# Orford: Territoire Insulaire / Orford: Insular Territory Geneviève Chevalier

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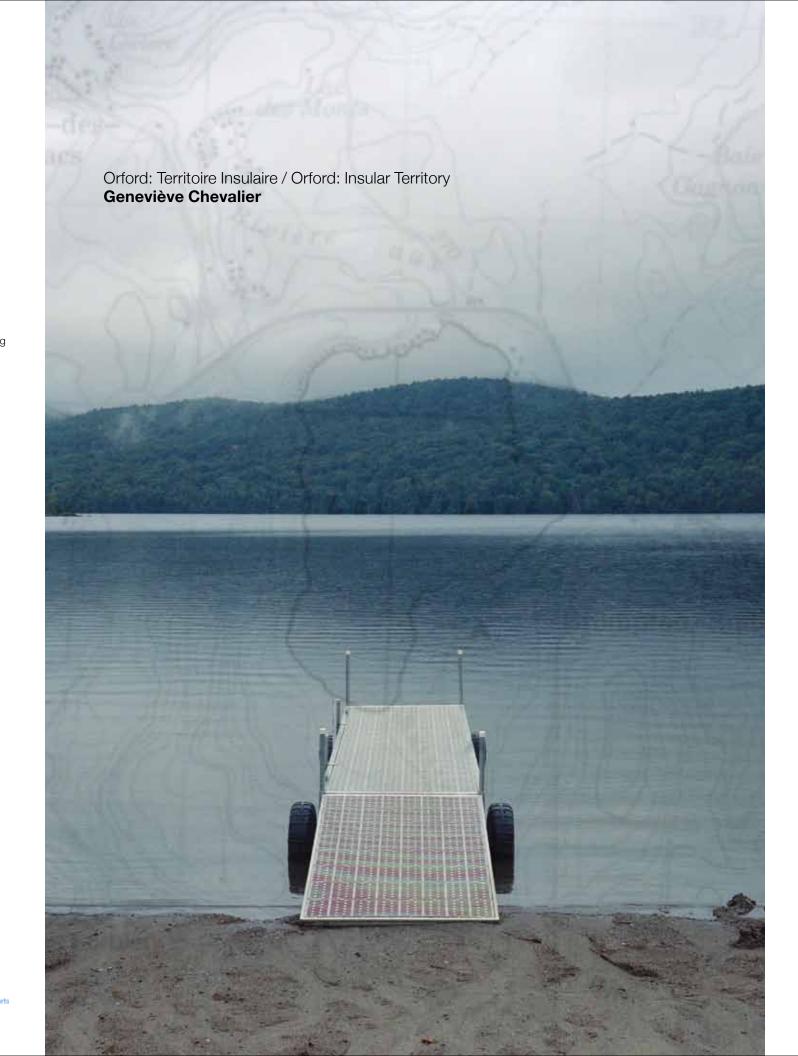
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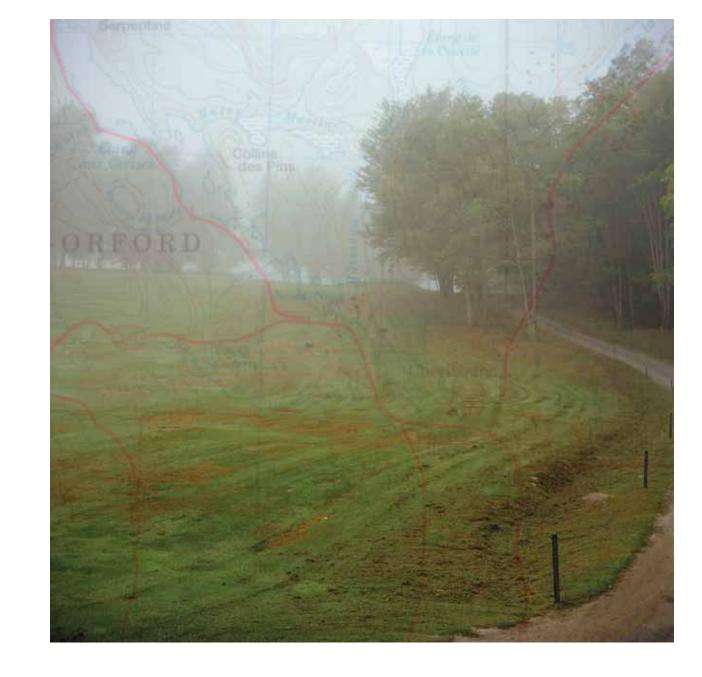
**Geneviève Chevalier** is a visual artist, independent curator, doctoral student in the programme Études et pratiques des arts at UQÀM (Montréal), and the recipient of the SSHRC Joseph-Armand Bombardier CGS Doctoral Scholarship. Her research focuses on exhibition practices, site-specific methodologies and ideas around public spheres. The approach Chevalier generally privileges is contextual, and, as part of her research, she has worked as a guest curator for the Foreman Art Gallery of Bishop's University on the 2011–12 two-part, site-specific exhibition *Stanstead Project or How to Cross the Border*. As a curator, Chevalier has worked with such artists as Ron Benner, Ursula Biemann, Valérie Blass, Geoffrey Jones, Jim Holyoak, Thomas Kneubühler, Christian Philipp Müller, Andreas Rutkauskas, Andrew King and Angela Silver, and Althea Thauberger.

Chevalier's work as an artist has been presented at the DUMBO Arts Center in Brooklyn, New York; Thames Art Gallery, Chatham, Ontario; CRANE lab (Research Center for Digital Arts, Ethics of Art and Regeneration), Chevigny, France; Regart and Wagon art itinérant Artist Run Centres, Lévis and Québec City; and Centre DARE-DARE, Montréal. She has been awarded with a grant from the Brucebo Fine Art Scholarship Foundation in Gotland, Sweden and various grants from the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec (CALQ) and the Centre interuniversitaire des arts médiatiques (CIAM). Chevalier teaches at UQÀM (Montréal). She has served as co-curator at the Foreman Art Gallery, and as an assistant to the late artist and architect Melvin Charney. Born in Québec City, she now lives and works in Eastman, Eastern Townships, Québec.

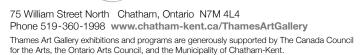
Geneviève would like to thank artist Colette Laliberté for her contribution to this project.













## The Natural World That Remains to be Seen (and Experienced)

With her project Orford: Territoire Insulaire / Orford: Insular Territory, artist Geneviève Chevalier engages the viewer in a conversation about our collective and individual experiences of nature. By focusing her investigations on a particular place, her local provincial park, Chevalier asks us to reflect on how history, politics, and philosophy have shaped the way we use and experience the landscape. Without placing any value judgement on our interactions with "wilderness," a term that has come to connote both a wasteland and a place for recreation that exists outside of everyday human culture, Orford questions the conceptual boundaries we have placed around the natural world. Chevalier's multi-sensory and multi-disciplinary project opens up this simplified understanding by demonstrating how much our cultural attitudes and physical interactions with nature have shaped its very existence.

The nucleus of Chevalier's project is Parc national du Mont-Orford, a protected site that is part of the Parcs Québec or la Société des établissements de plein air du Québec network, located in the Eastern Townships at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountain chain. A highly developed and much-used park with a rich history, Mont Orford was established in 1938 through the cooperation of local and provincial governments who worked together to purchase land for the public commons. From the hiking trails to the golf course, the lakefront where visitors swim and boat to the cycling paths, this recreation park offers many types of natural and outdoor activities. It is also an important point of exchange for people of the region, whether Anglophone, Francophone or Allophone, a place where the sometimes factious issues of language and identity can become secondary to the enjoyment of the outdoors. Cultural and artistic events take place within the park: the Orford Arts Centre offers a classical music academy, a summer festival, and exhibition spaces for visual artists. The importance of this park as a cultural and democratic institution cannot be clearer: Mont Orford represents a natural and heritage landscape, a place of importance both for its environmental value and cultural contributions to the community, and for its historic value as a signifier of social and political cohesion.

A recent threat to this protected and invaluable recreational space inspired and informs Chevalier's *Orford*. In 2006, a plan was revealed by the provincial Liberals under Jean Charest to sell 459 hectares from the park for a large condo development and to divest the park of its publicly-owned ski hill and golf course. A five-year battle ensued between a coalition of environmental and community activists (organized as SOS Parc Orford) and the government, which led to the restoration of Park Mont Orford's protected status in 2010. Chevalier's artistic response to the near-dissolution of her local provincial park began in that year, resulting in a thought-provoking meditation on the importance of this natural site to her community, an exploration that takes a quasi-ethnographic look at how people enjoy and experience the landscape.

Bringing together photography and video with archival material and an audio recording, *Orford* uses different documentary formats to explore the various landscapes that make up Mont Orford Park. In the multi-channel video projection that dominates the project, Chevalier collages footage of visitors using and moving in the landscape — driving, paddling, sailing, and swimming. The sense of kinetic action and activity in the park is exaggerated by the composition of the video, which cuts from two to three channels, each a stream of images made up of multiple clips that randomly generate different combinations. The soundtrack keeps a strict beat, a pounding of waves, feet, paddles, and car wheels that emphasizes the almost frenetic movement of people through the park's various thoroughfares and spaces. Presented alongside this video is a series of digital photographs of the park that at first glance appear as beautiful and pastoral impressions of Mont Orford's natural splendour. Yet in each image we can find aspects of human occupation and usage. Sometimes these are deliberately added by the artist, as when she layers a topographical map over the image of one of the park's peaks. At other times these cultural traces, a golf flag or a road marker, are present as a result of human alterations made to the landscape. These little reminders of how humans have represented and shaped the natural world are complemented by a display of archival documents and press clippings from the recent debates around preserving the park's non-commercial status. Finally, Chevalier includes an audio recording of a talk by art historian and landscape theorist Benedict Fullalove, who was invited to give a public presentation at the park on the cultural history of wilderness.

Through this series of visual, auditory, and material interactions within the gallery space, Chevalier asks the viewer to consider the notion of art as a process-based form of research-creation. *Orford* reflects Chevalier's deep interest in creating art that encourages the viewer to interact with various forms of representation, from ephemeral documents and digital recordings to more permanent objects of art, such as photographs. Chevalier's creative process was similarly constructive and process-driven. She explored the park as a visitor, participated in park-organized activities, and organized a public hike as a way to open up the project to collaborative information gathering. As a result, *Orford* exists as an experiential whole that combines more traditional art forms with participatory art-making methods and exhibiting techniques. Chevalier's art practice reflects the notion that our interactions with both nature and art have similar roots: each requires an open mind and a spirit of inquiry while fundamentally being grounded in a physical experience that takes place in time and space.

Orford not only engages the viewer through visual and theoretical considerations of landscape, but also focuses on current questions about how nature and wilderness are assigned worth and how much we are willing to protect them. While there are many ways to enjoy the outdoors — from the more sedate recreational practices of the day-tripping urbanite to the hardy explorations of wilderness backpackers — spending time in the landscape remains a challenge for many, especially for those of us without access to protected spaces. By making interaction with the community that so vehemently fought for Mont Orford Park part of her art-making process, Chevalier draws attention to the importance of community engagement in protecting and cultivating our existing natural places. At the same time, she points to the way that landscapes are shaped by their use and local needs, often at the expense of the idea of "pristine" wilderness. In a larger sense, Orford: Territoire Insulaire / Orford: Insular Territory asks the viewer to consider how nature remains an essential part of our sense of community and place, an important consideration today as we continue to put our natural world at risk.

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## Earth

Since at least the 1960s, a deepening moral conviction has been taking hold in what I'll call, in somewhat obsolete terms, the man-nature dialectic. Basically this: we, the human species in its late capitalist phase, are recklessly abusing the earth. We've been eviscerating the untrammelled wilderness in a process of ruthless resource retrieval. We've implanted Gaia's topsoil with the deep-set prongs of our agribusiness infrastructure. We've doused landscapes and lawnscapes with pesticides, and marred our topography with unrestrained urban overspread and burgeoning transportation arteries. Monster cities dot the planet and chuff out over seventy percent of the world's carbon emissions. This has been taking a huge toll on our skies and oceans, and thus the alarming problem of warming (and acidifying) waters and chaotic climate trends.

This is the way most people "think" about environmental issues, and though I've twisted the discourse into something of a caricature, nature sometimes has a way of telling us that that's about all we need to know if we're not scientists whose job it is to pore over data sets and methodologies for modelling climate change. On November 7, 2013, nature delivered one of its implacable epiphanies, a brutal hit at the Philippines only a few days before a United Nations climate convention was scheduled to open in Warsaw. A tropical cyclone named "Haiyan" struck Leyte Gulf with peak landfall impact.\(^1\) Category 5 winds and twelve-foot storm surges annihilated everything in their path. Several thousand people died in unimaginable states of panic and desperation as wind and water blasted through the archipelago and continued toward China and Vietnam. When the UN conference opened under the shadow of such apocalyptic wreckage, the Philippine delegate Naderev (Yeb) Saño issued an agonized plea for the Green Climate Fund and announced a personal fast in solidarity with Haiyan's victims (including his own family members). He protested the obstructionism of climate change sceptics and the UN's own laggard action on global warming:

To anyone who continues to deny the reality that is climate change, I dare them to go to the islands of the Pacific, the islands of the Caribbean and the islands of the Indian Ocean and see the impacts of rising sea levels; to the mountainous regions of the Himalayas and the Andes to see communities confronting glacial floods, to the Arctic where communities grapple with the fast dwindling polar ice caps, to the large deltas of the Mekong, the Ganges, the Amazon, and the Nile where lives and livelihoods are drowned, to the hills of Central America that confronts similar monstrous hurricanes, to the vast savannahs of Africa where climate change has likewise become a matter of life and death as food and water becomes scarce. Not to forget the massive hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico and the eastern seaboard of North America. And if that is not enough, they may want to pay a visit to the Philippines right now.<sup>2</sup>

In the closing hours of the Warsaw gathering, several charitable and environmental organizations, such as Greenpeace and Oxfam, withdrew in protest over the world body's failure to address uneven economic development and a worsening rate of carbon emissions.

These internal fault lines point to the many and difficult variables at play not only in global politics, but also in popular conceptions of what's going on with the earth. Saño's litany of threats is becoming relentless in some circles, and the natural thing to do is to look at the Philippines and say, "It's really that bad, isn't it?" But data gaps and the lack of predictive or retrospective certainty are also troubling. What of the putative "warming pause" of the last few decades? ask the sceptics. Can it be that all the temperature increases are happening in the Arctic or are stored away in the oceans? Why isn't there uniform warming across the planet?

And so the polemical atmosphere grows more and more divisive. A simple glance at media coverage tells us that bloggers, journalists, and researchers line up on opposing sides of the debate. Is the planet actually warming due to unprecedented amounts of fossil-fuel emissions, or is any warming trend part of a larger, cyclical paradigm of geo-cosmic proportions on which our pollutant-producing economies have but negligible effects? What are the facts and which story do they back up? Though the moral alarms continue to sound, much of the scientific record remains unsettled and international initiatives flounder against political opposition. Pinning down root causes of climate change and making rational determinations about what to do next is as labyrinthine and exasperating as seeking out justice in the early stages of the Michael Kohlhaas story.

It would seem that science and narrativity have a problem harmonizing their epistemic modalities. We know that warming waters expand and heat-trapping greenhouse gases help melt the polar icecap. This contributes to rising sea levels and makes coastal regions vulnerable to devastating floods, a process sure to continue over the rest of the century. A pair of lines from Shakespeare's sixty-fourth sonnet take on a new, environmental colouring: "When I have seen the hungry ocean gain / Advantage on the kingdom of the shore . . ." Nevertheless, as of this writing (January 2014), many researchers who tend to share Saño's misgivings and are not particularly partisan in the climate wars appear reluctant to draw a direct link between Haiyan and planetary warm-up claims. They note that increased temperatures in the upper ocean layer can boost the energy gradient of existing cyclones, but that intense storm activity has been no stranger to the equatorial Pacific. Moreover, it's difficult to pin down scientifically impeccable data that would confirm a notable warming curve in the last forty years or an increase in the frequency and violence of tropical cyclones. Thermal changes in the world's waters and atmosphere may be due to shifts in solar activity, heat seepage out of the earth's core, or a minute swing in the orbital tilt of the earth.

But if we're to listen to Leonardo DiCaprio there's at least one unimpeachable certainty out there. His environmental advocacy film *The 11th Hour* (2007)³ spells out the key to the warming problem: excessive oil dependency, an evil that permeates the entire global system. In the world-wide battle zone of climate discourse a verdict has gained traction, and not just among Hollywood types, the *Adbusters* demographic, or left-wing art theorists with university postings:⁴ beyond the large-scale physics of nature, with its complex swing factors, most anthropogenic environmental problems can be traced back to petroleum and the other fossil fuels. Millions of years of prehistoric sunlight trapped in composted plant and animal matter, and subject to heavy geological pressure, have been transubstantiated into liquid capital and flow through all the networks of manufacturing and consumption. And that's the problem. Oil is the world's main energy resource and the commodity that drives economic development and profits. There's no denying this, but it's on this processed sea of viscous muck that our ecological conscience and our public policy flagship must take sail.

Everything I've written is drawn from the debates that rage on through media platforms and other, more specialized organs. Saño's outcry at the Warsaw conference bears serious consideration, but it also lends itself to political strategizing of the bitterest sort. To sceptics, it clangs

like an exasperating ideological tocsin from the green side of the political spectrum. I've spent most of my life in academia, among the liberal intelligentsia, and nearly everyone I know agrees with the worst-case scenarios outlined above. The idea is that resources are finite and that the planetary eco-system can only take so much strain. The earth is reaching its tolerance level for human exploitation. The solution? It's time to come down firmly against the ordeals of capitalism.

I have but one, not-disingenuous response to this: isn't it also advisable to be on guard against inflated nominalizing? Do we really want to sweep away Skype, home heating, and modern dentistry with one all-purpose scare-word? Intellectuals should take care to consider abuses in the referential theory of meaning. Otherwise, demagoguery of the crudest sort takes over. Economics and social theory are not exact sciences. When loosely understood and given a Gramscian emballage, or ranged with facile media critique, we end up with jaundiced sermons about capitalism and multinationals. Isn't "capitalism" but a big baggy name for a set of practices that have driven world-wide wealth creation and facilitated our hyper-modern lifestyles? What would we do without cars, computers, plastics, or jet travel? In Warsaw, Saño chided himself and his fellow delegates for belonging to the carbon-spewing "frequent flyer club" — a phrase that's just as applicable to the world's big-name artists and curators.

It's statistically indisputable that two hundred-plus years of industrial capitalism have increased food supply, produced taller and longer-lived human beings, funded educational institutions, financed science, driven technology forward, and raised standards of living not only in Europe and the Anglosphere, but nowadays in China, India, and Brazil. In tandem with the rise of post-Westphalian statecraft and the rule of law, this economic dynamism has apparently stabilized social order and helped diminish the ratio of violent death due to war, as measured across human history (if we're to credit recent arguments made by Steven Pinker and Ian Morris). Looking for good news on the conservation front, the Cambridge (U.K.) zoologist Andrew Balmford conducted a global study which showed that economically developed societies where informed citizens act to defend biodiversity, and corporations, eager to shore up their public image, pour money into green policies, have the world's best record on environmental preservation — and this despite the grim, unabating effects of industrialization and the possibility that we might be heading toward "a world without seashells." But having said as much, the question is whether the pro-capitalist litany outlined in this paragraph isn't itself a gross simplification, this time from the Adam Smith side of things.

So that leaves us with the truism that the world we know is complex and contradictory. Which it is. Consider "socialism," the other big baggy name. If we count European welfare states as bastions of parliamentary democracy and capitalism, which they are, it is equally indisputable that they are the world's most functional socialist polities. What this seems to indicate is that there's never been a non-totalitarian socialism that offers a viable alternative to Western modernity. Which Marxist-styled revolutionary states have escaped the totalitarian temptation? The Soviet Union? Mao's China? Pol Pot's Cambodia? Castro's Cuba? Venezuela under Chavez and Maduro? North Korea? And what do we do with the self-declared "National Socialism" of Hitler's Germany? So socialism itself is a complex and contradictory historical practice, with conjoined investments in the capitalist frameworks of modernity.

Yet none of this lets "capitalism" off the hook, but rather puts its successes, and its trajectory, under a critical spotlight. The Western system can only be a beacon if a regulated free market approach creates conditions for a sustainable middle class. Is this therefore a desirable chimera for our times — building a better world through one part socialism for every helping of capitalism? The alternative is postmodern serfdom and unfettered plutocracy: financial speculators and corporate interests roaming the globe, capitalizing on the labour of Third World multitudes who've been sold out by their post-colonial elites. Economics is a form of housekeeping, but globalization ensures that no state can think of itself as a moated grange disassociated from the neighbours, no matter how far over the hill or beyond the seas. Human economies are situated amidst large, non-human settings that obey their own ecological laws. Unregulated banking practices and outsourcing tend to reduce the domestic manufacturing base in Western countries, but not global carbon volumes. Countries across the world, whatever their range of economic viability, mutate into consumerist societies gorged with cheap goods, half of them petroleum products. This perforce brings nature into the economic calculus. Violent weather sweeps away flimsy housing and kills off their huddling masses, whether in the Philippines or New Orleans.

Greens and the limitationists declare that capitalist modernity has led us to an impasse: more 'development' means more environmental degradation, and, eventually, an apocalyptic reckoning when typhoons and super-storms become more common, or exploding populations deplete coastal groundwater and send coastlines sinking, or we shave away more old-growth forests, and so on. All of this may come to pass and the world's most intelligent species may hit a hard ceiling, but the climate change debate can't be settled — scientists and policy makers don't have enough statistical history to work with — and so the different sides tend to retrench politically. One group affirms that narrow local interests must be transcended by green conscience on a global scale, since the planet is one giant ecosystem. The other side claims that nature as such doesn't really exist.

The seemingly self-evident view that nature's abundance isn't limitless has been challenged by reframing the philosophical definition of "nature" itself. Persuasive, anti-limitationist counter-arguments, bolstered by a study of economic data patterns, are at the core of the cornucopian environmentalism associated with such figures as the late Julian Simon or still-very-much-alive Bjørn Lomborg. These Prometheans, as John Dryzek names them, are interested in questions of environmental sustainability, but their arguments move in the domain of economics and political theory. For Simon and Lomborg, and their acolytes, there's no ecological crisis that can't be solved by human ingenuity and technological intervention. There's nothing in nature that's actually a "resource" unless humans decide to extract it. No fossil fuel economy exists in 'the animal kingdom'; nickel and gold are mere matter in their natural state. In their conception, "nature" isn't there; it's not really a being or a holistic body, but a system of matter integrated into our *habitus*.

Greens may recoil in horror at the Promethean *Weltanschauung*, but it's worthwhile to point out that long before ecological sensitivity started its public career in the 1960s, national governments were already dealing with the natural world as a resource trust. Agencies were set up to study and manage forests, fisheries, soils, mining, metropolitan park architecture, state wilderness preserves, etc. As far back as the 1930s

such administrative approaches to what we now call "the environment" were analyzed by Martin Heidegger as questions of rationalism and technology. His critique of what he called the modern technological *Weltbild* or "world picture" deplored our view of the earth as a reservoir of treasures waiting to be sourced and processed. Modern man was definably modern and not medieval or classical, said Heidegger, because he had risen above his position within the thick forest of beings and begun to view the world from the vantage point of quantification, pragmatics, and mastery.

Though terminology such as "modern man" or "the man-nature dialectic" is relatively outdated (and residually sexist), its staleness focuses attention on the philosophical preconceptions that not only are front and centre in Prometheanism, but also continue to haunt green discourse more generally, particularly when it's concerned with finding a balance of sustainability between the environment and the demands of modern societies. Once it's started — and the starting point goes back several millennia, to the birth of settled agricultural communities — it's difficult, if not impossible, to break away from the Promethean stages of the dialectic. Part of the reason that this is so is that technology, capitalism, and even socialism share a range of philosophical presuppositions. From Bacon and Descartes to Kant, and as far forward as Marx, nature has been constituted as an anthropocentric, quasi-aesthetic construct. For Kant, this was inescapable. The world beyond our mental faculties is not knowable as a *Ding an sich*, or thing in itself. Our grasp of reality consists of a cognitive synthesis, a representation that's based on raw empirical data, to be sure, but held together for human purposes by our intuitions and mental categories.

Even left-wing schools of thought, which look askance at Cartesian rationalism or Kant's transcendental unity of consciousness, and for whom everything is imprinted with sociology, would agree. Reality, they endlessly remind us, is filtered through a medial mesh of signifiers. As for nature, well, everywhere we look we encounter it as a cultural image or a psychological sphere where our fears and drives unfold. In the 1990s, the left-leaning American environmental historian William Cronon shook his field by critiquing anti-agriculturalist Earth-firsters and those whose conceptions of wilderness led them into a dualism that saw all uses of nature as abuses. In fetishizing the autonomy of "nonhuman nature" this type of environmental ethic fails to assign humans a "home" on earth; it sacralizes primitivism of the most polarizing sort; it courts a radical anti-modernism that contributes but little to the pressing issue — as Cronon sees it — of building sustainability while learning to "hono[u]r" and preserve the wild.<sup>8</sup>

Heidegger, for his part, had grasped something essential in the dialectic: technology is not merely a neutral, instrumental accomplice in the human engagement with nature, but a historically ascendant factor that recalculates our priorities within the dialectic. It imposes an epistemic schema on nature; this is a Promethean process that serves human purposes so long as technology remains more or less an objective tool; but in the brave new age of Artificial Intelligence, technology may well supplant human imperatives with its own self-generated determinations.<sup>9</sup>

In Heidegger's assessment, says Gary Shapiro, "our very sense of what the earth is has been shaped by technology" and "technology's reign is so deeply rooted that it cannot be contested simply by appealing for a more prudent management of resources." When it comes to the natural world, technology compels the earth to report itself. This is not merely the objective conquest of the organic world, or its transformation through labour, which Hegel and Marx talked about; it is not the mere exploitation of the earth's resources for the purposes of subsistence or the immediate needs of the tribe. What Heidegger observed was the amoral imperative of technology at work, which is to test the optimal state of objects, to command their readiness, to have living and non-living nature alike cooperate with our instruments and fit into our designs. It's as if an animal in the wild could be called to order, or a storm stilled by a single shout. In this Heideggerian vision of modernity, nature is framed and made to yield itself, and quite literally so — as either a preserve designed to ensure our access to authentic wilderness, or a giant gasoline dump, or a well-engineered fetus (the list goes on). This power of subjection, he argued, has become a cognitive reflex intrinsic to modern reason, and embeds technology and managerialism into our very conception of nature. To rid ourselves of such assumptions would seem to run counter to the powers of human thought itself.

#### Orford

Geneviève Chevalier's Orford: Territoire Insulaire / Orford: Insular Territory inserts itself into the green consensus, which isn't surprising, given the art world's ideological affiliations, yet Chevalier doesn't resort to grand gestures of moralistic outrage, which is refreshing and, again, surprising, since the installation arose from her experiences with a long-running protest movement named SOS Parc Orford. This was a citizens' action campaign orchestrated between 2006 and 2010, in which Chevalier played a part by joining marches and attending meetings open to the public.

The activism centred on Mount Orford Provincial Park in Québec's Eastern Townships, at the upper tip of the Appalachian chain. SOS aimed to save some five hundred hectares of Orford's wilderness preserve from commercial and residential development authorized by the Liberal government of Premier Jean Charest. The Liberals put out a call for tenders, but their project drew increasingly negative publicity, and Thomas Mulcair — who is currently leader of the left-of-centre Federal NDP (New Democratic Party) — departed Charest's cabinet, where he had served as ministre du Développement durable, de l'Environnement, de la Faune et des Parcs. At first, Chevalier observed from afar as SOS mobilized thousands of supporters (academics, artists, government employees, ordinary citizens), and then, for reasons unrelated to the protests, she and her partner moved from Montréal to the village of Eastman. This tiny, lacustrine resort is renowned for its upscale spa and its direct access to the Mount Orford massif on whose western side it sits. Soon, Chevalier was doing a lot of biking and hiking and cross-country skiing, and beginning to sort out her environmental convictions.

The SOS campaign proved successful and the Liberal initiative was annulled. The proposed hotels and condominiums, attached to existing golf links and ski facilities, didn't go forward, but this doesn't mean that Orford was then, or is now, an untouched wilderness whose landscapes aren't open to human traffic and recreational consumption. Under normal driving conditions, Orford is less than two hours from Montréal, and this makes it one of the busiest and most accessible nature preserves in the province. SOS ensured that the ecological integrity of the park would be maintained, yet there's no decline in its use. "It gets crazy busy in the summer time," says Chevalier, "...like a shopping mall literally." 11

Orford is administered by SÉPAQ, the provincial agency that supervises parks, hunting and fishing reserves, and tourist sites throughout Québec. Its mandate is to provide the public with recreational access to intact wilderness areas. It also partners with the University of Sherbrooke, barely a stone's throw from Orford. The university's biology department houses Ph.D. research labs and Canada Research Chairs in ecology, wildlife population dynamics, and several other areas. Ecologically speaking, this means that much of Orford has preserved its biodiversity and hosts over a dozen different ecosystems. But SÉPAQ also has to satisfy a more commercial and consumer-oriented mandate. Aesthetically, this ensures that Orford will have a manicured aspect, resembling a frontier Eden of the bourgeois imagination. (It's within the compass arc, in fact, of Fenimore Cooper's Mohican wilderness.)

As the SOS campaign gained steam it exposed abuses in the government's management of conservation and prompted Chevalier to think critically about opening "nature" to high volumes of public consumption. *Orford: Territoire Insulaire* addresses the fragile equilibrium between education and recreation, between the park that Chevalier loves and regularly uses and its place in the SÉPAQ regime. On its website, the agency's current president and CEO reaches out to "fan[s] of nature and wide open spaces" as well as to those who are looking for "distinctive dining and great hotels in unique settings." In line with this aspect of the mandate, Chevalier's exhibition targets Orford's specific locations — the golf course, the ski stations, and the beaches and lakes that SÉPAQ proudly advertises. Two years ago, the provincial government invited Corporation Ski & Golf Mont-Orford, a newly-founded private enterprise, to take over management of these eponymous facilities. The Corporation is part of a larger network which boasts that "[t]he national parks of *Québec maritime*" — the name of this larger tourism association — "are an immense natural playground" that provides "access to ski resorts throughout our regions. Test your mettle on or off trail, on groomed or ungroomed trails."<sup>12</sup>

Stepping in and out of the installation, viewers realize that there's a dual critique at work. Through the SOS-related material, Chevalier exposes the politics of environmental overuse. At the same time, it's not only the Charest Liberals or SÉPAQ who were or are being called to account. Chevalier ponders the aesthetic investments that graft human needs and longings onto the perception of nature. Whose "aesthetic investments"? Ours — anybody who has ever longed for alpine sunsets, endless tracts of boreal forest, and shimmering rivers winding off into a gilded distance; or gazed through the picture window of a restaurant in British Columbia's Pacific Rim National Park, admiring the immense tidal swell.

Our ability to look at nature contemplatively gets extracted under certain historical conditions and takes the form of landscape appreciation, as in eighteenth-century tourism seeking out the picturesque or the sublime. Such variations in landscape aesthetics were encapsulated by Robert Smithson in "A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects," his landmark essay of 1968. "The 'gloomy' ruins of aristocracy are transferred into the 'happy' ruins of the humanist," he wrote, and then asked, somewhat glibly, but with several layers of implication, "Could we say that art degenerates as it approaches gardening?" Smithson was meditating on the vast timescales of geological entropy, a perspective that dwarfs aristocratic and humanistic perception of landscape alike, unless, perhaps, the symbolism and the latent nihilism of 'the ruin' is engaged. But his observations also point to a level of embedded cognitive modelling in what I have been calling the man-nature dialectic. Specifically, the idea that nature is only conceptually available to us (i.e., as a totality named "nature") when it coheres into an aesthetic gestalt and space of human belonging. This coherence takes place under the guise of several names and constructs. A nature preserve or a wilderness park leans more in the direction of nature than culture, whereas gardens are at the cultural pole of this dichotomy. Terminologically, meanwhile, we're caught up in a tangled thicket of tropes and terminology, each at times synonymous with the other(s): earth, nature, wilderness, landscape, cultivated park, garden, environment.

If we're to proceed from Kant's theory of the faculties, our aesthetic sensitivity to nature may be as deeply rooted in the brain as language. If Chomsky's transformational grammar is a hard-wired component of human mental functioning, is it not possible that the aesthetic synthesis that we perceive in nature is also cognitively inevitable, and rises to the level of "art" when it is cultivated by individuals and institutionalized as culture? The disposition of a particular prospect, inclusive of its seasonal and meteorological conditions, has been fertile syntactic territory for the roving eye — and mind — of the landscape painter (and photographer) or poet. It may be that the multiplying images that flood our visual field and are consumed at whatever level of sophistication — from kitsch calendar landscapes to the high-minded wilderness meditations of antique paintings — are emergent expressions of an innate capacity in human consciousness.

For at least three hundred years, in the form of landscape aesthetics, art has been in the business of selling the magic of nature back to people, supplying images of contemplation and communion. Art historians have analyzed the nature mythos that runs through the landscape tradition. Particularly fertile areas of critical investigation have been eighteenth- and nineteenth-century portrayals of nature, or wilderness, as a frontier awaiting incorporation into a socio-political agenda or serving aesthetic and leisure needs. The nature lovers of the British Enlightenment wanted to make nature look like a work of art; inspired by the continental landscape fantasies of Claude and Poussin, park and garden designers would rearrange the terrain, and the sightlines, with artificial ruins and deliberately placed hillocks, coulisses, or copses. After the Age of Reason, and partly because of Rousseau, a taste for something presumably more primitive took hold. Romanticism ran deep into the nineteenth century, particularly when it crossed the Atlantic and arrived in North America, where the frontier pushed ever westward. Whether it was the Alps, the Alleghenies, or the Rockies, the Romantics cultivated nature-appreciation on a more cinematic scale. Parks and gardens were replaced by a taste for wilderness. Nature had to be sublime and all-encompassing, as on the day of creation.

These legacies from earlier centuries are still with us, as Chevalier's project acknowledges. Old paintings and prints have conveniently freeze-framed these historical stages of the West's epic dialectic of man and nature. The dialectic is ever present in literary works (poems, novels, and travel writing); it continues to inform socio-cultural practices (e.g., weekending, hunting, vacationing, green tourism packages, and so on); and it lives on in nation-building discourses under sustainability policies, resource development, and other such rubrics. The battle against Charest's sell-out of Orford proved that conservation activism doesn't have to be a radical act and can occupy some sensible middle zone in this continuum. The protestors wanted to rehabilitate and save nature from our encroachments and crimes, so that, presumably,

it can go back to its mysterious self-regulating as an ecosystem, while the public is free to tramp through it on hikes and bird-watching expeditions, or simply contemplate it in its 'otherness.' The SÉPAQ website, inclusive of its many links, does nothing to overturn this crypto-consumerist variant of nature romanticism and, indeed, only brings it out into the open.

Orford: Territoire Insulaire brings home this question of how nature is accessed and represented, and does so through a multitude of means. There's an immersive, wall-projected two-channel video of various vehicles (cars, motorcycles, motorboats, canoes, paddle boats) criss-crossing the landscape in every direction. These images contrast with large photo stills that offer a more contemplative perspective, and perhaps evoke — as Chevalier herself would like to imagine—the silent watchfulness of an animal observing from afar. In other sections of the installation space Chevalier presents relics and documents from a well-attended hike that she organized in Orford in 2010, at the triumphant high-point of the SOS action. Here we have snapshots taken by fellow hikers displayed on a table which also holds drawings by Colette Laliberté, the noted abstract painter and graphic artist from OCAD University in Toronto. Nearby is a flat-screen monitor that cycles through a slide show of images produced by a hired professional photographer. And there's more: a map that Chevalier created for the hike, an aerial photograph of the park, the GPS she used, a book or two, a guide to the park's flora and fauna, and several SOS documents.

Most of the hike participants were people from the region, young and old (many retirees included), who engaged each other, and Chevalier, in informal conversations about the events surrounding the park's partial dismantlement under the Liberal proposal. <sup>14</sup> Laliberté was among the hikers, as was Benedict Fullalove, the art historian who teaches in the studio-intensive program at Calgary's Alberta College of Art and Design. Fullalove's scholarship examines the historical interweave of landscape and identity discourses, with a special focus on the Canadian West. His absorbing 2010 lecture at the Orford Centre for the Arts (which was created along the lines of the Banff Centre, but on a much smaller scale and solely oriented towards classical music), is included in the exhibit.

The east-west axis of all this material (Laliberté-Fullalove, OCAD-ACAD, Orford-Banff, Appalachians-Rockies) brings out several themes in Chevalier's work. The "idea of pure nature is still being sold to people . . . coupled with the notion of entertainment, as if nature wasn't enough. . . . Maybe in visiting environments such as parks we can see how nature is adapting itself to us," Chevalier writes in an e-mail. As an easterner, she is aware that many in Canada, particularly in the West, nurture ideals of untouched natural grandeur, perhaps because they're still surrounded by enormous chunks of Albert Bierstadt-like cordillera. Yet even the most remote Western topographies are slowly coming under human pressure. In her own Québec backyard, Chevalier can see that occupied landscape has long been a norm, and it wasn't SÉPAQ or Charest that did it. Québec has a layered Aboriginal, French, and English history. While French colonization parcelled out large strips of land into privately held estates in much of the province's francophone south, the Eastern Townships saw such lands undergo a countervailing anglophone take-over. When the British Crown began administering the region in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, following the Seven Years' War, these estates, which had been allocated as neo-feudal seigneuries, were restructured as townships and given away to Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution, and to subsequent waves of British and Scottish immigrants.

#### Relationality

Chevalier structures her installation as an exercise in aesthetic democracy. This avoids the grating bluntness that can plague some forms of politicized art. In place of too-earnest didacticism or passionate appeals to solidarity, her approach is at once archival and "relational" in the best sense of this latter (and now fashionable) term. As noted above, the installation consists of video projections, photo stills, personal records, and assorted public documents arranged in a multifocal space. The parkland hikes organized by Chevalier, as well as Laliberté's drawings and the sound file of Fullalove's lecture, are extensions integral to its conception. Audiences confront not an artwork, lone and elevated, but a project in many pieces. The "art" comes down to a kind of participatory, public-service display intended for DIY navigation. There is no single, unitary object or take-away slogan that's meant to sum up the value and the meaning of Mount Orford Park or the haste to save it. This puts *Orford: Territoire Insulaire* into postmodern frameworks where the broken ontology of the autonomous artwork matches up with new modalities of ideological critique.

In a world of massive information overflow, in which epistemology and praxis must operate at multiple levels, how can discrete forms command our undivided attention or hold on to their aesthetic autonomy? If one wants to assess the ontological instability of the once fixed, tangible, and bounded art work, all one has to do is consider what's happened to the hit pop song (or the formal cohesion of the 33 rpm album) in our remix age of sampling and downloading. Just as the electronic revolution has revealed how technologically-dependent the human sensorium has become in recent decades, one could argue that the art work, as a stand-alone object, merely and illusively reifies a whole network of social acts and discourses.

In one regard, the politics of the relational turn in art hanker back to 1960s counterculture by way of the Habermasian public sphere.

One could concomitantly argue that relational aesthetics is what tends to happen to institutional critique and other activist practices in the age of the Internet. Open-concept interactive installations, availing themselves of Google or other portals, are shadowed by the gravitational pull of the World Wide Web and rehearse the continuing atomization, or dematerialization, of the art object. *Orford: Territoire Insulaire* doesn't open the installation space to external penetration via Internet hook-up, but that's hardly a remote possibility. The last time that Chevalier exhibited at the Thames Gallery was in 2008, when she partook in a group exhibit where a small German collective named Blackhole Factory used web access to dissolve deictic concepts of site-specificity. So it seems that the relational approach—if we agree that its genealogy has something to do with activism and institutional criticism — mimics, in the sphere of aesthetics, the switch from the revolutionary ethos of the Old Left to the "structural critique" model of New Left activism in the 1960s and beyond.\(^{16}\)

Boris Groys observes that today's communication technologies and social media "offer global populations the ability to present their photos, videos, and texts in ways that cannot be distinguished from any post-Conceptualist artwork. And contemporary design offers the same populations a means of shaping and experiencing their apartments or workplaces as artistic installations." It appears that the Conceptual Art

revolution wrought fifty years ago has surely triumphed, which means that its working assumptions, its experimental thrusts, have been surpassed and assimilated. In the meantime, the older aesthetics of contemplation and deep subjective pleasure have been replaced by digitally-driven modes of replication and consumption, as Walter Benjamin long ago anticipated. Today, refined devotees of fine art or learned enthusiasts of conceptual language games are outnumbered by the sheer number of consumers and worldwide image producers. The tools of artistic poiesis (a term that Groys resurrects from the Classical Greeks) are in everybody's hands. Aesthetics has fled the sacerdotal zone of high art, though frigid conceptual temples still stand right next to thronged museums outfitted with crowd-pleasing gadgetry for the latest blockbuster exhibits.

It's now an intellectual commonplace to say that when we categorize something as "religious art" from the past we're actually superimposing our own cultural templates. We admit that when we call a medieval ceiling fresco an "artwork" we're being at least somewhat anachronistic. We're integrating older practices into a system of secular fetishes known as the artworld, linked together as a network of museums and websites, and authors living and dead. As good historical and epistemological relativists, we admit that the "artworks" of a presumably more religious past, including those of "primitive" non-European cultures, were objects and spaces whose aesthetics were tacitly woven into ceremonial or liturgical (or martial) uses.<sup>19</sup>

But it took Duchamp to first show us that a ritualistic economy still structures art and its uses in the modern age, and that the presumably ontological reality that's supposed to anchor everything — the object itself — is something of a conceptual fiction. He prepared the way for relational aesthetics by reformulating the significance of ontology and authorship in art. Through him, with him, and in him, in the unity of the readymade . . . these two categories (ontology and authorship) could be dissolved into an economy of hermeneutic usage (audiences complete the meaning of a work) and institutional validation (when translated and enframed by a new setting, any object has the potential to become an 'artwork').

In other words, the so-called artwork has always existed as a virtual referent — more category than object — around which audiences and institutions and uses have conglomerated. The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer spoke of God withdrawing from the world, leaving space for secularism, even atheism, as weak, kenotic forms of "religionless Christianity." The eclipse of the unique aesthetic object, the loss of aura, the rise of spectacle, social media, and big money, the walk-through relational installations — what do all these developments and these familiar topoi from contemporary critical theory add up to, if not the idea that "[a] web without a spider still catches the light" (to borrow a line from Adam Gopnik)?<sup>20</sup> In the age of conceptualism and relationality that spiderless centre or that twinkling web, that's where we locate the event of "art."

Beyond the fading theological tropes, the theoretical genealogy of relational art goes back to Roland Barthes. His own cross-over from structuralism to post-structuralism involved downgrading transcendental authorship into a mere "author-function." Now, in an age of heightened electronic interactivity, we see that the executive hierarchies of the art world have the option of reducing themselves further, in line with a populist spirit that's analogous to an open-border immigration policy. Curators suspend their editorial primacy, handing the exhibition space over to the artist, who in turn diminishes her/his authorial privilege as well as the centrality of the unitary art work itself by pulling together installations that act as social sites or educational platforms. Isn't this (the devolution in roles from curator, through artist, to auto-pedagogic audience consumption) the principle that subtends *Orford: Territoire Insulaire*, perhaps even SÉPAQ's management of its parks? With its artifacts, its collaborative elements, its hiking context, its sources in an anterior and completely separate protest movement with which she self-affiliated, Chevalier's installation shows that the boundaries of art and life have been relaxed, and there is now free movement across several territories.

Perhaps relational aesthetics is therefore a mimic discourse, conformed to the digital age and the unpredictable fluidities of the global socio-economic situation. With the fall of the focal art object, follows its dispersal into various mediums and conceptual tropes; art is theorized — and consumed — as a discursive formation, or rather, as information from the world at large, which happens to have taken up temporary residency in a recognized institutional precinct. From this new, ontologically elusive conception of "art" flows an inclusivist mode of aesthetics. Whether the installation actually occupies a gallery interior or goes off-site, as with Thomas Hirschhorn's densely-jumbled monuments to his favourite philosophers and ideologues, the key point is to bring the public into the art work so it may engage not the artist's subjectivity, but the topical issues that the artist has laid out for interrogation. Chevalier's presentational strategy has been current in the art world for some time now and might be catalogued under "anti-Society-of-the-Spectacle styles of postmodernism." But the immediate point to note is that installations of this type are devised as civic microcosms and represent a pedagogical imperative in contemporary art history (an intriguing comparison may be made between locative relational installations like Chevalier's and Shannon Gerard's "Carl Wagan Bookmobile" project).

In his famous essay on the artwork, Heidegger talked about the "workliness" of the work, whereby art could set up an open space for the earth to disclose itself within a specific historical horizon. Orford: Territoire Insulaire fulfills this mission within the scope of a relational approach. Generically, this means that the art exhibit must be seen as a syntagmatic exercise in decentring, a breaking up of the finish and seamlessness of the traditional work, which leaves all kinds of gaps for the audience to step through. This is not art that seeks to overpower audiences with an enveloping Gesamtkunstwerk experience, or drive the viewer toward closure, but rather to turn the viewer into a browser and a student on a consciousness-raising quest. At the same time there's a Heideggerian 'setting-up' going on in the installation, and a detectable Heideggerian caveat even though Heidegger may have played no part in Chevalier's working methods.

"Maybe in visiting environments such as parks" — I quote Chevalier again — "we can see how nature is adapting itself to us." I take this as a concession to the modern world picture and the role of technology in framing and compromising the self-integrity of natural phenomena, converting these into representations for scientific use or, alternatively, for back-to-nature tourism and consumption. When you're physically falling apart and need a cane to walk the hills and the *Holzwege*, or feel the cold clutching hand of death on your inner organs, it's only human

to assume that you'd want the latest stem-cell research to speed up its discoveries and opt for cyber implants or a saving round of drug therapy. But insofar as technology, in Heidegger's thinking, is a means of compelling nature to "reveal" or "unconceal" itself, we may also encounter unexpected developments in the domain we're probing: nature withdrawing from us, eluding our pharmaceutical reach as in the case of bacterial microevolution, or troubling us with its long-term unpredictabilities (climate change) and violent disturbances (Haiyan) powered, perhaps, by anthropogenic effects on nature's cycles and systems.

Chevalier's eco-political commitments are fairly plain to see, and her work, particularly the photo stills, retains a poetic eloquence, but there's also a lot of worry on display. I detect a disturbing resonance underneath the documentary commemoration of the SOS victory. *Orford:*Territoire Insulaire is an archival testimony to SOS and her own expanding ecological conscience. As "art" it's also open-ended and relational. It welcomes public participation. But in drawing attention to the hectic overuse of provincial parks, and by having us walk the aisles, as it were, of her exhibition, Chevalier presents "nature" as an overconsumed construct. There's a hard question at the heart of the installation: do we, as a species caught up in the heavy throes of modernity, trust ourselves to reconcile ideals of human harmony with nature (if such harmony ever was) with enlightened public management of what we call "the environment"?

What I termed at the outset of this essay as the man-nature dialectic thus reveals itself as an anthropocentric (and not just an androcentric) dilemma that even socially-conscious art cannot assuage, for Chevalier intimates that even our search for aesthetic solace in nature — which may be a vital, quasi-existential need for us as higher-order animals — is implicated in the process of dialectical mastery. As far as modern memory is concerned, when hasn't the natural world not been a field of aesthetic projections or socio-economic undertakings? The problem with the Charest initiative at Orford, which SOS rightfully took down, was that it went too far in one direction: it wanted to redesign and restrict the park's "nature" aspect for the sake of financially elite clientele. But it may be that SÉPAQ does this same thing, only with more environmental responsibility and on a more democratic scale. It may be that delicate balancing act of preserving and using wilderness areas is the best we can strive for under the prevailing conditions of modernity, and that Chevalier's installation is a reluctant, somewhat melancholy concession to this.

#### "Nature," a Postscript

Has nature ever been a neutral setting for human activity, a holistic biosphere which we human beings invaded and corrupted by subduing it for our species-specific purposes? Isn't it true that when it comes to nature we have no choice? We're in it, utterly surrounded by its immeasurable paradigm — what we know of it on this planet. We find ourselves having to exploit nature one way or another. We tap into it and exert our mastery for the sake of our livelihood, but also use it recreationally and reflect on it aesthetically, and this means that it's the human viewpoint that's constitutive of "nature," a term inclusive of its other syntagma such as landscape or wilderness.

All consciousness, says the phenomenologist, is consciousness of something, and the human condition vis-à-vis nature is to have seen ourselves as always already within it — since the dawn of self-reflective cognition. So it should be equally obvious that the presumed equilibrium of man and nature, located in some 'once upon a time' in the pre-industrial past, and now dangerously out of reach because our environmental abuses have reached proto-apocalyptic magnitudes, is perhaps also a fallacious dream.

Speaking of apocalypse, it's funny how the old fables maintain their heuristic utility even as every progressive intellectual feels entitled to mock their metaphysical claims. But this fleering should really be beneath us. We still tell ourselves versions of that self-inculpating story that begins with our ejection from earthly paradise and ends with universal cataclysm (wars, famines, plagues, storms, and earthquakes). Not to mention that the victimological discourses of secular modernity reach back, as René Girard observes, to the anthropology of the Cross.

Ever since Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden, their exiled descendants have been drifting and questing, and cutting and burning and building their way through a wilderness that pre-existed the species (an arduous selva oscura). The God-given dominion of Genesis 1:28 comes at a steep cost. We're fraught with the knowledge that we plucked from forbidden branches, but we've yet to learn the parable of the fig tree.

Darwin pokes his head into this, too, for can't the little homiletic of The Fall be read as an allegory of humanity's exit from nature, from the pressures of natural selection, via the expansion of self-consciousness? Without the anthropocentric (in whatever shade of intensity) viewpoint there's no nature in "nature," but simply brute matter in different geo-chemical morphologies. If this is true, if "nature" is merely a screen discourse for lesser or greater degrees of anthropocentrism, including what we might call the humanist tradition of environmental appreciation (for lack of a better term) that takes its bearings from such things as the farming and beekeeping toils sung in Virgil's *Georgics* or Chinese shan shui landscapes — then it's not only industrial capitalism that's on trial, but our own hypocritical conscience. For if humanity emerges from the bosom of nature, but has managed in the long course of evolution to turn its mind back on its generative matrix, then nature — even as a working concept — can no longer enjoy ontological precedence in the dialectic.

If we were to scale back economic globalization, what would this be like? Is it even possible to un-know nuclear weapons or the internal combustion engine? More philosophically, if we were to de-alienate ourselves and head back into nature somehow, wouldn't this run counter to where we've arrived through the long process of Darwinian evolution? We've extracted ourselves (partially) from nature's embrace and now find ourselves desperate to reintegrate our consciences with the great planetary mother (and Father) we've betrayed. We drink up and plasticize her fossil fuels in an unquenchable lust for progress. All the while, we cling to the "clean energy" dream. Hence all the greening fads and the panicked dreams of finding a sustainable development balance. Does that mean we, ahead of all the animals, and little lower than the angels, as Pico della Mirandola once surmised, are now permanently stuck with our own bad infinity? Are our doom-laden climate change scenarios but a desperate attempt to see ourselves again in the mirror of nature?

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## End Notes

- 1. In the Philippines the same cyclone is named "Yolanda."
- 2. See John Vidal and Adam Vaughan, "Philippines urges action to resolve climate talks deadlock after Typhoon Haiyan," November 12, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2013/nov/11/typhoon-haiyan-philippines-climate-talks.
- 3. View DiCaprio's movie trailer at Tree Media Group's link: http://www.treemedia.com/treemedia.com/welcome.html#!the-11th-hour/c8c6, and his "demand [for] a separation between oil and state" in a five-minute "Global Warming" Youtube video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3pujlkSTqo.
- 4. In "Visions of Eternity: Plastic and the Ontology of Oil," Amanda Boetzkes and Andrew Pendakis write, "when we think about oil, we do so in one of two ways: either as a prized resource, 'black gold'; or as an industry with a specific location that operates within a predictable set of political variables that tend to revolve around issues of environmental negligence and corporate corruption." e-flux 47 (September 2013), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/visions-of-eternity-plastic-and-the-ontology-of-oil/.
- 5. See Pinker's The Better Angels of Our Nature (Viking, 2011) and Morris's War! What is it Good For? (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014).
- 6. Balmford attributes this formulation to Jeremy Jackson, a renowned U.S. marine scientist featured in DiCaprio's film. The oceanic absorption of excessive carbon emissions leads to deoxygenated waters and would be the potential cause for a dissolution of seashell architecture. See the introductory chapter of Balmford's *Wild Hope: On the Front Lines of Conservation Success* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), excerpted at http://www.press.uchicago.edu/books/excerpt/2012/balmford wild hope.html.
- 7. The term "Promethean environmentalism" is found in Dryzek's college textbook, *The Politics of the Earth*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 2013), chapter three, "Growth Unlimited: The Promethean Response."
- 8. I quote and paraphrase from Cronon's posting http://www.williamcronon.net/writing/Trouble\_with\_Wilderness\_Main.html, which forms the introduction to *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* (Norton, 1995), a compilation of essays by scholars in several fields. Cronon speaks of "tak[ing] to a logical extreme the paradox that was built into wilderness from the beginning: if nature dies because we enter it, then the only way to save nature is to kill ourselves. The absurdity of this proposition flows from the underlying dualism it expresses. . . . [I]f wild nature is the only thing worth saving, and if our mere presence destroys it, then the sole solution to our own unnaturalness, the only way to protect sacred wilderness from profane humanity, would seem to be suicide."
- 9. At the outer limits of Prometheanism one can envision a weird inversion taking hold: a forbidding era of trans- or post-humanism; that is, the suppression of anthropocentric systems via the ascendancy of artificial intelligence (Al). Already woven into our lives and bodies, often wireless and invisible, Al will begin to exceed human intelligence; escaping our programming checks, it will get to a point of upgrading its own capabilities and networks of control. Such is the dystopian near-future envisioned in James Barrat's *Our Final Invention* (St. Martin's, 2013).
- 10. See Earthwards: Robert Smithson and Art after Babel (University of California Press, 1995), 128,
- 11. E-mail to L. Buj, "Orford Project," Oct. 7, 2013.
- 12. See http://www.quebecmaritime.ca/en/sports-and-outdoor-recreation/skiing-snowboarding-tubing.
- 13. See Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 105.
- 14. Chevalier also conducted hikes with locals who were invited because of their specific involvement with the park; one man, for example, had donated land to increase its size. E-mail to Lorenzo Buj. "Orford Project," Oct. 7, 2013.
- 15. Geneviève Chevalier e-mail to Lorenzo Buj, "Project Orford: Follow-up," October 25, 2013.
- 16. This switch, which marks off the new critical modalities (the critique of spectacle and consumerism, the rise of environmentalism, post-colonialist resistance discourses, anti-globalization, etc.), was already announced by Gramsci in the twenties and thirties. Its next major articulation was in the work of Guy Debord and in the sociology of C. Wright Mills. The latter wrote in the September-October 1960 issue of *New Left Review*: "[W]hat I do not quite understand about some New-Left writers is why they cling so mightily to 'the working class' of the advanced capitalist societies as the historic agency, or even as the most important agency, in the face of the really historical evidence that now stands against this expectation. Such a labour metaphysic, I think, is a legacy from Victorian Marxism that is now quite unrealistic . . . . It is with this problem of agency in mind that I have been studying, for several years now, the cultural apparatus, the intellectuals as a possible, immediate, radical agency of change. For a long time, I was not much happier with this idea than were many of you; but it turns out now, in the spring of 1960, that it may be a very relevant idea indeed . . . we've got to study these new generations of intellectuals around the world as real live agencies of historic change. Forget Victorian Marxism, except whenever you need it; and read Lenin again (be careful)." "Letter to the New Left"
- 17. "Marx After Duchamp, or The Artist's Two Bodies," in Going Public (Sternberg Press, 2010), 123.
- 18. William J.T. Mitchell's "Networked Eyes" is a brief, but still-current assessment of the ersatz, global image economy; see Sensorium: Embodied Experience, Technology, and Contemporary Art, ed. Caroline A. Jones (MIT Press, 2006), 174-9.
- 19. See the late Alfred Gell's landmark essay, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, edited by J. Coote and A. Shelton (Oxford, 1992), 40–66.
- 20. See Gopnik's reflections on the anniversary of the Kennedy assassination and fifty years of conspiracy theorizing, "Closer Than That," *The New Yorker*, November 4, 2013, 102.