we do need to fight these wars, his discussion does indicate that he sees the disciplinary wars as both inevitable and enduring, describing the need to update ‘ourselves for new threats, new dangers, new tasks, new targets’ (p. 225). Chantal Mouffe, who has commented on Latour’s approach to politics in *Agonistics* (2013), may have sympathy for the antagonism at the heart of Latour’s war framing, but her focus on dissensus uses agonism to avoid war. Instead of war, she would hope that the conflicts that Latour notes could be worked through via the democratic institutions and political apparatuses of liberal democracies, with more long-term goals of deepening and radicalising democracy.

War, in Latour’s discussion of critique, functions in a similar way to catastrophe or crisis: it ups the stakes of the author’s writing and offers a warrant for what will follow. The war of critique and science that Latour is discussing, however, also has an effect on, and is affected by, catastrophe. As I noted in a previous section, it is just one page on that Latour invokes the catastrophe of global warming to show that the tools of critique need to be updated:

Generals have always been accused of being on the ready one war late—especially French generals, especially these days. Would it be so surprising after all, if intellectuals were also one war late, one critique late—especially French intellectuals, especially now? (p. 225-6)

Latour is saying that the intellectuals of critique are fighting a new war – with the charlatans of industry that deny global warming – with the old tools of critique

developed to fend off the old enemy of ideology. He continues with a form of self-effacement that appeared in his discussion with Serres when he writes (the quotes being attributable to Republican strategist Frank Luntz. I quoted this portion earlier, but it bears repeating):

I myself have spent some time in the past trying to show ‘*the lack of scientific certainty*’ ‘inherent in the construction of facts. I too made it a ‘primary issue’ ‘. But I did not exactly aim at fooling the public by obscuring the certainty of a closed argument—or did I? After all, I have been accused of just that sin. Still, I’d like to believe that, on the contrary, I intended to *emancipate* the public from prematurely naturalized objectified facts. Was I foolishly mistaken? Have things changed so fast? (p. 227)

If the radical left had identified a form of critique that focuses on doubt as being a tool that could exclusively be deployed by the left, climate scepticism shows them to be wrong. We might think of Latour’s introspection as a realisation of an inverse truth to the contemplation over whether the master’s tools can be used to dismantle the master’s house. Not only will the masters’ tools not dismantle the masters’ house, but the master may appropriate the tools of their servants to prevent the servants from ever rising up.

The basic co-ordinates of my study exist within this one paragraph: (1) the lack of scientific certainty speaks to the doubt that I have been articulating through the related terms of scepticism and disbelief; (2) I am also seeking to find the critical co-ordinates for an ecological form of emancipatory politics, in a lineage from the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School. But for Latour the actions that will challenge global warming are not ones that will come about by people believing less – that is the goal of the last war – but by believing, and caring, more. From here Latour returns to distinctions made in previous books between matters of fact and matters of concern:

The danger would no longer be coming from an excessive confidence in ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact—as we have learned to combat so efficiently in the past—but from an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as bad ideological biases! (p. 227)

Latour continues to question himself and his earlier work – there are a combined twenty-seven question marks on the page the above quote is from, and the following page – about the weapons of critique that he sees as having been appropriated by ‘dangerous extremists’ (p. 227). Critique’s mistake was that instead of focussing on undermining and challenging the conditions that allowed facts to be claimed as such, attention should have been focussed on getting closer to facts and the social conditions that made them possible. Matters of fact, he argues, are only always partial and rarely define reality. Instead, matters of concern play a much more important role in defining the state of affairs, and perhaps also enable a positive articulation of the social. However, in another round of self-reflection, Latour notes that his attempts to get closer to the matters of concern via Science Studies have been read as both attempts at debunking science as well as to ‘uncritically glorify the objects of science and technology’ (p. 232).

To correct any confusion about how he sees critique, Latour moves from his self-analysis to a discussion of what he estimates as ‘90 percent of the contemporary critical scene’ (p. 237). This scene is comprised of two positions: the fact and the fairy. The fairy position aims to expose the naiveté of a believer to that which they believe in. Directed at a believer and the subject/object distinction, this position claims that the idols of the belief makes the individual do things, but it is actually the ingenuity of the subject’s belief that projects powers onto indifferent matter. An example of this form of critique is that which attempts to show that it is not god who made man in his own image, but man – through the power of his imagination – that made god in his own image. By contrast, the fact position has the subject believing in the power of their own free will, when in fact, the subject is activated to things by larger powers such as genes or drives. An example of this position is the man who describes his fortunes as self-made, all the while ignoring the economic structures and privileges that allowed such a fortune to flourish.

The fairy position is the basic antifetishist movement; the fact position accepts ‘the solid causality of objectivity in the other’ (p. 239). Latour uses this description of a double-action of critique to help explain why no one was able to understand his anthropology of the sciences. While he wanted to portray the sciences as a matter of concern, ‘readers have confused the treatment of the former matters of fact with the

terrible fate of the objects processed through the hands of sociology, cultural studies and so on' (p. 240). He was neither aiming to show the instruments of science as false gods, nor trying to point to the contingency of language and meaning as the underlying structure of scientific knowledge.

'Critical barbarity' is the term Latour offers to describe what he considers the extensive misuse of these dual critiques, noting the hypocrisy between the pet-project/objects that critical theorists are attached to, which he suggests would never be subject to the critical treatment. As he states:

We explain the objects we don't approve of by treating them as fetishes; we account for behaviors we don't like by discipline whose makeup we don't examine; and we concentrate our passionate interest on only those things that are for us worthwhile matters of concern. (p. 241)

Where Latour sees his Science Studies as different from this critical barbarity is in the solidity of the objects that he has observed: they're too strong to be treated as fetishes, but too weak to be treated as causal explanations of an unconscious action.

The solution to the fact and fairy is the fair position. The fair position is what Latour arrives at in an attempt to craft the first new critical tool in a century. The aim of a 'fair' system would be to not confuse the question 'what is there?' with the question 'what exists?' and to focus on a renewed realist perspective. Using Alfred Whitehead, Latour sees the answer in our need 'to dig much further into the realist attitude and to realise that matters of fact are totally implausible, unrealistic, unjustified definitions of what it means to deal with things' (p. 244). What this perspective boils down to is a Heideggerian concept of the gathering with the critic who is 'not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles' (p. 246) things into a fair coherency. Instead of displacing subjects from the positions they inhabit, Latour argues that the role of the critic is to create spaces that people can inhabit. Notice that critical theory, or criticality or critique, is no longer part of the discussion, replaced by the human who generates critical work. When he returns to the concept of criticism, a page on, he enthuses that it must have a whole new set of positive metaphors and associations. Something will be deemed critical, he argues, if it generates more ideas than we have received, and if it is more concerned with multiplication than subtraction.

The challenge of moving from a focus on discrete objects and towards a fascination that draws critics closer to things is at the centre of Latour's (2008) fascination with design and spheres. It is in this text that he uses Sloterdijk's spherological theory of the atmosphere to encourage a conference of designers to take up the emancipatory challenges offered by climate change. In that same speech he revisited his thoughts on emancipations: 'To be emancipated and to be attached are two incarnations of the same event, provided you draw your attention to how artificial atmospheres are well or badly designed' (p. 8). Emancipation, here, comes about through immanence, but that immanence is forced upon us by our immersion in an atmosphere that is under threat. It is not that Latour's philosophy is reactive to the threat of global warming, but that given his philosophy there would always be one immanent threat or another that would be used to highlight the connections between humans and the worlds they live in.

Though Latour does not connect his emancipatory theory to a history of other emancipatory struggles, the stakes are clear. The times are dangerous and if the world is not designed with future habitation in mind, then there will no longer be an earth that is habitable. If critique is to have a role in addressing global warming then it needs to assist in tool construction and design, because 'critique, deconstruction and iconoclasm, once again, will simply not do the job of finding an alternative design' (p. 13). Critique finds time running short. The following section will consider the form in which Latour tries to set more of a direction for how he aims to return some steam to a beleaguered critique.

(iii) Actors, Networks and (critical) Theory

In the previous section, I briefly mentioned Latour's desire to create a form of critique that is focussed on getting closer to facts, rather than the critical move of distancing via debunking of ideological bias. In his 2004 article getting closer to matters of fact led onto discussions of getting closer to things, and the Heideggerian connection between 'the thing' and 'the gathering' (Latour, 2004b). Latour takes the etymological similarity between thing and gathering – based on the term *Althing* which meant a parliament-like gathering in Icelandic – to signify both a fact and a concern, a coming together of an assembly of beings and their disputes. Latour suggests that Heidegger's

distinguishing between things of craft and art, and the objects of industrial design, does a disservice to the complexity of all objects and things.

For Heidegger, an object can be used by people without consideration because it perfectly fulfils a function. By contrast, a thing is identified in its imperfect, or even complete lack of, use. Objects are always an assembly of different influences and influencers, but those influences are occluded in a manner similar to the Marxist concept of alienation. To Latour the difference between a can of Coke and Heidegger's jug is that we can treat the Coke can as an object because the labour that goes into it is occluded. For Latour: 'Heidegger's mistake is not to have treated the jug too well, but to have traced a dichotomy between *Gegenstand* [objects] and *Thing* that was justified by nothing other than the crassest of prejudices' (Latour, 2004b, p. 234). While Heidegger uses a critique of the object and veneration of the thing to oppose new forms of technology, Latour sees this distaste for new technologies as a romanticist prejudice. For Latour, all objects are things, it is just that their thingness is not immediately visible or understood when using the object.

Latour's attempt to recast all objects into things is at the heart of his Actor Network Theory, which is his method of denaturalising society. But what does it mean to promote denaturalising society? As he wrote in his *Politics of Nature* – the political (or in this case the social) and the natural are not opposite material realms where one is man-made, and the other is innocent or untainted (Latour, 2004a). Instead, the natural is that which has been rendered into the unquestionable matter of fact while the political is that which is contestable. But for Latour the contestability of the specific use of the term social as a way of explaining why things happen in particular ways has also started to mean something more solid than the term can actually account for. And so the task of his introduction to Actor Network Theory is to take apart meanings of the social and reassemble them into a collective – this is the process of denaturalising that which seemed like a natural assemblage or collective. He is keen to note that the impetus for this project was not his work on nature and politics, but his earlier study of laboratories. The new puzzles were not uncovered by his theorising against the nature/politics binary but 'after carrying out our fieldwork in science and technology' (2005, p.2).

For the hope of a revitalised critique that is able to turn objects into things and take things seriously, this realist form of materialism requires more elaboration. While Latour's work has recently moved towards metaphysical considerations of Gaia, the Anthropocene and speculative materialism, the most important point is how Latour theorises the agency of objects. Arguing for the agency of objects, even though much of his work focuses on reframing them as things, is the third of Latour's (2005) responses to a series of five uncertainties that structure the first half of *Reassembling the Social*. The agency of objects is not, he stresses, a symmetrical agency to that of subjects. Actor Network Theory, the method that frames Latour's (2005) attempts at moving beyond the bind of the social,

is not, I repeat is not, the establishment of some absurd 'symmetry between humans and non-humans'. To be symmetric, for us, simply means not to impose a priori some spurious asymmetry among human intentional action and a material world of causal relations. (p. 76)

The objects that Latour speaks of cannot be properly comprehended as agentic if by agency we mean the form of causality of actions to which the social sciences and philosophy are accustomed. Latour then suggests we consider the 'intellectual technologies' (p.77) such as maps, documents, files and paper clips, that are in a midpoint between the jugs (things) and coke cans (objects)— 'the middle sized dry goods' of analytic philosophers' (p. 77) – and the subject that can act. Instead of reducing the complexity of these intellectual technologies because we fear the slippery slope of agency, the differences and spatio-temporal discontinuities of things could be thought of as fluid. He offers two examples at this point that are worth dwelling on:

A shepherd and his dog remind you nicely of social relations, but when you see her flock behind a barbed wire fence, you wonder where is the shepherd and her dog—although sheep are kept in the field by the piercing effect of wire barbs more obstinately than by the barking of the dog. There is no doubt that you have become a couch potato in front of your TV set thanks largely to the remote control that allows you to surf from channel to channel and yet there is no resemblance between the causes of your immobility and the portion of your action that has been carried out by an infrared signal, even though there is no question that your behavior has been permitted by the TV command. (p. 77)

The problem that these examples present to Latour, in his own words, is representing and comprehending the temporal endurance of these connections: note that the dog and the shepherd had vanished, as had the labour behind the infrared signal. Actor Network Theory only takes into account objects commensurate with human actions. Or all objects even if we cannot comprehend their social ties? Latour's answer comes by the way of the researcher who employs Actor Network Theory. The researcher, who, in this short section, becomes the centre of Latour's focus must reconcile the contradictory pulls around objects through invention that minimises the distance, both spatially and temporally, between things and the place of observation. Latour writes,

Objects, by the very nature of their connections with humans, quickly shift from being mediators to being intermediaries, counting for one or nothing, no matter how internally complicated they might be. This is why specific tricks have to be invented to make them talk, that is, to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce scripts of what they are making others—humans or non-humans—do. (p. 80)

The invention to reduce distance and make objects speak also draws on accidents, historical accounts and at last recourse, fiction. By considering the Actor Network scholar's approach, and offering these tools to get closer to objects and bring them into an agentic realm, Latour feels he has done enough to reduce the contradictions around commensurability that were evoked by elevating the status of objects and making them speak.

Before moving onto a discussion of how Latour's view of objects and subjects lends itself to a theory of agency, it is worth highlighting Kochan's (2010) substantial criticism of Latour's use of Heidegger. Kochan not only rejects Latour's reading of Heidegger, drawing from Khong (2003) and Riis (2008), but also suggests that Latour's use of Heidegger is to evade questions around whether his own work is modernist. For this study, Latour's rejection of Heidegger is interesting but not central to the project as I do not look too far into, nor rely upon, his discussions of modernity or the distinction between objects and things except to describe how Latour starts to conceive of agency.

The agency of the subject of Actor Network Theory comes into a clearer sight in Latour's 'Agency at the time of the Anthropocene' (Latour, 2014a) and though this paper does not add anything new to the subject/object distinctions considered in texts like *Politics of Nature* it does, most clearly, show how Latour moves through a curious equivalence between the terms association, actor, agency and autonomy. The basis of Actor Network Theory is that people need to study the associations that make up any social situation so as not to prematurely naturalise the social. Those associations, we learnt in Latour (2005), include things – not objects – as much as they do people. Using the example of Galileo and the religious scholars who rejected his view of the behaviour of the orbiting earth, Latour suggests the earth has 'taken back all the characteristics of a fully-fledged actor' (2014a, p. 3) and an agent of history with Gaia as a ticklish sort of goddess. It is worth quoting Latour at length here as he makes parallels between Galileo and today's scientists, setting up the scientists as emancipatory agents:

We should not be surprised that a new form of agency—'it is moved'—is just as surprising to the established powers as the old one—'it is moving'. If the Inquisition was shocked at the news that the Earth was nothing more than a billiard ball spinning endlessly in the vast emptiness... the new Inquisition (now economic rather than religious) is shocked to learn that the earth has become—has become again!—an active, local, limited, sensitive, fragile, quaking, and easily tickled envelope. (p. 3)

Other than restating his position on ecology, this paragraph asserts all of the characteristics of the prime object made into a thing: the earth. This thing has a curious form of agency that is less direct than the Galilean observation that the earth moves: the earth *has* moved. How can agency be observed post-factum, moved as opposed to moving? How would we judge the autonomy of the object in directing its own moving if it was not observed either in the moving or after the fact via measuring devices? As with his work in *Reassembling the Social* on the human observer who guarantees the agency of the objects, a subject with memory and tricks is needed once more.

My reluctance to broaden agency to non-human things is primarily due to how little it seems this expansion of what counts as an agent will assist in political processes around climate change. Latour (2014a) accepts that agentic process for humans where he

quotes Serres discussing how humans have transformed the earth, a transformation that bears all the hallmarks of the Anthropocene. But what is the Anthropocene other than the zenith of human agency – a period of time *defined* by the effect that humans have on the earth itself? I would argue that if we accept the premises of the Anthropocene then we also need to accept some form of understanding of humans as the agents who can shape this period of time. While Latour's solution to rethinking things, and the relationship of objects and subjects is inventive, it is also disappointing. His attempt at claiming the status of actor for the thing is not supposed to lead to the thing being like the subject that acts autonomously. Instead, the observing subject becomes a thing too when it realises it will also be '*subjected* to the vagaries, bad humor, emotions, reactions, and even revenge of another agent' (p. 5), by which Latour means Gaia.

If climate crisis is truly as urgent as Latour and the other thinkers of this study suggest, and we are now in a period defined by our very agency over the climate, to describe human beings as among many things that are agentic seems to point in the wrong direction for attuning ourselves to the crisis and possible ways of challenging it. My concerns, then, are similar to those of the potential for object-oriented ontology to offer any timely theoretical tools to challenge urgent climate crisis. While on the one hand, there are fascinating insights in reconceiving the thing as an agent, I have not yet been convinced of this explanatory potential to either rethink what it means to be human in the Anthropocene or to assist in any other political project. I may, of course, be wrong in this – just as Morton suggests the pressures of an age of climate change is exactly the time for theory – but I have not yet been convinced of the efficacy of a human analysis of the agency of either things or object.

Without getting too far off of an analysis of Latour's work, I want to offer an example of how agency could be theorised in the time of the Anthropocene. McKenzie Wark's (2015) *Molecular Red: theory for the Anthropocene* describes a new epoch where human and natural forces are so entwined that both rely on one another. Wark foregrounds labour as the human-led process whereby the physical world becomes intertwined with humans. This intertwining does not extend agency to non-human actors but, first, rejects that agency is something that human or non-humans have. Agency is not an attribute of being but a result of iterative change based on particular practices.

Wark (2015) points to Donna Haraway's theorising of the post-human and cyborg as a way to connect the human and non-human through a labouring agent. There is a trace of Latour's network theory in the use of the term apparatus to describe the point where the human and non-human come together. But Wark, by contrast, is weary of 'saying too much about the nonhuman in advance' (p. 164), preferring instead to highlight the queerness of the category of the inhuman as the mediating space between the human and non-human. *Molecular Red* is a work on the specificity of labour: the 'red' of the title refers to the history of class struggle that Wark draws on, and which Latour avoids while the 'molecular' is the privileging of the actions entailed in labour in contrast to a more general focus on classes.

To recap: outside of the subject-object divide that Latour sees as the untenable basis of 90% of contemporary critique, we have a people connected to an earth coming together in our shared vulnerability as assembled, interconnected, local things. These people-things are agents, but do not act autonomously as we might imagine. The concept of emancipation sits awkwardly alongside Latour's view of the agentially-muted subjects and wound up objects. Consider agency as positioned from near the conclusion of the same paper:

Far from trying to 'reconcile' or 'combine' nature and society, the task, the crucial political task, is on the contrary to *distribute* agency as far and in as *differentiated* a way as possible—until, that is, we have thoroughly lost any relation between those two concepts of object and subject that are no longer of any interest any more except in a patrimonial sense (p. 15).

Rather than having succeeded in the distribution of agency, Latour has highlighted that the agentic task that he is reaching out to his readers with is the distribution of agency. If the agency of a thing both requires that humans distribute it to them, and is viewed in the rear view mirror of having happened – 'it is moved' – we are left in a very difficult position for those agents striving for emancipation. There is little place in this setting for the critical urgency around ecology that set the stage for Latour (2004b, 2013) in other works. Perhaps a richer approach would be to combine Latour's insights with Wark's (2015) and to be a little more reluctant about how agency is distributed. That reluctance would place more of an emphasis on how the right to make to distribute and assign agency comes to the observer.

If we are to understand critique as the caught in the tensions between doubting based on suspicion and emancipatory critical work based on action, Latour is clearly seeking to rebalance the formula against doubt and in favour of the emancipatory. But at the same time, his somewhat arbitrary view that 90% of critique is caught in a bind that is damaging to ecological struggles, indicates there is a urgent need for a kind of critique that might assist with emancipatory acts. But given his attempts at crafting another kind of belief in the thing requires so much speculative work it is difficult to understand how he can reconcile this with the urgency of ecological crisis, especially as seen in some of his other works like ‘Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?’ Is Latour’s recent work, which continues to branch out into metaphysics and literary studies, leading to a theoretical end or is it to mobilise his own network to focus their attentions on the earth as a fragile gathering? I will explore these questions in the final section where I tie his critique back to his views on climate change, and ecological crisis.

(iv) Political ecology, capitalism and normative theories of change

Given Latour invokes ‘political ecology’ as the answer to the question ‘what is to be done?’ might we expect more from him in terms of a normative critique of politics? Though *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (Latour, 2013) claims to offer a theory of modernity as a plurality that would help ground a political practice, the politics that emerges feels more descriptive than normative. As a theorist so opposed to the blatant charlatantry of climate sceptics, Latour does not seem prepared to deploy a politics of his own that would make the leap to a form of emancipatory theory based on studies of science to one based on the practice of science.

The allusion in the phrase ‘what is to be done?’ is to Lenin’s book on the need for a political vanguard to foment revolution and overthrow capitalism. But Latour’s work is opposed to explicit forms of anti-capitalism and avoids the emancipatory aims of Frankfurt School style of Critical Theory. In a footnote from *Politics of Nature* (1999) he outlines his position on capitalism,

Capitalism can be defined not as a particular infrastructure but as internalities without the externalities that it has produced. In the literal sense, it is an artifact of calculation, with all the performative effects that ensue. It is thus useless to

denounce capitalism—on the contrary, denunciation only reinforces it. Capitalism must be re-wrapped in the externalities that have always accompanied it, while economics cannot be allowed to confuse itself with politics. (p. 276)

Denouncing capitalism, he argues, reinforces it because it wrongly determines all forms of politics through the economic calculations of capital. We're left to wonder as to what this re-wrapping of capitalism in externalities looks like. Is the mention of capitalism akin to denouncing it that reinforces it? Given Latour so infrequently talks about capitalism this seems to be the case. And yet surely there is some way to describe these externalities in a systematic way that includes references to capitalism without undermining attempts at critique

Latour (2013) returns to the question of capitalism with the same arguments, though he extends these to other totalizing concepts, paraphrasing an imagined interlocutor who says 'Society, the State, the Market, Capitalism, the only great beings that actually hold up all this jumble' (p. 388). But when that interlocutor begins to decipher these concepts they do the same thing as those trying to decipher Science: all they find are flowcharts, offices, documents and 'other arrangements without the slightest transcendence' (p. 388). Capitalism and Anti-Capitalism, in Latour's language, are as much a product of the authority of capital letters as capital-S Science. And so while capitalism – with the externalities it produces – is accepted as the thing that leads to so many problems with the world, a direct denunciation of it is rejected because it produces helplessness rather than being generative of new and stronger critiques. The answer to 'what is to be done?' is at first political ecology, but not in the 'doing' of what is to be done, but in the 'what' of distinguishing politics from ecology, and the assemblages that make up both. Once this 'what' is considered then the two concepts are rearticulated in the most productive, pragmatic manner possible. If this seems circular, then I would argue that it is: the descriptive trumps the normative, and leads to a softer kind of normativity based on the multitude of assembled parts. 'What is to be done?' is answered by the 'doing' involved in finding the 'what'.

Perhaps Latour's lack of a direct normative politics does not matter. One of the strongest critiques of environmental communication in Mathur (2005; 2008) was that it was confused over whether it was a study of environmental communication or was

a report on the author's own practice of communicating about the environment. A critical theory of communication that is worthy of the name critical could be characterised by a refusal to disavow the descriptivist scholarly work that studies communication, even when the subject of the study is recognised to be of urgent importance. Just because Latour is a multi-disciplinary theorist with a dedicated method it does not mean that he ought to be responsible for also creating the conditions where that method influences the world. Perhaps his writing is enough. But if a form of critical theory is to participate in emancipatory change – and if theorists like Latour point to Lenin when asking what needs be done – it does not seem sufficient for that change to free people from prematurely naturalised facts. Latour may agree that this form of emancipation is not sufficient for challenging climate change, but he might also recognise that this doubting does play a necessary role in some emancipatory politics that must first clear away the intellectual debris of what was.

Directions in environmental communication from in Latour

In this section I will use the discussions entered into in the two previous sections to highlight some key insights for environmental communication from Latour's work on critique and climate change. Specifically, I will consider two ideas: one, a complication of the concept of what the theoretical concept of emancipation might offer when it is not emancipation from a circumstance but from an understanding; two, the tensions occasioned in the Anthropocene characterised by the strength of humans in contrast to the weakness of objectivity.

The concept of emancipation is relatively rare in environmental communication. One strong example comes from Jaspal, Nerlich and Cinnirella (2013) who posit this as one form of social knowledge, though with more of a focus on an in-group who readily understand the changes to come than on the positive potentials of an emancipatory programme.

All of the critical theory that has been focussed on emancipation in this study so far has seen the term as synonymous with a form of political organising. Those forms of emancipatory critique were seen as held back by doubt, rather than enabled by it. But

with Latour's work on science the emancipatory potential of critique could be advanced through an individual critic challenging what they saw as prematurely naturalised facts. In 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?' Latour (2004b) describes how he once thought of himself as doing emancipatory work by protecting people from being deceived by these prematurely naturalised facts. While the article goes on to show how climate change sceptics also employed this same justification, the idea that emancipation could be based in doubt adds complexity to how critique can be considered. While this focus on prematurely naturalised facts may have functioned as an aside in Latour's work – it is not explicitly developed in any of his other work – and hasn't been emphasised in more recent writings, it is of importance to any attempt to position the emancipatory potential of critique.

For environmental communication, the notion of something being prematurely naturalised speaks to the kind of doubt that critical theorists can bring to the discipline. The concept of a 'prematurely naturalised fact' comes from Latour's understanding of objectivity that is based not on a division with the subject, where some things are of humans and others are of nature. Instead, a prematurely naturalised fact is something that could apply to any assemblage of things, human conditions or behaviours that have been rendered natural. Instead of seeing the relation of nature to the political as a divide, the use of naturalised as a verb brings out the process whereby descriptions of processes are made more or less contestable. This is the kind of inroad that allows theorists in environmental communication to start dialogue internal to the sub-field on what counts as facts and when they should be contested.

It is worth noting that Latour pays little attention to the idea of emancipation from prematurely naturalised facts other than in beginning of 'Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?' Nevertheless, this framing goes a long way to help understand that the difference between doubting and emancipatory politics is not simply the gap between thinking and acting, but that the two are intertwined. Latour's framing, if not particularly useful for climate crisis, does help to add texture to the role of doubt in critique and so has some use for environmental communication. What would this focus on the contest over naturalised facts mean for contemporary critical approaches? Would a critique of these established 'facts' be seen as sufficient in environmental communication given the drive towards empirical work noted by critics of the sub-

field like Mathur (2005; 2008)? It is also worth recalling that for Latour the process of freeing people from prematurely naturalised facts corresponded to the crisis of critique. So instead of seeing Latour as siding with emancipation over doubt as a function of critique, if we are seeking out a Latourian response to critique we need to go further and consider the matters of concern that he suggested should follow. These matters of concern are as much issues of how people relate to matter as they are to concerns. If the fairness which Latour (2004b) places as central to elaborating on these matters is to have any weight then it needs to be seen through the constituent weakness of objects in the Anthropocene, which takes us to the second insight for environmental communication from this reading of Latour

For this study I've been highlighting the need for a focus on the human in a crisis that is connected to global changes sometimes described as the Anthropocene. But Latour's focus on the weakness shows that critique might also add something to the more localised discussions that are more traditionally the concern of studies of specific environments. A focus on the constituent weakness of things – on how pervious all things are to that which is around them – is an odd contrast to the focus on the strength of humans as defined by the term Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene is an age defined by human effect on the physical world being so powerful that it defines the geological history – or as Latour writes geostory – of an age. How does this human-centred force relate to the weakness of humans as agentic subjects? The answer lies in Latour's conception of the collective, or gathering. The collective is the assemblage of humans and other influences that is more representative of the social than a subject or object alone. Things gather into a gathering, or a parliament of things. Any one human alone is weak, but the assembly of humans and things is strong. The Anthropocene represents the power of humankind as a collective; but humans as individuals are characterised by a weakness that delimits agency. Individuals act and are acted upon; subjects are subjective agents, but also subjected to other assemblies and assemblages.

This critique of a privileged subject is not a new thing and any basic introduction to Foucault and discipline or governmentality would offer similar insights. However, when paired with the urgency of questions around agency in the time of the Anthropocene, these tensions are perhaps best addressed in the way that Latour (2010a;

2012; 2014b; 2015b) has moved towards an analysis of literature and film to explicate the problems and possibilities of climate change. Where his earlier work looked at the regimes of justification and where ecological thought fitted within predefined argumentative styles, a focus on the imaginative and metaphorical potential of narratives - such as *Frankenstein* and the film *Avatar*, as well as the authors behind these works – might allow for the power of humans as a collective to be imagined by what is recognised as the weak, agentic subject. These types of analyses are lacking in environmental communication and while I wouldn't expect people to necessarily see Latour's nascent works as offering a definitive guide for the study of these narratives, there is certainly more space for pop culture analysis as a form of environmental communication.

Abandoning a critique that has run out of steam to focus on collectives (ironic given that much of the abandoned critique had focussed on empowering collectives) and the past-tense agency of objects (see his work on agency in Anthropocene) makes sense in isolation. But when he is also remarking on the urgency of the ecological threats in an Anthropocene, the lack of normative commitments at the level of both the individual and collective action feels limiting. If Latour's work is part of a project to reform a type of critique in an affirmative manner, then there are some positive directions in his reading of film and literature in the Anthropocene, and some consideration of design as an immanent field. These strands are the closest to an answer to the – however ironic – Latour's (2004a) invocation of Lenin's 'What is to be done?'

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study has been to show how key critical theorists on climate change develop concepts that could add new conceptual tools to environmental communication. To take up that challenge is to acknowledge and push against – and perhaps through – the tensions between doubt and emancipatory politics. Part of this challenge has required highlighting how environmental communication has been constituted and delimited as a sub-field of knowledge, with a journal that represents this sub-field and an orientation towards crisis and an interdisciplinarity oriented towards the sciences.

The following chapter has two parts. First, I offer a meta-analysis of the insights found in the previous four chapters centred on Sloterdijk, Žižek, Latour and Morton. I will seek to work across the divergences, and different registers, found within these thinkers' work to bring them into conversation with one another. As each author covers remarkably different intellectual ground, this 'speaking to one another' might sound more like an awkward departmental meeting than a sonorous choir where bass, alto, soprano and tenor coalesce around a shared tune. The aim of the thesis was never to promote a neat critical consensus from these four thinkers, but to use each as a voice of critical dissent able to invigorate, interrupt and ultimately enrich environmental communication. Four themes emerge when these thinkers are brought into dialogue: (i) humans and others, subjects and objects; (ii) the global scale of global warming (and its relation to the local); (iii) climate crisis and communism; and (iv) nature and its uses.

In the second part of the chapter I consider the effect the emergence of climate change has had on critique and conversely, of the impact critique has had upon environmental communication. I argue that for environmental communication to do justice to climate crisis as well as environmentalism it needs to expand the discussions over the rationale for the discipline from conservation biology to also include critical thinkers. I suggest, a decade after the formation of the journal *Environmental Communication*, that it is

time to turn towards the strengths of humanities, social sciences and philosophy. I conclude with four suggestions as how environmental communication, as a sub-field that embraces the critical complexity, can move forward by embracing the four themes that have emerged from this study.

To reflect on the implications of this study for environmental communication at the end of the conclusion rather than the start might give the reader a sense of constant deferral. The main purpose of the study, after all, was to show what critique can say to environmental communication. That sense of deferral is not intended, but is a side-effect of taking the topic of critique as seriously as I take the sub-field of environmental communication.

This thesis has negotiated the broad and the narrow, allowing the thought of each critical theorist to be drawn out, before being contrasted and synthesised with the other thinkers. Visualising the structure we might picture an introduction that fans out into four chapters focused on a specific author – each of which could have been substituted for a different critical theorist without substantially interrupting the form of the work. At its broadest this study has asked if there is a role for key critical theorists in responding to the urgency of ecological crisis with a specific focus on climate change. After fanning out, this chapter represents a shepherding in, or a funnelling down, into a set of conclusions. At this narrow end, the study returns to its opening question: what do critical theories have to say in response to urgent ecological crisis.

This study approached the question of critique and climate change through the discursive framing of environmental communication as a sub-field of communication studies. More specifically, I scrutinised the first decade of publications from *Environmental Communication*, along with other relevant articles published in auxiliary journals. In setting the tone for *Environmental Communication*, Cox (2007) and a number of respondents invoked the concept of critique as being one of the tools the journal would deploy. The place for critique, however, was overshadowed by the call to situate the discipline within the framework of urgency developed by conservation biology and the concomitant ethical injunction this implies. While some respondents to Cox (2007) offered more critical readings of the sub-field and its task, few registered the kind of dissatisfaction, or alternative critical insights that Mathur (2005; 2008) elucidated.

I defined critique as a process arising from the tensions occasioned by actively professing a belief in an emancipatory political action while simultaneously exercising the doubt or scepticism that characterises the rigour of thinking critically. In short, critique involves the tension between affirmation and negation when both are taken seriously and drawn into relation with one another. For this study taking these distinctions seriously meant seeking out how critical thinkers described climate change as an existing reality and the sources they used to do this, and contrasting that with the approach to doubting the truth claims of others taken elsewhere in their works. I was particularly interested if there was a change in the way these authors wrote of critique both during and after their descriptions of the crisis of climate change.

Bringing the four authors together

The overall structure of this study has been fairly conservative with a chapter devoted to four different thinkers, with each of these chapters structured in similar ways: first, a discussion of how the thinker described climate change and then ecology; second, how they relate to broader strands of critique; finally, a summary of the thinker's key thoughts in relation to climate, ecology and critique was offered. The benefit of this strict structural division became apparent when I was initially attempting to compare approaches between the different authors considered in this study. Each thinker is coming from different disciplines and traditions and to begin by summarising and contrasting their thought would not allow for the valence of each of their qualities to emerge. However, it was also clear in my analysis of each thinker that there are overlapping tendencies that needed to be commented on and contrasted. Hence, this section brings all four authors together – as well as associated discussions – to see how the insights summarised so far might speak to one another. Where, in previous chapters, I have asked 'how might critique respond to the urgency of climate change?' the four thematics will be my answer.

In order to bring the four thinkers treated in thesis into constructive dialogue with one another, I will also return to a fifth – Chantal Mouffe – for assistance. Mouffe constantly grapples with the tensions between articulations of democracy and

liberalism in her own work. She has developed an approach that emerges between articulations of democracy and liberalism, which offers an approach to analyse the structuring relations between concepts in tension rather than pit those concepts against one another. For Mouffe, that articulation came from an articulation of two interlinked but irreducible concepts: democracy and liberalism. In the tension between these concepts, dialogues that are useful in and of themselves emerge.

Like Mouffe (2000) – who suggests that protecting democratic institutions, rather than expanding on liberal rights, is the key area for political work today – some of the four tensions highlighted in the pages to come are more prescient for emancipatory work of political ecology than others. Equally, this playing off of concepts through tension and preferences, like Mouffe’s schema, are not intended to be binary, as if they are inseparable. But perhaps we can think of them as binary in the sense of code that is like the simplest alphabet possible: it is not just 0 and 1 that create meaning, but the far reaching permutations on the temporal repetition of a combination – 01011110000, for example. Similarly, it is not a single contrast between, for example, a Human and an Other that is important in this summation, but in the ways that many thinkers – primarily Morton and Latour in this study – have played these concepts off against one another. Alternatively, but keeping with the mathematical formula, this summation can be thought of as an unsolved arithmetic of uncommon denominators: instead of adding Sloterdijk to Žižek to arrive at *the* climate critique par excellence, I brought Sloterdijk and Žižek together in whatever commonalities could be found. What emerged was neither a party plan nor an ideological programme.

Finally, I want to emphasise that this summation is an intervention in the discursive sub-field of environmental communication not a prescriptive approach that seeks to ‘solve’ climate change. The summation represents the compromise made when confronted with such varying descriptions of ecology, climate and critique found across each of these thinkers. I am acutely aware of the sheer quantity of thought involved in the works referenced in this study and want to be as cautious as I can about reducing any of this thought to a contest of erasure where, for example, a preference for Sloterdijk’s work on spheres would have to play off against thinking about Morton’s critique of the beautiful soul. Nothing could be worse than to think of the preceding chapters as some sort of playoff that would require one of the semi-finalists

to eventually emerge as *the* thinker to be followed. Each of the thinkers could have been the sole focus of this study but the point of bringing them together is to pave a way to a more critically aware form of environmental communication, and a more ecologically and atmospherically considered form of critique.

If I am coming down on the side of anything in a prescriptivist fashion it is in seeing a broader valence in critical theories and critique, especially those that treat doubt and scepticism as a continued challenge and not as a tool in the ultimate service of better outcomes. Instead of seeing the opposition of concepts and thinkers in a binary antagonism, where one must occlude or defeat the other, it would be better to see them as languages that are recognisable to the other. In binary code, what is the condition of a 0 if not for the possibility of a 1? I am arguing that where this study does tend towards the opposition of concepts, these pairings represent a broad frame for understanding as opposed to the limitations of environmental communication pointed to in the opening chapter. If I felt that these categories had already been dealt with in sufficient depth in environmental communication I would be happier making an argument for the primacy of one over the other. But as the tensions involved in the pairing are mostly nascent, articulating them is of primary importance. That is enough of a defence of categories. They are complicated, often pairs and only important insofar as they serve the discussions that feed into and come out of their pairing.

(i) Humans and Others: anthropocentrism in the Anthropocene

Who or what would a critically-informed ecological mindset serve? I ask ‘what’, as well as ‘who’, because in this section I discuss the heightened focus on the object and subject, as well as the human and its Others, which have come to the fore in this study. However, I will not be advocating for a substitution of object-orientated theory in place of critical theory in the age of the ecological crisis. Rather, those considering environmental communication need to develop a way to value human culture that is anthropocentric, but not exclusively so. Latour and Morton address this task most directly, especially in Latour’s work on assemblages and Morton’s on hyperobjects. Morton’s critique of the anti-humanist tendencies in deep ecology and the subjectivity of the beautiful soul play an important role here too. I will begin with a return to the

parts of Morton's work that speak to this issue before bringing in Latour's explication on nature.

The critical theories of Morton and Latour encourage us to begin to think of a form of humanism that is not anthropocentric. The value of human cultures needs to be asserted alongside other assemblages of human and non-human actors. It is this valuing of the human that is at the heart of notions of crisis – without us there is no Anthropocene, though there are still other ecological crises such as extinction of species, as well as depletion and pollution of habitats. For those in the more nihilistic strands of deep ecology, it might be perfectly fine to see the end of human life on earth as we know it, but a critical theory that is emancipatory seems certain to seek an emancipation led by humans who understand their place in the Anthropocene.

Timothy Morton's work, in particular *Ecology without Nature*, dissects a misanthropic trend in ecological and environmental literature. This trend can be summarised by the movement towards deep ecology where the errors, if not outright sins, of humans mean that we, at a species level, have forfeited a right to life. For deep ecologists, humans damage natures – animals, environments, outer space – and so it is the victims of humans that are of more value than humans. Humans are corrupt; nature is pristine. Morton (2008) shows this tendency most explicitly through the concept of the beautiful soul (see Chapter Four). The beautiful soul retreats from human worldliness so as to protect the core of their being – their soul – from the corruption of the human species. The beautiful soul's retreat functions as a refusal of agency to participate in politically emancipatory projects, as humans are universalised as the opposite to a beautiful deep green nature. And, ironically, it is the soul of the human – that ephemeral, spiritual dimension – that represents the nature within humans and which is incorruptible. Why strive for political ecology, the beautiful soul would ask, when politics will corrupt the process and pervert the initial, pure aims? It would be better, they might argue, to spend the weekend in the mountains than go to the Green Party AGM. In another incarnation of the beautiful soul, Morton suggests that this subjectivity is not just against politics, but actively seeks to self-create an identity through lifestyle choices. The beautiful soul, then, is more compatible with a consumerist subjectivity than with one that engages in politics.

We can see the beautiful soul in Morton's description of the literary form of ecomimesis. The author who uses the concept of ecomimesis finds the authority for the argument that will follow by describing their place in the world. The author is not offering an abstracted theory, but is a sensual human dependent on the nature-stimuli that surrounds them – I hear a bird chirp, see the ocean from my desk, am enlivened by the Christmassy contrast of the pōhutakawa bloom. By locating himself in a place, the author also shows where his allegiance is: not to the communicative world of texts and speech, but to the non-human 'real' world outside the book. Nature as the other is real; the writing, arguing self is debased.

By returning to the insights of Morton's work I do not want to deny the valence of deep ecology: there is a space for these anti-humanist and anti-human perspectives especially in becoming aware of ecology. When one is born into a humankind that has been so destructive of animals, trees and the atmosphere, then strong moral opposition to that destruction is needed. But in an age where that destruction is registered as a geological force – the Anthropocene – then the passivity of the beautiful soul seems like acquiescence to those who continue to ruthlessly destroy the planet. In the Anthropocene the struggle is not just animals and trees against humans. Instead the Anthropocene pits the long-term existence of humans, animals and trees against a short-term preference for things today to stay the same as they were yesterday. If we were to create a slogan for this thought it would riff off the well-worn, sometimes-cynical adage that freedom is not free: sometimes conservation is not conservative.

We should also follow Morton as he conjures another name for the time of the Anthropocene: the age of hyperobjects. The Anthropocene describes the geological force of human industry, while hyperobjects frame the same humans as weak. In the age of hyperobjects humans are hypocritical as we are always already compromised through our entanglement with the problems (super, wicked problems in this case) that we seek to solve. Where Morton offers the pragmatic and psychoanalytic insights into the need to act in an age of the Anthropocene, Latour deconstructs the binary between nature and humans. That deconstruction goes further than a rejection of a Cartesian divide between subjects and objects, man and nature, by a two-fold move. First, nature is described not as a physical entity, but as an acceptance of a certain state of affairs that is more in line with 'the natural'. The natural, for Latour, is merely a description

for relations that have been provisionally rendered incontestable, not an ontological quality of being. Second, once nature is seen as a category reliant on a lack of contestation about its conditions of possibility, the interplay between non-human and human actors through networks can be theorised. It is in these interactions that Latour's thought is grounded in a localisable theory where these networks, or assemblages can be recorded and understood by agents.

Where Latour's theory tapers off, and where more recent writings from Morton (2015) become speculative, is at the point where the observations around assemblages are made. Both Morton through his object oriented ontology, and Latour through his actor network theory, aim to describe non-humans as actors. In Morton's (2016) *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* this has taken the form of a postulation that agrilogistics – a form of logic derived from the first imperatives for men to become sedentary and develop local agricultures – has structured logic, rather than logic structuring how this agriculture came about. In this inversion of thought away from humans-leading-technologies to technologies-leading-humans Morton is able to continue with the subject-decentring approach of the object-oriented project. Latour (2005), by contrast, finds himself slipping back towards a reliance on the human to document the agency of temporally enduring relationship of assemblages that include humans. His political task is to distribute agency as widely as possible, but in doing so the ultimate agent is the person who distributes the task of distributing agency: the human remains at the centre of the project, against Latour's stated intention.

Where Latour and Morton are most useful, is in their descriptions of the intersecting of humans and the world around them. In that worldly immersion humans are the agents of an Anthropocene. This sense of agency has neither been fully articulated, with Latour and Morton offering initial theoretical descriptions, nor have most humans consciously understood this sense of agency. I shall return to three useful concepts from Morton to position his work as the most able to think through the relationship between the human and the non-human, though his insights also feel as if they are built on the broader work of theorists like Latour and his work on nature and society.

Morton is particularly useful for people thinking about climate and critique in three manners: first, through his imaginative and compelling rhetoric – object oriented and otherwise – which, like Latour, stretches out to an engagement with other thinkers of

aesthetics well beyond philosophy and critique. His description of hyperobjects and the super wicked problems that occasion them is a clear indication of how the strengths of theory can achieve the difficult task of making the scale of climate change as immediate and terrifying as it needs to be to lead to change. Second, Morton offers the tools to be able to critique the forms of already existing ecology that are anti-human. His critiques of the beautiful soul and the role of ecomimesis are not to simply mock the naivety of some green authors, they force those who profess a concern for ecology to go beyond the quietude of deep ecology and to assess whether they think human culture should survive. Finally, Morton's theory of dark ecology theorises the interplay between people as being both to blame for the current crisis, as well as offering the potential to challenge this crisis. A dark ecology, as opposed to a deep ecology, is gothic and gloomy, but also warm and sweet. The dark ecological aesthetic is full of exaggerations, but it is that intensity that makes it uniquely human. Embodied in the form of the hypocrite, dark ecology offers a potentially affirmative subject for an ecology without nature.

Critical theories in an age of the Anthropocene need to follow the claims that humans are a geological force that is leading to a new era with an analysis of the agency behind that force. Not only is climate change happening and humans are responsible, but we are also, in turn, capable of making a sustainable Anthropocene. Our entanglement with the non-human is not a reason to avoid discussing how that agency ties into emancipatory political change, but is the basis of those changes. Are we hypocrites, we are all to blame? Yes, but the answer to accusations of hypocrisy is not to stop voicing concerns but to recognise that this makes us ultimately responsible for what comes next.

(ii) The global scale of global warming (and the local)

Each of the four theorists I considered was trying to relate a theory that did justice to the enormity of the climate crisis. That scale was almost universally conceived of as at the global level. Where Latour and Žižek's early writings located ecological catastrophe on the local, national and regional levels – the dying off of trees or pollution of oceans, for example – their more recent works have focused on the globe.

And yet, in trying to relate to ecological issues didn't we also just see from Latour and Morton that the immanence of human relations to the non-human was of utmost importance? This section will show how we might think of the scale at which a critical theory of climate-focused ecological thought might operate, given both the urgency of the crisis and the need to theorise between humans and non-humans.

Peter Sloterdijk's work is the most helpful for moving from a localised environmentalism to an understanding of the major threat to the environment as found in our relation to a global atmosphere. He primarily achieves this across his *Spheres* trilogy, with particular emphasis on *Globes: Spheres 2* (2014a) which offers a retrospective expansion of the concept of globalisation, from the way the heavens were considered as an encircling sphere (with the anti-thetical sphere of hell at the centre of the world) through to the seafaring global excursions of sea-faring, colonial Europe to the contemporary understanding of globalisation with both communicative and transport functions. The power of Sloterdijk's work in this area lies in the combination of an erudite reading of history with his self-described exaggerated rhetoric and conscious and explicit use of grand narratives. Rhetoric and narrative converge in the 2500 pages of the *Spheres* trilogy to reconfigure a spatiality that is contemporary and able to traverse between the scales of intimate, global and plural contexts. The connections between the local, microspheres, to the global, macrospheres is not just something abstract, but in *Foams* (2016b) links to climate conferences in Tokyo and Rio de Janeiro. Further, Sloterdijk shows how the movement of flora and fauna to an imperial Europe brought to light cultural technologies, like the glass house that illustrated how humans have sought to create pampered space where life was possible in inclement external atmospheres. From that model he describes how political figures cling to conventional understandings of the world as imperial consumption, rather than one that might be allied to the kind of climate control that understands the limits of the earth as atmosphere. While this analysis sounds speculative and distant, by connecting it to the everyday experiences of intimate spheres we can develop a much more integrated understanding of being in space that does not resort to the ecomimetic literary tactics described by Morton.

From Sloterdijk we learnt to read ecological issues through the etymology that links 'ecology' to the domesticity of the house. We might be tempted to conclude from that

domesticity that Sloterdijk's aim is to think and act locally, but his task is actually the reverse: to expand the sphere of the domestic to the globe. To think of ecology in an age of climate crisis means that we need to think atmospherically – this does not mean that critique only requires global logics or thought, but that a national imagination is not sufficient. The critical ecological task, for Sloterdijk, is climate control: the taking expansion of humans making themselves comfortable in domestic spheres to guiding and maintaining the atmospherical conditions of life. Along with this expansion are a number of socio-political quandaries that have long been associated with these kinds of globular projects: tensions between the individual and the collective, and the role of both in participating in democratic processes.

The challenge of globes, for Sloterdijk, is inextricable from his focus on the techniques that humans use to work on themselves and the world, which he designates anthropotechnics. Those anthropotechnics are also known as positive ascetics and are more similar to the training and design work of an athlete compared to the negative ascetics of fasting that is associated with religious asceticism. So while Sloterdijk's asceticism does come from the individual it does not limit itself to a local sphere, but is global in aspiration. This aspiration, and a willingness to focus on individuals, is one reason why Sloterdijk is considered to be a theorist of the right by some who seem only to have read his controversies, though he states that he identifies with the community-building ethos of social democracy. The role of the community is also apparent in his reading on communication (see 2013c; 2014b) as a means for promoting not just the individual, but also the group in which the person asserts belonging through a shared language of self and collective praise. Sloterdijk's view, then, is thoroughly and consciously Nietzschean: the individual is part of a collective but not subsumed within it. The struggle to overcome climate change and to see ecology as something that is intimately human, and thus requiring fashioning, benefits from this Nietzschean reading. Not least, is the focus on how communication functions as a collective and individual building task of praise. Fashioning a good life, rather than the loss of quality that climate change would lead to, requires seeing language as that technology that draws people together in optimism.

Sloterdijk is not alone in his framing of these issues at a global level – indeed, the very concept of global warming denotes the scale of the problem. Morton's work on

hyperobjects and the framing of climate change as a super wicked problem also focuses on how the temporal and spatial scale of climate change can be thought. The hyperobject is a way of conceiving the imperceptible magnitude of climate change, alongside other temporal and spatial dimensions that outlast human cognition. It is a theory that puts humanity into perspective, not to diminish the value of humanity, but to discount the immediately perceivable context in which humans confront hyperobjects like climate change. At the same time as seeing climate change as a hyperobject, Morton extends the concept to all possible objects as all things are part of other things. So while hyperobjects are fleeting in their ability to be perceived, they are also seen through effects – the rise of ocean levels is not climate change in and of itself, but an effect of the hyperobject. So instead of being a global phenomenon, the hyperobject is instead non-local. Hyperobjects are definable by going beyond human cognition, and not just as an opposition to humans (because we can also be a manifestation of a hyperobject; for example, a human might die of the hyperobject plutonium poisoning from the Chernobyl explosion).

When hyperobjects are speculative and leak into a (hyper)object oriented philosophy, the super wicked problem is grounded in troubling emancipatory political solutions. If the super wicked problem is the question, then Morton proposes the hyperobject as an answer. But the hyperobject is not an emancipatory answer – it does not speak to the will of an agent except to frame the agent as one among many, while at the same time yearning for a central authority or rational solution. Morton and object oriented ontology is of interest from a rhetorical point of view, but if the aim of that rhetoric is to reshape how people see their relation to the world, then Sloterdijk's spheres and anthropotechnic work is a far better frame to the challenge posed in thinking through and beyond super wicked problems.

Where Morton makes a strong description of the difficulty of imagining climate change through the figure of the Hyperobject, Sloterdijk's atmospheres and globes go beyond the difficulties of description to assert what a world humans are responsible for will look like. His work on spheres and climate control has the air of someone who is either convinced that humans are not about to become extinct or seriously imperilled. It might be argued that his optimistic view is a function of his attempt to enlighten the mood of critique, but, if that is the case, it is not the whole story: his descriptions of the world

atmosphere are strong enough to provide hope in and of itself. While his apparent lack of concern for crisis might be read, again, as a kind of individualist indifference for the masses of humanity, I would contend that, rather, Sloterdijk offers such a vast and unique rhetoric of where the world has come from, and where it is likely to go, that one cannot help but see a genuine post-climate, non-deep ecological understanding of human life. Sloterdijk's works on spheres is particularly insightful at the level of the globe, and when combined with his positive ascetics creates a way of seeing the world that requires us to go from a form of local environmentalism— which as we saw in Latour and Žižek emerges from concerns about trees and pollution – to an ecology that meets the challenges of world making.

The scale of climate change as an atmospheric phenomenon, rather than a local challenge, is the work of imaginative thinkers to come. The four critical theorists in this study understand the necessity to describe ecology at this scale, but are only at the beginning of moving this focus to the global.

(iii) Climate crisis and communism

In the two previous sections I drew out both global and local forms of critical theory. Sloterdijk offered an analysis that is infused with the task of emboldening emancipatory political challenges to climate crisis. This section will place those emancipatory tasks alongside class struggle and political systems, with the more recent work of Žižek being important here. The main benefit from including Žižek's thought in this analysis is in terms of a framework that attempts to place climate change alongside three other global antagonisms. At the same time, Žižek sees three possible futures where the antagonism of climate change is used to justify communist, socialist and authoritarian-capitalist/fascist forms of government.

At this point in time, where climate change is widely being described as an urgent matter, I would argue that climate crisis needs to be the central loci of political organising rather than seeing particular political forms as being the sole way to deal with the crisis. In Chapter Three I wrote of the difficulty in justifying Žižek's communist hypothesis when he also recognized that climate change was a threat that meant the proletariat had more to lose than their chains. Instead of going over Žižek's

arguments again, I will return to the point where he argues about whether the only way to solve climate change and other ecological issues is to focus on new communist forms that resist the creation of new apartheid. These antagonisms are described in terms of whether they match the universal, the particular or the singular in a Hegelian lexicon, but there are some differences as to what the universal is and what the particular is in Žižek's work on ecology and whether it is the particular or the universal struggle that should be privileged. For a Hegelian-framed argument, the universal is an ideal that can only be achieved through the particularity of a class struggle.

Žižek's argument is that while ecological catastrophe is seen as the crisis that should unite people beyond any ideologies, 'the key to the ecological crisis does not reside in ecology as such' (2010, p. 334). Žižek privileges the particularity of capitalism in this reading, in contrast to the universal of climate change, because the particular represents a coming together of singular individuals to achieve their visions of the universal. But even if we accept the Hegelian reading as a useful way to think about the relationship between the four antagonisms that Žižek (2009; 2010) identifies, there is no reason why aspects of ecological catastrophe or climate change could not also be conceived of as particular – say, by reading the coming together of all the aspects that lead to climate change – in addition to their articulation as universal.

The key for Žižek in framing climate change as one of his four antagonisms is not just in anti-capitalist struggles but in linking ecology to a new form of communism that is the only possible answer to climate catastrophe, as it alone would not exclude any people from ecological solutions. In contrast, capitalism is leading to further ecological crisis, even though capitalism may also promote solutions – and even the mixed-market solutions he calls socialist (but which are closer to a kind of social-democracy) – to the problems it has created. His framing of crisis indicates that he expects existing hegemonic responses to climate change and ecological catastrophes to allow for the richer people and nations to erect walls and other less tangible divisions that will protect them from the worst excesses of climate change. Žižek's argument rightly takes aim at the generalisation of risk to all in a society as discussed by Ulrich Beck (2013) and as also argued by Curran (2013a; 2013b). While Žižek makes important critiques of the limits of responses to climate change to solve all four of the antagonisms that he

notes, I side more with the view that the urgency of responding to climate change outweighs the need for a communist solution to all four antagonisms.

A more nuanced form of Žižek's focus on capitalism can be found in both Swyngedouw (2010) and Berglez and Olausson (2013) who develop the concept of the post-political condition of climate change, drawing on both Žižek and Mouffe. The post-political condition refers to a situation where responses to a phenomenon is framed as taking place outside of a critique of both capitalism and the existing market economy (Swyngedouw, 2010). Berglez and Olausson (2013) show how consensus on climate change as an anthropogenic fact is premised on a type of shallow ecological thinking that avoids linking it to the need for radical socio-political change. The consensus on climate change is, instead, based on three aspects that preclude the kind of change they see as necessary: naturalised beliefs in climate science, emotional indifference to personal experiences of changing climates and a focus on individual micro-actions as a response. Žižek's cameo in Berglez and Olausson (2013) features his earliest work on ideology, not his communism. (It's worth noting that the radical and critical approaches of Berglez and Olausson (2013) are far less present in their joint paper for *Environmental Communication* (Olausson and Berglez, 2014) where they, nevertheless, emphasise a number of excellent observations on challenges for journalism in a time of climate crisis.

In much the same vein as Žižek rejects capitalist solutions to climate change, Morton (2015) rejects the sciences as being able to come up with an adequate response to climate change, because the sciences created the technologies that created the problem in the first place. While Morton accepts the validity of scientific measurement of climate change – recall the graph at the start of *Hyperobjects* and his repeated assertions there that climate change is happening – he seems to be making a differentiation between the measurement of science and the kind of rationalities and outcomes that come about through the use of that scientific knowledge. My view is that the urgency of the climate crisis is such that all tools at hand will need to be used to find solutions – whether these are new ways of thinking, or technologies to ameliorate climate disruption. I do not see any merit in precluding possibilities for technological solutions to the climate crisis ahead of time just because the forms of knowledge or organisation have led to the current problems. The question of whether

science and technology as they function in the current economy can save us is a major question, and only by rejecting Žižek and Morton's attempts to, respectively, locate ecological issues squarely in the field of a communist analysis or against the rationality of science, can we maintain an openness to it.

Those who are more interested in a capitalised version of Critical Theory, or even political economy in general, may feel queasy following this turn. The Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, as characteristic of the Western form of Marxism founded on the challenging of capitalism, may well have dealt with capitalism as an urgent global problem, but it was rarely of the same kind of crisis as occasioned by global warming. If so-called critical theories emerge that see capitalism – green technology start-ups for example – as an element of struggles against climate change, then might thinkers in the tradition of Critical Theory be right to wonder what remains of criticality? But as I argued in the opening chapter of this study, the term critical has already been expanded in scope to include anything from critical thinking to any generally negative commentary. The criticality of critical theory that I am considering is more tied to assessing the present situation for its greatest threats rather than of maintaining a fidelity to a political response that is in line with a Western form of Marxism. While post-Marxists like Laclau and Mouffe have been making this point since *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* was first published in the mid-1980s, a version of Žižek – especially in his post global financial crisis work – seems determined to return to communism as the central, structuring political project that all others, including climate change, must look to.

Just because communism is not a necessary precursor to thinking of a future that challenges climate change it does not mean that thinkers like Žižek do not provide fertile descriptions of capitalism that are necessary to understand the economic context in which climate change occurs. Similarly, authors like David Harvey (2014) writing on ecology in his *Seventeen Contradictions of Capitalism* and John Bellamy Foster's (2000) writing on Marx's ecology offers necessary critiques of the entanglement of ecological crisis and capitalism. Necessary though they are, these titles are not sufficient to create the kind of view of humans in the world that will be required to slow down global warming and the resulting climate change.

The privileging of ecological crisis over the hope for communist responses that aim to stop any people from being the ecologically impoverished is not something I take lightly. I do not, for example, subscribe to the Latourian approach from Chapter Five that saw any denunciation of capitalism as merely bolstering it. If anything, I would tend towards the focus of Gibson-Graham (1996) who point at the multiple types of capitalism and the need to go beyond any monolithic conceptualisation of capital if anti-capitalist and pro-environment measures are to succeed. In contrast to Latour Gibson-Graham (1996) actually spend a great deal of time discussing what the smaller forms of capitalism might be rather than using the dismissal of capitalism as an edifice to avoid talking about a raft of capitalisms. For example, their analysis is able to pry apart the capitalism of the financial markets from that of the precarious sole trader and in doing so show the fragility and multiplicity of capitalism(s). While their point might be the same as Latour's at the broad level of rejecting the efficacy of a capital-C Capitalism, they take this point as the start of a project rather than a conclusion or footnote to avoid discussing political economy.

At the same time as I am wary of making a communist project central to this future critical responses to climate change, I am also wary of any move to privilege ecological crisis just because it is framed as urgent. If urgency of a crisis becomes the mark of how an issue should be addressed there will always be some issue that is more urgent for some people than addressing economic inequality and the growing borders between the haves and have-nots. For example, of the other two antagonisms that Žižek notes that sit alongside new apartheid and climate change, arguments could be made about the urgent threat of bio-engineering as per Berardi (2015) so as to continue to avoid robust organising against the kinds of economic exclusions that Žižek sees new forms of communism as being able to challenge.

While discussing political economy it is also a good time to consider the tone of critical theories and in particular those that Sloterdijk (2016a) describes as miserabilist. While I have only briefly gone into Sloterdijk's animosity towards contemporary thinkers of communism (see Sloterdijk, 2010a for a little more on these) his focus on critique as having a responsibility for the social mood is useful to consider, especially as it relates to the tone of urgency that justifies much of the tone of climate related writings (see Sloterdijk 2013c). A critique that favours the urgency of ecology over communism

will not necessarily go beyond the miserabilism described by Sloterdijk. Indeed, as the chapter on his thought showed, the critic may well have a responsibility to affirmative social mood as much as she has a responsibility to doubt or emancipatory political projects.

This wrapping up of communism, class and climate change in a dozen paragraphs is not enough to conclude discussion on the role of the economic systems of capitalism in leading to both ecological catastrophe and climate change. But, as with Latour's warning in Chapter Five, I wonder if critical theory is not using the battle plans of a previous war to unsuccessfully think through the necessary responses to ecological crisis. My concern is that critical theories' diagnostic strength in citing the role of capitalist accumulation does not lead to an adequate prescription to the super wicked problem of climate change.

The question of political projects that align with climate change is important because of the history of critical theories attempting to push for large-scale change through alternative political systems. While the return to a communist hypothesis marks a useful point for political theorists, the concomitant insistence from Žižek that this hypothesis is the only way to solve all other crises is too vague to be warranted. A communist response to climate change might remove the walls and borders that make the result of climate change a problem for the poor rather than the rich, but until the communist hypothesis turns into a communist theory and programme, it is simply too opaque to rely upon as the only way forward.

(iv) Nature and its uses

Sloterdijk's (1987) critical unmaskings detail a history of enlightenment disturbances of concepts of both objectivity and nature. His last two critical unmaskings show that there is no good nature underlying everything, and that natural categories are constructed, hiding 'the rudiments for ideologies of order' (p. 59). Though he does not draw explicitly on authors who are as clear in their rejection of nature as Morton and Latour, his travels through rejections of metaphysics, ideological superstructure and morality draw on critical temperaments against the natures and naturalisms of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, to curate a text where the concept of nature – whether it is human

nature, the natural order, or a materialist/physicalist nature opposed to ideals – lacks any basis.

In this study both Latour and Morton have subjected the concept of nature to their own undermining and deconstruction. In Latour's (2004) case that move was to show that nature is a function of truth claims that couldn't be contested – that were *naturalised* – and that political ecology needed to free itself of the powerful rhetorical move of invoking nature. Morton (2008) made similar claims a few years later in *Ecology without Nature*, also stressing the limits to a challenge to ecological crisis by invoking a binary between a natural world and a human world. Despite these critiques, the call to the natural and binaries between humans and nature persist without paying heed to their rejection by theory or theorists. Morton (2008) shows how the political side of deep ecology displaces critiques of nature through a classically metaphysical denunciation of the bad nature of humans. 'Nature' persists only secondarily by being articulated as a definite sphere for political action. Primarily, 'nature' is the referent for the good and the unsullied and in contrast to the corrupted human species. As I have already noted, Morton shows how deep ecology is acquiescent with apolitical, non-emancipatory politics that would see climate change not as a problem, but solution to the damage of human-led agricultural and industrial revolutions.

As Latour notes, the concepts of nature and the natural persist because they have a hard rhetorical edge that allows for strong claims to be made. His critical commitments – to matters of concern rather than matters of fact – mean that he is unwilling to invoke categories like nature. If critique is to have any value in matters of urgent ecological crisis then it needs to perform these basic unmaskings of constructed categories. And yet Latour's analysis for what matters of concern should be – a focus on fairness – does not seem to offer either the immediacy to counter urgent ecological issues or a sufficiently new rhetoric to help people understand the place of humans in the world. So, as per Latour's question for political ecology, we are left with something that is now more like Lenin's lament than a communist call to action: 'what is to be done?'

The concept of nature and its uses is relegated to past conceptualisations that inform Sloterdijk's present work on spheres, anthropotechnics and design but do not preoccupy him. My praise of Sloterdijk's thought is based as much on his conceptual acuity as on the force of his rhetoric: while the former can be seen in summaries such

as Couture (2016) on his psychopolitics, spherology and therapy procedures, the latter requires a reading of his not insubstantial works. While Latour maintains his fascination with the formality and rigour of science and others' regimes of justification, and Žižek pushes for an ecological solution that leaves no-one behind, Timothy Morton's work on aesthetics, as well as on his agrilogistic theory, begins to approach some of the same imaginatively rich rhetoric as Sloterdijk. If nature's role in ecological thought is to be replaced by a conception of humans and non-humans that inspires thinkers as 'pupils of the air' (Sloterdijk, 2016, p. 462), then it will come more from these exaggerations than from the oughts and shoulds of reasonable men. And while these exaggerations take form they are also quite aware that their rhetoric is attempting to go beyond our present, so the spectre of scepticism in its Levinasian formulation – a non-rational doubt that can be reasonably dismissed, but which always returns – also hovers, a shadow that does not necessarily impede what the emancipatory response to climate change might be, but which reminds us of the fragility of these projections. In tandem with that fragility of thought, the shadow of scepticism reminds us of our own mortal fragility and the quagmire that waits when we invoke ourselves as agents of destiny.

Where the first three tensions have resolved into a focus on a critique for the future, the criticism of the trope of nature is a constant read-guard, where critique must be vigilant about maintaining ground already covered. The appeal to nature is simple because it turns the world into solid objects that are uncontestable. In a time of climate change we might be tempted to take this short cut, but invocations of nature rest on a tenuous authority that simply can't hold.

The intersection of critical theories and environmental communication

The study of these four authors has, at its broadest level, offered an alternative rationale and ethos for environmental communication that focuses on urgency and crisis at the level of an atmosphere rather than a local ecosystem. This is not to say that environmental communication focussed on the local has no place, but that there needs to be much more attention paid to a space that we might call climate communication

and which focuses as much on determining just what the climate is as on communicating already understood facts about it. To suggest that the critical theorists that I have considered in this study can play a role in that communicating about the climate is simply to say that they have offered some of the richest and broadest considerations of what it means to live in the climate. On the one hand that means that work like Latour's in considering theology, literature and film as sites where broader narratives are structured about living in a threatened climate is very important. Those studies should be as much about a broad, descriptive survey of the popular culture on climate that is produced today as it is strategising on how to convince the public that climate change is real. I am simply not convinced that the later can be done convincingly because I haven't yet seen evidence that anyone in environmental communication has the kind of understanding of climate that would make it less of a hyperobject and more of an understandable object. The horizon of understanding climate is, in my estimation, decades off. Work like that of Sloterdijk's focus on spheres and Morton's on hyperobjects feels like the tip of the iceberg in a project of truly understanding the implications that underwrite the Anthropocene.

One might be forgiven for wondering at this point in the study what the communicative insights are for this project – my focus has been on criticality and climate change, with the assumption that these insights will offer some insights to environmental communication. By approaching this study through critical theories I have located it on the side of an environmental communication that emphasises the study of communicating about the environment rather than the side focused on the doing of environmental communication. My aim has never been to apply existing communication theory to critique environmental communication, but to show a blind spot in the discipline of environmental communication and to argue for how a wider conception of criticality and critical thinkers can strengthen the field. Thus, this portion of the chapter uses insights from a consideration of critical theories with the aim of broadening the kinds of topics that are considered of concern to environmental communication.

If my intention had been to make environmental communication correspond *to* contemporary critical theories, then what really has occurred instead is a correspondence *with*. If we accept the parameters of inhaling and exhaling critique

established in chapter one then this correspondence should always have had a *with* component. That correspondence of critical theories with the subject of environmental communication – climate change, ecology and environmental issues – has meant that not only are there lessons for those studying and interested in environmental communication but also for those interested in the way that, at its most urgent, climate crisis might influence how contemporary critical theories are thought, prioritised and argued over. Most significantly and perhaps arguably, I have suggested that critical theories should focus on climate change in and of itself, rather than having solutions to this crisis that travel through a new formulation of the communist hypothesis, as per Žižek.

This section will take the four insights in the previous section to argue for a reconsideration of the focus of critical theory as well as environmental communication. My conclusions for the sub-field of environmental communication will suggest that a decade after the sub-field began a journal in its name, it is time for a broadening of the discipline and a move away from an initial focus on conservation biology to a focus on fields closer to critical communication theory that might offer original insights both internally and for a more general audience.

Returning to emancipatory critique

The history of critical theories is one of a critique drawing together political economy and culture to, more often than not, push for emancipation from capitalism and the relations that come from such a society. As such it might seem odd that so little of this study has been focused on class and that where it has, there have been questions about whether that focus is justified. Of the four main thinkers considered in this study, only Slavoj Žižek offered a kind of critique that saw an analysis of the economic, and specifically neoliberal and capitalist underpinnings of climate change as the most important site for critique. For Žižek *only* a focus on the particular function of the economy that excludes on the basis of class will ensure that responses to climate change – as global as it seems – does not lead to other dystopias. We might imagine a repurposing of the above quote that says ‘yes, we can solve climate change without endangering the global market economy’. This possibility was central

to Žižek's analysis as one possible future for a world that is combating climate change. As I wrote in a previous section on Žižek, we need to be aware of the potential for one-off fixes to issues as large as climate change to be substituted for underlying critiques of political economy that have been central to structuring problems like climate change. For this study, and in contrast to what Žižek dismisses as merely cultural demands, I argue that the form of ecological crisis is more significant.

By contrast, Timothy Morton explicitly states that the urgency of responding to climate change must trump the economic and class issues that have been the traditional focus of critical theory. This realisation has led Morton away from identification with the questions of critical theory and has made him particularly weary of the hypocritical side of critical theory when that hypocrisy corresponds to something closer to the beautiful soul than to a discourse of vulnerability. If critical theory is to remain important then it needs to be centrally focused on the relation to the most basic ecological conditions of life and economy that are under threat. That means that instead of privileging a communist hypothesis, we should be working towards an imagining of new ecological, climatological and/or atmospheric hypotheses.

I am not arguing here for the kind of pluralisation of the field of critical theory that might come from the quilting of early Žižek or Laclau and Mouffe. I am arguing for the central focus on climate change, not as one among many, but as the greatest threat to human survival as we know it. Included in that central focus is a move away from localised environmental concerns and towards the global threat of climate change. These movements can be seen in the way that Sloterdijk, Latour and Žižek have gone from their own representations of ecology in the 1980s and 1990s as about trees and pollution, through to the foregrounding of global warming and climate change in more recent work. The displacement of both class and a multitude of other concerns does not imply that the economic concerns most traditionally associated with Critical Theory should be excluded from contemporary criticality. Instead a robust focus on ecology and climate crisis by those who have come from critical backgrounds is needed. More specifically, critical theorists could add a much-needed understanding of the historical and present practice of emancipatory politics across a wide range of fields as well as provoke robust discussions around ideology, belief and scepticism.

Where Wark (2015) notes that climate science does not need Marxist theory, but Marxist theory needs climate science, I would suggest the relationship between critical theories and ecology – including environmental communication – as far more interconnected and interdependent.

One major problem with shifting the focus of critical theories towards ecological issues is the lack of an identifiable agent of historical change for climate issues. The theorists considered in this study have done less work on the role of human political organising around climate change – especially in comparing the place local, national and global scales in the constitution of political agents. By contrast they have spent more time deconstructing the boundaries and borders around human understanding of our relationship to the environment around us. The focus on the Anthropocene shows that humans are agentic in the sense of causing geologic changes, but not in the sense that we are aware of our capacity to change or deviate from the climate crisis in which we are presently embroiled.

By contrast, thinkers such as Ulrich Beck (1992) suggest that instead of lacking an identifiable agent of historical change, all humans – rather than a class, populist or worker based group – share the stakes in avoiding ecological catastrophes. The idea that there is a we who are all in this together is thoroughly challenged by Curran (2013a; 2013b) who argues that the distribution of risk is uneven and that the rich have the capacity to avoid risk through measures such as buying the safest land and affording the costs of movement and migration. Beck's (2013) response repeats a few examples where risk is more dispersed to all, but also acknowledges examples where risk is not generalised to all people.

A critical account of climate change also suffers from a deficit of an identifiable agent of emancipatory politics. Could this lack of an agent be because lived ecological experiences are a weaker basis for unity and oppositional politics than class? As Morton (2013) discusses in *Hyperobjects*, the super wicked problem of climate change eludes our ability to perceive the threat before it is too late. And so while we might at first think that there is an identifiable group for agents of climate emancipation to oppose – the rich, the West, industrialists – this is a group that critical theorists will need to either research more, such as in Oreskes and Conway's (2010) *Merchants of Doubt*, or in the imaginative styling of McKenzie Wark (2015) where his focus on

science fiction leads him to invent the Carbon Liberation Front as the agent of evil. The invocation of the Carbon Liberation Front as the perpetuating party of climate change highlights one mutation of critical theory in an age of climate change.

Critical theorists can create alternative realisms drawing on their multidisciplinary connections across broad fields of knowledge. For example, in this study Morton invokes art theory and aesthetics and has collaborated with Bjork to try to evoke the world of climate change; Latour has pursued work with theologians, designers, and artists to try to depict the assemblages that need to respond to global warming; Wark has, as I have suggested, invoked writers of science fiction; even Žižek has drawn on films and art to show the enormity of the climate crisis as well as placing climate threats alongside other threats. Sloterdijk's grand theory of globalisation as a way of coming to understand the world as atmosphere offers the most imaginative depiction of humans place in and reliance upon the earth for survival and thriving.

Returning to doubting

But is a focus on the imaginative the best direction for critical theory to take? What about rigour? As per Latour (2004), I would argue that the traditional tools of critique as both a serious debunking of misguided beliefs or the assertion of hidden determinants has already permeated climate based arguments. When the industrialists that he and others cite are able to deploy doubt as a tool to delay action, new tools are needed for criticality to have much purchase. In line with that I would argue for a place for imagination as a central critical tool. As Morton has written, now is exactly the time for people to be stepping back from the invocation of urgency as the major rhetorical tool and trying new ways of theorising and talking about climate change. Rationalist explanations of the world and the threat that is being faced have not succeeded in making politicians, industrialists or whoever is responsible for global warming take action. Normative prescriptions on how humans should respond to climate change have shown themselves totally unable to deal with the complexity of the issue. At best they have encouraged more recycling; at worst they have fostered a sense that nothing can be done. There is a great opportunity for thinkers of plurality, complexity and utopias to use their broad critical palette – from psychoanalysis to

contemporary neo-Marxist thought – to reframe how humans see our inextricable entanglement with the super wicked problem of the hyperobject known as climate change.

So what of doubt and scepticism? This study of critical theories was premised on an irresolvable tensions between (in)action and (dis)belief. Doubt was established as a temporally enduring condition that is essential to critical theories, where questioning did not limit itself to a challenging of the status quo, but pursued the questioner as she sought to propose solutions and unity to the problems raised by her questioning. And yet despite the centrality of doubt and scepticism through both critical judgment and the less than rationalist re-emergence of a Levinasian scepticism (as described in Chapter One), all of the thinkers I considered treated doubt as far and away the secondary issue to the challenge of emancipatory political change.

Throughout the thesis doubt and scepticism have taken multiple forms from scepticism as a type of methodological tool to be deployed, through to an undecidability that relies on poststructuralist premises of objects as constructed entities that are only ever ephemerally encountered. Each of the critical thinkers in this thesis was chosen because they took the question of doubt to be more than a methodological or practical issue. If this spirit of critical doubt is to find a home in environmental communication it needs to reflect the impossibility of ever eradicating itself by human will. This is the Levinasian form of doubt described in Chapter One – the bird of prey that swoops down as soon as we've forgotten its presence – rather than the form of doubt that justifies a study but which we must erase if we're to offer definitive conclusions.

For a Critical Theory that is based on culture and political economy it was reasonable to see Adorno or Horkheimer as experts in the field and people who could provide as good a rebuttal to issues of doubt as any other. But for climate change, would an expertise based on climate science make critical expertise redundant? We can't turn to Sloterdijk for a reading of temperature changes in the Arctic, can we? So while the critics of economy could be said to be experts in at least one form of economy, the same can't be said for these critical approaches to the science of climate change. So instead of being experts in the field of climate science, and allowing that assumption of expertise to guide the conditions of possibility of doubt, critical theorists may need to repurpose their relation to what counts as belief and disbelief. Those thinkers that

engaged in descriptions of exactly what this ‘climate change’ thing is, typically relied on the expert data and testimony of international bodies such as the International Panel on Climate Change, with a few cursory references to carbon parts per million in the atmosphere or a graph on changes in temperature. Imagine if a critical theorist of economy were to rely on the World Bank or International Monetary Fund! And yet this (necessary?) trusting in institutions is exactly at the centre of Latour’s (2013) recent analysis on how science is to be bought into the democracies.

Latour (2004) was also very aware that doubt was not the same as neutrality. He felt that the work he had done on trying to emancipate people from prematurely naturalised facts had produced a discourse that allowed a selective form of postmodernism to selectively appropriate doubt in the service of other political ends. Surely, some might argue, there is little similarity between this selective postmodern appropriations of doubt and the philosophical doubt known as scepticism? The problem for those wishing to discern between forms of doubt relies on the answer to the question of who is doing the discerning.

The best way to show if scepticism is being applied selectively is to see what concept of science the same people or group invokes at other times. As Latour showed in an analysis of Climategate – both sides of the argument relied on strong representations of science, which we might call scientism. The only doubt in the Climategate case was over the interpretation of the leaked emails – those who thought the emails showed corruption believed that the science was corrupted and they offered their sources for a genuine climate science. In contrast, others claimed that the Climategate emails revealed a rigorous scientific process and that those who leaked the emails were reading controversy into it that was unjustifiable.

From Latour we can see that a strategic commitment to doubt might be as problematic as an overly positivist position. To identify doubt and to side with it does have political implications and is hardly ever neutral. A world beset by threats such as nuclear weapons might see inaction and disbelief as useful tactics guided by the wait-and-see ethos of the precautionary principle – this was one conclusion of Sloterdijk (1987) when writing in a time of the cold war. But the negation of belief and action also has effects, primarily in the time taken up by the waiting and the future evaluation of the seeing. For climate change, urgency as the temporal opposite of ‘waiting and seeing’

is not just a matter of exaggeration – it is a response to the super wicked problem of delayed effects.

For a critical theory that takes climate crisis as the most important site for emancipatory politics there remains one more insight from a tradition of doubting that can contribute to broader understandings of what it means to do critique. The influence of metaphysics and psychoanalysis on critical theories is to be welcomed as rich strands of non-rationalist doubt that help to understand both how humans relate to the world around them and to the irrational aspects of attempting to change behaviours. Levinas's insistence on a temporally enduring form of scepticism, as well as Žižek's (1991) insights into irrational responses to ecological crisis across three subject positions – cynical, obsessional and moral – are particularly instructive. The emancipatory worth of critical theories are only as strong as their tools: even at its most emancipatory and polemic critical theory needs to avoid a descent into becoming the, however militant, public relations arm of climate science. Hence, Žižek's analysis of the three subject positions also includes sites where those more focused on emancipatory politics can reflect on their own arguments and positioning, especially the role of the moral imperative of the beautiful soul.

Further to the focus on the enduring aspects of doubt within a critical climate theory, if climate change is characterised as the time of hyperobjects, as well as an Anthropocene where humans are at once responsible for vast geological changes to the climate without the agency to direct these changes, then the theory of cynical reason as developed by both Sloterdijk and Žižek is valuable. Though neither of those thinkers persist with cynicism as a central locus of their work, their subsequent positions – Sloterdijk on anthropotechnics; Žižek on communism as a particular struggle alongside climate change – give examples of how a critical theorist might, in themselves, react against and go beyond a generalised spirit of cynicism.

In summary, one of the first challenges of a critical theory with an utmost concern for global climate crisis may well be the task Morton (2007; 2008) was attempting: gaining some legitimacy for the voices that speak from outside the circumscribed authority of the sciences. I would argue that the recent political failings of both the Copenhagen and Paris climate conferences should allow a space for critical theorists to renew claims to both their authority in dealing with and cultivating emancipatory political projects

as well as identifying and diagnosing the myriad forms of doubt and irrationality that make up the human persona and influence how we see our place in the world. Beyond this focus on doubt and emancipatory politics, critical theorists like Sloterdijk and Morton can offer compelling visions of human beings in the world of atmospheres and hyperobjects. If the planetary vision of Sloterdijk and Morton ever appears too disassociated with the humanistic assumptions of climate scientists, then Wark's work on labour is a useful corrective. Wark shows that even though some critical theorists may have their heads in the clouds – and there's nothing wrong with that - others are focused on the boots in the mud.

For a critical environmental communication?

Despite the fact that this study has sought to show how critical theorists have corresponded to, and with, issues of ecological and climate crisis, the ultimate aim has been to better inform how environmental communication scholars understand and practice critique. The critique that I argue will broaden and enliven the discipline of environmental communication is not a thunderbolt from the sky. Mathur (2005; 2008) has already made two searching critiques of the sub-field and suggested adding the critical lifeblood from scholars like Niklas Luhmann and Gregory Bateson. The concept of critique is invoked, if not pursued, in Cox's (2007) orienting discussion on conservation biology. To reconnect this study with the earlier critiques of environmental communication from the opening chapter I want to restate two specific critiques from Mathur.

Mathur (2005) argues that there is confusion within environmental communication about whether it is a field (or sub-field in my reading) of interest and study or a conceptual phenomenon. If environmental communication is a field of interest then it is a practice that includes non-academics and is more aligned to the notion of communication as a something that environmental communication scholars do. In contrast, if scholars of environmental communication see the sub-field as a conceptual phenomenon then they are more likely to apply communication theory to understand how other people who are doing environmental communication behave. For Mathur, and for myself, seeing environmental communication as a conceptual phenomenon

allows for a productive distance that would encourage other theorists of the environment, communication and other related disciplines to be considered alongside and even in opposition to a hegemonic incarnation of environmental communication. As Mathur notes, there is overlap between these two interpretations of the field, though it is useful to be aware of the potential of both practices and the tendency of most environmental communication to be developed through a retrospective appraisal of practice.

In addition, Mathur (2005) argues that environmental communication has focused far too much on case studies and empirical research with conceptual frameworks of risk, hazard and disaster. He argues that these almost universal frames – with the exception of some work drawing from literary and cultural critics – prematurely limits the philosophical and political enquiries that are possible in the sub-field without being aware of that limiting. He writes that this singular focus tends to mean underlying conceptual definitions of environmentalism and communication remain unexplored. Mathur's two articles on environmental communication only include one footnoted reference to the establishment of a journal called *Environmental Communication*, but from my overview of the work done since, the framing of a conservation biology view of the field, as well as the crisis discipline focus, has tended to mean the philosophical and political underpinnings remain undertheorised.

If Mathur's reflections come from an outsider critiquing the insiders of environmental communication, Cox' (2015) reflection offers an insider's reading that shares some of the same concerns. Specifically, Cox gets away from the localised thought of environmental communication based on hazards through a discussion of the scale and complexity of climate change. The focus on scale in Cox's (2015) work speaks to the similar critical suggestion that part of climate crisis is our inability to offer convincing descriptions of the very basis of a climate and atmosphere that is changing. While Cox is not as explicit about the need to move to imaginations of climate at the global level as I have been in this concluding chapter, his work does point in that direction. Cox's caution is not misplaced: while we might hope that a focus on the global does not displace a focus on other local environmental issues, anecdotal evidence from discussions at COCE 2015 (Conference on Communication and the Environment) indicate this is happening.

Cox's tone in 2015 has also shifted from laying out a set of thesis for the sub-field and how the new journal should operate (in Cox, 2007) to championing a small group of writers who engage in theorizing and specify a conceptual approach adequate to the challenge of the global scale of climate change. That analysis bears similarities to that discussed above in terms of Sloterdijk's analysis of the globe and a need to recalibrate an analysis away from the local and towards the scale in which climate change operates. In the same article Cox also highlights the need to navigate the human-nature relationships that has been central to Latour and Morton's work. And while many other writers make gestures towards the need for interdisciplinarity and analysis of political and corporate interests, the more dominant suggestion in both the founding papers of the first issue of *Environmental Communication* and the ICA conference from 2013 (published in 2015) is that environmental communication suffers because it is not engaged enough with practitioners. On the whole, despite Cox's work, which does not explicitly argue for a renewed criticality, it seems that those with an interest in bringing critical theories, methods or contestations to the fore are outnumbered.

My consideration of contemporary critical theorists writing on climate change and global warming within the broader context of ecology and crisis has shown a range of philosophical and political themes and directions that would help environmental communication address the critiques made by Mathur. If more attention is paid to the conceptual underpinnings around climate change, as well as the heightened urgency around climate change in comparison to localised environmental matters, then environmental communication scholarship will have greater import for the public and other academics. These diverse views may also develop productive disagreement internally, though Cox (2015) argues – without a lot of scope for challenges to this system – that the interdisciplinary differences have led to a type of siloing effect where discourse communities have developed that are singular and exclusive.

One approach to bring more critical voices to the fore in environmental communication would be to suggest the creation of an explicitly critical sub-field of environmental communication research. But would the creation of critical environmental communication offer a proliferation of fields at the expense of more genuine engagement? Since Mathur's 2008 overview of the sub-field of environmental communication, some essays have been published in *Environmental Communication*

that show at least some familiarity with, and interest in, philosophically and politically oriented works. That familiarity indicates some appetite for the critical dimension to co-exist alongside case study and empirical analysis. A few examples of exemplary works from the first ten years of the journal: the study of the environment as spectacle in line with Debord, from many of the articles in issue six, volume ten (see, for example, the introduction from Goodman et al (2016) or Pezzullo (2016)); Prelli and Winters (2009) offer a theological account of evangelism that might appeal to Latour, and use Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory as a grounding. Ytterstad (2014) redeploys a Gramscian account of framing that would appeal to readers of Critical Theory. Cramer and Foss (2009) find space for discussions on the earth-human relationship using Jean Baudrillard. Finally, the range of exemplary insights that have followed Cox's (2007) proposal that environmental communication should be a crisis discipline based on conservation biology, especially those from Schwarze (2007) and Plec (2007).

Environmental communication as interdisciplinary

Instead of proposing that the insights of this study go the way of Mathur's (2005; 2008) unfulfilled hopes that Bateson and Luhmann would receive more attention, I propose that environmental communication, and especially the journal of the same name, use the anniversary marked by the decade since the journal's inception to reframe environmental communication away from a conversation with conservation biology and that reading of a crisis discipline, and towards a focus on the communicative and rhetorical. If this study, as initially framed, viewed the reliance on conservation biology as a way of grounding the expertise of environmental communication in the interdisciplinary then this explicit movement would suggest that the discipline needs to be, instead, justified by the theories and practices more historically associated with the humanities and social sciences. Examples of this kind of work can be found in the fields of critical communication studies and critical rhetoric.

In 2007 – before the widespread failures of Copenhagen and Paris climate conferences – it might have been valid to hold out that rational political and communicative practices just needed a chance to travel through the myriad levels of international

institutions before reasonable measures to combat climate change would be implemented. But in 2016, with little in the way of progress in international agreements or impetus to manage climate change, it is clear that environmental communication cannot justify its existence as simply the public relations wing to ecology or other environmental sciences. The commitments of conservation biologists cited by Cox are all sourced from the late 1980s and early 1990s. As we saw from the change in focus on ecological crisis to climate crisis in Sloterdijk, Žižek and Latour, an enormous amount has changed in the last thirty years. If conservation biology and the legitimacy of the sciences were once a necessary grounding for the establishment of environmental communication as a subfield, the urgency of climate crisis today – as well as the work already done in environmental communication – may mean that the subfield no longer needs such framings to cement its disciplinary claims.

Environmental communication as a crisis discipline

In addition to the subfield's interdisciplinary grounding, the discursive frame of environmental communication also grounded its validity as a response to crisis, and more specifically as a crisis discipline which necessitated an ethical duty. I suggest that the concept of crisis is maintained – including a focus on the global over the local – but is developed with more attention to theories of crisis from the humanities and social sciences. While conservation biology was a useful starting point for Cox's (2007) framing of environmental communication, the philosophical postulates and commitments of the natural sciences ought to be supplemented with more critical approaches both to crisis and ethics. Crisis could, instead, be linked to the broader work in the humanities and social sciences that takes more seriously the value of a broader range communication research and traditions that are grounded in the wider concerns of the philosophy (at least as it is framed in the Anglosphere – recall the difficulty of Latour to accede to any discussion of his work in the context of humanities, preferring an evolving 'digital humanities'). My argument for this move is not based on an argument that conservation biology, or the more general scientific communication of climate change, has failed to offer a coherent understanding of what climate change is and the threat faced by people. Instead, the problem is that by placing the intellectual rigour of the humanities and social sciences – and at its most reflexive end, critical

theories – secondary to knowledge imported from the sciences, those interested in environmental communication are less justified in deploying the valuable tools that make communication worthy of study in and of itself.

For example, Cox's (2007) focus on an ethical duty borrows heavily from Soulé's work in the sciences, thereby re-importing the study of ethics to the humanities from the sciences even though the study of ethics has been most developed in the academy from philosophical work in the humanities and social sciences. This approach to ethics feels like the equivalent of exporting raw fish to be processed overseas and then importing it back in a crumbed and consumable form. This critique of the direction in Cox (2007) is not to imply that scholars of environmental communication have not produced excellent studies grounded in ethics (see Dannenberg et al, 2011, for example) but simply that these critiques need not come from the elsewhere of the sciences. I appreciate that Cox does point to conservation biology as a field that environmental communication could borrow from rather than replicate. However, the dedication of the first third of the framing article in the inaugural issue of *Environmental Communication* to how conservation biology has grappled with ethics gives a clear indication that conservation biology ought to be the discipline of most interest to environmental communication scholars.

It might seem odd at this point of a study that has argued that the crisis of climate change ought to reorient critical theory to now be saying that the knowledge of critical theory ought to frame environmental communication in contrast to knowledge from a scientific discipline. However, the point is not to make arguments for the sciences over the humanities in broad strokes, but to suggest that the question of communication should draw from disciplines – especially those with critical approaches – with a strong and long history of considering ethics, crisis, emancipatory politics and doubt. If climate change is the starting point of analysis it is only so as an observation about the world; it does not require we take on all of the epistemological and ontological views of climate scientists.

The arguments about human responsibility for crisis from Soulé in Cox (2007) make it sound like the realisation of a crisis would be a shame, but manageable. That version of a crisis would have humans continuing on as we have all along. Even the explanation of the importance of conservation biology as a frame draws on the personal tragedy

for the scientists who have committed their lives to ‘the rescue effort’ (p. 8) rather than the personal tragedy being something that would in all likelihood contribute to massive displacement, famine, and death on unimaginable scales. A critical approach is much stronger at showing the entanglement of theorists with the world. For example, Žižek (1991) more than a quarter century ago was able to dismissively write that no longer are questions of the environment ‘an exaggerated concern over a few trees, a few birds’ (p. 28). Nor is the question of climate change one that we would continue to phrase as about ‘species, communities, and ecosystems’ (Soulé, 1987, as cited in Cox, 2007, p. 8). Instead environmental and climate change questions are centred on the urgency of avoiding catastrophe and, as Žižek put it ‘literally a question of our survival’ (1991; p. 8).

In this study I have proposed four contemporary authors who are not only theorists of a crisis of ecology, but who specifically deal with the crisis of climate change. Where Mathur (2005; 2008) indicated that the ecological theorising of Luhmann and Bateson would add a critical depth to environmental communication, I argue that the focus needs to be even more sharply directed to climate change. The ecological theorising of Luhmann, for example has been taken up by some theorists of environmental communication (see Grant, Peterson and Peterson, 2001; Peterson et al, 2009) but the work of the four more globally oriented thinkers has only briefly been drawn on.

If it seems strange to use a theory of crisis from three decades ago when the climate crisis was only beginning to be understood at that time, it also seems strange to continue with the notion of an ethical duty drawn from conservation biology. The idea of ethics as a duty once more passes off ethics as something like a chore that mature adults need to do, but which is not entangled with human existence. To that end, none of the four writers I focused on discuss the ethics of climate change. Gardiner (2013) does, however, and offers an excellent insight for environmental communication scholars who are interested in how an ethicist might unravel the indecision and irrationality of the climate crisis as an ethical challenge. But to speak of an ethical duty is to seek to impose moral obligations on people who have either been unwilling or unable to meet the challenges of modernity, as Sloterdijk puts it in his *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Though none of the writers I considered explicitly framed their discussions on climate change as an ethical duty, that compulsion to make the world

better is simply a deep and enduring feature of the emancipatory push of critical theories. To suggest there would be an ethical duty for these authors would be to show a total misunderstanding of the very project of their authorship – these ethics are tied up inexplicably with their focus on ecology and climate change, rather than a duty that precedes their work.

Environmental communication as critical

Environmental communication would be emboldened by embracing a philosophical orientation that sees doubt not as something to eradicate but as a productive force. To principally see doubt around ecology and climate change as a function of irrationality or climate scepticism is to only tackle a straw man of disbelief. Critical theories are not critical because they fetishise disbelief but because they come from a tradition committed to freeing people as much from prematurely naturalised facts as they are to freeing them from prematurely naturalised social relations. If scholars in environmental communication are oriented towards a field that understands the tensions between doubt and emancipatory politics then there will also be pragmatic gains in terms of improved communication with a range of non-experts on climate change and ecology.

If this articulation of environmental communication finds itself in need of a discipline to aspire to, a role Cox (2007) suggested for conservation biology, it could be any number of other fields that are also trying to draw from histories of the humanities and social science to inform how contemporaries think and communicate about ecology. Consider the sub-field of ecocritique from which Morton's (2007; 2008) early writings came. If rational and scientific descriptions of climate change have not gained the necessary purchase, perhaps it really is time to find more evocative and imaginative language. English departments have developed ways of discussing the rhetoric of ecology, nature and wildlife that Latour has drawn upon as exemplary devices for imagining alternative futures. Similarly, the edited collection put together by Biro (2011) shows that there are thinkers in the social sciences who are interested in, and adept at, reimagining the interplay of Frankfurt-style Critical Theory with contemporary ecological problems. And if scholars are searching for a field with a little

more pragmatism and future-orientation, then the interest sparked by Sloterdijk and Latour in design departments might offer a useful special issue on how to think globally about a climate control that had only recently been considered a domestic issue.

In looking back at the various articles titled ‘Response to Cox’ in the inaugural issue of *Environmental Communication* few were without reference to the role that criticism could play in the future of the discipline. I argued in the opening chapter of this thesis that these critical theories have not been sufficiently developed in *Environmental Communication* in the ensuing years. The four writers I have studied in this thesis are not peripheral to contemporary critical thought and yet despite their rich thought on ecology, environmental communication scholars have not yet drawn from them in any depth with only a few scattered references to their thought in *Environmental Communication* and other, related journals and books in the field.

In the spirit of Cox’s section on normative tenets for environmental communication, I end this chapter by returning to the four synthesised points from this study’s consideration of critical theories and climate change that were described earlier in this chapter.

1. Environmental communication must value, though not exclusively so, the continued existence of human cultures. This value is based on an acceptance of our responsibilities in the Anthropocene and – as opposed to deep ecology – find some value in human activity *even though* humans are responsible for the Anthropocene.
2. Environmental communication needs to focus more, if not exclusively, on the global level of climate crisis than on particular forms of localised environmental crisis.
3. When considering how critical theories frame climate crisis, the urgency of the issue needs to focus on climate analysis directly rather than through a lens that is limited to one particular political formation, whether that be communist or capitalist. The political and economic aspects of class analysis and traditional Critical Theory are important in diagnosing how climate change has emerged through industrial practices, but that does not

make it sufficient to theorise how responses to climate change should be framed.

4. Environmental communication should actively work to challenge the binaries, both overt and hidden, between nature and politics, nature and humans, and nature and society. To study 'nature' should be to study how concepts are rendered natural.

Final words

The four authors were dealt with in separate chapters so as to best draw out their specific ways of speaking to critical theories, climate change and ecology without the voices becoming entangled. The aim of having those voices in silos was to try to bring out the texture of each thinker's vision without any one prematurely dominating the study. Before attempting something of a synthesis of the concepts, tools and critical positioning taken from these four chapters I reiterated my approach to some of the oppositions that had been developed.

Based on my reading of all four thinkers, and contrasting the strength of their theories in contrast to one another, I arrived at the following four thematic foci: (i) a focus on identifying with human and non-human forms; (ii) a focus on the globalism of climate change over the localism of some earlier environmental writings; (iii) a moving of focus from political economy to ecology and (iv) an elaboration on the rhetoric and theories of nature and the natural.

From these insights I made four recommendations for environmental communication: it should (i) tend towards a re-evaluation of human cultures in addition to the environmental; (ii) refocus on the global aspect of climate change; (iii) favour a critique based directly on climate change and not filtered through any one political form, or potential form; (iv) critique the basis of all oppositions of nature against some other. From these four recommendations I hesitated to suggest that a critical sub-field of environmental communication should be formed. Instead I argued that the sub-field refocuses its efforts on using the rich history of communication, ethics and more

broadly the social sciences and philosophy to offer tools to reimagine our place in the atmosphere as well as challenge the changing of the climate.

Though the main aim of the study was to use critical theories to speak to environmental communication, I also found it useful to see how these recent attempts by critical theorists to engage with climate change and ecological crises impacted what the object of critical theories might be in the coming decades. Critical theories, I argued, remain caught between the affirmation required to sustain emancipatory political practices and the irrepressible return of a doubt and scepticism that could not be reduced to being a part of scientific process.

Where the authority for the Frankfurt School's style of Critical Theory was derived by a reading of political economy against society by the theorists themselves, critical theories today may need to find new ways to work with the authority of climate science. Critical thinkers inhale knowledge from the sciences and exhale claims about crisis, politics and ethics. This is the particular skill of people who breath critique. Breath is our most immediate link to climate change, drawing sustenance from the atmosphere in a mostly unconscious process. Do the allusions of a breathing critique allow for more imaginative connections between agency in the Anthropocene? Does this allusion offer an interesting, immediate way of connecting people to the atmosphere? If so: wonderful! If not: other critical faculties and techniques will need to be developed to represent the entangled world we find ourselves in.

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