

## Chapter 4

# Thought-in-Action/Action-in-Thought

Gunnar Olsson

An entire volume devoted to the theme of knowledge and action! What a gift and what a wonderful opportunity to return once again to the Olsson Laboratory of Epistemology and Ontology, to the company of the twin sisters of rhetoric and dialectics, to the mutating banana flies that by now have been with me for more than half a century. And what a fascinating, non-ending, and interesting adventure those years have been, from beginning to end an attempt to understand how we understand, every day steeped in the hope of catching a glimpse of how we become whatever we become.<sup>1</sup>

But wait! What is it to be interesting, and where do I go to find it? As so often before, the answer lies in the word itself, for the English term *inter-esting* stems from the Latin *inter esse*, literally *in-between-being*. To be interesting is, consequently, to dwell in the razor-sharp limit between categories, to explore the trenches of the no-man's land of the excluded middle. Now, if I am courageous enough to enter that crater-strewn wasteland, and if I am curious enough to keep my eyes and ears open, then I will eventually encounter a troupe of traveling magicians who to great applause are performing their magic tricks of ontological transformations, an antiphony of voices, some divine some other human. As the angels keep chanting

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<sup>1</sup>In what follows I will draw freely on the history of my own works, occasionally even quoting without quotation marks. In addition to the texts listed toward the end of this chapter, there is much to learn from *GO: On the Geographies of Gunnar Olsson*, a remarkable anthology edited by Christian Abrahamsson and Martin Gren (2012). It contains not only a representative selection of facsimile reproductions of some of my own articles from 1967 to 2010 but also some brilliant illuminations set off by a long list of first-rate pyrotechnists: Christian Abrahamsson, Trevor Barnes, Alessandra Bonazzi, Michael Dear, Marcus Doel, Franco Farinelli, Reginald Golledge, Martin Gren, Jette Hansen-Møller, David Jansson, Gunnael Jensson, Ole Michael Jensen, Tom Mels, Chris Philo, Michael Watts. And I who always fancied myself as a Wittgensteinian solipsist! Stand corrected, identity crisis in the making, Paulus Gunnarius on the road to Damascus.

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their wor(1)ds of “Let there be—and there was,” the plebeians respond that “*Verum factum*—the true is the made,” indeed that to them something is true because they have made it themselves. And in that perspective both Jahweh and Giambattista Vico come out as what they really are—expert jugglers of worlds which from one viewpoint are and from another are not, true creativity in both cases nothing but a speech act through which the powerful can claim that something is something else and be believed when they do so. Knowledge is by definition an exercise in translation.

“What, then, is truth?” asked Nietzsche in his essay *On Truth and Lie*, immediately replying that truth is

a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power. (Penguin edition, 1976, pp. 46–47)

Whereas the self-declared LORD created the world by uttering it—light and darkness, mountains and rivers, you and me, everything flowing out of his mouth—the humpbacked Vico was a Neapolitan professor of rhetoric it is not only to American pragmatists that meaning lies in practice and the paradigm of informative truth in the finger-pointing index of  $a = b$ . The Kantian *as-if* at work. Yet we must never forget that although words may well change people, to things they do nothing.

What follows will be structured as a retracing of routes taken, essentially a collage of vistas glimpsed in the distance. Nothing new, merely a dose of coherence dashed into a cocktail which to the aficionados has been a source of intoxicating enlightenment, to the doubters a drug of impure ingredients and frightening side-effects. The recommended antidote is a product of the Nicomachean Pharmacy, delivery a mouse-click away:

It is the mark of an educated man to look for precision in each class of things just so far as the nature of the subject admits; it is evidently equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician and to demand from a rhetorician scientific proofs.

Now each man judges well the things he knows, and of these he is a good judge. And so the man who has been educated in a subject is a good judge of that subject, and the man who has received an all-round education is a good judge in general. Hence a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life, but its discussions start from these and are about these; and, further, since he tends to follow his passions, his study will be in vain and unprofitable, because the end is not knowledge but action. And it makes no difference whether he is young in years or youthful in character; the defect does not depend on time, but on his living, and pursuing each successive object, as passion directs.

[These] remarks about the student, the sort of treatment to be expected, and the purpose of the inquiry, may be taken as our preface. (Aristotle, trans. 1941, Book 1, Chapter 3, 1094b and 1095a)

Beware though, for the fact that the young man is young does not mean that he is a *tabula rasa*. On the contrary, because like everyone else he is a product of his own upbringing: a palimpsest of impressions, layers upon layers of indicatives and imperatives; a ceaselessly over-painted canvas onto which the world is casting whatever it is casting; a self-referential story composed in a mixed code of genetics and socialization, its nonachievable purpose to make us obedient and predictable, to turn you and me into exchangeable, yet unique, pieces in the ongoing game of one against many, us versus them. It is these traces of the taken-for-granted that function as an invisible map of the invisible, a library of the unconscious, a nontouchable guide that leads me through the unknown, rewards and punishments distributed along the way. And as the explorer now moves on, (s)he gradually realizes not only that the first-person singular is the linguistic shifter par excellence but that this same *I* is the cartographers' fix-point of fix-points. Little wonder, therefore, that the world refuses to sit still, for when pushed to the interesting limit of in-between-being I discover that I am one with my own map, its coordinate net constructed as the asymmetric body of Leonardo's Vitruvian man, head up and feet down, eyes in front and arse in the back, left hand to the left, the right to the right. Thus, therefore, spake Zarathustra: "You say 'I' and you are proud of this word. But greater than this—although you will not believe in it—is your body which does not say 'I' but performs 'I'" (Nietzsche 1976, p. 146; my rendering, Olsson, 1991, p. 122). Body politics undressed, for most will agree that it is more honest to preach as you live than to live as you preach.

A circling tale of no beginning and no end, the taken-for-granted present everywhere, visible nowhere. Thus it would indeed be strange if not I too were a product of my own time and place, in this case the Swedish welfare state of the postwar decades. And even though by heritage, choice, and inclination I was never drawn to the Social Democratic Party per se, it is impossible not to be impressed by its vision of equality and social justice, including the idea that the bright new world should be erected on a foundation of causal theories and well-calibrated models. Such were the 1950s and early 1960s: the high noon of social engineering, the dream of a happy marriage between scientific knowledge and political action come true, the maximizing principles of utilitarian ethics institutionalized, Alva and Gunnar Myrdal the high priests in a congregation of politically anchored experts who took it as their mission to turn Sweden into a People's Home, a state of rationality in which the physical infrastructure (not least the architecture of the living quarters, especially the kitchens and the communal washing-rooms) was designed to ensure that the users would have no choice but to behave accordingly, at bottom a positivist belief that the road to mental hygiene and proper thinking goes via the body, an ideology well captured by Axel Hägerström's (1911) rejection of metaphysics and his advocacy of value nihilism—his well-known motto *praetera censeo metaphysicam esse delendam*, a paraphrase of Cato's "Carthage must be destroyed." But not everyone was born with genes deemed good enough for the future, an argument which was readily extended to the widespread practice of forced sterilization. *Zeitgeist* is the term, in the same breath an excuse and an accusation, for "when I obey a rule, I do not choose. I obey the rule *blindly*" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 219).

To the budding geographer the time-bound message could not be misunderstood: Capture the power of social relations in a net of scientific laws and then, like your friends in physics, chemistry, and medicine, you too will have acquired the means not merely for understanding the world but for changing it as well. If the natural scientists know how to construct rockets that take them to the moon, if they know how to generate energy by enriching uranium, if they know how to save lives by transplanting hearts, then your duty as a social scientist is to discover similar techniques for eradicating poverty! Before you accept that challenge, though, be sure to ask yourself first why no one now reads Plato and Aristotle for what they had to say about physics or medicine, then why so many continue to return to the plays of Sophocles and Shakespeare for their insights into the human condition of hopes and fears, love and hate. How does the circumstance that we have accumulated knowledge in some areas and not in others relate to Aristotle's remark that we should look for precision in each class of things just as far as the nature of the subject admits and that it would be equally foolish to accept probable reasoning from a mathematician as to demand scientific proofs from a rhetorician?

No small order given to a young man inexperienced in the actions that occur in life and therefore prone to pursue each object as passion directs. And yet, how could I possibly have ignored the challenge? GO ON, GO ON.

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The list of required readings included the classics of location theory, cognitive science, decision theory, systems analysis, matrix algebra, probability theory, spatial statistics, and a sprinkle of historical geography, all of it somehow yoked together in Walter Isard's conception of Regional Science and its extension into Peace Science, the latter firmly anchored in the Quaker-thin interface of scientific knowledge and political action, John Dewey's pragmatism and the collections of the Barnes Foundation never far away. A formative experience it was, the handsome fellowship that in 1963–1964 took me to North Armoriga and the intellectual hubs of the Wharton School, Berkeley, and Northwestern.

Great. Yet, in hindsight, the seeds might well have been planted 10 years earlier by the odd gymnasium teacher who did whatever he could to introduce his rowdy pupils to the concentric rings of von Thünen's isolated state and the cost curves of Alfred Weber's isodapanes. Perhaps I was the only one to pay attention, but the truth is that I can still feel in my body the boy's excitement when he literally *saw* why there were so many gauchos on the Pampas and so many steel mills along the Ruhr. The rhetorical power of geometric construction on the high wire, von Thünen's agricultural landscape depicted as an archer's target with the bull's eye as the central city on a homogeneous plain (more correctly the Junker's own estate), Weber's factory finding its place of least cost, the Archimedean point that is located at the center of a Euclidean triangle whose corners are the concepts of transportation, labor, and agglomeration. Deep roots it has, the subsequent definition of geography as a geometry with names, essentially an exercise in the drawing and baptizing of points, lines, and planes. Picture and story merged into one.

So there it is, the glue of socialization decomposed: Vico's *verum factum*—the true and the made are convertible—long before I knew the name; Wassily Kandinsky's abstract expressionism as a social scientific practice years ahead of my first visit to Dessau; Euclid's *Quod Erat Demonstrandum* overruled by his *Quod Erat Faciendum*—that which was to be demonstrated overruled by that which was to be shown—the beliefs of the former lodged in the socialized mind, the convictions of the latter in the individual body. These fix-points revealed, I can now better understand why once upon a time every Swedish school room was equipped with a blackboard, a ruler, a compass, and a square, these four implements serving as the teacher's pedagogical tools par excellence, to every generation after Plato the very key to understanding how we understand. In that context of knowledge creation, it should also be added that Immanuel Kant—the philosopher of limits—often referred to his own work as a form of architecture. In my mind the three Critiques may profitably be read as a report from the masterbuilder's experiments with different construction materials, one cement for the palace of pure reason, another for the house of practice, a third for the court of judgment.

And this interplay of reasoning modes is exactly why August Lösch's *Die räumliche Ordnung der Wirtschaft* (1943/1954) is such a groundbreaking book and why he himself was such an exceptionally interesting person, the conflict between Jahweh and Vico embodied. As the 33-year-old put it in the fateful autumn of 1939:

The natural equilibrium of economics differs from the equilibrium of nature exactly as the moral differs from the mechanical. Nature works according to laws, but man acts according to his *idea* of laws. In other words, nature *must*, man *may*, act correctly. In order to do so he must have some conception of how he shall act. As to economic equilibrium this means that *in order to guide his activities he needs insight into the conditions of this equilibrium*. This is especially true for the lawmaker, since all others are bound by his precepts even though unable to perceive their rationality. (p. 93, emphasis in the original)

With that link between knowledge and action firmly established, Lösch then proceeded to the formulation of a general theory of location, a derivation based on the principle of profit maximization rather than cost minimization, the lattice of nested hexagons its most spectacular outcome. As he put it in the book's preface, the mathematical calculations are there "because it is reprehensible not to trust reason and rest content with vague words and hazy statements" (p. xv). Heaving a sigh of relief that the number of equations coincided with the number of unknowns, he nevertheless exclaimed: "If only we had a method that combined the generality of equations with the clarity of geometrical figures!" (p. 100)

The rhetorical point is well taken: If I want to be believed, it is not enough to tell a trustworthy story, I must also know how to paint the picture that goes with it. Rephrased, the credibility of a given argument is immensely increased if it is expressed not only in one but in both of the major modes of communication. Therefore,

theory may be compared with reality for various ends, according to the sort of theory held. If it is to *explain* what actually is, the examination attempts to discover whether it started with a correct idea of its subject and arrived at an explanation that not only seemed possible but also corresponded with reality. On the other hand, if theory is to *construct* what is

rational, its assumptions may still be tested by facts, but not its results. Its author can discover from an examination of the facts whether he has built on adequately broad experience, whether he has taken all objective or subjective essentials into consideration. His procedure resembles the preliminary work of an architect, who cannot lightly neglect the characteristics of a site, the laws of nature, and the wishes of the owner. But a comparison with existing structures will not show whether his blueprints are accurate; in our case, that is, whether the theoretical structure has been properly erected. For the existing structure may be as faulty as the projected one. No! *Comparison now has to be drawn no longer to test the theory, but to test reality!* (Lösch, 1943/1954, pp. 363–364, emphasis added)

German idealism lodged in a thinker who has been described as

a combination of rare strength of character, intellect, and warmth of personality, [a man] who died shortly after the end of the hostilities on May 30, 1945, at least partially as the result of that very strength of character which forbade him to make any compromises with the National Socialist regime. (Hoover in Lösch, 1943/1954, p. vii)

His hands tied, it was the mind that carried him back to the place where his unconscious had been formed. In Lösch's own words:

It was not easy for me largely to forego the attractive task of applying what has thus been tested to our more complicated German conditions and analyzing the pertinent facts. But apart from all foreign studies [mainly based on U.S. data] and the wide applicability of the resulting ideas, my youthful experiences in a little Swabian town constitute the real background of this book. [To] have my original experiences there confirm my final theories gives me a real sense of security, and so I dedicate this book to the land of my birth, the land that I love. (Lösch, 1943/1954, pp. xv–xvi)

It is difficult not to cry, especially if one compares the fate of Lösch's life and work (1906–1945) with that of Walter Christaller (1898–1969), the first edition of Lösch's *Die räumliche Ordnung der Wirtschaft* appearing in 1940, the second edition in 1943, Christaller's *Die zentralen Orte in Süddeutschland* in 1933. In the present context of thought-in-action, it is simply impossible to ignore the fact that whereas Lösch paid a high price for his refusal to swear a personal oath of allegiance to the Führer, Christaller's political views (hence by extension his built-in attitudes to intentional action) were fluttering in the wind, like the LORD himself consistently inconsistent. The record is there for anyone to inspect. First, the trenches of World War I turned Christaller into a card-carrying Social Democrat. Second, in the summer of 1934, when that party had been banned, he fled on his bicycle to the liberty of France, from where he was promptly lured back to a job offered him by Konrad Meyer, an SS professor of agronomy, who already at that stage was working directly under Heinrich Himmler. Third, in the summer of 1940 Christaller joined the National Socialist Party (membership number 8 375 670). Fourth, immediately after the war that same(?) person enrolled as a member of the West German Communist Party and in 1953 was accused of collaborating with his comrades in the DDR. Fifth, after 14 years as a Communist he resurrected himself as a Social Democrat, just in time for his plenary lecture at the historic meeting of the International Geographical Union Symposium in Urban Geography in Lund, Sweden, in August 1960. To only partial avail, however, for even though the conversion might have paved the way to an honorary doctorate at Lund, it failed to get him

the visa that would have taken him to the United States and the lecture tour of his life. Broken was the icon when the young man met him about 5 years before he passed away, the sadness of his eyes forever etched into my memory.

Water in water, a palimpsest hard to decipher, a mille-feuille bound to cause indigestion. But who am I to judge? What does a Swede born in 1935 know of blaring sirens, exploding bombs, ruins, terror, death camps, starving children without shoes? As so often before, I am once again drawn into Wittgenstein's struggle with solipsism:

I am my world. There is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas. If I wrote a book called *The World as I found it*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc.,.... The subject does not belong to the world: rather it is a limit of the world.... There is no *a priori* order of things. (Wittgenstein, 1921/1961, 5.63–5.632, 5.634)

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Drawing the limits of the world is exactly what the joint history of human geography and regional planning is about. And in that essentially political enterprise references to central place theory have often been used to legitimate some drastic intrusions into the daily lives of entire populations. All for their own good, of course.

For understanding these connections between text and context, it is important to know that Christaller's and Lösch's shared goal was to detail how a given area is colonized or settled, especially how a set of hierarchically nested and hexagonally distributed centers are (or, more accurately, *should be*) tied together into a functional whole. In that sense they were more immediately concerned with the geometry of the stage than with the actors' movements across it, more focused on scenography than on dialogue. The outcome was in both cases a script of power. And for that reason the critic should never forget that

what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect raises his structure in the imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labor-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the laborer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his modus operandi, and to which he must subordinate his will. (Marx, 1867/1967, vol. I, p. 178)

An outstanding example comes from the Dutch polders, lands reclaimed from the sea and therefore at constant risk of being flooded. That likelihood must, of course, be carefully controlled and the condition of the dikes and pumps minutely monitored, a duty which since the eleventh century has been entrusted to an especially elected local authority appropriately called the *Hoogheemraadschap*. By law a modus operandi to which everyone must subordinate their will, the oldest democratic institution in the country.

These newly reclaimed lands are obviously both flat and nonpopulated, hence as close to the theoreticians' conception of a homogeneous plain as any social engineer could ever dream of. And exactly as the Marx quotation suggests, the planners actually *did* raise the structure of the new villages, towns, and cities in their imagination

before they erected them in reality, a wonderful illustration of how the abstractness of Platonic forms is turned into the concreteness of visible objects. Seemingly a textbook application of practical reason, the intentionality of the plan preserved in the materiality of physical structures. Only seemingly, though, for in the case of the early Zuiderzee polders the impact of technological change was seriously underestimated. To make a long and complicated story short and simple, the constructed places proved to be too many, too small, and too closely packed, the location of the brick-built stores, schools, police stations, and hospitals obsolete before the mortar had dried. In addition, and because roads and houses are costly both to build and to tear down, the spatial nonoptimality tends to stick. *The Achilles-heal* of every optimizing location theory.

Lösch's remarks about the comparison between rational theory and faulty reality come readily to mind, Hegel's epistemology of self-conscious reevaluation as well. The reason is that the planning of the later polders, especially the Oostelijk and the Zuidelijk Flevolands, has become increasingly sophisticated. But that development rather heightens than lessens my surprise that Christaller's static, deterministic, and inelegant theory was used at all. The only excuse I can think of is that we are all children of our own time and place, the Dutchmen of 1930 as much as I at eighty. And what a happy circumstance that is. For what saved the subjects of the great polder project was not the machinations of social engineering but the circumstance that Holland is an open society, its citizens free to design their honeycombs as their fancy fancies.

In that respect the Third Reich was obviously different. But what richer pasture could the likes of Konrad Meyer and Walter Christaller have wished for than the newly conquered *Lebensraum* (living space) of Eastern Europe, a vast area showed down to them as a gift from the Führer's heaven. Like the Dutch polders, also the territory that the *Reichskommissariat für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums* (Reich Commission for German Resettlement and Population Policy) was commissioned to settle had the characteristics of a homogeneous plain, the techniques of ethnic cleansing as merciless in Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, and Ukraine as anywhere else. The clearing of sufficient living space in the East was de facto *the* cornerstone of Nazi foreign policy, the very precondition for the Germanization that was meant to follow, the *Entfernung* (removal) of foreign elements setting the stage as effectively as the digging of the dikes in Holland. As an amateur artist, Hitler surely knew that without a properly prepared canvas there will never be any painting. And as the Leader of a populist movement he was well aware that no political battle is more decisive than that about the boundary between identity and difference, one and many, us and them, me and you. Such was consequently also the purpose of the charts, tables, and maps that came out of Meyer's office: the utopia of a totalitarian *Herrschaft* (rule) projected into optimally located settlements, everything and everyone in its proper place. Seventy-five years later the whole affair strikes me as a Dadaesque blend of Kandinsky's Bauhaus, Malevich's suprematism, Picasso's cubism, Ernst's surrealism. The irony of the *entartete Kunst* (degenerate art) in its proper perspective.



The outline of this new world was drawn in *Generalplan Ost* (General Plan for the East), a strictly confidential document prepared in the period 1939–1942, deliberately destroyed in May 1945 lest it be used as incriminating evidence, by later historians eventually pieced together again. It consisted of two parts, the Small Plan which covered actions to be taken during the *Blitzkrieg*, and the *Big Plan* which outlined what was to follow in the 30-year period thereafter. The text of the latter is simply too much for sensible analysis (a total of 31 million undesirables to be moved to West Siberia, the remaining to be treated as slaves), but the figures of the former are even more staggering. (Between October 12 and December 31, 1939, about 1,700,000 Jews and Poles were actually deported to places with names now well known, another five million classified as unsuitable for assimilation.) The machinelike horrors of the *Entfernung* set the stage not merely for what was *meant* to come but for what actually *did* come.

It is now well established that Walter Christaller was directly involved in the German settling of Warthegau, the Polish territory occupied by the German forces in September 1939—a story forcefully told by Barnes (2015) and much elaborated in the works of Bauman (1989), Kamenetzky (1961), Madajczyk (1994), Rössler (1989), and many others. A moment of truth for any theoretician eager to see his abstract imaginations metamorphosed into concrete reality. Yet nothing compared to what was to come with Christaller's appointment to the staff of Konrad Meyer, the mentor who under Himmler's personal supervision was charged with the task of finalizing the plans for the still unconquered *Lebensraum*. Included in the directives was the megalomaniac idea of a fortified string of SS garrisons and “pearl settlements” that would run all the way from Arkhangelsk on the Northern Dvina River to Astrakan in the Volga delta, the *Übermenschen* (superior humans) in the west securely separated from the *Untermenschen* (subhumans) in the east. The surviving records occasionally refer to Christaller's theory, but there is no explicit mention of any detailed plans; who knows, perhaps they were not Aryan enough. Crucial indeed, for every judgment of guilt and punishment should be based on the here-and-now of particular circumstances, not on the there-and-then of general principals. On the surface a matter of alternative descriptions, deeper down an entangled skein of modal logics.

It is the struggle with the latter that now brings me to the intricacies of the word *can*, like all modal verbs of vital importance to any critique of power, by extension, to any worthwhile understanding of the relations between knowledge and action (Ofstad, 1961, pp. 328–337; see also Olsson, 1980, pp. 118b–115b). The reason is that the “all-in can” (forty-seven of them) is essentially a combination of two “sub-cans,” one denoting ability, the other opportunity. For instance, there is no doubt that Walter Christaller already in 1933 knew how to deduce an optimal settlement pattern from a set of (un)realistic assumptions, but it was only after Hitler's *Drang nach Osten* (drive toward the east) that he got a chance to apply his knowledge and in that manner show the world who he really was. Hand in glove, a temptation hard to resist, a mixture of pleasures and nightmares, a situation he shared with many others, Martin Heidegger most prominent among them. The pivotal question is, of course, whether, given the circumstances, he could have acted otherwise. If not, he

should not be held responsible, regardless of his political (in)stability. Purgatory has many chambers, and in some congregations you get to Paradise because of your beliefs, in others because of your deeds. “In this connection,” wrote Albert Speer (1969/1970) in a passage of direct relevance for the assessment of spatial planning,

I must mention [Hitler’s] plan for founding German cities in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union. On November 24, 1941, in the very midst of the winter catastrophe, Gauleiter Meyer [Alfred, not Konrad], deputy of Alfred Rosenberg, the Reich Minister for the occupied eastern territories, asked me to take over the section on ‘new cities’ and plan and build the settlements for the German garrisons and civil administrations. I finally refused this offer at the end of 1942 on the grounds that a central authority for the city planning would inevitably lead to a uniform pattern. I insisted instead that the great German cities each stand as sponsor for the construction of the new ones. (p. 182)

For Oberführer Konrad Meyer-Hertling the situation was less clear. Like Speer, he too was convicted at Nuremberg, but unlike the genius of organizational dynamics, his crimes were deemed so small that immediately after the trial he was set free for time served, a whitewash paper written by Walter Christaller being part of the evidence. In the judges’ opinion Meyer’s contribution to *Generalplan Ost* was “a strictly independent scientific study” (Rössler, 1989, p. 427)—in Marx’s dialectics something imagined that never made it into reality; in my own terminology, an ontological transformation aborted.

No serious wrong-doing proven and in 1956 the University of Hanover appointed Meyer Professor Ordinarius (full professor) of Land Planning, a post he occupied until his retirement. The pragmatism of expert knowledge and political action undressed, H. C. Andersen’s emperor as he must have appeared to the lackeys, who continued to carry the fabulous train that did not exist. The boys in the gutter saw it differently. For even though they had never attended Meyer’s and Christaller’s alma maters, they still knew that ethics is the only ordered discourse that has thought-and-action as its defining subject matter. In addition, they were soon to learn the Foucauldian lesson that it is in the prison and madhouse that we discover what is normal, indeed what it means to be human. As Arendt (1977) put it, there are strong streaks of banality in evil; the institutions of modernity a precondition for the Holocaust. It is telling that Heidegger’s postwar critique of technology paid much attention to the verb *can* and its tendency to turn into a *may*, the *may* into an *ought*, the *ought* into a *shall*, the *shall* into a *must*.

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Mind-boggling are the German vignettes, the offered interpretations part and parcel of the same epistemology of extremity that for 50 years has served me so well. Come to think of it, it may well be that same attitude that has made me less responsive to the political calls for changing the world and more focused on the hidden in my own taken-for-granted, the latter the only critique that to my solipsist mind is honest enough. That remark is obviously not an excuse for the shallowness of what I have just written about Hitler, Himmler, Meyer, and Christaller, merely a way of saying that it is by detecting the beam in my neighbor’s eye that I become

aware of the mote in my own. And what a painful experience that is, learning to roll with the punches, a technique which Marlene Dietrich practiced to perfection:

It's not cause I wouldn't  
 It's not cause I shouldn't  
 And you know it's not cause I couldn't  
 It's simply because I'm the laziest gal in town.

In that mood I shall now proceed to the spatial set-up of the Swedish welfare state. As Shakespeare (1602/[n.d.](#)) put it in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, “the world’s mine oyster, Which I with sword will open” (Act II, Scene II, 2–3).

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The story goes a long way back, not least to Gustav Eriksson Vasa, the guerilla leader who in 1523 threw the Danes out, united the Swedes into one country, and let himself be elected king to crown it off. Once that goal had been achieved, he faced the problem of paying back the money he had borrowed to finance his campaign, a problem he solved by confiscating the riches of the Church, converting to the Lutheran faith, and translating the Bible in the process. An expert in Machiavellian rhetoric and the logistics of tax collection, he penetrated so deeply into the minds of his subjects that a Swede of the twentieth century readily recognizes the similarities. *Allt förändras, allt förblir ändå det samma*, or, as the French have it, *Plus ça change, plus ça reste la même chose*, alternatively, the more things change, the more they stay the same. In the farewell speech Gustav gave to Parliament on June 16, 1560:

I know that in the minds of many I have been a harsh king. But the times shall come when the children of Sweden will want to tear me up from the ground, were that within their might. I also know that the Swedes are quick to agree and late to question. I predict that many pretenders and false prophets will be forthcoming. Therefore I beg and advise you: Stick firmly to God’s words. Listen carefully to your superiors and stand united together. My days will soon be gone. For telling me that I need neither stars nor any other sorcery. I feel in my body the signs that I will soon be taken away. Follow me then with your sincere prayers and, when I have closed my eyes, let my body rest in peace. (Retrieved November 10, 2015, from <http://sv.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasakoret>, my translation)

Quick to agree and late to question, well organized by their superiors.

Following in his grandfather’s footsteps was Gustavus Adolphus, in 1632 killed in the mist-enveloped battle at Lützen, his military forays clearly proving that Sweden from then on was a power to reckon with. The road to success was forged by his genial chancellor, Axel Oxenstierna, the man who invented the administrative set-up that made it all possible, its basic outline still with us.

It is this historical stickiness that now prompts me back to the 1950s and some fundamental problems which Christaller’s theory was then called upon to settle. To put it very simply, the old parishes and communes—often with boundaries unchanged since Oxenstierna’s time—was a harness too small for the expanding welfare state. Something had to be done, and on January 1, 1952, the number of rural communes was cut from 2281 to 816. Not enough, however, and 10 years later a new and wider reform was set in motion, the number of communes (including the towns and cities) presently down to 290.

These administrative reforms have had a revolutionary impact on the daily life of every Swede, the redrawing of the political boundaries directly related to the where, when, and how you happen to be born; to the when, where, and how you will eventually die; to every whatever that may or may not lie in-between. The underlying ideology is, of course, that just as all citizens should have equal rights regardless of whether they are rich or poor, so the same should hold regardless of where they happen to live. No small deal but a tacit admission that the whereness of spatial form bears directly on the whatness of social relations. Whether form follows function or function follows form is in that perspective a moot point, the geographer's inference problem when it matters.

The blueprint of this brave new world was drawn by a politically appointed committee supported by a set of experts, the result submitted to the Minister of the Interior as number 1961:9 of *Statens Offentliga Utredningar*—The State's Official Investigations. The pivotal parts of this document were written by Sven Godlund and Torsten Hägerstrand, two up-to-date geographers who explicitly anchored their reasoning in Christaller's theory. Their basic argument was that whereas the drastic changes in transportation technology had led to novel forms of shopping behavior and thereby to the spontaneous establishment of larger market areas, the administrative units were legally sanctioned leftovers from a previous era—the commercial system was efficient, open, and modern; the legal was outdated, closed, and obsolete. The committee therefore recommended that the boundaries of the latter should be redrawn to coincide with the hinterlands of the former. And in that twist from the economist's *is* to the politician's *ought*, the play was changed in the middle of the act, the utopian dreams of justice disappearing in the wings, fatally stabbed by the reality it was supposed to replace. Exit man with his precious visions, hopes, and fears. Enter the Thiessen polygons with their crude distance minimizations and cost-benefit ratios. Ideology and methodology in profound and irresolvable conflict.

The root of the problem lies in the social gravity model, a formulation which in the heydays of the 1960s lay at the frontier of quantitative geography, the page-turner of my own conception of thought-in-action and action-in-thought. Although originally conceived as an analogue to Newton's law of gravitation—the interaction between two objects directly proportional to the size of their masses and inversely proportional to the square of the distance between them—its social science application a special case of Vilfredo Pareto's optimality principle, the latter a sociological generalization with deep roots in the mathematics of the negative exponential (see, e.g., Arrow, 1951; Sen, 1993). The irony is that even though Pareto, Hägerstrand, and Godlund knew perfectly well that they were describing the world as it was, Italian fascists and Swedish democrats read their texts as recipes for how a better world could be constructed. As Marx put it, the philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world, the point is to change it. This (mis)reading was in no way inevitable, for Pareto argued very explicitly that observed behavior belongs to the same category of "logical action" as economic profit maximization, Machiavellian politics, and scientific work. But to sanctify observed behavior as logical action is nothing but a rhetorical technique for legitimating the status quo. The history of the

social gravity model provides an excellent example, for although in the beginning it was treated as a formulation of great explanatory power, later generations have come to see it as an expression of autocorrelation. As Tobler's (1970) first law of geography has it, "everything is related to everything else, but near things are more related than distant things" (p. 236). A planning tool tailor-made for unintended side effects.

In that perspective Pareto's conception of logic appears just as narrow as the dogma of any other religion. Rather than perpetuating the belief that the reasoning rules represent objective and unassailable a priori principles, we must therefore constantly remind ourselves that they are neither ethically nor aesthetically neutral. If we are prepared for that volte-face, then we too, like Vico, Nietzsche, and Heidegger before us, will discover how it is grammar that tells us what kind of object anything is, not the other way around. As a consequence, we will then understand that the role of all languages, deductive logic included, is not to furnish labels for the objects we are talking *about* but to shape the categories we are thinking and talking *in*. And thus it is by no coincidence that the tautological  $\mathbf{a} = \mathbf{a}$  is the linchpin of conventional logic just as the evasive **I am who I am** is the self-proclaimed name of God the Father. And so it is that every concept is a tool of human making, intelligible only in the context of our personal and social lives.

If we dare not admit that our analytical languages have these characteristics, then we run the risk of imposing on reality a strictness that it neither has nor ought to have. And if in our many-faceted roles as experts, citizens, and social engineers we choose to ignore this hallmark of critical theory, then we will inevitably produce a society that both mirrors the techniques by which we measure it and echoes the languages in which we talk about it. By extension a dystopia of human puppets with no dreams to dream and nothing to be sorry for. And thus it is that Pareto's *ought* cohabits with the *is* of the elite, exactly as it was propagated in the ethical theory of Hägerström (1911; see also Marc-Wogau, 1968) and the legal principles of Lundstedt (1932–1936) and Olivecrona (1942), legitimating shapers of Swedish ideology. The outcome is that the law of large numbers rules supreme, the emerging relations between individual and collective a classic case of double bind. And in that sense the negative exponential serves the purposes of populists and elitists alike. The utilitarians should be more cautious, for it is the very kernel of their ethics that every act should be judged in terms of its consequences, not in terms of the intentions behind it.

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The statistics are equivocal, especially when it comes to education and health care, by all accounts key ingredients of any welfare system. Thus, there is general agreement that the Swedish school system is in deep crisis, the results no longer at the top of the evaluations generated by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) but regularly below average and steadily sliding; among the 40 countries listed in the 2013 evaluation, Sweden is ranked as number 36 in reading and 38 in mathematics. Little wonder that in a press release (May 4, 2015) the OECD concluded that

Sweden has failed to improve its school system despite a series of reforms in recent years. A more ambitious, national reform strategy is now urgently needed to improve quality and equity in education....No other country taking part in PISA has a steeper decline. (Retrieved November 10, 2015, from par. 1–2, <http://www.oecd.org/Sweden/Sweden-should-urgently-reform-its-school-system-to-improve-quality-and-equity.htm>)

Much to mourn but most alarming are the figures that Swedish eighth-graders' command of mathematics is now at the same level as that of seventh graders' a decade earlier and that one quarter of the boys fail to comprehend what they are reading. The social and economic inequalities are following suit, a new class of unemployables growing up, a development most pronounced in the ethnically segregated areas of Malmö and Stockholm. Counterfinality is the term for the mismatch between intentionality and consequence, the infected sore of utilitarian ethics and the source of an intense debate with immediate ties to the administrative reforms of the 1960s. The turning point came in 1991 when the political *cum* administrative responsibility for the schools was shifted from the state to the local municipalities, a reorganization that in one stroke—and very deliberately—lowered the status of the teachers. The result is that more than half of them are officially unqualified for their jobs! An ocean liner to turn around, the *Titanic* heading for the iceberg.

In the meantime the health-care system is struggling with an attitudinal problem of its own. To be precise, the 2011 Commonwealth Fund International Health Policy Survey of eleven comparable countries placed Sweden at the bottom of the list in terms of health-care availability. Similar figures hold for the sense of dignity, respect, and empathy that the patients thought they had the right to expect but did not receive, one third of the doctors demonstrating that they knew little or nothing about their clients' medical history. Since with growing age we tend to forget first what we learned last, many immigrants from the 1950s, now in nursing homes, have lost their Swedish and are therefore, unbeknownst to themselves, reverting back to their mother tongues, idioms typically unknown to their helpers. Sadder than sad, the art of dying a question of *chairos* rather than *chronos*, an issue of the right moment rather than the orderlies' work schedule. But just as eugenics is not euthanasia, so euthanasia is not suicide.

In the meantime all surveys agree that although everyone considers the level of expert medicine to be outstanding, the proportion of patients who doubt that they are receiving the best treatment available is higher in Sweden than in any of the comparable countries, the sense of shared trust no longer what it used to be. To put it bluntly, Swedish health care sees a diagnosis, not a human being. Political dynamite, not least because the degree of (dis)satisfaction varies between socioeconomic groups—the higher the education, the higher the trust, the professors of geography and anesthesia the best of friends. Human, all too human. Gustav Vasa echoes back: Listen carefully to your masters, be quick to agree and late to question. But there is an echo of *The Phenomenology of Mind* as well, for

just as lordship shows its essential nature to be the reverse of what it wants to be, so too, bondage will, when completed, pass into the opposite of what it immediately is: being a consciousness repressed within itself, it will enter itself, and change around into real and true independence. (Hegel, 1807/1967, p. 237)

Hegel's remarks notwithstanding, the empirical truth remains: The values of the strong today are metamorphosed into the facts for the weak of tomorrow. The point is not that the Swedish welfare state *is* a tragedy but that it is *structured* like a tragedy: everything beautifully right in the beginning, everything horribly wrong at the end, no one to blame in between. To understand human action is therefore not to blame but to see that actors are so entrenched in their roles that they take the shadow play for reality and reality for the play. It is indeed an integral part of all internal relations (logic and money being paradigmatic examples) that we obey their commands without hearing them and without knowing where they come from. And for that reason I am eternally grateful that I was born in Per Albin Hansson's Sweden and not in Adolf Hitler's Germany or Joseph Stalin's Soviet Union. But this fortunate circumstance must not keep me from realizing that everything comes with a price, the politics of the welfare state included. For instance: How do I insult a power which is so powerful that it is faceless? How do I learn about difference when difference is defined away? How do I topple a regime that has no statues erected in its honor? How do I find my way in a jungle of paragraphs? How do I live in a culture so proud of its penis that it is unaware of its Phallus? Why is it so hard to detect the relations between the *Nom-du-Père* and the *Non-du-Père*?

Servitude and (in)equality exposed, King Oedipus blood-soaked before us.

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On my reading, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* (ca. 440 BC) is a paradigmatic example of Bertrand Russell's theory of proper names and definite descriptions, his formula for how a given statement can at the same time be both true and informative. And in this sense the tragedian and the atheist are alike that both were driven to truth by their ignorance of truth, their engagements a relentless pursuit of knowledge no matter where it would lead them. From beginning to end a struggle with tautology, the latter by definition always true but never informative.

In the play's prologue, Oedipus, the king with the swollen foot, he who once had saved the city from the sphinx, is asked to become what he had once been before. In the petitioner's words:

You are not one of the immortal gods, we know;  
 Yet we have come to you to make our prayer  
 As to the man surest in mortal ways.  
 [Once], years ago, with happy augury,  
 You brought us fortune; be the same again!  
 (Sophocles, trans. 1949, pp. 4–5)

On this occasion the charge is to save the city from the plague. But whereas solving the riddle of the Sphinx had led him to the dignity of man, solving the problem of the plague will take him to himself. In his search he is pushed to truth by his blindness to truth, and, when he finally sees it, he blinds himself, thereby to see more clearly. At the end he saved the city but destroyed himself, neither result on purpose, even though everything started with a purpose. All is fate, except that each step along the way could have been avoided. Freedom and necessity are mixed, the

forces of certainty and ambiguity embracing each other. In the beginning everything is right, in the end it shall all be wrong. Be the same again!

Once the stage has been set, the crucial question: “Who were my parents?” The chorus replies:

Bewildered as a blown bird, my soul hovers and can not find  
Foothold in this debate, or any reason or rest of mind. (Sophocles, trans. 1949, p. 25)

After a row of excruciating interrogations, the bewildering ambiguities finally spring into unquestionable certainty. When that happens Jocasta can no longer contain herself, no longer equate the name “Oedipus” with any of the alternative descriptions, “my king,” “my husband,” “father of my children.” First praying “May you never learn who you are!” she cries out:

Ah, Miserable!  
That is the only word I have for you now.  
That is the only word I can ever have. (Sophocles, trans. 1949, p. 56)

In the new context any other word would be false. And she exits into her apartment, her hair clutched by the fingers of both hands, closing the doors behind her. A long scene later, when also Oedipus has convinced himself that logic had run its course and that all his premonitions had been right, he breaks the door open and rushes in. As a messenger reports,

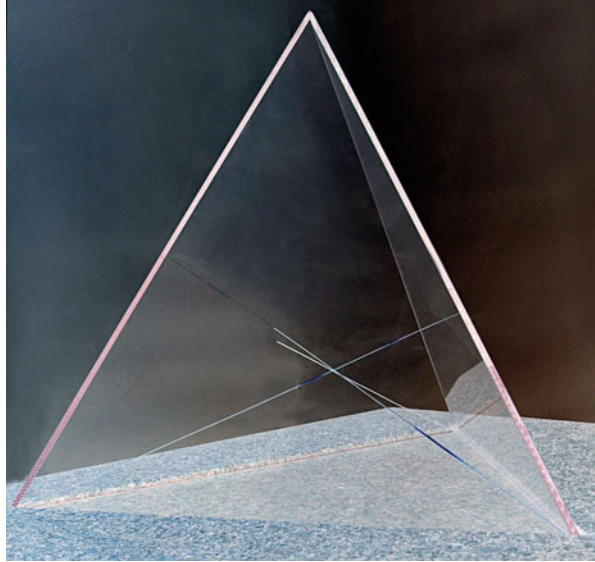
And there we saw her hanging, her body swaying  
From the cruel cord she had noosed about her neck.  
A great sob broke from him, heartbreaking to hear,  
As he loosed the rope and lowered her to the ground.  
I would blot out from my mind what happened next!  
For the King ripped from her gown the golden brooches  
That were her ornament, and raised them, and plunged them down  
Straight into his own eyeballs, crying, “No more,  
No more shall you look on the misery about me,  
The horrors of my own doing! Too long you have known  
The faces of those whom I should never have seen,  
Too long been blind to those for whom I have been searching!  
From this hour go in darkness!” And as he spoke,  
He struck at his eyes—not once, but many times;  
And the blood spattered his beard,  
Bursting from his ruined sockets like red hail. (p. 67)

Millennia later we keep returning. And as times go by, as they eventually did for Oedipus too, we come gradually to understand that in every already there is always a not yet, in every not yet always an already. Finding out who he was may or may not have rid the city of the plague; Sophocles never bothered to say. What he did tell us, though, is that at the crossroads, the place where Laïos was killed, nobody knew, in the palace, where the truth was revealed, nobody rejoiced. Honesty is in pursuit and pursuit in tragedy, life itself a game of dice played by men and watched by gods.

As the tragic hero eventually understood and accepted, whatever fate there is we bring onto ourselves. To do otherwise would be to be dishonest to oneself, to break the rules of one’s own game, to be utterly lost. In the long run that is impossible. For everyone is one with his own map.



**Fig. 4.1** Gunnael Jensson, *Mappa Mundi Universalis*. Glass tetrahedron on granite base, 25 × 25 × 19¼ in. Mixed media (Kalmar granite, Weissglass, gold, ruby). Museum Gustavianum, Uppsala. First exhibited in the Uppsala Cathedral, September, 2000 (Photo by the author)



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And for that cartographic reason I must now briefly turn to the sculpture *Mappa Mundi Universalis* (Olsson, 2007, pp. 411–437; Jensson, 2015; see also Jensen, 2012), in the same expression a mapping of power-and-knowledge and a self-referential presentation of the fix-points, sight lines, and projection planes of understanding, in every respect the joint effort of myself and my friend and former student Ole Michael Jensen. So close was in fact our cooperation that in the end we reported our findings not under our individual names but under the amalgamated imprint of Gunnael Jensson. Seemingly not a map at all, just a tetrahedron of transparent glass grown out of a square slab of granite (Fig. 4.1). Not much, yet enough to last us for a lifetime.

To understand why, imagine how a long time ago a drama was set in motion. The stage-floor is a flat rock that gently slopes into the sea, the actors some strange creatures that emerge out of nowhere, aimlessly spreading across the homogeneous plain. A foot gets stuck in a crevice and for the first time ever there is a difference different enough to make a difference. The others notice, they point and they mutter, every gesture an attempt to force the bothering difference into graspable identity. An event of tremendous consequences, for what we are now about to witness is the very first sacrifice, *the* act through which the indefinable creatures are changed into human beings, a species whose individuals are held together and kept apart by their use of signs, every sign an ironic expression of Signifier and signified merged into one.

When the foot is pulled out of the rock, a well of blood springs up, a constant reminder of what happened when the original deviance was turned into a nonwilling scapegoat, the baring of the navel of what it means to be human. In the materialized

version of Jenson's sculpture, the place of this remarkable event is shown by a red ruby, a godly symbol which in the accompanying text is called **a**. Not because it is **a** but because the semiotic animal must call it something.

In the definitional struggle that now follows the mute difference is transformed into a set of communicable identities, like every translation an act of violence. More precisely, the foot in the crevice splits into a trinity of reformulations, a set of provisional reincarnations that in due course, and after much swirling around, find their positions in the corners of an equilateral triangle. Subsequently, each of the cornered aliases adopts a name that reflects the pain with which it was born: the shadowy **a**; the tautological **a = a**, the informative **a = b**. Atoms of understanding captured in a mushroom cloud of perpetual fission.

When the tension reaches its limit, the rock bursts and out of the lava grows a glass tetrahedron, a crystal palace sometimes known as the crucible of man, sometimes as the prison house of language. The floor and the three walls of this enchanting structure are all built as equal-sized equilateral triangles, the walls transparent, the foundation sunk into the granite ground, the ruby-covered well at its center. In a twist of cultural survival, the three reformulations (**a**, **a = a**, **a = b**) now rise from the base, stretch upwards, and meet again at the tetrahedron's top, the multitudes of Greek polytheism converging in the singularity of Abrahamic monotheism. Like every mapping, also this one is a triangulation, the **a** and its three restatements coming together in the vanishing point of the pinnacle, the locus of a tautological entity that by definition is what it is—**a = a = b**—a contradictory condensation of difference and identity, God's name (if a name it is). And from its inception this Absolute speaks. *Let there be!* And there is. A universe flowing out of the creator's mouth, in James Joyce's conception a commodious vicus of (p) recirculation.

In the coolness of the evening, the utterer listens back to what he has heard his tongue say, claiming first that it is very good, then that he alone has the right to judge. Tolerating neither idols nor false prophets, he declares that all usurpers will be killed and that every critique will be censored. Hereafter, there shall be neither pictures nor stories, hence no maps either. Impressed by his own achievements, he proclaims a day of rest, a Sabbath without work, 24 h devoted to the glorification of himself and his faithful.

Such is the subjection of subjects. Such is the structure of power. Such are the techniques by which we are made so obedient and so predictable.

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The crystal palace is a well-guarded castle, its ruling resident the tyrant of tyrants. Admittedly a rhetorical exaggeration, for no Absolute is absolutely absolute, no crook crooked enough to live on forever.

But the palace is also a marvelous movie theater, one projector in each of the basement corners, golden rays carrying the alternative translations from the machine rooms to the screens of the opposite walls: the glass of Marcel Duchamp's *La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même* (1914) (The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even); the limestone wall of Plato's cave; the wood panel of Fra Angelico's *Annunciation*; all found again in the *mappa* of cartographic reason. And when the projections of the imagined identities hit the sheets of glass, they miraculously change into a set of Peircean signs, no longer the private fantasies of their inventor but communicable bits in an evolving discourse. To be technical, the *a* becomes the symbol of *a*, the *a = a* the icon of *a = a*, the *a = b* the index of *a = b*. But just as the painter's canvas must be properly prepared for the paint not to crack or run off, so must our minds be indoctrinated to ensure that all that is solid does not melt into air. Three grand institutions have risen to the task: religion (with its belief in the *a* of shared conventions), art (with its *a = a* striving for perfect resemblance), science (with its *a = b*, the *as-if* knowledge of provisional truth). Each mode of understanding entrenched within its own self-supporting power structures, rituals, rules, and regulations.

If these rituals could be perfectly performed, then the projection lines would strike the screening planes at 90° angles, every message going straight back to the cornered restatement it came from, nothing learned in the process. But even though the Saussurean/Lacanian sign is steeped in mimetic desire, the diverse ontologies of Signifier and signified guarantee that this perpetual urge can never be satisfied. Hence the fortunate consequence that no translation can ever be perfect. It follows that in actuality the inclination of the (en)lightening rays is never *right on* and that the projections, instead of returning to the original identities unchanged, they begin to bounce between the walls. In turn, this slight deflection means that whatever I happen to think, say, and do is never pure and simple but always a nondissolvable blend of religion, art, and science. And suddenly I see where the trigger of tragedy lies: in the purifying spirit of the right angle, in the hatred of the other which is built into the desire of every identity formulation. Hitler's *Lebensraum*, Stalin's *Gulag*, the Rwanda genocide, the iconoclastic controversy, *Jyllands-Posten*'s Mohammed pictures—all of them variations on the same theme. Murderous is our history, murky the connection between knowledge and action.

In turn, this analysis explains why for 40 years tragedy has occupied such an important place in my own conception of what it means to be human, indeed why I take it to be the most insightful of all available conceptions of thought-in-action and action-in-thought. The original setting is crucial, for Sophocles—a Janus-like figure who with one eye was scanning the old, with another was imagining the future—lived his long life in the abyss between the *mythos* of Homer and the *logos* of Plato. What he then discovered was that the greatest tension of his time lay in the attitudes to predicament, for while the archaic poets had taken a person's social standing to reflect his or her ability to handle contradiction, the new philosophers defined

paradox as the greatest threat to the cohesion of human reason, an enemy to be fought by all means. As Wittgenstein (1921/1961) later put it, “without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries” (4.112). But in Sophocles’ eyes religion itself was nothing but a human invention designed to keep people in place, like other laws issued by the humans of the polis, not by the gods of Olympus.

In my mind this pre-Christian circumstance explains both why the tragedians assigned such a crucial role to the chorus and why the recurring convulsions of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are essentially a political crisis, an orgy in promises that cannot be kept and therefore should never be given, the election results bought with junk bonds issued in the voters’ own names. Whereas the problem for the tragedians was the exact drawing of the boundary between the humans and the gods, the problem for the postdemocrats is that although all animals are equal, some pigs are more equal than the others. In my readings it is exactly these relations between religion, arts, and science that permeate also the cascading reflections of writers like Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou, Peter Sloterdijk, and Slavoj Žižek. Getting crowded is the crystal palace, the prophets moving in.

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In the history of the *longue durée*, the examples of Swedish welfare, central place theory, geography, and planning deserve little but a footnote. Yet they too spring from the tension of trust and verification that lies at the heart of European culture, perhaps of all cultures, the tales about Oedipus’ foot and Odysseus’ scar pulling in one direction, the paragraphs of Moses’ first stone tablet in the other. In the cleft in-between hides everything inter-esting, including the scientist’s testable theory and operationalized model, in the same breath a reified deification and a deified reification, the potentially informative  $a = b$  turning into the tautological **I am who I am**. In that context the lawmakers’ grasp of human action as a magic game of ontological transformations is truly remarkable: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them” (Exodus 20:4–5, Deuteronomy 5:8–9, King James Version).

Well decreed. For in the empirical now-here of the utopian No-where, nothing is more inhibiting than our inability to be abstract enough. As Abraham responded on his way to the *akedah* (Genesis 22:1, King James Version): “Here I am.” And the two went on together, world literature’s most pregnant silence.

The spiral is closing in, every thought emitting a throw of dice. Hazardous is the hazard. In the Vico-inspired language of Norman O. Brown’s (1974) *Closing Time*:

The true (*verum*) and the made (*factum*) are convertible  
 Verification is fabrication  
 Homo faber  
 Man the forger; at his forge  
 Forging the uncreated conscience of his race. (p. 18)

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