# Critical Theory of World Risk Society:
# A Cosmopolitan Vision

## Ulrich Beck

A critical theory of world risk society must address at least three questions: (1) What is the basis of the critique? What is "critical" about this critical theory? (The question of the *normative horizon* of the world risk society) (2) What are the key theses and core arguments of this theory? Is it an *empirical* theory of society with critical intent? (3) To what extent does this theory break with the automatisms of modernization and globalization which have taken on a life of their own and rediscover the openness of human action to the future at the beginning of the 21st century political perspectives, cosmopolitan *alternatives*?

## 1. The Normative Horizon of World Risk Society: Normative and Descriptive Cosmopolitanism

*The category of risk and its ambivalences*

It is easy to underestimate the subtlety of the sociological category of risk:

– First there is its boundless thirst for reality: the category of risk consumes and transforms everything. It obeys the law of all or nothing. If a group represents a risk, its other features disappear and it becomes defined by this "risk." It is marginalized and threatened with exclusion.
– Classical distinctions merge into greater or lesser degrees of risk: Risk functions like an acid bath in which venerable classical distinctions are dissolved. Within the horizon of risk, the "binary coding" – permitted or forbidden, legal or illegal, right or wrong, us and them – does not exist. Within the horizon of risk, people are not either good or evil but only more or less risky. Everyone poses more or less of a risk for everyone else. The qualitative distinction either/or is replaced by the quantitative difference between more or less. Nobody is not a risk – to repeat, everyone poses more or less of a risk for everyone else.
– *Existent and non-existent*: Risk is not the same as catastrophe, but the anticipation of the future catastrophe in the presence. As a result, risk leads a dubious, insidious, would-be, fictitious, allusive existence: it is existent *and* non-existent, present *and* absent, doubtful *and* real. In the end it can be assumed to be ubiquitous and thus grounds a politics of fear and a politics of prevention. Anticipation necessitates precaution and this obeys, for example, the calculation: spend a cent today, save a Euro tomorrow – assuming that the threat which does not (yet) exist really exists.
– *Individual and social responsibility*: Even in the smallest conceivable microcosm, risk defines a social relation, a relation between at least two people: the decision-maker who takes the risk and who thereby triggers consequences for others who cannot, or can only with difficulty, defend themselves. Accordingly, two concepts of responsibility can be distinguished: an *individual* responsibility that the decision maker accepts for the consequences of his or her decision, which must be distinguished from responsibility for others, *social* responsibility. Risks pose in principle the question (which combines

defence and devaluation) of what "side effects" a risk has for others and who these others are and to what extent they are involved in the decision or not.

– *Global space of responsibility*: In this sense global risks open up a complex moral and political space of responsibility in which the others are present and absent, near and far, and in which actions are neither good nor evil, only more or less risky. The meanings of proximity, reciprocity, dignity, justice and trust are transformed within this horizon of expectation of global risks.

– *Risk communities – a kind of "glue" for diversity*: Global risks contain *in nuce* an answer to the question of how new kinds of "risk communities," based neither on descent nor on spatial presence, can evolve and establish themselves in the cacophony of a globalized world.[1] One of the most striking and heretofore least recognized key features of global risks is how they generate a kind of "compulsory cosmopolitanism," a "glue" for diversity and plurality in a world whose boundaries are as porous as a Swiss cheese, at least as regards communication and economics.

However, it is one thing whether this unity in diversity created (at least momentarily) by the experience of threat is described or whether a politics of recognition of diversity is affirmed in the sense of normative principles – for example, against universalism, which denies the importance of diversity, or against nationalism, which produces equality in difference only in the national context, or against multiculturalism, which affirms mono-cultural diversity in the national context. The "cosmopolitan moment" of the world risk society can be understood in descriptive and normative senses. Therefore I distinguish between two concepts of cosmopolitanism, a broader one in which I underline the *normativity* involved in the cosmopolitan moment and a narrower one in which empirical *cosmopolitanization* is initially explored in a *analytical descriptive* manner.[2]

I hardly need to underline that I am always concerned with just one, not "the," critical theory, namely, that based on the theory of the world risk society. This already alludes to the limits of this critical theory.[3] Here the perspective shifts from a descriptive to a normative outlook.[4]

The way in which the other is presented and represented within the framework of global risk publics is essential for establishing morality in the world. The staged experience of current and possible catastrophes and wars has become a key experience in which both the interdependence of and threat to human existence, its precarious future, impinge on everyday life. Yet, normatively speaking, the presentation and representation of the other calls not only for sound and image, but also for meaning. It presupposes an understanding of the alien Other, *cosmopolitan understanding* – or, in the humanities and social sciences, *cosmopolitan hermeneutics*.[5]

Charles Husband[6] complements Jürgen Habermas in this respect. Opening up the horizon of meaning of a plurality of voices for one another calls not only for a right of communication but also for the right to be understood. The presence of a plurality of voices remains substantially meaningless, Husband argues, if these voices are not equipped with the right to be heard and understood.

Cosmopolitan understanding rests, on the one hand, on a specific, but also limited, cosmopolitan competence; for the failure to hear and understand is the reverse side of an education system geared to national integration and homogeneity. On the other hand, it is impossible for everyone to listen to everyone at the same time. This means that the cosmopolitanism of listening and hearing presupposes consciously drawing the boundaries to what is not heard and not understood. Cosmopolitan understanding is first made possible

by this reflected selectivity because only then does the shift in perspectives, the inclusion of the other in one's own life, become possible in a more profound way. Yet this exemplary understanding broadens the horizon in a cosmopolitan manner.

The global threat gives rise to a kind of *moral import*. Among other things, in cosmopolitan risk conflicts conducted in the media:

– resources are provided for forming a judgement, however selective and sweeping;
– sensational stories are presented that jolt us out of our apathy and present new standpoints and perspectives; the result is:
– an invitation to cross-border commitment;
– institutionalized claims to objectivity and truth are undermined;
– global risks enlarge our existential horizons by integrating (at least for a moment) other things and other people and the reality of suffering and destruction across borders and divides into ourlives.

As Kevin Robins observed in his analysis of the representation of the Gulf War in the mass media, this form of moral import also has its limits:

> The screen exposes the ordinary viewer to harsh realities, but it screens out the harshness of those realities. It has a certain moral weightlessness: It grants sensation without demanding responsibility, and it involves us in a spectacle without engaging us in the complexity of its reality.[7]

This observation is correct and incorrect at the same time. It is familiar insofar as the mediatization of catastrophes stages a kind of totalitarian occupation of everyday space. But it fails to recognize that in the very staging of the shock, in its uniqueness and authenticity, distances shrink and a closeness is generated that challenges us to adopt an ethical position that transcends borders.

The category of *hospitality* has featured centrally in normative cosmopolitanism since Immanuel Kant. The meaning of the ethical principle of hospitality is the duty to welcome strangers. Hospitality not only includes the freedom of speech but also involves the duty to listen and to understand. Kant was thinking of the right to visit to which all human beings have a claim based on their share in the common possession of the surface of the earth. Because the earth is a sphere, human beings cannot spread out indefinitely but must come together and put up with the fact that they live in close proximity to one another; for in the beginning no one had any more right to any portion of the surface of the earth than anyone else.

What does this right to hospitality mean as regards global risks? The essential differentiation here is between the degree to which hospitality rests on an invitation and the degree to which this right means that those who have not been invited – for example, people in need – can claim the right to hospitality. Is there such a thing as "enforced hospitality"? Derrida argues that there can be no hospitality without a home, a place of welcome and one in which someone is made welcome.

This does *not* hold for global risks. The difference resides already in the fact that, in the global space of responsibility of global risks, nobody can be excluded from "hospitality." In the light of the exhaustive coverage of global threats in the media, others and strangers are as much a presence for us as we are for them, whether we or they like it, or realize it or want to acknowledge it, or not. And simply because of our own precarious situation as

subjects in the world and because of the equal status of strangers as subjects in the threatened world, neither we nor they are in a position to reject claims to help and to pity, to listen and to understand. This actually occurs quite naturally. And one must immediately add that it occurs all the more emphatically and emotionally the more irrefutable such claims become. Eruptions of amorality and indifference, indeed of hatred, can also be understood in this way because nobody can escape this new kind of cosmopolitan "collective consciousness" (Durkheim) that global threats create.

Perhaps the category of "hospitality" or "friendship towards guests" [*Gastfreundschaft*] – which can easily become inverted into "hostility towards guests" [*Gastfeindschaft*] – is not appropriate to expressing the inescapability of moral proximity over geographical distance. Perhaps it makes more sense to speak of all people being transformed into neighbours? Perhaps different ways of coping with this "globalized neighbourhood" remain open, where hospitality in the Kantian sense remains the exception (as easily occurs with the condition of global neighbours).

In legal terms, the ethical principle of recognition of others involves a kind of *cosmopolitan law of global risk*. This is no longer merely a matter of hospitality but of the right of the "living side effects" of the risk decisions of others to a say in these decisions. This may sound innocuous but it presupposes a radical reconstruction of existing national and international law. Even if it is only a matter of formulating and imposing minimum standards of this cosmopolitan law of risk, this includes:

– that "we" and "others" are placed on the same moral and legal footing as regards strategic risk decisions;
– which presupposes, in turn, that the interests of vulnerable members of other societies are placed on a higher footing than the interests of co-nationals on the basis of a universal human right of inviolability. Global risks produce harms that transcend national borders. Thus cosmopolitan law of risk is possible only if the boundaries of moral and political communities can be redefined so that the others, strangers and outsiders are included in the key decisions which jeopardize and violate their existence and dignity.

*Theory of world risk society*

Incalculable risks and manufactured uncertainties resulting from the triumphs of modernity mark the *conditio humana* at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Existing and orienting oneself in this world, therefore, increasingly involves an understanding of the confrontation with catastrophic risks ("the new historical character of the world risk society"). This confrontation is a self-confrontation with the institutional arrangements from which the threats proceed ("theory of institutional contradictions") and with the logic peculiar to the associated conflicts. Those who enjoy the benefits of risks are not the ones who have to bear the costs ("antagonism of risk").

The cosmopolitan communicative logic evolves through the contradictions and conflicts. Global risks have the ability to press-gang, so to speak, an unlimited number of actors who want nothing to do with one another, who pursue different political goals and who may even live in incommensurable worlds ("theory of the reflexivity and real cosmopolitanism of global risks"). This communicative logic must be differentiated according to ecological, economic and terrorist risks. We must ask how this social theory proves its worth ("basis in the science of the real")?

Then there is the related question concerning *political perspectives*. In political terms, the logic of global risks can lead to the breakthrough of a *cosmopolitan political realism*. With its combination of normative and ascriptive cosmopolitanism, it enables us to make the reflexivity of risk, the multifarious voices of criticism and conflict that find expression in society itself, into the basis of social criticism in sociology ("theory of world risk society as a critical theory of social self-criticism").

*The new historical character of the world risk society*

The main problem of sociology today is that is asking the wrong questions. The guiding questions of social theories are usually orientated to stability and (re)production of order and not to what we are experiencing and hence must grasp: an epochal, discontinuous. Social change in globalized modernity in the West *and* the Rest. A critique of the social sciences, and in particular of sociology, is therefore a necessary precondition of a social theory for the twenty-first century. An over-specialized, highly abstract sociology infatuated with its methods and techniques, has lost its sense of the historical dimension and fundamental discontinuous change of society. As a result, it is neither equipped nor inclined to fulfil its proper task of understanding and situating the current transformation of its research object in the social-historical frame and thus to offer a diagnostic perspective on the epochal signature of the new era of Second Modernity. This abstinence regarding social history has led to a stunting of sociology's historical imagination, rendering it incapable of recognizing and overcoming the blindness to anticipated catastrophes and their political power (which constituted its strength at its birth at the beginning of the catastrophic twentieth century). Instead it perpetuates sociological platitudes saturated with masses of data and obscures the processes and empirical indicators of the deep, self-generated unease of modernity which span the spectrum from self-destruction to self-contemplation, as well as the socio-cultural critiques and processes of reflection which they trigger.

The new historical character of world risk society can be rendered visible only through detailed empirical-analytical criticisms of this self-induced narrow-mindedness and historical immaturity of sociology. For the threats and uncertainties in question, in contrast to earlier eras, are not the result of the errors of modernization but of its *successes* and hence are contingent on human decisions through which science and technology are perfected, which are immanent in society and hence cannot be externalized. They are collectively imposed and hence are individually unavoidable, objectively uncontrollable and hence no longer insurable in their ultimate effects. The historical uniqueness of the world risk society, which differentiates this era as much from national industrial society as from earlier civilizations, resides in the decision-dependent possibility of control over life on earth, including the historically unprecedented possibility of self-destruction and the possibility of the anthropological self-transformation of human beings which was heralded by the discovery of the blueprint of the human genome in the summer of 2000. Thirty or forty years hence, this will probably appear in retrospect as a further founding act and driving motor, this time of the bio-world risk society.[8]

However, the novelty of the emerging social formation comes completely into view only when we relate the consequences of radicalized modernization to the social institutions which they have made possible and which, coupled with their cultural basic principles and political practices, lend the emerging risks and uncertainties their culturally, socially and politically explosive character.

*Theory of institutional contradictions*

As Piet Strydom (2002) correctly observes,[9] I developed this partial theory of institutional contradictions in *Ecological Politics in an Age of Risk* (2002) [German: *Gegengifte* (1988)] through a controversy with – i.e. an appropriation and critique of – Niklas Luhmann's 1986 study *Ökologische Kommunikation* which was published at the same time as my *Risk Society*. Luhmann bases his argument on the slogan that what cannot be controlled is not real. Because modern society consists of functionally differentiated systems that can cope with self-generated risks only in the terms of their own specific systemic logics – the economy in terms of prices, politics in terms of majorities, law in terms of guilt, science in terms of truth, etc. – modern society not only cannot cope with environmental and other global risks; these problems do not even exist. Those who give them expression, such as social movements and counter-experts, are the real source of danger because the "noise" that they generate "disturbs" the smooth functioning of the systems. I reduced this to the ironical-critical formula: "Schweigen entgiftet!"[10] ("Silence decontaminates!").

Hence, I turned this diagnosis from its head onto its feet. Instead of making the reality of global risks cleverly disappear in the metaphysics of systems rationality (thereby avoiding the historical falsification of one's own systems theory), I draw the opposite conclusion from a similar diagnosis, namely, that contemporary society and its subsystems are incapable of coping with their most urgent, self-generated problems. The counterpart of the non-responsibility of science is an implicit responsibility of businesses and the sole responsibility of politics for legitimacy. Responsibilities can indeed be assigned but they are spread out over several social subsystems. The global threats posed by modernization should not be assigned to science or the economy or politics but are a "coproduction" of these subsystems. Thus we are dealing with an extensive labyrinth whose construction plan is not non-responsibility or irresponsibility but, rather, the coexistence of responsibility [*Zuständigkeit*] and impunity [*Unzurechenbarkeit*] – to be more precise, responsibility *as* impunity, or organized irresponsibility.

The contradictory nature of the basic institutions of modern society, which lay claim to both competence and impunity, is grounded in increasing social differentiation, in the factor in which Luhmann thought he had discovered the meta-solution to all problems. Thus the contradictions within and between the institutions of modern society become clearly visible as the latest in contemporary experiences of catastrophes, as magnified by the alarmism the mass media. A core contradiction in contemporary society is the fact that advanced modernity, with the aid of its scientific instruments and its mass mediated communication, is forced to accord highest priority to the mega-threats it itself has generated, although it is clear that it lacks the necessary concepts to observe or impute, let alone "manage," them adequately – at any rate, not as long as the institutional status quo is absolutized and held constant in an ahistorical manner.

The self-criticism of society becomes more radical to the extent that these contradictions are overcome through recurring catastrophic crises and their anticipation in the experience and memory of modernity. As the latest example of the global financial risk demonstrates again, this self-criticism initially unfolds as *immanent* critique of the institutionalized and continually newly-proclaimed promises of security and their failure in the concrete experiences of catastrophes. This includes an involuntary self-criticism of science in the conflict between experts and counter-experts as well as the inability to redeem in an anticipatory way promises of security in the face of the "unknown unknowns," hence of the inability-to-know. Here the (unreflected) self-confrontation of modernity turns into "reflexive" modernization

in the narrower sense: conflict awakens and impresses upon consciousness that a "misconception of the century" has crept into the relation between global risks and the institutional arrangements from which they have arisen and which are supposed to control them.

Risks can no longer be dismissed as side effects. Instead they are becoming an internal problem of apparently self-enclosed social systems. At the same time, every attempt to manage the complexity of risk creates the need to fall back on abstractions and models which give rise to new uncertainties. This is the basis of a further institutionalized contradiction. Risk and non-knowledge prompt the call for security and lead to new insecurities and uncertainties in the general groping about in the fog of insecurity and uncertainties. Moreover, the undecidability of problems, which nevertheless have to be decided, is growing along with the pressure to make decisions.[11]

Yet threats are not "things." Hence conflicts and struggles over definitions arise in the interplay of constructivism and institutionalism. These do not occur in an institutional vacuum, however. A key component of this social construction and its "plausibility" and "truth-resources," hence its collectively binding force, resides in the relations of definition. Here too, it is the case that the communicative logic of risk permeates society in all of its institutions and lifeworlds. And to the extent that every new catastrophic experience awakens memories of previous catastrophes, the more these relations of definitional power become publicly visible and themselves a political issue. This prompts the question concerning a new ethics and system of responsibility, concerning a democratization of the relations of definitional power in the world risk society – in other words, the question concerning a *responsible* modernity.

However, the brutal fact of ontological insecurity always has an ultimate addressee: the recipient of the residual risk of the world risk society is the *individual*. Whatever propels risk and makes it uncalculable, whatever provokes the institutional crisis at the level of the governing regime and the markets shifts the ultimate decision-making responsibility onto the individuals who are ultimately left to their own devices with their partial and biased knowledge, with undecidability and multiple layers of uncertainty. This is undoubtedly a powerful source of right-wing radicalism and fundamentalism in the second modernity that is not easy to stem.

*Risk antagonism*

In questions of social inequality in the world risk society, the issue is not how the risks are allocated but, rather, what risks actually are or, more precisely, what they are for whom – opportunities to be seized or threats imposed by others – but, above all, who has the power to divert the hazardousness of the risks they incur onto others. This is the structural conflict built into the communicative logic of risk. There is no ontology of risk. Risks do not exist independently, like things. Risks are risk conflicts in which there is a world of difference between the decision makers who could ultimately avoid the risks and the involuntary consumers of dangers who do not have a say in these decisions and onto whom the dangers are shifted as "unintentional, unseen side effects." Risks disintegrate systematically into these antagonistic, perhaps even incommensurable worlds: those who run risks and define them versus those to whom they are allocated.

This is especially flagrant in the case of the new risk wars in which the military means of violence are deployed in such a way that the war-making nations seek to maintain the illusion of peace for themselves, hence to render the horror of war latent by shifting it onto the other side. "Collateral damage" is the scare word intended to render victims anonymous. It is

supposed both to reveal and to conceal the nature of the killing of others as an "unintended side effect"; but in fact it points to this division of worlds into peace for us who are waging war and war for those for whom the danger of destruction and death is becoming an everyday reality.

The concept of the enemy derived from the old wars between states is too undifferentiated to capture this way of shifting the risk of the violence of war from the decision makers onto "those affected." In the Iraq War, for example, the US government did not intend to wage war against the Iraqi people. On the contrary, the goal was to liberate the Iraqi people, hence to crush the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein and his military and power apparatus. The US may even have hoped for a *post hoc* internal revolution *after* the goal of the military intervention – the overthrow of Saddam's regime as a "military operation" on the living body of the Iraqi people – had been successfully completed. However, such a limited aim (assuming, for the sake of argument, that one wants to lend it plausibility out of the numerous alternative public attempts by the Bush administration to legitimize its self-authorized Iraq War) entangles this form of risk-redistribution war in serious contradictions. For precisely the faceless term "collateral damage" designates the toll of lives which the Iraqi civilians, who were supposed to be "liberated," have to pay for the war which was forced upon them. At this point, the basis of legitimation breaks down, however, quite apart from the fact that a more instructive example of the institutionalized contradictions of the management of the risk of war by the state is hard to imagine. The war gave rise to what was supposed to be prevented, namely, the spread of terrorist violence – Iraq has become the playground and recruitment centre of global terrorism.

This antagonism of risk takes many forms. Interestingly, it becomes both more and less acute under conditions that are often rather carelessly described in terms of the "globalization of risk." It becomes less acute because the equality and relevance horizon of the national outlook becomes inapplicable and is replaced by the reciprocal irrelevance and inattentiveness institutionalized by the national boundary. The incommensurability which is the reverse side of the internal orientation of national politics reinforces the complex relations between risk giver and risk receiver countries, which are in any case difficult to disentangle. At the same time, however, it aggravates the potential for conflict because the vagueness and indeterminability of the risks throw open the door to cultural perceptions and neuroses. The more overtly global risks elude the scientific methods for calculating them, the more influential becomes the perception of risk. The distinction between real risks and the perception of risk becomes blurred.[12] Who *believes* in a risk and why does it become more important than the sophisticated probability scenarios of the experts.

The principal lines of conflict during the Cold War were clearly political and derived their explosiveness from questions of national and international security. The geopolitical lines of conflict in the world risk society run between different risk perception cultures*. We are witnessing an invasion of politics by culture. An outstanding example of this is the contrasting urgency, indeed reality, attributed to the dangers of climate change and transnational terrorism, respectively, in Europe and the United States. We should not overlook or ignore one phenomenon here, namely, the possibility of a sudden change in perception – the *conversion effect*. Before 11 September 2001, conflicting perceptions and evaluations of the climate risk, but *not* of the terrorist risk, prevailed on the two sides of the Atlantic. Only as a result of September 11 did North America (if one can speak in such blanket terms) abandon its general risk agnosticism concerning the prophesies of the "collapse of civilization"

*See M. J. Williams (2008), a.a.O.

coming mainly from Europe and abandon the role of exporter of optimism for that of exporter of pessimism in the special domain of transnational terrorism. Not only are the cultural perceptions and definitions of risk and threat in Europe and America drifting far apart; because they are drifting far apart, Europeans and Americans are effectively living in different worlds. And the same happened during the financial meltdown: hard core US-neoliberals changed over night into state socialists for the rich. But the conflict narrative of world risk society is one-sided: For example, climate change exacerbates existing inequalities of poor and rich centre and periphery – but simultaneously dissolves them: The greater the planetary threat the less the possibility that even the wealthiest and most powerful will avoid it. Climate change is both hicrardical and democratic.

Thus the globality of the world risk society finds expression in a contradictory dynamic: unity and disintegration are simultaneous occurrences. The politically and extremely important "risk community of fate" is cleaving over the questions of who shares which definitions of risk and how the threats should be dealt with. Of decisive importance here is, for example, how much the terrorist risk permeates the perception of international politics and whether it favours the breakthrough of a preventive-military or of a preventive-political view of the world. A shift in perception in a primarily military direction would force Europe into the role of the outsider who cultivates and champions luxury problems. Thus new lines of conflict and alternatives are emerging not least between different constructions, dimensions and potential sources of global risks.

> In contemporary society, where we are witnesses of a profound transformation of the cognitive organization of social life, this competition and conflict have taken on a graphic profile in the context of the risk discourse. Here it manifests itself as a new form of class conflict, possessing also a gender dimension. . .The culturally constituted cognitive structures guided science, technology, industry, capitalism and the state, which culminate in the experimenting society, are confronted by another set. The latter was introduced into public sphere by a mobilized public and the new social movements and is currently pursued by citizens in many capacities in the direction of participatory or deliberative democracy and a cosmopolitan democratic form of governance. . .Collective responsibility, or co-responsibility, stands for this set of cognitive structures. Responsibility in this sense, as the constructivist approach suggests, does not imply an absolute prohibition against potentially harmful research and experimentation, but rather a reasonable and balanced arrangement based on new cognitive structures arising from the latest evolutionary spurt.[13]

Joost van Loon poses a key question in this context when he asks whether the multiplication of risks is a dead end, or whether there is an escape from the negative dialectic of risk and risk aversion and the entropy of ambivalence.[14]

*Theory of the reflexivity and the real cosmopolitanism of global risks*

Let us recapitulate the steps of the argument thus far. The specific ontology of risk finds expression in the overcoming of the difference between reality and representation, where the key factor is the anticipation of the becoming-real. An increasing number of such risks is undermining the operative logic of the institutions of the nation-state and of industrial society, because these anticipated, staged risks can no longer be confined to specific geographical or temporal spaces but are exerting global and simultaneous effects. What then does the reflexivity of risk mean?

– *Cosmopolitan event (like 9/11)*: The massmedia produce the spontaneous concurrence of the catastrophic event (or its anticipation) in real time in a global scale with active

presence and participation of the whole of humanity. It is the traumatic shock experi-
ence, this real-life thriller in everyone's living room that fears down the walls of national
indifference, overcomes the greatest geographical distances and creates a kind of cos-
mopolitan solidarity (for this moment of time).

– *Enforced cross-border communication*: As regards the horizon of global risks, everyone
  is living in a direct and universal proximity with everyone else. Cosmopolitanism in this
  new sense of a unification enforced by threats is a *condition*, not a *choice*. The conjecture
  that what is common to all human beings today is the longing for a world that is a little less
  a unified is not unfounded. This negative solidarity based on the fear of global destruction
  once again exhibits the communicative logic of the world risk society. I stated earlier
  that what lends the production and distribution of risks in the contemporary world their
  political potency is that it is impossible to externalize the resulting problems. In other
  words, systemic closures are no longer an option because we are all bound into this World
  Wide Web of the production and definition of risk.

  That is to say, reflexivity disassembles autopoiesis and reassembles communication
  flows into hybrid systems. Closures offered by expertise, legislation and moral panics
  are not met with trust in the systems that produced them. The technical fix can no
  longer be formed. The reinvention of politics. . .necessitates a reversal of autopoiesis,
  an opening of intrasystemic closures.[15]

– This is precisely what is accomplished by the reflexivity of risk: it dissolves the identity
  of subject and reflection; this is the reverse side of the enforced communication which
  remains bound to different media, technologies, actions, meanings, networks, "actants,"
  values (Latour).

  The political challenge of the risk society lies in the systems being able to act upon each
  other without complete conversion. That is to say, politics that enable communications
  between different information flows without reducing them to the logic of one system
  only. For Luhmann, this is impossible, hence his political quietism. For Beck and
  Habermas, there is no alternative.[16]

Many will dismiss this as wishful thinking. But that fails to recognize the turn towards a
"cosmopolitan realpolitik" which is already discernible today under the cultural and political
contradictions of world risk society (see below).

– Finally, risk rationality develops an existential "logic" of shock, suffering and pity on a
  global scale in opposition to the "instrumental rationality" which Max Weber places at
  the centre of his sociology and Horkheimer and Adorno and most recently also Jürgen
  Habermas have criticized (albeit in completely different ways). One could say that risk
  reflexivity – or, more generally, reflexive modernization – is an ambivalent, *realist* cri-
  tique of instrumentally stunted reason. Here in key domains of social rationalization it can
  be empirically and theoretically demonstrated how the radicalization of modernity leads
  to a self-confrontation, self-delegitimation and self-transformation of instrumental ratio-
  nality. This is motivated exclusively by the maximization of effectiveness and efficiency.
  Emotions, by contrast, are as little their concern as is the "concern with being," one's
  own or that of others, which is among the central existential, boundary-transcending
  experiences of the world risk society (Ritter 2004). Global experiences of risk bring
  to light a traumatic-existential deep dimension of sympathy (tsunami) and an abyss of
  ontological insecurity (failure of science, law, police, the military) and hatred (suicide

terrorism). Admittedly, instrumental rationality involves a certain degree of reflection – means and ends must be brought into relation to, and balanced off against, one another. The reflexivity of global risks has an entirely different character, however; it includes both the voyeurism of the global mass media and the anthropological shock, the selfless concern and fear, though also the panic-stricken anxiety and its instrumentalization by a whole range of political players.

*Divergent logics of global risks: on the distinction between economic,*
*environmental and terrorist risks*

At least three axes of conflict in world risk society must be distinguished in the communicative logic of global risks: first, *environmental risk conflicts*, which spontaneously generate a global dynamic; second, *global financial risks*, which are at first individualized and nationalized; and, third, the *threat posed by terrorist networks*, which are both empowered and disempowered by the states. In the case of environmental risks that pose physical threats, there is on the one side *affluence-induced* environmental destruction, as in the case of the hole in the ozone layer and the greenhouse effect, which may justifiably be laid primarily at the door of the Western industrial world, though their impact is, of course, global. From this we must distinguish *poverty-induced environmental* destruction, such as the clearing of the rainforest, which is mainly confined to particular regions though its scale is no less alarming.

Then there are the global *economic* risks, the imponderabilities of globalized currency and financial markets which have commanded increasing public attention in recent times.[17] This global market risk is also a new form of "organized irresponsibility." Facilitated by the information revolution, the financial flows determine the winners and the losers. Because of the structural dominance of competition in this sector, no player is sufficiently powerful to change the direction of the flows. Nobody controls the global market risks. Because there is no world government, the market risk cannot be curbed on national markets. On the other side, no national market can seal itself off completely from the globalized markets.

However, this neoliberal economic policy faces a central problem. Too few leading minds in the international economy have noticed that the world has become increasingly democratic. Voters have a tendency to vote against decisions that place painful restrictions upon them. They are generally too short-sighted to wait for the improvement in their situation consistently invoked by the economists which, as Keynes put it, arrives in the long run when we are all dead. As the "Asian Crisis," the "Russian Crisis", the "Argentinean Crisis" and finally the ongoing US-American-Global Crisis demonstrate, the middle classes are the worst hit by financial crises. Waves of bankruptcies and job losses shook the respective regions. Western investors and commentators viewed the "financial crises" exclusively from the perspective of the possible threat they posed for the financial markets. However, global financial risks, like global ecological crises, cannot be confined to the economic subsystem but mutate into social upheavals and thus into political threats. In the case of the "Asian Crisis," such a chain reaction destabilized whole states and led simultaneously to outbreaks of violence against minorities who were painted as scapegoats.

And what was unimaginable just a few years ago is now becoming a real possibility, i.e. the iron law of the globalization of the free market is in danger of collapsing and with it the associated ideology. All over the world – not just in South America, but in the Arab world and in Europe – politicians are taking measures against globalization. Protectionism is experiencing a revival; some call for new transnational institutions to control global financial

flows, whereas others plead for transnational insurance systems or a renewal of international institutions and regimes. The result is that the era of free-market ideology is becoming a distant memory and is being overshadowed by its opposite, namely, the *politicization* of the global market economy. Even advocates of a global free market are increasingly expressing openly the suspicion that, after the collapse of communism, only *one* opponent of the free market remains, namely, the unbridled free market which has shrugged off its responsibility for democracy and society and operates exclusively on the maxim of short-term profit-maximization.

There are surprising parallels between the Chernobyl reactor catastrophe and the Asian financial crisis. The traditional methods of steering and control are proving to be inoperable and ineffectual in the face of global risks. The millions of unemployed and poor cannot be financially compensated; it makes no sense to insure against the impacts of a global recession. At the same time, the social and political explosiveness of global market risks is becoming palpable. Governments are being overthrown and civil wars are threatening to break out. As risks come to public awareness, the question concerning responsibility becomes loud. This dynamic leads to an inversion of neoliberal policy – not the economization of politics, but the politicization of the economy.

> Serious Consideration should be given to establishing an Economic Security Council within the United Nations. . . There are many issues, including governance of currency markets and responding to ecological risks, that cannot be resolved without collective action involving many countries and groups. Not even the most liberalized national economy works without macroeconomic coordination; it makes no sense to suppose that the world economy is different.[18]

To be sure, economic crises are as old as the markets themselves. And, since the global economic crisis of 1929 at the latest, it has been clear to everyone that financial crashes can have catastrophic effects – especially for politics. The Bretton Woods institutions established following World War II were conceived as global political answers to global economic risks, and the fact that they functioned was a key factor in the emergence of the European welfare state. Since the 1970s, however, those institutions have been largely dismantled and replaced by a succession of ad hoc solutions. Thus we face the paradoxical situation that, whereas markets have never been more liberal and more global, the powers of the global institutions that monitor their effects have been drastically curtailed. Under these conditions, we cannot rule out the possibility of a worldwide financial disaster on the scale of 1929.

In contrast to environmental and technological risks, whose physical effects first win social relevance "from outside," financial risks also affect an immediately social structure, namely, the economy or, more precisely, the guarantee of solvency which is indispensable to its normal functioning. This means, first, that the impact of financial risks is also much more strongly mediated by other social structures than the impact of global environmental risks. Hence, financial risks can be more easily "individualized" and "nationalized" and they give rise to major differences in perceptions of risk. Finally, global financial risks – not least in their worldwide (statistical) perception – are attributed as *national* risks to particular countries or regions. Of course, this by no means implies that economic interdependence risks are any less risky. Since all of the subsystems of modern society rely on the other subsystems, a failure of the financial system would be catastrophic. No other functional system plays such a prominent role in the modern world as the economy. Thus, the world economy is without doubt a central source of manufactured uncertainties and insecurities in the world risk society.

The threat posed by global terrorist networks, by contrast, is a completely different matter. As we have seen, environmental and economic crisis can be understood as side effects of radicalized modernization. Terrorist activities, by contrast, must be understood as *intentional* catastrophes. More precisely, they conform to the principle of the intentional triggering of unintentional side effects. Hence, the principle of deliberately exploiting the manifest vulnerability of modern civil society replaces the principle of chance and accident. The concept of an accident, which is based on the calculation of the probability of cases of loss, is no longer applicable. Terrorists need only target so-called residual risks and the civil consciousness of a highly complex and interdependent world to globalize the "felt violence" which paralyses modern society and causes it literally to freeze with panic. Correspondingly, the terrorist risk leads to an extreme expansion of the domain of "dual use goods" that serve both civil and military purposes.[19] Transnational terrorism differs from national terror in that it neither pursues national goals nor depends primarily or exclusively on national actors within nation-states. Thus "transnational" means multinational terrorist networks with the potential to attack "the West" and "modern society" anywhere. What is striking is that and how the global anticipation of terrorist attacks is ultimately "manufactured" in involuntary interaction with the power of the Western mass media, Western politics and Western military. To put it pointedly, the belief in "global terrorism" springs from an unintended self-endangerment of modern Western society.

For all their differences, environmental, economic and terrorist global risks have two key features in common. First, they all promote or dictate a policy of proactive countermeasures that annuls the basis of the existing forms and alliances of international politics, necessitates corresponding redefinitions and reforms and calls forth new political philosophies. This means that the premises of what counts as "national" and "international" and of how these dimensions should be related to and demarcated from each other are collapsing and must now be renegotiated under the banner of risk prevention in the meta-power game of global and national security policies.[20] This invites, among other things, the question: does a Europe enamoured of its pacifist worldview (of environmental risks) recognise that Islamic terrorists are not anti-American (as many Europeans believe) but anti-Western, anti-European and anti-cosmopolitan? Will a clandestine coalition develop between Islamic-terrorist anti-Americanism and European anti-Americanism based on the maxim "the enemy of my enemy is my friend"? Or will Europe stand alongside America because it recognizes that Islamic terrorist fundamentalism hates and wants to destroy everything that Europe stands for, namely, non-religious liberal-mindedness, loss of binding traditions, an agnostic ethos of respect among those who accept uncertainty as part of the human condition?

Second, it holds true for environmental, economic and terrorist risks alike that they cannot be foisted onto the environment as *external* threats but must be understood as consequences, acts and uncertainties that are produced by civilization. Accordingly, the risks of civilization may give rise to a more acute global normative awareness, create a public space and perhaps even a cosmopolitan outlook.

## 2. The "Wirklichkeitswissennchaftliche" ("Real Scientific") Basis of a Cosmopolitan Social Theory with Critical Intent

Social theory, whatever its provenance, must make explicit its empirical basis if it is not to remain historically and empirically empty and immune to refutation. If social theory no longer wants to be a science of unreality that is oblivious of its own historical origins and has absolved itself apodictically of any historical-empirical danger of falsification (and hence is

"worse than false" because it can neither be confirmed nor disconfirmed) and again become a curious, normatively and historically sensitive "science of reality" ("Wirklichkeitswissennchaft", Max Weber) inspired by the intellectual pioneering spirit of the classics, then it must prove itself in the present. An account of the transition to the world risk society "is based in reality, socially constructed, to be sure, but the collective outcome of innumerable social transactions is no more unreal or wishable away than the bodies in Hiroshima in 1945."[21] Thus the foundation for such a renewed social historiography resides in the *social facticity of global risks*.

Two conditions must be fulfilled in order to grasp this "meta-change" (i.e. change in the system of reference of social change). First, a lifeworld phenomenology of the world risk society must be worked out, that is, a precise empirical record of everything which changes in the lives of human beings as the influence of the globality of risk increases. Hence, we must develop first a *descriptive theory*, new categories and methods that enable us to observe and describe how the practical experiences of human beings are reflected in the globalized world in recognizable "cosmopolitan" social forms (i.e. ones which blur the existing basic differentiations and national boundaries) and how this affects the self-images of human beings, groups and populations and is expressed in action.

The second condition is that we need a *explanatory theory* of the world risk society. This must include the institutional conditions, consequences, contradictions and the resulting dynamic of the new era, define the meaning of new practical experiences and throw light upon the interrelation between historical change and lifeworld experiences and practices.

Edmund Husserl also describes these two conditions in very general terms. He assumed that "the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché belonging to it are destined in essence to effect, at first, a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion."[22] Thus the basis of a theory of world risk society in a science of the real resides in the fact that it succeeds in tracing how global risks permeate and revolutionize everyday lifeworlds – not unlike a "religious conversion being opposed by non-believers."

An outstanding example of this is undoubtedly climate change. Here the globalization of risk has actually altered the framework of human experience and social action (though many think not extensively enough). The worldwide linkage of side effects of industrial triumphs promotes a global consciousness and makes it possible to conceptualize global risks. Once the endangered earth itself becomes the reference point of human action, the globality of risks will become an indispensable feature of thought and action. Even the negation – an appropriate answer to climate change must make the impossible possible, namely, that humanity constitutes itself as a political actor, renounces reckless industrialism and successfully orchestrates a transformation of lifestyles – reflects this quasi-religious conversion. And, of course, there are all kinds of non-believers. Thus the dynamic of world risk society releases an actual or potential avalanche of lifeworld changes that are triggered when risk ceases to be a limited individual problem and becomes a global phenomenon of far-reaching political significance.[23] As I have argued, however, the contours of world risk society essentially take shape outside the field of vision of "unseen and unwanted side effects." But this means that the social facts do not appear as such. They first have to be sifted out of the understanding of linear theories of modernization that specifically maintain the latency of risks and their side effects character. This is why it is indispensable to make a specific, perhaps even methodologically informed, connection between descriptive theory and experience in order to work out the phenomenology of global risks. Only in this combination is it possible to reconstruct empirically how the new practical experiences transform our understanding of old concepts and what prompts the development of new ones.

Underlying this is a "contextual universalism"[24] that takes a sceptical view of the possibility of ever discovering eternal truths in human, social and natural processes. At the same time, it insists on the necessity of uncovering and designating to the best of our knowledge the "contextual universalisms" in present-day experience.

This leads to a competition among interpretations. Theories of linear modernization and rationalization confront theories of the world risk society and both focus on the lifeworld phenomenology of global risks. Realistically speaking, the competing interpretive approaches can lead to a kind of "stalemate of explanations." For, even where a watershed between eras is asserted and demonstrated, overlaps and hybrid forms of old and new phenomena arise, hence a *both/and* in which *all* of the competing social theories can find confirmation for their assumptions. Thus, there is certainly a *sociological structural conservatism* possible which makes the new era into an appendage of the old and projects the features of the old order into the future. This procedure is not fruitless either because the social structures and institutions of the first modernity by no means collapse as a whole at a particular historical juncture. Thus, methodologically speaking, one must indeed practice what Max Weber called "double-entry bookkeeping." He assigned it a major role in the rise of capitalism. "Double-entry bookkeeping" is also needed in this sense in order to record the rise of the world risk society.

Nevertheless, there are decisive moments that, in the sense of Thomas Kuhn's (1962) concept of a paradigm shift, first render the novelty of social facts describable and knowable. For uncovering the empirical facts of the world risk society not only presupposes the availability of a corresponding theory but also *practical* changes in the social and methodological organization of the social sciences. A key issue here is undoubtedly overcoming "methodological nationalism." If one defines "culture" (or "society") as the development of universally shared meanings based on collective practical experience, then the world risk society breaks with the conception of separate and closed cultures and introduces the practical experiences that transcend cultural differences into everyday life. In this respect, the world risk society represents a threat to the traditional concept of culture, community and society. Cultural boundaries and oppositions are broken down in staged global experiences of threats and it becomes apparent that their alleged inherent incommensurability rests on decisions concerning national demarcations backed up by power. It likewise becomes apparent that forms of social organization – for example, a nation-state that erects barriers against the outside world – in reality erects barriers to mutual understanding. Other cultures, religions, nations cannot be understood on the basis of universal classifications and surveys that the social sciences have borrowed from the natural sciences. A *cosmopolitan hermeneutics* is both normatively and empirically necessary in order to understand the international intercultural conflict dynamic of world risk society.

Only the *summation* of the phenomenology of internally globalized lifeworlds based on combining theory and description yields "historical falsification criteria." The latter proceed from the epochal shift, yet they can form the point of departure and guideline for innovations in social theory.[25] In the early modern period, the collapse of the transcendently legitimated social order was such a "historical falsification criterion"; at the beginning of the nineteenth century, i.e. of industrial modernity, it was the key experience of the internal dynamic and self-empowerment produced by human decisions (the rising market economy) and of the political explosiveness of the associated class conflict; then later it was also the integrating effect based on the connection between national society and nation-state and opened up the horizons of sovereignty, democracy and the welfare state (also as a national answer to the class conflict which Marx understood in transnational terms). These are historical criteria of

falsification dealt with by the founding classics and over which they struggled for answers in their conceptual and empirical studies.

Since the 1980s at the latest ("environmental crises," "individualization"), but especially at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is the many faces of uncontrollable, manufactured uncertainties, insecurities and risks which are experienced and given expression in the most prominent public debates, controversies and conflicts globally by social movements, scientists, experts, politicians, states and – not least – terrorists. Here, as I said, working out the new epochal quality of this planetary uncertainty, which is the result of all striving to overcome it, is of major importance. The key issue in many areas of everyday life is not just the concrete experience of uncontrollability but the loss of credibility and trust, disintegrating the guiding ideal of rationality and control, and this is shown in people's practical experiences.

Thus the concept of "practical experience" (similar to Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of "habitus") seeks to provide an answer to the problem of how to find a sociological concept for the preconceptual, non-ideational foundation of discourse.[26] Just this constitutes the extra-theoretical, extra-sociological point of departure for an empirical social theory of world risk society: on a large and a small scale, in everyday family life and in global politics, human beings are searching for the lost certainty and security.

With this we have also identified the limits grounded in the *theory* of world risk society. At the same time, however, this critical theory must also be measured by how far it overcomes the obstacles to action posed by the linear, automatized modernization and opens up the horizon for political alternatives.

## 3. The Political Alternative: Cosmopolitan Real politik

Traces of a future politics can certainly be discerned in the interactions and antagonisms of risk conflicts, i.e. of the cosmopolitan political realism whose basic principles can be summed up in five points.

*First*: World risk society exhibits the new historical reality that no nation can master its problems alone. This is no longer an idealistic principle of utopian internationalism or a social scientific ivory tower philosophy but an insight of political realism. It is the fundamental law of cosmopolitan Real politik, which contradicts the unilateralism of the US government as much as the counterforce fantasies of the Europeans.

*Second*: Global problems give rise to transnational commonalities. Those who play the national card lose. Only those who understand and conduct national politics in a cosmopolitan way can survive. National states, regardless of whether they are weak or strong, are no longer the primary units for solving national problems. Interdependence is not a *scourge* of humanity but the precondition for its survival. Cooperation is no longer a means but the end. Individual states mostly operate both unilaterally and multilaterally, depending on the issues with which they are dealing and the areas in which they are operating. The more globality is consciously recognized, and thus the more cultures, countries, governments, regions and religions are affected, the more ineffective and unrealistic unilateral action becomes. For the likelihood of failure is greater because both effectiveness and legitimacy are products of cooperation among states. In short, the method of cosmopolitan Real politik provides the detour. Progress in the interminable Middle East conflict, for example, cannot be achieved in isolation through direct interaction between Israelis and Palestinians but only via the detour of a globally arranged and moderated regional compromise in which every nation has something to gain in a major give and take: security for Israel, sovereignty for the Lebanese,

a state for the Palestinians and the Golan Heights, currently occupied by Israel, for Syria. For this it is necessary to speak and negotiate with one another in spite of divisions and hatreds in order to replace the national zero-sum game with a positive-sum game based on peaceful mutual dependence.

*Third*: International organizations are not merely the continuation of national politics with other means. They bundle and transform national interests, giving rise to the positive-sum game among the states concerned that can supersede the negative-sum game of national autonomy. National (neo-)realism asserts that international organizations primarily serve national, not international interests. Cosmopolitan realism states that international organizations serve neither national (in the old sense) nor primarily international interests, but that they transform, maximize and extend national into transnational interests and open up new transnational spaces of power and action for a wide range of global political players, though also for individual states. Who or what sustains this cosmopolitan integration among states? Certainly the "national" calculation of the states and governments concerned (as the realists in political science assert), though one transformed to its core by a *cosmopolitan supplement*. This is ultimately to everyone's benefit, because only thus can regional and global problems – which are also national problems – be, if not solved, then at least reined in within expanded political spaces. The creation of international organizations presupposes that the United States will limit its power of its own accord as a strategy for the legitimation and cooperative extension of power. Something different and new arises when states that stand in asymmetrical power relations cooperate in the face of global threats under conditions of law and respect for democratic values.

*Fourth*: The refusal of some European states and of the UN Security Council to act as a rubber stamp for US military unilateralism did not lead to a loss of power of the EU and the UN, as many commentators suspected; on the contrary, both have gained in global credibility. The legitimacy of global risk politics is founded essentially on a global division of powers between the power to employ military force and the procedural power of global public consensus. Only the autonomy of the EU and UN vis-à-vis unipolar US military power can furnish the latter with the requisite legitimacy. The seemingly indispensable direct link between national power and its national legitimacy in the national sovereignty paradigm is counterproductive at the global level. If the United States seeks agreement with the EU, it will optimize its chances of winning the support of the UN and thus the political premium of the unanimity of the US, the UN and the EU.

*Fifth*: Unilateralism is uneconomic. Cosmopolitan realism, by contrast, is also *economic* realism. It reduces and redistributes costs, not only because military expenditures are in any case many times higher than the costs of a strategy of political prevention, but also because costs rise exponentially with the loss of legitimacy. Conversely, shared responsibility and shared sovereignty also mean shared costs. For example, it might even be possible to fund US experts from the UN budget and to deploy them with the blessing of international law. Such practical options of transnational politics are ruled out by national unilateralism. In other words, cooperation between states – an important element of cosmopolitan realism – is also good business.

*Critical theory of world risk society as social and political self-criticism*

The troublesome, though not unanswerable question "How is critique possible?" no longer even arises for the majority of sociological theories. Apparently something like "critical sociology" or "critical theory" cannot be easily reconciled with positions that lean towards

constructivism or relativism. Sociologists who conduct their business on the basis of such epistemological positions are not especially bothered or spurred to reflection when alerted to the fact that they are adopting premises of the institutional order which they are investigating and are thereby affirming (whether intentionally or not) this status quo. Normativity is in bad odour. It is generally assimilated to procedures in which a normative ideal is opposed to a deformed reality in order to deduce the predictable conclusions. Such endeavours induce a sense of embarrassment, at least among German sociologists concerned with clinical value freedom. For they cherish the belief that they have finally rid themselves of the unpleasant sweaty odour that clings to such exertions.

However, they fail to recognize that a sociology that unreflectively succumbs to the premises of its research object, and is in this sense uncritical, fails to fulfil its most basic task. It succumbs to, rather than breaking with, the fixations of society's self-descriptions and thus remains incapable of registering either empirically or analytically what drives social and political reality and splits it apart. The most wonderful epoch-specific example of this is the "methodological nationalism" which leads sociology to assume unreflectively that it is condemned to being a "national sociology" in which nationals study nationals for nationals. Here the world is divided according to the distinction between "us" and "the rest." Sociology studies "us," whereas the study of others is a field for others, anthropologists, ethnologists, etc. It is no surprise that, committed to this division of labour, sociology systematically misses the involved mixings, contingencies and complexities of world risk society. Hence, a realistic science of the world risk society presupposes the emphatic critique of the cognitive contours of the national contexts of action, for only through a decisive break with the homogeneity between the basic premises of political and methodological nationalism can the structures, contradictions, options and constraints of national patterns of action in the world risk society be laid bear. In this way, the critical theory of world risk society becomes at once realistic and critical; indeed, it becomes realistic because it is critical, and thus capable of distancing itself in a critical way from the cognitive structures of the national outlook which dominate social and political action. This kind of *realistic* critical theory does not hamper a realistic scientific sociology but first makes it possible.

Because risk is synonymous with risk conflict, the antagonism among social actors within and between institutions, political and sub-political fields of action and social movements becomes a fruitful source of possible alternatives. On the other hand, it is the sense of reality, rather than normative exuberance, that forces us to develop the abilities and sensibilities which first enable us to register in sociological terms the full spectrum of culturally defined alternatives within institutionalized practices and the constitution and organization of society. If the national sociology fixated on integration still had an unreflective awareness of the guiding norm and of what is "normal" and what is "deviant" by this standard, this dualistic way of thinking becomes incapable of grasping reality under the conditions of the world risk society. The paradoxes and contradictions built into the dynamic of world risk society which come to the fore along with it smash to pieces the carefully organized, one-dimensional categories of normal vs. deviant behaviour, equilibrium vs. disruption, subjectivism vs. structuralism, etc. The distinction between possibility and reality also disintegrates in the real virtuality of risk. In other words, anyone interested in a realistic approach to risks must open him or herself up for alternatives. Here, too, the sense for possibility becomes a sense of reality (to borrow a formulation of Robert Musil).

Thus critical theory of world risk society also means becoming alert to the manifold, real self-critical voices of the developing world risk society. Insurance experts criticize the zero-risk thesis of the engineers and managers who want to reduce insurance costs. Of course,

they do not do this because they want to become involved in or switch over to the national or global power game as ersatz critics but out of pure economic self-interest: high risks are good for business. Postcolonial social movements blame the "outside threats" to which they once again find themselves exposed, this time not due to a lack of modernization but to the export of the problems created by radicalized modernization under the false banner of "unseen side effects." Even in the seemingly most homogeneous, hierarchical and closed organizations, such as the armed forces, critical voices are raised internally, though often also publicly, when it comes to the risks of a planned deployment. There is no shortage of "whistle blowers," as the counter-experts to the zero-risk pronouncements are judiciously termed. And the law also holds universally that after the catastrophe, the warnings of counter-experts are proved right. Moreover, the end of one catastrophe is merely the prelude to another.

The polarization of risk expands the spectrum of self-criticism from within society. Not to suppress and fail to understand this immediately out of a false evaluative horizon of homogenizing norms – again inspired by the aim of producing a science of the real – constitutes the cosmopolitan realism of a critical theory of the world risk society.

## NOTES

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1. In his examination of the challenge that the world risk society theory poses to JR studies, M. J. William demonstrates (in his "(In) Security Studies, Reflexive modernization and the Risk Society," *Cooperation and Conflict*, 43, no. 1 (2008), 57–79) the formation of risk communities had become an major issue in the field of International Relations, including the reformation of the NATO.

2. In a critical review, William Smith concludes "There is, of course, a risk in stretching the concept of cosmopolitanism in such a way that it incorporates an explanatory – sociological aspect as well as a normative – philosophical dimension. It may be difficult, for example, to retain a clear focus on the difference between "really existing" cosmopolitanization and its normative – philosophical shadow. In the end, however, the great strength of Beck's trilogy is its steadfast determination to bring cosmopolitanism down to earth. In this respect, he demonstrates that cosmopolitan thinking can enrich sociology *and* that sociology can enrich cosmopolitan thinking," "A cosmopolitan sociology: Ulrich Beck's trilogy on the global age" *Global Networks* 8, no. 2 (2008), 259.

3. These could even be extended further by the other dimensions of the theory of reflexive modernization, namely, individualization and cosmopolitization; see V. Deck and E. Grande, *Cosmopolitan Europe \* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 28–31.

4. Roger Silverstone, *Media and Morality: On the Rise of Mediapolis* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).

5. Although there is much talk of "the Other" in classical sociology, this is meant to be the universalized Other, not the alien Others who speak different languages and who live in partially overlapping, partially incommensurable pasts and futures.

6. Charles Husband, *Media and the Public Sphere in Multi-Ethnic Societies*, Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2000).

7. Kevin Robins, *Into the Image: Culture and Politics in the Field of Vision* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 80.

8. Nikolas Rose, "Neurochemical Selves," *Society* 41, no. 1 (2003): 46–59; Stefan May, "Rechtspolitische Nebenfolgen und Entscheidungskonflikte der Biomedizin," in Ulrich Beck and Christoph Lau, eds., *Entgrenzung und Entscheidung. Was ist neu an der Theorie reflexiver Modernisierung?* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2004): 193–208.

9. Piet Strydom, *Risk, Environment, and Society: Ongoing Debates, Current Issues, Future Prospects* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2002), 59.

10. Ulrich Beck, and Christoph Lau, "Second Modernity as a Research Agenda: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations in the 'Meta-Change' of Modern Society," *British Journal of Sociology*, 56, no. 4 (2005): 525–557.

11.   Barbara Adam, Ulrich Beck, and Joost van Loon, eds., *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues For Social Theroy* (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 2000); Beck and Lau, *Entgrenzung und Entscheidung*, 2004.

12.   Marry Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

13.   Piet Strydom, *Risk, Environment and Society: Ongoing Debates, Current Issues and Future Prospects* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 2002), 152 f.

14.   Joost van Loon, *Risk and Technological Culture: Towards a Sociology of Virulence* (London: Routledge, 2002), 41.

15.   Ibid., 40, 43.

16.   Ibid., 43.

17.   Li Puma and Lee, *Financial Derivatives and the Globalization of Risk* (Durham: Public Planet Books, 2004), 141–160; Boris Holzer and Yuval Millo, "From Risks to Second-Order Dangers in Financial Markets: Unintended Consequences of Risk Management Systems," *New Political Economy*, 10, no. 2 (2005): 223–245.

18.   Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press: 1998), 176.

19.   Michael Bauer, *Reflexive Modernisierung und Terrorismus* (Unpublished MS, Munich 2006).

20.   Ulrich Beck, and Christoph Lau, "Second Modernity as a Research Agenda: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations in the 'Meta-Change' of Modern Society," *British Journal of Sociology*, 56, no. 4 (2005): 525–557.

21.   Martin Albrow *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press: 1996): 106.

22.   Edmund Husserl, *Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 137.

23.   The empirical studies of the Collaborative Research Centre on Reflexive Modernization in Munich, which has been working on the these questions in a broad thematic spectrum of research projects since 1999 in collaboration with several universities, have in fact succeeded in establishing a descriptive theory of second modernity and demonstrating that such phenomena of a meta-change occurred in the period between 1960 and 1990. To this extent an empirical phenomenology of reflexive modernization has in fact been systematically worked out (though one which does not deal with the example of the lifeworld experience of global risks) (Beck and Lau, "Second Modernity as a Research Agenda," 2005).

24.   Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 81–6.

25.   Ulrich Beck, *Soziale Wirklichkeit und Modernität: Versuch einer gegenwarts-historischen Bestimmung der Soziologie* (Unpublished MS, Ambach 1983).

26.   Angelika Poferl, *Die Kosmopolitik des Alltags* (Berlin: Sigma, 2004).

**Ulrich Beck** is Professor of Sociology at Munich University and at the London School of Economics, and Senior Loeb Fellow at Harvard University. He is the author of numerous titles including *World Risk Society* (1998), *What is Globalization?* (1999), and *Cosmopolitan Vision* (2006).