

Article

Small Revelations, . . . Maybe Not Even with an Apocalyptic Tone

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Abstract: This article tries to be funny in a very serious way, following Virginia Woolf's call in *Three Guineas* that, in the face of man-made disasters, we may have to make fools of ourselves in relation to common sense. Apocalypses, such as the Anthropocene, climate change, and mass extinction require—like the Second World War that Woolf refused to simplify—a tentative search for knowledge, not controlling and predictable methods in the search for a solution. The article is based on how Jacques Derrida's discussion with Immanuel Kant regarding how truth should sound before the apocalypse over the years has increasingly come to describe contemporary doxa, within which there is only room for mystagogues, who inaugurate followers in the "real truth" behind "fake news", or scientisticists, who believe that facts and truth are the same thing. When Derrida shows how these two positions depend on each other, sharing the modern belief that knowledge is associated with development, boundaries and control, he also shows how this narrows knowledge down to the predictable, and, thus, makes it complicit with the mistaken efforts of control responsible for today's challenges. Against this background, the article analyzes works by the artist, Eva Löfdahl, and links them with questions concerning connections between truth, knowledge, art, and science.

Keywords: apocalypse; Anthropocene; scientism; knowledge; art and science



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Citation: Johansson, Anders E.. 2021. Small Revelations, . . . Maybe Not Even with an Apocalyptic Tone. *Humanities* 10: 128. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h10040128>

Received: 4 November 2021

Accepted: 9 December 2021

Published: 16 December 2021

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So, the world is coming to an end. Or rather, our world, the one which we thought boundless, is reaching its limit. Timothy Morton claims that this world came into being with the agricultural revolution (Morton 2016, p. 4), Aristotle claimed that money and trade enabled the pursuit of the limitless wealth characterizing it (Aristotle 1998, p. 15), and Marx claimed that capitalism demands continuous growth. The insight that meets us today is that this world has been finite all along. We have touched on the Real, so to speak, in a measurable way, as stated in the latest report from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Nevertheless, it is always possible to make even death meaningful. The apocalypse is a call to action, also for those who deny it. The wakeup call of the revelation tells us that history has a direction and that we have a task. In "The End of All Things", Kant states that humanity needs the notion of the end of time to make life meaningful and worthy of our endeavor (Kant 1996, p. 224 f.). In addition, the imagined end must be terrible, he says, so that mankind is forced to reflect on its shortcomings and improve itself. The end of time should, so to speak, have a sublimely affective effect. It is clear that climate change and mass extinction are meeting Kant's criteria for such an end. They create meaning.

The world that is collapsing is grounded not only on limitless growth, but also on the notion that development has a direction. Even if God is dead, man has a task, if only to survive. This means that when facing the end, we tend to ask questions such as: How should we solve this problem? How do we stay in control? Although we now know, or should know, that it is the belief that we have been in control that has brought about the uncontrollable end, our only hope seems to be more control.

What if the problem cannot be solved? What if the very belief in a solution is what prevents us from really thinking carefully about the end and its consequences? The end? In what way? For whom? For what? There are no simple answers to such questions.

We are in a situation that, in the words of Aristotle in *Politics*, “involves an *aporia* and therefore political philosophy”. My translation is based on C. T. C. Reeves’, which states that such a situation “involves a *problem* and political philosophy” (Aristotle 1998, p. 86), and H. Rackham’s, which formulates it like this: “... raises a *difficulty*, and calls for political philosophy” (Aristotle [1944] 1972, p. 231).¹ However, since I think that neither “problem” nor “difficulty” are correct translations, I have modified and maintained the Greek word, *aporia*. It is not when we are solving problems or difficulties with methods that we already know that we begin to think. For Aristotle, when we are faced with an insoluble contradiction, an *aporia*, and when we are forced to stop taking for granted that we already know what to do, this is when philosophy begins. Dialectics does not seek to determine what is right on the basis of criteria or calculations. It accepts that there are contradictions and conflicts that cannot be solved, but that must be thought through and analyzed critically, without us knowing in advance what a correct decision might be, or even who should make it. Aristotle, again: “... none of the definitions on the basis of which people claim that they themselves deserve to rule, whereas everyone else deserves to be ruled by them, is correct” (Aristotle 1998, p. 88). When it comes to governing and political decisions, one truth does not exclude other truths. Or, as Aristotle also puts it: “... all dispute somewhat justly, but [...] not all do so in an unqualifiedly just way” (Aristotle 1998, p. 87). The statement is, as so often with Aristotle, a poetically nuanced understatement, dry and slightly ironic. If everyone is a little right in some way, this does not mean that arguments are nothing but opinions. It is possible to think, to analyze *how* the arguments are right and wrong, and where they lead.

Today, through all the attempts to make us avoid thinking, we are forced into either the delirium of conspiracy theories or the stupidity of scientism. The voices that are heard are those of the mystagogues, when they inaugurate their followers in the “truth” behind fake news, and those of the experts, when they claim that facts and truth are the same thing and that we therefore should not bother with contradictions and conflicts. The logic that characterizes both positions—we already know the truth, or at least what a truth should sound like, and we are entitled to it—leads to a situation where everything is being interpreted in terms of being “for” or “against” one’s own community. It is not even necessary to try to understand what the other is actually saying because of the belief that it is possible to know in advance what *can* be true and what *must* be a lie; it is possible to possess infallible criteria for judging what is real or fictional, good or evil, and, because of that, you do not have to think. The deadly link existing between such a reductive and stupid concept of truth and the logic of rights rooted in cultural relativism—the right to *our* truth—has not been that obvious since the former heyday of fascism.

Well, that was a beginning in an apocalyptic tone, was it not? Dark, elliptical, prophetic, and at least somehow true. It *is* difficult to avoid that tone today. Revelations concerning the end of life, the end of humanity, the end of culture, or the end of reason call us to action from all sides. The mystagogue and the scientisticist are united in that tone. Both positions are common sense, belong to contemporary doxa, and show how modern progressive faith is rooted in religious beliefs. The oscillation between hope and despair, deliverance and doom, is at the heart of modernity. Loss makes the future meaningful. Suffering provides one with the right to redemption, which is also a return to what has been lost.

The notion of the future is mimetically dependent on the past, as Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe describes the typography of what Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schubach has called an “archaeoteological” view of history (Lacoue-Labarthe 1998; Schubach 2017, p. 175). It is, therefore, not surprising that the mystagogue and the scientisticist (like other servants of doxa, such as economists, pedagogues, and politicians) still idealize a view of knowledge belonging to the 19th century, the age of progress, when we still knew what was what, when the Newtonian laws of nature applied everywhere and always, when art was meaningful, when the sexes were two, when atoms, garbage, and colonized people stayed in their places, i.e., before our world began to collapse. Of course, such a view of knowledge has

always had more to do with administration and ideology than with actual knowledge. Thus, when the electric car today is said to be our only hope, is this not primarily due to a belief that it will be possible to *administer* a rebirth? Electricity, in its spooky form of existence, has always been reminiscent of the holy spirit, especially if one manages to ignore that it has to be produced at a price; if not greenhouse gases, then, for example, turbine-mashed salmon and eels.

If I am to try to refrain from the temptations of the grand apocalyptic tone, and simply formulate what I mean (difficult once the mystagogue within you has started), it is, namely, that the polarization between the mystagogue and the scientist not only structures today's public discourse, but their interdependence also articulates the aporetic nature of our present situation. This means that we can no longer take our mystagogic or scientific ways of understanding our world for granted. We must start to think.

Jacques Derrida's essay, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", which deals with Kant's essay, "Of an Overlordly Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy", is a valuable analysis of the interdependence of mystagogues, on the one hand, and ideologues of science (scientificists), on the other, when they try to draw boundaries for what they consider to be genuine truth. Unlike Kant, who, in his text, wants to maintain a clear dividing line between the mystagogues' seductively false and poetical language, on the one hand, and the rational methods of real philosophy, on the other, Derrida claims that they belong together, that the boundaries between them are blurred:

We know this scene well today, and it is, among other things, to this repetition that I would like to draw your attention. Not to take sides or come to a decision—I shall do no such thing—between metaphor and concept, literary mystagogy and true philosophy, but for a start to recognise the old solidarity of these antagonists or protagonists. (Derrida 1984, p. 16)

The enlightened belief in an evolution that thinks it has overcome metaphysics and poetry is, in fact, an extension of eschatology. Modern rationality is a mixture of mystery and enlightenment:

But if Kant denounces those who proclaim that philosophy has been at an end for two thousand years, he has himself, in marking a limit, indeed the end of a certain type of metaphysics, freed another wave of eschatological discourses in philosophy. His progressivism, his belief in the future of a certain philosophy, of another metaphysics, is not contradictory to this proclamation of ends and of the end. (Derrida 1984, p. 20)

The Enlightenment thinker that believes he has overcome mystifying metaphysics is, in fact, also repeating it. Kant's progressivism is, in itself, eschatological, according to Derrida. Modern rationality is a mixture of mysticism and enlightenment: "Each of us is the mystagogue *and* the *Aufklärer* of another" (Derrida 1984, p. 18).

Derrida does not, however, claim that there is no difference between science and mysticism. It is when Kant claims to be able to decide in *advance*, or just by the tone, what is true speech and what is false speech, that he stops being a critical philosopher and becomes an ideologue. The apocalyptic and literary tone Kant criticizes does not prevent the mystagogue from being able to say something true, Derrida remarks, at the same time as he claims to hear precisely that tone in Kant's own presentation. It is, however, important to notice how Derrida emphasizes that he is not trying to decide who is right. What he describes is a contingent, but given, historical situation. "Each of us" must be taken literally: this includes all of us, even the deconstructivist. We cannot stand outside the languages, discourses, technologies, and practices that shape our common world. However—and Derrida is equally clear on this point—this does not mean that we are trapped in this world. Although we have only one world, we never have only one world. It is possible to analyze both conspiracy theories and factoids, both mystagogues and scientificists. It is possible, in the spirit of Aristotle, to ask, "To what end?", in each individual case. It is possible to think.

What allows us to distinguish between true speech and false speech is, according to Kant, the moral law, which is unconditionally given and possible to hear and understand for anyone who acknowledges rational thought. Kant wants, like today's debaters, to be able to distinguish the true tone from the false, not on the basis of what is said, but on the basis of general criteria, and he finds these criteria in the form of the moral law.

However, if it comes down to *hearing* the difference, then what seemed to be about being able to strictly distinguish between scientifically based philosophy and disguised mysticism turns out to be about "tuning in to the pitch of a voice or to a quality of timbre", as Derrida puts it (Derrida 1984, p. 8 f.). Then, one may ask, is not the formalism of the moral law, first and foremost, a way of creating a *we*, a community of those who recognize the right tone, in order to provide common sense with a transcendental look?

Being able to recognize the right tone might, however, not be such a transcendental skill, as Kant would have it. His musical analogy lets in things that disturb. We know that the tuning system on which Western tonal music rests consists of compromises, standardizations, and an acceptance of equivalency replacing precision. Something other than the exact, the right, and the true, is, thus, already there in the system. The risk (or possibility) is that when we have learned to accept that a third is not really a third, other things can also creep in, or, rather, already be there. As Derrida puts it: "Generalized *Verstimmung* is the possibility for the other tone, or the tone of another, to come at no matter what moment to interrupt a familiar music" (Derrida 1984, p. 24).

To realize that reason, in its familiar mood, is also a bit out of tune, in order to be effectively standardized, is not to abandon reason. Instead, that realization urges us to analyze and think more carefully, without assuming that we already know how to recognize what is right or wrong, true or false, relevant or not. Instead, Derrida claims that we must let the other come first. We must let "come" take precedence over both questions and answers; let all the tones be heard; affirm also those tones who, in relation to standardized reason, appear as false tones; and we must also take seriously the mistunings that disturb a judicious community, without abandoning reason.

The core of the archaeoteleological view of history is always a human *we*, an *us*, here and now, the mediators between beginning and end, origin and goal, the realizers of the direction of history, the ones who can determine what tones and chords are the correct ones, and where they must lead—those who have an ear for the tonal system of history, so to speak, and are, therefore, able to distinguish between noise and meaning. However, what if it is not possible to determine the right tone, as Derrida puts it, or to even determine where the tone is coming from? What if everything is an informational mess, without a central *we*, from the beginning? What if the apocalypse, in the sense of the end of a world, and the collapse of order, meaning, and direction, *does not* constitute the beginning of a rebirth, mediated by humankind on its way to its teleological goal, but, instead, is what characterizes our transcendental conditions to a greater degree than the moral law?

And there is no certainty that man is the exchange [*le central*] of these telephone lines or the terminal of this endless computer. No longer is one very sure who loans his voice and his tone to the other in the Apocalypse; no longer is one very sure who addresses what to whom.

[...]

This is one of the suggestions I wanted to submit for your discussion: wouldn't the apocalyptic be a transcendental condition of all discourse, of all experience even, of every mark or every trace? (Derrida 1984, p. 27)

If this is the case, man must abandon his will to control, and allow tones to come that are not already determined as the only possible tones. Or, rather, just let *come*, which, in itself, is to sound an apocalyptic tone beyond order:

Perhaps you will be tempted to call this disaster, catastrophe, apocalypse. Now here, precisely, is announced—as promise or threat—an apocalypse without apocalypse, an apocalypse without vision, without truth, without revelation,

dispatches [*des envois*] (for the “come” is plural in itself, in oneself), addresses without message and without destination, without sender or decidable addressee, without last judgment, without any other eschatology than the tone of the “Come,” its very difference, an apocalypse beyond good and evil. “Come” does not announce this or that apocalypse: already it resounds with a certain tone; it is in itself the apocalypse of the apocalypse; Come is apocalyptic. (Derrida 1984, p. 34 f.)

There are other thinkers who have let the contingency of music be a reminder of the limitations of reason. Theodor Adorno, of course, but also Timothy Morton, who underlines how atonality and serialism not only reveal the conventional nature of musical reason, but also made it obvious how much has not been heard because of these conventions:

Atonalism liberated the notes; serialism in turn liberated the musical form in which the notes were played.

[...]

Without this conceptual frame [the tonal system], what is heard is a spectral resonance, precisely the fullest spectrum of an instrument’s timbre. (Morton 2017, p. 281)

Series do not lead somewhere. Serialism pays attention to every tone, makes it equal and incomparable, not equivalent and interchangeable, and it thereby opens up unexpected relationships. By contrast, the archaeoteleological belief that history has a direction closes its ears to the singular and to connections that are not considered relevant. By presenting the contingency of musical conventions, serialism exposes other possibilities, other kinds of knowledge.

Jean-Luc Nancy has argued that the Fukushima disaster showed that everything is connected in unexpected ways, and that it is no longer possible to effectively determine what is relevant on the basis of the idea of a direction. Are we still on our way somewhere, he asks, when civilization has proved incurable? A cure or a solution would only be a continuation of what has caused the problems. What we must avoid is the idea that we should be able to find a solution:

What remains to be considered, though, goes beyond the range of solutions. For a solution—whether it consists of giving up nuclear energy or of considerably augmenting protective measures—remains caught in the orbit of the totality of technological arrangements and behaviors within which our lives are lived—within which civilization develops. (Nancy 2015, p. 18)

[...]

It is no longer just a question of human decision: This decision becomes such that what it decides goes beyond anything calculable as the effects of a decision. (Nancy 2015, p. 23)

In keeping with Derrida’s image of communicative networks beyond human control, Nancy’s incomparable connections beyond the calculable encompass everything:

The incommensurable is of a different nature: It is not even involved in the order of calculation; it opens onto the absolute distance and difference of what is other—not only the other human person but also what is other than human: animal, vegetable, mineral, divine. (Nancy 2015, p. 27)

This underlines the fact that the apocalypse can no longer *lead* to anything. The threat that emerges with Fukushima is an “apocalypse that opens onto nothing”, Nancy states (Nancy 2015, p. 21), and, in the face of such an apocalypse, we must remain in what is close by:

Fukushima can make us decide not to use nuclear energy anymore or to use it differently: I cannot enter here into the considerations these options involve. I can instead assert that no option will make us emerge from the endless equivalence of ends and means if we do not emerge from finality itself—from aiming, from

planning, and projecting a future in general. That our ends have become future ends, that will be the main product of what we call the West or more generally the “modern.” To speak of “postmodern” is correct if we mean by that giving up any aim for a future conceived of as the unity of a meaning to come. But it is not enough, since that remains trapped in a scheme of succession, of before and after. What would be decisive, then, would be to think in the present and to think the present. No longer the end of ends to come, or even a felicitous anarchic dispersion of ends, but the present as the element of the near-at-hand. The end is always far away; the present is the place of closeness—with the world, others, oneself. (Nancy 2015, p. 36 f.)

What we need is a thinking that stays with the questions and thinks them through in their complexities. The near may then be far-fetched, even when it is close by. Just as mistuning has always been in the middle of the familiar *Stimmung*, so our knowledge has always had nonknowledge in the midst of it. We have never been modern, have never been in control, as Bruno Latour states (Latour 1993). We have never gained knowledge the way we thought we did. We just have not noticed. Hans-Jörg Rheinberger claims that scientists grope and think with their fingers just as much as they follow established and predictable methods (Rheinberger 1998, p. 400). When scientific mystagogues claim to know what is right in advance, they stand for ideological mystifications that have very little to do with how knowledge is actually formed. Instead, their aim is to effectively control knowledge, for example, by dogmatically distinguishing between art and science.

The recent report from the IPCC, on the other hand, shows that we must be open to far-fetched connections, following Lautréamont’s famous call to also pay attention to relations, such as “the chance encounter of a sewing machine and an umbrella on an operating table”. We must carefully follow connections we did not expect. Small, or spooky and large, such as Morton’s hyperobjects, far-fetched and very nearby.

An artist who has always listened to calls such as Lautréamont’s or the IPCC’s is Eva Löfdahl, a Swedish artist born in 1953. In a catalog text for one of her exhibitions, she states that an artwork is an “incomplete reflection” that is “always thrown back”, and thereby disturbs the very idea that something leads to something:

Do you exit at the same place again, or do you exit at the same place again?
(Löfdahl 1990, p. 24)²

The rhetorical figure by which a word or a phrase is repeated after a brief interruption is called a *diacope*, and by repeating the same sentence on either side of the exclusionary interruption of “or”, Löfdahl turns a sensible question, which normally would express a desire for guidance, into something unanswerable. Unless we interpret it rhetorically, of course, as a diacope is usually interpreted. Then it would express an emphasis, as when we ask the question, “Are you stupid, or are you stupid?”, by which we would not expect an answer, but would only point out that the stupidity is so obvious that no alternatives are possible.

If Löfdahl’s question were to be a rhetorical question, then what is it that is so obvious that no answer is required? The question, “Are you stupid?”, is, in itself, almost always rhetorical; the repetition only reinforces this. However, the question Löfdahl asks is (in its unrepeated form) seldom rhetorical when asked, but, for the most part, a clear question asked by someone who wants an answer, or needs an answer: If I go in here, will I come out, and, if so, will I come out in the same place again? I need to know that to feel safe. To dare to enter. I do not want to take any risks. I want control. I want to know where I am going.

With the repetition, control is lost. The similarity with the rhetorical question regarding stupidity points to the possible meaning that you always, compulsively, come out in the same place, with the difference being that the interpretation is not at all as overdetermined as in the case of the question regarding stupidity. Another way of trying to control Löfdahl’s question—and the way it brings sense to an end—is to contextualize it, in the manner of Arthur C. Danto when he states that contemporary art is the end of art, since

contextualization has become everything (Danto 1997). If a nonartist puts a dot on a painting, it is not art; if an artist does, it is art. The given context determines whether you come out in the same place. Danto is, of course, right, but of course, also wrong. It is possible to place Löfdahl's question in the culture reserve that is usually called the "autonomy" of art, maintaining that art does not deal with the comprehensible, but with the incomprehensible. Such an art-historical contextualization makes the incomprehensible question comprehensible as an instance of the incomprehensible. The limits of reason are maintained at the same time that art is given limited freedom, at the price of being taken less seriously. The license to be incomprehensible depends on a respect for the boundary between real knowledge and art; then the deeply serious fun of Löfdahl's question can be ignored.

However, what if we were to take Löfdahl's question seriously? Take art seriously? Even if it is not possible to definitively determine the correct tone, or even what her question means? What about just letting it *come*? Not knowing in advance, just following to where we end up? While, at the same time, not excluding the possibility of thinking and articulating how we follow, or analyzing "to what end" the question leads, or to what particular place? In the manner of Benjamin and Adorno, perhaps? Reading the artwork as a constellation?

Löfdahl's latest exhibition, 2021, was called *Remote Commons*, and I would like to see that title as somehow synonymous with the far-fetched correspondences that Baudelaire and his successors recovered from the mystics. So, let me continue to search for the far-fetched, and, by doing that, take the joke seriously.

In that mode, is it not the case that Löfdahl's question could be said to constitute something of a messianic gesture? A messianic gesture in the same sense that Giorgio Agamben interprets Paul's letter to the Romans? A gesture that upsets us a little, not necessarily more than the syntactic, temporal, and spatial differences that "or" stands for, but which, in its small shift, points to the fact that difference, nonidentity, and nonknowledge have always been there, beyond our control, or, rather, in the midst of what we thought we were controlling—*calling* us? I want to claim, far-fetched or not, that this is what the repetition of the question does (among other things, of course). The repetition takes back what is said in the first instance. Just as Agamben means that Paul's *hōs mē*, "as not", should be understood:

Once again, *menetō* ("remaining") does not convey indifference, it signifies the immobile anaphoric gesture of the messianic calling, its being essentially and foremost a calling *of the calling*. For this reason, it may apply to any condition; but for this same reason, it revokes a condition and radically puts it into question in the very act of adhering to it.

[. . .]

Hōs mē, "as not": this is the formula concerning messianic life and is the ultimate meaning of *klēsis* [calling]. Vocation calls for nothing and to no place. For this reason it may coincide with the factual condition in which each person finds himself called, but for this very reason, it also revokes the condition from top to bottom. *The messianic vocation is the revocation of every vocation.* (Agamben 2005, p. 23)

The far-fetched can be found in the near and small, in what we normally simply do not think we need to care about. Moreover, it can change everything. Could the turning of the ignition key in my car have anything to do with the apocalypse?

The title of another work by Löfdahl, "Coral Islands for The Thirty Years' War" ("Korallöar till 30-åriga kriget"), puts forward correspondences in a discreet way, so that you hardly notice them. The Swedish preposition "till" can be translated as any of the following: for, of, on, to, at, by, towards, until, till, toward, into. When translated, "for" has been used in the title, which, to my ears, gives it a too limited meaning. The enigma of coral islands being *for* the Thirty Years' War—one of the most terrible wars Europe has suffered, from 1618 to 1648—in *any way whatsoever*, makes all the possible translations above valid,

including all their possible connotations, such as, for example, the fact that the English words listed, in the manner of “till”, are most often related to some kind of end, recipient, boundary, or goal, which is, of course, relevant in an apocalyptic context. However, let us not bother with such esoteric issues. The important thing is that the title *connects* coral islands to the Thirty Years’ War.

What do plaster casts of bicycle helmets put on white boxes with holes, and pipes that appear to be on wheels—a description of the work—have to do with the title? Lots. The seriousness of the work’s fun play is framed and emphasized by the title. For corals and wars do belong together: they are intimately linked to each other and with the apocalyptic end of our world.

The war known as “The Thirty Years’ War” is not so much characterized by its battles as by the protracted killing of a third of Germany’s population through environmental destruction. The armies were consumption machines that not only destroyed on purpose, but also by just being there, as Brecht demonstrates in *Mutter Courage*. However, “The Thirty Years’ War” is not the only thirty-year war to which the title can be related. Löfdahl’s work, dated 1993, also inevitably commemorates the thirty-year memory of the first atomic bomb blast on the Mururoa atoll; that is, it commemorates the actual use of a coral island for war. Today, we begin to approach the sixty-year memory of this event, and we all know how the killing of corals has escalated since Löfdahl created her sculpture. Admittedly, it has never been the intention to damage the corals, but what climate change has taught us is that intentions do not matter. The world is out of our control. The corals whiten when they die. The white box may also refer to the sarcophagus in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the one whose white exterior stands for how the good intentions of colonialism contained nothing but death.

Löfdahl has often returned to the box shape. In a text written for a retrospective exhibition of her work, she writes, quoting herself from another catalogue text:

The unit, the box shape, why have I chosen this? Well—it is empty, demanding and easy to identify with.

I have tried to express it as follows:

“They stand here. They are almost identical with themselves.

In the space is everything that one recognizes.

Clarity returns the wish unfulfilled. The ‘gap’ has moved in to itself and its neighbour.

[...]

A subject is out acting.

Tilts latent towards gone.

There they stand, waiting for us to identify ourselves with them.” (Löfdahl 2011, p. 87)³

Löfdahl twists and turns the box—inside, outside, empty, possible to fill. The box shape is simple, and so little is needed for meaning and identification to arise. When she makes holes and openings in the box and adds the coral-like castings of bicycle helmets, as well as what looks like wheels, then the box becomes filled with an interior. Subjectivity, meaning, and intention are assigned, fictionally, ironically, playfully, and very seriously.

In other works, Löfdahl has also suggestively invoked subjectivity by holes whose locations signal an interior with will and intention. In “Coral Islands for the Thirty Years’ War”, this is reinforced by the bicycle helmets, whose function is to protect the brains of those who ride bicycles, and, therefore, it synecdochally invokes bicycles as vehicles intentionally used by humans. However, the boxes also *look like* vehicles, other vehicles. Are they not cars? Who does not want to try to push them forward, as if they were toy cars? Vehicles connote direction, efficiency, control, and determination, that is, modernity, progress, climate change, and mass extinction. The driver of a vehicle masters time and space so that economic growth does not have to acknowledge any limits, in that you also need protection, helmets, for what is vulnerable. Moreover, we need to refuel petrol tanks

through holes and let out exhaust gas through pipes. Or are they exhaust pipes? Is it not also a cannon tube? Is the vehicle not a tank? There is not much that is as *intentionally* destructive as a tank, is there? The first helmet was certainly a combat helmet. We now wear bicycle helmets for protection against risks we have created ourselves.

Löfdahl does not express inner experiences. She creates constellations, in the sense of Benjamin and Adorno, or “applied models” that materialize “existing concept[s]”, as she herself puts it. A model should be about “distinguishing potential”, “be functional”, and have “a dynamic that articulates a growing light”, she states (Löfdahl 2011, p. 87). Alexander García Düttmann, in *The Memory of Thought*, describes how Adorno, in an early text, defines the model concept in a way that can be related to how Löfdahl uses it: “. . . constructed, non-organic images, [. . .] which allow ‘reason to approach reality tentatively and experimentally, to approach a reality which does not surrender itself to a law’” (Düttmann 2002, p. 90). The tentative and the experimental belong together, something that scientism has never understood. Science also works with constellations, according to Adorno in *Negative Dialectics*, although it has not always understood that that is what it does (and here I use the translation of Adorno that can be found in Düttmann’s book, since its use of the word “scientism” suits me better than the term “scientivism”, used in the English translation of Adorno’s book):

How objects are to be disclosed through constellations is not to be derived from philosophy, which has shown little interest in this, but rather from important scientific investigations, fully accomplished scientific work has often enough proved to be in advance of its own philosophical self-understanding as scientism. (Düttmann 2002, p. 90).

Bicycle helmets are entangled with dead coral reefs, objectively and far-fetched, shown by Löfdahl in her small revelations of the obvious. These are the kinds of connections we need to start paying attention to, instead of excluding them from the beginning because we have no law or method to control them. Today, measurement results, such as those in the reports from the IPCC, point to patterns of such complexity, and contradictions and conflicts of such insolubility, that we cannot rely on the foreseeable. Everything is on the surface and everything pulls away, as with Löfdahl’s work. The box is, at the same time, empty and secretive. It hides no inner meaning, and it provides no answers. It is a constellation that urges us to think. The correspondences are obvious and incomprehensible. Today, it is common sense that is wrong. A “wrong life cannot be lived rightly”, as Adorno once put it (Adorno 1978, p. 39). That is what the measurement results show. What needs attention is, therefore, both far-fetched and near-fetched.

The belief that one can decide in advance what *may* be true or not depends on the economic, administrative, and political marginalizations of knowledge that cannot be incorporated into the useful, into growth, into the exploitation of everything. The IPCC report states the indisputable: we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, it does not claim to have the political solution to this. It cannot say what politicians should do. Real political decisions must be made without knowing what is right in advance and must be made tentatively. Tentativeness does not exclude decisions and action. On the contrary, it is the ideological view that it will always be possible to determine in advance what might be relevant, important, and right that reduces politics to administration, and politicians to mystagogues and scientific dogmatists, who are not allowed to be tentative, and who can never admit that they may be wrong.

What excludes action, what paralyzes politicians, is a system that is so self-righteous that it excludes groping, and reduces politics to rule-based actions, and possible errors to individual mistakes. “Groping” means being aware of the nonknowledge in all knowledge, allowing oneself to be tentative, in order to arrive at truth beyond rules. The IPCC and Eva Löfdahl are groping in different ways over different kinds of things, and the differences must be respected. However, they have arrived at truths, undeniably and objectively, unlike those who thought they already knew.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ My italics in both quotes.
- ² All translations of Eva Löfdahl's texts are mine, unless otherwise stated.
- ³ Löfdahl quotes herself rather carelessly. See [Löfdahl \(1987\)](#), p. 59.

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