An aerial photograph of a city, likely Melbourne, showing a dense urban landscape. The buildings are covered in greenery, with a prominent central tower featuring a circular sign that reads 'TOP'. The surrounding area is filled with trees and other buildings, creating a lush, green urban environment.

Issues Paper Series

**COMING THROUGH SLAUGHTER:
ECOLOGY OF THE URBAN AGE**

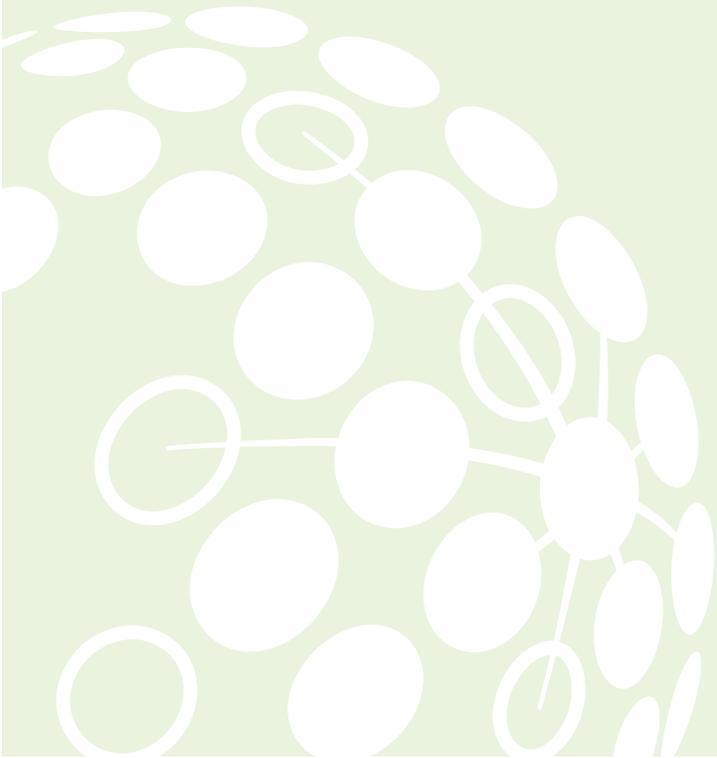
BRENDAN GLEESON



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



MELBOURNE SUSTAINABLE
SOCIETY INSTITUTE



Coming Through Slaughter: Ecology of the Urban Age

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Editor Dr Lauren Rickards, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, Lauren.Rickards@unimelb.edu.au

Production Editor Claire Denby, Melbourne Sustainable Society Institute, cdenby@unimelb.edu.au

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Coming Through Slaughter

Michael Ondaatje's 1976 book *Coming Through Slaughter* provides the leitmotiv for this essay, composed of extracts from my new book, *The Urban Condition* (Gleeson 2014). Ondaatje's story, which traces the life of Jazz pioneer, Buddy Bolden, explores the modern predilection for 'creative destruction'. It was the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter (1883-1950) who gave us the latter term, to describe the expensive paths that markets take to innovation and growth, requiring along the way much dislocation and wastage. 'Creative destruction' has a certain arty playfulness to it, but Schumpeter used it to summarise a terrible reality which goes to the core of the modern capitalist experience.

The growth compulsion is a beast that must be fed with live bodies and precious resources. As part of this, we have learned to discount the awful human cost, human and natural, of change, especially politically forced change that has sought to clear the way for growth. Countless lives have been tossed into the furnace of reform and innovation.

Reflecting on the past few decades – the years of reform and then of the miracle economy – I've found my chance to deploy Ondaatje. We were told it was a time of wondrous growth. We were also reassured that the 'fundamentals' were right and that we could look forward to perpetual growth. The system failed on both counts. First, even during the boom years, growth was sluggish and uneven. Then came the great default of 2008-9 which showed this wondrous machine to be a Ponzi scheme of economic trickery and political manipulation.

At what cost? Countless lives were side-lined and discounted. This was nowhere more evident than in our cities where new netherworlds of poverty have formed. Austerity governance with all of its privatisations and inequities is our inheritance it seems.

Modernisation, and its many booms and surges, lifted living standards for many. It was also, however, an era of fantastic waste and natural despoliation. A charnel house of growth, again reflected in our eco-cidal cities. Our long run despoliation of Nature was speeded up and we now face both the legacy of industrialisation and our more recent experiments with neo-liberalised capitalism. New gales threaten; this time not under our control and not in service of the growth imperative. Climate change and resource insecurity are the greatest of these natural tempests.

We emerge from the consumption carnival, and into the face of the coming storm, weaker not stronger, denuded of resources and of ideas. The twin ecological and social defaults that have opened so dramatically in recent years implicate two institutions as pivots of system failure, markets and governments. All this is to shatter the dream of liberal(ised) democracy, a simple faith in weakly steered markets to guide us through history.

We've come through a slaughter of riches and possibilities, to a new realm of human vulnerability. This is no catastrophe, yet. The times compel us to rethink and reset our states and economies in quest of sustainability and resilience. The era of adolescent self-harm must pass to a new maturity where we can live peaceably with Nature and with our own roiling ambitions for freedom and realisation. The dictum of human adulthood might be that 'There is no creativity in destruction'. Have we learned this yet?

*I, Bertolt Brecht, came out of the black forests.
My mother moved me into the cities as I lay
Inside her body. And the coldness of the forests
Will be inside me till my dying day.*

Bertolt Brecht

Coming

The Urban Condition

The urban age has been declared. A chorus of expert and popular commentary welcomes a golden era of human prospect. A new conversation welcomes the fact that humanity is now preponderantly an urban species, *homo urbanis*. The major transnational institutions bestow great significance to urbanisation as a force shaping human fortunes. For the past half-decade, the United Nations has broadcast the message of a new urban ascendancy. UN-Habitat enthuses, “A fresh future is taking shape, with urban areas around the world becoming not just the dominant form of habitat for humankind, but also the engine-rooms of human development as a whole” (2012:v).

The bloodiest century in history gives way to an era of urban opportunity, but in a world unsettled by planetary scale threats to natural and human orders. Ulrich Beck (2009) speaks of a ‘dialectics of modernity’, underlining the simultaneity of triumph and crisis in a world pervasively and continuously remade by capitalist modernisation. Beck casts us in an age of unprecedented global risk marked by an auto-genesis of threat that seems integral to capitalism itself: of world global society wracked by the agonies “...self-dissolution, self-endangerment and self-transformation” (2009:163).

The terrible and terrifying dialectic of modernisation was revealed continuously through the twentieth-century, as the scale of the paradox reached ever upwards to the twin heights of accomplishment and extinction. In 1961, through the heavy pall of the atomic age, John F. Kennedy, recognised, “The world is very different now. Man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life” (in Watson 2012:12). It was a moment of revelation that was both appalling and enthralling. Other moments of species insight were to follow: the dawn of a *Silent Spring* (Carson 1962) that masked the poisoning of Earth’s ecology, the first view from space of a finite world and *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al. 1972). Later, recognition that centuries of carbon capitalism had squandered the planet’s ability to support life, potentially all of it.

The modern conversation has fixed progressively on this great contradiction of human development. Narratives collide. Triumph is reread as calamity, and progress retold as regress. There were foretellings. Long before President Kennedy’s declaration, Marx and Engels scorned the boasts of the industrial bourgeois who “like the sorcerer...is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells (Marx & Engels 1985[1848]:85-6).

The urban age renews the contest between hubris and doubt. Urbanists enthuse for an epochal opening, whilst others, like philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, see closure, *Living in the End Times* (2010), already sounded by

the mounting testimonies of human and natural default. The spectre of Apocalypse is hardly new, but its horsemen, as Žižek points out, have never been more terrifyingly present.

A struggle for species prospect, perhaps survival, has been widely recognised for some time. In 1992, a large congregation of the world's leading physical scientists issued a global alarm; the 'Warning to Humanity' pointed out that our species and the natural orders were on a 'collision course' (Union of Concerned Scientists 1992). The long Promethean journey of modernity was to end disastrously. Evidence of rising global ecological dysfunction since that time seems to be bearing out that terrible prophecy. Even the sentinels of the global economy seem worried. In early 2013, the IMF's head, Christine Lagarde, colourfully warned that future generations would be "roasted, toasted, fried and grilled" if global warming wasn't checked (Elliot 2013). In 2008, an article in *Science* by the felicitously named Grimm and co-authors stated that the city was where the battle for ecology would be won or lost (Grimm et al. 2008).

For the first time, the centre stage of human contest is urban. Much commentary would have us believe that cities are more than human stages; infernal machines at the heart of the crisis. Grandly flagged statistics report their overwhelming contribution to global consumption and despoliation. Urban landscapes are said to consume around three-quarters of the world's energy and generate the same proportion of its greenhouse emissions. Global urban growth to 2025 will drive an 80 million cubic metre increase in water demand and necessitate new built floor space equivalent to the an area the size of Austria. The hard spectre of the 'consumptive city' looms over the global environmental consciousness. This truism of the age neglects the dialectic of urbanisation, in which cities are simultaneously engines and artefacts of the underlying process of accumulation, of money, matter, bodies, and ambition.

Cities also lie in other hearts, those of human imagination and desire. Our long love affair with the city has reached new heights. It will only continue and intensify. By 2050, it is expected that 3 out of every 4 humans will live in an urban setting. World population will have grown by around a third to number ten billion. In the developed world nearly 9 in 10 people will be urban denizens, even as some national populations decline. The modern urban ideal was born in Europe and borne out(wards) in its new worlds. It was, as the French urbanist Henri Lefebvre (2003[1970]) observed, a spatial manifestation of industrialisation. Long before the recent assertions of an urban age, he recognised that capitalist modernity had reached the point where it was defined by 'complete urbanization'. Lefebvre contended that urbanisation was a motive force, not artefact, of capitalist accumulation.

Lefebvre declared *La Révolution Urbaine* in the wake of the serious disturbances of the 1960s. But his argument was historical and social scientific, not enclosed in the moment. Through the ever lengthening reach of industrialism and its spatial forms, the urban became a 'ubiquitous' feature of capitalist modernity. Marx and Engels were early to recognise this, observing in 1848 that "The bourgeoisie has subjected the country to the rule of the towns" (1985[1848]:84). The enormity of urbanisation meant that cities were more than strongholds of modernisation, becoming central to the process of accumulation itself.

A decade before Lefebvre's declaration, Jean Gottman (1961) had marked the spiralling scale of urban evolution, embodied in modernity's newest enormity, the megalopolis. Massive industrial urbanisation "... could hardly have happened without such an extraordinary Promethean drive" (1961:79). This 'immense experiment' was later extended through globalisation to the remaining unexploited parts of the globe. The new worlds of North America and Australasia where nature lay unclaimed and uncostered beckoned the "Promethean endeavours that had long been confined to the dreams of European people" (ibid.). There was recognition of threat not just achievement in his observations: "As the frontier becomes more urban in its very nature...the vultures that threatened Prometheus may be more difficult to keep away" (ibid). Gottman's megalopolis passed into popular recognition, but as safe diorama, cleared of the Promethean

vultures that he saw circling its parapets.

Through the twentieth-century capitalism absorbed and was ever more dependent upon 'the urban process' for its deepest necessities, social reproduction, and deeper still, value creation. Subsequent evolution in the political economy, especially the rising dominance of finance capital, drives rising complexity of the relationship between accumulation and urbanisation. For David Harvey (2010), the recent and continuing global economic recession is a financial calamity of urbanisation. The urban process is simultaneously a key circuit for economic growth and an ever widening flank of system risk.

The process of urban completion continues, surging across a world connected by economic globalism, migration, technological coupling, and common environmental peril. The Asia-Pacific is rapidly urbanising and is projected to host 54 per cent of the world's urban population by 2050 with upwards of 750 cities of over half a million people. China's "pell-mell urbanization" (Harvey (2012:xv) has emptied its country-sides of half their populations. More than 300 million of its citizens have shifted to cities since 1995. It is expected that by 2025 there will be more than 220 Chinese cities with populations of more than one million.

Urbanisation continues apace in the megalopoli and new cities of South America and Africa. UN-Habitat states: "...between 2010 and 2015, some 200,000 people on average will be added to the world's urban population each day. Worth noting is that 91 per cent of this daily increase (or 183,000) is expected to take place in developing countries" (2012:25). As the same body notes, much of this means the growth of slums not urban prosperity. Also aggregate growth in urbanisation hides many complexities in migration flows and change, including the prospect of urban shrinkage in parts of the world, especially Eastern Europe.

The major global institutions now recognise that city governance and planning are pivotal concerns. And yet, urban expertise seems at a threshold (is it a cataclysm?) of possibility, facing millennial pressures for fundamental change in the face of complex, rapidly unfolding threats that have nullified its historical rationale and contemporary purpose. What worked to guide the courses of national urbanisation during the previous stages of modernity seem wholly inadequate in an era facing complex, fast moving threats and disruptions at the planetary scale. The times beckon new wisdom.

Stadt Luft Macht Frei

'Stadt Luft Macht Frei', or 'City Air Makes You Free', is the defining injunction of modernity. Modern western cities were launched as the vessels of liberation from a human era darkened by power and enchantment. The link between the urban and the urge for emancipation goes back to much earlier times. And to other parts of the globe, what we know today as the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. In its primordial, post-Neolithic forms the city was the expression of that most basic freedom, from natural necessity, from subsistence and endless toil. City walls protected, and thus freed, their populations from wilder human compulsions, for acquisition, dominance – for war.

Later, in Classical Antiquity, the city expressed a deepening political imagination and a strengthening instinct for collective expression and development, *res publica*. New cultural flows followed the courses of urbanisation. In Marx and Engels memorable words, cities "rescued a considerable part of the population from the idiocy of rural life" (1985[1848]:84). (Observing the towering follies of contemporary urbanism, we may conclude that idiocy is no longer a uniquely rural affliction.)

The city was the escape raft from a life of servitude and grubbing. Modernisation has however failed miserably on many accounts and in many quarters... For Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, globalised modernity hums with urban disenchantment, especially amongst "...those for whom cosmopolitanism is not a lifestyle choice, but the tragic involuntary condition of the refugee or otherwise dispossessed" (2010:417). The

'wild impulses' of market expansion, political ambition, and cultural aspiration have driven an ever urbanised modernity towards the precipices of risk, uncertainty and self-doubt. Second modernity is nothing less than "...a historically new, entangled Modernity which threatens its own foundations" (ibid:410).

The city, a powerful beacon of hope and opportunity through modernisation, is now indissolubly linked to natural risk and human endangerment. Mike Hodson and Simon Marvin highlight the "dual and ambivalent role of the city, as both a victim and cause of global ecological change..." (2010:138). A series of natural and human catastrophes in recent years have underlined the vulnerability of cities to sudden endangerment. The sources of urban crisis are both endogenous and exogenous – a tsunami or flood being an instance of the former; a resource system failure (water, power) representing the latter.

The 2011 tsunami that devastated Japan's highly urbanised coast exemplified how endangerment can unfold in a series of catalysing exogenous (tsunami inundation) and endogenous (nuclear plant failure) shocks that drive human threats to precarious scales – especially when potentially lethal technological systems are disrupted. Global warming will vastly increase the tempo and power of these natural furies.

Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleans, mythically loved city in the world's richest nation, descended into anarchy – no less than a time of civic terror. The internal fragility of western modernity is tested further by enemies that wage their war from within. Second modernity is countered by Islamist (and other) counter-modernities that use cities as terrifying stages to attack western assertion.

The urban age defines what some scientists now call the 'Anthropocene' – an epoch dominated in its latter stages by modern Prometheism. Žižek rejects the naturalism inherent in many scientific renderings of the Anthropocene; viz., the idea that "...because humans constitute a particular kind of species they can, in the process of dominating other species, acquire the status of a geologic force" (2010:331). He counters that "...this shift from Pleistocene to Anthropocene is entirely due to the explosive development of capitalism and its impact" (ibid). It is the universal threat to existence that now binds humanity for the first time as a 'species', not the potency that generated the crisis.

Beck and Grande offer, "When a world order collapses, that's the moment when self-reflection should begin" (2010:409). Reflexivity is taken as birth cry of the second modernity. And yet, this compelling injunction of the time echoes wordlessly in a post-political age. No common cause, or new dispensation, has emerged to arrest epochal decline or to assay global threat. It seems evident that rapid, epochal global change is not conducive to human deliberation about 'common dangers'. At least not to now. What stands against the tide of endangerment? It is surely collective will that must arrest the slide to disaster. In the face of power and its many arrogations, the human right to a good destiny must be reasserted.

The city, the new human heartland, is where this battle for human renewal must be joined. It can and must be won. The consequences of loss are unthinkable, indeed as yet unknowable. The city air must once again nurture the cause of human realisation. To restore human prospect, *Homo urbanis* must dismantle its own work, the material and ideological apparatuses of Promethean modernity. They must be held to account through critical scientific interrogation and brought to heel by politics. Where to begin? So much of contemporary modernity seems like dangerously flailing pieces of machinery, uncoupled to wild play by a disintegrating industrialism. The collapsing natural order surely points to first priority, a political economy that is hard wired for growth. It is a death machine that endangers *homo urbanis* and all that depends upon us.

The Limits to Capital?

Are we at the threshold of the 'next world' that British scientist and environmentalist James Lovelock (2009) speaks of? Put differently, is the human species now at the precipice of natural default and the massive societal change it must surely trigger? These are not new questions. The end of carbon-intensive capitalism has been long predicted: "Already, more than a century ago, Max Weber anticipated the end of oil-based capitalism when he spoke of a time when 'the last hundredweight of fossil fuel is built up'" (in Beck 2012:90).

The contemporary problem of overshoot has two faces: one of over accumulation and thus depletion of natural capital; the other a simultaneous overabundance of finance capital and critical deprivation of social capital. The built environment is now central to these twin crises of the age. Urbanisation is at the heart of overproduction and ecological default, but also central to the absorption of excess capital. The massive contemporary infrastructure development push in world cities reflects both realities – absorption and depletion.

The ricocheting spiral of these modalities defines the urban age. This indicates a convulsive instability at the heart of human prospect that contradicts the predictive confidence of popular urban commentary. The convulsion suggests a bad ending. In 1970, Lefebvre explicitly linked the "extension of the urban phenomenon and the formation of urban society" to a culminating economic rupture that would take the forms of a "crisis of overproduction, a monetary crisis" (2003[1970]:169).

Such a culminating crisis seems imminent. The strengthening testimony of natural science suggests that what Žižek terms "the infernal self-propelling machine of Capital" (2012:35) is finally reaching the limits of improvidence. So can we speak finally of the limits to capital? Harvey states that "...capitalism has, in the past, successfully circumvented around natural barriers" – the seeming resolution (at least for now) of the peak oil emergency may be the latest instance of this impressive 'Houdini' reflex (2010:78). Harvey also acknowledges that "There may be an imminent crisis in our relation to nature that will require widespread adaptations..." (ibid). By adaptations he does not mean the technocratic innovations or lifestyle adjustments inherent in 'green urbanism' but wholesale systemic change.

Is Žižek correct? Will natural scarcities and despoliation soon present an absolute, and thus insurmountable, barrier to accumulation that will trigger a final transformative crisis of capitalism? The Right scoffs and many progressives still wish for reform not transformation. The evidence, however, supports Žižek. A massive, paroxysmal adjustment to the human world is inevitable. The next world is already dawning.

Decades of green censure have done little or nothing to reset the path of consumption, which has yearned for ever higher, ever more trivial peaks. We may recall the philosopher Erich Fromm's (2009[1942]) warning that the destructive contradictions of modernity would ever reveal themselves in this manner. The great unheralded cost of individuation was alienation from earth, kin and community. This rupture would drive an exodus of souls towards the consolations of consumerism and other compensations for the 'terrible burden' of 'self-strength'.

This flight from desolation has defined the consumerist age of neo-liberalism, but it does not explain exhaustively the origins of the current human predicament. Through technological artifice and material restraint small parts of the species have suppressed the consumerist drive. But we do not know how to produce less. Energy descent appears unavoidable and climate warming locked in. We enter a dark chrysalis era.

Slaughter

*I hear an army charging upon the land,
And the thunder of horses plunging, foam about their knees:
Arrogant, in black armour, behind them stand,
Disdaining the reins, with fluttering whips, the charioteers.*

*They cry unto the night their battle-name:
I moan in sleep when I hear afar their whirling laughter.
They cleave the gloom of dreams, a blinding flame,
Clanging, clanging upon the heart as upon an anvil.*

*They come shaking in triumph their long, green hair:
They come out of the sea and run shouting by the shore.
My heart, have you no wisdom thus to despair?
My love, my love, my love, why have you left me alone?*

James Joyce

The Black Sun

The urban age is a melancholic era. Many failures and antipathies are implicated by expert and broader opinion: the empty promises of wealth and power mirrored by the depredations of poverty, insecurity and exclusion; the grinding influence of cultural oppression; the void of commoditised culture; the neglect and eschewal of children in western culture; and the anomie of a world without gods, traditions and utopias. The new individualism celebrated and prosecuted by neo-liberal globalisation has come at enormous psychic and emotional cost to the species. It is most starkly registered in a sweeping decline in human mental health. The World Health Organisation has predicted that depression will be the second most devastating disease in the world by 2020 (Bayley 2013).

It cannot be coincidental that mental health failure appears to be the new human malaise, at least in the West where it is overtaking the old foe, cancer – ‘emperor of all maladies’. Record rates of depression and melancholia are registered in the West, and their incidence is rising generally through the globe. The OECD reports that “The use of antidepressants has surged across the rich world over the past decade...” (Boseley 2013). More than one in ten Americans is now medicated for depression. Similar rates of prescription are observed in Australia, Canada and Nordic Europe. In China, “...the antidepressant market has grown by about 20% for each of the past three years, albeit from a lower base” (ibid).

Julia Kristeva, analyst of melancholia, observes: “The periods that witness the downfall of political and religious idols, periods of crisis, are particularly favourable to black moods” (1989:8). Kristeva hears in the keening of human lament, “The Blank Rhetoric of the Apocalypse”:

...never has the power of destructive forces appeared as unquestionable and unavoidable as now, within and without society and the individual. The despoliation of nature, lives and property is accompanied by an upsurge, or simply a more obvious display, of disorders whose diagnoses are being refined by psychiatry – psychosis, depression, manic-depressive states, borderline states, false selves, etc. (ibid:221-2).

Kristeva links the welling of human psychosis to the depletion of politics, and the depleting influence of neo-liberal consensualism,

Today's milestone is human madness. Politics is part of it...Politics is not, as it were for Hannah Arendt, the field where human freedom is unfurled. The modern world, the world of wars, the Third World, the underground world of death that acts upon us, do not have the civilised splendour of the Greek city state. The modern political domain is massively, in totalitarian fashion, social, levelling, exhausting (ibid:235).

Perhaps our failing relationship with nature, and thus ourselves, is a deeper, if largely unspoken, cause of the melancholia of which there exists so much evidence. The idea is captured in Beck's comment on species angst and the natural metaphors it deploys: "What worries people nowadays is the premonition that the anthropological certainty of modernity is founded on quicksand" (2009:232). The hideous and massive spectres of global warming, resource depletion and species loss betoken a crisis before which the individual is impotent and spectral: unseen and unspoken. Nowhere is this paralysis before the storm more acutely felt than in the city, where natural agency is most diminished, externalised, given over to the work of resource systems and technology, just as Arendt predicted would happen.

The long work of Promethean modernism has estranged humanity from nature. Arendt warned of the consequences of alienation, which might be summarised as an outbreak of human stupidity. The "almost infallible signs of alienation from the world" would be, "A noticeable decrease in common sense in any given community and a noticeable increase in superstition and gullibility..." (1998[1958]:209). The waning of human common sense is perhaps powerfully registered in the aggressive asininity of climate scepticism and the misty eyed enthusiasms for pre-modernity that have declared a 'New Age'. Both, in very different ways, are 'denialist' movements, retreating into mysticism in the face of awful human endangerment. They further betray the waning of social confidence in the modern ideal, entangled in its own alarming contradictions: "It's no wonder that the business in hopelessness is flourishing" (Beck 2012:161).

Global warming shrouds the great celestial motif of human existence. The sun, hitherto the source of all life, is now darkened by the threat of unmediated potency. A failing atmosphere cannot restrain its awful power. Michael Marder writes of the human moment, "We are...faced with a choice between two distinct pyropolitical models, sources of luminosity and warmth, but also threats of fatal conflagration..." ((2012:164). Can a hotter Earth provide any home to our species? At the same time, energy, the sun's providence, is dwindling. A grinding epoch of 'energy descent' looms. Kristeva's *Black Sun* (after Nerval) presents a signifier that captures and reflects the melancholy of the urban age: "...a dazzling metaphor that suggests an insistence without presence, a light without representation: the Thing is an imagined sun, bright and black at the same time" (1989:13).

Climate denialism expresses not sublime refusal of suppressed reason but the depressive anxieties of power. The aggressive disporting of scepticism in western media and politics is thus a refusal to behold the darkening sun of human prospect. Kristeva finally,

Depressed people know that their moods determine them thoroughly but do not allow such moods to pass into their speech. They know they suffer because they are separated from their narcissistic motherly coating but ceaselessly maintain their omnipotence over a hell that is not to be lost (1989:47).

Power, besieged by righteous foes, by truth, by nature, clings to burning cities. Better to rule in hell, than to serve in heaven. Neo-liberal urbanism's stubborn subscription to growth is a deathly text to be read in this light.

Mourning

And so it is that Promethean modernity passes; and much that is beautiful, nurturing, clever and productive must pass with it. The sweep of death will surely include modern urban imaginaries that distil the logic of capital: the smart, well designed, productive city of recent popular urban commentary (e.g. Glaeser 2010); the intelligent, programmed city of the new urban physics. The death of the industrial libido means the extinction of modern urban aesthetics. Nature has called time on the excesses and deceptions of modernity, including its idealised and idolised urban forms.

Europe in the midst of the First World War was so deeply cloaked in mourning as to think it marked an end to all that was worthwhile. Was this indeed the end of modern civilisation? Sigmund Freud urged a different view, acceptance of dissolution based on the idea that in such times it is a world which matters to us that is dissolving, not the possibility of species existence and even of civilisation.

A time may indeed come when the pictures and statues which we admire to-day will crumble to dust, or a race of men may follow us who no longer understand the works of our poets and thinkers, or a geological epoch may even arrive when all animate life upon the earth ceases; but since the value of all this beauty and perfection is determined only by its significance for our own emotional lives, it has no need to survive us and is therefore independent of absolute duration (Freud (1915) in von Unwerth (2006): 216-7).

Such ruinous moments are for Freud the prelude to emancipation. Species libido, so heavily invested in the objects of industrialism, is freed, "...our capacity for love (our libido) is once more liberated" (ibid: 217). *Homo urbanis* must endure a period of mourning and tribulation, before a blackened sun is brightened again by reborn human desire and possibility. The passage of global wars in the bloody twentieth-century simulated this great extinction and renewal of species hope.

Mourning, as we know, however painful it may be comes to a spontaneous end. When it has renounced everything that has been lost, then it has consumed itself, and our libido is once more free (in so far as we are still young and active) to replace the lost objects by fresh ones equally or still more precious. It is to be hoped that the same will be true of the losses caused by this war. When once the mourning is over, it will be found that our high opinion of the riches of civilization has lost nothing from our discovery of their fragility. We shall build up again all that war has destroyed, and perhaps on firmer ground and more lastingly than before (ibid:219).

In this Freud and Arendt are at one. As the latter insisted (with some impatience perhaps): "A philosophy of life that does not arrive, as did Nietzsche, at the affirmation of 'eternal recurrence' (ewige Wiederkehr) as the highest principle of all being, simply does not know what it is talking about (1998[1958]:97). This celestial assurance of continuity from great thought does little perhaps to ease the immediate burden of what is to come. Arendt herself was well aware that between the great cycles of recurrence lay the darkened valleys of human suffering and toil: "The human condition is such that pain and effort are not just symptoms which can be removed without changing life itself; they are rather the modes in which life itself, together with the necessity to which it is bound, makes itself felt. For mortals, the 'easy life of the gods' would be a lifeless life" (ibid: 120). We will soon know what she meant.

None of this was to approve lethargic fatalism or to deny the possibility of human realisation. Perhaps the greatest insight of modernity was that destiny is choice not fate. The hard work of choice is upon us. *Homo urbanis* must now work to chart the coordinates and terms of species destination. Harvey puts it plainly, "Our political task... is to imagine and reconstitute a totally different kind of city out of the disgusting mess of a globalizing, urbanizing capital run amok" (2012:xvi).

Through

The new always happens against the overwhelming odds of statistical laws...the new therefore always appears in the guise of a miracle.

Hannah Arendt

To the Next World

It is the age of crumbling empires. Insecurity and hesitation are at war with assurance and arrogation. Despite overwhelming and increasingly painful testimony of its failure, we seem unwilling to indict capitalist modernity and set about its replacement. In the maw of inaction, the heralds and apologists of the dying order assert new certitudes as means for delaying its end, and the termination of its endowments on the powerful and the vested. The new urban commentaries, like *The Triumph of the City* (Glaeser 2011), serve this cause of obfuscation and delay, if largely unconsciously, by prosecuting the cause of doomed modernity. Innocent perhaps, yet dangerous; they are part of a broader ideology of denial that works to 'normalise the apocalypse'.

On the other hand, the catastrophism of some radical perspectives would join cause with reaction by asserting an end to human history, certainly its modern phase. As John Barry makes clear, "...a view of the inevitability of collapse can and does lead to de-politicized or even anti-political responses" (2012:290). Predicting a postindustrial dark age for humanity, Kunstler sees history superannuated to *The Long Emergency* (2005); centuries of starvation, disease, and civil disorder (also Kunstler 2012). In this schema, we moderns will return to 'reechanted lives'. Both conservative reaction and progressive catastrophism refuse in different ways the work of species transformation which lies before us.

We should not fear terminal social crisis, because, like death itself, it is part of the human condition, the necessary prelude to rebirth of prospect. As Arendt made clear,

Life is a process that everywhere uses up durability, wears it down, makes it disappear, until eventually dead matter, the result of small, single, cyclical, life processes, returns to the over-all gigantic circle of nature herself, where no beginning and no end exist and where all natural things swing in changeless, deathless repetition (1998[1958]:96).

And so it is with social life. We are learning painfully that, contra the Promethean delusion, human society is fastened to the 'deathless repetition' of 'natural things'. As our great modern accomplishments have shown, we are not a passive element in that eternal movement of existence. For us, recurrence means co-evolution with the planetary order, which has brought lately the urban age. The city is simultaneously our principal act of realisation, and our greatest disturbance of the natural order. From this costly plateau of achievement we must conceive and commit to a more settled path of planetary evolution.

A place of safety if not tranquillity lies beyond the storms of the present crisis. This is a destination that the species itself must choose not anticipate through an enormous and unprecedented act of collective will. Massive decarbonisation and resource restraint are necessary steps towards a safer place. They will be all the harder to achieve as we suffer the depredations of a failing world order. Retrenchment of capitalism will not present a straight path back to ecological moderation. Its death agonies will likely generate many wild quests for salvation through vulgar resource exploitation. These deathly misadventures are prefigured in the contemporary lust for Arctic exploitation, the fracking rush in the new worlds, and the enthusiasm for newly unlocked carbon, such as Canada's tar sands.

We should, nonetheless, accept the miraculous possibility of the new, and of species restoration, in this gravest hour of human peril. Miracle in this sense is not conjuring of magic, but deployment of metaphor to oppose false, paralysing certitudes, especially fatalism and naturalism. The good natality of which Arendt speaks is no heavenly visitation but a terrestrial labour, the consequence of human desire for continuity and realisation. In a time of fading prospect – a ‘post-political age’ of morbid proclamation (‘end of ideology/history’) – we must refertilise human aspiration as means for ensuring the birth of a new, post-capitalist modernity. This is not to restore the age of enchantment. Accepting the work of recurrence in ‘dark times’, as Arendt cast it, is to avow not forswear the project of human realisation that has guided modernisation from its outset.

What is the ‘miraculous course’ we must commit to? Where is its end place? To be washed up, as castaways, on the desperate shores of survivalism? No. That is to accept the miserable final landing of a failing order. We should reconceive and replot our exit from capitalist modernity, not as retrenchment to misery, but as quest for a new human plenitude. Freed from the diktak of capitalist growth, and its straitened materialism, our species could discover fresh forms of realisation in things without ‘value’, at least as presently conceived. A post-accumulative political economy is the premise for a new urban modernity.

A matured urban modernity must deny equally the sirens of dystopian and utopian ideal. *Homo Urbanis* will find that its true homeland lies between the storms of despair and the peaks of perfection – in the littoral of human possibility, the good city. What values, designs and strategies should guide a new urban modernity committed to a new human ecology of self-limitation and care? We may add to this Arendt’s ideal of an expressive citizenry determined to prioritise political action (*Zoon Politikon*) as means for ensuring a constant vitality of human purpose and meaning. In her schema, “The polis...is the optimal locus for that action” (Kristeva 2001:14) which translates to city not public square (agora). Eco-federal governance must strive to realise at the city scale what can be started not finished at the communal level: a new urban modernity that takes care, self-limitation and equity as signposts to intrinsic wealth. This beckons a great conscious repossession of the modern city, and the dispossession of its overlord, Promethean desire. A new urban ecology is surely summonsed to replace the mouldering idylls of industrial modernity

Beautiful Waste

The good city will not be a society of saints. Salvation is not earthly work. Weber (2001[1905]) made clear, loss of *certitudo salutis* was a price to pay for modernisation. Heaven can elect when we have done our work. Nor will it embrace secular ideals of perfection – the dour market town of chaste liberalism, the consuming circus of neo-liberalism. It will not be the roughhewn utopia of twentieth-century socialism; cabbage queues and watchfulness. The good city will transcend industrial modernity to realise a new modern possibility. It will replenish and extend our hard won gains of civil and personal freedoms.

The good city will preserve our power to transform nature to free us from material necessity. This will be put to a better end than money chasing money. The obsession with organising things to accumulate more things will have passed away. Care will be an ordinary thing, but still hard work. Power will be an ordinary thing, dispersed to communities, but still our greatest venality.

The good city will be a better place than now. Not for its virtue; this will wax and wane. Goodness will emerge from a new reciprocity between humanity and nature. We will care for this city and it for us. This will mark a new landfall of human achievement. We will have survived the slaughter of value that we knew as industrialism. The great trial that followed will, eventually, have ended well. In making an exhausted way to new shores, we will have finally learned to see the earth again. We will have done everything the hard

way, *via humanis*. The new world we re-inherit will be, in the words of the late Australian musician David McComb, a beautiful waste. We should not fear it terribly. Our extraordinary capacity for making convivial things, including from ruined cities and spoiled landscapes, will remain undiminished.

To eyes that can see, this miraculous power is already quietly at work in the world's metropolitan ruins and 'doomed peripheries'. In Detroit, slaughtered industrial behemoth, a community farming initiative establishes agriculture in urban badlands in quest for better health, justice and renewal of human purpose. *Rebel Cities* in the Global South refuse the wasteland destinations charted by neo-liberal urbanism (Harvey 2012). These urban natalities witness to species optimism and courage in dark times.

Ivan Illich, maverick priest, radical philosopher, prophesied the looming demise of promethean capitalism, inviting us to: "...imagine the children who will soon play in the ruins of high schools, Hiltons, and hospitals" (1977:23). This was not the Dark Age intoned by catastrophism, however, but the opening scenes of a 'convivial modernity', of children celebrating through play the downfall of the modern pretender, Prometheus. With the fall comes exposure of the tyrant's fraudulent claim on modern identity. Illich: "Prometheus was not Everyman, but a deviant. Driven by *pleonexia*, or radical greed, he transgressed the boundaries of the human condition. In *hubris*, or measureless presumption, he brought fire from heaven..." (1977:116). We should hail not dread the imminent end of the usurper. This is as far as metaphor goes. We must also realise Prometheus as our own failed creation, not infliction of the gods. The fire in the heavens that sears us now is all our own work.

We ate the fruit of knowledge. We cannot undo its work. We cannot go back to the first light of purity. There is only the way ahead. Eden must be renewed in our own cultivations. *Homo urbanis* should find its good home in the city not in a new age of enchantment. The miracle of modern recovery that awaits us is, as Arendt explained, our inborn ability to endlessly produce the new...against the odds. The Promethean dream is reaching its improvident end. We wake in a time of vast possibilities. Something awful is being born, but also something new. The odds, if we take them, are in our favour. In the next world we can be monarchs of the beautiful waste.

*In the earthquakes to come, I very much hope
I shall keep my cigar alight, embittered or no
I, Bertolt Brecht, carried off to the asphalt cities
From the black forests inside my mother long ago.*

Bertolt Brecht

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Alice Hoy Building (Blg 162),
Monash Road (Melways Ref 2B-E7)
The University of Melbourne
Parkville VIC 3010, Australia

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