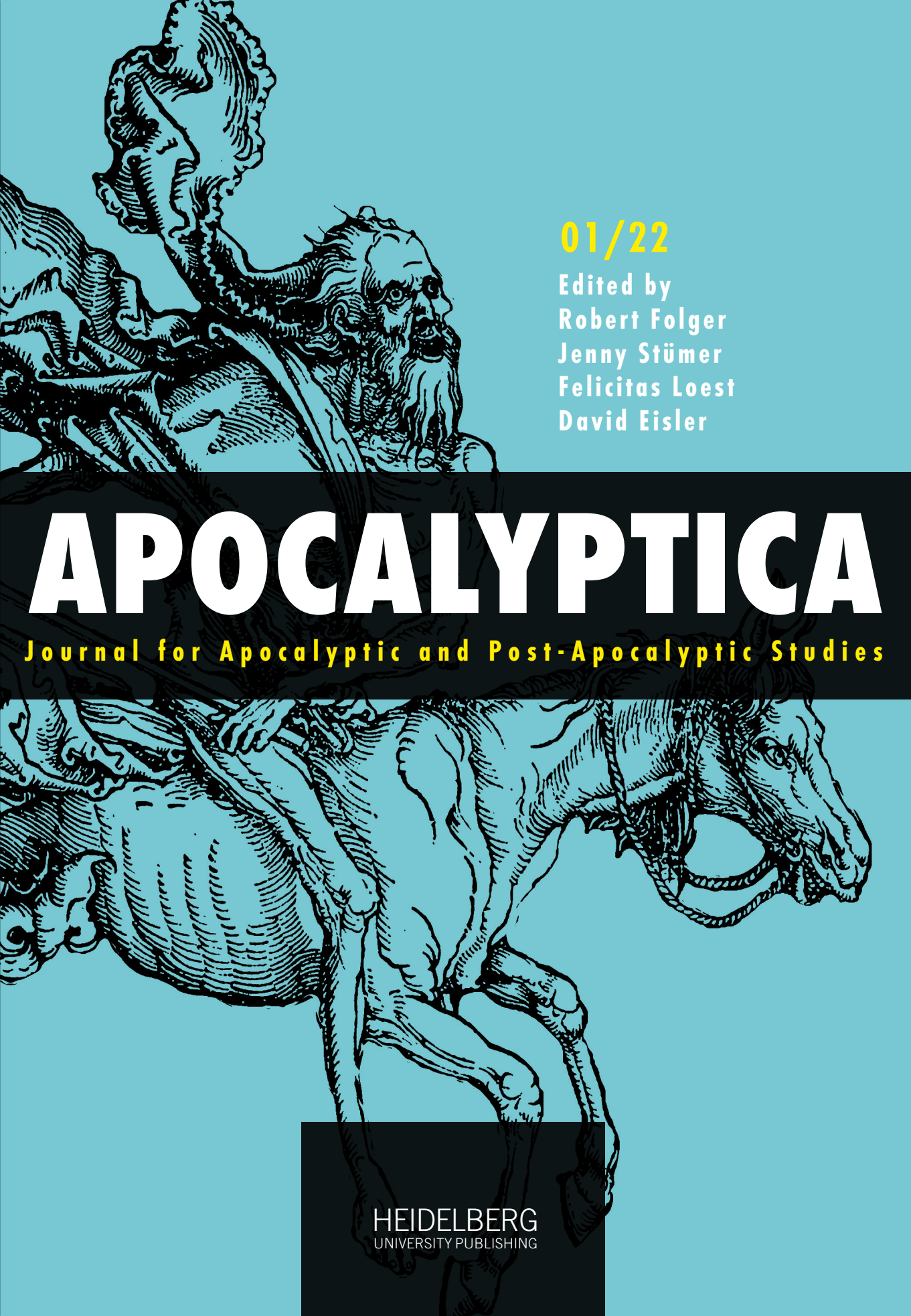

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Thinking with the End(s) of Worlds

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Jenny Stümer and Felicitas Loest

The Apocalyptic Word

Why begin with the end of the world?

As we move forward with *Apocalyptica*'s first issue, the world is looking dire: Anthropogenic climate change is accelerating, the petrochemical experiment is in full force, resources are depleting, species are vanishing, climate refugees are met with increasingly militarized borders, forests are burning, oceans are dying, we all have plastics in our blood and the COVID-19 pandemic still holds a strong grip on the world. Meanwhile Vladimir Putin has raised the stakes of nuclear threat once more as millions are fleeing a war-torn Ukraine. In Yemen Children are starving. Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos are colonizing space. The Far right is on the rise around the globe and disaster capitalism is feeding off the poor. People are tearing each other apart on social media. Oil spills, earthquakes, hurricanes and school shootings are common news events. Homelessness is endemic. The necropolitical war machine is tearing through the Middle East. Algorithmic governance has put us under constant surveillance. Scientists have glued their hands in protest to the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy while *Don't Look Up* is the second most watched film on Netflix. Kentanji Brown Jackson is being badgered at her confirmation hearing and the Dakota Access Pipeline is still transporting toxic crude oil to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe reservation. Slow violence has gained traction; the Hyperobject is disintegrating.

We are faced with a plethora of catastrophes; a cataclysm of apocalyptic scenarios all of which propose the unravelling of a destructive way of inhabiting the Earth, or an anti-relational refusal of the (common) world, while constantly doubling down on the gendered, raced, colonial, and environmental violence that have impelled these devastating patterns in the first place. The simultaneity of apocalyptic upheaval, in other words, provokes a peculiar convergence of premonitions, experiences, and time-

lines, where one end is haunted by an/other, giving rise to new challenges that demand our questioning of what it meant, means, and will mean to live through the end times. Following Karan Barad, it is obvious that these different apocalypses do not merely exist side by side but that they can live "inside" each other (2018, 57), uprooting the past and throwing us back to the future as the present slips away. In other words, there are many endings and many worlds, but it is through the philosophical trope of the pluralist apocalypse that we can come to approach the interconnectedness and intersectionality of these various (up)endings. Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the colonial assault on the Americas, Africa, and Australasia, two World Wars, slave ships, famines, genocides, invasions, dispossessions, storms, floods, diseases, and the coming bee extinction; these earth/world-shattering events can (and should) not be equated, of course, but they interlace and blend in ways the apocalypse as a figure of thought can make tangible and therefore, thinkable. In this sense, apocalypse as an intellectual project reminds us that death and catastrophe cannot be simply relegated to what Malcom Ferdinand describes as "off-world spaces, far removed from European Centers" (2021, 65)—if not for lack of trying—and that the disasters of past and present are neither neutral nor natural but subject to political and cultural forces that we can and must interrogate.

At the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS) we work with the premise that the apocalypse provides a way into thinking through these complex and urgent entanglements. We propose that apocalypses are productive, that they are more than theological abstractions and that the world(s) they are upending are not a given. We assume that apocalypses have happened and that they prompt us to question how we make sense of/in a disaster-ridden world. Optimistically speaking, apocalypses are transformative: They are about the creation of novel and emancipatory collective imaginaries that undo pervasive conceptions of the world and trouble established ontological and epistemological promises of the ways we may inhabit this planet. As NK Jemisin puts it, "the end of the world is happening as we speak. The question becomes whether it's the kind of world that needs to go." (Jemisin 2018, 477). In this vein, we want to broaden the notion of the apocalypse beyond ideas of disaster projected onto a future that ideally requires no change from us. Instead, apocalypses and post-apocalypses invoke a possibility of constructive upheaval, revolutionary energy, and radical difference.

Jemisin's provocative evocation of what John Drabinski, with reference to Aimé Césaire might call "the apocalyptic word" reminds us that

"out of the end of the world, beginning is possible" (572) and that the end of history has not actually happened. As Oxana Timofeeva puts it, "the end of the world is a permanent reality. History doesn't have an end" (2014). Rather, "the end of the end of history" (Timofeeva 2014) can free us to reshape our world(s), in so far as its inscribed futurelessness marks a "starting point for thought" (2020, 4) in Jessica Hurley's words. The end thus produces "a place for struggle and resistance and somehow, impossibly, for hope" (Hurley 2020, 4). In this sense, living and thinking with apocalypses changes the horizon of how we orient the present and deal with the environmental and human consequences of Western chronopolitics. As Drabinski has further explained, "without apocalypse, there is always and only the despair of the past dragged into a melancholic present and future" (2016, 567). Our approach to the end of the world then is respectful to the destructions of past, present, and future, but, at the same time, it is defiantly enthusiastic, refusing the apocalypse as a bad object per se. Instead, we utilize the end as an opening, as Césaire would insist: Apocalypse, in this sense, unlocks new ways of thinking and being in and with the world.

In line with these bearings, we treat the apocalypses as end and beginning. Apocalypse as a mode of thinking, writing and working together teaches us about the limits and potentialities of 'world', 'worlds', and 'worlding'; raising questions about what it means to think with, against and beyond the end today. What movements, politics, ideas, geographies, sensibilities, stories, and images might be considered (post)apocalyptic or invoke debates and feelings about the end of the/a world? How do apocalypses entangle temporalities of past, present, and future? How do crisis and catastrophe shape human and non-human actors and their interconnections? And, how does the apocalypse as an idea help us to address escalating global as well as local challenges in ways that may articulate the promise of more just political futures and fuller relationships with each other and the world?

Apocalyptica makes room for exploring these questions, utilizing the apocalypse as a point of uncovering and connection. Of course, etymologically the word apocalypse refers to a revelation; it marks an unveiling or disclosure, elucidating something that is hidden or less obvious. At the same time (and perhaps more commonly) we tend to think of apocalypses as catastrophic events that are shocking, crushing, and overthrow the status quo. We hope that this journal can be a venue for both of these nuances: presenting, discovering and illuminating novel approaches and ideas about the end of the world that in some sense mark a form of obliteration, a shattering of established worlds and ways of being and thinking.

This includes a commitment to our transdisciplinary mission—an effort to encourage the possibility of open-access dialogue between different fields as well as with and between diverse epistemologies and cosmologies, toppling the boundaries that keep us apart. The apocalypse as an academic venture requires the exploration of a variety of theoretical and methodological consideration as it invites a broad range of experiential and experimental case studies. We maintain that where apocalypses and their envisioned aftermaths produce a series of practical, intellectual, and creative opportunities that engage with the possibility of plural worlds, embodied futurities, or non-linear temporalities, they can reflect on the cultural or lived experiences, haunting sensibilities, and productive fantasies that employ the un/making of worlds. If, as Jacques Derrida puts it in his musings on the apocalyptic tone in philosophy, "disclosure not only opens to vision or contemplation, not only affords seeing but also affords hearing/ understanding," (1984, 5) then we need to explore each other's way of relating to the world (or refusing it) in order to fully appreciate and endorse the emancipatory potentials of apocalyptic thinking and writing.

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The cultural politics of the apocalypse recognize that the end of the world and the impact of apocalyptic thinking reproduce our experiences and our reactions to radical, catastrophic change in the public debate. What we are asking then is, in Donna Haraway's (2016) words, to "stay with the trouble," and to sit with the revelatory politics of the apocalypse. We suggest that the apocalypse as an experience and narrative illuminates historic events and contemporary discourses, often questioning the world as a socio-political phenomenon or infinite horizon of human and non-human relationships and thereby plays with perspectives on what past, present, and future mean or can mean. For example, colonial experiences can be viewed as apocalyptic injuries or a catastrophic loss of cosmology; upending futurity. At the same time, we find in the works of Frantz Fanon, James Baldwin or W.E.B. Du Bois a yearning for apocalypse, a deep wish for an end of the world as the only path towards decolonization and racial justice (Fanon 1952, Baldwin 1963, Du Bois 1920). In a similar vein, Joana Zylinska insists on the "feminist counter-apocalypse" which opposes "the masculinist and technicist solutions" relieving Western elites from a fear about the end of *their* world (2018, 3). While Fanon, Baldwin and Du Bois imagine a radical ending to ontological racism and human subjugation, Zylinska advocates a shared condition of precarity in the post-industrial (read: post-apocalyptic) world. In each case, apocalypse reveals the uneven dis-

tribution of suffering, trauma, and extinction; and presents itself as highly politicized catalysts by which a new politics might emerge, precisely when and where the end is severed from the technocratic ecology of fear and the managerial fixes that promise to secure Western futures. The end as a beginning, in other words, allows us to consider the possibility that we are not (just) living in the present, that the world is not inevitable, that the future might have already passed, and that the past can be changed.

Effectively the apocalypse asks for trouble. It demands that we trouble temporalities, narratives and long held understandings of the present (and how they came to be) in an effort to rethink our outlooks. As Franklin Ginn puts it, "the political charge of the apocalypse is that it destroys the future," (2015, 357) a concern that is otherwise most often rehearsed in relation to what Paul Crutzen has popularized as the Anthropocene and which marks a key anxiety of end time moods today. Of course, from the point of view of apocalyptic actualities the Anthropocene remains inadequate to fully describe the current moment. In fact, more often than not, it proliferates, as Kathryn Yusoff has pointed out, "a sudden concern with the exposures of environmental harm to white liberal communities" and "it does so in the wake of histories in which these harms have been knowingly exported to black and brown communities under the rubric of civilization, progress, modernization and capitalism" (2018, xiii). In other words, the Anthropocene erases the fact that apocalypses have been part and parcel of creating the very world whose end is now repeatedly lamented; a world which, it seems, "is just now noticing the extinction it has chosen to continually overlook in the making of modernity and freedom" (Yusoff 2018, xiii). In this sense, the Anthropocene as a crisis-laden present is itself a postapocalyptic scenario that requires us to problematize and reinvent established narratives, imaginaries, and mythologies.

The means by which we articulate the destruction of our world(s) matter. The end of the world is increasingly featured in fiction films, TV series, music, art, video games, comics, literature, theatre and photography. We are particularly interested in how these depictions of apocalypse articulate the cultural politics of past and present while imagining devastating or liberatory futures. However, as Ginn further elaborates, "fantasies of apocalypse are both a product and a producer of the Anthropocene" (2015, 351). As such popular culture, literature and art can work as regressive spectacles of future ruin, erasing the uneven distribution of environmental damage and human suffering, or they can propose "a form of social dreaming," (Gergan, Smith and Vasudevan 2020, 94) utilizing apocalypse as transgressive tool of the imagination. Of course, Christopher Palmer explains that "[a]ll catastrophes in apocalyptic fiction are fictional, (...) and

figure as challenges to the author's imaginative powers" (2021, 262). However, he also suggests that "[t]he challenge with reimagining apocalypse is often taken up, and then a great deal is revealed about views of society and the individual, views or what in society, or indeed in civilisation, might survive, and what might mutate, and what might disappear, under extreme stress (2021, 21)." Apocalyptic imaginaries, in other words, provide a blueprint of the particular anxieties, impulses and creativities that colour the political possibilities of specific contexts.

Crucially, not all apocalypses are epic, spectacular, or cinematic. Apocalypses differ in scale and pace. Timothy Morton (2013) uses the notion of the hyperobject to describe phenomena that are "so huge and so lasting, compared with humans that they obviously seem vivid and slightly unreal" (129). Hyperobjects such as global warming or nuclear radiation exceed human conceptions of space time distribution and, in Morton's view, are "directly responsible for (...) the end of the world" (2). At the same time, hyperobjects "haunt social and psychic space with an always already," (29) firmly tethering the end to the personal and the "figments of human imagination" (2). Thinking the apocalypse alongside Morton then requires layered considerations of the representational possibilities of 'the end' and compels us to reflect on what Rob Nixon (2013) calls a "delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (2). Alongside Nixon we acknowledge that "politically and emotionally, different kinds of disasters possess unequal heft. Falling bodies, burning towers, exploding heads, avalanches, volcanoes, and tsunamis have a visceral, eye catching and page turning power that tales of slow violence, unfolding over years, decades, even centuries cannot match" (2). The question is then: how do we convert different scales of apocalypses into images, narratives, architecture, landscapes and other forms of artistic and aesthetic endeavours? How do we account for disasters "that are slow moving and long in the making" (Nixon 2013, 2) and those that are too vast or too intimate to warrant straight forward dramatizations? Exploring stories that stimulate a desire for political intervention and radical change, apocalypse as cultural imagination moves beyond the notion of fiction as something that is 'unreal', but reminds us that our realities are structured, maintained (and sometimes upended) precisely by the individual and collective fantasies that underwrite end time scenarios in the first place and which in turn have 'real' material effects.

All too often debates about consequences and solutions to contemporary and impending catastrophe reflect a semi-religious belief in the techno-managerial fixes promised by the entrepreneurial, digital revolution. In April 2022 Elon Musk told us that "as long as we push hard and are

not complacent, the future is going to be great." "Don't worry about it," he said cheerfully, sending waves of relief through his legions of followers (Musk and Anderson 2022). Yet, in drawing attention to the convolution between apocalypse and technology we see a more urgent opportunity to seriously reflect on the technocratic problems inhibiting collective efforts to remake the world, not least because destructive hierarchies and power relations are ostensibly replicated in industrial and digital spheres, subverting technology's many promises for a bigger, better, brighter future. Instead, we see increasing pressure put on our relationships with the very fabric of a fact-based reality. As Cathy O'Neil (2016) details in *Weapons of Math Destruction*, data economies are driven by human prejudices, biases, and agendas hidden from public view while "many poisonous assumptions are camouflaged by math and go largely untested and unquestioned" (25–26). Similarly, Safiya Noble (2018) cautions that marginalized people are exponentially harmed by commercialized search engines and that "algorithms of oppression" mark yet another set of violent tools that project and accelerate the unfolding crises. Her findings unnervingly resonate with Shoshana Zuboff's (2019) warning about a surveillance capitalism gone "rogue" to describe the harvesting of big data as a "force driven by novel economic imperatives that disregard social norms and nullify the elemental rights associated with individual autonomy that are essential to the very possibility of a democratic society" (6) with the explicit aim "to automate us" (4). Collectively these observations invoke the spectre of an emerging authoritarian techno-imperialism that recalls the logic of prior apocalypse(s), urging us to carefully examine a depoliticized ecology of Western progress and technophilia. They also invoke a crucial trope of disaster culture by proposing an apocalyptic zombification of society and governance.

Of course, the zombie is a central figure of post-human end times scenarios and no introduction to the apocalypse would be quite complete without mentioning these munchy, scrambling, half-dead ghouls. While zombies can be traced back to West African and Caribbean Vodou traditions, invoking the necropolitical structure of colonialism's undead slave politics, in its pop-cultural reincarnation the zombie often appears as a post-racial crisis figure against which a group of usually white protagonists can face off extinction, often by ignoring the racialized apocalypses that have already been carried out on the very same planes. More productively, Mel Chen (2015) describes the zombie as a "complexly racialized, eternally laboring figure" (25) that maps posthuman biopolitics on anything from economic zombification to rapidly communicable viral pandemics to fears about hordes of migrants bent on crashing the gates of Eurocentric pat-

rimonies, collapsing "borders of nation, geography, natural barriers, class, gender, age, race, ability, and health" (26). Add in the notion of terrorist assemblages swallowing up the world, and those undead politics unwittingly establish the various coordinates of contemporary apocalypse.

Crucially, Chen is interested in the articulation of disability, debility and debt invoked by the zombie, paying attention to the zombie's "queer reproduction" and "strange temporality" (2015, 25–26). Her account thereby also works as yet another reminder that thinking with the apocalypse initiates intersectional analyses of violence and politicized debates that reconsider the role of human/inhuman imaginaries through the projection of a posthuman world and the transformative capacities of Lee Edelman's (2004) "no future." In fact, Jack Halberstam points out that "every zombie represents a critique of the human" (2020, 166) invoking a central predicament of ending the world and apocalypse's most contentious claim: The zombie imagines the end of the human as such — but, like the apocalypse as a scenario against which the zombie emerges, this annihilation of the human bespeaks the abolishment of a category that depends on "white racial fantasies of longevity (even in the face of diminished environmental capacity), technologically enhanced futurity, and a maximized relation to survival" (Halberstam 2020, 166). The Apocalypse, hence, also emerges as a form of posthuman world-making; a poignant rejection of the human that can be read as afro-pessimistic refusal of the gendered, racialized and ableist structures that have brought about our current crises.

Activists have taken up the challenges of the apocalyptic world in inspiring ways, debating, deconstructing, reimagining, organizing and acting on the vanishing of worlds and the inauguration of new ones. Black Lives Matter, Indigenous Lives Matter, the protest on the Standing Rock Sioux reservation, the Zapatistas, but also Fridays for Future alongside Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion have changed the coordinates of what the end could (and should) mean. Engaging in a broad range of justice-based world-making practices, activists from around the globe have long understood that a world seeped in racism, heteropatriarchy, imperialism, poverty, inequality, settler colonial violence and environmental destruction requires radical grassroot upheaval. As Angela Davis puts it, "in order to make real, lasting change, we have to do the work of building movements" (2021). Crucially, the apocalypse as political composite requires dialogue about how different injustices fold into each other in order to generate a vigorous interrogation of the ways in which their associated struggles might fall trap to reproducing well established power dynamics. As Davis further explains, "we cannot retain whiteness and maleness as measures for liberatory futures, even when the presence of such mea-

sures is deeply hidden beneath such seductive universalisms as freedom, equality and fraternity" (Davis 2021b, xvii). Instead, apocalyptic activism requires a holistic approach producing much needed alliances between anti-racist, anti-sexist, and environmental struggles (Ferdinand 2021) and acknowledges that the colonial condition of upending worlds cannot be disentangled from the production of technology, climate disaster, nuclear threat, border militarization, petro-capitalism, etc. It is important to consider what apocalypse can do for the people whose worlds have ended and whose relationships with the world have already been foreclosed in the most violent ways. Admitting these interconnections reimagines the apocalypse as a common project: a sight for struggle, resistance, and hope.

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Apocalyptica explores the many sides of apocalyptic thinking in order to investigate an archive of the apocalyptic imaginary and to explore experiences of apocalypse and post-apocalypse from a broad range of fields. We understand the apocalypse "as a theme, a concern, a fascination, an explicit reference and the horizon … of a work or a task," to borrow Derrida's infamous tribute to the end of the world (1984, 30). But we also see an opening, a rupture, a fantasy with consequences, a call for action, an aesthetic, a form, a narrative, a chance! In other words, we want to highlight the apocalypse as a productive intellectual confrontation in order to grapple with the cultural politics of disaster, catastrophe, and the (up) ending of worlds. With this first issue we hope to set the tone for a far-reaching encounter with apocalypse and its varied possibilities.

Prefacing the first issue, CAPAS director Robert Folger (with a nod to Frederic Jameson) proposes an archaeology of apocalypse which positions 'the end' (and *Apocalyptica*) in its dialectical orientation toward both prophecy and *Nachträglichkeit*. Apocalyptic ideas then serve as the horizon for experiencing the present, suggesting an exploration of the apocalyptic impulse in daily life. The aim here is to overcome outdated and vague notions of apocalypse as aesthetic escapism (as fiction without consequence). Instead, critical investigations of the apocalypse hinge on the question of its reality: a philosophical endeavour which Folger initiates by assembling eleven theses or reflections that attend to the theorization of apocalypse as a complex and politically relevant figure of thought.

We are proud of the works we were able to select and impressed with the variety of engagement with the end of the world they showcase. These articles, at the beginning of the end, fittingly explore the apocalypse through different modes of temporalities and with reference to a variety

of psycho-social projections. The approaches differ in their understanding of apocalypse and its potentials for unmaking and remaking the world, but they are notably united in proposing the end as a resourceful cultural fuse, capable of igniting individual and collective imaginaries that propose the apocalypse as an important means of cultural politics. Each article in this issue provides a distinct path into thinking and writing with the apocalypse; however, vitally each author, in one way or another, asks to remap, rethink, or rewrite our world in the face of disaster, real and imagined. While these discussions mark the beginning or spark (rather than a full reflection) of what we envision the apocalyptic word can achieve, we hope they inspire a first reckoning (pun intended) with what the end can mean.

We are honoured to inaugurate this first issue with a contribution from one of the distinguished voices on the apocalyptic challenges today: the prolific philosopher and cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek. His 2010 book *Living in the End Times* examined the end of the world through the motif of the "four riders of the apocalypse" (one of whom heads the cover of this issue) in order to explore the major repercussions of capitalism's terminal crisis. Žižek cautions that "the global capitalist premise is approaching an apocalyptic zero point. It's 'four riders of the apocalypse' are comprised by the ecological crisis, the consequences of the biogenetic revolution, imbalances within the system itself and the explosive growth of social divisions and exclusions" (2010, x). He argues that our collective responses grieve the end through mechanisms of ideological denial, outbursts of anger, and attempts at bargaining before withdrawing to depression. However, Žižek also sees a chance for new beginnings and insists on the apocalypse's revelatory capacities. To him catastrophe entails a hidden truth; it "reveals something we ignore in our normal existence" and conversely that when confronting truth (or thinking we do) our world has to be shattered (2020a, 745). More recently, Žižek has elaborated these ideas, thinking more carefully about the apocalypse invoked by the prospects of digital control, a realization of Ray Kurzweil's "Singularity," or, as he calls it, "the apocalypse of a wired brain" (2020a) and the various end time scenarios galvanised by the COVID-19 pandemic (2020b). Žižek maintains that "the lines that separate us from barbarism are drawn more and more clearly" (2020b) and that it is only through a fatal threat that we can imagine new beginnings or antidotes to an impending posthuman capitalism. In fact, to him the challenge of apocalypse lies precisely in the truthful annihilation of a preceding order, in the resistance of the human spirit, and the possibility of global solidarity: "Communism or barbarism," he writes, "as simple as that!" (2020b, 108).

Žižek's work speaks to our project not simply because it remains committed to the revelatory potentials of the apocalypse but also because he audaciously affirms apocalyptic analysis as a drive towards "radical social change" (2020b) even when the promises of unconditional justice cannot be achieved. This kind of anti-hope is central to apocalyptic thinking, precisely because the apocalypse marks an uncanny encounter with the real. The always already of the apocalypse, its uncanny temporality, or very possibility, tears a hole into the social and material realities to which we subscribe as normality. At the same time, the promise of unmitigated disclosure or truth necessarily remains unfulfilled. Apocalypse as a spectral entity, a haunting from the future-past, appears as an all-powerful transposition, which despite having always already failed, effects an emancipatory re-orientation of the present; a poignant change in how we face it. The apocalypse re-assembles conceptions of the world precisely where it presupposes a multiperspectival interplay between the attritional violence of operational disasters (e.g. colonialism, environmental catastrophe, racism, sexism, etc.) and the eruptive upheaval of more pointed world-shattering events (e.g. Columbus sets foot on the Americas, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, 9/11, the fall of the Berlin Wall, etc.). The apocalyptic encounter, unveils these interconnections, unfolding them simultaneously and triggering us to undo the worlds of past, present, and future without fully resolving the violence implied.

Žižek's contribution to this issue is a re-print of the inaugural lecture he generously gave at the opening ceremony of CAPAS in October 2021. In his introduction, Žižek identifies a "weird moment" coalescing multiple apocalypses, all competing for the "quilting point" totalizing all others. Referring to the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination sceptics, the prospect of nuclear annihilation, the total digitization of our lives, the excessive production of waste, ecological catastrophe, the breakdown of sexuality, the death of philosophy, madness and the illusion of free will, Žižek sketches the current moment as a multi-layered challenge for humanity. Asking us to consider "what kind of apocalypse is announced in the plurality of catastrophes that today poses a threat to us all?," Žižek cautions us not to perceive the end of the world as just another aspect of normality, as something that is coming at us in the near or far future. Instead, he reminds us that the catastrophe has already happened and that our normality is by definition "post-apocalyptic." To Žižek this state of the aftermath enables the interrogation of apocalyptic repetitions; a retrospective disclosure. Truth is bestowed afterwards, "from catastrophe to apocalypse and then back to catastrophe." Žižek's remarks, in other words,

set the scene for an ongoing engagement with the end as a marker of beginnings; in this first issue and beyond.

Initiating our debate about the end of the world, Maral Attar-Zadeh examines the apocalyptic imaginary through the temporality of the 'already/not yet' as an organizing principle of the 'grammar of the Anthropocene.' In Attar-Zadeh's view much of contemporary debates about the future are caught up in this irreversible temporal positioning impeding action and change. Countering this impasse, she advocates for a different kind of modality reworking our orientation towards the future. Taking us back to the past, Amelia Urry interrogates the apocalyptic fiction of Camille Flammarion in order to examine the end of the world as a project of speculative science. Tracing the astronomer's public role in defending scientific authority and his impact on science communication, Urry's imaginative discussion unfolds Flammarion's apocalypse across technologies of photography and other projections in the 19th century. Neal Curtis invokes the revelatory aspects of contemporary apocalypse, examining the role of the red pill metaphor for the Alt-Right movement. Drawing on the works of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Lacan, Curtis exposes conspiracy, hate, and violence as aggressive responses to perceived precarity and annihilation. He maintains that the red pill apocalypse disappoints a sense of status in the world and that this investment in the self is precisely what makes it so dangerous. Staying with conservative America and using a combination of participant observation, interviews, and discourse analysis, Tristan Sturm contours the apocalyptic geopolitics of Jews for Jesus, an US American Christian Zionist Movement in Los Angeles. Sturm examines the varying views and commitments to prophetic scenarios within the movement that have reinvigorated apocalyptic meaning in US American and Middle Eastern events, unfolding a geopolitics of (premillennial) religion. Expanding the discussion through a pop culture lens, Annika Elstermann's article theorises cycles of apocalypse through a reading of the TV series *Battlestar Gallactica*. Drawing on psychoanalysis and Norse mythology, Elstermann is interested in repetition as a motif of apocalyptic death and rebirth that allows us to consider a sense of shared humanity and much needed change of the status quo. Finally, Ruby Nieman's contribution explores the posthuman and other-than-human figurations made available after the 'green' apocalypse through an engagement with Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogies. Nieman's article interrogates the postapocalyptic semiotics of these works of Anthropocene literature in order to provide insight into potential survivals of the end through a decoupling of language and human agency.

We hope that these contributions will initiate a rich and thorough engagement with the end of the world in order to shine a light on the apocalypse as a multifaceted intellectual project, unfolding the end as a means for imaging new ways of seeing and being in a conflict-ridden world. Indeed, we hope that the works we present here can mark a re-orientation towards (or away from) this world and that this venue can help us to make sense in and of the end times we find ourselves in. Our aim is to champion the potential of critical thinking with and cultural analysis of the apocalypse as an imaginative and (potentially) transformative force in a doomed world. The apocalyptic word, then, is not an occasion for depoliticised prophecy or simply a means to give up. Instead, our project requires us to confront our many catastrophes head on and with open eyes, so that we can create encounters of thinking and writing that flourish in the face of the end. Finally, the apocalyptic word is a call for creativity, community, and change. It marks the ultimate interpolation for beginnings: a request to begin, in Aimé Césaire's words, "the only thing worth beginning: the end of the world, of course" (1983, 55).

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Robert Folger

Archaeologies of Apocalypse: A Preface

The second part of Fredric Jameson's (2005) *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, titled 'As Far as Thought can Reach', and consisting of twelve essays, attests to his sustained critical interest in Science Fiction over several decades. The first part 'The Desire Called Utopia' is a comprehensive reflection on the importance of utopia for Jameson's critical project and its relation to science fiction. As Andrew Milner observes, for Jameson, "all art, indeed all class-consciousness, can be understood as at once both ideological and utopian" (2009, 102). Jameson posits a dialectical relation between science fiction and utopia: "the historical novel of the future (which is to say of our own present) will necessarily be science-fictional inasmuch as it will have to include questions about the fate of our social system, which has become a second nature" (2013, 298). Our future is essentially related to our present imaginations of and desires for the future which are rooted in the social and economic contradictions of our present: "even our wildest imaginings are all collages of experience, constructs made up of bits and pieces of the here and now" (Jameson 2005, xiii). Since science fiction is an extrapolation of our own material culture, and its epistemologies, both cultural and scientific, it makes archaeologies of the future possible, not as speculation but as an unearthing or unveiling of the future in present imaginations, preoccupations, and hopes.

In this sense, "utopias are non-fictional, even though they are non-existent. Utopias in fact come to us as barely audible messages from a future that may never come into being" (Jameson 2004, 54). The reader of Science Fiction accepts that the world evoked[1] corresponds to the laws that underpin the scientific world-view and natural laws of his time and accepts them as a possible future reality. This perceived reality of utopian

1 Jameson reproduces, in this respect, Darko Suvin's (1979) argument.

science-fiction distinguishes them categorically from the genre of fantasy. Yet possible futures are not necessarily utopian. On the contrary, in the current cultural climate and socio-economic conditions dystopias, future worlds worse than the present one, and anti-utopias prevail. Jameson does not outright reject dystopias because he identifies a kind of "critical dystopia" which "is a negative cousin of the Utopia proper" (2005, 198) and has a critical function to warn about the possible fatal consequences of current trends and developments. Anti-utopias, Jameson claims, deny the possibility of a better future, reject any utopian impulse as dangerous, and thus cement the status quo. In the light of the lack of a current program of action, he proposes an "anti-anti-Utopianism" whose very "distance [...] from its social context [...] allows it to function as a critique and indictment" (2005, xv–xvi) of the political reality of the present.

Utopia, dystopia, and anti-utopia foreground Jameson's own position of anti-anti-utopianism. They are the three key notions for his archaeologies of the futures. Toward the end of the first part, 'The Desire Called Utopia', in conjunction with the telling title of the chapter 'Journey into Fear', he unexpectedly amplifies his taxonomy. While he welcomes "the monitory fears and passions that drive the critical dystopia," (2005, 199) he also sees another "passion" to denounce an undesirable future:

> In that case, a fourth term or generic category would seem desirable. If it is so, as someone has observed, that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, we probably need another term to characterize the increasingly popular visions of total destruction and of the extinction of life on Earth which seem more plausible than the Utopian vision of the new Jerusalem but also rather different from the various catastrophes (including the old ban-the-bomb anxieties of the 1950s) prefigured in the critical dystopias (2005, 199).

For Jameson, apocalypse is a narrative genre distinct from anti-utopia because it is devoid of "any commitment to disabuse its readership of the political illusions" (2005, 199) the anti-utopians seek to combat. While this analysis seems to warrant an in-detail theorizing and analysis of apocalyptic thought and narrative, Jameson brings back apocalypse into the fold of an archaic and outdated utopianism.

> Yet this new term oddly enough brings us around to our starting point again, inasmuch as the original Apocalypse includes both catastrophe and fulfillment, the end of the world and the inauguration of the reign of Christ on earth, Utopia and the extinction of the human race all at

> once. Yet if the Apocalypse is neither dialectical (in the sense of including its Utopian 'opposite') nor some mere psychological projection, to be deciphered in historical or ideological terms, then it is probably to be grasped as metaphysical or religious, in which case its secret Utopian vocation consists in assembling a new community of readers and believers around itself (2005, 199).

I have reproduced Jameson's reflections on the apocalypse in full because they are as frustrating as they are helpful. Jameson's view is at odds with the increasing proliferation of apocalyptic imaginaries, narrations, and, scientific projections. It can be argued that apocalypse is becoming, or already is, the horizon for utopia, dystopia, and anti-utopian thought, as that which not only threatens to become but actually happens. More importantly Jameson's categories overlook postapocalyptic narratives and imaginations. In his view the category of dystopian postapocalypse, which is, as I argue, not only an empty catch-word but a *real* desire and fear that an archaeology of the future must unravel, is a tautology that can be simply replaced by dystopia.

Jameson's oversight of apocalypse is predicated upon his definition of apocalypse as "extinction of the human race all at once" (199). This definition is prevalent in common use, although with significant inconsistencies, as the popular notion of the postapocalypse attests. It is limited and misleading. Jameson himself refers to the "original Apocalypse," meaning the *Book of Revelations*, which tells us about the end of this world and the "reign of Christ on earth" (199). In a synecdochical sense, apocalypse refers also to the actual destruction of everything in this world, which is the major plot of John's *Book of Revelations*. This naturally implies that the apocalypse is the end not of *the* World, but of *one* world, and the beginning of *a* new world, which is the rationale of its "secret Utopian vocation." The Christian apocalypse is possibly the most hyperbolic expression of utopia but it does not mean 'the extinction of the human race all at once'. The reign of Christ on earth is nothing less than a utopian postapocalypse. If the apocalypse, the end of one world, does not mean total destruction, apocalypse may not only happen but may have actually already happened, giving sense to the notion of postapocalypse, and providing another category for archaeologies of the future.

A further inconsistency in Jameson's view on apocalypse is that it is not dialectical because it is at odds with his acknowledgement that it is "both catastrophe and fulfillment" (199). Scholarship has often associated apocalyptic thinking with a linear conception of time, because everything and every event is a kind of vector pointing toward the end. However,

we should not forget that the original Christian idea of the apocalypse cannot be separated from typological thinking (Auerbach [1938] called it figural thinking), that is, the idea that the future is a sort of fulfillment and surpassing of the past, a doubling or folding of type (*týpos* Greek for blow, hitting, stamp, from which derives Latin *typus* for model, figure, effigy) and antitype (the corresponding or opposing type).[2] "[E]schatology is," as Frank Kermode observes, "stretched out over the whole of History, the End is present at every moment," (Kermode 2000, 26). However, there is a definite (narrative) closure when origins and last things; *typos* and *anti-typos*, appear together and cancel each other. This coinciding of past and present also affects the apocalyptic revelation as narration because, in a *mise en abyme*, this narration tells us about the revelation of a truth about humankind and its utopian destiny, and of each individual, in a final act of justice. At the end of the story of History begins another story which is supposed to end History.[3] This folding back at the moment of apocalypse of the present to the foundational moment is not only a narrative effect, but also calls forth the foundational contradictions (cast in Biblical terms as original sin). In this sense, apocalypse is eminently dialectic, because it is does not necessarily equal utter destruction but can also produce an *Aufhebung* of the opposites in a new world. This dialectic nature of apocalypse also accounts for the importance of revelation in its double meaning as the prophecy of future events, and as the unveiling of a truth which is necessarily *nachträglich* (belated, supplementary).

From Jameson's materialist position this 'metaphysical or religious' idea of apocalypse is of no relevance for the archaeologies of the future in our present. However, the archaeologies he proposes are not only relevant for future futures but also for past futures, that is, for historical formations when the 'original apocalypse' was science fiction of sorts (realities according to prevalent epistemologies and ontologies). Even in the 21st Century metaphysical notions of apocalypse maybe residual, in the sense given to the term by Raymond Williams,[4] in the 'Western World' this does not mean that it is not, to a certain degree, effectual, not to forget the possibility of their prevalence in other cultures in past and present. As Jameson says: the "wildest imaginings" of apocalypse, too, can be part and parcel of experiences of the "here and now" (2005, xiii).

If we take into account that apocalypse does not necessarily mark an eschatological endpoint, but may also mean the doom of one world and the beginning of another, and that apocalyptic thinking and storytelling are in a dialectic relation with past futures and future futures, Jameson's cursory remarks on the notion of apocalypse can be read as a plea for archaeologies of apocalypse that overcome antiquarianism (apocalypse as

2 The linguist Boris Uspenskij speaks of a "cosmological" model of temporal perception which entails "the relation of events to a certain primeval state, a first time, which never disappears in the sense that its effects continue to be realized throughout the temporal process. Events which occur in this primeval time form a text which is constantly repeated (reproduced) in the events that follow" (Uspenskij 2017, 231).

3 In Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's 1805 *Le Dernier homme* (*The Last Man*), which can be seen as the prototype of the genre of the Last Man and the beginning of modern, secularized apocalypticism, the Biblical Adam appears as an agent of apocalypse in the moment of destruction, and the last couple Syderie and Omégare are clearly the anti-types of the Edenic couple which they "surpass" in their decision not to procreate; see Folger (in press).

4 Williams (1977, 121–128) proposes the concepts of 'residual', 'dominant', and 'emerging' as indications for contemporaneity and the imbrication of ideas, stages, and formations in history.

an outdated notion) and aesthetic escapism (apocalypse as fiction without consequences) by restoring, or uncovering, their political relevance. *Apocalyptica* strives to contribute to this endeavor.

Although Jameson does not do justice to the notions of apocalypse and postapocalypse in his *Archaeologies of the Future,* he gives important clues on how to do archaeological work because of the close relation of apocalypse to the other categories of futures he analyzes: dystopia, anti-utopia, and utopia. A cursory overview of popular culture, art, and literature as well as the public debates, and politics, shows that the notion of apocalypse and postapocalypse have a heyday: actual or impending cataclysms, catastrophes, and crises are labeled as apocalyptic and their aftermath as postapocalyptic. Upon closer scrutiny this choice of word appears to be often merely metaphorical.

In his analysis of utopia, Jameson is also interested in its "historical conditions of possibility [...] for it is certainly of the greatest interest for us today to understand why Utopias have flourished in one period and dried up in another" (2005, xiv). A similar case can be made for apocalyptic fantasies. From a viewpoint anchored in Western academia and its undeniable roots in ontologies and epistemologies indebted to Judeo-Christian thought, apocalypticism, that is, the idea, that the world is going to end, seems to be a universal notion. It is part of the mission of *Apocalyptica* to caution against accepting the universal and transcultural validity of apocalyptic thinking (for instance in belief systems in which cyclic notions of time and extremely long intervals of world-destruction and renewal depotentialize the apocalyptic ideas as a horizon for experiencing the present, or, in case of belief, in reincarnation which precludes the idea of the end of the world properly speaking). However, historical records show that apocalyptic thinking has been a factor in many cultures in human history, either as a sort of background noise or in the form of apocalyptic or millenarist flares or revolutionary movements.

How does Jameson explain the flourishing of utopia and the drying up in different historical conditions, and what are these conditions? He draws on Ernst Bloch who "posits a Utopian impulse governing everything future-oriented in life and culture" (Jameson 2005, 2). He distinguishes Bloch's utopian impulse from "deliberate and fully self-conscious Utopian programs" (2005, 3). Jameson organizes the utopian impulse "into three distinct levels of Utopian content: the body, time and collectivity" (Jameson 2005, 4). While "the properly Utopian program or realization will involve a commitment to closure (and thereby to totality)" (2005, 5), this closure

> is virtually, by definition, lacking in the multiple forms invested by Bloch's Utopian impulse. Here we have rather to do with an allegorical process in which various Utopian figures seep into the daily life of things and people (2005, 5).

If we distinguish, in relation to apocalypse and postapocalypse, between the post(apocalyptic) impulse, which "seeps into the daily life," and closed systems, we possibly have to reevaluate the metaphorical use of the terms, because they may be apocalyptic "figures" that either coalesce, under certain historical conditions, into closed systems, or have the quality of a metonymy, because they are figures of the totality, as for instance, Hiroshima, Chernobyl, and Fukuyama for the nuclear apocalypse.[5] Archaeologies of apocalypse and postapocalypse will have to uncover not only full-blown closed systems (as texts, social movements, belief systems etc.) but also study the apocalyptic "figures" in daily life. Given the observed and perceived "flourishing" of apocalyptic impulses in daily life, the analysis of the formation of proper apocalypticism will be a major concern for cultural studies, including this journal.

I propose to develop further lines of investigation of apocalypse and postapocalypse by tracing the apocalyptic impulses and their re-organization into closed system by means of an archaeology of current studies on apocalypse because they are not only an effort to come to terms with the phenomenon of apocalypticism, but also an indication of the formation of closed systems in our present. The following reflections on preliminary archaeologies of apocalypse is, by no means, a consistent theory of apocalypse, but an attempt to map some possible lines for research in apocalypticism and postapocalypticism.

I take as my starting point a recent book by Monika Kaup, *New Ecological Realisms: Post-apocalyptic Fiction and Contemporary Theory* published by Edinburgh University Press in 2021. Kaup relates the proliferation of postapocalyptic fiction in the last decades with current trends in philosophy that attest to a renewed interest in the question of being or existence, which can be labeled as "new realisms." The debate about realism was rekindled by Maurizio Ferraris's 2012 *Manifesto of New Realism*. In the realm of philosophy Quentin Meillassoux, Graham Harman and Markus Gabriel are among the best-known representatives of this line of thought. Kaup's label "ecological realism," also considers proponents of the so-called ontological turn, a current originating in anthropology, which advocates not only a plurality of epistemologies (different modes of access to one reality) but a plurality of ontologically real worlds. With the word 'ecological' she expresses the fact that these new ontologies

5 I owe this observation to Emilián Ortega y Freili.

"reconnect the human cultural world with the natural environment" (2021, 47) by postulating an "embeddedness" (2021, 47) of human reality in natural contexts. Kaup's starting point is the recovery of the real, and of realism after poststructuralism which she equates with radical constructivism and postmodernism.

> While structuralism and poststructuralism rightly delegitimised naive concepts of the real, of individualism and anthropocentric humanism, they have led to some disabling generalisations that turn large areas of reality (art, religion, everyday practice, lived experience, embodied understanding, embedded action, hybrid, ecological networks of humans and non-humans) into marionettes of abstract structures by deploying monolithic causality (2021, 2).

Rejecting old realism, scienticism and positivism, Kaup draws on "a new realism of complex and embedded wholes, actor-networks, and ecologies, rather than a realism of isolated parts and things" (2021, 4–5). She discusses four new realisms, Bruno Latour's actor-network theory (ANT), Markus Gabriel's field of sense ontology, Francisco Varela and Humbert Maturana's theories of autopoesis and enactivism, and Jean-Luc Marion's take on phenomenology. Each of these theories provides Kaup with a frame to interpret one of four contemporary post-apocalyptic novels, she claims, are supplementing the theoretical and philosophical insights:

> As a crisis narrative about the end of an entire world, apocalyptic thinking is ontological. What is more, like the new realist theories selected here, it embeds a contextual or systems vision of the real. Apocalypse is a way that the (entire) world is. It is not about depicting individuals or isolated things, but about picturing contexts. Apocalypse is a field of sense (Markus Gabriel) in which individuals and things appear. While apocalyptic narrative is about getting ready for the coming end of the world, post-apocalyptic fiction is about crawling out of the rubble and remaking world and society from within the wasteland of ruins (2021, 5).

The provocative theses that 'apocalyptic thinking is ontological'; that 'Apocalypse is a way that the (entire) world is'; that 'Apocalypse is a field of sense,' and that 'post-apocalyptic fiction is about [...] remaking world' merit critical consideration as a diagnosis of the apocalyptic and postapocalyptic impulse that is being shaped into an apocalyptic system. In my preliminary archaeology of apocalypticism, I will focus on Markus Gabriel's theory of fields of sense, which is, as the quote above indicates, the foun-

dation for Kaup's argument, and Jean-Luc Marion, whose notion of saturated phenomena, makes it possible to frame the idea of the reality of the ending of worlds on different scales (global, of cultures and societies, and on the level of the individual).

Prior to this analysis we must reflect on the oddly apodictic statement that "apocalyptic thinking is ontological," and that it is the way the *entire* world is. It derives from Kaup's explanation, or rather story, of the origins of new realisms:

> To begin with, the ontological turn responds to the real-world events of climate change. Anthropogenic environmental changes are material transformations that cannot be explained away by reference to social, linguistic or ideological construction. [...] [C]onstructivism affords the rhetorical tools for climate change denial (2021, 21).

This statement implies, in my opinion, a misunderstanding of constructivist thought, at least in its "poststructuralist" manifestations, which is, in turn, a rather clumsy label for theories that should be clearly differentiated. Emphasizing the mediated nature of our access to a material reality does not equate denying it the status of reality per se. Her main argument, however, is intriguing: apocalyptic thinking is ontological because it thinks or envisions the end of the world as reality or as a real possibility. Kaup bestows certainty of these "real-world events" by reference to Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor's notion of a "contact perspective of embedded realism" (Kaup 2021, 29) which presupposes "an embodied agent, embedded in a society, and at grips with the world" (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015, 91). This supposedly natural access to the world, can be understood as a life-wordly experience, prior to critical reflection, which Alfred Schütz has described as the "paramount reality" ("Vorzugsrealität"; Schütz and Luckmann 2003, 69) of everyday life.[6]

From a phenomenological perspective the sociologists Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann propagated the notion of *Erlebnisstil* (style of experiencing) (Schütz and Luckmann 2003, 71). The life-world (*Lebenswelt*), the totality of the phenomenal reality, contains various "realms of reality with closed structures of sense" ("Realitätsbereiche geschlossener Sinnstruktur") (Schütz and Luckmann 2003, 54). These realms correspond to a specific style of cognition and experience" ("Erkenntnis- und Erlebensstil") (2003, 57). This style is characterized by "specific tension of the consciousness" ("spezifische Bewusstseinsspannung") (2003, 57), that is, a specific and pragmatic relation with the physical reality of objects. It is defined by a "preponderant form of spontaneity" ("vorherrschende Form

6 All translations are mine.

der Spontaneität") (2003, 57), that is, the interaction of the body with the physical world. Although each style of experience presupposes a particular *epoché* (2003, 57), the exclusion of everything that questions the realm of reality, there is, according to Schütz and Luckmann, a paramount reality of everyday life with its unquestioned givenness ("fraglos gegeben"; 2003, 69). Contact realism is the realism of this paramount reality.

It must be noted that Kaup's argument implies or rests on a *petitio principii*: apocalyptic thinking is about real things because the apocalypse is real, and, its reality cannot be doubted because it is "embedded in a society" or accepted as real. In this respect her study is not only a study about manifestations of apocalypticism, but a "seeping" of apocalyptic figure or impulses into daily life (Jameson 2005, 5), the paramount reality, where the reality of apocalypse becomes unquestionable, shaping a closed apocalyptic system.

Kaup's argument is indicative of the function of apocalypse. The reality of the end constitutes a post-Cartesian *fundamentum inconcussum*, and it works as an equivalent of the "reified generalities" rejected by Kaup because they "typically figure as the hidden ultimate reality in constructivist explanations" (2021, 18). After all, Jameson may be right that apocalyptic thinking is ultimately metaphysical, and its current flourishing corresponds to a yearning for certainty that pretends to be real without the mediation of ideology. It requires a leap of faith disguised as certain knowledge. Various apocalypticisms, starting with the Judeo-Christian tradition, have in common that they accept the reality of the end: one particular end. Accepting the reality of the end of the world or a world is an articulation of fear and preoccupation, and, the same time, paradoxically an antidote to fear and uncertainty.

Apocalyptic thinking can establish closed systems but these systems are not philosophical because of the irruption of time: they are always already narrative. In other words, apocalypse anchors the present, as Frank Kermode (2000) has argued in his seminal study from 1966, in relation to the end of the world. Moreover, this narration is related to the question of judgement or justice (or the lack thereof), giving apocalypticisms the typical moralizing bent: whose fault is the end of the world? Will the culprits be judged? And will they suffer for their crime? That is why Kaup attests an "intense moralism" to postapocalyptic fiction (2021, 76). Apocalyptic and postapocalyptic thinking and narration are imbued with a notion of poetic justice of sorts, because narration and justice are essential in making sense of the world: "Reality is [...] the sense we have of a world irreducible to human plot and human desire for order; justice is the human order we find or impose upon it" (Kermode 2000, 105). The

poetic justice of apocalyptic and postapocalyptic thought is an aspect that requires further exploration.

Kaup's central tenet that apocalyptic thinking is ontological draws essentially on Markus Gabriel's theory of fields of sense. Gabriel rejects "constructivism's" supposed rejection of undeniable ontological reality, "the assumption that 'we cannot discover any fact >in itself<' but have instead constructed all facts ourselves" (2015, 39). No less important is the fact that he refutes naturalism (old realism) because it only grants reality to observable material things. Against this view that there is only one real (empirical) world he holds that "*the* world does not exist" (2015, 78).

This catchphrase expresses the conviction that there are other ontological spheres made-up of, or constituted by non-material, constructed things. The term Gabriel uses for these spheres of reality is fields of sense, a set of rules, "the way in which an object appears." (2015, 68–69). "Things in themselves always appear only in fields of sense, and that means that they are already embedded in facts," states Gabriel (2015, 124). This is also why the scientific universe is not a totality, i.e. *the* World, because there are many things, artefacts of human activity, that cannot appear there. Gabriel seems to contradict himself by stating "The world is the field of sense in which all other fields of sense appear," (2015, 74) because this enveloping field is a form of rehabilitating *the* World. If we stick by this definition, the end of the world, can only mean the disappearance of all fields of sense, because things always appear to somebody. However, apocalyptic thinking always envisions an aftermath. If apocalypse is a field of sense that makes real the end of the world, it logically cannot mean the end of all fields of sense.

Hence, it is more instructive to follow the implicit corollary of Gabriel's catchphrase that *the* World does not exist. It also conveys the idea that there is more than one world, and that these worlds can, and will, end in the course of history. A world can be described as a field of sense; however, not every field of sense qualifies as a world, lest we engage in a pan-worldism and a pan-apocalypticism, which would explain nothing. According to Gabriel, "every field of sense is itself an object. From this it immediately follows that, for each field of sense, there is a field of sense in which it appears" (2015, 78–79). I propose that one condition for a field of sense, understood as a world, is that it can appear in the apocalyptic field of sense. Moreover, since a world is, as it were, the natural habitat of the human race or a community, I think that it must presuppose that a world has the status of a contact reality or the paramount reality; the pre-reflective reality of everyday activity and experience; which is another way of saying: the world as we know it.

If many worlds exist and existed, worlds' endings and apocalypses are real not only as a projection or a fantasy, but also as a historical reality; I will reflect in a moment on prospective and retrospective apocalyptic framing. The plurality of worlds also makes it possible to address the vexing question of the scale of apocalypse. Kaup's work is a perfect example for the wide-spread inconsistencies in studies of apocalypse regarding the reach of the term; Kaup oscillates between claiming, similar to Jameson, that apocalypse "envisions destruction at a planetary or cosmic scale," (2021, 52) and discussing more localized historic events (Hiroshima, Holocaust) as apocalyptic (2021, 54). If we understand worlds as fields of sense in which things appear according to the logic of a paramount reality, the cataclysmic destabilization of a culture (as it happened in 15th and 16th Americas, in the First and Second World War) or the destruction of a village in the Thirty-Years War can be apocalyptic; all these empirically observable events can be transformed into apocalyptic events, once they appear in the field of apocalypse, or if we follow Jameson, if they are shaped into a closed apocalyptic system.

This raises the question of "the way in which an object appears" (Gabriel 2015, 68–69) in the apocalyptic field and what the emergent properties of these objects are exactly. Kaup claims that "Apocalypse is the field that rearranges the appearance of things and ideas within it," (2021, 202) staging an "ontological transformation" (2015, 60); precisely because apocalypse rearranges what is real before reflection. Thus, the mode of appearance in the apocalyptic field is not essentially one of disappearance, destruction, or annihilation, but rather of transformation and rearrangement; with newly emergent properties.

The motor of this transformation is narrativity. Kaup speaks of a "world-endist emplotment," (2021, 59) which is another way of expressing Frank Kermode's seminal insight that narrations order events from the perspective of the ending to provide orientation in the now: "Men in the middest make considerable imaginative investments in coherent patterns which, by the provision of an end, make possible a satisfying consonance with the origins and with the middle" (2000, 17). In terms of Kermode, it can be argued that narration is per se apocalyptic. However, the apocalyptic narration properly speaking has emergent properties. In order to effect a *real* transformation, apocalyptic narration must be organized according to the principle of verisimilitude, as an extrapolation of the present to a future ("*If This Goes On"*, as the title of Robert A. Heinlein famous 1940 novella programmatically designates). The subject, or the human actor, must accept the narrated apocalypse as her or his future or really possible future. This is precisely why apocalyptic narratives are realist in their

literary mode, more specifically, that they require, as Jameson observes, "a Science-Fiction perspective of some kind." (2013, 298). Without this realism or verisimilitude, as is the case, for instance, in the genre of fantasy, apocalyptic things and ideas are neither transformed nor transformative; in these cases, the impulse and also the entire field of sense of apocalypse, appear in other fields of sense. Absorbed or defused apocalypticism is, of course, relevant to Apocalyptic and Postapocalyptic Studies, but should be differentiated from transformative (utopian) apocalypticism.

Apocalyptic narrative establishes a "world-endist" horizon of expectation (Koselleck 1989), leading to a reevaluation of present and past in relation to the future and to a reordering or transformation of things and ideas. A perfect example for this transformative power is the Anthropocene narrative. It tells us that humans have become a geological force with the power to destroy the planet. This process started hundreds of years ago, and was presumably observable in paramount reality, but only once it enters the field of sense of the apocalypse/Anthropocene the observable phenomena become related to the end of the world, creating new attitudes and a moralizing discourse.[7] Elements that appear in the world of science like a raise of temperature, a virus, an empirically observable conflict, are transformed, upon appearing in the field of apocalypse into figures of impending doom. This transformation changes the perceptions and attitudes towards said elements. Kaup holds that "by destroying and remaking the world, [...] [apocalyptic narrative] reveals the hidden order of the world," (2021, 21) and, it must be added, the constitutive reason for the destruction; the 'original sin'. However, rather than speaking of the discovery of something hidden, we should speak about the retrospective realization of an order.

The apocalyptic field has a teleological orientation toward the looming or promised end. However, as narrative it is also capable of ordering and transforming past events by retrospectively relating the historical events of the paramount reality to its apocalyptic end. This happens when historical catastrophic or cataclysmic events are retrospectively cast as apocalypse. This is another mode of the ontological transformation in a process of ordering, conveying sense to unbearable or contingent real, and henceforth *really* apocalyptic, events. The revelation of the hidden order that ultimately caused the doom is essential in this process of apocalyptization.

The world appears to somebody, and in order to end it must appear as ending. The end of the world must be accepted as the end of the world. This issue is related to the question of scale, which I have already briefly discussed. Is an individual or personal end of the world conceivable? The lifeworld is predicated upon intersubjectivity which means that apoca-

7 For a critical view of the depoliticizing effect of the ontologization of the Anthropocene see Erik Swyngedouw and Henrik Ernstson (2018).

lypse is a shared experience. However, the question can be reframed and reformulated if we take into account that the apocalypse is not an event that happens somewhere out there in Quentin Meillassoux's "great outdoors" (2008, 7), but a transformative process of the world that happens to the inhabitants of this world, to each single one of them; or not, as we will see.

Again, Kaup's study provides a starting point to the question of apocalypse's relation to the subject of human actors. Human actors are of course not the only ones conceivable, as, for instance Bruno Latour points out (Kaup 2021, 84–104) but a meaningful notion of apocalypse requires a notion of self; the historically and culturally variable relation between a first-person observer and consciousness and an environment, the world it opposes or into which it is embedded. Kaup considers "New Phenomenologies after Poststructuralism" (2021, 5), as she calls it in the title of her last chapter, to substantiate her thesis that "the field of sense related to subjective experience are accessed by the phenomenological method" (Kaup 2021, 254). Since phenomenology posits that reality is not concealed behind the appearance of objects, but rather that appearance *is* real, Kaup maintains that "phenomenology is ontology" (2021, 254).

Kaup specifically draws on Jean-Luc Marion (to a lesser degree on Alphonso Lingis), and his reconceptualization of the subject and subjectivity. A disclaimer is expedient: the subject is often associated with the Cartesian subject, which, as *res cogitans*, opposes the *res extensa*, the world of objects, a world of things that can be manipulated and dominated. The history of Western philosophy after Descartes can be described as a continued attempt to mend the breach between self and world, subject and object, reformulating both notions, the subject (from an epistemological point of view) and the object (the terrain of the ontologies) and their relation. Subjectivity is, in its broadest sense, a way of being in the world (separated from the environment or embodied and embedded), and a potentiality for action, as Peter Haidu (2004, 114) has called it.

Marion's 'new phenomenology' is one of the attempts to rethink subjectivity. Marion's key concept is givenness, which he defines as the result of a third phenomenological reduction, after Husserl's "transcendental reduction" and Heidegger's "existential reduction" (Marion 2002, 2–3). He calls it "the pure given" (2002, 2–3). According to Marion the phenomenon requires that there is something given which the subject receives: "Givenness and response are co-constitutive (together generating what Marion calls the 'gift')" (Kaup 2021, 256). The subject emerging from this process is not autonomous. It is first recipient then agent. In Marion's perspective the subject is a gifted subject, or simply the 'gifted'.

As Kaup points out, for the discussion and understanding of apocalypse, a particular class of phenomena is of great interest: unforeseeable, unbearable, overwhelming and without comparison, phenomena "in excess," as Marion says, which epitomize the "given par excellence" (2002, x). Marion calls them "saturated" phenomena. Among the saturated phenomena he singles out the revolutionary event:

> [W]hen the arising event is not limited to an instant, a place, or an empirical individual, but overflows these singularities and becomes epoch-making in time [...] covers a physical space such that no gaze encompasses it with one sweep [...] and encompasses a population such that none of those who belong to it can take upon themselves an absolute or even a privileged point of view, then it becomes a historical event (2002, 228).

Kaup is certainly right in asserting that "apocalypse is a prime instance of the event intended by Marion" (2021, 263). The phenomenology of apocalypse assumes that a saturated event, apocalypse, is given to the subject. It requires a response (event *and* response are constitutive of the phenomenon) which transforms the gifted; reordering her or his relation and embeddedness into the Given. The overwhelming, catastrophic, or cataclysmic event by no means "predetermines," as Kaup observes, "the response it is met with" (2021, 265). Kaup frames the question of response in terms of right and wrong choice, a distinction that is based, implicitly, on her preference for a re-alignment of the human/environment relation, which is, from a Jamesonian archaeological point of view, indicative for the formation of a post-apocalyptic system which organizes the desires and contradictions of the present.

More importantly, the notion of the apocalypse as a gift that can transform the subject, or not, highlights an important question in relation to the apocalypse as the end of a world understood as a field of sense that qualifies as a paramount reality. Rather than giving primacy to the destructive events in the material world it focusses on the transformative power in the 'gifted subject'. Accepting the gift of apocalypse is another figuration of revelation. A world ends when the "gift of apocalypse" is accepted by individuals who are transformed and who transform their new field of sense, creating a new better world, or fail in the process. If not, they are trapped in the field of apocalypse, working through a postapocalyptic trauma, as James Berger has argued, haunted by the ghosts of the past, or of lost futures, in painful process of working through which opens up spaces for resistance and hopes for justice. These two modes are charac-

teristic for postapocalyptic narrations, where protagonists live a reduced form of their former life in a damaged yet essentially (read ontologically but also ideologically) unchanged world—Jameson calls these failed worlds dystopias—or struggle to build a new, better world, the latter the only postapocalyptic imaginary considered and valued by Kaup. In these cases, Jameson's utopia cannot happen before apocalypse.

As I stressed before, these reflections do not pretend to be a coherent theory of apocalypse, but they may serve as Deleuzian lines of flight for further studies in apocalypticism and postapocalypticism and the archaeologies this journal wants to help promote. I conclude with a summary of suggestions on important aspects of these archaeologies.

1. Apocalyptic thinking has an affinity to new realisms, corresponding to a yearning for certainty.
2. The presumed reality of the end of the world is an articulation of fear, and, at the same time, an antidote to uncertainty, because it anchors reality, implying a promise of justice.
3. Apocalypse is a means of expressing a lack of orientation, and, at the same time, it provides an ontological fulcrum whose ideological implications are concealed.
4. A world can be described as a field of sense; however, not every field of sense qualifies as a world.
5. One condition for understanding a field of sense as a world is that it can appear in the apocalyptic field of sense.
6. A world has the status of a paramount reality; that is, the prereflective reality of everyday activity and experience.
7. There are many worlds with different scales (global or more localized); as fields of sense they can end, and have ended.
8. Apocalypse promises an ontological transformation: this transformative power is predicated upon narrativity which is the main emerging property of the field.
9. Apocalypse as a field of sense can appear in other fields in a defused form.
10. World requires a first-person consciousness. The world appears to somebody, and in order to end it must appear as ending.
11. Apocalypse is a saturated phenomenon with the power to unhinge the world. The end of the world depends on the acceptance of the gift of apocalypse.

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Slavoj Žižek

From catastrophe to apocalypse... and back

When I visited Heidelberg for the first time, I was told that Martin Heidegger once took a walk on the famous *Philosophenweg,* slipped on a sharp turn, and ingloriously fell down. My intervention here can also be taken as a comment on another slip of Heidegger's, the one that happened on his *Holzweg* as a thinker. It concerns precisely our topic, the topic of apocalypse, catastrophe, and the end of history.

We live now in a weird moment where multiple catastrophes — pandemic, global warming, social tensions, and the prospect of full digital control over our thinking — compete for primacy, not just quantitatively but also in the sense of which of them will count as the 'quilting point' (Lacan's *point-de-capiton*) which totalizes all others. The main candidate in the public discourse is, today, global warming, while lately the antagonism which, in our part of the world, at least, appears as the crucial one is the one between partisans of vaccination and vaccine-sceptics. The problem is here that, for the Covid-sceptics, the main catastrophe is today the fake vision of the (pandemic) catastrophe itself which is manipulated by those in power to strengthen social control and economic exploitation. If one takes a closer look at how the struggle against vaccination condenses other struggles (struggle against state control, struggle against science, struggle against corporate economic exploitation, and the struggle for the defense of our way of life), it becomes clear that this key role of the struggle against vaccination is the outcome of an ideological mystification in some aspects even similar to anti-Semitism: in the same way that anti-Semitism is a displaced-mystified form of anti-capitalism, the struggle against vaccination is also a displaced-mystified form of class struggle against those in power.

To find a way in this mess, we should maybe mobilize the distinction between apocalypse and catastrophe, reserving the term 'catastrophe'

for what Günther Anders called "naked apocalypse." Apocalypse, "an uncovering" in Ancient Greek, is a disclosure or revelation of knowledge; in religious speech, what apocalypse discloses is something hidden, the ultimate truth we are blind for in our ordinary lives. Today we commonly refer to any larger-scale catastrophic event or chain of detrimental events to humanity or nature as 'apocalyptic'. Although it is easy to imagine the apocalypse-disclosure without the apocalypse-catastrophe (say, a religious revelation) and the apocalypse-catastrophe without the apocalypse-disclosure (say, an earthquake destroying an entire continent), there is an inner link between the two dimensions: when we (think that we) confront some higher and hitherto hidden truth, this truth is so different from our common opinions that it has to shatter our world, and vice versa; every catastrophic event, even if purely natural, reveals something ignored in our normal existence, puts us face to face with an oppressed truth.

In his essay *Apocalypse without Kingdom*, Anders introduced the concept of '*naked apocalypse*': "the apocalypse that consists of mere downfall, which doesn't represent the opening of a new, positive state of affairs (of the 'kingdom')." Anders's idea was that a nuclear catastrophe would be precisely such a naked apocalypse: no new kingdom will arise out of it, just the obliteration of ourselves and our world. And the question we should raise today is: what kind of apocalypse is announced in the plurality of catastrophes that today pose a threat to all of us? Let's begin with the obvious candidate: what kind of apocalypse announces itself by the prospect of full digitalization of our lives?

When the threat posed by the digitalization is debated in our media, the focus is usually on the new phase of capitalism called, by Shoshana Zuboff, 'surveillance capitalism': "Knowledge, authority and power rest with surveillance capital, for which we are merely 'human natural resources'. We are the native peoples now whose claims to self-determination have vanished from the maps of our own experience." We, the watched, are not just material, we are also exploited, involved in an unequal exchange, which is why the term 'behavioural surplus' (playing the role of surplus-value) is fully justified here: when we are surfing, buying, watching TV, etc., we get what we want, but we give more; we lay ourselves bare, we make the details of our life and its habits transparent to the digital big Other. The paradox is, of course, that we experience this unequal exchange, the activity which effectively enslaves us, as our highest exercise of freedom; what is more free than freely surfing on the web? Just by exerting this freedom of ours, we generate the 'surplus' appropriated by the digital big Other which collects data.

However, as important as this 'surveillance capitalism' is, it is not yet the true game changer. I see a much greater potential for new forms of domination in the prospect of direct brain-machine interface which is today's main candidate for the end of history: after it will take place, the rest will not be history; at least not history as we knew it and experienced it. The distance between our inner life, the line of our thoughts, and external reality is the basis of the perception of ourselves as free: we are free in our thoughts precisely insofar as they are at a distance from reality, so that we can play with them, make thought-experiments, engage in dreaming, with no direct consequences in reality, no one can control us there. Once our inner life is directly linked to reality so that our thoughts have direct consequences in reality (or can be directly regulated by a machine that is part of reality) and are in this sense no longer 'ours', we effectively enter a post-human state.

We regularly hear complaints about the digital virtualization of our reality, of how we are losing contact with authentic reality, sex included. If we talk about material reality, it is mostly about exhaustion; the growing *shortage* of natural resources. But there is also the opposite: the excess, the exploding *abundance*, of waste in all its forms, from millions of tons of plastic waste circulating in oceans to air pollution. The name for this surplus is 'emissions'. What is emitted is a surplus which cannot be 'recycled' and reintegrated into the circulation of nature, a surplus which persists as an 'unnatural' remainder growing ad infinitum and thereby destabilized the 'finitude' of nature and its resources. This 'waste' is the material counterpart of homeless refugees which form a kind of 'human waste' (waste, of course, from the standpoint of capital's global circulation).

The conclusion that imposes itself here is: what if apocalypse in the full sense of the term which includes the disclosure of hitherto invisible truth never happens? What if truth is something that is '*stiftet*' (constructed) afterwards, as an essay to make sense of the catastrophe? Some would argue that the disintegration of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1990 was an authentic apocalypse: it brought out the truth that Socialism doesn't work, that liberal democracy is the finally discovered best possible socio-economic system. But this Fukuyama dream of the end of history ended with a crude awakening a decade later, on September 11, so that we live today in an era that is best characterized as the end of the end—the circle is closed, we passed from catastrophe to apocalypse and then back to catastrophe. We hear again and again that we are at the end of history, but this end just drags on and even brings its own sense of enjoyment.

Our usual notion of catastrophe is that it takes place when the intrusion of some brutal real—earthquake, war, etc.—ruins the symbolic

fiction which is our reality. But, perhaps there is no less a catastrophe when reality remains as it is and just the symbolic fiction that sustains our approach to reality dissolves. Let's take the case of sexuality, since nowhere do fictions play a more crucial role than in sexuality. In an interesting comment on the role of consent in sexual relations, Eva Wiseman (2019) refers to "a moment in *The Butterfly Effect*, Jon Ronson's podcast series about internet porn. On the set of a porn film an actor lost his erection mid-scene; to coax it back, he turned away from the woman, naked below him, grabbed his phone and searched Pornhub. Which struck me as vaguely apocalyptic"; note the word "apocalypse" here. Wiseman concludes: "Something is rotten in the state of sex". I agree, but I would add the lesson of psychoanalysis: human sexuality is in itself perverted, exposed to sadomasochist reversals and, specifically, to the mixture of reality and fantasy. Even when I am alone with my partner, my (sexual) interaction with him/her is inextricably intertwined with my fantasies, i.e. every sexual interaction is potentially structured like "masturbation with a real partner" (Wiseman 2019). I use the flesh and body of my partner as a prop to realize/enact my fantasies. We cannot reduce this gap between the bodily reality of my partner and the universe of fantasies to a distortion opened up by patriarchy and social domination or exploitation: the gap is here from the very beginning. So I quite understand the actor who, in order to regain an erection, searched through Pornhub: He was looking for a fantasmatic support of his performance.

Such a loss of fiction is what happened to the hardcore actor who needed Pornhub images to sustain his sex activity. However, one can also imagine a non-catastrophic dissolution of symbolic fiction which simply liberates us from the hold of fantasies. When, towards the beginning of Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*, the heroine returns home from wandering around the garden early in the morning, she answers the Nurse's query "Where were you?" with: "Nowhere. It was beautiful. The whole world was grey when I went out. And now—you wouldn't recognize it. It's like a postcard: all pink, and green, and yellow. You'll have to get up earlier, Nurse, if you want to see the world without colors. /.../ The garden was lovely. It was still asleep. Have you ever thought how lovely a garden is when it is not yet thinking of men? /.../ The fields were wet. They were waiting for something to happen. The whole world was breathless, waiting" (Anouilh 1946). One should read these lines closely: when Antigone sees the world in gray, before the sunshine transforms it into a postcard kitsch, she didn't see the world the way it was before her eyes saw it, she saw the world *before the world returned the gaze on her*. In Lacan's terms, while walking around the garden before sunlight Antigone was looking at the world before the

world was returning the gaze. Maybe, this is what Hegel meant when he wrote that philosophy paints reality grey on grey.

This brings us to another apocalyptic end, the long-foretold end of philosophy. Today, we have TWO ends of philosophy, the one in positive science occupying the field of old metaphysical speculations, and the one announced by Heidegger who brought the transcendental approach to its radical conclusion, reducing philosophy to the description of the historical "events"; modes of disclosure of Being. In the last decades, technological progress in experimental physics has opened up a new domain, unthinkable in the classical scientific universe, that of the "experimental metaphysics" suggesting that "questions previously thought to be a matter solely for philosophical debate have been brought into the orbit of empirical inquiry" (Barad 2007, 35). What was till now the topic of "mental experiments" is gradually becoming the topic of actual laboratory experiments: exemplary here is the famous Einstein-Rosen-Podolsky double split experiment, first just imagined, then actually performed by Alain Aspect. The properly 'metaphysical' propositions tested are the ontological status of contingency, the locality-condition of causality, the status of reality independent of our observation, etc. This is why, at the very beginning of his *The Grand Design,* Stephen Hawking triumphantly proclaims that "philosophy is dead" (Hawking and Mlodinow 2010, 5). With the latest advances in quantum physics and cosmology, the so-called experimental metaphysics reaches its apogee: metaphysical questions about the origins of the universe, etc., which were till now the topic of philosophical speculations, can now be answered through experimental science and thus be empirically tested. The prospect of a 'wired brain' is a kind of final point of the naturalization of human thought: when our process of thinking can directly interact with a digital machine, it effectively becomes an object in reality, it is no longer "our" inner thought as opposed to external reality.

On the other hand, with today's transcendental historicism, 'naïve' questions about reality are accepted precisely as 'naïve', which means they cannot provide the ultimate cognitive frame of our knowledge. For example, Foucault's notion of truth can be summed up in the claim that truth/untruth is not a direct property of our statements but that, in different historical conditions, different discourses produce each its own specific truth-effect, i.e., it implies its own criteria of what values as "true":

> The problem does not consist in drawing the line between that in discourse which falls under the category of scientificity or truth, and that which comes under some other category, but in seeing historically how

> effects of truth are produced within discourses which are neither true nor false. (Foucault 1980, 118)

Science defines truth in its own terms: the truth of a proposition (which should be formulated in clear explicit and preferably formalized terms) is established by experimental procedures which could be repeated by anyone. Religious discourse operates in a different way: its "truth" is established through complex rhetorical ways which generate the experience of inhabiting a meaningful world benevolently controlled by a higher power. So, if one were to ask Michel Foucault a big metaphysical question, like "Do we have a free will?", his answer would have been something like: "This question only has meaning, it can only be raised within a certain episteme; field of knowledge/power which determines under what conditions it is true or false, and all we can ultimately do is describe this episteme." For Foucault, this episteme is, in what in German is called *Unhintergehbares*, something behind which we cannot reach.

In a similar vein, Heidegger's typical move when confronted with the prospect of a catastrophe is to move back from the ontic level to its ontological horizon. In the 1950s, when we were all haunted by the prospect of a nuclear war, Heidegger wrote that the true danger is not the actual nuclear war but the disclosure of Being in which scientific domination over nature is what matters; only within this horizon can an eventual nuclear self-destruction take place. To parody his jargon, one might say that the essence of a catastrophe is the catastrophe of/in the essence itself. Such an approach seems to me too short: it ignores the fact that the eventual self-destruction of humanity would simultaneously annihilate *Da-Sein* as the only site of the disclosure of Being.

These two approaches, scientific and transcendental, do not complement each other, they are mutually exclusive, but the immanent insufficiency of each of them opens up the space for the other: science cannot close the circle and ground in its object or the approach it uses when analyzing its object, only transcendental philosophy can do that. Transcendental philosophy, which limits itself to describing different disclosures of Being, has to ignore the ontic question (how do entities exist outside of the horizon of their appearing to us), and science fills in this void with its claims about the nature of things. Is this parallax the ultimate stand of our thinking, or can we reach beyond (or, rather, beneath) it?

Although Heidegger is the ultimate transcendental philosopher, there are mysterious passages where he ventures into this pre-transcendental domain. In the elaboration of this notion of an untruth /*lethe*/ older than the very dimension of truth, Heidegger emphasizes how man's "stepping

into the essential unfolding of truth" is a "transformation of the being of man in the sense of a derangement /*Ver-rueckung*—going mad/ of his position among beings" (Heidegger, 1975, 338). The 'derangement' to which Heidegger refers is, of course, not a psychological or clinical category of madness: it signals a much more radical, properly ontological reversal/aberration, when, in its very foundation, the universe itself is in a way 'out of joint' and thrown off its rails. Among great philosophers, Schelling and Hegel clearly saw this dimension. For Hegel madness is not an accidental lapse, distortion, or "illness" of human spirit, but something which is inscribed into an individual spirit's basic ontological constitution: to be a human means to be potentially mad:

> This interpretation of insanity as a necessarily occurring form or stage in the development of the soul is naturally not to be understood as if we were asserting that *every* mind, *every* soul, must go through this stage of extreme derangement. Such an assertion would be as absurd as to assume that because in the *Philosophy of Right* crime is considered as a necessary manifestation of the human will, therefore to commit crime is an inevitable necessity for *every* individual. Crime and insanity are *extremes* which the human mind *in general* has to overcome in the course of its development. (Hegel 1817, par. 408)

Although not a factual necessity, madness is a formal possibility constitutive of human mind: it is something whose threat has to be overcome if we are to emerge as "normal" subjects, which means that "normality" can only arise as the overcoming of this threat. In short, we do not all have to be mad in reality, but madness is the real of our psychic lives, a point to which our psychic lives necessarily refer in order to assert themselves as "normal." We must also remember that Heidegger wrote the lines on madness in the years of his intensive reading of Schelling's *Treatise on Human Freedom*, a text which discerns the origin of Evil precisely in a kind of ontological madness, in the "derangement" of man's position among beings (his self-centeredness), as a necessary intermediate step ("vanishing mediator") in the passage from "prehuman nature" to our symbolic universe: "man, in his very essence, is a *Katastrophe*—a reversal that turns him away from the genuine essence. Man is the only catastrophe in the midst of beings." (Heidegger 1984, 94)

However, at this crucial point where in some sense everything is decided, I think that we should make a step further with regard to Heidegger's formulation—"a derangement of his position among beings"—a step indicated by some other formulations of Heidegger himself. It may

appear clear what Heidegger aims at by the quoted formulation: man as *Da-Sein* (the "being-there" of Being, the place of the disclosure of Being) is an entity irreducibly rooted in his body (I use here the masculine form since it is at work in Heidegger). However, if the disclosure of the entire domain of entities is rooted in a singular entity, then something "deranged" is taking place: a particular entity is the exclusive site at which all entities appear, acquire their Being; so, to put it brutally, you kill a man and you simultaneously 'kill Being'. The ultimate cause of the derangement that pertains to *Da-Sein* thus resides in the fact that *Dasein* is by definition embodied, and, towards the end of his life, Heidegger conceded that, for philosophy, "the body phenomenon is the most difficult problem" and that "[t]he bodily /*das Leibliche*/ in the human is not something animalistic. The manner of understanding that accompanies it is something that metaphysics up till now has not touched on." (Heidegger 1979, 146). I am tempted to risk the hypothesis that it is precisely the psychoanalytic theory which was the first to touch on this key question: is not the Freudian eroticized body, sustained by libido, organized around erogenous zones, precisely the non-animalistic, non-biological body? Is not this (and not the animalistic) body the proper object of psychoanalysis? Heidegger totally misses this dimension when in his *Zollikoner Seminare*, he dismisses Freud as a causal determinist:

> He postulates for the conscious human phenomena that they can be explained without gaps, i.e. the continuity of causal connections. Since there are no such connections 'in the consciousness,' he has to invent 'the unconscious,' in which there have to be the causal links without gaps. (Heidegger 2017, 260)

This interpretation may appear correct: is it not that Freud tries to discover a causal order in what appears to our consciousness as a confused and contingent array of mental facts (slips of tongue, dreams, clinical symptoms) and, in this way, to close the chain of causal links that run our psyche? However, Heidegger completely misses the way the Freudian 'unconscious' is grounded in the traumatic encounter of an Otherness whose intrusion precisely *breaks*, interrupts, the continuity of the causal link: what we get in the 'unconscious' is not a complete, uninterrupted, causal link, but the repercussions, the after-shocks, of traumatic interruptions. What Freud calls 'symptoms' are ways to deal with a traumatic cut, while 'fantasy' is a formation destined to cover up this cut. That's why, for Heidegger, a finite human being a priori cannot reach the inner peace and calm of Buddhist Enlightenment (nirvana). A world is disclosed to us

against the background of an ontological catastrophe: "man is the only catastrophe in the midst of beings."

Now we face the key question: is man as the only catastrophe in the midst of beings as exception, so that if we assume the impossible point-of-view of looking at the universe from a safe distance, we see a universal texture of beings just not deranged by catastrophes (since man is a catastrophe only from his own standpoint, as the exception that grounds his access to beings)? In this case, we are back at the Kantian position: reality 'in itself' outside the clearing within which it appears to us, is unknowable, we can only speculate about it the way Heidegger himself does when he plays with the idea that there is a kind of ontological pain in nature itself. Or should we, rather, take Heidegger's speculation seriously, so that the catastrophe is not only man but already nature in itself, and in man as the being-of-speech this catastrophe that grounds reality in itself only comes to word? Quantum physics, for example, also offers its own version of a catastrophe that grounds reality: the broken symmetry, the disturbance of the void quantum oscillations; theosophical speculations offer another version: the self-division or Fall of Godhead itself which gives birth to our world.

If we endorse this option, then we have to draw the only consequent conclusion: every image or construction of 'objective reality', of the way it is in itself, 'independently of us', is one of the ways being is disclosed to us, and is as such already in some basic sense 'anthropocentric', grounded in (and at the same time obfuscating) the catastrophe that constitutes us. The main candidate for getting close to how reality is 'in itself' are formulas of relativity theory and quantum physics—the result of complex experimental and intellectual work to which nothing corresponds in our direct experience of reality. The only 'contact' we have with the Real "independent of us" is our very separation from it, the radical derangement; what Heidegger calls catastrophe. The paradox is that what unites as with the Real "in itself" is the very gap that we experience as our separation from it.

The same goes for Christianity where the only way to experience unity with god is to identify with Christ suffering on the cross, for example, with the point at which god is divided from himself. The basic premise of what I call 'materialist theology' or 'Christian atheism' is that the fall of man from god is simultaneously the fall of god from itself, and that there is nothing that precedes this fall: 'god' is the retroactive effect of its own fall. And this move of experiencing the gap itself as the point of unity is the basic feature of Hegel's dialectic, which is why the space beyond Heidegger's thought that we designated as the space beyond the transcendental is

the space to which Hegelian thought belongs. This is also the space for thinking which cannot be reduced to science. Heidegger offers us his own ambiguous formulation of this obscure point: "I often ask myself—this has for a long time been a fundamental question for me – what nature would be without man—must it not resonate through him in order to attain its own most potency" (Heidegger 1990, 44).

Note that this passage is from the time immediately after Heidegger's lectures on *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* from 1929–30, where also formulated was a Schellingian hypothesis that, perhaps, animals are, in a hitherto unknown way, aware of their lack, of the 'poorness' of their relating to the world; perhaps there is an infinite pain pervading the entire living nature:

> if deprivation in certain forms is a kind of suffering, and poverty and deprivation of world belongs to the animal's being, then a kind of pain and suffering would have to permeate the whole animal realm and the realm of life in general. (Heidegger 1995, 271)

When Heidegger speculates about pain in nature itself taken independently of man, we should read this claim without committing ourselves to anthropocentric-teleological thinking. Along these lines, one can also understand why Kant claims that, in some sense, world was created so that we can fight our moral struggles in it: when we are caught into an intense struggle which means everything to us, we experience it as if the whole world will collapse if we fail; the same holds also when we fear the failure of an intense love affair. There is no direct teleology here; our love encounter is the result of a contingent encounter, so it could easily also not have happened but once it does happen it decides how we experience the whole of reality. When Benjamin wrote that a big revolutionary battle decides not only the fate of the present but also of all past failed struggles, he mobilizes the same retroactive mechanism that reaches its climax in religious claims that, in a crucial battle, not only the fate of us but the fate of god himself is decided.

This brings us to the question of time. Apocalypse is characterized by a specific mode of time, clearly opposed to the two other predominant modes: traditional circular time (the time ordered and regulated on cosmic principles, reflecting the order of nature and the heavens; the time-form in which microcosm and macrocosm resonate in each other in harmony) and the modern linear time of gradual progress or development: the apocalyptic time is the 'time of the end of time', the time of emergency, of the 'state of exception' whereby the end is near and we are preparing for

it. In such a constellation, the standard probability-logic no longer applies; we need a different logic of temporality described by Jean-Pierre Dupuy:

> The catastrophic event is inscribed into the future as a destiny, for sure, but also as a contingent accident: it could not have taken place, even if, in *futur anterieur,* it appears as necessary. […] [I]f an outstanding event takes place, a catastrophe, for example, it could not not have taken place; nonetheless, insofar as it did not take place, it is not inevitable. It is thus the event's actualization—the fact that it takes place—which retroactively creates its necessity. (DuPuy 2005, 19)

Dupuy provides the example of the French presidential elections in May 1995 and quotes the January forecast of the main polling institute: "If, on next May 8, Ms. Balladur will be elected, one can say that the presidential election was decided before it even took place." If—accidentally—an event takes place, it creates the preceding chain which makes it appear inevitable. In this sense, although we are determined by destiny, we are nonetheless *free to choose our destiny*. This, according to Dupuy, is also how we should approach the ecological crisis: not to 'realistically' appraise the possibilities of the catastrophe, but to accept it as Destiny in the precise Hegelian sense: like the election of Balladur, if the catastrophe will happen, one can say that its occurrence was decided before it even took place. Destiny and free action (to block the 'if') thus go hand in hand: freedom is at its most radical the freedom to change one's Destiny.

This, then, is how Dupuy proposes to confront the catastrophe: we should first perceive it as our fate, as unavoidable, and then, projecting ourself into it, adopting its standpoint, we should retroactively insert into its past (the past of the future) counterfactual possibilities ("If we were to do that and that, the catastrophe we are in now would not have occurred!") upon which we then act today. Therein resides Dupuy's paradoxical formula: we have to accept that, at the level of possibilities, our future is doomed, the catastrophe will take place; it is our destiny and, then, on the background of this acceptance, we should mobilize ourselves to perform the act which will change destiny itself and thereby insert a new possibility into the past. Instead of saying "the future is still open, we still have the time to act and prevent the worst", one should accept the catastrophe as inevitable, and then act to retroactively undo what is already "written in the stars" as our destiny.

The rather sad conclusion we are forced to draw from all this is that a catastrophe is not something awaiting as in the future, something that can be avoided with well-thought-out strategy. Catastrophe in (not only)

its most basic ontological sense is something that always-already happened, and we, the surviving humans, are what remains; at all levels, even in the most empirical sense. Do the immense reserves of oil and coal, till now our most important source of energy, not bear witness of immense catastrophes that took place on our earth before the rise of humankind? Is the founding of Israel not a consequence of the Holocaust? Our normality is by definition post-apocalyptic.

As Alenka Zupančič perspicuously noted, the ultimate proof that the ecological apocalypse has already happened is that it has already been renormalized. Increasingly, we are 'rationally' reflecting on how to accommodate ourselves to it and even to profit from it (we often read that large parts of Siberia will be open to agriculture; that they can already grow vegetables on Greenland; that the melting of ice on the northern pole will make transport of goods from China to the United States much shorter). An exemplary case of normalization is the predominant reaction to the disclosures of whistleblowers like Assange, Manning, and Snowden, which is not so much a kind of denial ("WikiLeaks is spreading lies!") but rather something like: "We all know our governments are doing these things all the time, there is no surprise here!" The shock at the revelations is thus neutralized by reference to the wisdom of those who are strong enough to sustain a sober look at the realities of life. Against such 'realism' we should allow ourselves to be fully and naïvely struck by the obscenity and horror of the crimes disclosed by WikiLeaks. Sometimes, naivety is the greatest virtue.

The main voices of renormalization are so-called 'rational optimists' like Matt Ridley who bombard us with good news: who declare that the 2010s were the best decade in human history, poverty is declining in Asia and Africa, pollution is decreasing, etc. If this is the case, then where does the growing atmosphere of apocalypse come from? Is it not an outgrowth of a self-generated pathological need for unhappiness? When rational optimists tell us that we are overly scared about minor problems, our answer should be that, on the contrary, we are not scared enough. As Alenka Zupančič formulates the paradox: "Apocalypse has already begun, but it seems that we still *prefer to die* than to allow the apocalyptic threat to scare us to death." In the Spring of 2020, the lieutenant governor of Texas, Dan Patrick, said that grandparents like him don't want to sacrifice the country's economy during the coronavirus crisis: "No one reached out to me and said, 'as a senior citizen, are you willing to take a chance on your survival in exchange for keeping the America that all America loves for your children and grandchildren?'" Patrick said. "And if that's the exchange, I'm all in" (quoted in Rodriguez 2020). Even if it was meant

seriously, such a gesture of self-sacrifice is not an act of true courage but an act of cowardice and precisely because it fits exactly Zupančič's words: Patrick prefers to die rather than to courageously confront the threat of catastrophe.

It is easy to see how rational optimists and prophets of doom are two sides of the same coin: the first are telling us that we can relax, there is no cause for alarm, things are not so bad at all; the others are telling us that everything is already lost and we can just relax and perversely enjoy the spectacle. They both prevent us from thinking and acting, from deciding, and from making a choice. If we access the data soberly, there is one simple conclusion to be drawn from them: the ecological crises which are exploding lately open up a quite realist prospect of the collective suicide of humanity itself. Is there a last exit from the road to our perdition or is it already too late, so that all we can do is find a way to painless suicide? What should we do in such a predicament? The temptation to be avoided here is the temptation of modesty. We should, above all, avoid the common wisdom according to which the lesson of the ecological crises is that we are part of nature, not its center, se we have to change our way of life; limit our individualism, develop new forms of solidarity, and accept our modest place in the life on our earth. Or, as Judith Butler put it, "an inhabitable world for humans depends on a flourishing earth that does not have humans at its center. We oppose environmental toxins not only so that we humans can live and breathe without fear of being poisoned, but also because the water and the air must have lives that are not centered on our own" (Butler 2021). But is it not that global warming and other ecological threats demand of us collective interventions into our environment which will be incredibly powerful, direct interventions into the fragile balance of forms of life? When we say that the rise of average temperature has to be kept below 2 degrees Celsius, we talk (and try to act) as general managers of life on earth, not as a modest species. The regeneration of the earth obviously does not depend upon 'our smaller and more mindful role', it depends upon our gigantic role which is the truth beneath all the talk about our finitude and mortality. If we also have to care about the life of water and air, it means precisely that we are what Marx called "universal beings" as it were able to step outside ourselves, stand on our own shoulders, and perceive ourselves as a minor moment of the natural totality. To escape into the comfortable modesty of our finitude and mortality is not an option, it is a false exit to a catastrophe. So, again, what can and should we do in this unbearable situation, unbearable because we have to accept that we are one among the species on the earth, but we are at the same time burdened by the impossible task to act as universal managers of the

life on earth? Hannah Arendt outlines the only way out apropos parental authority:

> Modern man could find no clearer expression for his dissatisfaction with the world, for his disgust with things as they are, than by his refusal to assume, in respect to his children, responsibility for all this. It is as though parents daily said: 'In this world even we are not very securely at home; how to move about in it, what to know, what skills to master, are mysteries to us too. You must try to make out as best you can; in any case you are not entitled to call us to account. We are innocent, we wash our hands of you. (Arendt 1961, 191)

Although this imagined answer of the parents is factually more or less true, it is nonetheless existentially false: a parent cannot wash his/her hands in this way. The same goes for saying: "I have no free will, my decisions are the product of my brain signals, so I wash my hands, I have no responsibility for crimes that I committed!" Even if this is factually true, it is false as my subjective stance. This means that the ethical lesson is that the parents should pretend (to know what to do and how the world works), for there is no way out of the problem of authority other than to assume it, in its very fictionality, with all the difficulties and discontents this entails.

But, again, what does such instance imply? I want to propose here a link to Antigone. From the standpoint of *eumonia*, a good and lawful order of the city, Antigone is most definitely demonic/uncanny: her defying act expresses a stance of de-measured excessive insistence which disturbs the "beautiful order" of the city; her unconditional ethics violates the harmony of the *polis* and is, as such, "beyond human boundary." The irony is that, while Antigone presents herself as the guardian of the immemorial laws which sustain human order, she acts as a freakish and ruthless abomination; there definitely is something cold and monstrous about her, as is rendered by the contrast between her and her warmly-human sister Ismene. If we want to grasp the stance that leads Antigone to perform the funeral of Polineikos, we should move forwards from the over-quoted lines about the unwritten laws to a later speech of her where she specifies what she means by the law that she cannot not obey. The standard translation goes as follows:

> I'd never have done it
> for children of my own, not as their mother,
> nor for a dead husband lying in decay—
> no, not in defiance of the citizens.

> What law do I appeal to, claiming this?
> If my husband died, there'd be another one,
> and if I were to lose a child of mine.
> I'd have another with some other man.
> But since my father and my mother, too,
> are hidden away in Hades' house,
> I'll never have another living brother.
> That was the law I used to honor you.

These lines caused a scandal for centuries, with many interpreters claiming that they must be a later interpolation. Even the translation of the first sentence varies. There are some which totally turn around its meaning, like the following one: "Whether a mother of children or a wife, I'd always take up this struggle and go against the city's laws." Then there are translations which delete the brutal mention of rotting corpses, with Antigone simply stating that she would never violate the public laws for a dead husband or child. Then there is the above-quoted translation which, like most of them, does mention corpses in decay, but merely as a fact, not as something Antigone subjectively assumes. One of the rare correct translations of these lines which fully renders Antigone's subjective stance is David Feldshuh's: "For Creon's law, I would bow to it if / A husband or a son had died. I'd let their bodies / Rot in the steaming dust unburied and alone." (Sophocles 2004). "I'd let their bodies rot," as Alenka Zupančič noted in her extraordinary new study on *Antigone*, is not just the statement of the fact that an unburied corpse is rotting in the open but the expression of her active stance towards it: she *would* let the body rot.[1] (Zupančič 2022).

It is clear from this passage that Antigone is at the very opposite end of just applying to her dead brother the general unwritten primordial rule of the respect for the dead. Therein resides the predominant reading of *Antigone*: she enacts a universal rule deeper than all social and political regulations. Although this rule is supposed to allow for no exception, its partisans usually oscillate when one confronts them with a case of extreme evil: should Hitler also be given a proper funeral? Cornel West likes to call persons he writes about "brothers"—say, in his course on Chekhov, he always referred to him as 'brother Anton'—but when I heard him saying this, I was tempted to ask him if he would also, when talking about Hitler, refer to him as 'brother Adolph'. Judith Butler tries to save the day here by deftly pointing out that the reference to a brother who cannot be replaced is ambiguous: Oedipus himself is her father but also her brother (they share the same mother); but I don't think we can extrapolate this opening into a new universality of the respect for all those who

1 I rely here heavily on Alenka Zupančič. 2022. *Let Them Rot: Antigone's Parallax*. New York: Fordham University Press. This booklet is simply a game changer: nothing will remain the same after it; everybody dealing with Antigone should read it.

are marginal; excluded from the public order of community. Another way to save the day is to claim that any person who dies is for some other(s) in the position of exception as defined by Antigone: even for Hitler, there must have been somebody for whom he was irreplaceable (let's not forget that, for the citizens of Thebes, Polineikos *was* a criminal). In this way, we can claim that Antigone's 'exception' ("only for my brother am I ready to break the public law") is really universal: when we are facing death, the dead is always in a position of exception.

However, such a reading fails to avoid the paradox: Antigone must have been aware that, for hundreds (at least) who died in the battle for Thebes, the same holds as for Polineikos. Additionally, her reasoning is very strange: if her husband or her child were to die, she would let them rot only because she would be able to replace them. Why should respect for the dead be unconditional only for those who cannot be replaced? Doesn't the procedure of replacement she evokes (she can find another husband; breed another child) strangely ignore the uniqueness of each person? Why should another husband be able to replace a husband whom she would love in his singularity? Antigone's exception is grounded in her unique family situation: her privileging of her brother only makes sense against the background of all the misadventures that befell Oedipus's family. Far from being a simple ethical act expressing the utter devotion to one's family, her act is penetrated by obscure libidinal investments and passions. It is only in this way that we can explain the weird mechanical reasoning that justifies her exception (brother cannot be replaced): her reasoning is the superficial mask of a deeper passion.

So, the fact remains that what Antigone does is something quite unique: her universal rule is "let the bodies rot," and she fully honors this rule with only the exception of her particular case. The law that she obeys in properly burying Polineikos is the law of exception, and this is a very brutal law, far from any human reconciliation. This brings us back to the distinction between examples and exemplum: Antigone's monstrous act is not an example of anything, it clearly violates the universal law, but it is nonetheless its exemplum, the exemplum which not only functions as an exception with regard to this law but which *turns this exception itself into a law of its own*. Antigone, thus, makes a Hegelian step further with regard to the triad of law, its examples, and its exemplum: she transposes the gap that separates exemplum from examples back into the universal domain of the law itself. She demonstrates how the consequent actualization of the universal law has to turn it into its opposite. Instead of opposing the pure law (respect for the dead) to its factual violations (we often let them

rot), she elevates these violations themselves into a universal law (let them all rot) and elevates the law of respecting the dead into an exception.

Among the big translations of *Antigone*, Friedrich Hoelderlin's is deservedly praised as unique, and one cannot but note how her exception (her readiness to perform the proper funeral of her brother) can be read in the light of a specific feature of Hoelderlin's late poetry: instead of first describing a state of things and then mentioning the exception ('but'"), he often begins a sentence directly by '*aber*' ('but') in German, without indicating which is the 'normal' state disturbed by the exception, as in the famous lines from his hymn *Andenken*: "Was bleibet aber, stiften die Dichter" / "But poets establish what remains." The standard reading, of course, is that, after the events, poets are able to perceive the situation from the mature standpoint, i.e. from the safe distance when the historical meaning of the events become clear. What if, however, there is nothing before the 'but', just a nameless chaos, and a world (concocted by a poet) emerges as a 'but' as an act of disturbing a chaotic void? What if at the beginning there is a 'but'? So, what if we read Hoelderlin's line literally? "But poets establish what remains", meaning poets donate/create/establish (*stiften*) a 'strophe', the opening line of a poem, which is that which remains after what? After the *Katastrophe* of the pre-ontological gap/rupture.

In this sense, Antigone's choice (of brother) is a primordial ethical act: it does not disturb a preceding universal ethical law, it just interrupts the pre-ethical chaos of "letting them rot". The pre-ethical chaos is cut short by "*aber mein Bruder*…" ("but my brother…"). However, is it not that Antigone's act is so problematic because it *does* disturb a pre-existing order of customs? There is only one conclusion to be drawn here: with her act, with her 'but' Antigone herself devalues the preceding order of customs, reducing it to a chaos or rotting corpses. An act does not just introduce order into chaos, it simultaneously annihilates a preceding order, denouncing it as a false mask of chaos. Today, we need such acts more than ever.

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Apocalypse When?

Two Views from the End-Times[1]

Abstract: The end is already here; the end is yet to come: not a pair of contradictory statements but one statement made up of two parts, forming a temporal modality — already/not yet — which orders much of contemporary political, ecological, and philosophical discourse about the future. The present has already foreclosed on the future; the present is the crucial time to act to avoid this foreclosure. The grammatical tense of the Anthropocene is therefore the future perfect: we speak of human and nonhuman worlds as they *will have been,* of our sphere of action within the irreversible transformations of life and earth as they *will have occurred*.

This essay is an examination of already/not yet as the dominant temporal position in and of our contemporary crises. I offer a brief sketch of its recent historical development and attempt to draw out the affective and phenomenological tendencies which it contains, describes and performs — suggesting that this temporal positioning has contributed, over the past century, to the apocalypse becoming permanentized, rendering recuperative action difficult and mourning impossible. Finally, I ask whether an alternative temporal positioning to the already/not yet might be possible — a modality of no more/still, which orients the subject towards the future not through the imposition of a looming and latent eventuality but through a difficult, incomplete, and ultimately generative confrontation with what simultaneously *is* and *is no more/never was*.

Keywords: eschatology, Anthropocene, modernity, R. S. Thomas

1 I thank Robert MacFarlane for his generous feedback on an earlier version of this paper, and John Zilcosky for illuminating conversations about the beginnings and ends of time in modernity.

The End

The end is already here; the end is yet to come: not a pair of contradictory statements but one statement made up of two parts, forming a temporal modality—already/not yet—which orders much of contemporary political, ecological, and philosophical discourse about the future. "The greatest challenge we face," writes Roy Scranton in his seminal *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*, is "understanding that this civilization is already dead" even though the "zombie system" of petro-capitalism continues and accelerates for now, "voracious but sterile" (2015, 23). The already/not yet, as Rebecca Comay has shown, manifests itself in the familiar figure of the deadline—"due dates, expiration dates, environmental tipping points, pandemic turning points"—which is simultaneously looming and has already passed (2020, 5). The present has already foreclosed on the future; the present is the crucial time to act to avoid this foreclosure. This temporal positioning is most clearly present in discourses about the Anthropocene. The very definition, by the Anthropocene Working Group, of the term as a "stratigraphic 'golden spike'" implies a future in which the present has ossified into permanent record (Zalasjewicz *et al.* 2017, 57). The broader narrative of the Anthropocene can similarly be seen as "an archaeology of the future," the attempt to "transform our own present into the determinate past of something yet to come" (Jameson 1982, 152). The grammatical tense of the Anthropocene, then, is the future perfect: we speak of human and nonhuman worlds as they *will have been;* of our sphere of action within the irreversible transformations of life and earth as they *will have occurred*. Klaus Scherpe and Brent O. Peterson call this "a shift in the grammar of the end of the world" (1986, 97).

This is a recent shift, perhaps, but to an old grammar: that of Christian (specifically Pauline) eschatology, which describes the Kingdom of God as "both already here but not yet fulfilled" (Noortgaete 2015, 110).[2] The adoption of a biblical apocalyptic timeframe while dismissing, for the most part, the redemptive force is, at its core, part of what Celia Deane-Drummond calls the "secular attraction to [and] appropriation of apocalyptic" in Anthropocene studies and related contemporary discourses about the future of the planet (2008, 177). The already/not yet modality belongs to a larger body of biblical apocalyptic language and imagery which has survived "as a vehicle for visions of destruction and regeneration, of nihilistic despair and futuristic fantasy" while its original meaning, Apocalypse as divine revelation, "has been virtually extinguished" (Carey 1999, 9). Considering "already/not yet" as an expression of eschatological timing invites a closer examination of its structure and content, an examination which

2 The already/not yet modality in Christian theology has been developed most fully by scholars of "inaugurated eschatology"; Oscar Cullmann, for example, calls it "the only dialectic and the only dualism that is found in the New Testament" (1951, 146). See also Ladd 1973 and Vos 1979.

would challenge its neutrality as a mere instrument of geological record-keeping and political projection: as Stefan Skrimshire notes, eschatology "is concerned not only with reasoning about the end, but also the psychological-phenomenological experiences and ethical orientation of believers towards it" (2014, 157). This essay is such an examination of already/not yet as the dominant temporal position in and of our contemporary crises. I offer a brief sketch of its recent historical development, and attempt to draw out the affective and phenomenological tendencies which it contains, describes, and performs. Finally, I ask whether an alternative temporal positioning to the already/not yet might be possible; suggesting that this alternative may be found in the later poetry of Welsh priest-poet R. S. Thomas—a modality of no more/still, which orients the subject towards the future not through the imposition of a looming and latent eventuality but through a difficult, incomplete, and ultimately generative confrontation with what simultaneously *is* and *is no more/never was*.

Time and Timing in the Eschatological Flood

The ubiquity of the already/not yet modality—and of an apocalyptic imaginary more broadly—in contemporary discourse is part of a larger picture of the apocalyptic over the past century; one that includes the development, growth, and the eventual dominance of eschatology as a focus and mode of theological inquiry which, running parallel to secular discourses of the apocalyptic, has contributed to a shared cultural vocabulary of last-things. Theologian Christoph Schwöbel has called the twentieth century "the century of eschatology," citing Carl Ratschow's remark that the renewed awareness of the eschatological character of Christian theology has "almost flooded" the field in the period (Schwöbel 2000, 27; Ratschow 1982, 334). Gerhard Sauter also refers to this sudden surge in eschatological thinking in aptly climactic terms, referring to periods of upheaval and crisis as "storms" which disrupt the terrain of eschatological doctrine (1999, 25). The systematic study of the "apocalyptic corpus" began, Derrida remarks, "only in the nineteenth century"—the *OED* locates the first usage of "eschatology" in 1844 by American theologian George Bush—but by the late nineteenth century it was integrated into mainstream theology, and by the beginning of the twentieth it had already become "the crisis through which the eternal threatens every stability in time" (Derrida 1984, 14; *OED* 2021; Paipais 2018, 1027; Schwöbel 2000, 222). Rather than fixed, static, or closed dogma, the systematic study of eschatology was

a new and dynamic field which transformed the nature of theological inquiry over the course of the twentieth century. The common claim that the evolution of the apocalyptic imaginary since modernism has continued to "cast the idea of the end of the world in ancient, religious, biblical terms" is thus only partially true (Rudrum 2008, 58). The biblical language of the apocalypse, though "ancient," was historically situated and in profound flux during the same period, in the process of transforming into "a substantially different eschatology [...] than what was widespread in the church for centuries" (McFague 1993, 261).

I emphasise the newness, dynamism, and historical contingency of modern eschatological theory even in its orthodox theological forms for two reasons. The first is that an awareness of the parallel development of a modern apocalyptic temporality in the field of theology belies the tempting but reductive narrative that current political, philosophical, or ecological iterations of the already/not yet modality are simply secularised and 'disenchanted' versions of a pre-modern, naïve, religious view of the end-times. As Charles Taylor has shown, the "subtraction story" of secularism—the claim that modern ways of being in and knowing the world have emerged from a "subtraction" of (liberation from, loss of) religiosity—accounts neither for the genuinely new possibilities of the secular nor for its latent dependence on, and referrals back to, religious systems and categories (2007, 22–29). The second, related, reason is that this awareness challenges the common approach to the theological as an inert resource from which myths and symbols may be extracted and instrumentalised; suggesting, instead, that inquiries into the temporal structure of contemporary crises would benefit from a more rigorous and two-sided conceptual traffic between secular and theological understandings of apocalyptic temporality.[3]

What kind of temporal and phenomenological shift, then, does the already/not yet modality of our contemporary crises signify? Not a simple movement from a naïve faith in, to a disenchanted cynicism about, the future, but rather the decoupling of eschatological temporality from one secular regime of thought (Enlightenment progressivism) and its tethering to others (modern, postmodern, Marxist, and posthumanist versions of futurity). The idea of a redemptive future with roots in the present was already "a secularised hope" in the eighteenth century, an "alignment with Enlightenment progressivism" which promised an "open future which is to be filled with content through the means of human self-actualisation" (Bauckham 2007, 674; Northcott 2015, 107; Schwöbel 2000, 220). "Staking everything on a better future as the modern West has done," writes Richard Bauckham, "would probably never have been conceivable had Chris-

3 On disciplinary tensions around the adoption of Pauline eschatology by post-Marxist critics of historicism, see Paipais 2018.

tianity not taught people to place hope in the future on the basis of the promises of God" (2007, 674). This pairing of Christian eschatology and Enlightenment optimism, however, would soon begin to grow tenuous: already at the end of the eighteenth century, Malthus's writings on planet scarcity and overpopulation complicated the relationship between human progress and future redemption—an early precursor, as Delf Rothe suggests, to the historical narratives to be found in works of "green eschatology" (2020, 148).

But it was not until the twentieth century, with its "man-made catastrophes…bound up with a deep propensity to apocalyptic thinking" that the already/not yet modality came to signify a foreclosed rather than a radically open future (Rabinbach 1997, 2). Of course, biblical apocalypse is already in a sense "closed"—its content divinely determined, always already inevitable in its presence outside, after, at the end of time. In invoking the contrast between opening and foreclosure here, however, I am concerned with the idea of temporal stance and positioning. For writers and thinkers of the redemptive apocalypse, the end-times may be closed but they are not foreclosed upon: the divinely-ordained apocalypse of Christian theology is radically open *for now* and *from here* because it holds the promise of regenerations, transfigurations, and newness which cannot be comprehended or fully known before they arrive. It is this time-bound and contingent promise-as-opening which, I argue, begins to close at the turn of the century. The traumatic experience of the First World War brought about for many, including W. B. Yeats and T. S. Eliot, what David Rudrum has called the modernist "apocalypse without salvation," the end precisely of an end-times which would be capable of carrying redemptive or regenerative promise (Rudrum 2008, 61). What remained in the absence of this transformative end was the "pure and self-sufficient logic of catastrophe" which has become "permanentized" and "frees itself from the necessity of expecting an event that will alter or end history" (Rabinbach 1997, 12). The death-events of the Holocaust and the detonations of the atomic bombs during the Second World War poisoned not just the present but the future with their brutality and inhumanity—the world after Auschwitz and after the bombs would be one wherein the apocalypse was not only detemporalized but spatialized—threatening to repeat itself again elsewhere in an "unfolding of […] a kind of negative *Ereignis*" (Rudrum 2008, 66).[4] "In some sense, we are already dead," writes Slavoj Žižek in *God in Pain*, "since the catastrophe is already here […] after Hiroshima, we cannot any longer play the simple humanist game of the choice we have ('it depends on us whether we follow the path of self-destruction or the path of gradual healing')" (2012, 55). The "nuclear event"

4 See also Barton 2010.

became the ultimate symbol and shorthand, for postmodernists like Baudrillard, of the end which had already come, had not yet come, would never come, was always coming: "the actual nuclear event will not occur, because it already has occurred" (Baudrillard 1983, 104). Schwöbel claims that it was the dawn of "the global ecological crisis" in the last quarter of the twentieth century which "shattered the future-oriented visions of eschatologies for which the future was the screen on which the fulfilment of all human hopes was projected" (2000, 235); this shattering, in fact, had already been in motion since at least the beginning of the century, and was only reaching its fullness, its end, in the ecological crisis.

In the "will have been" of the Anthropocene; in its staging of the present as not only the ruins of the future but what will bring ruin upon it, the modality of already/not yet is not only fully untethered from redemptive visions of the future but reversed in its temporal orientation. In traditional eschatology as in revolutionary messianism, what is already/not yet is the Kingdom of God—or its utopian political equivalent—which breaks into the present from the future, its power and enormity so great that it engenders itself as potential and promise within the present. Through the course of the twentieth century, however, it was the past and present—traumatic events, destructive cycles, ruptures which had already happened or were already taking place—which started to cast their shadow into the future, transforming, limiting, or terminating it before it could arrive. The First World War left millions shellshocked and brought about discourses of trauma and its endless "afterwardness" (*Nachträglichkeit*), atomic bombs detonated into the future, planting the radioactive seeds for an indefinite future "nuclear event"; climate science began to prove that past and present generations have been flooding, burning, extracting from, and consuming the planet not just as they live but also irreversibly into the future. This is the distinguishing quality of our contemporary positioning of already/not yet; instead of the eschaton exploding into the present, instead of the possibility of things being otherwise hovering silently at the edge of every moment, our present leaks and burns and radiates into the future, rendering it a host for its half-life.

Hence the power of the deadline, both looming and past, to paralyse "with the certainty of failure" and lull "with the promise of reprieve" (Comay 2020, 14). A deadline set for us is closed, a deadline only *we* can meet; its structure already excludes any possibility for something which is new or other to break in from the outside. Warnings about the catastrophic future which we, in the present, have both already put into motion and must work to defer "can pivot [...] easily between rallying call and resignation," writes Comay, not because "the doom-saying is disre-

garded or that it fails to stimulate," but because "the excitement" it shores up "has a peculiar soporific impact"; in a reversal of traditional eschatological temporality, our past and present inaction gain the power to breach into the future and become the eschaton, the "last thing," returning to us and retroactively imposing on us an inability to act before it is too late (Comay 2020, 14).

If, within the phenomenological structure of the already/not yet, we cannot save the world, we cannot mourn its loss either. "The work of mourning," writes Martin Jay, "is conscious of the love-object it has lost, and it is able to learn from reality testing about the actual disappearance of the object and thus slowly and painfully withdraw its libido from it" (1993, 93). Neither is possible in the framework of the already/not yet and its enactment of "the petrifying mental gesture of *it will have been*." Carrying the finalising power of the "already," this gesture "is only able to provoke the hedonism of being able to forget—but scarcely the painful memory of what was lost" (Scherpe & Peterson 1986, 109). Even this forgetting, which hinders the ability to mourn, is itself foreclosed upon by the insistence of the "not yet"; "for the earth, however wounded by our depredations, is still around to nurture us" (Jay 1993, 97). In this iteration of apocalyptic thinking and feeling, Jay detects "the symptoms of melancholy as Freud describes them": "deep and painful dejection, withdrawal of interest in the everyday world, diminished capacity to love, paralysis of the will, and, most important of all, radical lowering of self-esteem accompanied by fantasies of punishment for assumed moral transgressions" (1993, 92). The moods of the already/not yet of the Anthropocene are melancholy and mania, "objective irony" and "radical indifference," as well as dread and stupor in the face of endless deferral and unavoidable immanence (Scherpe & Peterson 1986, 97).

No More/Still: Making Time for What Remains

Perhaps this is an unfair assessment. The "will have been" of the Anthropocene, after all, serves as a reminder (paralysing as this reminder may be); speaks in a register of accountability (impossible as it might be to maintain). Any attempt to find an alternative to the temporal positioning dictated by the already/not yet should thus take seriously the temptations of willing evasion and unwarranted optimism, and remain grounded in the reality of the crisis even as it searches for different affective and ethical relations to it. We may not agree with the critical view of the already/not

yet positioning as potentially pathological, or be inclined to discard it completely; it would still be worthwhile to search for alternative ways of being and knowing in our iteration of end-times, to be creative and flexible in the face of so many foreclosures on intellectual, imaginative, and material possibility.

It might be apt to think here about R. S. Thomas, for whom reorientation—and particularly the specific gesture of "turning aside"—held the potential for encounter with the new and the other, for finding and stepping into imaginative and spiritual openings in the midst of the mundane and the bleak.[5] The Welsh priest-poet also lived through the twentieth century and engaged seriously and deeply, as a poet but also as a parish priest, theologian, and voice for the Welsh nationalist movement, with its eschatological character, crises, and upheavals (Davies 2001, 68). One of the central points of tension in Thomas's work and thought was his relationship to science as language, as practice, and as cosmic ordering force. His earlier poetry most commonly allied the aesthetics of scientific advancement and inquiry with "the Machine"—the central figure and manifestation of evil in his poetry, a terrifying hybrid and faceless assemblage of "technological ability, science devoid of conscience, and logic devoid of the *logos*" (Davies 2001, 68). Around the time of the publication of *Laboratories of Spirit* (1975), however, Thomas's stance towards science became less antagonistic and more exploratory and ambivalent. The problem of science is, in his later poetry, one mainly of language and orientation. It is treated as a way of seeing and being in the world which has the potential to profoundly unsettle and challenge the existing poetic and theological structures of his experience, but which is nevertheless impossible to ignore in its strange, cold, and inhuman complexity. Decoupled from the cannibalizing force of the Machine, the aesthetics and vocabulary of the "scientific" became increasingly associated with another one of the problems or questions at the core of Thomas's thought and theology—that of silence, obscurity, inaccessibility, or (ultimately and disastrously) the absence of God (Pikoulis 2003). With its openness to an uncomfortable and potentially even incompatible hybridity, Thomas's poetic and theological vision is a perfect example of the necessarily contingent and "profane" nature of religious experience, belief, and expression especially during *kairotic* times of crisis and upheaval, since these times "call for, indeed force upon us, changes in our religious symbolism and [...] frames of reference" (Kaufman 1983, 9). As a man of a fundamentally conservative temperament, Thomas was keenly and bitterly aware of the ways in which these pressures could deform and hinder the human relationship to nature and to the Divine. But with his later poetry, inflected with "scientific" language

5 See, for example, "The Bright Field" and "Aside" in Thomas 1993.

and ways of seeing, he began to consider and elaborate on the ways in which these deformations might make room for abstract, even mystical access to the genuinely other, to be able to communicate something of the radical otherness of God.

"Emerging," the opening poem of *Laboratories of Spirit,* begins with the following lines:

> Not as in the old days I pray,
> God. My life is not what it was.
> Yours, too, accepts the presence of
> the machine? (1993, 290)

Already in these lines lies the central problem of the poem: the tension between a permanent and devastating loss and the hybrid newness and continuity of what remains in its wake. The speaker can no longer pray "as in the old days"; the speaker still prays, prays for the whole poem. The subject of this prayer is a strange God, one who has perhaps become strange or transformed in "the presence of the machine," or one who has always been alien, unresponsive to the "old ways" of prayer, a God of 'form and number' (1993, 290). At the centre of the poem is a transformation, a coming into a new relation with God:

> It is the annihilation of difference,
> the consciousness of myself in you,
> of you in me; the emerging
> from the adolescence of nature
> into the adult geometry
> of the mind (1993, 290).

It is difficult to overstate the stakes of this "emerging" out of nature for Thomas, whose poetic, political, and theological language had up to this point been organised primarily and profoundly around local landscape, nature imagery, and "green" religious symbolism like the tree and the burning bush.[6] It becomes clear that this poem-prayer is an attempt—a struggle—to redefine and perform a new relation between a believer and a deity who have both been revealed to be "not what they were" and have become, at least from the believer's perspective, strange, deformed, new to each other. "There are questions we are the solution/to", realises the speaker, "others whose echoes we must expand/to contain" (1993, 290). God and believer occupy a modality of no more/still; the poem balances

6 See Morgan 2003; Perry 2008.

at the edge of, and pivots between, a devastating loss and a transformed, unfamiliar, expanded, othered continuity.

In "The Moon in Lleyn", also in *Laboratories of Spirit,* Thomas characterises the modality of no more/still as explicitly eschatological. In the first half of the poem the speaker, kneeling by the sea, describes what he sees as the no-more, the loss of religion; not just in the present ("the bell fetches / no people to the brittle miracle / of the bread") but also at the end of time, a modernist "end of the end": "it is easy to believe / Yeats was right," says the speaker, referencing the apocalypse without redemption of "The Second Coming" (1993, 311). The stunning turn in the second half of the poem is apocalyptic in the literal sense of the word, a revelation in time:

> But a voice sounds
> in my ear: Why so fast,
> mortal? These very seas
> are baptised. The parish
> has a saint's name time cannot
> unfrock. In cities that
> have outgrown their promise people
> are becoming pilgrims
> again, if not to this place,
> then to the recreation of it
> in their own spirits.

The voice offers to the narrator a vision of a saved world, but this redemption looks new, works in unfamiliar ways, requires an expansion of our categories in order to contain it. The image of the baptised seas is a perfect example of the concept of 'deep incarnation' an attempt in the field of ecotheology to "show the radical meaning of the incarnation for the whole of creaturely reality [...] an incarnation into the very tissue of biological existence and systems of nature" (Gregersen 2001, 205). This, according to Peter Scott, is the ecological task of eschatology in our times: "both the concept and task of eschatology must be expanded to encompass non-human nature" (2000, 92). The sense that the world is no longer saved and the reality that it is still redeemed can only be contained in a nonlinear understanding of time and of the world's relationship to God which the believer must brave: "You must remain / kneeling... prayer, too, / has its phases" (1993, 311).

This extension and deformation of categories in order to make room—and time—for encountering the Divine is not always rewarded as

it is in this poem. Thomas's willingness to expand what constitutes continued existence (the "still" of his temporal modality) always risks a kind of transgression or mutation which annihilates what he is attempting to save, conjure up, and encounter (its 'no more'). But it is precisely the fact that this positioning sets up such high stakes that makes it valuable as a way of seeing and being in moments of transformation, crisis, and loss. When Thomas probes the silence, absence, and alienness of God he is opening up to the possibility of the destruction of what he knows in order to bear witness to the possibility of a God, and therefore a world, which is completely other, emerging like a lit bush from the fallen or foreclosed present. This risky and incomplete dialectic takes place at what Derrida calls a "point of infinite pivoting" (1981, 221); a kind of apocalyptic radically different from the already/not yet in "positively welcoming the intrusion of chaos into the existing cosmos" (Bull 1999, 78). In this pivoting, God and the possibility of eschatological redemption, of a future not already foreclosed upon, exist as an "absolute contradiction" which "may be repeatedly forgotten and rediscovered" (Bull 1999, 40). Regardless of whether its gambit pays off, the no more/still contemplates and acknowledges loss—of an old view, even if it might have been a misunderstanding, of the world and our relationship to it. Even as it searches and hopes for what "still" might be possible, it is willing "to tolerate [the] impossibility of" "complete dialectical sublation" and what Jay calls the work of mourning (1993, 98).

No more/still is the modality of "apocalyptic hope" which is "*hope in danger*, a hope that is capable of suffering" (Moltmann 2000, 137). The redemptive newness for which it hopes is not in a closed or determined future but in the present, in the recognition and acknowledgement of the altered and deformed 'still'. It is apocalyptic in the original sense of the word in its engagement with questions of presence and absence, *Mischung* and monstrosity, revelation and oblivion. Stepping aside from the melancholy and mania of the foreclosed already/not yet, it opens up "a third space" which is "alien to pessimism or optimism, of the luminous darkness"; making time for "amorous *chance*—future unknown—of some contagious conviviality" by breaking "apocalyptic closure into dis/closure" (Keller 2015, 311). No more/still is the modality of confronting ongoing extinction, in motion but incomplete; of simultaneously inhabiting and mourning the landscapes, timbre, habits, and rhythms of our lives as they bend and mutate and transform, imperceptibly and in their totality, in the end-times in which we live. It rejects the despair of the *will-have-been-anyway* by pursuing, with "a new kind of humility in the face of the ever-growing magnitude and power of our interventions" (Noortgaete 2015, 113), the still-important work of confronting, recognising, salvaging,

and mourning the mutations and deformations of the familiar: The world is no more; the world is still here.

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The Astronomer at the End of the World

Authority, Speculation, and Communication in Camille Flammarion's 'La Fin du monde'

Abstract: During the *fin de siècle,* a Romantic trend in apocalyptic fiction coincided with a boom in popular science writing and spectacles. Astronomer and science popularizer Camille Flammarion made his career at this confluence, establishing a vision of science as fundamentally imaginative and necessarily in communication with the public, rather than a strictly empirical enterprise limited to specialists. This essay will take Flammarion's use of apocalyptic themes and imagery as a window onto the turbulent negotiations over scientific authority around the turn of the century. In his novel *La Fin du monde,* and related writings, speculative plots about the end of the world are used to deliver scientific knowledge to the public, while at the same time demonstrating the potential dangers of bad communication and irresponsible speculation. For Flammarion, the end of the world was an especially fruitful site for these debates because it was both impossible and unavoidable: impossible because the universe was supposedly infinite, and unavoidable because entropy pointed in only one direction. This apparently unresolvable dilemma provided an ideal setting for Flammarion's vision of an open science as authoritative over unseen events and mediating through troublesome processes of transmission and distortion.

Keywords: fin de siècle, science fiction, popularization, astronomy, entropy.

By the close of the nineteenth century, the end of the world had become a topic of scientific debate. Even as imperial mapping projects approached the apparent limits of the globe, new developments in thermodynamics rattled the perceived stability of the cosmos. In 1852, the physicist William Thomson declared that "within a finite period of time past the earth must have been, and within a finite period of time to come the earth must again be, unfit for the habitation of man" (Thomson 1857, 142). This view echoed and rephrased a then-flourishing Romantic trend in literary apocalypse that extended from the 1805 publication of Jean-Baptiste Cousin de Grainville's *Le dernier homme* through Mary Shelley's pandemic novel, *The Last Man* (1831), building, by the end of the century, into a steady flow of extinctions, ruined cities, and planetary finales.[1] Framed thus by the geographical ends of the globe and the temporal end of the universe, this *fin de siècle* anxiety over the apparent limits of humanity dovetailed in the 1890s with a vivid popular fixation on the *fin du monde* itself.

In 1894, the astronomer and popular author Camille Flammarion published his own take on the form with his novel *La Fin du monde,* in which he reprised the doomed lovers of De Grainville's poem alongside a parade of familiar themes. Indeed, the book combined so many recognizable tropes that it threatened to burst the generic mold: the plot even stretched to include two separate apocalyptic events, as well as an expository chapter that considered many other possible endings. This surfeit of doomsdays indicated a tension over the nature of scientific authority at the end of the nineteenth century; after all, whoever could be trusted to predict the end of the world must perforce be a reliable source of information about the state of the universe in the meantime.

Scholars of Victorian science and literature describe the period as one of enormous social and scientific upheaval, though also one in which new disciplinary norms were beginning to constellate around formal methods and specialist training.[2] Even as positivist thinkers insisted on the empirical limits of scientific knowledge, new developments in geology, natural history, physics, and astronomy disturbed existing models at every scale.[3] Contra the empiricists, the promoters of these newer frameworks encouraged a view in which scientific prediction was no longer a matter of, say, observing the position of celestial bodies and calculating their trajectories. Henceforth, the makeup, origins, and evolution of such distant and difficult-to-sense objects were all valid targets of investigation, via new technologies of chemical analysis, photography, and telegraphy (Becker 2011). These new realms of science also introduced new forms of communication with the broader public, through novel imageries and imaginaries (Secord 2014; Morus 2010; Lightman 2009).

1 For an exploration of Grainville's poem, see Wagar (2003); Ransom (2014). On Shelley, Bailes (2015). Many more examples of this literary trend may be found in the catalogue of English-language science fiction from 1644 to 1968 found in Clarke (1972). For more on the trope of the last man specifically, see Stafford (1994). While my study will focus on the final decades of the 19th century, these trends continue into the 1900s and the formal foundation of science fiction; as explored by Whitworth (2001).

2 One example of disciplinary development at this time is the case of "psychophysics," which was developing between mechanics and sensory studies at this time; see Staley (2018).

3 For a general overview of the scale and range of these transformations, see Williams (2006, 457–70).

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the French bourgeoisie exercised a remarkable appetite for popular and participatory science (Chouillet et al. 1992). This was reflected in the preponderance of new mass-produced journals, crowded lecture series, and market demand for personal scientific instruments such as telescopes (Béguet 1990). Flammarion was the youngest of a cohort of *vulgarisateurs* that included François Moigno, Victor Meunier, and Louis Figuier, all of whom modeled themselves to some degree after polymath heroes such as François Arago and Alexander von Humboldt. Abroad, analogous figures included the English astronomer Richard Proctor and the astrophysicist J. Norman Lockyer (Lightman 2009, 295–352; Bigg 2010, 305–24). Lecturers, writers, publishers, and social critics: these popularizers constructed extensive cultural structures outside the traditional bastions of scientific authority, institutions which were increasingly being bulwarked behind elaborate entry requirements like the *baccalauréat* and the *licence* (Fox 2012, 285–90).

Camille Flammarion's willingness to speak critically of that establishment contributed to his enormous popularity (and profitability) as a public speaker and writer. His works were widely translated into English and favorably reviewed in foreign newspapers. Throughout his career, he was immersed in debates about science and the public in France and abroad, through syndicated newspaper columns, books in translation, and scientific lectures and exhibits. Despite this notoriety, Flammarion's role as a public communicator of science has only been lightly treated in English-language scholarship.

This essay will take Flammarion's use of apocalyptic themes and imagery as a window onto the turbulent negotiations over scientific authority at the turn of the century. *La Fin du monde*, along with its English translation *Omega*, is exemplary of Flammarion's heterodox approach to popular science, in which speculative plots deliver specialist knowledge to the public while at the same time demonstrating the potential dangers of bad communication and irresponsible speculation. While his contemporaries sometimes maligned such public exchange and conjecture as a corruption of science's authoritative empiricism, Flammarion insisted on their necessity. In so doing, the astronomer presented and defended a view of scientific authority as fundamentally a process, and product, of communication across seemingly impermeable barriers: between scientific institutions and the public, as well as between the known and the unknowable. By speculating about the end(s) of the world, Flammarion had an ideal subject through which to enact this vision of an open science, authoritative over unseen events and mediating through troublesome processes of transmission and distortion.

Speculation & Spectacle: Scientists in Public in the 19th Century

Speculating Science

Astronomy's rise as a social authority might be explained through a series of celestial events spread over centuries, during which time scientific observations and predictions became increasingly precise and the rhetoric of astronomical prediction increasingly powerful. The ability to forecast the movements of heavenly bodies was fundamental to establishing the role of the scientist in society; this was particularly true of comets (Yeomans 1991; Schaffer 1988). But by the mid-1800s, the power of established protocols of prediction and calculation was shifting in relation to more tentative approaches and newer theories in multiple domains, where strict traditions of observation were unsettled in favor of more open-ended explorations. Scholars have shown how prominent articulations of thermodynamics by Sadi Carnot, William Thomson, and Rudolph Clausius between the 1830s and 1860s, along with new instruments of spectroscopy and photography, contributed to a view of the cosmos as a complex, chemical system tending to disorder, rather than the perfect mechanism of a clockwork universe (Brantlinger 1989; Clarke 2001; Anger 2014). On Earth, evolutionary theory and geological catastrophism gave shape to the idea that the planet's apparently stable systems could shift dramatically (Rudwick 1997). Emphasis of the critical role of the imagination in this view of science can be traced to earlier Romantic figures such as Alexander von Humboldt and François Arago (Dassow Walls 2009; Holmes 2009; Tresch 2012). By the late nineteenth century, these diverse speculations were linked by common concerns and influences; critically, debates over science were fraught with anxiety about the unconscious will of the individual corrupting the supposed objectivity of scientific work (Galison and Daston 2007). Nevertheless, uncertainty—whether about the history and future of the Earth, the nature of its inhabitants, or the larger fate of the universe—created a space of possibility into which charismatic individuals could venture without relinquishing claims to objectivity and authority.

In astronomy, this shift developed in fits and starts as tension built between institutional discipline and the more improvisatory approaches of popular science. As late as 1854, François Arago's authoritative and accessible *Astronomie populaire* countered popular speculations about the disappearance of Saturn or the immolation of Jupiter with an appeal to the Laplacean stability of the solar system (Merleau-Ponty 1983, 39–40).

Within a decade, however, science popularizers were putting new emphasis on narratives of possibility and probability over the familiar plot of calculability. Flammarion, styling himself as a successor to Arago with his own *Astronomie populaire* (1880), nevertheless turned away from stability and predictability. Instead, he touted astronomy's ability to puzzle out "celestial hieroglyphics": that is, to 'read' a story in the stars, as though parsing linguistic nuance rather than making purely mathematical derivations (Flammarion 1880, 399). This emphasis pervaded his career from his first published work, *La Pluralité des mondes habités* (1862), in which the scientist imagined the possibilities of alien civilizations. This publication found echoes in Richard Proctor's 1870 *Other Worlds Than Ours* and in works by American astronomers such as Percival Lowell and Bartholomew Burges, who postulated Martian civilizations and comet-bound aliens travelling around the solar system (Crowe 2008; Nall 2019; Fraser 2021). Yet, these imaginative extrapolations were grounded in logical arguments about scale and reach of the universe, particularly relative to the limited nature of observations: If space is infinite, and life is present in one place, how could it not exist elsewhere?[4] Reasoning along such lines, Flammarion concluded that "modern astronomy" had placed "the doctrine of human existence on other planets on a solid and imperishable basis" (Flammarion 1887, 160).

By the 1870s, the young Flammarion had given up institutional posts at the Paris Observatory and the Bureau of Longitude and was on his way to becoming one of the most popular—and one of the most prolific—writers in France. Between the publication of *Pluralité* and his death in 1925, Flammarion authored more than 70 volumes, ranging from scientific descriptions of the atmosphere and cosmos to first-person travelogues and philosophical speculations on psychic energy and the nature of life in the universe. Accordingly, much scholarship of Flammarion focuses on his role within new media forms that allowed scientists to speak directly to the public: primarily the burgeoning popular press and the scientific lectures and spectacles then undergoing a century-long boom in popularity (Bensaude-Vincent 1989). Another prominent approach has addressed Flammarion's unconventional interest in psychic and occult phenomena (Bensaude-Vincent and Blondel 2004; Finn 2007; Brower 2010; Lachapelle 2011) although these research areas were not self-evidently outside the mainstream at this time (Noakes 2019). Both strands of scholarship are important to understanding Flammarion's emphatically public and openly speculative approach to scientific practice.

Scientist-popularizers like Flammarion, characterized by a "qualitative, literary, and aesthetic approach rather than a quantitative, mathematical

4 This argument for the existence of extraterrestrial civilizations was also taken up by various utopian and socialist thinkers, and used as an incitement to consider the possibility of other life-ways on Earth, e.g. Louis-Auguste Blanqui (2009). For more background on alien utopias, see Crowe (2001, 218–24).

approach," favored the general and the popular over the specialist and the institutional (Bigg 2010, 308). The astronomer Maria Mitchell, who in 1847 made her name as the first American to discover a new comet, explicitly criticised the limited view of astronomy demonstrated by almanacs and ephemeris. In her view, astronomers could be predictive (calculating positions), observational (forming hypotheses), or prophetic; the latter involved "[looking] up at the stars with a sense of speculative possibility" and was, in Mitchell's opinion, regrettably practiced little among her fellow astronomers (Fraser 2021, 126). Flammarion, reflecting on his time at the Paris Observatory, made a similar point about his colleagues, writing that all were "careful calculators" and that none "was interested in celestial contemplation, none asked himself what the other worlds were, none travelled with his imagination in the infinite spaces of the sky" (Flammarion 1912, 154).

The practice of "travelling" by imaginative power was core to Flammarion's science, and evocative of other kinds of imaginative exploration in science and popular narratives. Emulating Humboldt and Arago, Flammarion refuted the positivist belief that scientific inquiry should, as Auguste Comte insisted, remain "local" to our own solar system and to topics relevant to "our real needs" (Merleau-Ponty 1983, 170). Flammarion commuted Mitchell's idealization of an astronomical third way into an imperative, writing that the "mission of astronomy was not to stop at the measurement of the *positions* of stars, but to rise to the study of their *nature*" (Flammarion 1912, 156). To rise (*s'élever*) also carried connotations of leaving the Earth's surface, just as one would in a balloon. Although eighteenth-century mania for hot air ballooning had eased slightly, the scientific observer aloft in a balloon remained a popular figure in scientific and literary writings (Brant 2017; Doherty 2017). The aerial vista—which Flammarion had experienced on several occasions including during his honeymoon (Finn 2007, 46)—suggested the exciting possibility of leaving behind the limitations of Earth-based observation to achieve a cosmic perspective, even if only through imaginary means (McCormack 2018; Henchman 2014).

This speculative vision was closely tied to new techniques of spectroscopy and photography that let scientists chemically 'sample' the stars at the ends of their telescopes, as well as related innovations of representation and communication (Bigg 2010, 305–24). Though Arago had initiated experiments in spectroscopy during his tenure as Observatory director, by the middle of the century, the methods of "celestial chemistry" mostly took place in ad hoc laboratories outside the formal centers of astronomy (Tresch 2012, 107–109). For Flammarion, spectral analysis evoked the act

of reaching toward the stars as though "to touch with our hands" (Flammarion 1887, 160).

Notably, this tactile approach to astronomy was also linked to nineteenth century explorations of the human soul; this is especially clear in French, where 'analyse spectral' evokes the same 'spectre' that a medium might summon at a séance. This ghostly pun enforced Flammarion's insistence on the physical reality of immaterial phenomena, be they electromagnetic or ethereal, or some combination of the two. At the time, research in the luminiferous ether (Navarro 2018) resonated with demonstrations of "action at a distance" carried out by psychic mediums (Finn 2007). Religious and spiritist doctrines freely combined these sorts of speculations, as in Balfour Stewart and P. G. Tait's *The Unseen Universe* (1875) and Louis Figuier's *Le Lendemain de la mort* (1871). These phenomena equally required 'natural' explanation under Flammarion's scientific approach. "Our souls are not pure spirit," Flammarion wrote, but "fluidic substances. They move and communicate between each other by material means, but of a material subtle, invisible, and imponderable" (Flammarion 1897, 60–61). Thus, the composition of distant stars and the material of the human soul were interrelated in Flammarion's cosmology, in which spectral analysis could uncover physical and psychical connections between our bodies and the distant universe.

Communicating Authority

Thus a newly tactile, exploratory, and spiritist science seemed to throw open the doors of the universe to questions of the unseen, the infinite, and the incalculable. This speculative science was also characterized by its thorough entanglement with acts of public communication, in which novel technologies of observation and analysis became tools of presentation and entertainment. That is, not only could stars be sampled through photography and projection; they could also be shown to the public, in newspaper reproductions and darkened lecture theatres. While science and its communication are always entangled (Secord 2004), the late Victorian period saw a particular emphasis on the interchange between making and communicating knowledge (Morus 2006; 2010). In this view, Flammarion's engagement with the press was not incidental but a deliberate tactic and central tenet of his work.

Alongside the expansion of astronomical practices, new modes of engagement began to emerge. New journals such as *Cosmos* and *L'Astronomie* furnished an appetite for fresh imagery and speculation;

in turn, these drew together new communities of scientists who could organise themselves outside of established institutions (Lightman 2009; Baldwin 2015). As the Second Empire extended its ambitions over state science, institutions such as the Paris Observatory came to embody a rigid and limited scientific culture, where previously the revolutionary, republican science of Arago had held sway. Arago's successor as Observatory director, Urbain Le Verrier, exemplified this shift (Aubin 2003; Fox 2012). In a repudiation of Arago's emphasis of enthusiasm and curiosity in science, Le Verrier insisted on militant discipline and absolute precision among his employees.[5] Alternative structures cropped up in response, including the Société astronomique de France, which Flammarion founded in 1887 as a gathering place for non-academic scientists and enthusiasts. Within these communities, Flammarion and others had the freedom to mingle scientific practice and popular communication. This was a broader, more inclusive vision of science, perhaps, but also one in which questions of authority and conflict would have to be carefully negotiated.

A central site for this negotiation was the popular press. Illustrated magazines and broadsheet newspapers experienced enormous growth during the late nineteenth century, powered by technological change and newly populist forms of journalism (Tattersdill 2016). These new publications were notorious for favoring profit over strict accuracy; as H.G. Wells commented, "The normal newspaper is a sheet of advertisements, with articles written to attract, amuse and interest customers, provided they do nothing to detract from the primary purpose of putting goods over to the reader" (Wells cited in James 2012, 44). And yet these were unquestionably powerful forms. During this intense period of popularization, the gravity of new journalism drew many scientists into its pages. This was epitomized by the 'Mars craze' beginning around the 1880s and continuing into the first decade of the 1900s, when even scientists tending to mistrust of the press felt compelled to comment in its debates (Lane 2006; Nall 2019). During this time, Mars exercised a powerful attractive force on the scientific imagination, serving as a dark analogue for evolutionary and entropic concerns about Earth (Markley 2005). In these and other controversies, Flammarion was an enthusiastic commentator, with columns syndicated in French, British, and American papers throughout the latter half of the century; especially via the Paris edition of the *New York Herald* (Nall 2019, 18–19; 94–97). He published opinions on meteorological forecasts, tidal waves, sunspots, and solar eclipses: all topics which were at the center of immense public interest, and often controversy.[6] Among these disparate prognostications, Flammarion also predicted, from time to time, the end of the world. Indeed, by the 1890s, it seems to have become one

5 It is difficult to overstate the differences between Flammarion and Le Verrier, who is frequently described as a near-caricature of the precise and blinkered empiricist that Flammarion (and Arago) reacted against. The supposed boredom of positional astronomy was indeed a key part of its claim to authoritative status (Donnelly 2014). Le Verrier was, however, responsible for opening the Observatory to the public through the founding of the Association francaise (Aubin 2003).

6 Demonstrative titles include: 'Is the Climate of Europe Changing?' (*New York Herald,* March 1891) 'Past and Coming Crops and Seasons,' (*NYH*, Oct 1893), and 'Flammarion on Sun Spots,' (*NYH*, June 1891).

of his favorite topics for comment, whether he was forecasting a fatal planetary cooling on geologic timescales or debating the possibility of an imminent run-in with a comet.[7] (Fig 1).

THE SUNDAY HERALD, BOSTON, MAY 15, 1910—MAGAZINE SECTION. 5

FLAMMARION'S TALE OF THE COLLISION WITH HALLEY'S COMET

SO FRIGHTFUL WAS THIS SUDDEN BRILLIANCE THAT ALL ESCAPED WITHOUT EXCEPTION .... RUSHED FOR THE FIRST DOOR THEY COULD REACH ....

Eminent French Astronomer Pictures the Ghastly Horrors That Befell Mankind in 2400 A.D., When the Heavens Rained Fire and Gases.

BY EDMUND NOBLE.

Figure 1. Flammarion's tale of a collision with Halley's comet. (*The Sunday Herald*, Boston, Mass. 15 May 1910)

In treating apocalyptic themes, Flammarion submitted to a contemporary interest in utopian thinking, characterized in France by the philosophical writings of Henri de Saint-Simon and Charles Fourier (Manuel 1962). Abroad, this genealogy was mirrored by socialist-leaning fictions like Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1887) and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890). These writers shared a tendency to depict the future as a stable endpoint from which to survey various contemporary schemes of social improvement. Together with *La Fin du monde*, these texts illustrate how a century of industrialization and mechanization had transformed 'the end of the world' into a secular fable by which to digest the moral, political, social, and scientific ideologies their authors held dear.

These apocalyptic and utopian speculations were continuous with fictional concerns, and sometimes blurred into the norms of professional science. Adelene Buckland has explored the ways in which 19th century

7 For example, an article, appearing in September 1893, on the return of Halley's comet was titled 'End of the World - Flammarion Says It's Sure to Come' (*Kalamazoo Gazette*, Sept 1893). Other similar stories linked the cometary return to planetary heat and climate.

geologists used narrative and drama to tell stories about the past; in this case, being a good scientist meant telling a good (and convincing) story (Buckland 2013). Other Romantic and Victorian scientists used literature and poetry to think through (or satirise) concepts in math, physics, natural history, and chemistry (Brown 2013). Flammarion also borrowed liberally from popular media and culture to illuminate his scientific passions; meanwhile, popular culture was borrowing right back. Characters such as Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1818), Robert Louis Stevenson's Jekyll (1886), and H. G. Wells' Moreau (1896) enshrined a popular view of the scientist as a deeply ambiguous moral figure.[8] In French, the writer most associated with the "scientific romance" was Jules Verne, whose staggering output began with *Cinq semaines au ballon* (Verne 1863) and continued to an eventual 60 installments of the *Voyages imaginaires* series. Variations of the Vernian scientist-explorer archetype can be found in Flammarion's writings, especially his philosophical explorations in *Recits de l'infini* (1873), which he later adapted into the novel *Lumen* (1887).[9] These literary works at the confluence of popular science writing and Victorian gothic literature demonstrated a growing interest in—and uneasiness over—the role of science in society.

The convergence of the melodramatic and the scientific can also be seen in the visual vocabulary of science popularization, which commonly saw sensational images and dramatic scenes deployed alongside texts. When these hyperbolic and stylized illustrations accompanied a technical argument, they might be interleaved with scientific charts or diagrams displaying a cooler rationality (Lightman 2012). These apparently separate registers were in fact complexly interconnected throughout the 19th century (Marshall 2021). Flammarion's work is exemplary of this iconographic jumble, in which illustrations were deployed in chaotic and seemingly incoherent relations that saw technical illustrations and figures mingled with romantic scenes and reproductions of historical imagery (Béguet 1990, 162–67; Keshavjee 2013). Literary scholar Elsa Courant characterizes Flammarion's more technical illustrations as lending "scientific justification" to his fantastical claims, thus separating his work from similar "scientific romances" while enacting a persistent confusion over, and convergence of, generic expectations (Courant 2016, 7). Arguing from the other direction, Bruce Clarke has suggested that the more asynchronous images declare a kind of intentional obsolescence in their deployment of medieval, renaissance, and baroque iconography (Clarke 2001, 35–36). Certainly, these archaic-seeming images serve to historicize Flammarion's narrative, grounding arguments about future conditions in a partially constructed and reimagined past.

8 Shelley and Stevenson are prominent members of this canon but the most notorious of all is H.G. Wells, who would come to be credited as the founder of science fiction; see James (2012); Shackleton (2017).

9 The influence almost certainly worked in the other direction, too: In 1865, soon after the "instant sensation" (Fox 2012, 197) of Flammarion's *Pluralité*, Verne published his own story of extraterrestrial travel, *De la terre à la lune* (1865). Interestingly, Verne also authored an earlier dystopian/apocalyptic novel, titled *Paris au XXe siècle*, the manuscript of which was only discovered and published in 1994. For more on the dynamics between Verne and Flammarion, see Finn (2007).

Photography had a decisive role in the visualization of science in this period. Beginning with the daguerreotype, invented by Louis Daguerre in 1839 and championed by Arago, photography had revolutionized mid-century science, in general, and astronomy in particular (Tresch 2012, 89–122). Alongside these changes came transformations of mass media and visual culture more broadly (Belknap 2016; Natale and Leonardi 2021). The photographic process held out the possibility of reproducing a "true" copy of reality (Galison and Daston 2007) while simultaneously introducing new complications to the boundaries between truth and artifice (Lightman 2020; Dawson et al. 2020). In science, photographs offered a powerful channel for collecting and communicating findings, perhaps most notably through images of solar eclipses and solar transits (Canales 2002; Bigg 2010). During the Mars debates, too, photographs were used to claim credibility, though their meaning was often unclear or unstable (Lane 2006, 204–5). Though photographic reproduction was cost-prohibitive until the late 1890s, photographs were sometimes copied manually by an engraver in order to import some of their alleged authority into print (Belknap 2021).

Although much of the historiography of scientific photography emphasizes its mechanical objectivity, for Flammarion, photography and cinematography enabled fluent movement between speculation and science, illusion and reality, particularly when deployed selectively in the public lectures and entertainments that were a fixture of late nineteenth-century Parisian society. As Laurie Garrison has shown, public spectacles were often highly ambiguous, open to multiple and conflicting interpretations (Garrison 2012). In his lectures, Flammarion borrowed from popular illusionists and 'fantasmagoriciens' such as Robert Houdin and Étienne-Gaspard Robertson when he juxtaposed realistic images of stars and nebula (Fig 2) with the sudden, startling image of a skeleton, thus blending the specialist "telescopic" views with popular phantasmagoria (Barber 1989). These projected apparitions, confusing technology and magic, science and wonder, trick and truth, were exemplary of Flammarion's spectacular and speculative communication.

Narrating the End of the World

These themes of speculation and communication—and their translations between science, literature, technology, and society—are central to the inner workings of Flammarion's apocalyptic novel. In *La Fin du monde,* the relationship between scientists and the media plays out in an uneasy series of co-dependent encounters, as the territory of 'the end of the

Figure 2. 'Les plus belles nébuleuses du ciel' from *Atlas céleste* (Flammarion 1877) (credit: Bibliothèque nationale de France)

world' is staked out as both a scientific opportunity and a media event (Flammarion 1894, henceforth *LFDM*).

Long before the fictional comet makes contact with Earth, but after its position has been calculated, Flammarion's 25th century Paris is already in disarray, as "the entire population, worried, troubled, terrified, every social class mixed together, as though hanging on the decision of an oracle as they waited feverishly for the results of the calculation that a famous astronomer would publicize that Monday, at three o'clock, at the meeting of the Académie des sciences" (*LFDM*, 2). The suspense over a scientific meeting recalls the 1773 publication of Jérôme Lalande's *Reflexions sur les comètes qui peuvent approcher de la Terre,* which was a carefully calculated catalogue of potentially dangerous comets. Though Lalande made no actual predictions of cometary collisions, the incomplete communication of his findings was widely taken to signify that such a collision must be imminent. The resulting months-long panic was so extreme it caused "stillbirths and public disorder" across France (Schaffer 1988, 56–58). Flammarion also writes a direct account of this episode later in the book to evince the power—and danger—of the interplay between scientific and public imaginations (*LFDM*, 197–199). It is this dynamic which forms the true center of Flammarion's novel.

From Position to Composition

Flammarion's interest in both the authority of traditional astronomy and the imaginative possibilities of newer practices drew him into mediation between strict positional astronomy and the speculative science of the composition and nature of celestial bodies and the universe. Accordingly, the interplay of calculation and speculation weaves through *La Fin du monde*. In the first half of the book, calculation has an uneasy, partial triumph as the astronomers successfully predict the path of the incoming comet but bungle its public communication; in the second part, the possibilities of speculation open a wider vista on the future, raising new questions about the role of science in parsing distant and uncertain possibilities.

At its outset, *La Fin du monde* seems to be a straightforward fable of scientific authority. From the moment the new comet appears in the sky, its significance for humans on Earth is understood through traditional astronomical observation and calculation: "No one would have suspected, from this inoffensive glimpse, the tragic role that this new star was going to play in the history of humanity. Only calculation indicated its march

toward the Earth" (*LFDM*, 30). Flammarion's own career in astronomy began with an appreciation for the predictive powers of the science, after he witnessed a partial eclipse that, he wrote, "impressed me the more forcibly at the time because it had been foretold to a minute by the learned men of Paris, and had taken place exactly as predicted by them" (Flammarion 1890, 101). By contrast, on this same occasion he recalled that "the good old countrywomen of the place said that the end of the world was at hand" (1890, 101). The disparity between the credulous women and the knowledgeable astronomers is framed starkly in this formative brush with prediction.

The theme of astronomy as a replacement or antidote to superstition is developed more fully in a chapter of *La Fin du monde* devoted to the 'History of belief in the end of the world across the ages.' Leaving his plot to the side, Flammarion uses this chapter to detour through the history of apocalyptic predictions by religious prophets and courtly astrologers, mapping the emergence of astronomy as a predictive authority over centuries (*LFDM*, 171–215). Arriving at the point in this story that encompasses his present day, Flammarion demonstrates the unfinished business of this progressive depiction of history, in which "prophets of evil, more or less sincere," have announced the end of the world as many as 25 times over the course of the nineteenth century (*LFDM*, 215). These misguided prophets base their methods in "cabalistic calculations that rest on no serious principle" and Flammarion concludes that "similar predictions will return as long as humanity survives" (*LFDM*, 215). This rather extraordinary sentence both invalidates attempts to predict the end of the world, while itself positing the eventual end of humanity, thus calling into question the possibility of prediction altogether.

The limited nature of calculation-based prophecy is likewise on display as Flammarion's comet approaches Paris. While its position, velocity, and mass are precisely known, the makeup and meaning of the celestial object remain deeply uncertain. The scientists who assemble to debate the implications of the comet focus on the ways in which the specific arrangement of materials that make up the comet may interact with planetary systems; it is not, after all, a uniform Newtonian mass, but an agglomeration of gases and irregular solids. Spectroscopic analysis had revealed the comet to be composed primarily of 'oxide of carbon,' and it is this fact that moves the conversation away from astronomical authority and into a realm accessible to other (and, to Flammarion, less trustworthy) experts. In this new epistemic register, Flammarion suggests, the uneasy balance between calculation and speculation breaks down. This is exemplified by the personage of the President of the Academy of Medicine, a skeletal fig-

ure described as an undertaker presiding over a corpse, rather than a doctor who might be "animated by the hope of curing illnesses" (*LFDM*, 60). He gives a speech full of vivid, technical description of the effects of carbon monoxide: "The circulation of the blood will stop. The venous blood will fill the arteries and veins alike…the base of the tongue, the throat, the carotid artery, the lungs will redden with blood, and soon the entire corpse will show a violet coloration characteristic of this suspension of hemoglobin" (*LFDM*, 63). This exotic portrayal in fact represents the ordinary effects of death by suffocation, rendered extraordinary through irresponsible use of the doctor's authority and imagination. Furthermore, this act of communication has an immediate and palpable effect on the audience, who turn various colors as they listen, from green to scarlet red, as if fulfilling the doctor's predictions in real time.

This, then, is Flammarion's idea of the dangers of over-speculation, in which the values of dispassionate calculation and probability are abandoned in favor of imaginative productions. Nevertheless, the chapter finishes midway through the scientific debate, leaving the audience—both the scientists at the meeting and the readers of the book—waiting to find out "whether the end of our world must truly come from the mysterious menace suspended above our heads at that moment, or whether its arrival might occur by other calculable causes" (*LFDM*, 86). This phrasing of "other calculable causes" reveals a fundamental problem with calculation as a predictive tool, despite its historical successes. While the future may be *able* to be calculated, that is no guarantee that it will be calculated correctly.

Speculations in the News

If scientists are sometimes irresponsible communicators, then Flammarion suggests that their misdeeds pale in comparison to the role of the press in creating crisis and fomenting panic. Satirising the controversy-fueled journalism of the 1890s, Flammarion writes:

> For a long time, all the newspapers in the world, without exception, had become simple mercenary businesses. The press, which had in other times provided services to free human thought, was for sale to governments and to base capitalists, demeaned by financial compromises of every sort. All newspapers were commercial operations. The only question for them was how to sell the greatest number of broadsheets pos-

> sible every day, and how to make their headlines pay dividends…'business is business,' that was everything.
>
> They invented false news that they calmly denied the next day, undermined at every chance the stability of the State, travestied the truth, put into the experts' mouths things that they never said, slandered blatantly, dishonored men and women, sowed scandals, lied with impunity…[they] put their own readers in peril and betrayed every social class at the same time, with the only goal to excite general curiosity to the point of paroxysm and to "sell the numbers" (*LFDM*, 12–13).

The fictional journal in which Flammarion concentrates this vision of mercenary, amoral media is *The XXVth Century*.[10] Its owner is an anti-semitic caricature of an 'American Israelite' who spends the first half of the novel playing the stock market and manipulating a tentacular global media enterprise from an underground bunker in Chicago. Yet the relationship between the media mogul and the scientific authorities is not a straightforward one of truth and falsehood, or supply and demand, but rather a complex, two-way process of distortion. For instance, the Director of the Observatory—a "venerable elder" who serves as a double for Arago—prefaces his comments before the Académie by saying that if he had the "misfortune" (*LFDM*, 52) to be business-minded, he would invest while the market is depressed by news of the cataclysm. On cue, the American businessman races from the room to turn this "purely scientific reflection" into financial action (54–55). Bruce Clarke identifies this character as Flammarion's "daemonic double," a grotesque stereotype who seems to exert a compulsive attraction over his author (Clarke 2001, 57). Indeed, there are uncanny parallels in the ways both figures mediate their authority toward the public: the player of markets speculates financially while the author speculates in fiction, both selectively telling a story about the end of the world to achieve their goals. Indeed, while the American is an obvious villain of the story, he is notably one of the few characters to respond rationally to the astronomers' scientific predictions, drawing on the "new calculations" in order to make his financial speculations (*LFDM*, 89).

Despite the worst malfeasances of the press, Flammarion emphasizes that there is no possibility for scientific authority divorced from its means of communication. Experts who seek to distance themselves from popular debates risk becoming so detached from human affairs that their knowledge becomes obsolete. The astronomers who first study the comet, for example, judge it to be the exclusive interest of fellow specialists; only "a calculation to be verified" (*LFDM*, 16). Not "overly worried" about the

10 The name echoes *Le XIXe siècle*, founded in 1871, but it is more likely a satire of American "yellow journalism" papers, such as the *Herald* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*.

collision insofar as "consequences on the level of humanity," they publish their results in special astronomical reviews, "the only [journals] that still had some authority" (16). These journals do not seem to have many readers, however, as several days pass before the news is picked up by general interest publications. Even when the astronomers are drawn into public debate, "submitting" (16) to interviews as though to unwelcome surgical procedures, they insist on the boundaries of public and professional interests. The Observatory Director, whose "voice was listened to everywhere," uses his platform to issue a statement that "all conjectures were premature until one heard the authorized technical discussions that would take place at the Institute" (*LFDM*, 20). In other words, the astronomer insists that scientific authority cannot, or should not, be separated from its proper setting.

This proves to be a futile tactic. Helped along by the opportunistic reporting of *The XXVth Century*, the public falls into a panic while the American mogul, "our indefatigable speculator," profits from the experts' predictions (*LFDM*, 34). After the scientific meeting, people wander the streets, their faces "livid and pale, eyes sunken, hair in disarray…marked by the most dreadful anguish that ever weighed on the destiny of man"—despite the fact that, notably, "the day passed without astronomical incident" (*LFDM*, 221–224). The contrast between extreme human despair and mundane reality suggests that, at this point, the stars of human fate are not so much celestial as they are serial.

Projecting the Ends of the World

Mediation and perspective are key to understanding how to approach the end of the world. In *La Fin du monde*, the Observatory Director points out to his audience at the Academy of Sciences that by "the end" we indicate an apocalypse in earthly terms only: the end of *this* world. If we allow our vision to travel beyond the familiar and the known, however, we might see a different pattern, one in which an ending might look a lot more like a beginning.

This attention to mediation turns us, next, to the public toward whom these mediated messages might be directed. Throughout Flammarion's career, he addressed his audiences not just as readers but as spectators. Images were central to transmitting the astronomer's speculative, spiritist vision of science. In the blending of the technical and the abstract, as well as the scientific and the miraculous, Flammarion explored the technology and the trickery of spectacle with the same intent with which he

employed the fantastical plots of his books; both approaches were means of projection, whether via light or the imagination, into realms beyond the limits of direct observation.

In this space of spectacle, the world's end provided a fertile ground for representation. Apocalyptic images played through Flammarion's rhetorical repertoire long before *La Fin du monde*, often in allegorical and melodramatic depictions. In the 1880 *Astronomie populaire*, for example, a section on 'the death of worlds' (Flammarion 1880,101–3) is accompanied by an image of the "last human family" imagined as a gothic huddle of skeletons attended by the ossified remains of a loyal dog (Fig 3). Another exemplary image has been the subject of much previous study and popular fascination since it first appeared in Flammarion's *L'Atmosphère* (1888). Often referred to simply as 'the Flammarion engraving,' the image appears to be a medieval woodcut, but closer inspection has shown it was engraved with a burin—a tool not used before the eighteenth century—possibly by Flammarion himself, who was apprenticed to an engraver in his youth. In the ornately carved image, a figure identified as a missionary lifts the edge of the celestial dome to peer into the cosmos beyond (Fig 4). Whatever its origin, the anachronistic effect grounds Flammarion's account of the triumphs of modern science in a history in which false beliefs (the flat Earth; the testimony of religious authorities) had been transcended by more critical, curious exploration. The power of the iconography has since assimilated other meanings, eventually coming to stand as a mythic metaphor for the heterodox, revelatory science that popularizers like Flammarion promoted. The missionary even lifts one hand toward the sky, as though enacting Flammarion's tactile spectroscopy.

In fact, this engraving also presents an 'end' of the world, albeit the physical one of a flat Earth. The visual rhyme is more than a coincidence, however, as both kinds of endings present a fundamental challenge to representation and Flammarion's interest in such images demonstrates the tension in his cosmology between observation and the invisible. Both the last human family and the missionary are pictured from seemingly impossible perspectives: in the former case, we know that there is no one left to witness the scene, so that it appears to come from beyond the grave; in the latter, there is ostensibly nowhere an observer could stand to see both the inside and the outside of the 'dome' of the sky, so that we seem to be standing outside the Universe itself looking in. By constructing these kinds of impossible images, Flammarion demonstrates how one might envision the invisible: there is no point from which these events can be observed, and yet we observe them. These are all, therefore, meta-images of how speculation works to construct plausible scenes of

Figure 3. 'La dernière famille humaine' from *Astronomie populaire* (Flammarion 1880)

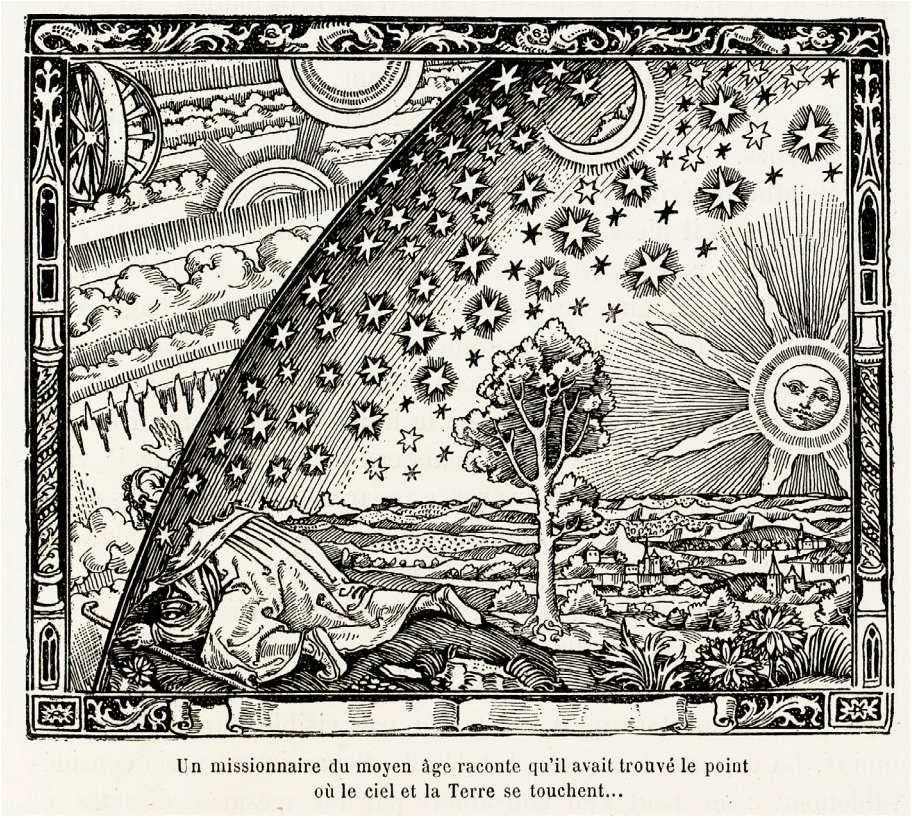

Figure 4. The 'Flammarion engraving' from *L'atmosphère* (Flammarion 1888) (credit: Bibliothèque nationale de France)

impossible content. The seemingly incongruous iconography of *La Fin du monde* functions in this same way, restaging the story in a parallel, mythical register.

This bears an important similarity to another of Flammarion's speculative novels, *Lumen,* in which an astronomer discovers his disembodied spirit can travel through space faster than the speed of light. These frictionless, effortless movements grant Lumen the extraordinary visionary capacity to 'rewind' time and watch the history of the Earth as though it were a moving picture. Throughout the book, the camera furnishes the chief cosmic metaphor, as the light that 'contains' Earth's history is projected infinitely into the universe like a moving picture into a darkened theatre: "These successive and endless projections into space of the history of all accomplished facts on each one of the worlds, carried out in the heart of the Eternal Being, of whom ubiquity thus holds each thing in eternal permanence" (Flammarion 1887, 143). The spectator for this universal cinematography again occupies an impossible subject position: the

"Eternal Being" who can observe the entire universe in space and time must be present everywhere at once and yet take up no space, must be looking in every direction and at every scale, at every moment. Lumen's superhuman travels can only approximate this imagined state of complete omniscience in the same way that a speculative image approximates an otherwise inaccessible idea.

Speculation is necessarily fraught with dangers of perception. Among the optical illusions that Lumen experiences is one in which the astronomer seems to observe the Earth's death as the planet begins to heat and expand, finally merging with the sun into a giant, amorphous nebula. "To witness the end of a world is a rare privilege," Lumen remarks as he is seized by "a feeling of vanity" and calls out in despair over the fate of "innumerable inhabited worlds" (Flammarion 1887, 85–87). Yet this vision turns out to be another apparition—a trick—that reveals a truth. A disembodied godlike voice corrects Lumen's interpretation: "Not *the end* … *but the beginning"* (87). The message and its meaning have been reversed through mediation, and that what Lumen took to be the end of the world is in fact a reversed view of the nebular hypothesis of planetary formation. In this vision, the future of humanity, in fact, still lies ahead. But this reversibility demonstrates an important tenet of Flammarion's philosophy: The end of the world only exists within a mediated human framework. Just as the solar system reignites at the end of *La Fin du monde*, when "there could be neither end nor beginning" (418), here we see the meaninglessness of space and time when the subject position of the observer is removed. Without a witness to establish a pattern—that is, to identify an 'end' or 'beginning'—there is only ceaseless change and endless, ubiquitous light.

Conclusion

In 1921, Berlin journalist Alexander Moszkowski published his *Conversations with Einstein*, over the protestations of its subject.[11] In a chapter on 'Other Worlds,' Moszkowski reports a conversation in which he brought up "the fantastic figure" (Moszkowski 1921, 112) of Flammarion's Lumen, to which Einstein is immediately dismissive. Moszkowski records Einstein's reaction: "The whole story is mere humbug, absurd, and based on false premises…[i]t is not an imaginary experiment: It is a farce, or, to express it more bluntly, a mere swindle!" (116).

Much of Flammarion's career may be seen as preliminary to developments in science and literature in the twentieth century. One oft-cited

11 First published as *Einstein the Searcher*; see Brown (2014); Redington (2014).

passage of *Lumen* even seems to anticipate Einstein's physics, as Lumen rebukes Quaerens that "as you are disposed to regard your ideas respecting time and space as *absolute*, while they are only *relative*, your understandings are closed to the truths which reside outside your sphere" (Flammarion 1887, 66). Henri Poincaré, whose 1902 *Science et Hypothèse* influenced the young Einstein, was a correspondent and collaborator of Flammarion's in the early years of the twentieth century—he even delivered a speech at a 1912 'scientific jubilee' celebrating the astronomer as "a savant who is at the same time a poet, and a poet who is also a savant."[12] Most evocative of all is Einstein's own account of the origins of the theory of relativity, which the physicist traces to a formative daydream of travelling alongside a light beam, seemingly reprising the central premise of *Lumen* and enacting Flammarion's ideal of travelling "with [the] imagination in the infinite spaces of the sky" (Flammarion 1912, 154). Looking back in 1955 at this "juvenile thought experiment," Einstein concluded that "invention is not the product of logical thought, even though the final product is tied to a logical structure" (Pais and Penrose 2005, 131).

Yet, even if Moszkowski's testimony is taken as trustworthy, Einstein's dismissal of Lumen suggests he did not acknowledge the similarities between his approach to scientific imagination and that of the French astronomer. As he reportedly complained, the premise of Lumen "projects us right out of the world of reality into a pure fiction of thought, which, if followed to its conclusion, leads to the most degenerate form of imagination" (Moszkowski 1921, 118). For Einstein, Flammarion's projecting imagination overshot the boundaries that twentieth-century physics and astronomy would come to delineate and fortify around the discipline. The French astronomer's attempts to marry science's calculating authority and speculative scope did not usher in a new era of scientific psychospiritism. Indeed, by the 1920s, psychical research was increasingly separated from mainstream physics, and figures like Flammarion were seen by other scientists as credulous and superstitious, not unlike credulous countrywomen predicting the end of the world.

But Flammarion's extraordinary communicative force did shape the world that would come after the end of the century. New norms of science fiction, as formally described by Hugo Gernsback in the 1926 inaugural issue of American monthly magazine *Amazing Stories,* brought together science and speculation (Tattersdill 2016). H.G. Wells, often credited as the 'father' of the genre, took many of his most memorable ideas from Flammarion's 1890s fiction and articles, not least the Martians with which he made his fame in *The War of the Worlds* in 1898. Wells' 1897 story *The Star* is a direct retelling of *La Fin du monde,* which Wells likely

12 'La Jubilee scientifique de M. Camille Flammarion' *Le Petit journal*, 1912.

read as *Omega* sometime after 1894. Later, Wells expanded this brief story into his novella, *In the Days of the Comet*, in which scientific authority over the heavens is undercut by the chemical uncertainty of the comet (as seen through spectral analysis) which ultimately has social ramifications that dwarf the limited concerns of astronomers.

For Flammarion, the end of the world was a fruitful theme because it was both impossible and unavoidable: entropy pointed toward it, and infinity pointed away from it. The things that made apocalypse a difficult scientific topic, inaccessible to ordinary inquiry, unavoidably drew on imagination and communication, both necessary tools for understanding—not merely calculating—the mechanics of the universe. Scientific authority in the world had real consequences, as the comet panics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had shown; it also could produce real insight into distant stars and distant times through the emerging viewpoints of chemical analysis and theoretical physics. And yet the realm of the known expands at a rate proportional to the unknown. The unseen and the invisible continue, to this day, to exert their imponderable influence over the observable universe. Every new discovery at the turn of the century, including relativity, raised new questions even as it answered old ones. On this point, at least, Flammarion and Einstein agreed.

When MIT professor Norman Hugh Redington published chapters of Moszkowski's *Conversations* online in 2014, he chose a familiar image to head the chapter on discovery: the Flammarion engraving. In this ancient-seeming illustration, the missionary kneels to poke his head under the edge of the sky, looking out from the end of the world into a cosmos whose structure defies representation. In reality, the sky may have no edge and the world may not end, but the image nevertheless communicates, forcefully, the possibilities of seeing past what can be seen, and the compelling desire to reach out and touch what lies beyond.

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Red Pill: The Structure of Contemporary Apocalypse

Abstract: Taking apocalypse literally as "uncovering" this paper talks about contemporary apocalypse as a collection of narratives uncovering a range of conspiracies such as white genocide and the Great Replacement, the New World Order, incels and feminism, and the COVID hoax. These cohere into a movement often referred to as Alt-Right where a feature of practice is to uncover types of thinking and forms of 'truth' that are supposedly suppressed, such as race science. The lead metaphor for this generation of conspiracy thinking is the "red pill" metaphor from the film *The Matrix*. This metaphor—ingestion of a sacrament—also ties the movement to religion and the traditional context of apocalypse. Addressing this dominant reading of apocalypse the paper goes on to explain how these conspiracies are responses to ontological precarity and the perceived collapse of a world. The paper uses the work of Martin Heidegger and Jacques Lacan to show how challenges to the dominant social structure—challenges based in gender, "race", sexuality and conceptions of white privilege—undermine a sense of a "world", causing anxiety and violence as individuals and groups seek to secure themselves through aggressive forms of self-expansion in the face of supposedly annihilating threats.

Keywords: Alt-Right, anxiety, world, Heidegger, Žižek

Red Pill: The Structure of Contemporary Apocalypse

The last decade has seen a resurgence of far-right politics that draws together a range of affiliations including nationalism, ethno-nationalism, Christian (or religious) conservatism, and neo-fascism. What is

perhaps most concerning, however, is the way the aims and motivations of the far-right have started to dovetail with mainstream conservatism, where 'race', immigration, and the opposition to multiculturalism have played significant roles in the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit referendum. We can also see the alignment in the way the media regularly deploys terms like 'cancel culture' and 'wokeism' to delegitimise calls for equality and social justice. In the US, this resurgence is most evident in the rise of the 'Alt-Right,' a name that emerged from a lecture delivered by paleo-conservative Paul Gottfried in 2008, entitled 'The Decline and Rise of the Alternative Right'. *AlternativeRight* was then used in 2010 by the neo-Nazi Richard Spencer, Gottfried's protégé, as the name for his website, before 'Alt-Right' became the accepted abbreviation. According to Mike Wendling (2018), paleo-conservatives oppose immigration and multiculturalism 'and are strict traditionalists when it comes to gender, ethnicity, race and social order' (17–18). In particular, it is the perceived naturalness of a racial order with white people at the top that is the central philosophy for those who adopt this affiliation. Along with the racism, Islamophobia and white supremacy, they also support a politics that is patriarchal, heteronormative, aristocratic, eugenic, libertarian and anti-social. Those who are allegiant, but do not explicitly stipulate the importance of white supremacy, are referred to as 'Alt-Lite' (Hawley 2019; Wendling 2018; Neiwert 2017), but for the reasons set out above, I prefer to use the more general term 'radical right' because of how the views of the Alt-Right/Lite have increasingly found their way from the margins into mainstream politics.

This resurgence has also taken the form of an awakening where people claim to be in possession of a revelation.[1] This revelation positions adherents as heroic defenders of the West, but I will argue it rather reveals the fragility at the core of the radical right's identification. Amongst the broader movement, this awakening is expressed in the metaphor of the 'red pill'. This is a reference to the scene in *The Matrix* where Morpheus offers Neo the chance to leave the constructed world in which he exists and see reality as it actually is. Offering him his open hand on which he has placed a blue pill and a red pill, Morpheus tells Neo: "You take the blue pill… the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill…you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes" (Wachowskis, 1999) Neo, of course, takes the red pill and wakes up to find himself in a cocoon where he is being used as a battery—his life force generates energy—for a world now run and completely controlled by machines.[2] To say that you have taken the 'red pill' or to declare oneself 'red-pilled' is therefore to announce a dual uncovering. The first is to be in possession of a new vision or way of see-

1 Most recently, these revelatory politics have been seen in the disinformation claiming the COVID pandemic is either a fraud or was intentionally manufactured and is an attempt by a world government to control people. In response, users of social media take to the greatest tool of corporate and government micro-surveillance yet invented, the mobile phone, to tell others that the vaccination is a nefarious means to track and monitor an unthinking, soporific population.

2 The curious thing about the adoption of the 'red pill' metaphor by a political movement that advocates traditional gender relations is that *The Matrix* was made by two trans women, and the film has been widely interpreted as a trans allegory. This was made even more evident in the fourth film in the franschise, *The Matrix Resurrections*, directed by Lana Wachowski, where the red pill leads to an explicit rejection of heteronormativity and the nuclear family.

ing and an array of supposedly esoteric or secret knowledge. Given that the literal meaning of apocalypse—*apokaluptein*—is to uncover or reveal, this form of politics is decidedly apocalyptic.

However, this is only one aspect of this apocalyptic culture. The second is closely linked to the more common understanding of apocalypse derived from the Book of Revelation, which tells of the end of the world. In the various tributaries that feed into the dark waters of the radical right, each one contains some element of a world-ending scenario. Even in the most recent COVID conspiracies that speak of an end to liberty and the death of freedom, those opposed to the vaccine have adopted a deeply anti-Semitic trope and likened it to the holocaust. They attire themselves in a Star of David as if the mild inconvenience they experience from governments trying to prevent a deadly disease is equivalent to the persecution and genocide experienced by Jewish people in the first half of the twentieth century. The religious overtones of this aspect of contemporary apocalypse are also evident in the metaphor of the 'red pill' which signifies both a sacrament and a communion, as well as a transition or transformation that are central to all sacred practices. To be 'red-pilled' is to share in a communal uncovering of dangerous—if not actually evil—forces that threaten the annihilation of worlds.

To understand this, and to explain the structure of contemporary apocalypse, this paper has three parts. The first looks at the political structure and describes the most dominant narrative of the red-pill apocalypse. While this alt-universe comprises a host of stories and theories, the issues of 'race' and gender provide the two primary pillars of this particular apocalypse. However, due to the limit on what can be adequately discussed here, this part of the paper focuses specifically on the politics of 'race' and ethnicity. The second part introduces the ontological structure of the red pill apocalypse. This is because while many of these apocalyptic narratives contain elements of physical collapse or decay, they are primarily concerned with the loss of a world conceived as a *way of life*. To understand the significance of losing such a world we will need to follow Martin Heidegger to consider this making and unmaking of the 'world'. This will also require some brief consideration of how Heidegger's own apocalyptic thought combined with his anti-Semitism lead to his greatest failing in identifying with National Socialism.[3] Finally, while part two will help us understand the general anxiety experienced by the red pill community, the third part on the psychological structure allows us to arrive at the particular core of this apocalyptic fantasy. Using the work of Jacques Lacan, the paper focuses on the nature of imaginary identification, especially identification with the supremacy, entitlement and supposed merit

3 In volume 15 of the black notebooks, as part of a discussion of 'globalism,' Heidegger evokes a view of 'World-Judaism' very similar to the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory known as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. He writes: "World-Judaism, incited by the emigrants allowed out of Germany, cannot be held fast anywhere and, with all its developed power, does not need to participate anywhere in the activities of war, whereas all that remains to us is the sacrifice of the best blood of the best of our own people" (2017b, 208).

of the white man that is so threatened by progressive political advances. Ultimately, it will show that rather than being heroic, the red pill apocalypse is, to borrow a phrase from Maurice Blanchot, disappointing (1997, 101). It claims to be daring but manifests merely fragility and resentment.

Political Structure

The politics of the radical right is dominated by a range of apocalyptic narratives and scenarios, variations of which appear every day on Conservative 'news' outlets such as Fox News, Newsmax, and TruNews. The examples are far too numerous to list but a couple from 2019 that epitomise the apocalyptic nature of this kind of politics—in both senses of uncovering and annihilating—will help elucidate the problem. In March 2019 on *The Laura Ingraham Podcast*, Dr. Paul Nathanson was asked to comment on the issue of trans rights. He noted how radical the goal of such a politics is, saying 'We're not talking about people who want to simply do a bit of reform here and there, add a new category. They want…they must, in fact, destroy whatever is in order to replace it with what they think should be.'[4] He concluded that the ultimate goal of trans activists is to 'use social engineering to create a new species' that will be part human, part machine. A little later in that year Pastor Rick Wiles on TruNews warned about the devastating consequences of veganism, in particular innovations such as vegan 'meat'. Claiming God to be 'an environmentalist' who wants everything just as he created it, Wiles concludes: 'He created this planet, he created the universe and he's watching these Luciferians destroy this planet, destroy the animal kingdom, destroy the plant kingdom, change human DNA. Why? They want to change human DNA so that you can't be born again. That's where they're going with this, to change the DNA of humans so it will be impossible for a human to be born again. They want to create a race of soulless creatures on this planet' (Mehta 2019).

There is, of course, nothing new in the apocalyptic ravings of Christian conservatives in the US. In fact, the culture as a whole remains deeply apocalyptic. Even the most dominant and mainstream narrative of American identity ascribes to a theological interpretation know as Millennialism. This has two versions. Post-Millennialism proposes that the US is the Kingdom of God and has a moral and spiritual obligation to extend that Kingdom throughout the globe. This is what is known as American 'manifest destiny,' and is ascribed to by liberals and conservatives alike. The other version, Pre-Millennialism, is primarily the domain of Christian conservatism and claims the Kingdom of God will only come after a final

4 https://www.newsweek.com/laura-ingraham-podcast-trans-people-species-machine-paul-nathanson-1377906

and devastating confrontation with Satan after which the chosen will be redeemed following the second coming of Jesus (Melling 1999; Northcott 2004). Rather worryingly, this version sees destruction, calamity and violence as positive signs heralding the final conflagration and our salvation.

Although elements of this vision remain part of the structure of contemporary apocalypse the current version takes on a particularly racial configuration of nation where being 'red pilled' opens ones eyes to the dangers of democracy with its commitment to multiculturalism and racial equality. Central to the apocalypse of the radical right, then, is the narrative of 'white genocide'. This has been an important aspect of white supremacist apocalypse since the inception of the early movement, coming to a head in the white power movement of the 1980s who proposed migration to the Northwest of the US in search of a white homeland. At the time, in the words of Robert Miles, leader of the white power congregation, Mountain Church, they were seeking '"a sanctuary for our Folk … since we are an endangered species in America"' (Belew 2018, 162). Taking this sentiment even further, Order leader Bob Mathews wrote in the epigraph of James Coates's book *Armed and Dangerous: The Rise of the Survivalist Right*: '"We are the legions of the damned […]. The army of the already dead" (Belew 2018, 224). Here we can hear echoes of the 'one drop' mantra of 19th-century white supremacists who argued "any non-white ancestor fundamentally alters all lineal descendants for evermore" (Wendling 2018, 44).

In keeping with their bid to prevent any further contamination to either biology or culture they also believe "diversity is code for white genocide" (Wendling 2018, 78), a key point that has put them at odds with traditional conservatism due to its "hesitancy to engage directly with the issue of race […], which the Alt-Right consider existential" (Hawley 2019, 164). And by existential here they primarily mean the dissolution of a white *world* premised on white supremacy and 'European' values (with 'European' being another marker for a putative white civilization). However, traditional conservatism has become increasingly less reluctant to make race an issue, as was seen in Trump's 2016 victory and the rhetoric of the Brexit campaign, which was premised almost entirely on the negative effects of immigration and the wonders of Britain in the age of Empire. Although the Alt-Right affiliates are often not Christian (as many of the earlier movement were) or are anti-religion, the broader politics of the radical right has emerged from a post-Cold War world where the identification of Islamism as the new enemy has provided "a bridge issue with the evangelical right" (Belew 2018, 188).

Firmly established as a continuation of this early heritage, the contemporary variant has been encouraged by two relatively recent far-right publications that have come out of France: Guillaume Faye's *The Colonization of Europe* and Renaud Camus's more recent *The Great Replacement*. These two books have gained significant celebrity and have been central to the resurgence and mainstreaming of far-right thought. Although less extreme than the one-drop mantra of 19th century white supremacism, Camus' theory nevertheless evokes both cultural and biological replacement. In a lecture from 2010, he argued:

> Faced with the tight cohorts of the Great Replacement, we must assert ever more firmly our will to keep our culture, our language of course, our way of life and our way of being, our religion or what is left of it, our landscapes or, what remains of them, our laws, our mores, our habits, our cuisine, our freedoms. France has always been open to those who wished to join her out of love, admiration, a sincere desire to merge with her spirit and her mode of existence on earth. On the contrary, she must be closing down completely, and she should have done it a long time ago, to those who would pretend to reestablish on its soil the type of society they left behind. (2010, 27–28)

Although there is a sense here that Camus remains open in some way to migration—at least for those who agree to total assimilation—he nevertheless refers to migration as a form of "counter-colonization" (32) and that "in the face of the colonization underway there is no indigenous people anymore" (24). This idea of the death or erasure of an indigenous culture—while itself a myth—has been a powerful rallying cry for right wing populists in North America and across Europe.[5]

While the sources and causes of far-right resurgence are numerous, the event that breathed new life into these very old hatreds in the US was the election of Barack Obama. As David Neiwert has noted, "The gradual coalescence of the alternative-universe worldviews of conspiracists, Patriots, white supremacists, Tea Partiers, and nativists occurred after the election of the first black president, in 2008" (2017, 231). For Carol Anderson, his election represented "the ultimate advancement" of black America, "and thus the ultimate affront" (2017, 5) to assumptions of white supremacy. In the words of Don Black, a leading figure in the Alt-Right, "White people, for a long time, have thought of our government as being for us, and Obama is the best possible evidence that we've lost that" (Neiwert 2017, 90). In Anderson's excellent analysis in *White Rage*, this was the manifestation of white supremacy's greatest fear, and something it has been fighting

5 This myth, at least in the UK, was seriously dented when DNA testing on the oldest skeleton ever to be found on the British Isles indicated his skin would have been very dark (McKie 2018).

against since slavery was abolished in the US in 1865. It is, of course, not a coincidence that this was the same year the Ku Klux Klan was founded as a reactionary attempt to reclaim what had supposedly been lost, and counter any challenge to a world based on white superiority.[6]

Almost 150 years later, while it skirted around such explicit racism, the Brexit campaign and decision by the UK to leave the EU was also based on the desire to recover what was said to have been lost — or actively erased — namely Britain's greatness. In this, a very specific interpretation of World War 2 and a particularly ethnic representation of nation took centre stage, one that had become its own cultural industry. As Paul Gilroy explains: "Revisiting the feeling of victory in war supplies the best evidence that Britain's endangered civilization is in progressive motion toward its historic completion" (2005, 88). He goes on to argue that the war has "totemic power" and carries "the status of an ethnic myth" that makes "it a privileged point of entry into national identity and self-understanding [and] reveals a desire to find a way back to the point where national culture [was] both comprehensible and habitable" (89). In this dominant interpretation of Britain and Britishness, immigrants "represent the involution of national culture [and] the perceived dangers of pluralism" (90). Encapsulating the ontological precarity I will outline in part 2, Gilroy claims that when "the history of the empire became a source of discomfort, shame, and perplexity, its complexities and ambiguities were readily set aside. Rather than work through those feelings, that unsettling history was diminished, denied, and then, if possible, actively forgotten" (90).

He continues by saying the "invitation to revise and reassess often triggers a chain of defensive argumentation that seeks firstly to minimize the extent of the empire, then to deny or justify its brutal character, and finally, to present the British themselves as the ultimate tragic victims of their extraordinary imperial successes" (94). The logic is that Britain brought civilization to other countries only for the inhabitants of those countries to return to Britain and destroy the very civilization the British had gifted them; and British citizens from former colonies and more recent migrants "carry all the ambivalence of empire with them. They project it into the unhappy consciousness of their fearful and anxious hosts" (100). Ultimately, Gilroy explains, this "melancholic pattern has become the mechanism that sustains the unstable edifice of increasingly brittle and empty national identity" (106).

This anxiety experienced in the unmaking of a (white) world is also discussed in Sivamohan Valluvan's book on race and nation in Britain. For him, the political orientation of conservatism and projects like Brexit is to

6 According to Anderson (2017), the history of US domestic policy can be written as a series of attempts to undermine any and every advance made by people of colour. From the immediate overturning of the 1865 Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, created by Congress to lease forty-acre plots of abandoned plantations to former slaves, to the Black Codes that required African Americans to "sign annual labor contracts with plantation, mill, or mine owners" (19) who could be charged with vagrancy or auctioned off if they refused, US courts and state legislatures did everything to reassert what they saw as the natural racial hierarchy. These Codes, that effectively prevented free movement or freed slaves was an attempt to interrupt "black flight", which, according to Anderson, "threatened much more than the economic foundation of a feudal society; African Americans' determination to achieve their full potential endangered the legalistic, biological, and philosophical tenets of a racially oppressive system" (54). In other words, "the whole culture of the white South was erected on the presumption of black inability" (54).

"look into the past for the promise of the future" (Valluvan 2019, 98). Here, the past is mediated by an image of "edifying and homogenous whiteness" (100). In this process, "Empire and the histories of the colonial order intrinsic to it become [...] non-negotiable objects of nationalist recall" (113) that provide a form of "solace" (113) in the face of a world that has slowly been unmade through the dual processes of imperial decline and immigration. As a reactionary attempt to recover something akin to an antediluvian age this project must also "readmit the validity of white supremacy's various propositions" (113). Ultimately, for Valluvan, a "pivot towards the Second World War circumvents the ghosts of colonial brutality that otherwise threaten to haunt Britain's past" (114). Not only then does World War 2 stand as a historical marker of previous British greatness, understood as Empire, the fact that this was a time that Britain fought Nazism enables the mythologists of this time to focus on the goodness of Britain and cast out these ghosts that haunt the national imagination. For Valluvan this is "a British monumentalisation of self as a moral authority" (115). As such, it should be clear how a project like Brexit protects adherents from the unmaking of their world.

Ontological Structure

To understand the foreboding and doom-laden vision of the red pill apocalypse we need to have a sense of how the world and our place in it can feel so precarious. To do this, it is helpful to follow Heidegger's thinking. This is for a couple of reasons. The first is because he talks about the world as a 'referential totality' (1962, 99), that is, a set of meanings that organise, maintain, and legitimise our thoughts and actions; or that 'which constitutes significance' (160). Everything I do in my everyday activities while at work or at leisure *refers* to a collection of aims, purposes, goals, reasons, and rationales that warrant that behaviour and through which they makes sense. I will say more about this very shortly, but his analysis is helpful in the first instance because Heidegger understands the world as an interpretive project through which we make sense of ourselves and of the life we live. However, as an interpretive project our world is always susceptible to being questioned, challenged or rejected.

The second reason for using Heidegger's analysis is because he himself fell prey to the projecting fantasies of apocalypse and it is important to consider why this might be. His apocalyptic thinking was made eminently manifest in his interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1966 where he concluded that in the face of the crisis of technicity the "only possibility available to us is

that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god" (1981, 57). In fact, his apocalyptic resignation was pronounced enough for him to add that "at best we can *awaken* a readiness to wait" (57, my italics). His fatal error was, of course, to have seen something like this stirring in National Socialism, so it is important to briefly consider this matter so that we don't repeat it. It could be proposed that Heidegger was so fearful of the nihilism he saw in the calculating instrumentality of modernity that he accidentally ended up supporting a movement that became the most crystallised version of it. However, his anti-Semitism clearly makes this untenable because of how clearly he connected this calculating instrumentality to Judaism. In volume 8 of the 'black notebooks' he writes: "One of the most concealed forms of the *gigantic* [a term Heidegger used for global technicity], and perhaps the oldest, is a tenacious facility in calculating, manipulating, and interfering; through this facility the worldlessness of Judaism receives its ground" (2017a, 76).[7] He went even further in volume 14 where he explains the entire conflict with England in terms of world-Judaism:

> Why are we recognizing so late that England in truth is, and can be, *without* the Western outlook? It is because we will only henceforth grasp that England started to institute the *modern* world, but that modernity in its essence is directed toward the unleashing of the machination of the entire globe. Even the thought of an agreement with England, in the sense of a division of the imperialistic 'franchises,' does not touch the essence of the historical process which England is now playing out to the end within Americanism and Bolshevism and thus at the same time within world-Judaism. The question of the role of *world-Judaism* is not a racial question, but a metaphysical one, a question that concerns the kind of human existence which in an *utterly unrestrained* way can undertake as a world-historical "task" the uprooting of all beings from being (2017b, 191).

The problem was that he believed American capitalism and Soviet communism were two versions of this calculating instrumentality that reduced being (and hence all beings) to an exploitable "standing reserve" (1977, 19). As a result, he believed they were occluding a more authentic way of being that, he argued, Germany was specifically tasked with revealing. For Heidegger, challenging this precursor to the globalism that remains the *bête noir* of the radical right was *the* task at hand. Connecting this nihilism to Judaism clearly contributed to his terrible decision, but other elements no doubt contributed. He took a fatalistic view of history as that

7 This connection is repeated in volume 12 where Heidegger writes: "the occasional increase in the power of Judaism is grounded in the fact that Western metaphysics, especially in its modern evolution, offered the point of attachment for the expansion of an otherwise empty rationality and calculative capacity" (2017b, 37).

which is sent or destined. This is something specifically worked through in *The Principle of Reason* in relation to the concept of *Geschick* (1991, 61–63). As such, Heidegger continually spoke about the need to be *attentive* to an event suggestive of a new epoch. The problem was he mistook the event of National Socialism for something that it wasn't. However, as Slavoj Žižek (1999) has argued, this was not in spite of his philosophy but because of it. His rejection of the ontic in favour of the ontological, most famously worked out in *Being and Time* (1962, 31), made him *inattentive* to the actual politics. In Žižek's terms he could not see "the complicity [...] between the elevation above ontic concerns and the passionate 'ontic' Nazi political engagement" (1999, 14). So, anti-Semitism, Being as destining, and his disregard for the ontic all played their part, but we might also add Heidegger's focus on rootedness and dwelling, or his very specific and consistent circling of *polemos* (war, conflict, struggle, confrontation) understood as *Kampf* (2014) or *Auseinandersetzung* (1996) as the source of his failing.[8] Because Heidegger's affiliation with National Socialism makes his thought popular amongst the far-right it is beholden on us, if we are to use his work at all in this context, to highlight its faults, but as this is not an essay on Heidegger's Nazism these faults cannot be fully developed here.

Returning, then, to the first reason to consider Heidegger in this context, we need to ask how does he help us think through the precarity of the world? While I agree with Žižek that a sole focus on the ontological is a problem, ontological considerations do remain helpful if we start from, do not lose sight of, or are motivated primarily by the ontic, on which level the resurgence of far-right thought must be a major concern. Ordinarily, when philosophy asks ontological questions it is concerned with the nature of a being or *what* something is, but Heidegger referred to this as the 'ontic', reserving the term ontological for a consideration of Being itself, or *how* we are. When considering the nature of *Dasein* — a term he preferred instead of either human or subject in order to register the primacy of our being-[there]-in-the-world — he wrote that "*understanding Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being*" (1962, 32).[9] In other words, Heidegger was interested in what he believed gave us a better sense of what is essential to humans, namely *how* we relate to the things around us and how, most importantly, they become meaningful.

The precarity of worlds was first introduced in Heidegger's lecture series from 1921–22, published under the title *Phenomenological Interpretations of Aristotle*. Here Heidegger describes the world as "the content aimed at in living, that which life holds to" (2001, 65). It was something he would continue in the following year in his lecture series on "factical

8 It is worth noting that this shift in translation of the Greek *polemos* took place between the two lectures courses I have referred to here. The first held in 1934, the second in 1935. 1934 is the year Heidegger resigned the Rectorship of Freiburg, and this shift may be indicative of an attempt to distance his own thought from the rhetoric of National Socialism. One other significant biographical note here is that *polemos* was so important to Heidegger that he congratulated Carl Schmitt in 1933 for also putting the concept at the heart of his work.

9 Heidegger goes on to explain the difference between the ontic and the ontological is this way: '"Being-ontological' is not yet tantamount to 'developing an ontology'. So if we should reserve the term 'ontology' for that theoretical inquiry which is explicitly devoted to the meaning of entities, then what we have had in mind in speaking of Dasein's 'Being-ontological' is to be designated as something 'pre-ontological'. It does not signify simply 'being-ontical', however, but rather 'being in such a way that one has an understanding of Being'" (1962, 32).

life" (1999, 12). The idea that *life* 'holds to' a *world* is important because while it suggests that life and world are to some extent stuck together it is more like a clinging to than a firm grasp. Hence, life and world are intimately related, but not as "two separate self-subsistent Objects" (65). This means that life and world are neither distinct nor identical but are mutually implictated in each other; life always refers to a world and this referentiality is always acutalised in life. The problem, however, is that life is never so simple. The world isn't always realised, or isn't realised in the way we had hoped or even expected; there is a tendency for the meaning we ascribe to slip away.

While the gap between life and world is what makes reflection possible it can also act as a fault line that threatens the world with collapse. Most of the time, the referential totality that is our *way* of life is reproduced in everyday rituals, both sacred and profane, that we have inherited and pass on. These rituals and the cultural liturgy that accompanies them tell us what is legitimate and proper, what does and does not belong. There is even a case for saying that this totality, this *way*, determines what does and does not exist; what we see and what we don't. The world is, then, a collection of concepts, values, and beliefs sustained by the language we use and the stories we regularly circulate. It should not be surprising, then, that the world appears more fragile or appears to slip away when these rituals are no longer performed and these stories no longer recounted.

In the lecture series from the summer of 1923, entitled *Ontology — The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, Heidegger addresses the meaning of the world as an explicit theme. He discusses it in relation to hermeneutics, traditionally understood as the scholarly interpretation of religious texts. For Heidegger, however, hermeneutics stands for our general way of being. He proposes we think of our lived experience as something "in need of interpretation and that to be in some state of having-been-interpreted belongs" to that experience (1999, 11). This being-interpretive is how we are in the world and is part of the distinctive, open character of our existence. In other words, hermeneutics is about interpreting the things and events around us, but, for Heidegger, we also speak "from out of interpretation" (14). There isn't some prior condition that is free from this hermeneutic relationship. It isn't a secondary phenomenon, but our very way of being amongst things in the first place. We therefore exist *in* and *as* interpretation, with the world that our life holds to being a particular instance of that interpretative relation. The world, then, is always given to us *as* this or *as* that. Returning to the earlier lecture course, he notes how objects are not "bare realities, [...] they do not [...] run around naked" (2001, 69). Objects and entities are always given to us as meaningful in some way and

we in turn engage with them under the knowledge they might be understood *as* something else or conceived in another way. This is, of course, the underlying condition of our politics.

The world is, then, a specific interpretation that directs life from inception and is always already familiar. This familiarity is worked out in one of the most famous passages of *Being and Time*, namely the section on the "handiness" (*Zuhandenheit*, *Händlichkeit*) of tools and equipment (1962, 99–106). Here, 'handiness' relates to things being immediately available, functioning and effective for the purposes assigned to them. What is important here, though—and this is crucial for understanding our relationship to the world—is that as long as these useful things work in line with their assignments and within the references that combine in any given task, the useful thing can be said to *withdraw* (99). In other words, the world drifts into the background of my experience and is not part of my conscious awareness. As long as the pen is full of ink, the nib is in good working order, and the paper is dry, I will not be especially conscious of the act of writing, nor of holding the pen. This withdrawal also applies to the world in general. For Heidegger, the moment things become objectively present is the moment where a problem has occurred or something has broken down (103, 106).

Consequently, as long as life is *working* for me, the world that directs it remains withdrawn despite continuing to direct my every move. In this withdrawal it takes on a sense of naturalness. It has the character of 'inconspicuous familiarity' (1962, 137). However, should any part of my world malfunction by being challenged as illegitimate, immoral or even out-of-date, what normally and unproblematically directs my thought and behaviour suddenly becomes an issue for me. The world itself becomes a problem. This might only cause a minor, temporary interruption, but it can be a profoundly disturbing experience. So, while the world is so familiar as to be unnoticeable, anything that makes it conspicuous threatens it with collapse (1962, 233) and places Dasein in "the existential mode of the *'not-at-home'*" (233).[10] This is crucial for understanding our ontological precarity. To be more precise about this, we need to return to another feature of Heidegger's analysis of tools, where our use of them is always situated within a set "assignments or references which are constitutive" (101) for any given task, and each task links with others in pursuit of a broader purpose.[11]

Most importantly for Heidegger, we quite literally *find ourselves* within this collection of aims, objectives and purposes. My world's guiding "what for" and "for-the-sake-of" (80) are therefore integral to my sense of self. In Heidegger's language this means Dasein can be understood as the

10 Heidegger referred to this experience as one of "uncanniness" (1962, 233). In the later lecture course from 1942 published under the title *Hölderlin's Hymn—The Ister*, Heidegger returned to this theme of the uncanny to offer a specific account of how our ontological precarity turns violent. The existential mode of the 'not-at-home' can precipitate periods of the active violence Heidegger refers to as "predatory uncanniness" (1996, 90), which "is an extreme derivative and essential consequence of a concealed uncanniness that is grounded in unhomeliness" (90). For a more detailed discussion, see Curtis (2007).

11 In Heidegger's language, all assignments eventually lead back to the primary "what-for" or "the for-the-sake-of-which from which every what-for is ultimately derived" (1962, 80).

"dependency of being referred" (81). In other words, our sense of self is wholly *dependent* upon the chain of references that combine to organise, arrange and give meaning to our life. To reiterate, in holding to a world I am always already outside of myself, sustained by the cultural rites, norms and codes, values, beliefs and meanings that I in turn commit to reproducing. This also means that there is *no closed interiority to which we might retreat at times of crisis*, which means *there is no immunity or safe haven from the fate of the world*. Although life feels robust, we effectively reside on top of an abyss. Having said that, one of our core ideological strategies is to posit such an entity or closed interiority in an attempt to run from the world and its contingencies, but I will return to that in part three.

Given this dependency, it is hardly surprising that these references need to be regularly repeated and their boundaries constantly policed. The communal liturgy therefore seems to *substantiate* or make real the values that guide and define us. As long as we continue to tell the particular set of stories—about 'race', nation, gender, sex—that define us, the definition seems to have a greater reality and takes on an incontrovertible naturalness. The world withdraws. Without the regular ritualised performance, the world begins to break down. It doesn't disappear but is there 'obtrusively' (1962, 234), manifesting as a problem. What a consideration of the ontological affords us here, then, is an understanding that if the references making up a world—references we are dependent upon—are challenged (let us say the references that preserve the dominance of whiteness, patriarchy, heterosexuality, and Christianity), the world can slip away, or feel like it is coming to an end. This produces a generalised yet profound sense of anxiety that can in turn prompt violence against the entity perceived to be responsible for the destruction of the world.

Psychological Structure

While Heidegger's ontological analysis offers us a general theory of how the unmaking of a world and the loss of a home can cause anxiety-induced violence, I have chosen to close with a psychological account because I believe it gives us the best way to understand a more specific source of the red pill apocalypse and the radical right's fragile fantasy of supremacy. It is also possible to argue—although there is not room to fully develop this here—that Heidegger's work is imprecise on this specific issue because of his inadequate treatment of subjectivity. Even where being-in-the world is (and must be) taken as the "primary datum" (Heidegger 1962, 78), thereby dissolving any distinction between subject and object, we

do still posit some crucial aspect of subjectivity as the core of our being. While there is no pure interiority that isn't already directed in some way, one of our core ideological strategies—Žižek would say fantasies—is to posit such an entity in an attempt to run from the world and its contingencies. Heidegger cannot help us here, *and his god certainly can't save us*; in fact the positing of such a god and Heidegger's belief he had some privileged access to it or could *awaken* a readiness for its appearance is at the root of the problem. Hence, I believe a psychological or specifically psychoanalytic account will help understand this residual subjectivity and explain what happens when others fail to repeat or reproduce the stories that make up our world, as is happening in the progressive challenges to the world of the radical right. To do this, I will very briefly consider our ontological precarity in relation to the work of Jacques Lacan before turning to Slavoj Žižek's interpretation.

While Lacan himself radically critiqued the Cartesian split between subject and object, he nevertheless provided us with a philosophy of the subject that is particularly fruitful. To explain this it is necessary to briefly set out the organization of desire through the Lacanian tripartite schema of the Real, Imaginary, and the Symbolic orders (2006, 38). Initially it can be said that what Lacan calls the Real is the order of non-differentiation that Sigmund Freud referred to as primary narcissism. We are in the Real only prior to the emergence of the ego and later the subject, but this schema, while having a chronological component is not reducible to a temporal progression where each stage is the overcoming of the other. Instead, this pre-subjective state of non-differentiation continues to traumatically haunt the fully differentiated subject. In terms of the development of this subject, the first moment of self-consciousness takes place in the Imaginary Order with the formation of the ego. Here, the child, in what Lacan called the mirror phase (2006, 75), sees itself as the Other, that is, sees itself in the idealized image of another (a parent, specifically the mother for Lacan) which it jubilantly affirms as itself (76). However, given that the child's experience of its body is "fragmented" (78), this introjected other is a desired, complete, and autonomous form the child does not possess. The ego is thus coupled with an otherness that Lacan later named the *objet petit a* (2018, 103), which becomes the cause of my desire and the source of both paranoia and the violent outbursts against another perceived to be more satisfied. This appearance of the Other within the self remains an incurable antagonism or a perpetual source of "ontological decompletion" (Eyers 2012, 17) within the subject.

Importantly for the argument here, this conception of the mirror stage in subjective development was adapted from Alexandre Kojève's (1980)

interpretation of Hegel's master and slave dialectic. Very briefly, Kojève understood the subject in terms of negativity and the historical progress of humanity as a movement of becoming (234). For Kojève, this was also conceived in terms of desire. Not the desire for objects but the desire for recognition from another, recognition that gives value and certainty to what a person has become. In other words, "human reality is nothing but the fact of the recognition of the one man by another man" (41). The vulnerability of this relation is evident from the fact that in desiring recognition from another the subject is placed outside of itself in a relation of dependency only to be returned to itself through the process of recognition. Without the required recognition the subject can only 'return' to itself by destroying the other who is refusing to accommodate it. As we saw in part 2, this is central to Heidegger's analysis where the world must also return Dasein to itself. This imbrication of subject and object lead Lacan to claim "it should be noted that this experience sets us at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*" (Lacan 2006, 75). The particular and important twist that Lacan added was to propose that the mirror stage is actually a process of misrecognition that ensures the subject is forever removed from itself, always vulnerable, always homeless, and that characterises the ego's "defensive structures" (80). It is, then, through Lacanian psychoanalysis that the illusion of any sort of completion, security or salvation can be understood. It also explains the religious impulses of redemption as well as the proclivity for world-ending scenarios that articulate the permanent precarity of a subject always dependent on an 'other' for their deliverance. Again, we ought to be mindful here of Heidegger and his god in the face of world-destroying machination.

For Lacan, then, the foundation of self-consciousness is the immediate alienation of the subject from itself, and this remains the condition that haunts its future. The contradiction that exists between the image of the unified body, sometimes referred to as the Gestalt, and the experience of the fragmentary, dependent body in which the subject actually resides is the source of a permanent tension; even paranoia. Ultimately the perception and introjection of the Gestalt situates the agency of the ego "in a fictional direction" (2006, 76). Hence, the subject is cut in the mirror stage, severed from any adequation with itself, and it is this cut that has such a profound effect on the subject's future actions and is the key to understanding its fragility. Spurred on by the spectre of the fragmented body and the threat of annihilation that continually haunts the subject's phantasy of unity, the subject may strike out, or seek to negate whatever refuses to affirm it. Lacan concludes his paper on 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis' by warning us "It is this touching victim, this innocent escapee

[…], whom we take in when he comes to us; it is this being of nothingness for whom, in our daily task, we clear anew the path to his meaning in a discreet fraternity—a fraternity to which we never measure up" (2006, 101).

The original fracturing of the subject is masked by entry into the Symbolic. This is the entry into language where subjectivity is secured—given a place and a name—via the mimetic attachment to numerous signifiers 'filling up', although ultimately never fully satisfying the desiring ego. The Symbolic is thus the placing of a subject within a world that masks the trauma of the Real and the misrecognition of the Imaginary. This is another point where we might highlight a lack of criticality in Heidegger who believed that particular languages, in particular Greek and German, gave us (and him especially) access to the concealment of Being, and hence overcame the trauma of the Real (Butler 2014, 113).

In masking the trauma of the Real and the misrecognition of the Imaginary, the 'reality' offered by the Symbolic realm is better understood in terms of fantasy, which has a dual purpose. As something that coordinates the desire of the subject, it covers over the inherent void at the centre of each subject's desire and transforms the desire *for* the Other into more legitimate desires. In this instance, entry into the symbolic also means our desire is the desire *of* the Other, or it is the Other that tells us what to desire. This is also the ideological and intersubjective aspect of fantasy that helps to guard against the return of the Real that always threatens to undermine this carefully coordinated 'reality'. With regard to this, Žižek concludes that "in the opposition between dream and reality, fantasy is on the side of reality" (2006, 57). Fantasy's function, then, is to overcome this disjunctive moment. It seeks to guarantee symbolic authority by attempting to secure semiotic closure. The symbolic order fills up the subject by inscribing it within a seemingly endless series of exchangeable signifiers. The only way to escape this bad infinity is "to ascribe to one signifier the function of representing the subject (the place of inscription) for all the others […] in this way, the proper Master-signifier is produced" (Žižek 2002, 23). In terms of the red pill apocalypse that privileges racial superiority, it is not difficult to understand how whiteness figures here as the master signifier and what happens if the master signifier is challenged.

But fantasy not only protects our world by directing desire through the coordinates of the master discourse, any perceived failings of the master discourse, that is, grievances regarding failed promises, are projected outwards toward what Žižek (2005) calls the "spectral apparition". Within the coordinates of the red pill apocalypse such spectral apparitions are primarily people of colour and women (especially feminists), but these

also include a range of others: 'libtards', 'cucks', socialists, environmentalists, scientists, and various evil big Others: ZOG, the New World Order, Globalism, and Internationalists. According to Žižek, then, such spectral apparitions emerge because 'reality' can only ever present itself "via its incomplete-failed symbolization [...]: the spectre gives body to that which escapes (the symbolically structured) reality" (2005, 262).

As long as the subject is faced with what Michael Shapiro (1995) calls an "imitative other" who offers fraternity, all is well. On the other hand, spectral apparitions as *non-imitative* others destabilise the subject, opening up its "original fracturing" (Lacan 2006, 100) and are perceived as a threat. This is clearly relevant to Heidegger's analysis of the world where imitative others are required to maintain the referential totality that maintains our sense of self. Linking the screen of the mirror to the screens of our media it is also evident that to maintain the Imaginary identification, these screens must reflect back the identity the subject has assumed. When that identity also includes the assumption of 'natural' superiority it is clear how the failure to see oneself represented as such in the products of popular culture can lead to a crisis. A central component, then, of the red pill apocalypse is this sense of crisis brought on by those who don't reinforce the primary fantasy of white male superiority and universality.

However, to fully understand this and the dynamics of the red pill apocalypse we need to acknowledge that alongside the master signifier on the side of the object there needs to be a subjective correlate. For Žižek, "there must always be some 'little piece of the real', totally contingent but nonetheless perceived by the subject as a confirmation, as the support of its belief in its own omnipotence" (2005, 30). We find this in late Lacan where the focus shifts to the object that the subject itself 'is', to the *agalma*, a term adopted from Plato's *Symposium* by Lacan in the 1960–1961 seminar that he uses to refer to the secret treasure, which guarantees a minimum of phantasmatic consistency to the subject's being. That is to say, what Lacan also refers to as the *objet petit a*, is "something in me more than myself" and on account of which I perceive myself as "worthy of the other's desire" (Žižek 1997, 8). In other words, it is that which I fantasize the Other sees in me. The *objet petit a* is also that element of the Real that couples itself to the ego in the moment of misrecognition, where the ego sees itself as an idealised other. This, again, is why fantasy is so important because it "fills out the void of [the subject's] 'origins' by means of a narration" (2002, 211). Narrative tells of something lost in the past that is to be regained in the future, or indeed in some present messianic moment (MAGA, Brexit, and even Heidegger's god). This is a perfect encapsulation of both the mourning of a lost status and its future

redemption that is central to the red pill apocalypse, but it also veils the impossibility of gaining something that only emerges as lost.

Conclusion

For the radical right there has been an erosion of their world to the point where they feel it has ended. The meanings, values and references upon which they depend are seemingly vanishing into thin air if not being actively evaporated by hostile agents conspiring against their way of life. The anxiety produced by this opening up of the gap between life and world has triggered a hostile attempt to reconstruct it. The recent resurgence of the radical right under the banner of an apocalypse is nothing but a reaction to their perceived loss of status and a rear guard action against every progressive movement they blame for losing their way. Heidegger helps us understand this process because of his critique of Cartesian dualism that draws out the absolute dependency of Dasein on its world. However, to get to the kernel of this apocalypse, and offer the chance to explain why it is ultimately so disappointing, it was necessary to say more about the split between the biological (life) and the ontological (world). For this I suggested a detour through the psychological or psychoanalytical, because it is only here that we can critique the unworkable division between subject and object and still have a conception of the 'subject' that helps us understand why the challenge to a way of life generates such passion and can manifest so personally.

At the crux of the matter, and something I have written about in a little more detail elsewhere (Curtis 2021) is the fantasy of *merit* that coordinates and structures the 'reality' of the radical right, which we can only pursue with the assistance of Lacan. At issue is the fact that those who ascribe to the red pill apocalypse are a collection of people who believe some inherent superiority merits their social status and yet all these spectral apparitions keep interrupting their enjoyment and satisfaction by telling them their success or achievement is the result of some accident of birth. According to this oppositional narrative they are where they are only because of privilege, or what Alison Bailey called "unearned assets" (1998, 107). The sleight of hand played by the fantasy of meritocracy, then, is the belief that we have attained social status or economic success *based on our own very special and personal talent or hard work*; and it is here that we arrive at the most sacred part of our identity: Lacan's *object petit a*.

We build our sense of self from a world of references that includes our taste in music, choice of football team, diet, national and regional pride,

religious faith, job status and area of work, income, place of residence, hobbies, and places travelled, but in all of this there is some sense of contingency. What grounds or anchors us, what is absolute, is that whoever I am and whatever I have achieved it is because I have earned it. It is an internalised, ideal image of the special person we think we are and that we think the Other desires. Deep inside us, then, is this little statue, a shiny, perfect, sacred object set on a pedestal in our little Temple of Holy Talent, and talk of privilege rather than merit, social advantage rather than just deserts, threatens to break down the doors of the temple and smash that little statue to pieces. As Jean-Paul Sartre eloquently argued in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, for the white supremacist "there is nothing I have to do to merit my superiority, and neither can I lose it. It is given once and for all. It is a thing" (1976, 18). Those who challenge white supremacy have taken away this 'thing' and the racists want it back. A note of caution though; the fact that the red pill apocalypse is so disappointing does not mean it is not dangerous.

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Tristan Sturm

The Geopolitics of the Chosen People's Apocalypse: The Los Angeles Jews for Jesus and the Judeo-Christian Tradition

Abstract: Jews for Jesus (JFJ) is an aggressive American Christian Zionist missionary organization. Their particular worldview is both Jewish and Christian by faith whilst bridging American and Israeli national identities. Through critical discourse analysis of a key text, as well as a series of interviews, this article explores the apocalyptic geopolitics of members of the JFJ's Los Angeles branch and compares these views with a book on the apocalypse written by the JFJ Executive Director, David Brickner. This article shows that discourse analysis of apocalyptic social movements alone often misses the everyday and discordant discourses surrounding their theo-political imaginations. The three interviews examined show vast deviations in understanding and motivation that are unaccounted for in previous scholarship on religious geopolitics. This article concludes that these everyday discourses have influence on the cultural conceptualizations of both Christian and Jewish apocalypses and on many text-based academic findings concerning evangelicals and Messianic Jews.

Keywords: Messianic Jews; Apocalypse; Israel-Palestine; Christian Zionists; Judeo-Christian Tradition; geopolitics.

Jews for Jesus (JFJ) emerged in 1970 San Francisco as a northern California chapter of the Hebrew Christian Alliance of America (HCAA). The HCAA was a non-Jewish run organization seeking to convert Jews to Christianity. The chapter director and founder of JFJ, Moishe Rosen,

a Messianic Jew (or "Jewish believer in Christ") who was "born in Kansas City, but raised in Denver" to a family of Reformed Jews from Austria, felt that the Christian evangelical methods were not morally justified or effective in converting Jews to Christianity (Rosen 2012, 3). As a result, JFJ split off from the HCAA in 1973. In 1974 they opened the Los Angeles branch. Rosen and his group of converted or "Messianic Jews" saw themselves as part of the counterculture movement in San Francisco, borrowing both the hip missionary style and urgent message of the popular Hal Lindsey: the End was nigh (Lipson 1990; Sturm and Albrecht 2021). Unlike the traditional missions by evangelicals, JFJ targeted young people at universities, "adopting the young people's style in dress, hair, and music, the new mission proved successful with the new generation" (Ariel 2000, 4). By 1979 it had grown to have 100 employees in 6 branches in the US (Lipson 1980, 102), and today has offices in 13 states with over 200 employees.

The Los Angeles Branch of JFJ is a store-front institution (see Figure 1). Often the idea behind the "storefront church" is not simply because the institution could not afford a church but rather to draw in interested adherents in a religious marketplace. Weightman (1993: 7) describes Los Angeles area storefront churches: "in the first half century, 'white' Pentecostal and Adventist storefronts lined the main streets of Long Beach, landscape manifestations of fundamentalist Protestant individualism

Figure 1: Los Angeles Jews for Jesus Store Front. Photograph by the Author

delivered by in-migrants from across the nation." However, JFJ is not a church rather it is what one interviewee called an "information agency" and another called a "professional organization, not a member organization", clarifying that, "you can run away and join the circus and not Jews for Jesus."[1] The storefront acts as a middle-venue of conversion for local churches to prosper in Weightman's (1993, 1) religious marketplace where belief is sold through the spatial "appropriation of extant structures through adaptive reuse." The JFJ storefront is a staging ground for "witnessing" (their word for proselytizing) activities on the UCLA campus and elsewhere around the city. As Cyril, a JFJ missionary explained, they often go "witnessing" twice per week frequenting Bruin Walk (the UCLA main corridor) but also Santa Monica College, Cal State Northridge, 3rd Street Promenade in Santa Monica, and Venice Beach. The Westwood location was chosen, according to Cyril, because "there are many Jews that go to UCLA."

Their mission statement is that the JFJ "exists to make the messiahship of Jesus an unavoidable issue to our Jewish people worldwide" (Rosen 2012, vi).[2] JFJ publicly targets Jews for conversion through missionary work and through media sources by, for example, running full page advertisements in the *New York Times* and *Haaretz*. In tandem with this proselytizing is an apocalyptic geopolitical story about the direction of history and the signs that reveal the prophetic historical stage we are in. In a full-page *New York Times* advertisement during the Persian Gulf War in 1991, JFJ declared that Saddam Hussein "represents the spirit of the Antichrist about which the Bible warns" (Boyer 2002, 326). JFJ, consistent with other American evangelical prophecy institutions, found renewed apocalyptic meaning in Middle East events. Hussein's rebuilding of Babylon was seen as particularly prophetic by many JFJ members as the throne of the Antichrist.[3] While Saddam was firing scud rockets into Israel, Tuvya, former Executive Director of the Los Angeles JFJ, explained in an interview that he was expecting one of them to "ironically hit Mount Moriah, destroying the Dome of the Rock perhaps leading to the building of the Third Temple."[4] These Messianic Jews emerge and borrow a particular geographical vision from Christian Zionists that sees the world crystallizing into biblical geopolitical blocs (Dittmer and Sturm 2016). Christian Zionists often adhere to an eschatology known as premillennial dispensationalism and believe the modern state of Israel is the penultimate sign of Christ's return (see Boyer 1992; Weber 2004; Sturm 2018).

The modern history of Messianic Jewish movements can be traced to premillennial dispensationalism (Power 2011) and the JFJ's geopolitical imagination of the apocalypse also mirrors that of Christian Zionists.

1 Tuvya Zaretsky, interview by author, Westwood, California, September 2008.

2 For a fascinating series of testimonies of how Jews came to believe Jesus was the Jewish Messiah and join JFJ, including the influence of Timothy Leary, Buddhism, and travel to Israel see, Rosen's *Testimonies of Jews Who Believe in Jesus* (1992).

3 Hussein's rebuilding of Babylon was a tool for Iraqi nationalism. By identifying himself as the pre-Arab and pre-Muslim Nebuchadnezzar II, he was attempting to appeal to all of the religions and ethnicities of Iraq by transcending the trappings of "Arab nationalism" (Dijkink 1996). But as Nebuchadnezzar II, evangelicals are able to read Hussein through the prophecies of the Book of Daniel (Ch. 2–4) as the Babylonian leader who sacked Jerusalem, enslaved the Jews, and erected images of himself for worship. The Antichrist is argued to enact these very things immediately prior to the apocalypse (e.g., Dyer 2003 [1991]).

4 Tuvya, interview.

Ariel (2000, 227) notes, "their understanding of Zionism and the state of Israel resembles that of premillennialist evangelicals." They share a type of masculinist and muscular Christianity concerning imminent End Time battles presaged by geopolitical signs, but their concern for the future history of Jews deviates in important and under explored ways. This article explores those geopolitical signs and how they differ internally between members of the Jews for Jesus and between Christian Zionists and Messianic Jews. Research on Messianic Jews generally, and the JFJ specifically, has concerned their culture through ethnographic methods (Lipson 1990), their emergent history (Ariel 2000; Power 2011), and their theology (Harris-Shapiro 1999), but there is a distinct gap in the literature concerning their politics and specifically their geopolitics. Their geopolitics is an understudied yet crucial aspect in the social and political science of religions, that, I argue below, helps prepare the political and cultural ground to justify foreign policy decisions and provides a reinforcing prism for national self-definition in counter-distinction to biblically inspired conflations of evil and territory.

The first section gives a brief history of apocalyptic thinking among American premillennial dispensationalism and their relationship to Israel. The second section engages with the seeming paradox of being both Jewish and Christian *vis-à-vis* Islam as an internal Abrahamic Other (cf Jansson 2005). The third section conducts a critical discourse analysis of the geopolitical signs identified by the Executive Director of JFJ, David Brickner, in his book, *Future Hope: A Jewish Christian Look at the End of the World* (1999). Considering his power within the JFJ, his book represents an authoritative statement concerning the apocalyptic geopolitics of the JFJ community. To put his ideas into context, Brickner (1999, 53–54) explains, "what some westerners might consider ancient conflicts and antiquated concerns are, in fact, current events to many people in the Middle East." Brickner's elite and most public representation on the apocalyptic geopolitics of JFJ is then contrasted via a 2008 interview with the more agnostic geopolitics of the former LA Branch Director and JFJ Staff Development Officer, Dr. Tuvya Zaretsky. In the final section the critical discourse analysis of Brickner's JFJ apocalyptic geopolitics and Tuvya's agnostic geopolitics is compared with two in-depth semi-structured interviews with LA Branch JFJ missionaries in 2008, immediately preceding the election of President Barak Obama. Central to the argument in this paper here is a methodological one, specifically how individual lay missionary and even less public elite members deviate in their perspective of apocalyptic geopolitics from speciously representative voices like Brickner's.

Geopolitics of Religion

Almost a decade ago Gearóid Ó Tuathail in his book *Critical Geopolitics* (1996) wrote that "there are many connections between geopolitical thought and religious thought (vision, prophecy, father figures, and so on) that deserve investigation." Since then, there have been many attempts to incorporate religions and religious thought into the canon of what has come to be called "critical geopolitics" (Agnew 2006; Dittmer 2007; Dittmer 2008; Gerhardt 2008; Dittmer and Sturm 2016; Foster, Megoran, and Dunn 2017; Sturm 2018; Sturm 2021a). Ó Tuathail and Agnew (1992, 192) in an earlier definition suggest that "the study of geopolitics is the study of the spatialization of international politics by core powers and hegemonic ones". There are evident state-centric and Eurocentric problems with this definition, of course. It is to suggest that non-'hegemonic' or 'core' states or even people or religions do not 'geo-graph' with convincing results as though political elites were in some way separate from culture, or outside hegemony (Sharp 2000, 362). Ó Tuathail (1995, 195) would later clarify in writing, "geographical knowledge is produced…from the classroom to the living-room, the newspaper office to the film studio, the pulpit to the presidential office". He continues that the act of geopoliticking is done by those "who wish to make the world in the image of their maps".

Dalby (1991, 274) redefines geopolitics as a boundary producing performance of excluding and internalizing. Dalby (ibid) writes that an important "moment of geopolitical discourse is the division of space into 'our' place and 'their' place; its political function being to incorporate and regulate 'us' from 'them', the same from 'the other'". Otherness involves exclusion and, for Dalby, exclusion is inherently spatial. Dalby conceptually opens up a space for studying both evangelicals and Messianic Jews as they imagine a racialized distinction between believer and heathen, good and evil, by partitioning the world in early digestible dualistic geo-categories. These geopolitics are productive of a biblical hermeneutics that reads foreign policy and international politics headlines through the specious inerrancy of biblical text. Agnew (2006, 188) argues that religion can "inspire and justify geopolitical claims" and has fabricated its own geopolitical discourse. Concerning American evangelicals, Croft (2007, 692) argues they have developed their own views on foreign policy that challenge Realist, Liberal, and Marxist positions, what he terms "evangelical foreign policy". If we are interested in 'making sense' of geopolitics, we must attend to all of its influencing factors such as how it is affected by religion and, reciprocally, how geopolitics has pervaded religion. It is how geopolitics get

blurred between porous boundaries of influence that is paramount to understanding the subject (Gallaher 1997).

As I have argued elsewhere (Sturm 2013, 135), a distinction between the geopolitics of religion and religious geopolitics can be useful in such analysis: "The former refers to conflicts between actors who are clearly and rather unproblematically concerned with theologically inspired representations of how the world should be divided. The latter refers to plainly secular geopolitical discourse and action that nevertheless can be seen to employ political-theological vocabularies, symbols and action." This paper is concerned, then, with the geopolitics of religion, the ways in which JFJ imagine and enact their own religiously inspired geopolitics. In the next section, I outline how Jews became insiders in Christian Zionism and as a result made space for the identity of Messianic Jew.

Making Jews Christian and the Judeo-Christian Tradition

In Great Britain there were cycles of belief that it was the new Jerusalem, but the Jews were usually portrayed as related to the evil, and not the good of the Bible. This notion changed in 19th century Great Britain where Jews were sought from around Europe to immigrate to Britain to fulfill the Last Days prophecy, albeit functionally. It was within this air of ideas that John Nelson Darby was able to fashion modern premillennial dispensationalist eschatology now shared by many Messianic Jews and American evangelicals. Darby believed that 144,000 Jews would need to be converted to Christianity, and that all Jews would need to return to Palestine (Rev. 14:1). These ideas (along with British-Israelism) would play a role in British support for an independent Jewish state and the creation of modern Israel itself in 1948 (Cohn-Sherbok 2006).

Darby's theology was influential in the United States and was perceived as a missionary calling to convert Jews. From the 1880s to the 1910s Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe crowded the streets of major American cities like Boston and New York, and Christian missions operated in the immigrant quarters offering services, food, and money in hope that these efforts would open doors for conversion (Ariel 2000, 3). Founded in the early 20th century and still the largest organization to narrowly focus on Jewish conversion to Christianity in the United States, is the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America (formerly the HCAA). The HCAA took on a dual theo-political focus with their adopted Darbyite ideas: (1) convert American Jewry and (2) support the creation of a state of Israel in the Ottoman

province of Palestine. In Ariel's (2000, 227) words, the HCAA "organize[d] tours of Israel and take a deep interest in the fate of that country."

The concept of a Messianic Jew has both an eschatological and a socio-cultural precursor foundation in the U.S.A. The term "Judeo-Christian" is often used as a tool in American electoral politics to refer to the American solidity of a wide range of beliefs. Its use transcends exclusion by not referring to either Christian or Jew but by referring to both. It is also used to mark the shared aspects of each religion, namely the Tanakh. The term Judeo-Christian emerges in 1930s America as an anti-fascist moniker (Silk 1984; Schultz 2011; Sturm 2012). The term would later be theologically nuanced and politically solidified in American academia and culture with Jack Hexter's (1966) *The Judaeo-Christian Tradition*. American theologian and novelist, Arthur Cohen (1970, ix) in his book, *The Myth of Judeo-Christian Tradition*, responded to Hexter, as "not only a myth of history (that is, an assumption founded upon the self-deceiving of man) but an eschatological myth which bears within it an optimism, a hope which transcends and obliterates the historicism of the myth." Cohen argues that the hyphen that connects the adjectives is rhetorical American politics, theologically incongruent, and an obscure evangelical interpretation for the role of Jews for the End Times. Moreover, Cohen (1970, x) accepts his own supersessionism describing the relation as one elapsed by time: "for such terms as continuity, coalescence, and relation describe the disposition of objects in space, whereas the essential character of the Jewish and Christian connection is a relation of time and not in time alone but in filled time, time in which events are numbered." But, as explicated below, the Judeo-Christian relation at Jews for Jesus exists in a spatial field of eschatological prophecies centered on Israel and the imagination of geopolitical enemies of both the U.S and Israel.

In matters of geopolitics, Judeo-Christian is short-hand to refer to "Western civilization" by Samuel Huntington (1996) and Bernard Lewis (1987, x). In both of these cases, it is used specifically to mark a difference between Islam and the 'West'. Žižek (2006, np), in a typical unsettling reversal, poses a 'Jewish-Muslim civilization'. He argues that because "we usually speak of the Jewish-Christian civilization—perhaps, the time has come, especially with regard to the Middle East conflict, to talk about the *Jewish-Muslim civilization* as an axis opposed to Christianity." Bernard Lewis (1987, x), however, anticipated this hyphenation twenty-years before Žižek argues that "the term 'Judaeo-Islamic' is at least as meaningful and as valid as 'Judaeo-Christian' to connote a parallel and in many ways comparable cultural tradition."

Regardless, the JFJ understand Judaism to anticipate Christianity and therefore geopolitically exclude the third Abrahamic religion, Islam. To Messianic Jews, Judaism and Christianity are not different, but instead part of the same story. Jesus was who Zechariah (12:10; 13:1), Daniel (7:14, 9:26), and Isaiah (9:6,7, 53:1–6) had predicted: he was the Messiah, the prophet they had been waiting for (Goldish 2004). This hybrid-identity is contentious to many in the Jewish and Christian communities. In *The Vanishing American Jew*, Alan Dershowitz (1998, 324) disparagingly wrote, "A Jew for Jesus already has a name: a Christian." JFJ activities led to a counter-missionary group called "Jews for Judaism" which spoofs the name but also provides "information to help Jews refute Christian arguments in favour of conversion" (Jews for Judaism 2021). Despite some groups like the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington who condemn Jews for Jesus for disrespecting interreligious dialogue, the vast majority of evangelical Christian groups accept JFJ membership.

Messianic Jews retain rites like Passover and the Messianic Haggadah (Ariel 2000, 245). They sing different hymns than Christian evangelicals, and "many of the hymns relate to Israel's role in history, convey a messianic hope, and refer to Jesus as the Savior of Israel" (ibid, 227). They retain the Bar Mitzvah as one of the social and communal institutions in American Jewish life, however, they do not perform the traditional Jewish rites of the full Parasha. Instead, they read from the New Testament to promote their Messianic creed (ibid, 245). The JFJ see themselves and associate themselves as Christians, but of a different ilk. They are the 'Chosen People' believing in the 'true messiah'. Regardless, JFJ members are encouraged to attend evangelical, neo-Charismatic, and fundamentalist Christian churches and attend Hebrew Christian fellowship groups to retain a sense of ethnic identity and cultural heritage. It is common today to hear of Protestants and Jews united in the sphere of "moral values", sharing a kind of public religiosity. But within evangelical spheres it has also been historically common to see Jews as either Antichrist or responsible for the Antichrist's global economic empire. JFJ was deeply offended and demanded an apology from the late Rev. Jerry Falwell when he once said, "of course he [the Antichrist] will be Jewish" (cited in Bronner 2020, 376). Some Christian Zionists hold the belief that the Antichrist will be Jewish (many others think he is Catholic). Brickner (1999, 135), the Executive Director of JFJ, gives several reasons why the Antichrist is *not* Jewish, and since Jerry Falwell's late-1970s visits to Israel, most Christian Zionist texts would agree.[5]

Ariel (2000) argues that a reinforced Jewish identity among those who converted to Christianity came about because of the Sixth-Day war. Prior

5 For example, Messianic Jews differ in that they see the Torah as valid while dispensationalists see this keeping of the Torah as a confusion of the present dispensation of the church age with the great Tribulation where Jews will become prominent in god's plan for the world. Cohn-Sherbok (2006, 159) argues that "observation of the mitzvot is seen as a failure to distinguish between the dispensation of the law in the Hebrew Bible and that of grace in the New Testament." On the other hand, Messianic Jews argue that keeping Torah is in keeping with God's Covenant with Israel.

to this, most Messianic Jews attempted to merge into the Anglo-Saxon or "gentile" congregations organized around the HCAA (ibid, 198). Their self-perception, as well as evangelical Christian perception gave "them more room within the larger evangelical community to give expression to their unique heritage" (ibid, 229). It was here that the movement found its own voice outside of Christian evangelical churches. Emphasizing ethnicity in American culture was a source of pride but it was not unpatriotic or un-American. It was at this time that America had renewed interest in supporting Israel both culturally and politically (McAlister 2000; Gregory 2004). Prior to this time, the U.S. was reducing its presence in the middle East but overthrowing Syria and Egypt's non-aligned governments meant Israel was an important Cold War ally. To the JFJ, Jews were not betraying their heritage by accepting Jesus, rather they were becoming better, more American Jews. This hybrid ethno-religious identity also bridges a double national territorial identity: one Christian American and the other Jewish Israeli. Identifying as a Jew for Jesus both reinforces this hybrid territorial identity and blurs their religious identity. By representing Israel as having a prophetic role, JFJ is simultaneously making their own privileged identity in relation to it. Complicating the story, many Jews for Jesus were never Jewish, that is, they do not have Jewish parentage. They are often married to a Jew or prefer messianic communities over evangelical assemblies. However, many of these non-Jewish Jews for Jesus will still refer to themselves as "Jewish" (Ariel 2000, 250).[6]

In an interview with Jews for Jesus in September 2016, a JFJ volunteer, Darrell, told me for example, that while he was not ethnically Jewish, he nevertheless identified as a "Messianic Jew". He justifies this with the language of "true Jew": "What Romans 2:29 and Deuteronomy 30:6 call a true Jew, one with a heart circumcised from uncleanness by the Holy Spirit." Here there is a supersessionist logic at play, that the New Testament replaced the Old, and that "Jewishness" itself was transmuted into a spiritual disposition. I followed-up asking, "Does that mean that any true believing Christian can identify as Jewish?" Darrell responded cementing the loose ambiguity of "Jewish" within the JFJ by writing, "Paul in Romans writes about a true Jew being one inwardly, with a heart of true trust and belief in Christ as the Messiah; We are true children of Abraham by faith in Christ... a true Jew, is the New Testament spiritual one, Messianic Jews believe this."

The JFJ movement has been described as "syncretic", which implies the sharing of multiple values, customs and cultures (Lipson 1980). However, it combines what Di Rienzo (2002, 83) calls "non-optional" elements into a "symbiotic relationship", that is, there is an "absence of choice" as

6 My recent research (2017–present) in the Belfast Messianic community reflects this trend. A group of approximately 50 people who identify as "Messianic Jews" meet regularly at Synagogue nights, Israeli food celebrations, and International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem events. None of the members trace maternal (or paternal) Jewish parentage.

to the ability to change that part of the religion. The non-optional element according to the Ohr Somayach Tanenbaum College, a Jewish center for learning, is that "the Christian idea of the trinity contradicts the most basic tenet of Judaism—that G-d is one... In Jewish law, worship of a three-part god is considered idolatry; one of the three cardinal sins for which a person should rather give up his life than transgress" (quoted in Di Rienzo 2002, 89). Therefore, according to common Jewish understanding, these religions cannot be hyphenated. Other scholars, like theologian and Professor, Rabbi Cohn-Sherbok (2000), see the JFJ as the seventh and last branch of a menorah representing a linear progression of Jewish evolution: Hasidism, Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism, Reform Judaism, Reconstructionist Judaism, Humanistic Judaism, Messianic Judaism; therefore attempting to normalize it by placing Messianic Judaism on a linear continuum. Similarly, others have called messianic Jews the "thirteenth tribe" (Sobel 1974, 1). While largely rejected by Jews, we must contend that "JFJ may be seen as sharing or occupying (depending on one's ideological position) Jewish space and time" (Cohen 2011, 206).

What should be clear is that the combination of Judaism and Christianity is in part a matter of spatial representation, imagination, and interpretation. What should also be clear is that being Jewish serves certain functional roles as not only being Chosen by God through a covenant with Jacob's sons, but also having belief in Christ and the knowledge of his prophetic master plan. JFJ can define themselves as not merely Christians, but as Jewish believers in Christ: a type of God given belief married to a God given parentage.

Los Angeles Jews for Jesus and the Variability of Geopolitical Visions

Method and Theory

This section is split into two notwithstanding this introduction. The first is a critical discourse analysis of the geopolitics of David Brickner's (1999) book, *Future Hope*.[7] This text was chosen because it is the only eschatological statement for the JFJ and because Brickner, as the JFJ Executive Director, holds doctrinal authority in the organization. The second section is split into three interview sections with JFJ employees: Susan, Cyril, and Tuvya. Susan and Cyril were interviewed in person in 2008 (during the Obama campaign), Tuvya was interviewed in person in 2008 and by email in 2016. Each interview is compared to Brickner's eschatology and

7 By discourse analysis, I mean the systematic investigation of a discursive structure in relation, at least here, to the theme of geopolitics. By critical I mean the Foucauldian inspired investigation of texts into the power relations within an institution and also the social power exacted by such elites may lead to dominance, inequalities, and the closing off of other ways or modes of knowing (see Foucault 1980; van Dijk 1993).

apocalyptic geopolitics. The interviews were semi-structured but much flexibility was required. The interviewees were hesitant when talking about matters of the apocalypse, but having held informal discussions in JFJ Los Angeles branch periodically for a year prior to the politically delicate period during the Obama campaign, the interviewees were already familiar with the researcher.

This paper is interested in the cultural aspects of geopolitics, the "geopolitics of religion". As such, a cultural geopolitics approach concerns the everyday non-elite geopolitical discourse which explores the diverse and detailed analysis of how geopolitics are framed, and how these geopolitical visions can lead to future oriented narratives about the way the world is or ought to be. As Megoran (2006, 625) explains advocating for more ethnographic and observant methods, "the study of elite discourses remains only a partial contribution to the construction of a fuller understanding of the spatiality of political processes. Without a complementary study of the reception of these discourses by 'ordinary people,' there is an ever-present danger of crafting lopsided or even irrelevant accounts." It is for this reason that contrasting Brickner with these interviews of, on the one hand 'ordinary people' in the case of Susan and Cyril, but also, on the other, with less public elite voices like that of Tuvya, is important so as not to overdetermine and essentialize beliefs within a religion, sect, or organization. As we see below, while Brickner's apocalyptic geopolitics are typically masculinist assertions of the prophecy of foreign policy found in the dispensationalist evangelical movement, some of the interviewed members of the Los Angeles branch of the JFJ are more agnostic or cautious about the role of geopolitics in apocalyptic prophecy.

Elite Grand Apocalyptic vs Geopolitical Agnosticism: Brickner and Tuvya

1. David Brickner's *Future Hope*

According to Brickner, it is believed that upon all "true believing" Christians being Raptured into Heaven, the Antichrist (Satan's representative on Earth) will be fatally injured in a war and subsequently resurrected "on satellite television" for the whole world to see (Brickner 1999, 46). The world assumes from this act that the Antichrist is the Messiah. He uses this hegemony to achieve "economic manipulation" requiring all consumers to wear the Mark of the Beast "666" (Rev. 13:18).

The founding of Israel in 1948 is the central prophetic theme is Brickner's geopolitics. Brickner (1999, 7) writes:

> The rise of the Zionist movement in the late 19th century, the founding of the modern State of Israel in 1948 and Israel's recapture of Jerusalem in 1967 have cleared the way for all the end times events the Bible speaks of to take place. The fact that the Jewish people are back in the Land and once again in control of Jerusalem clearly signals that these are indeed the End Times.

For the first half of the Tribulation period (seven years before the apocalypse) the Antichrist signs a peace-pact with Israel. Because of the Antichrist's peaceful and charismatic world leadership, he brings détente between Israel and other nations and groups (citing Daniel 9:27, 11:40–41; Ezekiel 38–39; Matthew 24:15–20). At this time, he encourages Jews to build the Third Temple. Such an accomplishment, we are told, "would be sure to win the respect and trust of many Israelis and religious Jews worldwide" (Brickner 1999, 61). However, upon the Temple's completion, the Antichrist takes it as his throne and systematically kills "a full two-thirds of the population of Israel" (ibid, 62; Zech 13:8). Brickner compares this act to the Holocaust: "The acts of Adolph Hitler and his SS troops will pale in comparison to the desolation caused by the Antichrist and his henchmen" (62). Brickner attempts to normalize the prophetic death of members of his own ethnic group. However, Brickner offers the Messianic Jewish reader an escape; via the "reconciliation today in the person of Y'shua, Jesus the Messiah" (63).

To make things worse soon after this second Holocaust, still within the first half of the Tribulation, comes the battle of Gog and Magog, including the other biblical 'nations' Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal (Ezek 38:1,2,8,9). Although not as committed as to who these 'nations' represent today as Hal Lindsey was in his book *The Late Great Planet Earth* (1970) (Sturm and Albrecht 2021), Brickner (1999, 71) is still willing to suggest that (see Figure 2):

> Magog, Meshech and Tubal were tribes of the ancient world between the Black and Caspian Seas, which today is southern Russia. The tribes of Meshech and Tubal have given their names to cities of today, Moscow and Tobolsk. Rosh is believed by some to be where the name "Russian" came from.[8]

These 'nations' (variably confused with modern states) attack Israel from the north reaching the Valley of Jezreel (where Armageddon will take place). Flanked from the south reaching Beer Sheva are Gog's allies "Persia, Ethiopia and Put" (see Figure 2). Persia, we are told, is Iran and "the

8 Moshe Rosen, the founder of JFJ, in the mid-1950s was a member of the 157th Regiment Combat Team just outside Colorado Springs and for some time thought that he would be mobilized to Berlin to fight the Soviet Union (Rosen 2012, 37). Although his daughter's biography of him is vague of this moment, it is likely he would have been inculcated to the geopolitical imaginations of an evil Russia in a highly evangelical geographical setting.

others appear to be African nations, perhaps including Libya" (ibid, 71). But as these armies squeeze Jerusalem, God intervenes and destroys them (Ezek. 38:21, 22). In Brickner's text, God's wrath against the armies of Gog shows Jews that their Real God is a Christian God and they convert en masse. According to Brickner, this is only the beginning, "the battle of Gog and Magog is [...] the prelude to this final battle, often referred to as Armageddon [Har Megiddo]" (ibid, 72). Marking the second half of the Tribulation, the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel by leading his army into northern Israel (Daniel 9:27; 11:40–41). The rest of the armies of the world, although America and Europe are left out, follow the Antichrist for this final battle. They are followed by the "Kings of the East" who are probably "the Arabs kings East of Jordan" but Brickner is not sure, they may be from "China" (ibid, 73). All of Jerusalem is completely destroyed, including the Third Temple, but as the remaining Jews "cry out to God for deliverance," Y'shua (Hebrew for Jesus, see Rosen 1984) then descends upon the earth, exterminates the nations of evil, and rules on earth for a millennium.

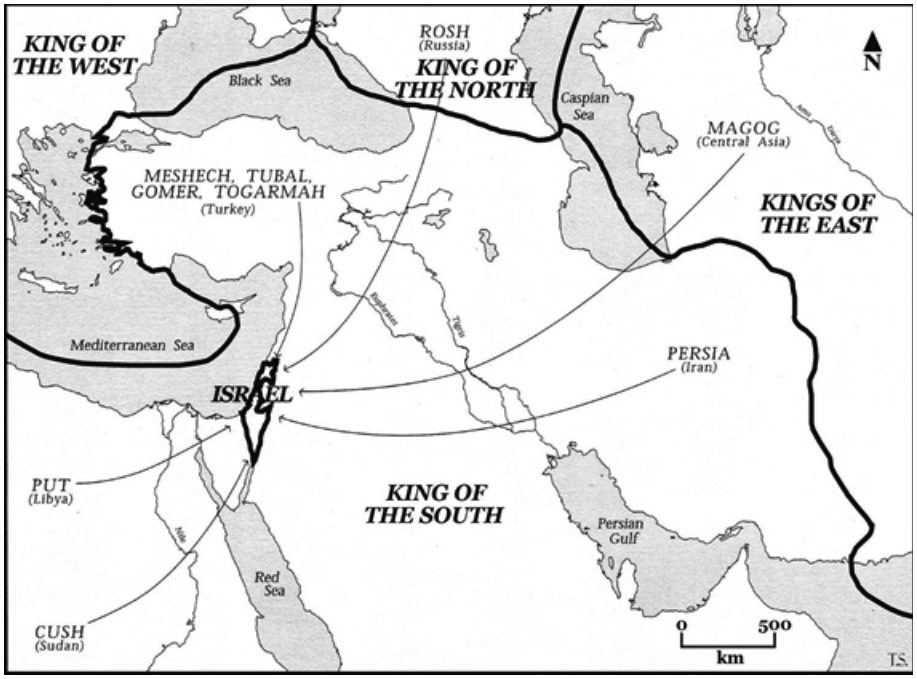

Figure 2. The Battle of Gog and Magog. Source: Author

In an attempt to strike urgency and vindication into the minds of his readers, Brickner is utilizing what Bernard McGinn (1998, 378) calls "psychological imminence", which he defines as "the conviction that the final events of history are already under way even though we cannot determine how near or far off the last judgment may actually be." Brickner (1999, 74) concludes that "the battle of Armageddon will be the climax of a spiritual battle that has been going on since the beginning of time, a battle which is going on even now." He continues giving his Jewish readers a Manichean ultimatum, if they do not *choose* to be with Jesus and to *believe* in Jesus as their Savior, they are choosing to be against him:

> To believe in Jesus you need to know that the battle lines have been drawn. God wants you to stand with him. There is no such thing as neutrality when it comes to this cosmic conflict; no spiritual Switzerland. Not choosing is a decision not to stand with God (ibid, 74–75).

Brickner imagines, and in so doing invites, genocide on his fellow ethnic Jews, a scenario where all but the predicted 144,000 Jews will survive this epic battle. But such a belief is not his alone; rather it is estimated to be shared by more than thirty-million American evangelicals (Weber 2004, 9). What is striking in this passage is that while identifying himself as a Jew, whose grandparents are Holocaust survivors, he is able to disregard any compassion for Jews who do not convert to Christianity from the position of the certainty of his biblical hermeneutics. Perhaps what would make sense is this identification of geopolitical enemies as shared between the US and Israel: both anti-Communist and both embroiled in Middle East conflict.

2. Tuvya: Our Mission Now, Let Christ Sort-out the Future

Tuvya Zaretsky, the former Los Angeles Branch Director and the JFJ International Staff Development Officer, attends the evangelical University Bible Church just south of UCLA on Wilshire Blvd. On the church's jewsforjudaism.org website in 2008 (although no longer stated), the mission creedal statement reads: "we believe that humanity in its natural state is in an eternally lost condition, in helpless bondage to sin, and under the power of Satan, who is the great deceiver."[9] Tuvya, who holds a Doctorate of Missiology from the Division of Intercultural Studies at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, revelled in his experiences with participant observation as a graduate student in Portland, helping "gentile-Jew couples", as he put it, work out their differences.[10] Tuvya had lived in Jerusalem for 4 years in the 1990s. Tuvya's management roles in JFJ and his

9 Tuvya, interview.
10 Tuvya, interview.

doctorate means that Tuvya represents a counter elite representation of the JFJ; one, as we will see below, that is far more agnostic and open to how their shared messianic end will be reached geopolitically.

More critically agnostic, when asked about specific prophecy interpretation in Brickner's book, Tuvya responded that there is "no single eschatology, it's non-essential."[11] Rather than eschatology, he explained, his "primary driver is to make Jesus an unavoidable issue, to make everyone aware of Jesus."[12] He explains, "to many Messianic Jews, this is the time we should go back to Israel. The reestablishment of government means that it is time to return. There have been many governments in Israel, [the] Macabees, Hasmonean."[13] Tuvya denies this calling, warning Christians of setting dates for Christ's return. He continues in contrast to Brickner, "1948 is potentially a huge sign [of the End Times] but if it is, it will also be the most tragic times for the Jewish people. I do not read of Gog and Magog with any relish; I'm not inclined to a Holocaust [...] I would like to take an allegorical view but it doesn't fit my hermeneutic."[14] Tuvya's premillennial 'hermeneutic' means the Bible is both infallible and is to be read literally albeit through a dispensationalist lens. What is significant with this latter part of Tuvya's discourse is his compassion for the "two-thirds of all Jews who did not convert before the Rapture."[15] He does not see the geopolitical events of the Tribulation, as Brickner did, as a "Future Hope." Brickner's text very much falls into the apocalyptic discourse of having the knowledge to break free of history's tragedies but also get a handle of the protean geopolitical events and alliances (Sturm 2016). The apocalypse provides the fear in his life to keep him secure against perceived evil forces.

When asked if he thought the nations of prophecy—Rosh, Magog, Cush, Put, Gomer, and so on—could be grafted onto modern states as Brickner had done, Tuvya replied "you cannot slap a label on a modern nation-state. You would want to make a distinction between modern boundaries and the boundaries of the Bible."[16] Tuvya, then, reads prophecy as referring to nations not as they are today, but as they were then. I asked, "Was it that the prophets were talking about past events?" Tuvya responded that unlike other premillennialists he does not conflate these "nations" to "territory," they are "nations, people, not states." That said, he feels that these nations still exist today, and used the Armenians as an example of an "age-old" nation. The "only geographical element" Tuvya was willing to explicate about was the "35 acres of the Temple Mount."[17] He explained that he did not care if Israel gave everything up to the Palestinians save for these 35 acres, that was a Jewish right and the place where the Third Temple would be built for Christ's return.

11 Tuvya, interview.
12 Yuvya, interview.
13 Tuvya, interview.
14 Tuvya, interview.
15 Tuvya, interview.
16 Tuvya, interview.
17 Tuvya, interview.

In closing, Tuvya disclosed a story about his 1999 trip to Israel during the Netanyahu/Barak election. He said that most of the Messianic Jews he was with prayed for Netanyahu to win because "he promised to increase the settlements and take a hardline with the Palestinians."[18] Tuvya instead presented a theory of geopolitical agnosticism continuing, "I said, 'no, we should vote for Barak.' They said, 'we can help guarantee Christ's return.' No, listen. If God wants his Son to return, he will return."[19] He continued by explaining that it was a good thing that Barak was elected because he granted the JFJ's application for non-profit status in Israel, something Netanyahu would have never done for fear of Christian proselytism. This can be described as a "clash of fundamentalisms," to use Taliq Ali's (2002) term, between Netanyahu's Likud party that most Messianic Jews saw as progressive for the prophecy of Israel but simultaneously stultified Brickner's (1999, 9) prophecy for "more [conversions] than ever in the past, only comparable to the first century AD as Jews became Christian converts." In an interview with Binyamin Klugger, director of the anti-missionary and anti-cult department of *Yad L'Achim* (a militant Haredi organization in Israel), he castigated Barak's decision to give the JFJ a base from which to proselytize to Jews. Klugger was sympathetic, however, to other evangelical organizations like the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem who do not proselytize to Jews but rather facilitate the *Aliyah* (or return) of mostly Russian and Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

Tuvya has obviously taken a more patient, less zealous, and ultimately more agnostic look at the geopolitics of prophecy relative to Brickner. Tuvya's knowledge of various apocalyptic geopolitics helped him choose his own, less fantastic interpretation of coming events. While the ultimate End for Tuvya and Brickner are the same, the geopolitical journey there is far less certain for Tuvya. Tuvya's thought, although not in print and therefore less widely heard, is unavailable to the critical geopolitician who reads elite level texts on a subject without talking to individuals about their worldviews. That said, Tuvya admits that he is "an exception to the rule."

Everyday Geopolitical Visions of the LA Branch: Susan and Cyril

In this section I explore the more everyday perspectives on the relationship between apocalypse and geopolitics. Like the contrast between Tuvya and Brickner, we see below deviating perspectives that would again be obscured by a focus on the official accounts or representations by public elites.

18 Tuvya, interview.
19 Tuvya, interview.

3. Susan: Fandom and an Indifferent Apocalypse

My first interview took place with the JFJ administrative assistant, Susan, who is not Jewish but identifies as an evangelical Christian. Susan is an example of the entwining of fundamentalist American evangelicals (Christian Zionists) and Messianic Jews. She is not a member of the JFJ, but in her words, "shares the Christian faith [with the Jews for Jesus] and has a deep love for the Jews."[20] She attends "all" of the Jewish festivals that the JFJ staff organizes. Apparently, many "gentile Christians" come to the Westwood branch to take part in Jewish rites and customs. The gentile Christians in attendance, she explains, are often "over zealous" at the prospect of participating in Jewish culture.

Susan does not focus her faith on Bible prophecy. Neither does she condemn those who do study it. To Susan, those of her congregation and those at JFJ who study biblical prophecy are "geeks" and comparable to "Trekkies" among the sci-fi fandom world, such categorical descriptions would include both Brickner and Tuvya. Dittmer and Dodds (2008, 452) also observe this geopolitical and "conceptual overlap between fandom and premillennial Christianity," they are fans of God. This imaginative fascination with other worlds and geopolitics of the future is wholly consistent with the work of Barkun (2003) who argues that American evangelicals have a fascination with science fiction; some evangelicals even contend that aliens are angels sent on an observational mission by descending from the sky in flying saucers (e.g., Hitchcock and Overbey 1997). It is contended that just as knowledges of the past have impact on the present by way of origin myths and memories, so do knowledges of the future (Weldes 2003; Rosenberg and Harding 2005). This is clear in the world of American evangelicals whose patient waiting punctuated with intermittent fervour can have determining effects on their daily lives (Boyer 1992). Outside mainstream premillennialism there have been several examples in the last thirty years of self-defined Christian groups gazing at the stars in anticipation, including Branch Davidians (Faubion 2001), Heaven's Gate (Harding 2005), and Raelians (Battaglia 2005) to name three, whose future orientation have led to future-present preparation and even violence (Sturm 2021b).

The End Times are important to Susan, though in a less detailed way than Brickner and other evangelical "Trekkies." She feels for example, that "we're in a war with the Devil" and that 1948 and 1967 were signs that the end times have begun, as she described it, the "olive leaf has grown."[21] She continued, now prompted by her admittedly "vague" memories of her knowledge of biblical prophecy, saying that "there is a set plan [for history] and there is only one way to [accept] God. Every prophecy in

20 Susan, interview by author, Westwood, California, September 2008.

21 Susan means the "fig tree." This is Jesus' last eschatological teaching understood by premillennists as legitimating their ability to look for "signs" of the end times but forbidding them to date set. Mat. 24:33: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh."

the Old Testament about Jesus came true, it's a billion to one chance!"[22] Evangelicals usually do not feel the need to justify Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, although Susan does here. Among the general discourse at the Jews for Jesus this aspect would be the crux of their religious hybridity. When asked if any states today were involved in the End Times, Susan was hesitant but suggested that Hal Lindsey's book, the *Late Great Planet Earth* (1970), was "pretty accurate" and that Russia will be involved and possibly China.

In 1989 Susan traveled to Israel with a group called the "Soldiers of Jesus." She described her tour guides, Ken and Bill Henderson, in masculine troupes as "tough guys who rip phonebooks in half."[23] Her group went to Har Megiddo, in the Jezreel Valley where Armageddon will take place. "It was like I could see the armies [at Armageddon]," she described to me.[24] When asked what it was like going to Israel during the first Intifada, she did not recall the reference to the event which is consistent with the cloister of such evangelical bus tours in Israel (Feldman 2007). Susan quickly tired of my questions concerning geopolitics and biblical prophecy, but had suggested that I watch the "Left Behind video" or a film produced by Matt and Laurie Crouch, the founders of Trinity Broadcasting Network called, 'The Omega Code'. The JFJ bookstore was sold out of the first film, but did have "The Omega Code 2: Megiddo". Susan had not seen the sequel but was impressed with the first movie; she attended the red carpet premier at the Mann Theatre in Westwood which was just two blocks away from the JFJ LA Branch storefront headquarters. The images are consistent with Brickner's and other premillennialist prophecy. At the bottom right of the DVD sheath, the Dome of the Rock has F-15s flying overhead and the Colosseum in Rome, said to be Babylon and the seat of the Antichrist by many evangelicals. If we can conclude anything about Susan in relation to apocalyptic geopolitics, it is that she believes in it saying "the world is a big ol' mess" but is rather indifferent about the details, leaving such pursuits to more "geeks" and "tough guys", and therefore does not let it motivate her actions as many of the elite level books published by American evangelicals would suggest (cf Gribben 2009).

4. Cyril: Apocalypse Now

If Tuvya is the exception, then Cyril is the rule. Cyril is a missionary for JFJ.[25] When asked about prophecy, he replied that "everyone has their own ideas," but continued that "most of the staff at Jews for Jesus would agree that God is not done with Israel."[26] When Cyril first accepted Christ in 1994 he was enthralled with End Times prophecy but that now he was

22 Susan, interview.
23 Susan, interview.
24 Susan, interview.
25 Cyril prefers a Messianic Jewish church called "Adat Y'shua Ha Adon" (Hebrew for "Congregation Where Jesus is the Lord") in Woodland Hills to the evangelical churches of Tuvya and Susan.
26 Cyril, interview by author, Westwood, California, September 2008.

less interested. That said, he believes that "times are getting interesting in Israel" and that "God wants me [Cyril] back there."[27]

In relation to the geopolitics of the apocalypse, Cyril interprets "Zechariah 14[:2], 'all the nations coming against Jerusalem'" literally, and as with Brickner, confuses states with nations. He explains that there is clamouring among "nations" today over Jerusalem, and that "the Jews have a biblical right to the land and a lot more that they don't have yet."[28] In an attempt to socially validate this belief, he adds that "most of the staff at the Jews for Jesus would agree with that."[29] Cyril describes the metes and bounds of biblical Israel as reaching into Iraq and Saudi Arabia including all of the Levant, concluding that "it's a big land." Cyril's views are in line with the Israeli 'Neo-Zionists'. Their scripts are shared between Christian Zionists as well. Newman (2001, 242) writes of the Neo-Zionist movement, who "makes public declarations against the 'surrender' of territory to foreign rule, arguing that this is against the 'Divine plan' and therefore negates God's law."[30] The Kach (or 'take') movement similarly argues, with much internal contention, that Israel's borders need to be stretched out to biblical Canaan; it is the land's destiny (Nyroos 2001). When asked about Bush's Road Map peace process, Cyril refuted its existence by saying, "there is no peace agreement. 'Land for Peace' is terrible. God even says in the Bible, 'punish those who cut up His land.'"[31] This is of course at odds with Tuvya's more flexible interpretation of Eretz Israel. But this is consistent with Brickner's immutable and infallible geopolitics. On this topic Cyril concludes, "the day will come when Israel will possess that land. There will never be peace in the Middle East until the Lord comes back."[32]

Cyril's view of Armageddon's second Holocaust (Zech. 13:4) was closely aligned with Brickner's book (1999). Cyril warns that by "not accepting [Jesus Christ], you are committing yourself to the Devil's work."[33] He then addressed the Author, saying: "you have to have a master, either the Lord or the Devil. A lot of people are serving Satan at a deep level, they just don't know it."[34] Cyril, like Brickner, is unwavering in his ideas of punishment for non-believers. They were given the choice to accept Jesus Christ and by not choosing they will be embroiled in a Holocaust-like mass murder of Jewish non-believers. All Middle East politics and all tragedies to Cyril are simply examples of God's wrath. He normalizes his geopolitics not in the way that Friedrich Ratzel had who saw the state in social Darwinist terms as an organic entity that needs to grow "naturally," rather, Israel grows "supernaturally." When asked what role the Unites States would have in these events, he paused, and lamented:

27 Cyril, interview.
28 Cyril, interview.
29 Cyril, interview.
30 Cyril, interview.
31 Cyril, interview.
32 Cyril, interview.
33 Cyril, interview.
34 Cyril, interview.

> Deep down, I think [the USA] will abandon Israel. If Obama is elected, I think this will happen. I don't trust that guy and he has connections to Muslims. There's something wicked about him. He's a people pleaser. I think he has Islamic ties. If he gets elected, maybe I will move to Israel [to await the End Times].[35]

At this point Cyril ended the interview, perhaps conscious of the fact that he had revealed too much or perhaps overwhelmed by the possibility that Obama would take the highest office in America. Cyril was hinting that Obama is the Antichrist and that he thinks that the election of President Barack Obama has End Time significance to the point that Cyril would feel the calling to move back to Israel to fulfill his Judeo-Christian role in the apocalypse.

End Time

As this analysis has shown, there are varying ideas about and commitments to prophetic scenarios that span from JFJ's highest rungs; between Tuvya and Brickner to the lesser heard voices like the Los Angeles JFJ office of Susan and Cyril. There is a clear premillennial dispensationalist weave that runs through all of the eschatological embroidery. The details do have significance, but they are the most powerfully heard emanating from those with the loudest, most authoritative, and most distributed voice. Brickner's book has this authority. Both Cyril and Tuvya had read it and were admittedly influenced by it, whether agreeing with it as in Cyril's case or having reservations about its certainties in Tuvya's case. At the scale of the JFJ, these discordant discourses are influential to those with the power to coalesce them into acceptable representations. Sharp's (2000) observation that politicians do not just make the headlines and gossip, they also read them and are influenced by them, applies here within and beyond the JFJ.

Beyond the methodological argument and justification for the investigation of everyday perspectives within apocalypse and geopolitics studies, this research also found a growing emergence of new Judeo-evangelical identities and the cooptation of "Jewishness" among American evangelical groupings. While I wouldn't go so far to claim that JFJ are the next development in the linear continuum of Judaism (Cohn-Sherbok 2000), I would add that Messianic Jews more generally have become part of a discourse of authoritative cooptation within the evangelical and neo-charismatic movements. Here, and without rejecting Judaism as in suc-

35 Cyril, interview.

cessionist theologies, some American evangelical discourses have transmuted the 'Chosen' or elect mantel within Judaism and replaced it with the volunteerism of Christianity. Here Darrell for example and to a lesser extent Susan, neither of whom were ethnically Jewish, could claim identity as "Jewish." Such a hybrid religious identity is deserving of further investigation both within the confines of the JFJ but also more broadly as a phenomenon within Christian Zionism (Spector 2009; Hummel 2019; Durban 2020; O'Donnell 2021). What was at one time a strictly evangelical preoccupation with Israel as it related to the penultimate return of Christ and apocalypse, has begun to adopt and coopt Jewish identity into the practices and discourses of apocalypse. But, as is concluded above, such a conclusion will always be complicated by the messiness of perspectives within any social movement or institution. And it is precisely this messiness, and not the simplistic essentialisms, that scholarship should strive to interpolate. Judeo-evangelical apocalyptic identities are not stable or universal categories.

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"And All This Will Happen Again": Apocalyptic Cycles in *Battlestar Galactica*

Abstract: This contribution examines cycles of death and (re-)birth and the interplay of destruction and creation in light of the repeating apocalypse which is the central theme of *Battlestar Galactica* (2003–2009). To theorise these cycles of repetition, the article draws on concepts from psychoanalysis such as Eros and Thanatos, as well as mythological examples of creation from destruction. At its core, this article attempts to answer three questions, at least within the context of *Battlestar Galactica*: Why should or shouldn't humanity survive the apocalypse? Why (and how) should we bother to? And why does everything that has happened before need to happen again?

Keywords: Battlestar Galactica, apocalypse, sci fi, Freud, repetition, determinism

The phrase "all this has happened before, and all this will happen again" is a central tenet in the belief system of characters in the television series *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*).[1] The motif of repetition and cycles recurs countless times, and on all levels, from the Cylon's resurrection technology (see below) to the meta-level and the fact that the TV show *BSG* is itself a remake.[2] The apocalypse itself is cyclical in *BSG*, and this will be the focus of this article: apocalyptic cycles, death and (re-)birth, and creation from destruction. *BSG* is a morally complex, ambiguous, and philosophically rich work; because of an overabundance of material, I will restrict my focus here to these points, and to exploring the implications

1 References to individual episodes within the series will be made thus: 1.12 for season 1, episode 12; in the case of a direct quote, followed by a time stamp for the start of this quote. All direct references in this article will be to the reimagined series (2003–2009), developed by Ronald D. Moore and David Eick. The films *The Plan* and *Razor* as well as the prequel series *Caprica* will be omitted here barring occasional reference, as the events told in these addenda do not change the arguments made by the main series or this article.

2 For an overview over a host of examples, rituals and cycles within the story and intertextual references to previous movies, series, and books alike, see Casey (2008).

of cyclical apocalypses. Discussions of other facets of the series, various analyses, and philosophical debates can be found in e.g. edited volumes such as *Battlestar Galactica and Philosophy* (2008), *Cylons in America* (2007), and *Battlestar Galactica: Investigating Flesh, Spirit, and Steel* (2010).

Due to its four-season runtime, large cast of important characters, nested plot, and repetitions and reincarnations, a truly succinct summary of *BSG* is impossible. To still make this article accessible to the uninitiated, I will limit myself to two things: firstly, a few words on Cylons, and secondly, a summary of events structured along known apocalypses in the storyworld of *BSG* — in chronological, not narrative sequence — which will also already serve to illustrate some points of repetition.

Cylons, in the series, are originally mechanical, artificially intelligent robots constructed by humanity to make their lives easier in certain areas; later forms, so-called 'skin jobs' look, feel, and are constructed exactly like humans.[3] As viewers (and characters) learn over the course of the series, Cylons were invented and created by humans, as well as by other Cylons, at various points, and always in similar, yet recognisably distinct forms. Whenever they are (re-)invented, Cylons ultimately gain sentience, resent their enslavement, and rebel against their creators. For most of the series, Cylons do not procreate as such: When a Cylon dies, their memories, including those of their death, are downloaded into a new body of the same model. There are twelve separate models, five of which (the 'Final Five;' see below) are the creators of the other seven. The Final Five Cylons are unique — at least in the sense that only one iteration is active at any given time — whereas multiple parallel copies exist of the other seven. These copies, though they share basic character traits, can develop distinct, individual personalities as they accumulate individual memories.

Some millennia ago (we only know that it must be more than 4,000 years prior to the events of *BSG*), humans, who then lived on the fictional planet Kobol in twelve tribes, created Cylons, who evolved from machines into humanoid forms. These Cylons formed their own (thirteenth) tribe and, along with their resurrection technology, left Kobol to find their own fortune on a planet called Earth (not the same as our Earth, which comes into play later). There, they evolved further, gaining the ability to reproduce sexually, making the resurrection technology obsolete, which in itself already shows that the purpose of resurrection technology is not individual immortality, but rather ensuring the survival of the species.

Eventually, the Cylons 'invented' their own artificially intelligent machines to work for them: their own mechanical slaves. These Cylon-built Cylons ultimately rebelled against their creators and started a nuclear war. Thus, when the *Galactica* lands on that Earth 2,000 years later, they

3 The motif of machines which (or, in fact, who) are at least superficially indistinguishable from humans has precursors in various science fiction media, where it is often utilised to explore questions of (post-) humanism and related matters of technology vs. nature; it can be assumed that many viewers of *BSG* would be familiar with the associated tropes. Examples include a number of characters from *Star Trek* as well as the *Alien* movie franchise, and most pertinently *Blade Runner* (1982) and its literary source, Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968).

find a postapocalyptic wasteland filled with radioactively contaminated debris and the skeletal remains of humanoid as well as mechanical Cylons. Before this rebellion, a group of humanoid Cylons (the Final Five) had reinvented the earlier Resurrection technology, enabling them to survive the apocalyptic event of their own machines' attack. These five survivors then begin searching for the other (human) Twelve Tribes, to warn them of the dangers of enslaving AI, and to instead "treat them well, keep them close" (4.15, 00:17:41). However, because they had not yet developed faster-than-light (FTL) travel, the journey took them 2,000 years (due to relativistic speed, time passed differently for the Final Five on board), and they arrived a few decades too late.

In the meantime, the Twelve Tribes of humanity had also left Kobol, and had colonised twelve other planets (in some proximity to each other), with Caprica as the later capital of the United Colonies of Kobol. They also reinvented Cylons (humanity also having forgotten that their ancestors did the same thing millennia ago) and used them for hard labour and warfare. These robots, too, rebel against their makers and it is during this 'First'[4] Cylon War that the Final Five arrive—too late to prevent the war, but at least apparently able to stop it.

The Caprica-constructed mechanical Cylons (of the 'chrome toaster' variety, as scientist Gaius Baltar, among others, calls them) have been engaged in experiments on humans and with human-Cylon-hybridity in an attempt to attain humanoid form, but to no avail. Unbeknownst to humanity, the Final Five convince the Caprica Cylons to agree to an armistice with the Colonies in exchange for humanoid, non-mechanical bodies and access to resurrection technology. From the point of view of humanity, the Cylons they created disappear after this point, and are not heard from for the next forty years. During this time, the Final Five create the eight models and supply them with resurrection technology. Model One (named John), their first creation, destroys the Sevens, rebels against his makers, murders their current version, erases their stored memories, and sends copies of all five down to Caprica with false memories and identities to make them live among humanity in the leadup to his planned annihilation of the human race: "I wanted you to see what they [humans] are like up close and personal. So I gave you all grandstand seats to a holocaust" (4.15, 00:32:00).[5] Then, forty years after the armistice, Cylon battleships launch a surprise nuclear attack on all twelve human planets, disabling most of their fleets, and killing the majority of the human race in the initial strike. Around 50,000 survivors manage to flee on a disparate assortment of ships, which form into a fleet around the *Galactica*, piloted by Commander (later Admiral) William 'Bill' Adama.[6]

4 The first that the viewers are told about and the first the main characters initially know of; obviously not the first in the chronology of the universe.

5 The One/John model seeks revenge on humanity for having enslaved the (mechanical) Cylons he considers his forefathers. He also resents his creators, the Final Five, for creating him in the image of humans, with human limitations, and wants to elicit remorse from them by making them see how flawed humanity is in his eyes. It is also suggested that many of his actions stem from jealousy and a desperate need for parental approval; this will be explored in more detail in due course.

6 The events of the attack on the Colonies and the survivors' escape constitute the plot of the miniseries which became the *Battlestar Galactica* pilot movie. All chronologically prior events are revealed over the course of the series.

At this point, at least three separate apocalypses and exoduses have occurred in the plot: Cylons from Kobol (and, arguably, humans from Kobol); humanoid Cylon survivors from Earth; and humans (along with some unknowing humanoid Cylon sleeper agents) from the Twelve Colonies. Themes of abandonment, attack, and exodus already echo through all of these events, particularly the latter two,[7] which follow almost identical sequences of invention, enslavement, sentience, rebellion, attack, and flight. The attack on Cylon-Earth, however, ended in mutual destruction, whereas Cylons achieved a decisive victory over humanity through their attack on the Twelve Colonies.

The apocalypse unleashed upon humanity by the Cylons can be considered not to be limited to the initial apocalyptic event, but to extend across the entirety of the series. Unwilling to accept humanity's unconditional surrender, Cylons chase the fleet of survivors as they, in turn, try to find their way to the mythical planet 'Earth' from scripture. When they finally identify its location, they of course only find the barren destruction left behind by the Cylon apocalypse 2,000 years prior; this loss of the promised salvation and thus hope, or in other terms, the revelation of its destruction, is in itself a quasi-apocalyptic event. The human survivors manage an — at times uneasy — alliance with some of the Cylons, defeat the remaining antagonistic Cylons, and manage a final FTL jump on the dilapidated *Galactica* — the target coordinates dictated by a *deus ex machina* in the form of a musical sequence — to what turns out to be prehistoric Earth (our Earth, not the one previously inhabited by the Cylons) 150,000 years before our time, populated by small tribes of early humans. They settle there, and the implication, confirmed by the epilogue, is that humans, Cylons, and hybrids alike mixed with the locals and became the root of humanity as it exists on Earth today — another apocalyptic revelation, perhaps, for the audience.

Because survival under constant threat and without a clear outlook is arduous, two questions arise and are continuously posed by the series: Does humanity deserve to survive? And why bother? The majority of this article will be spent on exploring the first question and its implications; we will return to the second at the end.

To answer the question of whether humanity deserves survival, we might as well look at it from the other side: Why shouldn't humanity survive? Or, in other words: Why do the Cylons attack? One argument that is made at several points (see e.g. Pilot, 00:40:27, 02:00:00) is that humanity is deeply flawed. Whether that in itself would warrant their destruction is questionable: Why would the Cylons be the ones to judge them? What they do judge, however, is one particular expression of humanity's flaws,

7 The initial exodus from Kobol as well; though this is not elaborated on in sufficient detail to make it part of the discussion here. According to religious scripture, humans are said to have lived among the gods on Kobol, so both Cylons and humans left their creators when they set out from Kobol.

namely that they created Cylons to enslave them. The urge for revenge for this prior injustice motivates the initial attack on humanity; the sustained pursuit of the survivors is at least partly motivated by fear of retribution. When Baltar suggests that they "end this peacefully," a Cylon Model Three replies: "They will never forgive us for what we did to the Twelve Colonies," (4.10, 00:28:25) implying that any human survivors would in turn seek revenge against the Cylons.

A next step then would be to inquire whether the Cylons are justified in their attack: Does the apocalypse happen with good reason? An answer to this could be that while the wish for justice or even revenge might be understandable, the dimension of their attack is out of proportion; but then, if humans created Cylons, did they not also create their potential flaws, including their rage? This line of argument can of course be extended *ad infinitum*: If, within the storyworld's various systems of faith, God/the gods created humanity, then perhaps humans should not be held responsible for their inherent flaws, and not for the ones of their creations. This upward-shifting of blame occurs throughout the series, but most pointedly (because it marks a shift) towards its end, in a debate among the Final Five regarding their role in and responsibility for the Cylon's attack on the human Colonies.

> Tory: "But the humans on Kobol made us. Go back far enough, it's always them."
> Tigh: "Yeah, you point a finger back far enough and some germ gets blamed for splitting in two. No, maybe we share the guilt with the humans, but we don't get to just shove it off onto them." (4.15, 00:23:42)

The acceptance of responsibility — instead of passing it up the chain — is also an emancipatory act, as it removes the dependency on the hierarchy of creation. The act of creation (or of having-created), after all, conjures up a metaphorical parent-child connection. This is not merely implied or subtextual in *BSG*, but made explicit throughout the series, from the very start before the attack ("humanity's children are returning home today" (Pilot, 00:39:38)) to the final episodes ("Your children are dying, Ellen, and you won't lift a finger to save us? Why?" (4.15, 00:27:19)). Looking at the dynamic from this point of view opens a host of interpretative approaches, the most obvious of which being the motif of patricide.

BSG is deeply mythological — not just in its own mythology, but also in terms of intertextuality, from the Mormon roots of the 1978 series to the countless mythological references scattered throughout: ship names

(e.g. *Valkyrie*, *Pegasus*, etc.), character names (Adama, Cain; various pilots' callsigns such as Apollo and Athena), and the obvious parallels between the Tribes of Kobol and the Tribes of Israel. And patricide, or the creation turning on the creator, is, of course, a familiar theme in mythology as well, one prominent example being Cronos' castration and deposing of his father Uranos, and Zeus' subsequent dethroning and imprisonment of his father Cronos.

For all its flaws in the field of anthropology, and in spite of its dubious universality, Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* ([1913] 1919) can help us construct a link between these stories. In this, "the expelled brothers joined forces, slew and ate the father, and thus put an end to the father horde. Together they dared and accomplished what would have remained impossible for them singly. Perhaps some advance in culture, like the use of a new weapon, had given them the feeling of superiority" (235). This applies to the titanomachy, the war of the (united) gods against the titans, their parents, in Greek mythology, as well as to the attack of the Cylons (*en masse*, and fortified by the technology provided by the Final Five).

In Freud, the sons consume the father's essence by eating his flesh: "This violent primal father had surely been the envied and feared model for each of the brothers. Now they accomplished their identification with him by devouring him and each acquired a part of his strength" ([1913] 1919, 236) — because the father is not a purely negative, but also an aspirational figure (thus "envied and feared"). The sons want to be like him, and in order to attain his power and identification with him, murder him. This inherent contradiction already evokes a tension: "the group of brothers banded together were dominated by the same contradictory feelings towards the father [...:] They hated the father who stood so powerfully in the way of their sexual demands and their desire for power, but they also loved and admired him" ([1913] 1919, 237). Freud continues to elaborate on various consequences of the patricide, but since the elimination of the metaphorical father (i.e. the entire human race) is never accomplished in *BSG*, the quoted passages will suffice here.

Cylons view themselves as humanity's children, and they are similarly ambivalent about their creators as the sons in *Totem and Taboo* are about their father. They — or at least many of them — see humanity as flawed and their own race as the future. At the same time, they seem to have an obsession with becoming human in order to surpass the human; while Cylons do not eat humans, they are deeply concerned with their biological mass. This is evidenced by years of experiments to gain not just superficial likeness, but bodies which are physically constructed like those of humans,

"internal organs, lymphatic system, the works," (Pilot, 02:15:00) so as to be virtually indistinguishable from them.[8]

John, Cylon Model One, might be seen as the sole exception to this, since he explicitly states that he would rather be a machine than human:

> Ellen: "The five of us designed you to be as human as possible."
> One: "I DON'T WANT TO BE HUMAN! I want to see gamma rays! I want to hear X-rays, and I—I want to—I want to smell dark matter! Do you see the absurdity of what I am? I can't even express these things properly because I have to—I have to conceptualize complex ideas in this stupid, limiting spoken language! But I know I want to reach out with something other than these prehensile paws, and feel the solar wind of a supernova flowing over me! I'm a machine, and I could know much more, I could experience so much more, but I'm trapped in this absurd body! And why? Because my five creators thought that God wanted it that way!" (4.15, 00:20:47)

Two aspects of this expression make it appear disingenuous. First, what he describes as his desires for mechanic perception are fundamentally human desires—feeling, experiencing, transcending. While this is not confirmed explicitly, since they do not speak, we never see a metal/machine Cylon exhibit a longing for sensory experiences throughout the series. Secondly, One's obsession with pursuing and ending humanity, which ultimately leads to his own demise, extends beyond any rational process and beyond what might reasonably be called revenge. It does not lead towards fulfilling his desire of becoming more machine-like, but rather is an indulgence of his rage.

It is not only the fulfilled act of patricide as described by Freud (through the internalisation of guilt and rules), but also the desire for identification with the creator which gives implicit power to the metaphorical father and thus, at the very least as a side-effect, reinforces the hierarchical order.

Whether we look at the apocalypse as an end, a revelation, or a fundamental change: patricide, viewed conceptually from a distance, might not initially look particularly apocalyptic. The deceased father, at the very least, would likely disagree, as might the sons when faced with the revelation of their guilt. More importantly, though, the suggestion that the sons' rise to power requires the death of the father connects to a point which is central to the conceptualisation of apocalypse as investigated in this article: creation from destruction.

8 Ultimately only achieved through the intervention of the Final Five, another parental identification group.

The work of Sabina Spielrein, a contemporary of Freud and student of Carl Gustav Jung, looks at the matter from the other side, that of the progenitor. In "Destruction as Cause of Becoming"[9], she investigates "why this most powerful drive to reproduce in addition to the expected positive associations carries negative ones such as fear and disgust"[10] (1912, 465) and soon explains that "to procreate means to destroy the self, as the genesis of the subsequent generation marks the decline of the former: thus, our descendants become our most dangerous enemies, who we cannot overcome, as they will survive and pry power from our dying hands." (466)[11]

At this stage, destruction and creation both in Spielrein's and in Freud's text refer — at least on the surface — to the actual people involved in that relationship: the parent must die in order for the child to prosper. Before we extend this to a larger scale, it is worth noting that traces of this literal interpretation can also be found in *BSG*. When the safe return of Lee Adama's father is uncertain, Starbuck tells him: "You know, Leoben [Cylon Model Two] said something to me when he was holding me in that dollhouse in New Caprica. That children are born to replace their parents. For children to reach their full potential, their parents have to die." (4.10, 00:02:30)

Interestingly, there is very little evidence for this in the *BSG* storyworld, though. In fact, it seems that the ones who prosper are those with a relatively strong link to the past — from old technology to mystics — and filial bonds. Those cylons who ally themselves to the humans, i.e. their metaphorical parents, rather than seeking their destruction survive; Lee Adama comes into his own after he has reconciled with and accepted his father; and Bill Adama returns safely to the ship. Starbuck herself, on the other hand, who had a fraught relationship with her parents, both of whom died before the start of the series, and to her own past, seems perpetually unmoored, unstable, and unable to fully define her own role.

To Spielrein, the total destruction of the parent is not a necessary side-effect of procreation. She points out that while for some organisms such as mayflies, the act of creation means full physical destruction of the self, humans generally do not die during sexual reproduction[12] (1912, 467), but they do destroy some part of themselves. In her analysis, "the reproductive instinct [...] consists of two antagonistic components and thus is a drive of becoming as well as one of destruction"[13] (503). This idea of conflicting drives of creation and destruction is later picked up by Freud in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", where he describes two opposing instincts — the death drive and the reproductive drive — at work in humans: "It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating

9 German title: "Die Destruktion Als Ursache Des Werdens". Passages from this text quoted here have been translated into English by the author of this article.

10 German original: "warum dieser mächtigste Trieb, der Fortpflanzungstrieb, neben den a priori zu erwartenden positiven Gefühlen negative, wie Angst, Ekel, in sich beherbergt" (465).

11 German original: "Selbst fruchtbar sein — heißt sich selber zerstören, denn mit dem Entstehen der folgenden Generation hat die vorausgehende ihren Höhepunkt überschritten: So werden unsere Nachkommen unsere gefährlichsten Feinde, mit denen wir nicht fertig werden, denn sie werden überleben und uns die Macht aus den entkräfteten Händen nehmen" (466).

12 A counterpoint might be raised here regarding the dangers associated with childbirth. However, death in labour is neither a general rule, nor what most people expect.

13 German original: "daß [...] der Fortpflanzungstrieb auch psychologisch aus zwei antagonistischen Komponenten besteht und demnach ebensogut ein Werde- als ein Zerstörungstrieb ist." (503)

rhythm. One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey." ([1920] 1955, 40–1)

These two drives, for procreation and for a self-determined death — after all, "the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion" (Freud [1920] 1955, 39) — are represented in various characters and situations in *BSG*. The most obviously persistent of these is the Cylons' quest for procreation in the form of sexual reproduction. This ranges from Six's fascination with, and her accidental killing of, a human baby in the very beginning (Pilot, 00:16:44), to experiments on human women and their ovaries (2.05, titled "The Farm"), to their interest in Hera, the human/Cylon hybrid child. In addition to a scientific interest in reproduction, some Cylon models also seem to be sexually promiscuous (One, Three, Six in various incarnations; and Ellen Tigh) — though not necessarily more so than human crewmembers, and certainly none more so than Gaius Baltar.

The Cylon Model Six is not only interested in sexuality, though, but also constantly and desperately in search of love. As she initiates sex with Baltar on (pre-destruction) Caprica, she tells him that "your body misses me, but what about your heart, your soul?" (Pilot, 00:20:06), and asks him whether he loves her. She quickly relents as she senses his rejection of the sentiment, but persists — in person and in Baltar's visions of her — throughout the remaining series. Analogous to this quest, another Cylon, a Three, develops an obsession with death. Since Cylons are 'resurrected' by having their consciousness and memories downloaded into an identical body upon death, she can experience not just dying, but death itself. Seeking for a revelation in the space between death and reincarnation, she has a Cylon Centurion shoot her so that she can experience death over and over again (3.08).

On the human side, we can find similar dichotomies. Starbuck's sexuality, for instance, is regularly expressed, while her reckless flying repeatedly makes others wonder whether she has a deathwish. Baltar's frantic attempts at self-preservation — an aspect of the death drive, according to Freud — are matched by his sexual interests in women. The most poignant representation of this oscillation though may be in the initial reaction to the Cylon attack on the Colonies. Commander Adama wants to stay and "continue to fight" (Pilot, 02:29:01), even though humanity at this point stands no chance in combat. He insists that he is going "to find the enemy. We're at war. That's my mission," (Pilot, 02:29:17) — even if it is a suicide mission. Newly sworn in President Laura Roslin, on the other hand, makes an appeal for retreat:

> Adama: "You would rather that we run?"
> Roslin: "Yes, absolutely. That is the only sane thing to do here, exactly that, run. We leave this solar system and we don't look back."
> Adama: "And we go where?"
> Roslin: "I don't know. Another star system, another planet, somewhere where the Cylons won't find us."
> Adama: "You can run if you like. this ship will stand and it will fight."
> Roslin: "I'm going to be straight with you here. The human race is about to be wiped out. We have fifty thousand people left and that's it. Now, if we are even going to survive as a species, then we need to get the hell out of here, and we need to start having babies."
>
> (Pilot, 02:29:35)

This is a direct debate on how to handle the apocalypse between the death drive — dying, but on Adama's terms, heroically and in military service defending the Colonies rather than being hunted down as fugitives — and the reproductive drive: securing the survival of the self and the species through procreation, thus retaining a future. Roslin's argument for continued life wins, which is emblematic for the course of the series; for as much death and destruction occurs at the hands of humans and Cylons alike, survival remains a dominant theme. This likewise applies to both Cylons and humans, and Spielrein's work is again helpful for connecting the various threads here.

While self-preservation of the individual is not contingent on procreation at all, the survival of the species is. Therefore, individual self-preservation is possible without destruction or change; the self can be maintained in stasis. The survival of the species, meanwhile, depends on one generation succeeding another, and thus "the species-preservation instinct is a 'dynamic' drive, which desires the change, the 'reincarnation' of the individual in a new form. No change can come to pass without a destruction of the prior state"[14] (Spielrein 1912, 491). The instinct for the preservation of the species is thus "inherently ambivalent" (490), as is procreation itself.

Though the death drive and sex drive are warring instincts, they are brought together in the act of reproduction: "During conception, the female and male cells unite. In the process, each cell as a unit is destroyed, and from the product of that destruction, new life emerges"[15] (Spielrein 1912, 466). Spielrein is referring to individual reproductive cells here, but we can also transfer this to the fate of the survivors at the end of *BSG*. To ensure the continuance of the descendants of humans and Cylons, the two previously separate races (and presumably the native humans of pre-

14 German original: "der Arterhaltungstrieb ist ein 'dynamischer' Trieb, der die Veränderung, die 'Auferstehung' des Individuums in neuer Form anstrebt. Keine Veränderung kann ohne Vernichtung des alten Zustandes vor sich gehen" (491).

15 German Original: "Es findet in der Zeugung eine Vereinigung der weiblichen und männlichen Zelle statt. Jede Zelle wird dabei als Einheit vernichtet und aus diesem Vernichtungsprodukt entsteht das neue Leben" (466).

historic Earth) merge. Notably, the character which the series epilogue refers to as "Mitochondrial Eve" (4.21, 00:39:09) is Hera, the child of human pilot Helo and Sharon, a Model Eight Cylon. The matriarch of humanity from this retrospective is thus specifically not Sharon — the matriarch's mother — but her child, the human-Cylon hybrid. Neither race survives individually, so the metaphorical parental cells are destroyed, but the life which emerges from their union carries on.

This ambivalence can also be found on a non-biological level. It is only through the ultimate, final destruction of the Cylon Colony carrying the remaining antagonists, and the concurrent damaging and effective destruction of the *Galactica*, rendering it unable to travel after its final FTL-jump to Earth, that the survivors can truly settle permanently. As Adama says, "[w]herever we are, we're gonna stay" (4.21, 00:10:52): neither do they have another choice now, nor do they need one. The entire fleet is subsequently destroyed, in a doubtless purely symbolic act, to cement this decision.

Making their permanent home on Earth marks both the end of the apocalypse which started with the Cylon attack on Caprica, and the beginning of a new age — perhaps of a new cycle. This type of apocalypse not as the end of everything, but the end of (many of) the gods and the dawn of a new phase is reminiscent of, among others, Norse mythology. This link is far from a tenuous one, but rather a reference which frames the entire series. In the pilot episode, the first location the *Galactica* heads towards after their escape is a place called "Ragnar Anchorage" (Pilot, 01:42:00). The three episodes which form the series finale are titled "Daybreak" in English; in the German DVD release, this has been translated as "Götterdämmerung", which makes the connection to the Twilight of the Gods more explicit. Daybreak is, of course, a type of twilight, too, but it marks the other side of the night: the connotation is not that of dying gods, but that of dawn, rebirth, and beginnings.

In Norse mythology, too, creation comes from destruction. Midgard is created by Odin and his brothers from the remains of a giant. The corresponding passage from the *Prose Edda* bears quoting in order to highlight the violence of this act:

> The sons of Borr slew Ymir the giant [...] They took Ymir and bore him into the middle of the Yawning Void, and made of him the earth: of his blood the sea and the waters; the land was made of his flesh, and the crags of his bones; gravel and stones they fashioned from his teeth and his grinders and from those bones that were broken. [...] Of the blood, which ran and welled forth freely out of his wounds, they made the sea,

> when they had formed and made firm the earth together, and laid the sea in a ring round about her [...] They took his skull also, and made of it the heaven, and set it up over the earth with four corners [...].
>
> But on the inner earth they made a citadel round about the world against the hostility of the giants, and for their citadel they raised up the brows of Ymir the giant, and called that place Midgard. They took also his brain and cast it in the air, and made from it the clouds [...].
>
> (Snorri [c.1220] 2006, 19–21)

Ymir is not only killed but dismembered, his component parts transformed into building materials and scattered. This is complete and utter destruction—and also absolute and ultimate creation, as destruction turns into construction, and what is being constructed is the world of the humans.

At the other end of the story, we have Ragnarok, the great war during which, among others, Odin himself will die and the world will be submerged in water. This apocalyptic event, however, is not actually the end, but rather the turning point towards a new beginning. The *Prose Edda* describes the aftermath of Ragnarok thus:

> In that time the earth shall emerge out of the sea, and shall then be green and fair; then shall the fruits of it be brought forth unsown. [...] In the place called Hoddmímir's Holt there shall lie hidden during the Fire of Surtr two of mankind, who are called thus: Líf and Lífthrasir, and for food they shall have the morning-dews. From these folk shall come so numerous an offspring that all the world shall be peopled [...].
>
> (Snorri [c. 1220] 2006, 83)

The humans are not the only survivors; the same passage also mentions a number of gods (two sons of Thor, Módi and Magni; Baldr; Hödr). The world which rises from the rubble of Ragnarok is not postapocalyptic in any sense we might associate with an aesthetic of depletion and destruction. Rather, it is fresh and fertile, with grassy plains, and ushers in the dawn of a new age of humanity—the connection to the *Galactica's* landing on Earth is apparent.

The way that the fate of the world(s) is narrated in Norse mythology is arguably cyclical.[16] The inhabitants of the *BSG* storyworld certainly, at least according to their own scripture, seem to be fated for repetition. We see many of these repetitions, as outlined above, over the course of the series, and by the final season, several of the characters also seem to

16 The cycles of creation and destruction might also indicate a fundamental human inability to conceptualise nothingness. Thus, beginnings are endlessly deferred, as are endings. One way to resolve the persistent urge to inquire "and what then?" is to close the circle and return to the beginning.

become wary of the roles they are playing in these cycles. Roslin suspends her cancer treatment, which had been exhausting her, and in justifying this to Adama says:

> "I've played my role in this farce. 'A dying leader will guide the people to the—' the fricking blah blah. I've been there, I've done that, now what? Is there another role that I have to play for the rest of my life? Do you remember what we said on New Caprica? How we talked about trying to live for today? Well, you better think about that, because maybe tomorrow really isn't coming. Maybe today is all we have left. And maybe, just maybe, I've earned the right to live a little before I die. Haven't I?" (4.12, 00:26:27)

This is her reaction to the disillusionment after finding the first Earth destroyed and uninhabitable, but it also shows a larger rejection of the roles and repetitions. Similar sentiments of trying to escape from this endless repetition can be found in other characters. Gaius Baltar, in an attempt to convince the Cylon Model One who is in command of the enemy Colony to back down, argues: "You wanna break the cycle? Break the cycle of birth? Death? Rebirth? Destruction? Escape? Death? Well, that's in our hands, in our hands only. It requires a leap of faith. It requires that we live in hope, not fear" (4.20, 00:40:12).

Though the phrasing is hyperbolic, the immediate matter at hand is also a pragmatic one. If the Cylons stopped attacking humanity, then humanity might perhaps stop firing back, and the chain of aggression and retaliation might be broken. The idea of "break[ing] the cycle" also extends to the grander scheme of things, though. If "all this has happened before, and all this will happen again," then humans will end up creating Cylons again, and the apocalypse will also happen again—perhaps with shuffled roles or in a different key, but fundamentally the same. That the series' universe has a propensity for repeating this plot need not be derived from scripture: we see humans and Cylons treading the same paths (creating and enslaving AI, rebelling against one another, travelling to the same planets) even within the scope of the series.

When the survivors arrive on the second (our) Earth to make their home there, Lee refuses the idea of constructing a city: "No. No city. Not this time. [...] We break the cycle. We leave it all behind and start over" (4.21, 00:14:44). He wants them to instead spread out and settle, but not only that. When Bill Adama, Lee's father, points out that the primitive inhabitants of prehistoric Earth do not have a language, Lee responds: "We can give them that [language]. We can give them the best parts of

ourselves, but not the baggage, not the ships, the equipment, the technology, the weapons. If there's one thing that we should have learned, it's that our brains have always outraced our hearts; our science charges ahead and our souls lag behind. Let's start anew" (4.21, 00:15:07).

This sounds idealistic and potentially idyllic at first, and in the brief glimpse we get of the interstellar settlers' first steps on this Earth, they seem to adhere to some Thoreauvian ideal of living simply and deliberately: Adama begins building a cabin with his bare hands in solitude (4.21, 00:37:12); Helo and Athena tell their daughter Hera that they will teach her "real hunting [...] how to build a house, how to plant crops" (4.21, 00:34:17); Baltar remembers that he "know[s] about farming" (4.21, 00:37:05). In one of the final shots, we see a trail of settlers making their way on foot, with bags slung across their shoulders, across the grassy plains.

Breaking the cycle by essentially initiating another, deliberate and peaceful apocalyptic event — launching the fleet into the sun, eschewing science and technology — is painted in very romantic tones. After the slightest consideration, though, this radical decision seems incredibly short-sighted and questionable within the overall thematic arc of the series. Ridding themselves of technology entirely, rather than debating and deciding which aspects of technology and science might be good, helpful, and even necessary for some people (medical care, to give one obvious example; perhaps also transportation), seems to be the opposite of taking responsibility for humanity's actions. It also decisively contributes to what has previously brought about cycles of apocalypse and rebirth: the great, universal forgetting.

The feeling lingers that the *Galactica* might have done well to invest in a few historians in addition to their mystics and religious leaders. It is surprising that a society whose technology is sufficiently advanced to traverse the galaxy, yet seems unable to maintain historical records or chronicles for the past 4,000 years — which would have been enough to reconstruct the events on Kobol and the Thirteenth Tribe, for instance.

This is reminiscent of a phrase from George Santayana's 1905 *The Life of Reason or the Phases of Human Progress*, later quoted by Winston Churchill and by now an aphorism: "when experience is not retained [...], infancy is perpetual. Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (Santayana 284). From a psychoanalytic point of view, Freud similarly states that if "[t]he patient cannot remember the whole of what is repressed in him [... h]e is obliged to *repeat* the repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of, as the physician would prefer to see, *remembering* it as something belonging to the past" ("Beyond the Pleasure Principle", [1920] 1955, 18). The goal of the psychoanalyst in these

cases should be "to force as much as possible into the channel of memory and to allow as little as possible to emerge as repetition" (ibid. 19). For the characters in *BSG*, the "channel of memory" seems easily clogged, and blocked off entirely by the unilateral decision to discard the "baggage" of their past in favour of a truly new beginning.

Lee's choice is surely well-intentioned, but might have restarted another cycle of repetition, even if it takes over 150,000 years to get back to the same point. This is also implied by the epilogue, which takes place in New York City in the 2000s — clearly in our world, with the familiar skyline and a reference to a *National Geographic* magazine. A version of Baltar and Six walk the streets, invisible to humans, and discuss the fate of humanity, noting the many (distinctly negative) similarities to previous iterations.

> Six: "Commercialism, decadence, technology run amok — remind you of anything?"
> Baltar: "Take your pick. Kobol. Earth. The real Earth, before this one. Caprica before the fall"
> Six: "All of this has happened before"
> Baltar: "But the question remains — does all of this have to happen again?"
> Six: "This time I bet no."
> Baltar: "You know, I've never known you to play the optimist. Why the change of heart?"
> Six: "Mathematics. Law of averages. Let a complex system repeat itself long enough and eventually something surprising might occur. That too is in God's plan." (4.21, 00:39:38)

Further ambiguity and doubt are added by the very last shot of the series, in which the camera pans away from Baltar and Six, and over to a shop's window, in which a television set is running a news report on 'Advances in Robotics'. *BSG* ends with a reel of real-life footage (from our world) of increasingly more humanoid robots and artificial intelligence, implying that we are already well underway in the next iteration of cyclical apocalypse.

Though this invites a debate of free will and predeterminism, we need to resist that temptation here, as this would lie well beyond the scope of this article, and has already been discussed elsewhere.[17] Instead, I want to turn to a matter which is implicitly raised by these cycles of repetition on a different level. That we are on track to repeat the fates of the characters in *BSG* is suggested not only by the 'Advances in Robotics,' but more sub-

17 See for example Johnson (2008).

tly and throughout the series by the fact that our world resembles theirs so closely. Initially, this might have been a pragmatic and prudent choice: reproducing aesthetics, fashion, and social conventions of our time in the fictional world lowers production costs, and makes the world and the characters more instantly relatable for viewers (see also Ryman 2010, 40–1). However, as the series progresses — and as sympathies to characters have been established and budgets stabilised — the similarities become more, not less. This previous iteration of humanity also has journalism, a military, a civilian government with an elected president at its helm; universities, theatres, opera houses; family structures, living arrangements, money; glasses to wear, cigarettes to smoke, alcohol to drink. And this extends beyond the humans of the Twelve Colonies, too. On the postapocalyptic Cylon Earth, Galen Tyrol (one of the Final Five, who has been there before but has forgotten his previous life) has a vision of the moments before his death in the same place millennia ago. In this, we see a scene from a street market, where vendors sell fruit and vegetables (grapes and an avocado are clearly identifiable) from a stall decorated with a Chinese lantern. In the background, posters on a wall advertise (in English) a film festival (4.11, 00:12:40). Tyrol's clothing in this vision is in no way futuristic: from his jacket to his glasses and haircut, he would fit seamlessly into the mid-2000s — specifically into the mid-2000s in the USA.

For all its ambiguity and moral complexity, this is something the show keeps returning to: "Eternal America", as Ryman calls it (2010, 57), or the American singularity.[18] The fate of the world (and of humanity) seems to be that of the United States of America and its culture, particularly in the early 21st century. Ryman explores an interpretation of *BSG* as a "Foundation Myth for White Folks" (45) and convincingly and justifiably criticises several implications of this — not least the matter-of-fact way in which the settlers claim the already inhabited land of the new Earth; the fact that the "melting pot" approach to Cylon integration seems to be more of a cultural assimilation into human structures; and the suggestion that all culture is at its core the equivalent of US American culture, since language, the names of the ancient Greek gods, monotheism, and many other things arrived on Earth with the *Galactica*.

We might, pessimistically, presume a narrow-mindedness on the part of the showrunners, or an overfixation on US audiences. More fruitfully, though, I think there is another point to be made here. This American-centric lens is not a fault or flaw of *BSG*, but an implicit commentary which can be derived from the series; and rather than imply American exceptionalism, this points toward an American[19] crisis: cyclical repetition as a symptom of an inability to find original expression.

18 A note can also be made here regarding the roots of *BSG*'s Thirteenth Tribe in the Mormon beliefs of the 1978 show's original creator Glen A. Larson. Similarly, the framing of Colonial America as a new 'Promised Land' and references to the Israelites (i.e. the Twelve Tribes) as far back as the 17th century should not be neglected; see e.g. John Cotton's 1630 sermon 'God's Promise to His Plantation'. That there were Thirteen Colonies at the time of the American Revolution is a coincidence which strengthens the connection between the Thirteen Tribes and some mythical American Destiny; though what we might call coincidence would, within the universe of *Battlestar Galactica*, surely count as providence.

19 Or rather a crisis which originated in the USA, but which has since spread to other parts of the world.

This also harkens back to the lack of a historical connection, a coherent self-narrative which would enable people to conceptualise a future, particularly a future which is different. The story of *BSG* is not one about the future, nor about the past; it is about a perpetual present, even if that extends over a few millennia.[20] Lee's decision in the final episode is only one explicit representation of that: he wants to get rid of that which came before, but by living purely in the now — farming, hunting, building cabins — the survivors deprive themselves of a way to choose their own path into the future, actually breaking the cycle of determined fate.

Is this a product of or a commentary on postmodernity? Perhaps both. Certainly, postmodern theory has described these issues before,[21] and a future paper on *BSG* might conduct a postmodernist reading of the series, with all its repetitions, its perpetual present, and its indiscriminate hodgepodge of mythologies and other references isolated from their origin. By then, the latest iteration of a reworking of *Battlestar Galactica*, which is currently in production (see Chitwood, might have been released, adding yet another layer of meta-reference and repetition.

At the end of this article, we need to close our own circle and return to the second question posed in the beginning: Why bother to survive in the face of the inevitable apocalypse? In *BSG*, we see that humans need hope, but that hope can also be given. As Adama says, "it's not enough to just live. You have to have something to live for. Let it be Earth" (Pilot, 02:48:39). Even more importantly, hope can be mutually maintained and sustained, and we can survive with and for one another. Love and human connection in *BSG* are as essential to survival — of the individual and of the species — as food and shelter.

Even the cyclical repetition is not entirely pessimistic: It is evidence of a persistent capacity to rebuild and create which is equally as strong as the destructive forces of the apocalypse, and it indicates a shared humanity across millennia. This is also underscored by the fact that the various motifs, desires, and fears described and analysed here echo and resonate across different cultures, mythologies, and time periods.

If we can derive any lessons from the above, then one would be to take some responsibility for our actions, and for the course of our lives; another would be to keep telling stories of the past, the future, and of the apocalypse, so that we can continue to conceptualise and create alternatives to the status quo.

20 The jump to modern-day NYC in the epilogue is just that: a jump. We see Earth 150,000 years ago, and then Earth in the 2000s, but none of the connecting dots, no part of the process.

21 See e.g. Jameson (1991) and Baudrillard (2005, 117ff.).

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Ruby Niemann

The Living Word: Textuality and the End in the *MaddAddam* and *Southern Reach* Trilogies

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.—Hebrews 4:12

Over his untasteable apology for a cup of coffee, listening to this synopsis of things in general, Stephen stared at nothing in particular. He could hear, of course, all kinds of words changing colour like those crabs about Ringsend in the morning, burrowing quickly into all colours of different sorts of the same sand where they had a home somewhere beneath or seemed to.—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

Abstract: This paper explores the relationship between the written word and the world beyond humankind in two apocalyptic trilogies: Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (*Oryx and Crake* [2003], *The Year of the Flood* [2009] and *MaddAddam* [2013]) and Jeff VanderMeer's *Southern Reach* series (*Annihilation*, *Authority* and *Acceptance* [2014]). In these two examples of Anthropocene literature, the end of Man and the end of the Word are neither wholly separate nor entirely constitutive of one another. Both trilogies explore the ways in which a chaotic, lively, a-human apocalypticism is described both by and through language and, more specifically, human and nonhuman textualities. In this paper, I describe how Atwood and VanderMeer's visions of Anthropocene afterlives decouple writing from human agency and, in doing so, provide ways of envisioning survival after the end of worlds.

In both the *MaddAddam* and the *Southern Reach* trilogies, the written word itself becomes a unique link between the human and nonhuman,

the living and nonliving (either dead or never what the biological sciences would class as 'alive'), raising questions about communication, intention, and a postapocalyptic semiotics of the Anthropocene epoch. Both VanderMeer and Atwood detach meaning-making from the concept of writing in a way that, rather than creating purely unintelligible text-acts, turns the written word into something more than a mere conveyer of meaning or even a creator of communal understanding. Language, which has always (or at least since Babel) functioned on some level to constitute an in- and out-group, in these texts forms either a barrier or a conduit between the pre- and post-apocalyptic.

"Where Lies the Strangling Fruit that Came from the Hand of the Sinner": Other-than-Human Eschatology and an Ecosemiotics of Collapse in the Southern Reach Trilogy

The three books of the *Southern Reach* trilogy follow the interactions different characters have with the location/phenomenon known as Area X. This region was once a stretch of sparsely populated coast (by context, presumably in Florida, although this is never made explicit)[1], known colloquially as the 'forgotten coast'. The region that later becomes Area X was once host to a handful of residents and abandoned houses scattered between the small village on the coast and the mostly-abandoned island that sits within sight of the forgotten coast, as well as two lighthouses (one on the mainland, functional, and one on 'failure island', defunct). At some point, thirty-five years before the start of the trilogy, an unknown presence creates a barrier between this stretch of coast and the rest of the world. Inside this barrier, things are no longer as they once were.

The trilogy begins with *Annihilation*, which follows a team of four nameless women (names being something that "belonged to where we had come from, not who we were while embedded in Area X" [VanderMeer 2014a, 9]) as they begin their expedition into Area X. Immediately upon introducing you into this world, VanderMeer decouples the discursive speech-act of 'names' from the people who now enter Area X, indicating a disjunction between the thing being named and the thing itself; a theme that carries throughout the text i.e.to name something in Area X is to not necessarily know it at all.

The novel is narrated by the biologist, whose now-deceased husband was a member of a previous expedition. In order to enter into Area X, the biologist and her companions are hypnotised by the leader of the

1 In a blog post on environmental critique VanderMeer describes his realisation that "the Gulf Oil Spill had created Area X" (https://environmentalcritique.wordpress.com/2016/07/07/hauntings-in-the-anthropocene/).

expedition: the psychologist. This hypnotism acts as the first act of linguistic control, a theme that continues throughout the text. Characters are unknowingly programmed to respond to certain phrases and commands, the wording of which do not necessarily have an obvious link to their intended outcome. As with the names of the expedition members, the importance of the discursive speech act is not tied to the *meaning* of it but rather that it is said at all.

Once across the border, there is another act of linguistic confusion—a 'geological anomaly' is found near base camp. A circular installation made up mostly of a spiral staircase and rock walls, penetrates the ground. The psychologist calls this, seemingly logically, a tunnel, but the biologist insists with increasing determination on calling it a 'tower'. Once she, along with the anthropologist and the surveyor, enters the tower, the biologist discovers a repeating series of pseudo-biblical text scrawled in organic, living matter across the walls. This writing is both a literal and metaphorical element of the lexical reality of Area X, threading its way through the three novels of the *Southern Reach* trilogy.

The three novels are made up of a shifting network of texts produced by and between humans and nonhumans (Area X and its various expressions): "[t]he first novel is a journal, the second novel a lab, the third novel an ethnography" (Strombeck 2019, 15). These three different forms of writing begin with the most personal (a journal is written by one person, about their experiences, for, nominally, an audience of one) before moving to a form that is somewhat larger in scope but with a still limited focus and potential readership, until finally broadening into the description and study of a culture or society as a whole.

VanderMeer's trilogy imagines language "as something intimately tied to, and sometimes generated by, the world itself" (Strombeck 5). While the structuralist ordering of language sees the relationship between text and world as a unidirectional one whereby text *produces* world, the *Southern Reach* trilogy reverses this; as Andrew Strombeck argues, Area X is, in many ways, the author of both the Southern Reach and the *Southern Reach Trilogy*, most clearly seen in the ways that the world of Area X produces text. However, the very nature of the text produced by Area X is to resist intelligibility, as can be seen through the clearest example of nonhuman writing in the trilogy: the Crawler's sermon.

The most obviously organic example of Area X's inhuman writing is the ambiguously religious text that the biologist finds growing on the walls of the underground tower that provides one of the unstable landmarks of Area X, along with the lighthouse and the island. The writing first appears as "dimly sparkling green vines progressing down into the darkness" that

"resolve[s] further" into "words, in cursive, the letters raised about six inches off the wall" (VanderMeer 2014a, 23). The words are themselves "a miniature ecosystem" made up of "what would have looked to the layperson like rich green fernlike moss but in fact was probably a type of fungi or other eukaryotic organism" that teems with creatures that are "translucent and shaped like tiny hands" (VanderMeer 2014a, 24). This strange little fungus-forest spells out the semi-intelligible sermon that flows throughout the trilogy:

> Where lies the strangling fruit that came from the hand of the sinner I shall bring forth the seeds of the dead to share with the worms that gather in the darkness and surround the world with the power of their lives while from the dim-lit halls of other places forms that never could be writhe for the impatience of the few who have never seen or been seen (VanderMeer 2014a, 46–47).

This cyclical, never-ending, verdant scrawl is the work of a creature that the biologist refers to only as 'the crawler'. As the reader later learns, this creature is the last remnants of lighthouse keeper Saul Evans who becomes a kind of 'patient zero' for Area X. 'The crawler' moves endlessly down through the tower, leaving the fungus-sermon on the walls. The words come to Saul, who had been a preacher before becoming the lighthouse keeper, after he is pricked by a strange plant in the lighthouse garden, making them "a hybrid of human and inhuman expression"; Area X writing itself through the language Saul knows how to use best (Strombeck 2019, 7).

Benjamin Robertson, in his definitive monograph on the works of VanderMeer, describes the way that his novels "reject conventional notions of textuality by affirming the capacities of such textuality to create a world whose existence depends entirely on textual descriptions of it" (2018, 78). The textual materiality of Area X and the *Southern Reach* trilogy itself resist a textual intelligibility. Robertson writes that "Area X is not text, nor is it amenable to editing or even reading by a human who has understood the nature of his textual condition" (2018, 116) because, as per Robertson's argument, to be textual is to be legible. I would argue, though, that in the *Southern Reach* trilogy, Area X represents an apocalypse of legibility that is not *distinct* from its textuality. Area X writes; we know this as it produces text. What it does not produce is *meaning*. Robertson himself writes that "[i]f Area X fails to be a postapocalyptic landscape, it is only the case because Area X refuses the logic of before and after implicit in the prefix 'post-' and obviates any notion of apocalypse" (2018, 144). Area X

and the new weird more broadly represent a destabilising event, an apocalypse of legibility that springs from the new weird inheritance of post-structuralist thought. The New Weird is, in many ways, the Anthropocene writing itself (as the Crawler's scrawl is Area X writing itself through Saul); a mode that "recognizes the criticality of science fiction no longer works and that horror is the only response to this situation" (Robertson 2018, 31). Area X is an apocalypse of meaning that is, in many ways, the only logical response of *textual* beings to a post-structuralist, post-disaster world.

In the second book, *Authority*, the reader follows Control (or John Rodriguez), a third-generation intelligence officer, son of a spy mother and an artist father. After spending his adolescence in a town near Area X, he returns as the new director of the Southern Reach facility, tasked with finding out what happened to the previous director after she entered Area X as the psychologist. What starts out as a fact-finding mission becomes convoluted the more involved Control becomes. He discovers he is being manipulated by James Lowry, the supposed sole survivor of the first expedition who, Control discovers, in fact, most probably died on the expedition. Whatever came back seems increasingly twisted and wrong. Yet the more Control tries to grasp onto meaning in Area X and its associated territories, the more it slips through his fingers. Here, also, we see the continuation of the theme of linguistic programming—Control discovers he has been hypnotised by the hero of the first expedition, who is in fact most likely a defective copy of the original. Control is therefore under the control of this failed expression of Area X itself, using a scattershot approach to neurolinguistic programming.

After spending months in Area X after the collapse of the 'border' watched over by the Southern Reach, Control comes to realise that "nothing about language, about communication, could bridge the divide between human beings and Area X" (VanderMeer 2014c, 311), he "bridges the gap by abandoning the linguistic category marking the human, and merging with Area X," which "represents the novel's most hopeful assertion of humanity's ability to change in response to the challenges posed by phenomena such as climate change" (Carroll 2016, 81). It is important, though, that in a book that is as much about the process of textual production as it is about the narrative this text produces, the text quoted above is, crucially, *not the end of the book*. *Acceptance* is made up of several different intersecting narratives: alternating chapters entitled 'The Director' (which takes place in the period leading up to and including *Annihilation*); 'The Lighthouse Keeper' (which takes place right before Area X takes over the forgotten coast); and 'Ghost Bird' and 'Control' (which both take place after the events of *Authority*, told from the perspective of whatever has

replaced the biologist and Control, respectively). Chronologically, then, Control's leap into the light is close to the end of the narrative, but both the book and the story continues for a little while longer. The book ends, in fact, with words that are directly produced by Gloria (or the director, or the psychologist) who is both *from* and *of* the region that predated Area X. Gloria is a member of the Indigenous tribe that lived on 'the forgotten coast' long before European or extra-terrestrial colonisation made the area increasingly strange. After Area X takes over, she leaves, only to return as an adult, entangling herself with the new realities of her former home.

The letter that closes out the trilogy is ostensibly written 'outside' of Area X, but it is impossible to say with any certainty where Area X ends and where the 'real' world begins and this is certainly true for the Southern Reach facility that sits just outside the numinous border. Therefore, while the letter that closes the trilogy—from the director to the lighthouse keeper—is not produced by Area X as directly as the words the Crawler that was once Saul Evans scrawls on the walls of the tower, it is still a production *of* Area X indirectly. So, while Control "abandon[s] the linguistic category marking the human" (Carroll 2016, 81), the hope that the *Southern Reach* trilogy presupposes rests not (or not only) with the ability to 'overcome' the strictures of language. While Ghost Bird's narrative closure involves her leaving the tunnel safe in the knowledge that "[t]he words were behind them" and that the tunnel "was just a place they were walking out of" (VanderMeer 2014c, 327), the book itself continues on, not leaving the words behind until the director (the *author* of the twelfth expedition) writes her final words to Saul Evans (the 'hand' that Area X writes with to re/produce itself through text). As the director herself thinks, with the letter, "like the script on the walls of the tower…[t]he words aren't important but what's channelled through them is" (VanderMeer 2014c, 333). Contra to the underlying principle of semiotics, which focuses on how meaning is created through language and therefore categorises language as the structural conveyance of meaning, VanderMeer's narrative suggests that ultimately the *content* and *meaning* of language is less important than the production of language itself. This is congruent with the larger themes of the trilogy: that the search for meaning and certainty is an ultimately failed project. Area X resists interpretation from all angles—it destroys scientific equipment—yet also resists occult interpretations of its origins.

The reader learns more about this destructive opacity through the final instalments of the biologist's account, where she discovers fragments of records from an organisation called S&SB. The reader knows, thanks

to histories provided by both Control and Saul Evans, that S&SB is the 'Séance & Science Brigade'. This group was a supposedly informal organisation "dedicated to applying 'empirical reality to paranormal phenomenon,'" (VanderMeer 2014b, 37) centred around the Event that created the barrier around Area X and the strange phenomena occurring inside of it. This information is not available to the biologist, however, and she never puts the pieces together. After reaching the island (called 'Failure Island' by Saul), which itself holds shifting and ambiguous significance throughout the trilogy, the biologist finds evidence of S&SB in the form of damaged equipment and scraps of documentation that escaped being burned prior to the apparition of Area X. Without any knowledge of what S&SB could stand for she starts calling them "the Seeker & Surveillance Bandits," (VanderMeer 2014c, 173) failing to get a single word right. She tries to piece together "weathered (often unreadable) papers and photographs, and even a few recordings that croaked out incomprehensible too-slow words" (VanderMeer 2014c, 174). This is reminiscent of how most information related to Area X — both that which occurs in-novel and, often, the novels themselves — is conveyed. It is not entirely absent. It is maddeningly close to comprehensible, like writing glimpsed in a dream; one *should* be able to make sense of it, at some point there *has* been meaning to it (one assumes) but this meaning is now only available in incomprehensible snatches. The more one learns about Area X the further one gets from understanding it. The usual kinds of evidence — writing, photographs, videos — in fact obscure the 'meaning' of Area X further.

Language and meaning exist in an uneasy relationship throughout the Southern Reach trilogy. When Control first starts as the interim director at the Southern Reach facility, he begins his research into the most recent expedition and he counts the amount of words spoken by the members of the expedition: "4,623 words…7,154 words…and the all-time champion, the linguist who had backed out at the last second, coming in at 12,743 words of replies" (VanderMeer 2014b, 17). This is then compared to "the biologist and her terse 753 words" (Ibid). Control is captivated by this so-called "self-control" (Ibid). Appropriately for a section titled 'Incantations', Control begins to feel that "[t]he ghost was right there, in the transcripts since her return, moving through the text. Things that showed themselves in the empty spaces, making Control unwilling to say her words aloud for fear that somehow he did not really understand the undercurrents and hidden references" (VanderMeer 2014b, 17).

Having failed to master Area X through understanding, he compulsively attempts to circumvent this fear by asserting mastery over the ambiguous speech-acts of the biologist by asserting mastery over her

speech through the act of counting. *Authority* is partially about a failed bid for authority over the Southern Reach and, by extension, over Area X. It is also worth noting that the root of 'authority' is the same as that of 'author' (from the Latin 'auctor', meaning originator or promotor). The struggle for authority in the Southern Reach is the struggle for who can be said to be the *author* of Area X, or perhaps more cogently the *translator* of Area X (although anyone familiar with translation studies knows that there is more than a little of the author in the role of the translator). The candidates are numerous. There's Control and his meaningless files; the missing Director who has a childhood connection to the forgotten coast and is obsessively trying to learn what has happened to her childhood home. There is Whitby, a Southern Reach employee who has been 'infected' by Area X and now collects pages for an increasingly esoteric thesis on the 'terroir' (the environmental makeup of a region that affects the things grown there) of Area X. Lowry, the supposed survivor of the first expedition, now controls Control from Central (the shadowy organisation that controls both Control and, loosely, the Southern Reach) using neurolinguistic programming (hypnotism). These people provide fragments of Area X through their written expression but ultimately none of them are the author nor the authority. That honour goes to Area X alone.

The author(ity) of the *Southern Reach* trilogy complicates without necessarily contradicting Roland Barthes's famous thesis on the death of the author. Like Barthes's 'writer', Control "can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them" (1977, 146). However, unlike Barthes's 'modern scriptor' who "traces a field without origin—or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins," (1977, 146) the 'field without origin' that Control aims to trace is, in fact, participating in the act of writing *itself* as an act of inscribing meaning *outside* of but inherently alongside questions of authority. In the *Southern Reach* trilogy, the author is not dead, the author is everywhere. The tools it uses to write are themselves impossibly, sometimes grotesquely, alive i.e. Control, the biologist, the lighthouse keeper, and even the director herself. Barthes argues that "[o]nce the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile" because "[t]o give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (1997, 147). While it would be useless to pretend this is a space to relitigate the claims of an essay that is almost forty years old and has been critiqued to death at this point (please excuse the pun), I would argue that the use of speech and text acts in the *Southern Reach* trilogy indicate

that the struggle for authorial control and therefore authority over the text that is Area X indicates that there exists at the heart of this trilogy an argument that to give a text an author is not the end of the text and the hunt for meaning within it, but only the beginning of said text. Area X is, in many ways, an entity that represents the apocalyptic annihilation of authorship and of genre, a destabilising presence within the new weird that "is a nonattitude, a nonrelation, a means of identifying the measureless gap between the human with its knowledge practices and the weird planet without a capacity to be known" (Robertson 2018, 134–135).

The apocalypse of authorship can be explored via Barthes's 'Author-God' as a projection of mastery. Barthes writes that "[i]n the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning" (1977, 147). In the trilogy as a whole, but in *Authority* especially, this attempt at *disentangling* is a constant project. Control finds the words written by what was formerly the lighthouse keeper scrawled in the director's office cupboard. Upon finding this screed Control assumes that "the wall beyond the door was covered in a dark design," before realising that "someone had obliterated it with a series of odd sentences written with a remarkably thick black pen" (VanderMeer 2014b, 96) that Control reflexively first thinks (before abandoning the idea) is "the director's psychotic ode to the plant in her drawer," (VanderMeer 2014b, 97) which links a vegetal piece of Area X with the writing that Area X inspires.

This plant (apparently undying, with a mummified mouse in roots, brought back across the border after Whitby and the director's secret trip) is further associated with difficult-to-parse language when Control attempts to read "the sedimentary layers [of notes] that had existed under the plant and mouse," which "proved the most difficult to separate out" (VanderMeer 2014b, 155). The writerly properties of plants are a theme in both the *Southern Reach* and the *MaddAddam* trilogies, creating a nonhuman scriptor that sits in authorial opposition to the human writers.

The difficulty to separate the notes under the plant is both literal and symbolic, as "[s]ome pages were brittle and thin, and the scraps of paper and ragged collages of leaves had a tendency to stick together, while being infiltrated and bound more tightly by the remains of translucent roots touched by lines of crimson left behind by the plant" (VanderMeer 2014b, 155). This plant—an emissary of Area X—has literally 'infiltrated' the director's attempt at asserting her authority over Area X through

writing. Control's project becomes one of disentangling rather than deciphering.

In his writing on the 'author-god', Barthes goes on to argue that "by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning, to the text (And to the world as text)" this refusal of meaning "liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases — reason, science, law" (1977, 147). It is interesting to consider this in light of the clearly religiously-inspired 'meaningless' text that forms the heart of the *Southern Reach* trilogy's theme of the resistance of text to interpretation. It could be said that the progenitor of the text, the lighthouse keeper, ultimately supports this assertion as he himself 'refused God' by leaving his calling as a preacher and his father's church to move to the forgotten coast. But by making this claim, I am already deconstructing Barthes's anti-theological project; I am assigning an authorial link between this 'meaningless' text and the hands (or perhaps cilia) that wrote it. Area X itself resists "God and his hypostases — reason, science, law," (1997, 147) but it also resists and undermines esoteric attempts to understand the phenomena that occur on the forgotten coast. There is no understandable reason — scientific, religious, supernatural — behind Area X. Area X exists to resist legibility.

By distinguishing between the author (or scriptor) and the act of writing, the *Southern Reach* trilogy (and, as I will explore later, the *MaddAddam* trilogy) reinscribes authority as meaning again. To have the ability to both create and parse meaningful text is to have authority over that text and the world that text institutes and conversely, to preclude others from being able to parse this meaning *disempowers* them, leaving them at the mercy of a force beyond their control. Frequently, characters in the *Southern Reach* trilogy realise that Area X (or whatever created it) is *not* thoughtless or unknowable, but rather that they (the human or almost-human characters) are not capable of recognising the level at which Area X makes decisions and that, in turn, Area X does not recognise them as sentient beings. To know or understand Area X (if that is even possible) is to no longer be able to articulate oneself in a way that makes sense to humans.

As I move into discussing Atwood's exploration of language after the end of humanity (or at least human mastery), I want to pause here to ask the question implied by the title of this paper: do the novels of the *Southern Reach* trilogy constitute apocalyptic fiction? Are they dystopian? Do they, ultimately, constitute an exploration of 'the end' and if they do, how is this 'end' presented? I argue, as Robertson does, that these texts

operate in an apocalyptic mode *from a human perspective*, but that by necessity the 'new weird' seeks to look beyond this limited perspective. In Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending*, he writes that "the paradigms of apocalypse continue to lie under our ways of making sense of the world" (1967, 28). It is the idea of apocalypse—this promise of a proverbial ending—that makes humanity legible to itself. This is the purpose for my return to post-structuralism as a way to understand the supposed apocalypses in these novels. If the apocalypse is the symbolic, structural ground by which our own lives are made legible to ourselves, then it can also be theorised that the ways in which this sense of legibility is deliberately withheld in the *Southern Reach* trilogy (making their claims to 'post-apocalyptic' uncertain, as Robertson notes), then VanderMeer's approach to an illegible yet textual linguistic apocalyptic mien that nevertheless refuses the concrete legibility of an apocalypse withholds the sense of an ending that offers a comforting structure to both apocalyptic narratives and human lives. Moving into the *MaddAddam* trilogy I look at how Atwood's exploration of language functions as a commentary on 'the end', and how the post-structuralist and deconstructionist ways of reading the apocalypse offer arresting approaches towards a legible, cohesive understanding of apocalyptic thought.

Death and the Mnemotechnic Archive of Language in the *MaddAddam* Trilogy

Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy is, like the *Southern Reach* trilogy, not a single cohesive exploration of one character or story across three books. Similar to VanderMeer's novels, Atwood's trilogy breaks cohesive structure, with each book being narrated in a different way. The first book, *Oryx and Crake*, is the most straightforward novel of the three. Like *Annihilation*, it is the single perspective of a character who finds themself alone in a much-changed and unfamiliar landscape that is, if not hostile to humans, then entirely indifferent to them. Jimmy, now Snowman in the present-tense of the novel, is the unscientific ('word person') son of two genius geneticists in a near-future bio-dystopia where society is rigidly divided along class lines that are defined by proximity to the scientific corporations ('corps') that run North American society through their genetic manipulation of human, animals, and plants.

The *MaddAddam* trilogy follows the experiences of several characters after a genetically engineered pandemic annihilates the majority of the population. In the first novel, Jimmy (who takes to calling himself Snow-

man after the pandemic) is a useless humanities major who believes himself to be the last genetically 'pure' human. He has been left in charge of the genetically modified human-animal hybrids called the Crakers, named for the man who both created them and unleashed the world-ending virus: Jimmy's best friend Crake.

Jimmy is a young man with an affinity for words in a society that is both careless of the utilisation of wordcraft while, at the same time, fundamentally reliant on words to promote and exploit the scientific creations turned out by the Corps, foregrounding the "recombinative nature of language, and implicitly [relating] it to the highly recombinant technoscience of the novel" (Cooke 2006, 118). Jimmy believes in the value of words, telling himself "[h]ang on to the words [...] the odd words, the old words, the rare ones [...;] [w]hen they're gone out of his head, these words, they'll be gone everywhere, forever" (Atwood 2003, 68). To Jimmy, the disappearance of these words is equivalent to the disappearance of himself as an individual and the supposedly-extinct species he represents: humankind. However, the words he is hanging on to—"*Valance*. *Norn*. *Serendipity*. *Pibroch*. *Lubricious*" (Ibid)—are removed from any context or meaning. It is not the *content* of the words that matters to Jimmy, it is their *existence*, and the way that they prove his *own* continued existence.

Language and death are linked throughout the *MaddAddam* trilogy in a similar way. Both the text and the characters within it mark the death of most of the human race—as well as the loss of the cultural forms attendant to it—with an obsessive archiving and reproduction of language. Jimmy ties his own personhood and the final remnants of his almost extinct civilisation to the continuation of these words, turning them (and by extension himself) into a memorial. This is an early indication of a theme that appears throughout the trilogy: the relationship between the written word (or the lack of it) and survival. In this world, language is an essential marker of acceptance into various groups (each group has its own jargon, codes, texts). Language in the *MaddAddam* trilogy is connected to the way that "[t]he human species, Atwood suggests, distinguishes itself from other life forms through storytelling" (Keck 2018, 37). When Zeb is about to die on a mountain, "[i]mminent death threatens him with the loss of language and storytelling and, therefore, the ability to distinguish his self from the living matter that surrounds him (Keck 2018, 37). "Soon," Zeb thinks to himself, "he'd be overgrown, one with the moss" (Atwood 2014, 80). Language is essential to forestalling 'the end', either of the self or of the world.

Blanchot's theory of language, writes that "the word institutes the object, the world, and in that very act it annihilates it, and along with it the author of the word" (2006, 48). This makes language and the movement towards symbolic intelligibility always-already an act of mutually assured destruction of the self/other (48). As in the *Southern Reach* trilogy, the *MaddAddam* trilogy indicates an essential violence in the attempt at mastery implied by the use of symbolic language to convey meaning.

It must be noted that when I use 'symbolic language' I am referring both to the higher-order language of symbolism and also written words (literally symbols used to convey language). Although the Crakers are capable of speech from the beginning of the trilogy, their adaptation of written language is symbolically similar to the development of spoken language. In view of the revelation that at least part of the narrative of *MaddAddam* is "the Story of Toby" that is written into a book by Blackbeard, it can be assumed there is a link between the spoken word and the written word as markers of symbolic thinking (Atwood *MaddAddam,* 474). The march towards symbolic intelligibility for the Crakers is positioned as a fall from grace and it is their access to words that marks the original breach—not only between the Crakers and animals—but also the breach between the Crakers and their goddess Oryx.

Snowman tells the Crakers a kind of original sin myth whereby:

> the Children of Oryx [non-human, non-Craker animals] hatched out of an egg, a giant egg laid by Oryx herself. Actually she laid two eggs: one full of animals and birds and fish, and the other one full of words. But the egg full of words hatched first, and the Children of Crake had already been created by then, and they'd eaten up all the words because they were hungry, and so there were no words left over when the second egg hatched out. And that is why the animals can't talk.
>
> (Atwood 2003, 110)

There is no direct reproof in Snowman's story. The Crakers are not, at least directly, expelled from paradise because of their hunger for words (as Adam and Eve were for their hunger for knowledge). They *were*, however, expelled from ParadIce (ParadIce being the name of Crake's research laboratory where the Crakers were developed) and thus forever separated from Oryx, who cannot communicate with either Snowman or the Crakers.

In Snowman's mythology, it is only Crake who can semi-directly communicate with the Crakers through Snowman's watch. But in Snowman's hallucinatory world, Oryx (or Snowman's version of Oryx) communicates with him, while Crake is terminally silent. While the reader knows both

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Oryx and Crake are equally dead, Snowman's relationship to them in their deaths is distinctly different. The act of 'lingophagy' on behalf of the Crakers leaves Oryx herself silenced as they consume all the words and leave none for her. Snowman, thus, passes on a cold rebuke from the Crakers' beloved teacher mother, i.e. the conveyer of the very thing that makes them more human than not; a rebuke that Snowman surely feels is aimed at himself. In Snowman's cosmology, that the Crakers can speak at all ultimately cleaves them from God, making the original sin not the desire for knowledge but rather the desire for intelligibility. As in the *Southern Reach* trilogy, there is something about the use of language for communication, and intelligibility specifically, that in some way degrades or lessens the very thing that one is attempting to describe (or master).

To understand why this should be one must explore the use and importance of language in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. The fluid and changing experience of human and non-human persons is explored in the *MaddAddam* trilogy through what Grayson Cooke calls the 'technics' of language. Cooke points to the outlandish use of language in advertising for the Corps that filters down to become part of the common language: words like 'pleeblands', animal names like 'pigoons', 'rakunk' (racoon skunk) and 'snat' (snake rat), as well as company names like 'OrganInc' (a play on 'organic' and what OrganInc is: an incorporated company that makes organs). Cooke writes that "the brand names and hybrid animals [Atwood] has dreamt up are indicative of the performative function of much biotechnological rhetoric (2006, 119)."

These technics of language become earmarks of hybridity and nascent personhood in the later books of the *MaddAddam* trilogy but they also indicate a loss of some kind of extra-humanist understanding of both self and world. There is evidence that as the Crakers acquire written language from Toby they become more and more inured to the singing that is at the heart of their culture. This singing is "beyond the human level, or below it. As if crystals are singing…like ferns unscrolling—something old, carboniferous, but at the same time newborn, fragrant, verdant," linking (as Atwood often does) sensations of deep history with a contemporaneousness that looks towards the future, as well as connecting this pre-human level of communication with nonhuman scriptors like plants (Atwood 2003, 122). This singing is so beyond language that to acquire writing, a concrete symbolic expression of human language, destroys the ability to experience the singing fully. Storytelling and writing makes the Crakers "more like human beings" and in doing so, codifies their access to the supra-human communication of singing into a ritualistic way of closing their storytelling ceremonies (Bowen 2017, 697).

The reader first sees Snowman having an adverse reaction to the singing because "[i]t reduces him, forces too many unwanted emotions upon him" (Atwood 2003, 122–123). Although all the humans have similar responses, initially none of the Crakers do; the singing is just what Crakers do. Later, after Blackbeard learns to read and takes over the role of storyteller from Toby, he asks his fellow Crakers "please don't sing yet" (Atwood 2014, 468) as if irritated. His speech — and the trilogy — ends with "now we will sing" (Atwood 2014, 474). This implies that the singing has become codified and ritualised, no longer a free expression of emotion. Developing the written word — and particularly the ritualised word — has lessened the ability to communicate or create *beyond* language.

In VanderMeer's trilogy, to attempt to grasp Area X enough to describe it is to misunderstand it, to lessen the complexity of the event that is Area X and reduce it to something as simple as what words can convey. In the *MaddAddam* trilogy, as the Crakers can access the written word (a mark of both the human and the humanist) they lose an essential beyond-humanness; become something other than themselves. If the messages the Crawler scrawls on the walls of the tower in *Annihilation* are the living word, then the words Blackbeard commits to his book using a scavenged ballpoint pen are dead, remaining so even when Blackbeard later repeats them orally to his audience.

There are two concepts at work here, then, depending on where you stand. From the perspective of the human race, Blackbeard's acquisition of written language is a triumph: the linguistic architecture of the human race will continue on and, with it, some part of ourselves will continue into the future; the outcome Jimmy longed for. But seen from the inhuman or a-human perspective, the Area X perspective that privileges a chaotic, vibrant, and unknowable future, Blackbeard's commitment to the written word is a tragedy.

Atwood's trilogy continuously draws a negative correlation between religion (and/or spirituality) and the permanent or semi-permanent use of text. The God's Gardeners are forbidden from writing anything down permanently, only using erasable slates. After leaving the Gardeners, Ren remembers being told "[*b*]*eware of words. Be careful what you write. Leave no trails*" (Atwood 2011, 7). Their reasoning is manifold. It makes sense that a group formed of dubious legality (which was working against the interests of the Corps) would not want to leave behind written evidence. The Gardener leadership themselves say that writing is dangerous "because your enemies could trace you through it, and hunt you down, and use your words to condemn you" (Atwood 2011, 7).

The concept of the trace or the ability to be traced has multiple meanings. In the Derridean sense, "[t]he trace, where the relationship with the other is marked, articulates its possibility in the entire field of the entity" (1976, 47). The trace "is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent presence" indicating, like the spectre, the mark of that which is there yet not there (Spivak 1976, xvii). To leave a trace is to leave a sign of oneself even through one's own absence. To be traced is to have this absence marked. To be traced IS to have had form, to be able to prove one's existence and therefore one's own self. Like the etchings left in the chemical make-up of soil by super-accumulators, including kudzu and pennycress; to leave a trace is to have been *there*, to have been an active agent in the process of something becoming something else. The language of plants also speaks clearly and loudly in the *MaddAddam* trilogy: either the imagery of the "ferns unscrolling" as the Crakers sing (Atwood 2003, 122) or the cursive handwriting of twisting vines rewriting the urban landscape after the plague. These vines — kudzu — interestingly, will ultimately serve the same function that Area X accelerates, as kudzu is a phytoremediator that is particularly useful for removing lead from soil. In Mel Chin's 1991 conceptual artwork *Revival Field* the artist planted a variety of 'superaccumulators' in the Pig's Eye Landfill Site, Minnesota. Chin, when discussing this work, "relates the operation of plants to more traditional operations of art on metal and stone, such as casting, carving, and reduction — the removal of materials in order to make a shape" (Fuller and Goriunova 2019, 111). In scriptorial terms, kudzu acts like an etching, like acid on a metal plate to create a typeface.

The traces of humans left in the geological record make up the body of evidence for the Anthropocene. We might read the geological record as writing into stone with "the presence of an absence: the mark of the here-no-longer that nevertheless remains" where "the trace haunts the present not with an absence that ruptures presence, but with a presence that negates negation" (Luciano 2017, 100). One of the things that is so horrifying to humans in both the *Southern Reach* and *MaddAddam* trilogies is how quickly the traces of human endeavour are effaced or obliterated. In the case of Area X, on a chemical level, as whatever has happened to the forgotten coast has also purified the ground of any traces of the pollution of the last two hundred years i.e. clean air, clean water, no heavy metals contaminating the soil.

Marks left in the lithic record, like fossils, "are traces: lithic ghosts incapable of disappearing; material echoes of past life; forms that, by refusing to vanish into the abyss of time, prevent time from becoming merely abyssal" (ibid). The environmental signatures of the Anthropocene

(nuclear material, plastics, concrete buildings) are a kind of halo fossil of the human, the geological traces of the human epoch that are not traces of the absence of flesh but are nevertheless "lithic ghosts incapable of disappearing; material echoes" of ourselves (ibid). To leave no trace is to live lightly on the Earth; to not scrawl your name in the stone book of history, to not leave your dead words in a field to be vulturized, in a practice not dissimilar to that done by Jimmy's artist girlfriend Amanda, also a former God's Gardener. Amanda's artistic practice involves taking "a truckload of large dead-animal parts to vacant fields or the parking lots of abandoned factories and [arranging] them in the shapes of words, wait[ing] until the vultures had descended and were tearing them apart, then photograph[ing] the whole scene from a helicopter" (Atwood 2003, 287). It is, in fact, the exact opposite of 'the living word'. This act of writing is salient in discussions of language and traces in the Anthropocene as Amanda's art becomes a kind of primal communication between the Earth and those with the ability to read, using the medium of dead (increasingly extinct) animals. Is it not possible, and indeed perhaps imperative, for us to read the unimaginably vast numbers of dying species as a form of communication that, while less direct, is no less loud? The language of eating and being eaten seen both in Amanda's vulturizing project and the hasty scrawl of kudzu underscores the link between continued survival and language in the *MaddAddam* trilogy. Crucially, however, it is a language that is made to be decomposed. The living word is what indicates potential survival on a *planetary* level, as opposed to the personhood-species level indicated by the survival of the scriptor-writer.

Conclusion

In the *Southern Reach* and *MaddAddam* trilogies, both VanderMeer and Atwood approach textuality and apocalypticism from a perspective that decouples meaning from text in a way that makes the utility and meaning of language ambiguous and yet undeniably crucial. In *The Southern Reach* trilogy, it is not the *meaning* of a text that is important but that the text exists at all. In a similar way, the symbolism of language and text in the *MaddAddam* trilogy prioritises not the content of language but the *form* that it takes; quite literally, how the letters are shaped and how communication is formed. Language is a living (and dying) thing in both trilogies, becoming not simply an extension of the person writing but rather a thing with its own aims, means, and modes of self-replication. In both the *Southern Reach* and the *MaddAddam* trilogy, language (particularly

written language) at times seems to be something that is in *opposition* to the human characters that, in the standard order of things, would be the ones to both make use of it and indeed to create it. Both VanderMeer and Atwood connect these new ways of using language and writing (the agency it implies, the recombinative power of language unshackled from its reliance on human communication) to a posthuman future, one which from the perspective of humanity looks a lot like the end of the (at least our) world. However, what it implies is, in fact, a world of limitless beyond-human possibilities. This does not make it any less terrifying.

In apocalyptic narratives the continuance of narrative and language (and, in the case of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, specifically the continuation of *writing*) implies a level of hope for human survival. And, in a sense, this reckless evolution in the living word does imply hope. But, as Franz Kafka is reported to have once said, there is "plenty of hope, an infinite amount of hope—but not for us" (Barnouw 1988, 187). Gerry Canavan, in an article on Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy that takes this Kafka quote as its title, argues that in the future of *Oryx and Crake* "[t]here is no hope for liberal individualist consumers living the pseudo-utopia of late capitalism" and that "[t]o the extent that Crake's murderous, Frankensteinian actions do indeed usher in a kind of utopia, then, we must understand that it is not a Utopia for *us*—not for us the way we now are, the way we now live" (2012, 154). In the *Southern Reach* trilogy, this point is ever more firmly emphasised; after all, Area X is a utopia of a sort. The air is clean, the water is pure, the effects of industrialisation have faded away. The biologist, at least, finds some level of pseudo-religious ecstasy in inching closer towards becoming-nonhuman but at the same time holding it back for as long as possible, using a combination of the written word and more direct methods such as self-harm. There are echoes of the lives of saints in the biologist's final missives, allowing herself to get close to the glory of what she calls the 'brightness' that will eventually burn her humanity away, but using pain and deprivation (like fasting, or a hair shirt) to hold herself back from approaching that final, nonhuman edge. Both VanderMeer and Atwood present readers with what is ultimately a non/posthuman utopia that, understandably, fills the humans perceiving it with fear and confusion. These new landscapes are not actively *hostile* to the humans who enter them they simply do not care about us. This is represented in part through acts of living and dying textuality such as the micro-ecosystem script on the tower walls, and Amanda's vulturized word-sculptures, or even the microbial etchings of kudzu. These are acts of communication that are not wholly removed from human hands (and, in the case of Amanda's art project, are instigated by human hands) but

they are nevertheless not entirely within the purview of humans when it comes to creating meaning through them. Nonhuman or collaborative other-than-human textuality represents a continuance beyond the end, but in the same way as Hebrews 4:12 describes the living word of God as "piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow," the living words of the *Southern Reach* and *MaddAddam* trilogies cleave meaning from language, signifier from signified, the writing hand from its own wrist, human from language and from the domain they once presumed to rule. The utopian post-apocalypse of the living word offers potential, survival, but no salvation — there is, again, hope — but not for us.

Ruby Niemann recently received her doctorate in English Literature from the University of Adelaide with a dissertation on Anthropocene theory in the recent works of Margaret Atwood. Most recently her work appeared in *Adapting Margaret Atwood: The Handmaid's Tale and Beyond*, edited by Shannon Wells-Lassagne and Fiona McMahon. Her essay on viral and nuclear adaptation was recently awarded the Contemporary Women's Writing Essay prize.

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Book Review
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David F. Eisler

When 'The End of Everything' Really Is

In something like five billion years the sun will exhaust the hydrogen gas that fuels its core and begin burning helium atoms, exerting thermal pressure on its fiery outer layers and causing a radial expansion that will push its now reddish girth beyond the orbits of the inner planets and likely engulf the Earth in an unceremonious act of mass accretion. If, somehow, humanity is still around by then, it will mean, at the very least, the literal end of the world.

If that doesn't get us, if, say, we have mastered the science of interstellar travel and colonized new worlds within the galaxy, we still won't be off the hook. Other stars will die, too, and the once vibrant galactic neighborhoods will see the lights go out, one by one, until hardly a twinkle registers across the far reaches of a nearly empty cosmos. One day far into an unimaginable future, the entire universe will meet its end in one of a handful of scenarios that cosmologists have detailed through their trademark squiggly equations; a wonderful mathematical shorthand to capture all our existential dread.

So, there it is. The universe will, in all probability, come to an end. And even if what we consider 'the universe' continues to exist, there likely won't be anything sentient around to perceive it. Researchers who study the apocalypse tend to focus on the Earth, of course. They consider the impact of the end times on humanity or, more inclusively, terrestrial life. But if the ultimate outcome is predetermined no matter what happens in the cosmological short term, what does it matter? What does that mean for us? Do we derive meaning from the impermanence of existence, or does the eventual 'end of everything' drain the meaning away from our efforts in the present?

Two recent books from the natural sciences tackle these questions head on, extrapolating the consequences of physical laws to their cold mathematical conclusions: Brian Greene's *Until the End of Time: Mind, Matter, and the Search for Meaning in an Evolving Universe* (2020) and Katie Mack's *The End of Everything* (*Astrophysically Speaking*) (2020). In these works, the end is inevitable, regardless of our ability to conceive it. For Mack, the fun comes in puzzling out the physics behind such cosmic mysteries. For Greene, it is the end of time itself that ultimately gives our existence meaning in the first place.

Though neither author addresses the concept of the apocalypse directly in the way most humanities scholars do, the end of the universe is quite literally the "end of everything" for Mack and "the end of time" for Greene. Greene even states in his introduction that "we will walk the timeline of the universe, exploring the physical principles that yield orderly structures from stars and galaxies to life and consciousness, within a universe destined for decay" (xii). As with many popular science books, Greene takes the reader on a layperson's equation-less tour of scientific history and concepts, from the laws of thermodynamics to the Big Bang, the origins of life, and human consciousness. While his primary focus is a thorough explanation of the dynamics between entropy and evolution, it's the "destined for decay" part that makes the book existentially haunting, especially with Greene's powerful argument in favor of reductionism, a determinist metaphysical perspective that brings discomfort to those who prefer the individual control of free will. Such determinism combined with our understanding of the physical sciences brings about the realization that "In the fullness of time all that lives will die" (2020, 3). He continues:

> For more than three billion years, as species simple and complex found their place in earth's hierarchy, the scythe of death has cast a persistent shadow over the flowering of life. Diversity spread as life crawled from the oceans, strode on land, and took flight in the skies. But wait long enough and the ledger of birth and death, with entries more numerous than stars in the galaxy, will balance with dispassionate precision. The unfolding of any given life is beyond prediction. The final fate of any given life is a foregone conclusion. (3)

The notion of reductionism leads to the conclusion that human thought is also the byproduct of physical processes — atoms and molecules whirling around in a particular pattern and structure that bring about what we perceive as consciousness — and Greene's project is to consider "whether

the evolving environmental conditions across space and time can support intelligent life indefinitely" (12). The empirical approach to this question based on the observations and measurements of physics is "not heartening," (12) as Greene writes. The language of natural science to describe this conclusion is as elegant as it is distant and unfeeling: "The end of each is driven by its own distinctive combination of physical processes, spanning quantum mechanics through general relativity, ultimately yielding a mist of particles drifting through a cold and quiet cosmos" (12).

Greene's description of what happens to the planets, the stars, the galaxy, black holes, and the universe at the longest timescales is mostly the story of how each of these things meets its end. At some point, "galaxies will resemble the burnt-out cities of a dystopian future" (260). While his earlier works such as *The Elegant Universe* (1999) and *The Fabric of the Cosmos* (2004) were pioneering explorations of cutting-edge ideas in physics, *Until the End of Time* bears the hallmark of a more personal meditation on life and death. Coming to terms with the existential terror brought about by contemplating the temporary nature of existence leads to a more enlightened perspective that encourages a "shift from grasping for a receding future to the feeling of inhabiting a breathtaking if transient present" (15). When you accept that "the universe will play host to life and mind only temporarily" and imagine "a future bereft of stars and planets and things that think, your regard for our era can appreciate toward reverence" (15).

Reverence is not exactly the word that most people would choose to describe what it feels like to be alive at a time when constant streams of global crises, catastrophes, and threats dominate our awareness and attention. The end of the world is not a comforting thought, though Greene's conclusion that the temporary nature of existence tasks us "with the noble charge of finding our own meaning" (16) opens the door for a more hopeful counter-narrative that attempts to rise above the impulse to daily despair.

In contrast to *Until the End of Time*'s philosophical investigation of meaning in the face of a deterministic universe, Katie Mack's *The End of Everything* (*Astrophyiscally Speaking*) is more concerned with the *how* of that end. In a playful and engaging tone, Mack explores five different possible endings for the universe:

- The Big Crunch: gravity ultimately reins in the expansion of the universe and everything eventually collapses back onto itself;
- Heat Death: the expansion of the universe continues forever, and all heat-generating matter will eventually run out of energy, leading to a cold, essentially empty blackness;

- The Big Rip: rather than waiting for everything to die in the Heat Death, dark energy drastically accelerates the expansion of the universe and rips all matter apart;
- Vacuum Decay: a shift in the fundamental properties of something called the "Higgs Field" creates what Mack dubs a "bubble of quantum death" (2020, 205) in which the laws of physics no longer work properly, and this bubble expands at the speed of light to destroy everything. (This is unquestionably the coolest scenario, and the one that could theoretically happen at any moment, if it hasn't already somewhere else in the universe);
- The Big Bounce: an eternal cycle of contraction and expansion essentially resets the universe from the beginning and starts over from scratch.

Unlike Greene, Mack frequently uses the term "apocalypse" to describe her project. Yet her interests lie squarely within the realm of the scientific method; her starting point comes from the fact that "the best measurements we have are only consistent with a handful of final apocalyptic scenarios, some of which may be confirmed or ruled out by observations we're making right now. Exploring these possibilities gives us a glimpse of the workings of science at the cutting edge" (2020, 5). Before she dives too deeply into the physics involved, Mack even spends a few introductory pages contextualizing her story of the end of the universe alongside more traditional eschatology:

> Whether or not we subscribe to any particular religion or philosophy, it would be hard to deny that knowing our cosmic destiny must have some impact on how we think about our existence, or even how we live our lives. If we want to know whether what we do here ultimately matters, the first thing we ask is: how will it come out in the end? If we find the answer to that question, it leads immediately to the next: what does this mean for us now? Do we still have to take the trash out next Tuesday if the universe is going to die someday? (4)

These final questions lead Mack to conclusions similar to Greene's, and she also grounds her interest in the cosmic apocalypse in the human search for meaning: "Acknowledging an ultimate end gives us context, meaning, even hope, and allows us, paradoxically, to step back from our petty day-to-day concerns and simultaneously live more fully in the moment. Maybe this can be the meaning we seek" (7). Again, though, this is a natural science approach, and Mack wants questions "that can be answered with sci-

entific observation, mathematics, and physical evidence," placing notions of truth within the realm of results that she can "rederive mathematically" (4).

The fact that both Greene and Mack choose to view the end of everything as an existential opportunity — Mack even writes that it "can bring a kind of joy even in the face of total destruction" (13) — rather than a call to take action is a revealing difference in perspectives between those who take the long view of the cosmos and those who study the planet. That's because thinking of the apocalypse as not merely an end but as a beginning breaks down at the cosmic scale. Cosmological concepts of the apocalypse negate or nullify many of the most pressing threats to the world because the timescales involved — billions or even trillions of years — directly contradict the narratives of immanence that dominate much current apocalyptic thinking. The nuances of climate policy, nuclear threats, imperialism, populism, racism, and so on, become smoothed out by an indifferent universe. Even the decades associated with climate change are insignificant on cosmological timescales, and those seem hard enough to convince many people of their immediacy.

One major difference between the terrestrial apocalypse — on the shorter timescale anyway — and the cosmological apocalypse is the literal powerlessness involved. The laws of physics have no criminals, so the end of the Earth and the end of the universe are not crises to be avoided or calls to action but rather the emotionless consequences of cold-blooded, dispassionate calculations. There is literally nothing we can do to stop the stages of the sun's evolution that will eventually destroy the Earth or slow down the expansion of the universe. As Emily St. John Mandel writes in her novel *Sea of Tranquility* (2022), "No star burns forever. You can say 'It's the end of the world; and mean it, but what gets lost in that kind of careless usage is that the world will eventually literally end. Not 'civilization,' whatever that is, but the actual planet" (103). The best we can hope for — assuming humans still exist at that point — is a temporary escape to another planet or star system.

Incorporating the idea of an ending universe into apocalyptic discourses may inject an interesting tension into a burgeoning field of interdisciplinary scholarship. What does it mean for our understanding of the apocalypse when "the end of everything" really is? How does this knowledge relate to, or illuminate, other concepts of the apocalypse? Does the end of the universe overshadow the end of the world, or are the timescales involved so vast and unrelatable that it makes little sense to concentrate on them, even within the context of apocalyptic figures of thought?

None of these questions are really within the scope of either *Until the End of Time* or *The End of Everything*, but it isn't much of a stretch to consider how these accessible, thought-provoking books are worthy additions to any library of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies. Whether thinking about the end of everything will lead to Greene's "reverence" for our current existence or Mack's "joy in the face of total destruction," bringing such ideas into dialogue with other apocalyptic discourses may challenge the dominant narratives and encourage a deeper engagement with questions about origins, endings, and everything in between.

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CAPAS

KÄTE HAMBURGER CENTRE
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Apocalyptica is an interdisciplinary, international, open access, double-blind peer-reviewed journal published by the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-apocalyptic Studies at Heidelberg University.
The journal explores the many sides of apocalyptic thinking in order to investigate an archive of the apocalyptic imaginary and to explore experiences of apocalypse and post-apocalypse as they unsettle the past, present, and future. Looking for thought-provoking voices and diverse perspectives invested in the end of worlds, we highlight scholarship from a broad range of fields that champions the potential of critical thinking and cultural analysis in the humanities, social-, and cultural science as an imaginative and (potentially) transformative force. The aim is to actively explore the apocalypse as a figure of thought (a practice, relationship, form, experience, aesthetic, or theme) in order to grapple with the cultural politics of disaster, catastrophe, and the (up)ending of worlds.

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