

WITH A VIEW ON THE END

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Curated by Julia Eilers Smith

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Eschatological visions of the end, in particular those concerning the advance of human-made climate catastrophe and imminent ecological and/or geopolitical collapses, have resurged in the twenty-first century, to say the least. Feeding off of present (if suppressed) anxieties, apocalyptic foreboding and its politically and moralistically minded applications saturate our news feeds and media intake, not only in literature, television, and film but also advertising. It pervades current rhetoric and popular imaginary, wherein we see and hear the term "apocalypse" used loosely to address crises of various magnitudes and applied to a wide range of phenomena with varying degrees of seriousness, its meaning distorted, banalized, and co-opted along the way.

Writers and scholars seeking to inject clarity into this word's hollowed-out condition often refer back either to its etymological roots in ancient Greek—*apokalyptein*, an "unveiling" or a "disclosure"—or to its biblical meanings, such as "enlightenment" or the "revelation" of a truth.¹ In its latter, messianic form, the apocalyptic structure entails a large-scale, worldly, structural collapse, a dreaded crisis soon to be followed by recovery or redemption. Meanwhile, in its modern uses, the term is applied in a much broader context and made to denote an expansive set of beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, events, and

processes concerned with the end of the world or of a particular ordering of the things that comprise it. The sense of an approaching demise is abstracted by its ubiquity, and in few cases exceeds capitalist recuperation and the nature of the spectacle.

In imagining what a post-extinction world might look like, dystopic scenarios—whether under the heading of fiction or nonfiction—lean by convention upon philosophical projection, which frames the devastation as an outside, future event or an indefinite force, continually "to come." The ultimate threat is thus envisioned as remote and isolated, and the worst always prophesied, in deferral. Such teleological orientations of ruin are most often hinged on a conception of the world that is removed from the complexities of the political present, and thus fail to account for past and permanent catastrophes which affect real lives unequally and in uneven distribution. They perpetuate a detached, mainstream notion of futurity based on a model of history as a linear, cumulative unfolding of events leading ultimately to a clear and determined end. This account of time is also based on a progress narrative, inherited from modern Western thought, which, according to geographer Kathryn Yusoff, "is also a narrative of the asymmetries of colonial possession (of subjects, land, resources) and indigenous and black dispossession."² That same narrative has (the white) man at its centre, with time as his unstoppable, forward-driving force.³

Emerging in parallel to these expectations, however, are versions of present history that realize a sharp reversal in approach, positioning the end as just one of many, one that has already happened and, perhaps most importantly, is still underway—ongoing in the present. Such renderings point to the social and material realities of those who are marked by the violence of racial and colonial capitalist structures with their unfettered mechanisms of extraction, exploitation, and dispossession. The project of stretching the interpretive possibilities offered by the apocalyptic formula, and casting endings and their

subjects in decisively different terms—as plural, as always already, as undetermined—provides an anchor for the exhibition *In the No Longer Not Yet*.

Through an array of methods and materials, the assembled artists bring into acute focus different breaking points on a splintering surface of world habitability, observing how each takes shape and what it might reveal. Faced with the evidence of persisting dissolution, they also gesture to the task of *putting an end* to the end of the world, to the undoing of the world, and to the states of attunement and responsibility to social and global justice required on the ground for such undertakings. The artists' foregrounding of this doubly faceted engagement encapsulates the distinction made by critical race theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva between the end of the world "in which we exist" (the problem) and the end of the world "as we *know* it" (the aim).⁴ "Knowability," as Ferreira da Silva explains, alludes to principles of understanding figured in Kant's philosophy, which refer to "the transparent I, as a formal entity, the one whose relation to the world—both sensible and intelligible—is mediated, but by forms (intuitions and categories) of the mode of cognition grounded on transcendental reason."⁵ Our modes of knowing are entwined with a racial logic of exclusion and predicated on an articulation of subjectivity and personhood as self-determined and as "protected by the principle of universality said to govern modern social configurations."⁶ Through her distinction, Ferreira da Silva prompts a shift in consciousness, asking that we categorically reevaluate dominant ways of thinking and relinquish conceptions of "The World" as an apprehensible and coherent entity.

In their confrontations with the end of this world—the one in which we *exist*—the artists in the exhibition relay real and imagined scenarios of threat and degradation in relation to places, events, and subjects, scenarios that manifest themselves across the lines of life and death. They constitute "spaces of death"—so termed by anthropologist Michael Taussig—or the "death-worlds" to which philosopher Achille Mbembe refers when describing physical, social, and

political means of upholding life folded into the fabric of necropolitical death-making.⁷ At the same time, the presented works inquire into the possibilities of *ending* as an ontological state of potential without resolution, employing processes that favour the latent, the distemporal, and the unwhole to propose acts of refusal and new patterns of interrelation.

Reversed temporalities and imagined endings and origins collide in Malena Szlam's analog film *ALTIPLANO* (2018), which sets into motion the landscapes of the Atacama Desert and the volcanic and sedimentary Andean Altiplano in northern Chile and northwest Argentina. Drawing from structuralist cinema and employing techniques of superimposition, long exposure, and in-camera editing, the work intricately assembles daytime and nighttime footage of the area's hallucinogenic terrain, with its range of mountains, volcanic craters, crinkly salt plains, active fumaroles, colour-saturated lakes, and limpid skies, which appear in constant states of flux. Acts of aggression committed in or against this region's territories and the transformation of its lands into places for excavation and commercial investment are registered in sedimentary depositions—overlapping strata formed in the rock, which keep a geologic record of these activities. Beyond alluding to the place's subjugation to the mining-industrial and tourist complexes, Szlam's work melts together the scope of geologic resources, from rocks and ore to waters and basic energy, emphasizing their interdependent relations. The work's fixed-camera perspectives belie the energizing and metamorphic agency of what Yusoff calls a "geologic corporeality, crossing 'live 'and 'dead 'matter."⁸ The soundtrack combines field and infrasonic recordings: the sounds of lava flows, fire, ice quake, the seafloor, and spouting geysers intermixed with the calls of blue and humpback whales (recorded by oceanographer Susannah Buchan) and acoustic perturbations from volcanic and tectonic activity (collected by volcanologist Clive Oppenheimer).⁹ In their complex amplitudes, these deep sounds resonate as a subterranean lament, an underground roar rising to the

surface like a shockwave and refusing to harden into a forgotten lithic conglomerate.

Miryam Charles's multi-pronged 16-mm short films *Fly, Fly Sadness* (2015), *Towards the Colonies* (2016), and *A Fortress* (2018) are made from textured sound collages and footage culled from the artist's travels to the Caribbean Sea, Haiti, and Germany. Each stages a story, which unfolds after the event of a breakdown—a nuclear detonation that leaves an entire population speaking in the same voice, a necropsy of a dead body as recorded in a doctor's journal, and the loss of a child under mysterious circumstances—together with the disorientation, the lapses in memory, and the process of retelling the event. Enmeshed in supernatural phenomena, these micro-tragedies are told with gaps in their narratives, leaving it to the viewer to fill in what the stories refuse to articulate. Presented consecutively as a three-channel video installation titled *Three Atlases* (2020), Charles's experimental films play with the devices of news reportage, travelogue, and scripted dialogue, bringing together the palpably strange and the anodyne (lingering shots of interiors and street scenes, landscapes captured while in transit) as they manifest in the lives of individuals, while also alluding to real-world catastrophes that are beyond comprehension, such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake. The sound and film effects, interleaved with multiple subjectivities, add to the works' disjointedness: the artist's voiceovers parallel inset intertitles, filmed sequences are laid over one another and others looped, still images flash between clips, clips of dialogues are reheard and reenacted, field recordings are juxtaposed with singing.

"Something with no beginning, end or middle, approachable in any order."¹⁰ James Nicholas Dumile Goddard's five-channel audio installation, *how will we hold on to each other?* (2020), propagates a terrain of sonic waves, at its core an ambient drone without firm parameters—an assemblage of processed saxophone and voice, juxtaposed against an acoustic rendition of the Big Bang created by physicist John G. Cramer. Playing continuously in the gallery, this

looping dronescape supports the piece's other components: four "sonic fictions" (in the artist's words), which play in sequence on ceiling-mounted directional speakers. Conceptualized in four chapters, the sounds presented here piece together different stages of ending—a spoken account of contemporary anxieties, erupting protests, a reflection on collapse and its possibilities, and the period of convention and collective organizing that ensues. This chain of events is enacted around a loose macrostructure of apocalypse and parsed into a sequence: status quo, collapse, revelation, recovery. Goddard articulates the future as a spatial, rather than temporal, condition—an extension of the present. These fictions map out ways in which we may take account of this extended present, and take action within it from a place of dialogue, sharing, and togetherness.

Fallon Simard's short animated videos stem from a queer Indigenous feminist perspective and are attentive to modes of processing, coping with, and recovering from what his titles identify as the toxic effects of colonialism, patriarchy, state violence, and global capitalism. Into these thoroughly corporeal works—*Carbon Tax* (2017), *Connected to Air* (2016), *Terra Nullius* (2016), and *Mercury Poisoning* (2016)—Simard inserts a still image as background (a sky with clouds, a peninsula, a shoreline) animated with overlaid digital effects: colour filters, stains, blurs, exposures, and distortions, all of them choreographed, in turn, to drift, disappear, transform, and proliferate on the surface. Interacting with the image via a sort of osmosis, these animations visualize flows between states of matter, pushing up through tears and cavities in the picture plane like X-rays seeking to reveal skeletal structures. As abstract forms, they speak to the chemical signatures of land and water habitats made inhospitable by pollution, contamination, and the health impacts of prolonged exposure. *Land Becomes Ghost* (2016) refers to the ongoing struggle over the building of the Site C dam in northeastern British Columbia (Treaty 8 territory), presenting a clip-montage of news coverage and campaign imagery of the protests. In the gallery vestibule, *Prayers for Dreamy Boys* (2018)

takes root in traditional medicine and the artist's memories of childhood and time spent with his grandparents. Here, clumps of cedar, blueberries, and water lilies—conceived as inanimate objects—wander to and fro across a surface of pink satin, pausing curiously, and moving together in and out of sync, pointing to forms of healing: rituals and daily diversions that help to undo colonial harms.

To execute her sculptures and installations, Rochelle Goldberg draws on a range of materials—organic, synthetic, industrially formed and carefully simulated—to create hybrid, more-than-human assemblages congealed into an entanglement of interaction—or of "intra-action," the agential realist notion introduced by Karen Barad. A physicist and philosopher, Barad theorizes things not as pre-existing and relating to each other from outside, as independent agents, but rather as ontologically inseparable, consistently re-configuring and re-constituting each other in infinite ways.¹¹ If the sculptural medium is said to be experienced as a "finite" entity, Goldberg chooses instead to invest in the viscosity and porosity of the materials, and cultivates sculpture as a set of interstitial existences. Her three installations—*Stomach* (2019), *Trigger: Towards everything they've ever wanted* (2019), and *Intralocutor: can you trigger the switch?* (2018)—are caught mid-process (be it growth or decay, transformation or stagnation), open to a re-evaluation of agency. Their emergent ongoingness of form and shape conjures an alternate articulation of the world. Goldberg's desolate, precarious, and forgotten environments, with their friction of unusual combinations, move away from human-centred expressions of life to prioritize instead an aggregate of things.

Syrus Marcus Ware's site-specific *Activist Wallpaper Series #3* (2020) comments on the visual traditions and materialist history of interior decor in a commemorative wallpaper that centres Black presence in the form of original portraits of "freedom fighters."¹² Intervening in the texture of the gallery's front wall, Ware designed a repeating geometric pattern from his large-scale pencil

portraits of activists and leaders from the Toronto queer and trans community. This he digitized and printed onto vinyl in a rich, interconnected network. Serving as a reference in the work's configuration is classic French *toile*—a printed textile of the eighteenth century used in upholstery and wallpaper, usually depicting pastoral and historical themes framed by ornamental or floral motifs. Here, Ware replaces the bucolic imagery with a mosaicked composition featuring three figures from art and academia—Rodney Diverlus, Kim Ninkuru, and OmiSoore Dryden—struck in candid pose. With his choice of colour, he effects an inversion of *toile*'s commonly cotton-white ground. The wallpaper adorns the gallery vitrine giving onto the building's atrium and Concordia University's library, changing the interior environment even as it creates an environment of itself as a form of living archive, achieving a synthesis that is at once transformative and liberating.

Brought together in the exhibition *In the No Longer Not Yet*, these six artists move across a plane of fractures, emphasizing apocalypse not as unforeseen, but as a deep-seated scaffold to the world as we *know* it. It upholds the function and maintenance of that world and is expressed as intimate endings of diverse kinds, that are justified, carefully programmed, and unevenly staged. The end "of this racial capitalist world," in Ferreira da Silva's words, is approached in the exhibition as "the only reasonable thing one can ask" of it.¹³ Rather than propose escape routes, the artists stay with the bits and pieces persisting in the aftermath of collapse, seizing its echoes and irruptions from the surface and the depths of contemporary life. Its effects are implied far beyond what the eyes can see, and in exposing these patterns of revelation, the artists reconfigure our histories and relations, and insist on bringing change to the order of things.

1. Charles Taliaferro, *A Dictionary of Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 18; Oaxana Timofeeva, "The End of the World: From Apocalypse to the End of History and Back," *e-flux journal* 56 (June 2014); John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 2.

2. Kathryn Yusoff, "White Utopia/Black Inferno: Life on a Geologic Spike," *e-flux journal* 97 (February 2019).
3. Ibid. On the racial anchoring of the progressive narrative of evolution and humanity, see: Kathryn Yusoff, "Geologic Realism," *Social Text* 138 (March 2019): 11. Yusoff writes: "It is only the distinction made between the inorganic and organic that allows the very concept of 'progress' to emerge, but at the cost of the suppression of the inhuman earth and its lack of purpose. And it is at this site of division between the organic and inorganic that racial subjugation is constructed as an ontological horror that campaigns on the senses in psychic and planetary terms, coupling fear of a black and fear of an inhuman planet through the category of the inhuman."
4. Denise Ferreira da Silva, "An End to 'This 'World: Denise Ferreira da Silva Interviewed by Susanne Leeb and Kerstin Stakemeier," *Texte Zur Kunst*, April 12, 2019.
<https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/interview-ferreira-da-silva/>
5. "For knowability in the Kantian formulation of the aesthetic register refers to the transparent I, as a formal entity, the one whose relation to the world—both sensible and intelligible—is mediated, but by forms (intuitions and categories) of the mode of cognition grounded on transcendental reason." Denise Ferreira da Silva, "In the Raw," *e-flux journal* 93 (September 2018).
6. Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 35. "Kant defines the limits of knowl-edge as that which in things—now objects—is available to the senses (movements and alterations)." in Denise Ferreira da Silva, "1 (life) ÷ 0 (black-ness) = ∞ - ∞ or ∞ / ∞: On Matter Beyond the Equation of Value," *e-flux journal* 79 (February 2017).
7. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 40; Taussig quoted in Yusoff, "White Utopia/Black Inferno."
8. "Fossils speak to and raise questions about human genealogy, inheritance, and modes of future and past survival, and thus they provoke thought to travel along the temporal cusp of geologic corporeality, crossing 'live 'and 'dead 'matter. Fossils both make manifest and historicise the geological condition of the human, a reminder that our bodily composition has an originary mineralisation and a fossilised end." Kathryn Yusoff, "Geologic Life: Prehistory, Climate, Futures in the Anthropocene," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 31, no. 5 (2013): 788.
9. To create the film's sound design, Szlam collaborated with Buchan, who collected signals from blue and humpback whales in the Pacific Ocean close to the Chilean coast, and Oppenheimer who recorded seismic signals from Mount Erebus in Antarctica, the second highest on the continent.
10. James Nicholas Dumile Goddard, "Ideas/Writing" (artist's unpublished notes, 2019).
11. Karen Barad, "Living in a Posthumanist Material World: Lessons from Schrodinger's Cat," in *Bits of Life: Feminism at the Intersections of Media, Bioscience, and Technology*, ed. Anneke Smelik and Nina Lykke (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 170. "The notion of intra-action (as opposed to the more usual 'interaction, 'which presumes the prior existence of independently determinate entities) entails a profound shift in the epistemological and ontological landscape, including changes in the nature of causality and agency."
12. Per the artist's words.
13. Ferreira da Silva, "An End to 'This 'World."