

## **There Will Come Soft Rains**

(War Time)

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,  
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;

And frogs in the pools singing at night,  
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,

Robins will wear their feathery fire  
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;

And not one will know of the war, not one  
Will care at last when it is done.

Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree  
If mankind perished utterly;

And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,  
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

*—Sara Teasdale, 1918*

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## Schopenhauer Today

After a multi-decade commune with Marx and Hegel, Max Horkheimer returned to the study of one of his early philosophical interests, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). By the 1950s, Horkheimer was distraught over the immense amount of suffering that had occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. Hegelian optimism made no sense given the historical record. The idea of progress was broken and abandoned. The sociologist Pitirim Sorokin summed up the mood well in *The Crisis of Our Age* (1941) when he stated, “In few periods of human history have so many millions of persons been so unhappy, so insecure, so hungry and destitute, as at the present time, all the way from China to Western Europe.” A strong sense of pessimism filled the air. Five decades of war, depression, genocide, massive class inequality, failed revolutions, emergent authoritarian states (on both sides of the political spectrum), and potential global destruction from atomic war left Horkheimer concerned for the future, but more significantly, wanting to understand suffering—a topic of some significance in the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

We might all do well to follow his example, as the suffering is still as great, and the many crises in the economy, politics, and the military continue unabated in the twenty-first century, with environmental and ecological crises including climate change, mass extinction, the poisoning of the planet, and

environmental injustice added to the list. Pessimism still hangs in the air, but CAE has some additional reasons to check in with Schopenhauer. We want to return to Schopenhauer to examine the centrality of the nonrational in his philosophy, as well as his conceptions of nature in all their glorious contradiction. We also believe his thought might shed light on the role of art within the frame of environmentalism. Through the work of the original curmudgeon, and the first to argue the opposite case whenever people or civilization became too self-congratulatory, we may be able to confront some less-than-pleasant thoughts that emerge when we think about environmental struggle and justice.

### **Kicking Against the Pricks I: People, Politics, and Antihumanism**

CAE admires Schopenhauer's contrarian tendency (in fact, it is a trait we hope to emulate in this very book). Wherever he saw philosophical consensus, he was sure some major delusion was behind it. Consequently, Schopenhauer introduced a number of heretical ideas that opposed centuries of consensus in Western philosophy. One of these notions was that humans are primarily nonrational in temperament and behavior. The common notion at the time was the Socratic one, in which reason drives the human chariot, keeping the horse of will and the horse of desire in check and on the path to wisdom. Schopenhauer believed this to be nonsense. Indeed, humans have a capacity for reason, but they do not use it to pursue lofty goals (if such things occur, it is incidental to the actual motivation). Humans are driven by innate needs and desires. Drives are nonrational and unaware of either outer or inner experience. They are simply blind forces that push the individual ever onward. Reason serves to fulfill these needs and desires, although it must navigate social convention and law, which act as constraining exterior forces. In spite of these constraints, people, places, and things are resources to be used to the best extent possible to suit individual needs. They are, in a word, utility.

Schopenhauer was also heretical in that he viewed humans as overdetermined and far from being masters of our own fate. Not only are we at the mercy of drives we do not understand, and that we often do not even admit exist, but our behavioral tendencies are determined by our character. Schopenhauer believed that each person has a set of essential traits that set strict parameters on their thinking and behavior. These traits do not change over time, and continuously act as a limiting force in terms of behavioral options.

The idea of humans as nonrational and overdetermined does have a legacy. In the early twentieth century, this point of view was the foundation of psychoanalysis, whereas today it is theorized in behavioral economics. Behavioral economics is a discipline combining concepts and data from economics, social psychology, sociology, evolutionary biology, and neuroscience. It has two fundamental insights: that humans are not very rational when making economic decisions, and that humans are not entirely in control during decision-making processes. The discipline is particularly sensitive to what it means to make this kind of suggestion. Practitioners know that their work challenges the institutionalized, dominant microeconomic view of humans as rational actors exercising free choice (although the literature on behavioral economics and macroeconomics is growing every day). While they are careful not to say that humans are irrational, they argue that we are using or being driven by other factors than reason and data (and not always with terrible results). Interior determining factors in decision-making include instincts, emotions, aversions, and personality traits (along the lines of what Schopenhauer meant by “character”). Accessibility also plays a key role, which may mean accessibility of data, but may also mean emotion or hearsay that can crowd out any rational resource. Humans tend to be lazy decision-makers in so far as the force that is most convenient to them will most heavily influence a decision. Exterior factors include social consensus (which quite likely is not tethered to the real), opinions of friends and family, social convention and habit, and personal history. This latter category is very broad and would include everything from all types of trauma to prior commitments (people tend to stay with what they know). Behavioral economists are delivering a gold mine of resources to help marketers better exploit the deficiency of reason that humans suffer, and for us to better understand how we actually act in the world.

Returning to Schopenhauer, this conception of humans led to a fundamental form of antihumanism. His was the genuine article. CAE is not talking about some postmoderns labeling themselves as antihumanist because they object to the Enlightenment model of the universal subject that marginalizes or completely fails to recognize the vast majority of humans in the world. Schopenhauer’s was a deep indictment of the uselessness of humans and the meaninglessness of humanity. Humans are nonrational, amoral, conflicted, miserable, delusional egoists who are moving ever closer to extinction. The German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach once said about Christians that for them, “the highest degree of illusion comes

to be the highest degree of sacredness.” This quote was echoed by Guy Debord, referring to deceived, misguided individuals pacified by spectacle. If this quote had a meaning to Schopenhauer, it would be about human illusions in regard to our own nature and state of being. We think of ourselves as reasoned beings asserting free will in a field of ubiquitous choice in an atmosphere of social liberty, when for Schopenhauer, nothing could be further from the truth.

Schopenhauer’s antihumanism brought him directly to conflict theory when it came to political thought. His interest was in English social philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679). Hobbes postulated a presocial state marked by conflict, in that all are sovereign, so all may do whatever they please when pursuing their interests. For Hobbes, it was a situation of tremendous disorder, if not total anarchy. Hobbes referred to this state as *the war of all against all*. Schopenhauer liked this concept very much, but disagreed vehemently with Hobbes on one matter. Schopenhauer believed that Hobbes was not describing the presocial state, but the current and permanent state of human interaction. The social fabric was little more than numerous egoists violently bumping up against one another, constantly frustrated, and in various degrees of psychological and/or physical pain.

CAE can only guess what Schopenhauer thought of the idea of democracy, but based on his few writings regarding social thought, we speculate that he thought it so silly that commenting on it would be beneath him. Since democracy requires its participants to be rational enough to understand what is best for them, through reasoned discourse to persuade others it is in their interest too, and furthermore, to show how it could be implemented in policy, it seems very likely that Schopenhauer would only find this laughable. Creating a governmental system with a backbone of rationality, reason, and informed participation was something far beyond human potential. Governments existed only to facilitate egoism in all its worst forms. Not that Schopenhauer was against a state attempting to maintain order amidst the sociopaths who populate it. He was a man of means and lived in constant anxiety that he might lose it all in a revolutionary (anarchic) moment.

Given the wretched state of humans, humanity, and society, what should a person do? Schopenhauer’s answer is resignation. Retreat to where one must in order to find some semblance of tranquility through the examination of inner experience, and wait out the punishment imposed upon the living for no reason or purpose. Disengage from the battle that is

ordinary life, for the harder we fight the forces that drive us, the more intensely those same forces assert themselves.

For CAE, this is the endpoint of antihumanism—retreat and disengagement. Why would we want to save an environment any more than we would want to preserve the instruments of our own torture? In Chapter One, we saw the active endpoint of green antihumanism: intensify the chaos, and stimulate and accelerate the forces that push humans in directionless and meaningless capacity until humans meet their own destruction. Schopenhauer presents the passive alternative. Just wait it out. Humans are busy plotting and enacting the destruction of the human race and the planet at this very moment. Why join the frenzy? And in the end, what will it matter? Humans are just another product of the individuation of the Will. Their destruction is of no consequence, either for good or bad.

CAE does not see either of these alternatives as viable ways to live. Even if in the deepest, darkest recesses of our minds we might believe Schopenhauer to be correct, we would rather place our bets on the hope that he is not. Even if we use Schopenhauer's own method for understanding the order of things, and use our inner experiences to gain a better understanding of what is hidden in outer experience, we do not find the level of torture that Schopenhauer says we suffer (although we are certain that there are many in this world who do), nor do we find outer experience to be of a hellish fury that would rival Dante's *Inferno* (although we know of places on the planet that are). We are of the suspicion that Schopenhauer is indulging in some exaggeration. Moreover, while CAE does recognize biological, psychological, social, and economic constraints on individual liberty, choice appears to be ubiquitous.

### **Kicking Against the Pricks II: The Two Natures**

Schopenhauer's second great contrarian moment lies in his thoughts about nature, but to understand this we will need to briefly review his metaphysics. Schopenhauer is intensely interested in the dual aspect of existence. The center of understanding this situation is the body. We can view our bodies objectively as representation or as outer experience, but are also able to view them subjectively as inner experience. We can access the drives, feelings, perceptions, thoughts, and physical processes inside our own bodies. The body is unique in that it is the only object that can be known in this dualistic manner. All other objects can only be apprehended as representation. For Schopenhauer, we are fortunate in that we only need this one

example to understand reality and appearance. Schopenhauer was always very concerned that Kant had given too much to skepticism in concluding that the thing-in-itself is unknowable. Schopenhauer thought that our inner experience gives us access to the real. The real is a singular thing—the force that courses through us and by necessity all else that appears. We come to understand this force through our instinctual drives. This force that manifests as the plurality of objects represented in the world he calls Will. (He does this because it makes the concept easier to understand; since we can comprehend it through inner experience, it is less vague than saying there is a singular energy, force, power, or other term commonly used to describe the thing-in-itself.) In *The World as Will and Representation* (1818, 1844), he describes it this way:

Just as a magic lantern shows many different pictures, but it is only one and the same flame that makes them all visible, so in all the many different phenomena which together fill the world or supplant one another as successive events, it is only the *one will* that appears, and everything is its visibility, its objectivity; it remains unmoved in the midst of this change.

Within this system is the contrarian element. Schopenhauer believes that the Will is not divine, but nonrational, blind, aimless, and void of intent or compassion. How it manifests as representation is accidental and meaningless. Not that he has a disregard for science (although he emphatically describes what he believes to be its limitations)—he understands the planet as having order in terms of physical laws or chemical reactions, but it is not an intentional order. There is no God, Great Architect, or Divine Designer. Teleology is a myth; complexity or expanse does not impress him. Nothing has purpose. Natural process is meaningless. It is blind, groping, and its products may flourish or die off. It really does not matter. Whether we are in the social world or the natural world, everything is oscillating between order and chaos, emergence and decay, life and death. In its blindness, the Will has no concern for contradiction, disharmony, or brutality, so once the Will is individuated and objectified it turns upon itself, fighting itself, consuming itself, destroying what it creates. Nature, like society, is no moral teacher. It has no relationship to good and evil. All it does is continue, to no end in particular. How and in what form is irrelevant to the Will.

This is a very modern view of nature. Indeed, Schopenhauer may be the first modern to propose this now all-too-familiar view. He is a proto-evolutionist, and is laying the foundation for the scientific view of nature. While he could not have been familiar with key scientific principles such

as selection, mutation, or adaptation (because these came after his time), he did understand nature as a completely secular process that has no meaning beyond its immediacy. This declaration from the early nineteenth century posed a profound choice that haunts us even now: we must side with the mystics and accept divine intervention and intention, or we have to answer some very difficult questions regarding meaning, ethics, and actions. In terms of environmentalism, we have to answer Schopenhauer's suggestion of resignation in the face of a scientific view of the natural world. Why should we care? If life is meaningless, why should it be valued?

Today, we know that the fate of every species is to be eliminated. If it is fortunate, a species may last four or five million years. During that period, it is likely that either the environment will change beyond the species' ability to adapt, or a better-adapted competitor will emerge, or the species will evolve into a different one. Scientific estimates are that 99 percent of the species ever to exist on earth are now extinct, and that much of that extinction was due to bad luck rather than competition from a better-adapted species. Who knew a massive meteor would hit the earth? There have been numerous times on the earth when there were relatively few species. It may be comforting to think that evolution is working from the simple to the complex and from singularity to great diversity, as that is how we like to think about the division of labor and culture, but in reality, evolution represents an oscillation pending conditions on earth rather than unilinear or teleological development. Science gives us no reason to prefer biodiversity over a small aggregate of species, or to prefer a mammal over bacteria or vice versa (although from an anthropocentric position, these choices are easy to make). Moreover, earth itself has an expiration date when everything will die. Even if luck is with the planet and there are no cosmic accidents that may cause this end-time calamity prior to the sun becoming a red giant, we know an end is coming. Even more chilling is the reasonable probability that the cause will not be cosmic ill luck, but rather human error that leads to a fatal global accident.

The associated preference for "sustainability" is also delusional when placed within a system that is clearly finite. Nothing is sustainable in an ever-changing world. This term can have economic pragmatic meaning, or it can disguise the desire to keep humans at the top of food chain, but it is meaningless in terms of evolutionary process. It also reveals very arbitrary or expedient choices among temporal units. When we are thinking environmentally, are we thinking with urgency, or about a decade, a lifetime, a century, a millennium, evolutionary time, or geologic time? The answers



to what is sustainable and how to practice it vary with this choice. Within this system, can we even make the claim of an “ecological crisis”? Is that not anthropomorphizing in a way science would find unacceptable?

In the end, arguments concerning environmental crisis can only come from the arts and humanities. Science can tell us with modest assurance the probability of future occurrences within the environment, why they are likely to happen, and perhaps what can be done to change them, but only the arts and humanities can call them a crisis, or label the occurrences as positive or negative. Once scientists do that, they are out of the realm of science. Protecting the environment is only arguable from a humanistic, if not anthropocentric, position. Otherwise we are obligated to be mere observers (perhaps with compassion, but without intervention), watching a lion kill the cubs of its rival.

CAE has promised two natures and a compelling contradiction, and we intend to deliver just that. As noted above, we tend to think of Schopenhauer’s version of nature as one of tremendous cruelty, where the many manifestations of the Will collide in brutal scenes of lust and violence without a trace of mercy or pity—a position that would inspire the naturalist and decadent literary movements in France later in the century. However, Schopenhauer had a soft side—times when his pessimism abated, and his flair for seeing suffering in all manner of life was subdued. One place was in art, and the other was in nature. In one moment nature is a scene of merciless brutality, and then, in an almost Jekyll-and-Hyde manner, nature becomes a wonderful place. Consider the following:

Yet how aesthetic nature is! Every little spot entirely uncultivated and wild, in other words, left free to nature herself, however small it may be, if only man’s paws leave it alone, is at once decorated by her in the most tasteful manner, is draped with plants, flowers, and shrubs, whose easy unforced manner, natural grace, and delightful grouping testify that they have not grown up under the rod of correction of the great egoist, but that nature has here been freely active. Every neglected little place at once becomes beautiful.

Passages such as this one are not few and far between; they are sprinkled throughout both volumes of *The World as Will and Representation* and function as modest relief from the grim elements that populate most of Schopenhauer’s works. Apparently, natural beauty has powers to soothe the savage pessimist, leading to the odd appearance of what reads like romanticism. Most assuredly, these lines could have been written by John

Muir himself. Schopenhauer shares with Muir the belief that humans have a different relationship to nature than do other beings who inhabit it. We can get something from nature that other species cannot—the highest form of human experience—totalizing aesthetic experience that functions as pure knowing. Nature serves us in a threefold way. First, and most importantly, nature in her profundity, great and small, has the potential to disintegrate ego. We can lose ourselves in nature and achieve a temporary disintegration of instinct and desire through our vision of nature's grandeur or beauty. Second, this process is pleasurable even when it is also terrifying. Finally, once returning from this higher state, we come back with a greater understanding of the real. We cannot know if Schopenhauer would have been a preservationist, but in passages such as the one quoted above, he certainly sounds more like a romantic than a pessimist, and indicates that nature should be left to itself. CAE's perception of Schopenhauer's more romantic side comes from our reading of his argument that nature can be most beneficial for humans by providing the great luxury of aesthetic experience (something woefully and painfully missing from everyday life in Schopenhauer's view). As a way to close, here is Schopenhauer's description:

If we lose ourselves in contemplation of the infinite greatness of the universe in space and time, meditate on the past millennia and on those to come; or if the heavens at night actually bring innumerable worlds before our eyes, and so impress on our consciousness the immensity of the universe, we feel ourselves reduced to nothing; we feel ourselves as individuals, as living bodies, as transient phenomena of will, like drops in the ocean, dwindling and dissolving into nothing.

### **Kicking Against the Pricks III: Art and Aesthetics**

Arthur Schopenhauer was a philosophical superstar of the modern art world. He may have had little influence in any discipline in the course of his lifetime (although there was a small popular discovery of his work in philosophy at the end of his life), but he more than made up for it after his death, as he was incredibly popular in the 1870s and '80s and, while less so after that, was still influential until the 1920s. CAE would say that the peak of his appreciation was akin to the popularity of Jean Baudrillard in the 1980s, or Gilles Deleuze in the 1990s. To be a part of the cultural discourse of those decades, one had to be at least conversant in these theoretical brands. In the late nineteenth century, whether one was a composer, a visual artist, or a writer, Schopenhauer needed to be a part of one's world. Schopenhauer was a gold mine of ideas, so people took what interested them, and often for

opposing purposes. The literary naturalists were fascinated by his concept of Will, through which Schopenhauer read nature in a more pessimistic way. At one point Émile Zola became so enamored with Schopenhauer that he wrote a novel, *The Joy of Living* (1883–84), illustrating the philosophy. The decadents were interested in the quest for aesthetic experience, and how this quest could become a lifestyle in all its final tragedy—the finest example being J. K. Huysmans's *Against the Grain* (1884)—another true homage to Schopenhauer. As decadence evolved into symbolism, aesthetics became the total interest, along with a few of the more occult elements. And there were those, such as Richard and Cosima Wagner, who simply accepted Schopenhauer as the modern gospel. Cosima Wagner often featured readings of Schopenhauer in her salon, which was nothing less than a showcase of the great scholars and artists of the time.

Perhaps Schopenhauer simply fit the mood of the time, as one and all seemed interested in the tragedy of life. Or perhaps it was because, in him, artists had something they had never had before: a champion. The old contrarian had done it again. He was willing to argue that if humans wished to experience and understand the real both as Will and as (Platonic) Idea, the means to achieve this objective was art (although as we have noted, nature could be a means as well), and that the noblest of dispositions was the artistic one. Philosophy, and metaphysics in particular, was next in the hierarchy, as it could explain *why* this is the case. Bringing up the rear were the sciences, which offer only practical information. This was quite an unexpected argument coming immediately after the Enlightenment. Consider the following:

Whilst science, following the restless and unstable stream of the four-fold forms of reasons or grounds and consequents, is with every end it attains again and again directed farther, and can never find an ultimate goal or complete satisfaction, any more than by running we can reach the point where the clouds touch the horizon; art on the contrary, is everywhere at its goal.

Much like nature, Schopenhauer begins with the idea that art is judged by its effect on the subject. We know we are witnessing art when we can access the essence of things. It transforms us from individuated consciousness to universal consciousness, which in turn makes possible the apprehension of the Ideas. Schopenhauer states it as follows:

But now, what kind of knowledge is it that considers what continues to exist outside and independently of all relations, but which alone is really essential to the world, the true content of its phenomena, that which

is subject to no change, and is therefore known with equal truth for all time, in a word, the *Ideas* that are the immediate and adequate objectivity of the thing-in-itself, of the will? It is *art*, the work of genius. It repeats the eternal Ideas apprehended through pure contemplation, the essential and abiding element in all the phenomena of the world.

Schopenhauer goes all in with Platonism with his ideas on eternal forms (which is ironic, since he vehemently disagrees with Plato's thoughts on art, calling them among the worst philosophical mistakes in history). His notion of the Ideas maps perfectly onto Plato's thoughts about them. If we take the example of the earth revolving around the sun, Schopenhauer would claim that this is temporary, because eventually the relationship between the planet and star will end. However, the *form* of two spheres in an elliptic relation will last forever. The idea is outside of time and space. When an artist paints a flower, he (Schopenhauer recognized only male artists) will be able to see and capture the essence of the flower, its Idea. That is because his genius is able to capture "not what nature has actually formed, but what she endeavored to form." The artist-genius has a peculiar way of seeing beyond the contingent, and this is the talent that makes him a genius.

From both art and nature we are able to apprehend both beauty and the sublime. The effect of a beautiful object of contemplation upon the viewer is to free the intellect from its service to the Will, allowing the self to wither away and leaving the viewer as a pure subject of knowing. Equally important to Schopenhauer is the affect that emerges in this state—one of intense "exaltation." Happiness, pleasure, knowledge, tranquility—for Schopenhauer these are all things positive, all things that negate the Will in both objective and subjective forms. Schopenhauer describes the effect as follows:

By calling an object *beautiful*, we thereby assert that it is an object of our aesthetic contemplation, and this implies two different things. On the one hand, the sight of the thing makes us *objective*, that is to say, that in contemplating it we are no longer conscious of ourselves as individuals, but as pure, will-less subjects of knowing. On the other hand, we recognize in the object not the individual thing, but an Idea . . .

Objects that assert themselves as art, but are not, are easily discovered because they do the opposite—they excite and agitate the Will. They draw us into the subjective (the feeling of the sensual), thus reinforcing our ordinary disgraceful state of egoism, and immerse us in the individ-

uation of the world. A well-executed painting of a nude will be exalting, while a poor one will be exciting. Equally as guilty of base sensuality are objects of charm and of negative charm (the disgusting—not to be confused with ugliness, which has a place in art), which should be avoided at all costs.

The sublime contains the beautiful and it, too, consists of phenomena that quiet the Will, in spite of the fact that the sublime is complicated by threat (physical and/or psychological). One might think that threat would inspire fear that would agitate the Will, but Schopenhauer believes that in the face of the sublime in all its various intensities, the opposite occurs. In a state of aesthetic contemplation, tranquility prevails (so long as actual immediate harm does not occur). Again, Schopenhauer:

The storm howls, the sea roars, the lightening flashes from black clouds, and thunder-claps drown the noise of storm and sea. Then in the unmoved beholder of this scene the twofold nature of his consciousness reaches the highest distinctness. Simultaneously, he feels himself as individual, as the feeble phenomenon of will, which the slightest touch of these forces can annihilate, helpless against powerful nature, dependent, abandoned to chance, a vanishing nothing in the face of stupendous forces; and he also feels himself as the eternal, serene subject of knowing . . . he himself is free from, and foreign to, all willing and all needs, in the quiet comprehension of the Ideas.

The majority of Schopenhauer's examples of the objects of sublime experience are from nature, and understandably so, given the need for such massive scale. He tries to argue, often unconvincingly, that architecture from antiquity such as the pyramids could have this effect, but examples from nature are his preference. The type of art that is best suited to the sublime is tragedy, which partially explains the late nineteenth-century European writers' fascination with tragic tales.

Although aesthetic experience sounds like redemption, Schopenhauer is not willing to go that far. These experiences are short-lived. Dandies may try to make permanent aesthetic experience a lifestyle, but they will fail, and the failure will be tragic. The Will snatches a beholder back into the individuated world as fast as a demon will return an escaped resident of hell back to the boiling pitch. For Schopenhauer, resignation and asceticism is the better long-term strategy, imperfect though it may be.

## Our Turn to Kick

At the end of this reassessment of Schopenhauer, CAE, like Horkheimer, thinks that he still has something to teach us, and that he will remain in the philosophical canon even if humanists cannot bear the darker side of these teachings (while also fearing in the back of their minds that he might be right).<sup>1</sup> The most significant lesson is to not underestimate the power of nonrationality. The Al Gore tactic of making a reasoned argument supported by data is simply not enough to convince most people of anything. Nor will scientific consensus, because huge numbers of people have no idea what that means. The great weakness of the humanities and sciences in terms of the environmental crisis is that we expect rational actors in rational systems. Argument has to be augmented with strategies and tactics that mimic the insights into nonrationality of behavioral economics, marketing, and advertising, in order to relay “small-*t*” truth through means other than reason, and ultimately to bring the participant back to a position of reason. (This is what distinguishes interventionist practices from propaganda, which relays falsehoods through a battering of nonrational qualities). Searching for the “bliss point” is as significant as mining the data. In our more performative projects, CAE has consistently sought out methods that allow us to translate the scientific consensus into more consumable but less aggressively ideological packets for nonspecialized audiences.

Over the years, CAE has also had an interest in qualitative microsociology, and has put some effort into our admittedly amateur studies of people who do not believe in environmental crisis, or are indifferent to it. The population we are speaking of here excludes the cynics who deny climate change because they can profit directly from doing so. For various reasons, CAE gets to spend time outside our bubble with people who deny environmental crisis or do not care about the environment, and not because they do not have a deep appreciation for nature. Most do, and spend a great deal of their time in nature (a good deal more than most urban dwellers). These are folks who cannot be convinced of much by argument or study. They are convinced by their own experiences in the world, which are then reinforced by family, friends, and neighbors. When they go outside, they experience clean air and water, and an exuberant nature that is carrying on as it always has. They register no sign of crisis, so environmental issues are not a priority in their politics (a common response to slow, process-laden catastrophe).

In such situations, we need a very different communication strategy, and that is what the arts are good for. Schopenhauer is right in the sense that the arts can deliver what science cannot. CAE does not want to go too far here. We are not advocating art as the metaphysical creation of universal, eternal beauty (although in nature the appreciation of beauty can be a potential intercultural point between many environmentalists and those indifferent to environmental crisis, and therefore a place to begin dialogue). To the contrary, CAE has continuously fought against such principles as inherently authoritarian, and considers that element of Schopenhauer's thoughts on art and aesthetics as one to be avoided, however influential and institutionalized it may have been. As artists, we are on a twofold mission: one, to deal with difficult audiences—the nonbelievers, so to speak—and develop the tools and situations that make communication possible. Schopenhauer's value here is that he reminds us that at times we have to leave the charts and graphs at home, and find ways to communicate crisis, in particular, to audiences beyond those already convinced that climate change and mass extinction are taking place. What is the DDT for this century?<sup>2</sup> How do we find the intersecting symbolic that spreads the environmentalist perspective to an extent that it can be transformed into votes or policy in places where such activity is severely lacking? We will offer some suggestions in later chapters.

Finally, Schopenhauer is an early reminder of the ideological possibilities that accompany thoughts on nature in the face of evolution and evolutionary biology. Schopenhauer's secular and unflinching assessment of natural development is to be admired. As science tells us, the divine is nothing more than a wish, and if we follow the elements of evolutionary theory that Schopenhauer first proposed to the world, there is absolutely no reason to care about the environment, extinction, or biodiversity. And yet, through art and aesthetics, he gives us every reason to care, and to hold this contradiction as a necessary part of being (the ability of many environmentalists to hold this contradiction without cognitive dissonance is another of Schopenhauer's legacies). But we must go further, to either create a new artificial scale of value that need only offer a practical alternative to humanism, or support an already existing one. CAE is of course open to the former, but sees no evidence of its successful development, and tends to prefer the expanded contemporary version of humanism, because, like it or not, our biases and prejudices in regard to nature, which all too often go unacknowledged, will guide the policies that are made, and the choices of what is to live and what is to die.

## Notes

1. Schopenhauer is a strange phenomenon. He stays in the philosophical canon, even though few outside of the arts have any time for him. He is slim fodder for dissertations or citations, but he has not found his way into obscurity (unlike Herbert Spencer, at one time the West's most influential thinker).

2. A few DDT-like symbolic alarms that have intensely reverberated in the popular imagination have sounded since Carson. The first was "the population bomb," from a book of the same name by Erich and Anne Ehrlich, written in 1968 and published by the Sierra Club and Ballantine Books. This neo-Malthusian treatise was alarmist to the core, and is yet another example of the savage necropolitics that emerges when environmentalism and alarmist demographic study bump up against one another. (The same problem can be found in Fairfield Osborn's 1948 neo-Malthusian book *Our Plundered Planet*, which was an influence on the Ehrlichs.) The Ehrlichs took their title from a 1954 pamphlet by General William H. Draper. CAE's concern is not with the book itself, but with how the phrase caught the public imagination. Why a general would like the metaphor of a bomb is obvious. The Ehrlichs, being more scholarly, originally preferred the title *Population, Resources, and Environment*, but understood the value of marketing, so "bomb" was used instead (with the blessing of Draper). Needless to say, bombs and explosions truly resonated in the minds of Americans in 1968, whether it was the baby boomers or the World War generation. Daily reminders of the bombings in Vietnam flooded the media, and Americans did not want to see this destruction come home. As the war wore on into the 1970s and the resistance to it intensified, the bombs did come home as the radical left began to blaze a trail of revolutionary adventurism with bombs used as calling cards. The "population bomb" remains a part of the language, and the anxiety it evokes continues among some demographics to this day.

As the population bomb/explosion began to fade from the public imagination, a second alarm sounded in the 1980s, with concerns over the "hole in the ozone." That sounded bad. The atmosphere was failing in its protective function and allowing the sun's dangerous, cancer causing, high-frequency ultraviolet rays to strike all of earthly life. This concern went so far as to lead to universal international cooperation to phase out a known cause—chlorofluorocarbons—in aerosol sprays and refrigerants, which appeared to be a good idea because it did help with slowing ozone depletion, and then with its rebuilding. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on how



the problem is viewed), there was no “hole.” What scientists meant was that they were observing a substantial depletion of ozone over Antarctica, which was not as aesthetically satisfying as the thought of a roving hole over populated areas zapping people with skin cancer. For those with a sense of black humor, the irony is that ozone is a greenhouse gas, and could contribute to melting Antarctica faster than it already is, which will in turn threaten many coastal and island communities. The jury is still out on whether the current rebuilding of the ozone to 1950s levels is good for the environment or not.

The third and most recent symbolic alarm is the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, which is usually described as a floating landfill the size of Texas, and at times much bigger—the size of North America! The idea of a mass of plastic bags, drink bottles, detergent flasks, and best of all, babies’ and children’s toys whirling about the Pacific choking the life out of it, seemed to implicate everyone in the ruination of the oceans. The island had to be eliminated or at least reduced. However, much like the ozone hole, there is no island, nor landfill. The Great Pacific Garbage Patch is actually billions of shredded, but mostly partialized, bits of plastic suspended in the seawater in multiple Pacific Ocean convergence zones, covering areas for which no one has an accurate scientific measurement. Not only can people not see the garbage patch from space, they might miss it if they sailed right through it. Without the image of the great patch, the pollutant lost its unbearable majesty. No international cleanup initiatives appeared despite all the mass media hullabaloo, but the (false) image did appear to reduce plastic usage among consumers intrigued by it. What these examples tell us is that threats to life on earth (particularly when they occur elsewhere or in the future) need to be aestheticized in order to carry moral or environmental outrage. We might also note that specific plans (the elimination of DDT or chlorofluorocarbons) function better than general plans (global population reduction or plastic-free oceans), much as environmental fixes for imminent event disasters occur more quickly than those for slow disasters like climate change.

