



IMAGINING THE APOCALYPSE

ART AND THE END TIMES

Edited by Edwin Coomasaru and Theresa Deichert

The Courtauld

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Front Cover: Gustave Dore, *The New Zealander* (published in Harper's Weekly, 31 May 1873). Wood engraving, 40.2 x 27.3 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. MET, 29.88.9(24) © Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1928

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What are the politics of picturing the end times? This online, open-access essay collection explores how art and visual culture has imagined Armageddon across the globe from the eighteenth century to the present. The book considers the ways in which apocalypticism has been contested by social conservatives and progressives, drawn on to perpetuate or challenge structures of power. Contributors discuss homophobia and queer utopias, climate change and nuclear anxieties, folk monsters and fears of revolt, imperial violence and anti-colonial imagination, the staging of conflict and disaster, popular culture and fascism, faith and denial in church congregations. Each reveal how a series of contradictions underpin the end times: beginnings and endings, annihilation and revelation.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1. Art in Apocalyptic Times

Edwin Coomasaru and Theresa Deichert

QUEER WORLDS

2. Derek Jarman's Revelation: AIDS, Apocalypse and History

Robert Mills

3. Apocalypse, Now: Queer hope for the end of the world and Dew Kim's Succulent Humans

Andrew Cummings

ECOLOGICAL ANXIETIES

4. A Dystopia Called Fukushima? Sōno Sion's The Whispering Star and the Post Modern Apocalypse

Theresa Deichert

5. Monstrous Ecology: Regional Iconographies and Bourbon Authority in Depictions of the Beast of Gévaudan, 1764-5

Harvey Sheperd

CONFLICT AND COLONIALISM

6. Apocalyptic Themes in Guyanese Art

Ian Dudley

7. Dada Millenarianism: Johannes Baader's Intervention at the National Assembly in Weimar, 1919

Lucy Byford

8. 'The Abbey in Ruins and Ablaze': Staging Disaster at the 1924 & 1925 British Empire Exhibitions

Tobah Aukland-Peck

MASSES AND DISASTER

9. Weird Weather and Biblical Floods: The Inundation of the American Megachurch

Kate Pickering

10. Apocalypse in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro and the End of Days imagery

Arthur Valle



Introduction

Art in Apocalyptic Times

EDWIN COOMASARU & THERESA DEICHERT

Fig. 1:
John Martin,
*The Destruction
of Pompeii and
Herculaneum*
(1822, restored
2011). Oil paint on
canvas, 161.6 × 253
cm. Tate, London.
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In 1928 the Thames burst its banks and London flooded. Fourteen people were killed and thousands made homeless. The river wall opposite Tate Britain collapsed – waves cascaded across the road and surged up through partially-filled subterranean ruins of the former Millbank Prison (demolished in 1892). The nine lower ground floor galleries and basement filled with water: 18 artworks were considered beyond repair, a further 226 badly damaged, and an additional 67 slightly affected. Among the oil paintings submerged was artist John Martin's *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* (1822, Fig. 1). After Martin's work was rescued, it was rolled up and stored in another part of the building – subsequently forgotten about until rediscovery in 1973 and restoration in 2011. The painting had been placed in Tate's basement in 1918 as the artist had fallen out of fashion, decades after once having thrilled nineteenth-century audiences with spectacular scenes.

The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum depicts the eruption of Italy's Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. Is it possible to imagine the end of imagination itself? What might the catastrophic events—both pictured by but also witnessed upon the painting—reveal about the complex entanglement between fantasy and reality when it comes to the ways artists have envisioned the end times? This book will explore the politics of creating images for crisis, and the way such disasters are depicted by artists and politicians. The essays in this edited volume range from recent queer utopias in South Korea to monstrous beasts in eighteenth-century France. Each contribution considers the ways in which apocalypticism is not just a neutral description but a conceptual frame with a narrative structure. Specific to their time and place, visions of Armageddon often involve the organisation of violence: they are usually accompanied by militaristic rhetoric of an in-group under attack from an out-group.

This connection with violence may have informed the earliest origins of apocalyptic discourses, which can be traced back to the Middle East's ancient monotheistic religions – or even further back to older Near Eastern and Persian mythologies.¹ Armageddon as a cultural current has always contained a series of conceptual contradictions: beginnings and endings, annihilation and revelation. But the notion of worlds ending is not unique to Judaism, Christianity, or Islam: it can also be found across the globe from Hindu eschatology, to Buddhist prophecies, or Norse legends.² It can be both a lived experience and phantastic projection: art and visual culture sit at the very interconnection of the two. Artists and image-makers have long drawn on eschatological thinking to reveal or challenge deep fears or traumas in their societies. But is it possible to illustrate an event that by its definition represents near total destruction?

Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum's flood damage is not the only instance where calamities reminiscent of apocalyptic conditions collided with the realms of art and culture. In recent years, as climate change is leading to ever more intensified weather conditions and natural disasters, museums and cultural institutions all over the world have faced destruction and invaluable losses due to floods, wildfires, and environmental contamination. The floods in Western Germany of 2021 brought on by torrential rainstorms, for instance, caused city archives to be submerged in water and mud that damaged artefacts and archival materials.³ In the same year, wildfires brought on by global warming-induced heatwaves were threatening the Acropolis in Athens Greece.⁴ When the earthquake and tsunami of 2011 hit the East coast of Northern Japan, they damaged museums, artworks and cultural assets.⁵

Moreover, as these catastrophes led to the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant which caused widespread radioactive contamination four public museums had to be evacuated and their artefacts became radioactively contaminated.⁶ The Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art was one of the museums, which had to suspend their operation due to being hit by the earthquake. Reminiscent of the double symbolism of the flood's effect on John Martin's apocalyptic painting 83 years earlier, the Fukushima museum displayed layout illustrations of Studio Ghibli's post-apocalyptic film *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* (1984) at the time when the disaster struck. Warning of potential disasters to come, director Hayao Miyazaki's film depicted a world where war has destroyed society and led to ecological crisis, rendering the environment toxic to humans.

Events such as the examples above not only call into question the boundaries between culture and nature, they also make us aware that we live in calamitous times, where the prospect of apocalyptic conditions of our current age of the Anthropocene have become even more palpable. As scholar of culture and media Heather Davis and philosopher Etienne Turpin have pointed out, the Anthropocene is a sensory phenomenon characterized by the experience of living in an increasingly toxic world.⁷ Moreover, they highlight the potential of art to address a damaged lifeworld through

‘experimentation’ and a ‘non-moral form of address that offers a range of discursive, visual, and sensual strategies that are not confined by the regimes of scientific objectivity, political moralism, or psychological depression’.⁸

In this context, the current moment of lived precarity presents itself as an opportunity to interrogate how artists have confronted conditions of socio-political, environmental, economic and personal instability through the subject of the apocalypse not just in recent times, but also looking back. This book aims to contribute to the study of art and apocalypses by examining the subject across a variety of historical times, events and artistic genres. Returning to our first example, to what extent can a damaged artwork be thought of as a portrait of the catastrophe itself? In the case of Martin’s work, the waterlogged and cut canvas seemed to represent two tropes of Armageddon: toxic smog (the volcanic eruption) and watery deluge. The ruined object also seemed to embody a tension between the end times as a cultural concept and as a material reality – in this case the latter seems to have rendered the former unreadable.

The tension between Martin’s artistic ability to picture disaster, and the material effects of deluge itself, came into complex contact in the waterlogged painting. Art critic and curator William Feaver implored Tate not to repair the giant hole in the canvas: ‘such a painting needs not patching up but respect for what it is: a picture of an act of God (or the gods) that happens to have been dealt a titanic whack’.⁹ He elaborates: ‘[t]he missing area may be considered actual loss visited on a graphic representation of catastrophic loss. Here, after nearly two centuries, Thames embankments and Pompeiiian waterfront align. History encircles us’.¹⁰ Perhaps *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum*, as both a portrait of destruction and an object that underwent its own seeming annihilation and resurrection, reveals something of the tensions that underpin Armageddon as a cultural concept.

The artwork went on display in Tate Britain’s major retrospective exhibition, *John Martin: Apocalypse* (2011). Curator Julie Milne believed that Martin’s spectacular scenes resonate in the twenty-first century, a time anxiously filled ‘with reports of ecological disaster, pandemic and terrorist threat’.¹¹ But reviewing the show, art critic Jonathan Jones concluded that cultural representations of Armageddon were just simply overblown nonsense. Asking ‘is our own sense of impending disaster just a product of our febrile imaginations?’—he insisted that nineteenth-century and contemporary British public experience such untrammelled peace and prosperous as to render any anxieties over the top.¹² Jones dismissed primary accounts by and historical research of: ‘[l]ooking at, and reading, the Victorians, you might conclude that they lived in a time that, like our own—as we imagine it—stood poised on the brink of catastrophe’.¹³

‘Nothing could be further from the truth’, he proclaims, ‘[n]ineteenth-century Britain was a peaceful, prosperous society’.¹⁴ Perhaps the critic is not a fan of apocalypticism as an artistic subject. In 2015, he dismissed Japanese artist collective Chim-Pom’s exhibition *Don’t Follow the Wind* (2015-ongoing) as a ‘fatuous plan’.¹⁵ In his review titled

‘Apocalypse no! Why artists should not go into the Fukushima exclusion zone’, Jones claimed that the exhibition was a ‘a mere stunt, a gesture’.¹⁶ As such, he completely missed the point of the project, which centred on the installation of artworks inside of the publicly inaccessible exclusion zone as a way of raising awareness of the former residents of the area or those affected by the disaster. Instead, Jones claimed that, contrary to scientific facts, the nuclear accident was being ‘well-managed and successfully contained’ and nuclear energy was in fact a clean and viable solution to the threat of global warming.¹⁷

In the context of Britain, Jones overlooks the violence of imperialism and anti-colonial movements or the class struggle and conflict that took place. He reassured readers that nineteenth-century Britain had ‘a growing empire, and an industrial revolution brought wealth and security to bourgeois Britain even as, in the British Museum library, Karl Marx toiled to demonstrate the doom of this pleasant capitalist way of life’.¹⁸ Jones insisted that the Victorians were merely overthinking things: ‘[t]he fears, or secret dark desires, of Martin and his contemporaries were rooted in imagination, not reality’.¹⁹ But why may Jones be willing to write off the events and cultural products of an entire century of profound strife and unrest? His critique was made in the aftermath of the 2007-08 global financial crisis: government austerity policies from 2010 were met with protests as the public began to polarise between left and right, while the police killing of an unarmed Black man Mark Duggan sparked riots in 2011.

The unrest took place just weeks before Jones’ review was published. His concluding paragraph reads: Martin ‘prompts us to ask if we, too, in 2011, are not feeding on fears that bear little relation to what is by the standards of all previous ages a comfortable and peaceful era ... maybe we should gaze on his nightmares to relax’.²⁰ Jones would go on to spend the next decade mixing his art criticism with angry critiques of left wing political activism: a time of rapidly widening inequality and renewed interest in socialism, resurging white supremacy and anti-racist movements, and ever louder warnings about climate change. Perhaps *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* does in fact reveal something about eschatological anxieties amongst the British public in 1822, 1928, or even 2011.

For Milne, ‘Martin’s apocalyptic vision was firmly rooted in the reality of his nineteenth-century world ... a period of economic, political and social transformation, beset by the upheaval of revolution and war, rapid scientific developments and industrial revolution’.²¹ At the time gender was also seen as a battleground for apocalyptic fears: in places like the US, for example, misogynists and feminists drew on a familiar language to picture potential threats and futures.²² In 1881 suffragist and Native American rights activist Matilda Joselyn Gage proclaimed: ‘the male element has thus far been held in high carnival ... The recent disorganization of society warns us that in the disenfranchisement of women we have let loose the reins of violence and ruin which

she only has the power to avert'.²³ End-times rhetoric has been repeated across centuries by with opposing ideologies.

Recently health and fitness coach Daniel Kelly called for cisgender men to take testosterone injections to supposedly reclaim their manhood, complaining: '[t]he 21st century male has become a maligned figure. The movement to empower women has swung the pendulum too far'.²⁴ He warns: '[w]hen there is no masculinity in society, there is no order. And where there is no order, there is chaos ... society breaks down'.²⁵ Such rhetoric might sound ridiculous but is not unique. In 2020 art critic Alastair Sooke lamented: 'the battle of the sexes has been rumbling on forever, recently the conflict has intensified – to the brink of nuclear Armageddon. Traditional masculinity is now considered so destructive, so “toxic”, that an entire gender is, arguably, in crisis'.²⁶

But while there are peoples for whom Armageddon is a script for reading reality, rather than reality itself – there are also those who have experienced world ending events throughout history: such as Indigenous experiences of genocide and settler colonialism, or the Atlantic slave trade's mass scale abduction and murder.²⁷ Such theft and destruction contributed to climate change, as geography scholar Kathryn Yusoff points out: '[t]he Anthropocene might seem to offer a dystopian future that laments the end of the world, but imperialism and ongoing (settler) colonialisms have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence'.²⁸ Political scientist Jairus Victor Grove, moreover, recognises that 'human apocalypses and geologic apocalypses ... [are] implicated in the other'.²⁹

In fact, in 1500 Christopher Columbus described his conquest of the Americas as a divine mission: 'as St. John writes in the Apocalypse ... He made me the messenger thereof and showed me where to go'.³⁰ For both perpetrators and survivors, Armageddon seems to offer a way of articulating world-shattering violence. Centuries later and on a different continent, a resident of Goma in the Democratic Republic of the Congo described the 1994 Rwandan genocide as: 'the beginning of the final days. This is the apocalypse'.³¹ Similar end-time semantics are to be found in the title of Rob Lemkin's documentary *African Apocalypse* (2021), in which poet and activist Femi Nylander travels to West Africa to explore colonial legacies. Recent poetry by Black feminist scholar and activist Alexis Pauline Gumbs has explored 'the realities we are making possible or impossible with our present apocalypse'.³²

She lists: '[a]fter and with the consequences of fracking past peak oil. After and with the defunding of the humanities. After and with the removal of people of colour from the cities they built'.³³ Mentioning a series of Black thinkers and organisations, Gumbs concludes: 'After and with the multitude of small and present apocalypses. After and with the end of the world as we know it. After the ways we have been knowing the world'.³⁴ By contrast, white supremacists and imperialists have long used apocalyptic rhetoric to try and justify the theft of land and destruction of lives. The 'great replacement' or 'white genocide' conspiracy theory, that white Europeans are

supposedly being bred out of existence, is one such example.³⁵

In 1968 British politician Enoch Powell's 1968 ventriloquised the real or imagined words of a constituent: '[i]n this country in 15 or 20 years' time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man'.³⁶ For Powell, it was 'like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre'.³⁷ The so-called EU 'migrant crisis' in 2015 was also cast in a somewhat apocalyptic framing by politicians and the press. In fact, in the decades after Powell's speech there seem to have been no end of events or anxieties that have been relayed through end time narratives in the media: fears of nuclear war, climate change, neo-imperial conflicts, financial crises, technological anxieties, claims for 'the end of history', pandemics, unrest – as well as social conflicts over gender, sexuality, and race.

The millennium also provoked talk of Armageddon, with fears the date would cause computer errors.³⁸ In 2000 London's Royal Academy held an exhibition on *Apocalypse: Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art*. In the catalogue curator Norman Rosenthal argued that 'all art is essentially apocalyptic', and that 'the coming of the twenty-first century – two thousand years after the birth of Christ ... is a subliminally apocalyptic moment'.³⁹ Such an account reveals a recurring feeling of living at the end times, which would only go on to be exacerbated in recent years. The essays in this edited collection were first presented during a conference at the Courtauld Institute of Art in London on 18–19th October 2019. A month later, the Chinese government recorded its first case of Covid-19.⁴⁰ The pandemic has certainly been experienced as world ending – both in the massive loss of life and dramatic social changes brought about by attempts to mitigate the disease's spread.

Around the world newspaper and blog headlines have read: 'End of the world: Jesus warned of deadly pandemic as sign of the apocalypse', 'Covid-19 resurgence – a glimpse of the apocalypse', 'Is this an Apocalypse? We certainly hope so – you should too'.⁴¹ When the UK Prime Minister spent time in hospital after catching the virus, journalists hoped for a Christ-like resurrection. Although some insisted that '[a] brush with death has empowered the Prime Minister', others worried about 'the picture of naked vulnerability it painted so entirely at odds with our rambunctious hero'.⁴² Declaring 'your health is the health of the nation', the implicit message was that if he had died it would have been the end of the UK itself.⁴³ But what is it specifically about apocalypticism as a frame that is so often invoked to call upon male saviour figures?

Christ's crucifixion is an obvious reference, but is there also an authoritarian and patriarchal politics at play here? Artist and theorist Joanna Zylińska has tackled these questions in her book *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse* (2018). She explains: '[t]he prophecy contained in the book's title ostensibly points to the extinction of the human species, yet it also signals the expiration of the White Christian Man as the key subject of history'.⁴⁴ For Zylińska, "The end of man" pronounced as part of the current apocalyptic discourse can therefore be seen as both a promise and an ethical

opening rather than solely as an existential threat'.⁴⁵ While the book reworks many end-times tropes, it also fits within an apocalyptic tradition that evokes both endings and beginnings, with utopian and dystopian potential.

The End of Man critiques responses to climate change that centre male saviour tropes or renewed drives for mastery: from business-as-usual neoliberals looking for an easy technical fix, to rising tides of eco-fascism on the far right directing violence towards those they consider threatening.⁴⁶ Her book contains plenty of irony and parody, but is sincere in its conclusions: that rather than autonomous or militarised, subjecthood should be rethought as relational and interdependent.⁴⁷ 'In doing so', Zylinska insists, her microvision of a feminist counterapocalypse 'promises liberation from the form of subjectivity pinned to a competitive, overachieving, and overreaching masculinity ... what kinds of coexistences and collaborations do we want to create in its aftermath?'.⁴⁸ Herein lies the conceptual contradictions that apocalypticism as a discourse, containing both beginnings and endings.

Perhaps the flood-damaged *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* evoked some of these tensions: Feaver might have argued against its restoration, but resurrection and rebirth is also a conventionally apocalyptic trope. But there is a larger question at stake in his response: is *The Destruction of Pompeii and Herculaneum* a projection of end-time fears, or somehow a sign of an unfolding Armageddon itself? Jones insisted it were merely the former. But writer Amitav Ghosh insists: 'let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination'.⁴⁹ For art historian T.J. Demos, '[w]e are entering the endgame – the terminal point of democracy, of liberalism, of capitalism, of a cool planet, of the Anthropocene, of the world as we know it ... Time itself is endangered, as much as imagination'.⁵⁰ What does it mean to try and imagine something that represents the end of imagination?

For Zylinska, 'the most dramatic message of the Anthropocene narrative ... [is] the fact that soon *there will be nothing to see* – and no one to see it'.⁵¹ Catherine Keller argues that Armageddon 'presents "the unrepresentable"'.⁵² Martin's waterlogged painting, not an artistic gesture but the result of rising tides, seems to embody such symbolic and literal destruction: the flood rendered the painted surface unreadable as a figurative scene and a large hole was torn through the centre of the composition. But the end times represent not just annihilation but also revelation: and whether it be the very real prospect of ecological disaster or the murderous projections of white supremacists, apocalypticism reveals structures of violence as well as fears and fantasies of power and powerlessness.

Armageddon is a cultural framework which has developed a series of conventions over centuries: the promise of rebirth after death or a saviour to turn chaos into order. Artists have long worked with and against such narrative tropes, and this book investigates the tensions between visual culture and political discourse that draw on or disrupt apocalyptic thinking. Grove complains that 'the conceptual and temporal

boundaries of apocalypses are frustrating diffuse'—but such flexibility is exactly why Armageddon has been profoundly generative as a cultural and social metaphor.⁵³ The word 'apocalypse' derives from Ancient Greek, meaning 'unveiling', and this edited collection aims to explore and understand what modern and contemporary images of the end times may tell about the societies that gave rise to them.

Chapter Overview

In Part 1 'Queer Visions', essays by Robert Mills and Andrew Cummings consider how artists have invoked apocalyptic imagery to challenge homophobia. In Chapter 1 Mills examines the practice of British filmmaker, artist, and gay rights activist Derek Jarman, whose work responded to environmental destruction, the potential threat of nuclear war, and the socially conservative government of Margaret Thatcher during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s and early 90s. Taking Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987) as a starting point, Mills considers how the artist's own HIV diagnosis was bound up with collective homophobia and mass death during the pandemic. His films and paintings reference apocalyptic narratives from the Bible's Book of Revelations to divine punishment for homosexuality, pre-Raphaelite paintings, and the British media's framing of the AIDS as a 'gay plague'.

Mills argues that Jarman also turned to Old and Middle English poetry as a way of critically confronting the conditions of his present, subsequently visualizing 'more ideal, open and queer futures'.⁵⁴ Presenting an analysis of contemporary queer South Korean artist Dew Kim's work, in Chapter 2 Cummings considers the potential for utopian futures in *Succulent Humans* (2018). The sculptural installation responded to South Korea's capitalist society that originated in the country's former history as a Japanese colony. For many in South Korea, non-confirmative expression of sexuality and gender is seen as a threat to the natural order. In this context, Cummings proposes that a prevailing cultural conception of apocalyptic homophobia is rooted in the juxtaposition of the monstrous queer body as open, porous and connected to nonhuman existence vis-à-vis a conception of the ideal human body as bounded, discrete and sovereign.

Similar to Jarman's, in Kim's work homophobia is also conceptualized in connection to ecological crises, climate change, and environmental collapse. Kim's installation draws on science fiction narratives, in which bodies become more-than-human as human-plant hybrid to reflect on present conditions and to project them into a post-apocalyptic future. Speculative or imaginative visions of the environment are also the subject of Part II, 'Ecological Anxieties', with essays by Theresa Deichert and Harvey Shepherd. Deichert's Chapter 3 explores work by contemporary Japanese artist and director Sōno Sion, including the film *The Whispering Star* (2015). Deichert considers the use of science fiction to contend with the socio-political and ecological conditions of Japan in the aftermath of the 2011 nuclear disaster.

Tracing the film's origins from the 1990s to its realization in 2015, Deichert examines *The Whispering Star's* portrayal of a postmodern apocalypse of post-bubble economy Japan of the early 1990s that came to a head anew and with urgency in the aftermath of the Fukushima nuclear disaster of March 2011. In focusing on the artist's post-apocalyptic representation of human disillusionment with science and technology, time and memory, and the non-human, Deichert argues the film contains an implicit warning about the consequences of a neoliberal political system and government-imposed censorship. But taking on a posthumanist stance, Deichert also highlights the film's failure to fully engage with the ecological implications of the nuclear disaster, which called into question the delimitations between nature and culture. Such a neat binary is also contested in Shepherd's Chapter 4, which shifts focus to eighteenth-century France.

The European Enlightenment conceptualized a division between humans and nature, as the former tried to exert control over the latter. In visual representations of the Beast of Gévaudan, which reportedly ravaged the south of France in 1764-65, Shepherd argues that the beast as apocalyptic symbol and portent of doom was based on cultural traditions and myths of the wider Languedoc region. Parisian imagery, by contrast, linked the beast to zoological origins as a wolf or hyena. Such symbolism became prevalent at a time when public faith in absolute monarchy had been shaken by unsuccessful wars and ongoing social grievances. The supposed killing of the Beast of Gévaudan provided an opportunity for King Louis XV to assert his power and order over the population. Such folk accounts reveal the ways in which political crises are often articulated through and bound up with environmental fears.

Part 3, 'Conflict and Colonialism', also considers links between end times imagery and violent wars or systems of rule: highlighting how the trope of Armageddon can be used to challenge or entrench structures of power. In Chapter 5 Lucy Byford studies a 1919 action by Dada artist Johannes Baader in Germany's Weimar National Assembly. She argues that Baader's anti-government stunt was a key event in the history of Berlin Dada. Byford presents detailed historical reconstruction with close examination of contemporary reportage, political context of Germany's new republic, and Berlin Dada's engagement with eschatology. She considers the artist's employment of millenarian language and imagery, such as that of the Horseman of the Apocalypse in his handbill. Baader used such concepts to critique of the new government as a continuation of imperial ideology in the guise of a newly established democracy.

In Chapter 6 Tobah Aukland-Peck provides further insight into the role of end times imagery in the context of the aftermath of the First World War. Aukland-Peck examines *The Defences of London* stage performances in the 1924-25 British Empire Exhibition in London, which juxtaposed scenes of apocalyptic destruction with the successful defense of the British capital against an unknown military force, the Royal Airforce Display *London Defended*, and the reenactment of the 1666 Great Fire of London. Combining episodes of imagined and historical Armageddon, these displays reacted to Britain's

internal and external destabilizations during the period. Growing nationalist movements in the UK's colonies challenged the British Empire, while the experience of the London air raids in World War I and the threat of class struggle were seen as a risk to national security.

Aukland-Peck shows how the stage displays aimed at promoting nationalism and faith in government. She argues that such representations sought to promote Britain as an undisputed imperial power. Chapter 7 also considers relationships between colonialism and apocalypticism: Ian Dudley examines the work of Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris and artist Aubrey Williams in the 1950s to 80s. Dudley demonstrates how their writing and paintings responded to and reworked the apocalyptic violence subjected to Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans by imperialist conquest, accompanied by untold environmental devastation. Harris and Williams challenged imperialist-capitalist narratives of linear progress by drawing on Mesoamerican Indigenous cultures, Modernist art, and mythological sources to fashion alternative temporalities and anti-colonial consciousness.

Part 4 'Masses and Disasters' turns to other case studies in the Americas: examining ideas of masses in relationship to apocalypticism, as church congregations or internet memes. In Chapter 8 Kate Pickering combines scholarly analysis with experimental writing practice to reflect on Houston's Lakewood Megachurch in the US. She maps links between white evangelicalism and therapeutic consumer capitalism, centered on the figure of the charismatic entrepreneurial pastor. Lakewood positions itself as a haven for religious seekers. Pickering demonstrates how the audio-visual and meteorologically-inspired displays and performances in the church's services serve to create an affective space through which to communicate evangelical apocalypticism and climate skepticism.

Through experimental writing, Pickering evokes a scenario that dissolves boundaries between the church's highly managed environment and its more-than-human surroundings. Lakewood Megachurch may have to face the consequences of climate change despite their denial, a politics they share with Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro. In Chapter 9, Arthur Valle studies portrayals of Bolsonaro in internet memes, video games, and cartoons that employ apocalyptic iconography. Valle considers how such imagery illustrates entanglements between economic crises, military state, the covid pandemic, and far-right politics. He demonstrates that end of times imagery is used both by Bolsonaro's opponents and followers in criticism or support: either presenting him as a Horseman of the Apocalypse or alternative as saviour figure in the face of queer, feminist or anti-racist activism.

The chapters in this book examine how apocalypticism has been long contested between social conservatives and progressives: drawn on to either perpetuate or challenge structures of prejudice and power. Contributors discuss homophobia and queer utopias, climate change and nuclear anxieties, folk monsters and fears of

revolt, imperial violence and anti-colonial imagination, the staging of conflict and disaster, popular culture and fascism, faith and denial in church congregations. Each reveal a series of contradictions that underpin the end times: beginnings and endings, annihilation and revelation. Art and visual culture have produced apocalyptic images for centuries, shaping the very imagination of the end times themselves. Artists may have provided warnings and offered alternative visions, but as our planet accelerates towards environmental breakdown, our collective imagination and very existence may ultimately be at stake.

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Derek Jarman's Revelation: AIDS, Apocalypse and History

ROBERT MILLS

Derek Jarman's creative acts across multiple media have often invited comparison with those of the visionary artist and poet William Blake. As Gray Watson observes, in an illuminating overview of Jarman's work and personal vision, his 'whole approach was very close to Blake's ... Blake's eccentric, radical, anti-materialist and somewhat apocalyptic vision prefigured Jarman's own'.¹ The aim of the present essay is to show how the visionary dimensions to Jarman's artistic practice were often shaped by—and sometimes in direct dialogue with—the biblical Book of Revelation. Like Blake, Jarman discovered in this paradigmatic account of end-time a source of inspiration for challenging the political culture of his day. Notably, by revisiting and reworking Christian notions of apocalypse, Jarman sought to contest the repressive sexual climate in British culture that located blame for the AIDS crisis primarily in the gay community.²

More specifically, I draw out resonances between imagery of destroyed and dilapidated cityscapes and landscapes in Jarman's films, paintings and writings, and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in the Book of Genesis, a text that remains thoroughly enmeshed with ideas of apocalypse in Christian thought. This will also provide a lens through which to perceive Jarman's critical engagements with events in his own lifetime that threatened global catastrophe, notably the AIDS pandemic, nuclear weapons and environmental devastation, all of which have invariably been perceived through an apocalyptic or prophetic prism. The aim of this analysis of biblical writings, insofar as they informed Jarman's thinking, is to throw into relief the artist's critique of religiously inspired apocalyptic conventions and his desire to highlight the persistence and damaging effects of this discourse on contemporary culture.

Finally, I touch on the broader historical and aesthetic dimensions to Jarman's encounters with apocalypse. In modernity, at least until the end of the Cold War, the term 'apocalypse' tended to be conflated with ideas of catastrophe and closure, even as contemporary representations in fiction or on screen also focus on the post-apocalyptic (which imagines apocalypse as a more drawn-out process). In its original sense, however, the term also referred to *disclosure* and revelation. Jarman harnessed the radical political potential of apocalypse as a genre, both to engage with the present, as he experienced it in modern Britain, and to open a window onto a future that resisted the seductive rhetoric of end times. Crucially, the artist's various engagements with apocalyptic themes perform the work of articulating what it means to survive destruction and to cultivate an existence among the ruins. To pursue this endeavour, as will be demonstrated in conclusion, he also had recourse to literary texts, especially from the Middle Ages, that directed attention to alternative modes of thinking and imagining the end of days.

Let us turn first, then, to the story of Sodom. Genesis 19 tells of how two angels come to Sodom one evening to investigate the city's sins. The patriarch Lot, seeing the angels at the city gates, offers them lodging in his house. But before the household goes to bed, Sodom's inhabitants besiege the residence and call on Lot to deliver his guests 'that we may know them' (19.5).³ Lot offers his two daughters up as

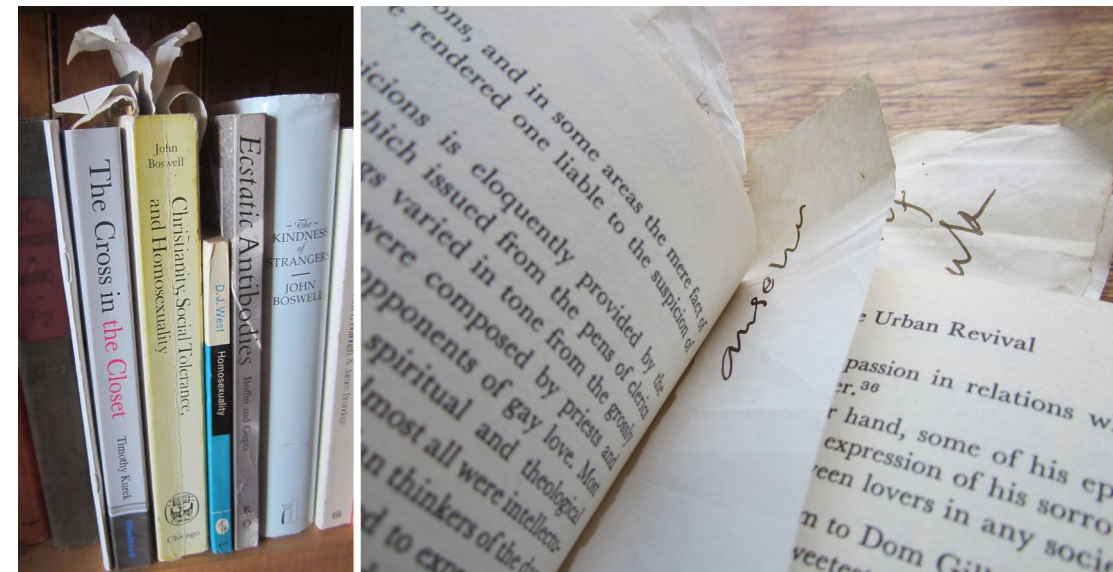


Fig. 1
Derek Jarman's
working copy of
John Boswell's
*Christianity, Social
Tolerance and
Homosexuality* from
the artist's library at
Prospect Cottage.
© Photo: the
author.

an alternative since, he announces, his overriding concern is for the wellbeing of his angelic visitors. This motif of female sexual exchange is often seriously underplayed by commentators obsessed with the implications of the episode for comprehending homosexuality. Threatened with violence, however, Lot and his family are escorted out of the city by the angels; and subsequently, readers are informed, the Lord 'rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground' (19.24–25). Then, in the dramatic climax to the tale, Lot's wife, ignoring the angels' warning to 'not look back' (19.17), is turned into a pillar of salt (19.26).

The destruction of Sodom was traditionally construed as a punishment for bodily depravity, though some modern commentators argue that the episode is chiefly concerned with lack of hospitality to strangers: the inhabitants of Sodom were simply exercising the right to 'know' who Lot's guests were, motivated by an awareness of the patriarch's alien status in the city. This particular interpretation was bolstered by the Anglican clergyman Derrick Sherwin Bailey, who in 1955 published a book on homosexuality in western Christianity that paved the way for the 1957 Wolfenden report on legal restrictions against male homosexuality in the United Kingdom, which in its turn led to partial decriminalisation in England and Wales a decade later.⁴ Bailey's argument that the Sodom story had not originally been written with homosexual acts or desires in mind, and that it more likely involved a condemnation of the Sodomites' inhospitality to angels, was subsequently taken up by other historians, notably John Boswell, whose seminal study *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, published in 1980, cites Bailey's book as a 'pioneering' work that significantly advanced research on Christian attitudes to homosexuality.⁵ Jarman reportedly owned several copies of Boswell's study and made frequent use of it in his published writings.⁶ The extant copy of Boswell's book at Prospect Cottage, Dungeness, where Jarman lived from 1987

until his death in February 1994, still preserves a series of handwritten markers that its owner used to identify some of the medieval churchmen that the author identified as ‘gay’ (Fig. 1). In the opening pages of Jarman’s 1992 memoir, *At Your Own Risk*, Jarman cites approvingly Boswell’s thesis—itsself derived from Bailey—that the biblical story of Sodom was concerned with lack of hospitality. Reflecting on how he has lived the first twenty-five years of his life ‘as a criminal’ and the next twenty-five as a ‘second-class citizen’, Jarman observes that if the sin of the people of Sodom was inhospitality, ‘the lack of hospitality that we have received in my lifetime reveals a true Sodom in the institutions of my country’.⁷

The cities of the plain, evocatively described in Genesis 19 as being consumed by fire and brimstone, recur repeatedly as motifs or tropes in other sections of the Bible: the books of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jude and so forth. Most significant of all is the citation of the Sodom story in the Book of Revelation, which concludes the canonical Christian version of the Bible. There, after the seventh seal of the Lord’s book is opened, fire and hail are described falling to earth—trees and grass burn; men drown; sun, moon and stars go dark—before the beastly Satan, condemned to a bottomless pit after his fall from heaven, is released from his confines to wreak further havoc. The beast subsequently makes war on and kills God’s two witnesses: ‘and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord also was crucified’ (11.8). What is more, a later passage identifies the same great city as the Whore of Babylon, riding a scarlet beast and reigning over the world: ‘And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and were wanton with her, will weep and wail over her when they see the smoke of her burning ... and say “Alas! alas! thou great city, thou mighty city, Babylon! In one hour has thy judgment come”’ (18.9–10). The story of Sodom’s annihilation was thus yoked, in the Christian Bible, to John the Divine’s vision of global destruction at the end of time. The great city invoked in these verses, which its original author and many commentators since have also identified as a stand-in for Rome, was conflated allegorically with another city, Sodom, whose own fate prefigured both the burning of Babylon and the fiery torments of the damned in hell following God’s final judgement; the city’s decimation represents a prelude to the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven in the text’s concluding chapters.

Jarman was an avid reader of Saint John’s Apocalypse and it held a firm grip on his imagination. The Book of Revelation is among the most heavily annotated sections in Jarman’s own copy of the Bible, which remains to this day in his library at Prospect Cottage; I have deliberately been quoting from the 1966 Catholic Edition of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, an English translation adapted for Catholic use, which was the text Jarman knew and worked with.⁸ Jarman also owned a copy of an edited volume of essays, *Facing Apocalypse*, which had been published in early 1987, around the time that his feature film *The Last of England*, with its celebrated invocations of apocalypse, was released. The starting point for *Facing Apocalypse*, as expressed in its

introduction, was that ‘the nuclear arsenal calls forth ancient images of the end, evoking dreams and nightmares of apocalypse from a variety of cultures’; the book’s wager is that a ‘careful scrutiny’ of apocalyptic imagery ‘may make us more sensitive to nuclear war—and to those psychological projections which threaten to erupt in an *irreversible* explosion of hostility’.⁹ Jarman too, it seems, sought to understand how imagery of the world’s end potentially laid the psychological groundwork for the planet’s real and future destruction through such phenomena as environmental destruction and nuclear disaster. He chose to face apocalypse by confronting the hidden impulses and anxieties it expressed.

Jarman had been drawn to apocalyptic themes throughout his career as an artist and filmmaker. Earlier iterations included his 1978 feature *Jubilee*, which has been characterised as oscillating between a seemingly archaic and idealised English Renaissance past, represented by Queen Elizabeth I and her sage John Dee, and a ‘postmodern punk apocalypse’ set in the wasteland of Britain’s present.¹⁰ Similarly, the script for an unrealised film project, *Neutron*, which Jarman commenced in 1979 shortly after the release of *Jubilee*, was conceived both as a Jungian interpretation of the biblical Apocalypse and as a political commentary on the rise of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative Party, whose members Jarman had already begun to view as the ‘greedy despoilers’ of Britain’s past.¹¹ The recently developed neutron bomb, a specialised type of nuclear weapon that was popularly believed to destroy human beings while leaving infrastructure intact, was the inspiration for Jarman’s title. While *Neutron* concludes with a final image of its Christlike protagonist Aeon setting out into the sunshine, dressed as ‘a medieval pilgrim with a palmer’s wide-brimmed hat and a shepherd’s staff’, a sign that past corruption had been eliminated and the slate wiped clean, another explicitly medieval-themed script, *Bob-Up-a-Down*, which Jarman was also working on at the time, features a plot in which a cycle of violence and destruction similarly concludes with an episode of cleansing and renewal.¹²

An installation at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in 1984 brought these interests in apocalypse to a head. To complement a retrospective exhibition of his paintings from the 1960s onwards, Jarman created six new works, known as the *GBH* series (Fig. 2), which were displayed separately in a dark, contemplative, near-sepulchral space within the galleries. The works were monumental in scale, extending almost three metres in height, and featured images of a map of Britain, painted in acrylic, which was surrounded and partially obscured by swirls of charcoal, gold and fiery red pigment. The paint was applied to a hand-laminated base, comprising a sheet of linen layered to the front with torn newspaper impregnated with glue, creating a densely textured and undulating surface that further obscured the aerial view of Britain.¹³ The imagery evokes smoke, flames and burning, signalling that viewers are being confronted with a vision of apocalypse, while the circles inscribed over each map call to mind the targeting sights of a wartime bombing mission. Jarman had been

Fig. 2
GBH Series III
and V (1983–84).
Installation view at
Void, Derry, 2019.
Mixed media on
canvas, each work
289.6 × 241.3 cm.
Private collection.
© Photo: the
author.



struck, when reviewing Britain's shape in an atlas, by its resemblance to an H-bomb explosion, lending support to this interpretation.¹⁴

Smaller-scale works linked to the *GBH* series similarly resonate with the political contexts that provoked Jarman's engagement with the idiom of apocalypse. Around two years after exhibiting the *GBH* series at the ICA, and while planning the film that would become *The Last of England*, Jarman created a work composed of black impasto, laid thickly over a gilded canvas and imprinted with a cracked pane of glass, that he entitled *Grievous Bodily Harm* (Fig. 3). The glass, engraved with the words 'VICTORIAN VALUES' and 'Night life' and the letters 'GB', is placed over a sketchy red map of Britain. 'GB' of course references Great Britain as well as the painting's title, while 'Victorian values' call to mind Margaret Thatcher's use of the phrase as a rallying cry in political campaigns from 1983 onwards.¹⁵ The 'Night life' phrase is more ambiguous but could refer variously to the nightmarish shadow cast by Thatcher's policies and the Cold War, and to sites of nocturnal possibility and queer connection, such as the cruising grounds of Hampstead Heath, which supposedly threatened to disrupt the nation's moral compass. Also explicitly dwelling on the menace of nuclear war and climate change is a work in two parts (Fig. 4): a painted panel featuring a shadowy landmass recognisable as Britain, streaked with red and white pigment and painted over a gold ground, and a gilt-framed clockface with its hands forebodingly set at one minute to midnight. The mock timepiece evokes the Doomsday Clock that the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* conceived in 1947 as a metaphor for the risk posed to humanity and the planet by nuclear weapons and climate change. At the time of writing,

Fig. 3
Derek Jarman,
*Grievous Bodily
Harm* (1986).
Oil and mixed
media on canvas,
46.3 × 35.56
cm. © Amanda
Wilkinson Gallery.
Reproduced by
permission of the
Derek Jarman
Estate and Keith
Collins Will Trust.



reflecting the intensification of threats in recent years, the Doomsday Clock is set at 100 seconds to midnight.¹⁶ But in the early 1980s, during which Jarman created these works, fear of nuclear annihilation was also very real, as was a heightened awareness of environmental concerns such as acid rain and the depletion of the ozone layer; Jarman's art and writings from his final decade are likewise peppered with references to ecological devastation.¹⁷

The composition and colours of the *GBH* group and related paintings are also loosely reminiscent of works by William Blake, notably 'The Ancient of Days', Blake's visionary frontispiece to his apocalypse-themed *Europe: A Prophecy* (1794), which shows the mythical figure Urizen using a compass to impose order on the material world at

Fig. 4
Derek Jarman,
*Untitled (England
II) (and clock)*
(1983). Mixed
media, in two
parts. Canvas 76.2
× 41.28 cm, clock
50.8 × 50.8 × 10.16
cm. © Amanda
Wilkinson Gallery.
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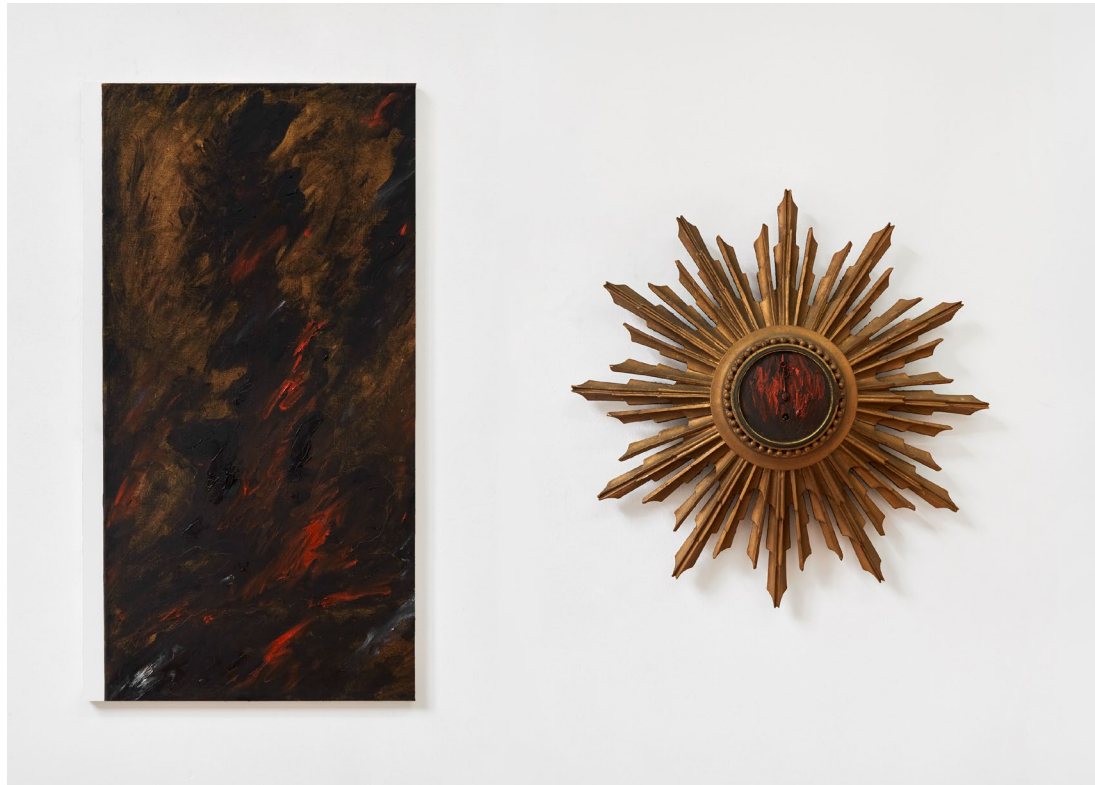


Fig. 5
Hereford map
(c.1300). Ink on
vellum, 159 ×
134 cm. Hereford
Cathedral Library.
© Photo: the
author.



Fig. 6
Detail from
Hereford map,
showing Sodom
and Gomorrah
and Lot's wife
transformed into
a pillar of salt. ©
Photo: the author.



the moment of creation.¹⁸ In addition, the surfaces and cartographic forms of the *GBH* series have been compared to the Hereford *mappa mundi* (Fig. 5), a medieval world map comparable in scale to Jarman's paintings, which is inscribed on a single sheet of parchment and represents the whole of creation—people, animals, places and historical events—as properly ordered and organised within a circle according to Christian principles.¹⁹ While it is not clear if Jarman knew the Hereford map or encountered it in person, it is worth noting that it includes stylised depictions of Sodom and Gomorrah (Fig. 6), shown as buildings submerged beneath the Dead Sea, as well as a portrayal of Lot's wife 'mutata in petra salis' [turned into a pillar of salt]. However, by contrast with the *mappa mundi*'s orderly arrangements of time and space, which were designed to accord with prevailing systems of geographical, religious, historical and legendary knowledge, Jarman's images evoke only disorder and destruction. As critic John Roberts noted, in a review of the ICA exhibition at the time it opened, the *GBH* series can be interpreted variously 'as a visionary projection of Britain under a nuclear fall-out cloud ... as a picture of Britain in the grips of the fires of Toxteth, Brixton and Bristol [riots in the early 1980s that occurred against a background of tensions between local police and Black communities], and as a glorious act of expulsion and exorcism: the ritual burning of Little England, this Sceptered Isle'.²⁰

One of the titles for the feature that eventually became *The Last of England* was *GBH*, signalling a clear thread of continuity between the themes of Jarman's 1987 film and the earlier paintings. Moreover, another of the film's working titles, *The Dead Sea*, conjures up the ties between the biblical Sodom story and Saint John the Divine's

Fig. 7
Refugees and
terrorists. *The Last
of England*, dir.
Derek Jarman
(1987). Screenshots
from DVD.



Fig. 8
Refugees rowing
in darkness. *The
Last of England*,
dir. Derek Jarman
(1987). Screenshots
from DVD.



vision of Apocalypse at the end of time. The collection of diary entries, interviews and notes for the script of *The Last of England*, published to coincide with the film's release and later republished under the title *Kicking the Pricks*, includes a reflection on the significance of the work's earlier titles. *The Dead Sea* suggested, to Jarman, the symbolist painter Arnold Böcklin's *Isle of the Dead*, with its image of an oarsman carrying a lone passenger and coffin-shaped object, both of which are swathed in white cloth, to a mysterious rocky islet.²¹ Also in the back of Jarman's mind were the 'dead waters' that 'lap ominously' through the stories of Edgar Allan Poe; and the filmmaker may have been thinking, too, of Poe's Gothic poem 'The City in the Sea', which tells of a strange city with 'time-eaten towers' and 'Babylon-like walls', while 'Resignedly, beneath the sky / The melancholy waters lie'.²² This imagery parallels the sequences in *The Last of England* representing water and shorelines, including footage of refugees waiting in London's bleak and decaying Docklands (Fig. 7), and a particularly resonant concluding segment in which a group of refugees row themselves silently across a dark expanse of water, lit by the light of a flare—one of Jarman's signature motifs—as they journey into the shadowy unknown (Fig. 8).

In the conversation in *Kicking the Pricks* in which he announces these connections, Jarman is also reminded of a parallel to William Holman Hunt's *The Scapegoat* (Fig. 9), reflecting that the painting's subject, the creature ritually burdened with the sins of others in the Book of Leviticus, is shown by Hunt tethered on the Dead Sea shoreline.²³ Traditionally, it was believed that the Dead Sea stood for the fate of the cities of the plain in Genesis 19, the barren landscape being cursed with the same fate as the legendary cities described being decimated by fire and brimstone in the biblical text. Lot's wife's own destiny to be turned into a statue of salt further cemented this connection in view of the Dead Sea's salty, sulphurous make-up. Moreover, as H. G. Cocks has shown, claims by a French archaeologist, Louis-Félicien de Saulcy, actually to have located the ruined remains of Sodom and Gomorrah as he travelled around the shores of the Dead Sea in 1851, ignited a vigorous Victorian debate about the realities of biblical history and its status too, perhaps, as a prophetic sign of the Apocalypse to come.²⁴ Just a few years before Hunt painted his picture, in other words, the Dead Sea's uncanny landscape had been identified as actually retaining physical traces of divinely-inspired cataclysm. Significantly, Hunt had read de Saulcy's account of his journey to the Dead Sea, and when the Pre-Raphaelite artist went there in 1854, to paint *The Scapegoat*, he chose as his location the foot of a range of hills known as Jebel Usdum ('Mount Sodom'), which features salt caves and a pillar of rock salt popularly known as Lot's Wife.²⁵ Hunt portrays the titular goat of his painting in a desolate and inhospitable landscape, which he identifies in an inscription at the base as 'Oosdoom', a transliteration of the Arabic name 'Usdum' that de Saulcy had cited as 'undeniable evidence' that the ruins he claimed to have 'discovered' on the shores of the Dead Sea were indeed those of Sodom.²⁶ The beast's horns are surrounded by a red woollen band,



Fig. 9
William Holman
Hunt, *The Scapegoat*
(1854–56). Oil on
canvas, 86 × 140
cm. Lady Lever
Art Gallery, Port
Sunlight.

which denotes the sacrificial animal described in Leviticus 16.21–2 ('The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him'), while also anticipating, typologically, Christ's crown of thorns. Displaced within a barren shoreline strewn only with bones, deposits of salt and withered plants, Hunt's goat stands isolated against a watery backdrop that is literally dead; it is the only living creature in a setting that the painter himself described as 'beautifully arranged horrible wilderness'.²⁷ 'God-forsaken' could aptly be applied to this landscape, though the imagery surely also brings to mind the wilderness of Dungeness, which Jarman had rediscovered just a few months before completing *The Last of England* and which is popularly characterised as exuding a 'post-apocalyptic' look and aura.²⁸

Ultimately, it was another Pre-Raphaelite painting from the 1850s that provided the inspiration for Jarman's title: Ford Madox Brown's *The Last of England*, which depicts emigrants leaving the white cliffs of Dover behind for life in the colonies.²⁹ But the fact that Jarman's film was originally shadowed by references to the Dead Sea signals that its celebrated invocations of apocalyptic themes and imagery also deserve to be viewed in light of their connections to the Sodom story. *Kicking the Pricks*, indeed, identifies a further parallel in a passage in which the director reflects on the film's ultimate message. It is 'about England', Jarman muses, 'a feeling shared with Oliver Cromwell', before reciting to the interviewer a series of what he calls 'mad' verses that purportedly derive from a speech delivered by Cromwell at the dissolution of Parliament in 1654 but are in fact taken from the biblical Book of Isaiah.³⁰ Jarman quotes from Chapter 63 of Isaiah, a judgement-themed text that provided an important source of language and imagery for the Book of Revelation, which centres on the theme of retribution against those seeking the destruction of Israel. After the prophet asks who it is 'that cometh from Edom', a city that had been prophesied by Isaiah's predecessor Jeremiah (49.18) as suffering the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah, God announces to the

prophet that ‘the day of vengeance is in my heart ... And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury’ (Isaiah 63.6). Jarman’s interlocutor subsequently asks whether he reads the Bible, to which the artist responds: ‘Frequently. The Song of Solomon. Revelation’. Referring to an infamous remark by the Manchester chief constable, James Anderton, in December 1986, that prostitutes, drug addicts and homosexuals who had AIDS were ‘swirling round in a human cesspit of their own making’, Jarman subsequently jokes that since he himself is ‘obviously in the cesspit’ he has ‘nothing to lose’, unleashing a series of associations between biblical vengeance, contemporary politics and the stigmatisation of marginalised communities that clearly parallels the Sodom narrative.³¹

Jarman’s citation from Isaiah, along with his passing reference to Hunt’s *The Scapegoat* and other allusions to divinely ordained punishment, registers the extent to which British political culture was itself underpinned, at the time of the film’s making, by a climate of scapegoating that worked to position gay men specifically in the proverbial cesspit. Section 28 of the 1988 Local Government Act, which banned the promotion of homosexuality in schools, was perhaps the most egregious instance of this phenomenon in Jarman’s lifetime. Although the passing of Section 28 post-dated the release of *The Last of England* by a year, the groundwork for the legislation had been laid in 1986, when a Private Member’s Bill aimed at preventing local authorities from ‘promoting homosexuality’ was tabled in the House of Lords.³² John Giffard, Earl of Halsbury, making a case on 18 December 1986 for the Bill’s second reading, issued a homophobic tirade that culminated in the accusation that gay men are a ‘reservoir of venereal diseases. . . . Syphilis, gonorrhoea, genital herpes and now AIDS are characteristically infections of homosexuals’.³³ Judge and fellow peer Tom Denning, who likewise spoke vehemently in support of the Bill, quoted verses from Genesis describing the destruction of Sodom and even had the audacity to compare the House of Lords to the biblical Lord who condemned Sodom and Gomorrah in the book of Genesis. Insofar as the legislation functioned as a means of curbing the activities of the supposedly ‘loony left’ councils that, in Denning’s words, ‘corrupted’ children through their use of public funds for ‘homosexual purposes’, the peers who championed the Bill were effectively characterised by Denning as a god issuing divinely-ordained punishment.³⁴ Stigmatising gay men specifically—Lord Halsbury distinguishes in his introductory comments between the ‘relatively harmless lesbian’ and the ‘vicious gay’—this debate neatly encapsulates the rot at the heart of government and the British polity that Jarman’s film so powerfully exposes.³⁵

On 22 December 1986, shortly after completing the filming for *The Last of England* and just days after the House of Lords had witnessed an outpouring of homophobia in connection with the bill that became Section 28, Jarman had tested positive for HIV antibodies.³⁶ Like other gay men living in London in the 1980s, however, he had been contending, in the years leading up to his own diagnosis, with the

virus’s impact on his identity as a gay man. The final pages of *Kicking the Pricks* contain a series of reflections on the effect of living with HIV on the author’s sense of time. In a lengthy poem entitled ‘HOPE’, Jarman reflects on how:

The virus saps
Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow?
It crosses out
Cancels
You feel apart, so far apart
The others are playing elections³⁷
Composing the tunes
Are they yours any longer?
You watch the argument
From a distance
So near but yet so far
Shall I? becomes
Why bother?
Ten foot under
Am I still part of this?³⁸

Here, Jarman is arguably channelling and individualising the imagery of ‘end times’ that had been insistently projected onto queer people, even before the advent of discourses of HIV and AIDS. The rhetoric of American religious conservatives, which constructed homosexuality as a contagious disease and apocalyptic signifier, its very existence interpreted as a harbinger of impending doom, had identified America itself as a kind of Sodom.³⁹ This language lay behind Anita Bryant’s assault on queer America in the late 1970s, leading the executive director of her Protect America’s Children and Anita Bryant Ministries to observe, in 1984, that the ‘road to ruin for America has been paved by the political homosexual militants ... They would lead America to disaster, just as their ancient counterparts led Sodom to its certain doom’.⁴⁰ Versions of this religiously-inspired invective crossed over to Britain in the 1980s, fuelled not only by the Christian right but by a media bent on sensationalising AIDS both as a punishment for immoral behaviour and as an existential threat to wider society. Coinciding with the release of Jarman’s *The Last of England* in 1987, the filmmaker’s friend Simon Watney published a ground-breaking study, *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media*. Watney demonstrated that the presence of AIDS among the marginalised groups most exposed to HIV infection was generally perceived, in British news media, as, to quote the book’s first edition, a ‘symbolic extension of some imagined inner essence of being manifesting itself as disease ... reinscribed as a property of persons, not a medical syndrome’.⁴¹ Furthermore, the view that the spread of AIDS could be attributed principally to gay men indicates ‘the active legacy of moral and theological debates which entirely pre-date the modern period, yet which remain available to make sense of any aspect of contemporary life in a far from fossilised discourse of disease and contagion’.⁴² In keeping with this, as outlined in another edition of *Policing Desire* published a decade later, imagery of AIDS in tabloids and on television, which invariably conceived it as a ‘gay plague’, typically imbued the syndrome with a ‘pre-modern’ notion of ‘disease

restored to its ancient theological status as punishment’.⁴³ The historical episode most frequently equated with the AIDS pandemic in mass media reporting was the fourteenth-century Black Death, but Watney rejected this apocalyptic logic by speaking frankly about the real-world effects of these misleading analogies, seeing as the duty of everyone involved in AIDS-related work to bear witness to ‘every example of injustice, inhumanity and insult’. Imagining AIDS as an apocalyptic signifier fuelled belief in the inevitability of HIV-related deaths, a state of affairs that Watney attributed to an ‘increasingly degraded, and degrading, mass media news industry’.⁴⁴

In 1989, Jarman gave a talk in conjunction with an exhibition of his at the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow, commissioned by the National Review of Live Art, which featured a live performance staged within a space that also included large-scale bed installations and walls pasted with tabloid newspaper pages spouting homophobic vitriol. His commentary engaged explicitly with the tropes identified by Watney: ‘Sexuality is treated in the British Isles theologically and pathologically. Attitudes prevail which were laid down in the 12th century ... for AIDS is after all a “gay plague”’.⁴⁵ Furthermore in the early 1990s, again taking stock of analyses such as Watney’s, Jarman had the opportunity, in a series of paintings created for his *Queer* exhibition at Manchester City Art Gallery (now Manchester Art Gallery), to satirise the press’s role in alienating Britain’s queer communities and disseminating alarmist misinformation about HIV and AIDS. These works, among the last he made, consisted of a ground composed of photocopied headlines from the gutter press, which, aided by assistants, were mounted on canvas and then daubed with paint. Subsequently, Jarman scratched words or slogans into the pigment, variously contesting or amplifying the messages conveyed by the newsprint.⁴⁶ The lattice of headlines in his 1992 painting *Blood*, for instance, lifted from a front page of *The Sun*, read ‘AIDS BLOOD IN M&S PIES PLOT’ (Fig. 10); meanwhile, the title word ‘blood’ is scrawled repeatedly in lower case lettering across the blood-red surface. Jarman was responding, with anger and defiance, to the fear of contagion expressed in the headline and the characterisation of AIDS sufferers as infective plague carriers. But the painting ultimately trades in the same hyperbole as the tabloids Jarman cites. The replication of motifs, perhaps intended to parody an Andy Warhol silkscreen print or a Cy Twombly scribble, serves to immerse the newspaper’s assault on queer identities and bodies in the visual and verbal symbols of the very substance, blood, of which it seemed most afraid.⁴⁷ Jarman’s reaction to the thinly veiled apocalypticism of British tabloids was to repeat its inflated claims and thereby expose them to critique and ridicule. In *At Your Own Risk*, published in the same year as he created *Blood*, Jarman quotes this and other headlines alongside passages of quotation from another voice, the gay press, that presented alternative perspectives. Tellingly, among the litany of queer-baiting slogans, is one that reads simply ‘SODOM AND GOMORRAH’.⁴⁸

Jarman was keenly aware of the extent to which religiously inspired language

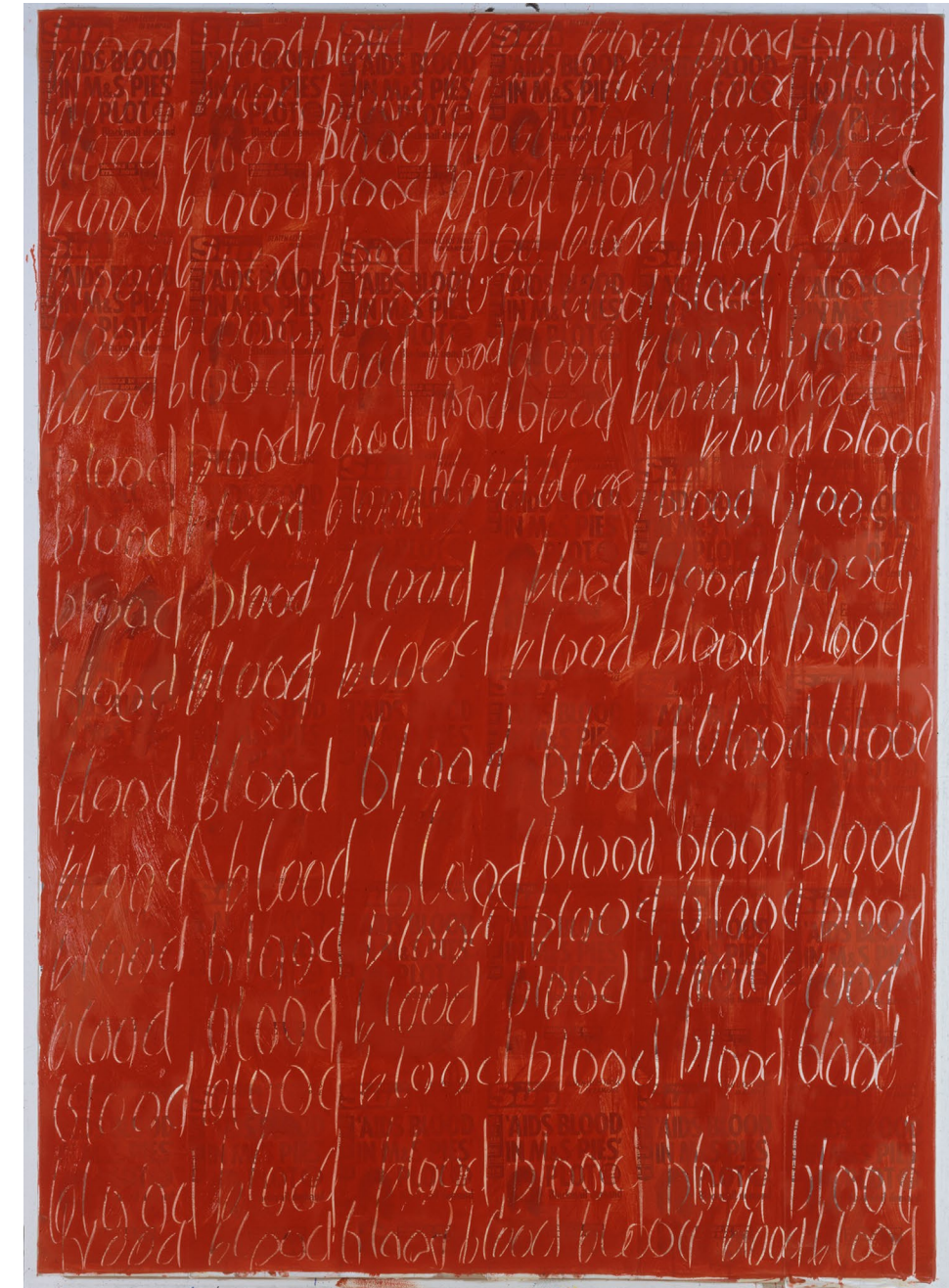


Fig. 10
Derek Jarman,
Blood (1992). Oil
on photocopies
on canvas. 251.5
× 179 cm. Private
collection. Source:
Jeff Horsley.
Reproduced by
permission of the
Derek Jarman
Estate and Keith
Collins Will Trust.

filtered into representations of queer people in the tabloid press. His book *Queer Edward II*, published to coincide with the release of his 1991 film *Edward II*, uses typography and textual collage to draw explicit parallels between the themes of Christopher Marlowe’s early modern play about the ill-fated medieval king and manifestations of institutional homophobia in modern Britain. Each section from the published shooting script, an adaptation of Marlowe’s original sixteenth-century text, incorporates a slogan that parodies the headline form, while italicised passages in the right margin of the script provide occasions for Jarman and his collaborators to offer their reflections on a given theme. On one page spread, which appears towards the end of the book, Jarman mentions that two newspapers, *The Telegraph* and *The Express*, refused to carry a story about him ‘as my open sexuality would offend their readers’; this is followed

by a reference to the recently elected Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, who pronounced that ‘our sexuality cannot be condoned, only forgiven, by his church’.⁴⁹ The point of the juxtaposition is to draw out the extent to which British journalism itself was steeped in moralising discourse. Far from being a fully secularised construct in 1990s Britain, the supposedly modern concept of homosexuality continued to be filtered through a religious, quasi-apocalyptic lens whereby queerness was perceived as posing a threat to the nation’s social and moral fabric.

The age-old link between the destruction of Sodom in Genesis and the final Apocalypse thus could be seen re-emerging in modern Britain in the guise of AIDS discourse. Jarman’s response was to counter such imagery through a mix of critique and parodic repetition. This is seen, too, in the two features made after *The Last of England* that drew most heavily on the Book of Revelation, namely *The Garden* (1990), conceived as a reworking of the Gospels, and Jarman’s visionary swan song *Blue* (1993), the three films being conceived as a loose trilogy. Among the most striking sequences in *The Garden* is a vignette in which a young boy, having danced a flamenco on a table, symbolic of his creative impulses, is surrounded by a group of ageing teachers dressed in academic gowns, who read from books including the Bible, while rapping the table with their canes (Fig. 11); the segment is a prelude to imagery of the flagellation and crucifixion of the gay couple that Jarman has stand in for Christ. The scenes are superimposed onto green screen footage of biblical verses, including extracts from the Book of Leviticus, as well as brooding imagery of the sea and nuclear power stations at Dungeness. Leviticus is presumably invoked due to its condemnation of men who ‘lie with mankind as with womankind’ as an ‘abomination’ (18.9), while the stormy setting of both the education and torture scenes seems to allude to the doom awaiting those who fail to heed the men’s interminable lessons.⁵⁰ What else but the chastisement of Sodom lies behind such imagery?

Blue itself, meanwhile, derives aspects of its form and language from the Book of Revelation.⁵¹ Aside from an unchanging field of International Klein Blue, Jarman eliminated visual referents, thereby challenging viewers to look beyond the threshold of the visible that is traditionally one of the defining features of cinema. Furthermore, Jarman linked this evocation of an anti-mimetic visionary landscape to a sense of apocalypse embedded in his own personal experiences of AIDS: ‘Here I am again in the waiting room’, the voiceover announces, ‘Hell on Earth is a waiting room. Here you know you are not in control of yourself, waiting for your name to be called: “712213”’. Here you have no name, confidentiality is nameless. Where is 666? Am I sitting opposite him/her? Maybe 666 is the demented woman switching the channels on the TV’.⁵² This passage of narration clearly makes direct reference to the Book of Revelation, with its number symbolism and announcement in the thirteenth chapter that 666 is the number of the beast. Later, in one of the film’s final poems, Jarman’s narrator again conceives apocalypse in terms of a direct, personal encounter with the notion of time drawing to

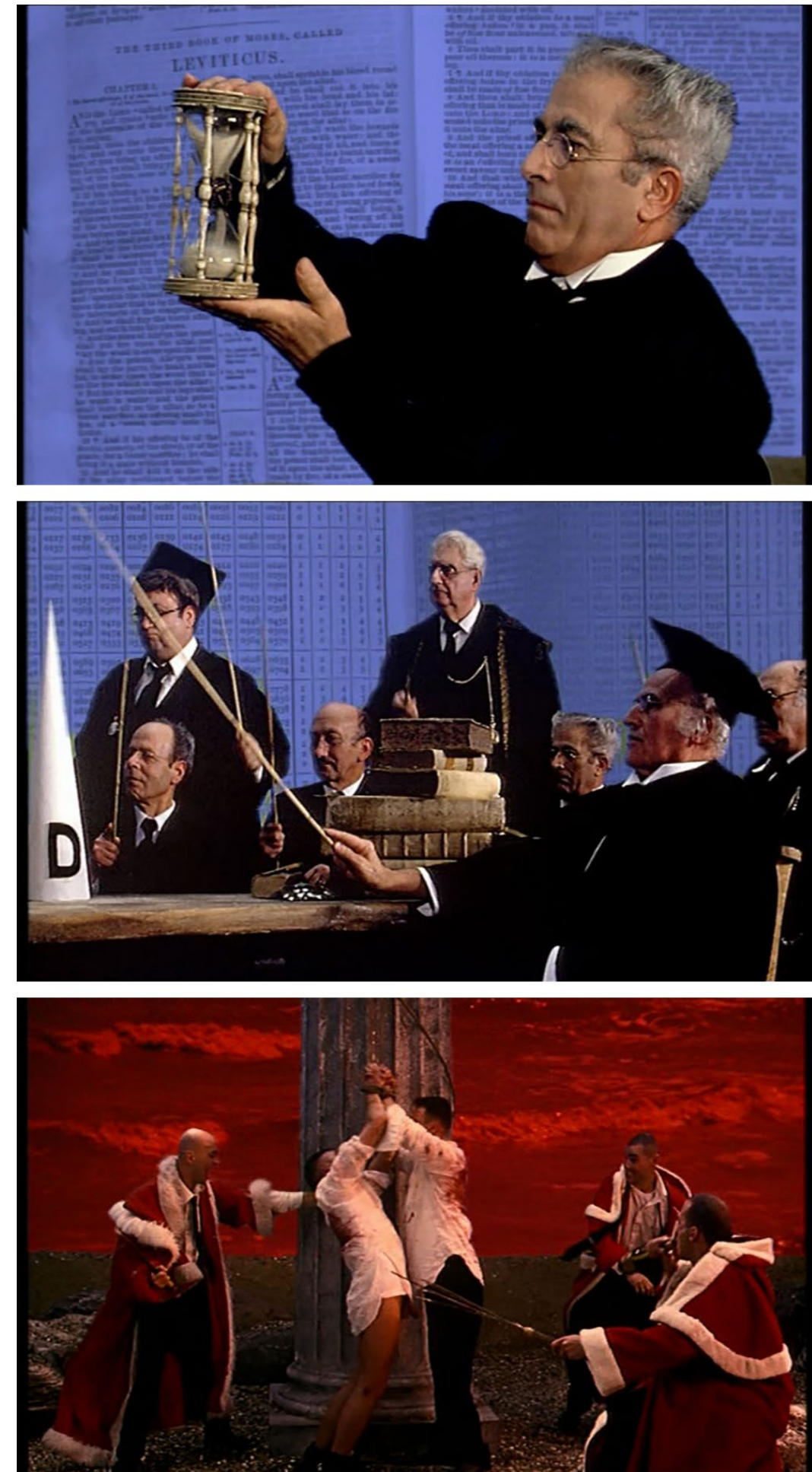


Fig. 11
Repressive
education and
flagellation. *The
Garden*, dir. Derek
Jarman (1990).
Screenshots from
DVD.

a close:

Ages and Aeons quit the room
Exploding into timelessness
No entrances or exits now
No need for obituaries or final judgements
We knew that time would end
After tomorrow at sunrise
We scrubbed the floors
And did the washing up
It would not catch us unawares.⁵³

Returning to *The Last of England* and analysing it in light of these later works, it is, therefore, worth emphasising that the film's vision of apocalypse was likely conceived, in part, as a response to the AIDS crisis specifically.

Jarman had become increasingly aware, in the years and months preceding his own HIV diagnosis, of media coverage representing gay men as infective plague-bearers. In *Kicking the Pricks*, the artist recalls how earlier in 1986, when his doctor had suggested that he take the test, he had visions of featuring in the 'daily diet of terror' that sells tabloid newspapers.⁵⁴ Although the filming itself was completed before Jarman learned of his own HIV status, the editing and sound-synching were undertaken in spring 1987 and the finished film has often been interpreted as registering the personal and cultural significance of AIDS. The soundtrack to a pivotal scene, for example, in which Tilda Swinton, playing a mourning bride, dances against the ruinous backdrop of London's Docklands, is the song Εξελόυμε ('Deliver Me'), from Diamanda Galás's *Saint of the Pit* (1986), the second instalment in her *Masque of the Red Death* trilogy memorialising the AIDS crisis. *Saint of the Pit* is delivered in the voice of the afflicted, drawing on Galás's experiences of AIDS activism, including the loss of her brother to the disease in 1986, which she described as a 'personal apocalypse'. *The Last of England* also alludes to the threat posed by Thatcher's Conservative Government to marginalised bodies and desires, notably with its imagery of military executions, refugees huddled beside the Thames and despondent young men wandering through a ruinous urban wasteland.⁵⁵ AIDS is arguably, as such, a significant subtext in the film, a theme that also resonated with Hunt's *The Scapegoat* (Fig. 9). Just as the titular beast in Hunt's painting has been expelled to an inhospitable landscape after being afflicted with the sins and sorrows of the people of Israel—or, as one of the biblical quotations inscribed on the work's frame has it, 'the Goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a Land not inhabited' (Leviticus 16.22)—so the various exiles and scapegoats in Jarman's film represent the stigmatisation of gay men in Thatcher's Britain, expelled to the margins and tainted, via their association with a deadly new disease, with the sin of Sodom.⁵⁶

Despite the film's seemingly relentless stream of imagery foregrounding decay and desolation, however, Jarman also insisted on the reparative potential of *The Last of England* as what he called a 'healing fiction'. Making the point with reference to medieval dream visions, he puts it thus in *Kicking the Pricks*: 'In dream allegory the poet wakes in a visionary landscape where he encounters personifications of psychic states. Through



Fig. 12
Fires. *The Last of England*, dir. Derek Jarman (1987).
Screenshots from DVD.

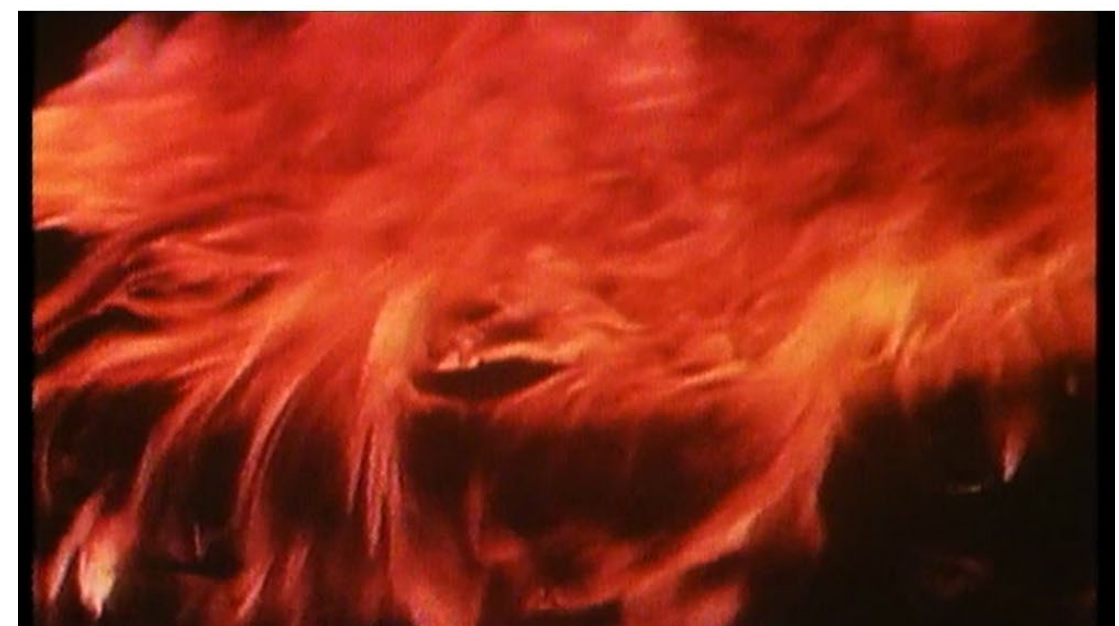


Fig. 13
Monument to
the Great Fire of
London. *The Last of
England*, dir. Derek
Jarman (1987).
Screenshots from
DVD.



these encounters he is healed ... *The Last of England* is in the same form'.⁵⁷ Supporting this view are the fires seen burning throughout the film (Fig. 12), which variously act as a destructive or infernal force, as in scenes of urban desolation such as footage of the 1981 Brixton riot, and as a source of light and guidance, as in the flares lighting the refugees' way in the concluding sequence.⁵⁸ Suggestively, footage filmed along the Thames that takes in manifestations of Thatcher's 'new London'—its Docklands, then in the throes of redevelopment, and its thriving City—also focuses, fleetingly, on the Monument to the Great Fire of London in 1666 (Fig. 13), a year many at the time predicted would be the end of the world in view of the date's numerical significance.⁵⁹ Intercut with these scenes of London's financial district is imagery of roaring flames and of a figure representing Babylon allegorically as a fat, bald woman manically spinning a star-covered globe.⁶⁰ Jarman is likely making reference here to the 'Whore of Babylon' in the Book of Revelation, which implies that the City of London, like its biblical counterpart, functions in the film as a symbol of imperialism and unfettered

consumerism. Minutes earlier a short sequence featuring footage of the bright lights of Manhattan similarly presents New York City as a kind of Babylon. But the monument to London's fiery fate also marks a moment of rebuilding and renewal. Just as significant as destruction, in other words, were fire's associations with cleansing and purgation.

Some years earlier, Jarman had personally experienced fire's simultaneously destructive, purifying and generative forces. In 1979 a space in Butler's Wharf, the last of the riverside warehouses that he made his home throughout the 1970s, burnt down shortly after he had moved into a building aptly named Phoenix House on London's Charing Cross Road. Like the mythical phoenix, Jarman saw himself emerging from his own ashes, as explored in *Kicking the Pricks*, where he reflects on how the Butler's Wharf fire—and implicitly fire in general—'consumed and cleansed, gave power to the imagination, ordeal by fire ... Fire runs in rivulets through my dreams, consumes everything in its path'.⁶¹

The most memorable scenes in *The Last of England* harness this sense of purification and rebirth. Footage of an eccentric 'marriage', filmed in a decaying warehouse (Fig. 14), shows a woman played by Swinton, dressed in white, celebrating her betrothal to a handsome groom (Jonny Phillips). But instead of the usual wedding march, the musical accompaniment to this strange sequence consists of another extract from Galás's *Saint of the Pit* album, a track called *La Treizième Revient* (The Thirteenth Returns).⁶² Featuring a sinister synthesised pipe organ, which emits sounds reminiscent of a Requiem Mass, the ominous soundtrack announces that what we are viewing is meant to be interpreted as disconcerting. Adding to this sensation is the inclusion of a pair of bridesmaids in pantomime-style drag. Moreover, the wedding party pushes a pram containing a baby smothered in tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun*, alluding—as in the paintings Jarman created for the later Manchester *Queer* show, which featured texts lifted from tabloid headlines and newspaper grounds—to the suffocating climate of moralism and sexual repression that had cast its shadow over British culture in the later 1980s (one of the headlines reads ominously 'Doom they shared'). Meanwhile, the soundtrack to this sequence also incorporates extracts from coverage of the royal wedding of Prince Andrew to Sarah Ferguson in 1986, suggesting that the 'marriage' ceremony in the film also epitomises the apotheosis of what Jarman would later dub 'Heterosoc', figured as a prison house of marriage, mortgages, monogamy and biological family.⁶³

In addition, however, these scenes can be interpreted as representing Jarman's take on chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation, where, after the conquest of Babylon and the casting of Satan into a lake of fire and brimstone, John describes seeing the New Jerusalem 'coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband' (21.2); the holy city's arrival as a bride anticipates Christ's Second Coming, when, as John continues, God 'will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more ... for the former things have passed away' (21.4). Except that the

Fig. 14
Wedding (Tilda
Swinton and Jonny
Phillips). *The Last of
England*, dir. Derek
Jarman (1987).
Screenshots from
DVD.



Fig. 15
Dance of bride
(Tilda Swinton).
The Last of England,
dir. Derek Jarman
(1987). Screenshots
from DVD.



wedding sequence in Jarman's film is followed by another that deliberately stands this imagery on its head. Swinton now appears in a desolate wasteland, in front of a flaming pyre, as she manages to cut her way out of the dress with a pair of sheers, a prelude to her iconic dance in the film's penultimate scene (Fig. 15). As Jarman comments in *Kicking the Pricks*, after Swinton's bride has been 'blown by a whirlwind of destruction', she 'becomes a figure of strength ... able to curse the world of the patriots: "God damn you, God damn you all"'.⁶⁴ Cutting up the dress, Swinton also enacts a version of symbolic cleansing; the process is characterised by Jarman as a 'shredding' of illusions. The bridal outfit is represented as a repressive trap from which, against a backdrop of purgatorial fire, the bride liberates herself in anticipation of a final, seemingly more hopeful ending.⁶⁵ Intriguingly, the location in which these sequences were shot is also charged with a millennial resonance by virtue of its title: the building that provided the backdrop to Swinton's dance and other key scenes in *The Last of England*, a derelict flour mill in London's Royal Victoria Dock, is known as Millennium Mills, a name that seems peculiarly apt in light of the site's role as a setting for Jarman's treatment of apocalyptic themes.⁶⁶

Finally, indicative of the storm's passing, viewers are confronted with an image of water shimmering beneath a night sky, as the aforementioned refugees steer their boat into the dark unknown (Fig. 8). These concluding scenes convey a distinct mood from the apocalyptic imagery encountered previously. The man who holds a flare to light the vessel's way, played by Spencer Leigh, had earlier in the film appeared wearing a high conical hat (Fig. 16), which alludes to his status as a heretic, while also carrying a burning torch; those condemned as religious nonconformists in medieval and early modern Europe were often forced to wear pointed paper hats or mitres signalling their disgrace.⁶⁷ Later Leigh reappears in the guise of a prisoner, being led slowly to his execution by a group of gun-toting and balaclava-clad 'terrorists', who are identified by Jarman as representing the Establishment.⁶⁸ The scene of the prisoner's death, repeated twice and intercut with footage of Swinton in a field of daffodils, her voice declaring sweetly 'don't be sad', precedes a sequence in which the refugees huddle beside the Thames in London's Docklands in the shadows of a bonfire, guarded again by terrorists (Fig. 7). Extracts from the footage of the execution also reappear in the segment where Swinton cuts herself out of her wedding gown. But the boat in the concluding sequence perhaps signals that some of those condemned earlier as heretics may finally have eluded the Establishment's suffocating ideologies, embarking in what Jarman describes, in *Kicking the Pricks*, as a 'great calm, after the stormy weather'.⁶⁹ The refugees do not clearly escape, as such, as do the émigrés in Ford Madox Brown's painting, who are destined to lead a new life in the colonies. Rather, as with Jarman's pursuits as a gardener in Dungeness, they seem to embark on a kind of psychic journey in which life is cultivated from the fragments and ruins of what remains after the storm has passed. Similarly, Swinton's escape from the entrapment represented by her wedding dress



Fig. 16
Heretic (Spencer
Leigh). *The Last of
England*, dir. Derek
Jarman (1987).
Screenshots from
DVD.

alludes to the possibility of a more open future outside such ideological constraints, a future that takes shape within the ruins of the past. If the refugees symbolise both the vulnerability and endurance of those who have experienced the destructive effects of genocidal violence first-hand—and it is worth recalling that societal responses to the AIDS crisis in the 1980s have periodically been characterised as genocide by negligence—then Swinton's bride expresses a response to war and patriarchal destruction that combines grief with strength, and defiance with empowerment.⁷⁰

* * *

In closing, I wish to bring into sharper focus some of the historical sources that informed Jarman's vision of apocalypse. In the early 1960s, before embarking on a Fine Art degree at The Slade, Jarman completed a BA in English, history and history of art at King's College London. This provided the artist with what his biographer, Tony Peake, has called a 'multifaceted literary compass with which to navigate the coming years'.⁷¹ Probably as a result of these studies, Jarman developed a lifelong interest in works of Old and Middle English literature. Here, I will briefly discuss how three such works—the Old English epic *Beowulf*; a record of visions by the late medieval mystic Julian of Norwich; and a short early English poem known as *The Ruin*—informed Jarman's responses to both AIDS and apocalyptic discourse.

As a prelude to this analysis, it is worth stepping back momentarily to reflect on the key motives that lay behind Jarman's imaginative encounters with the past. Jarman's art has occasionally been taken to task for its nationalist or patriotic leanings, or accused of trading in conservative varieties of nostalgia.⁷² While his engagements with history—and more specifically, with premodern texts, from Old and Middle English poetry to Shakespeare and Marlowe—were often filtered through a geographically

circumscribed lens, as witnessed in his final choice of title for the film that became *The Last of England*, this emphasis on literary ‘Englishness’ was ultimately rooted in Jarman’s university studies and the curriculum at King’s in the 1960s. Moreover, rather than treating the past as a repository of dead objects, a stifling ‘fossil culture’ in which everything is ‘now in its place, chronologically’, or mobilising history as a vehicle to fantasise the restoration of some putatively lost homeland, national identity or moral landscape, Jarman treated the past principally as a resource for critiquing and reshaping aspects of the present with a view to imagining more ideal, open and queer futures.⁷³ As he puts it in the screenplay of his 1986 film *Caravaggio*, which notoriously cultivates anachronism as a representational strategy, his aim is to find ways to ‘present the present past’, thereby drawing attention to the past’s contemporary and future resonances as an alternative to the climate of ‘ersatz historicism, everything in its ordered place’ that he felt characterised more conventional efforts to represent history cinematically.⁷⁴

Also, it is worth establishing a clear distinction between the forms of nostalgia that drove Margaret Thatcher to claim that her policies and promise of moral regeneration would make ‘Great Britain great again’ and Jarman’s overriding commitment to engaging creatively with the past as a means of critiquing the present and entertaining the possibility of queerer, less prescriptive futures.⁷⁵ When Thatcher commenced her first term as Prime Minister in May 1979, she stood on the doorstep of 10 Downing Street and famously invoked lines from a prayer attributed to the medieval churchman Saint Francis of Assisi, which resonated with her promise to restore harmony, truth, faith and hope to British life and politics. But while Thatcher herself occasionally had recourse to excerpts from premodern texts, she generally characterised the past as a repository of venerable but lamentably lapsed moral values, ones that she hoped could be resurrected as a means of reversing the so-called ‘permissive society’ that she and her political allies habitually singled out for criticism.⁷⁶ This moralising agenda also, of course, laid the groundwork for the homophobia peddled by right-wing tabloid media that works such as Jarman’s *Queer* paintings sought energetically to expose. Conversely, Jarman’s own citations of history tended to be motivated not simply by a desire to resurrect or reconstruct it with the aim of restoring ideas conceived as truth or tradition, but as a means of disrupting and rethinking contemporary regimes of normativity or what he called ‘Heterosoc’. If Jarman’s engagements with the past can be described as nostalgic on some level, then they seem to align more closely with the *reflective* variety of nostalgia that Svetlana Boym has identified as calling notions of absolute truth into doubt than with the *restorative* nostalgia that, she suggests, aspires to erase ambivalence, complexity or specificity.⁷⁷ Jarman’s longstanding efforts to contest simplistic notions of morality such as those witnessed in the reaction against permissiveness in 1970s and 1980s Britain also surely place him in the reflective camp.

The first of the three texts that I wish to highlight as having informed Jarman’s approach to history and apocalypse is the Old English poem *Beowulf*. Jarman would

have encountered *Beowulf* during his first year at King’s and returned to the text later in life during the making of *The Last of England*. One of the principal settings for *Beowulf*’s account of its eponymous, monster-slaying hero is the great Danish mead hall Heorot. Conventionally, mead halls were conceived as spaces for the fostering of community—for the exchange of gifts and stories, and the nurturing of friendships and alliances—but Heorot is presented as a space under attack: *Beowulf* begins by recounting how the monster Grendel has been undertaking nightly raids on the hall and slaughtering the brave warriors that it shelters. Grendel is subsequently defeated by Beowulf, an event described as an episode of purification after the monster has threatened to undo the social polity by destroying the space in which its most significant bonds were formed. Tellingly, in one of the two translations of *Beowulf* on Jarman’s shelves in Prospect Cottage, the section of the poem where the hero is tasked with purging the hall of Grendel, is entitled ‘the cleansing of Heorot’.⁷⁸ From this Jarman derived his sense of *The Last of England* as facilitating a process of symbolic cleansing, as articulated in the film’s final sequences featuring Swinton’s dance and the exodus of refugees. In *Kicking the Pricks*, describing *The Last of England* as an ‘attic’, Jarman compares the film directly with the mead hall:

Think of the mead hall in *Beowulf*, with the swallow flying through ... Think of that mead hall full of the junk of our history, of memory and so on; there’s a hurricane blowing outside, I open the doors and the hurricane blows through; everything is blown around, it’s a cleansing, the whole film is a cleansing.

I need a very firm anchor in that hurricane, the anchor is my inheritance, not my family inheritance, but a cultural one, which locates the film IN HOME.⁷⁹

In fact, as I have discussed elsewhere at greater length, the image of the mead hall as a refuge from the storm is ultimately inspired by a passage in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (completed c.731) rather than *Beowulf* per se.⁸⁰ In a chapter recounting the conversion of the kingdom of Northumbria to Christianity, Bede relays how a debate takes place in the Northumbrian court on whether to accept the new faith. The pagan king’s adviser counsels his master to accept the teaching of the Christian missionaries, alluding in a speech to an imaginary episode when a sparrow flies from wintry darkness into the light and safety of a hall. The adviser likens the sparrow’s flight to the lives of humans as they traverse the tempestuous arc of time, using the analogy to make the case that the arrival of Christianity brings with it the prospect of certainty in the face of an indeterminate past and indifferent future.⁸¹

Jarman owned a copy of Bede’s history and appears to have derived from this parable a sense that he needs to find his own anchor amid the storm. For Jarman himself, however, the grounding principle is not an otherworldly kingdom of heaven but his cultural inheritance in *this* world. As Mark Turner has observed, in an insightful analysis of Jarman’s conflation of Bede and *Beowulf* in his reflections on *The Last of England*, the industrial interiors that provide the settings for the film’s staged

Fig. 17
Sculptures in Derek
Jarman's garden
(June 2021).
Prospect Cottage,
Dungeness. ©
Photo: the author.



Fig. 18
Derek Jarman's
garden (June 2021).
Prospect Cottage,
Dungeness. ©
Photo: the author.



scenes—notably London's Millennium Mills—could be interpreted as modern-day equivalents to Bede's hall and Heorot, threatened as they are by the turbulence and destructive impulses that lie beyond but spaces that simultaneously persist as an 'attic' of memory and the 'junk' of history.⁸² The mead halls of early medieval literature, like the film's Docklands locations and the warehouse apartments that Jarman made his home during the 1970s, provide temporary shelter from the storm of history. This demonstrates Jarman's persistent interest in routing his vision of a ruinous and broken present through fragments of the past. Just as the artist's garden at Prospect Cottage incorporated materials salvaged from the beach at Dungeness into its structure (Fig. 17), so projects such as *The Last of England* were grounded in an awareness of literary and cultural history that afforded him with resources through which to defend himself and others from the monsters of materialism and state-sponsored homophobia.

My second example of Jarman's investment in history as a means of engaging critically with discourses of apocalyptic end time is his engagement with the meditations of a medieval mystic on human suffering. Jarman had first acquired a copy of Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love* while he was researching *Edward II*. His memoir *Modern Nature* describes, in an entry for 1989, how he reads the text 'to the gentle whirr of the washing machine', evoking a domestic sound that Jarman's companion Keith Collins, nicknamed 'HB' in the diaries, found a source of comfort.⁸³ *A Revelation* comprises a first-person account in English of the visions of a thirty-year-old woman, received in 1373 after a week of debilitating illness from which she almost did not recover. Lying on her sickbed, as the priest comforts her with a crucifix, and as her mother, thinking her dead, moves to close her eyes, Julian—likely named after the church that hosted the cell in which she was later confined as an anchorite—recalls receiving a series of sixteen 'shewings' or revelations. Revived by what she sees, Julian lives into old age, expanding the shorter version of her recollections twenty years later into a vivid and complex meditation on what it means to be human. Julian received her visions in the wake of an event commonly interpreted in apocalyptic terms, the so-called Black Death. While she would have been just a few years old at the time of the first major outbreak of plague in England, in 1348–9, there were several other spates of pestilence during Julian's lifetime including outbreaks in 1361–2 and 1369.⁸⁴ Significantly, however, while plague was commonly interpreted as punishment for human wickedness, inflicted by an angry, vengeful God, Julian's text promotes the image of a nurturing, maternal God; the narrator emphasises that, even in a world seemingly poised on the brink of destruction, 'al shal be wel, and al manner of thyng shal be wele'.⁸⁵ Some six hundred years after Julian received her revelations, Jarman found comfort in this response to apocalyptic-seeming times, quoting lines from the mystic in a diary entry for December 1989, just a few days before the third anniversary of his HIV test:

Julian says *It is today domysday with me, oh dereworthy moder*. I sing myself to the bookshops, mind full of the Middle Ages ... Everything I perceive makes a

song, everything I see saddens the eye. Behind these everyday jottings—the sweetness of a boy’s smile. Into my mind comes the picture of a blood red camellia displaced in the February twilight.

*Grete dropis of blode, in this shewing countless raindrops fall so thick no man may number them with bodily witte.*⁸⁶

The words recycled from Julian’s *Revelation*, including imagery of ‘doomsday’ addressed to God as ‘mother’ and of blood dripping onto Christ’s head like a deluge of rain, preface Jarman’s reflection that: ‘For years the Middle Ages have formed the paradise of my imagination ... the blisse that unlocks ... something subterranean, like the seaweed and coral that floats in the arcades of a jewelled reliquary’.⁸⁷ What Jarman takes from Julian’s text is a reassuringly homely image of falling rain, which, while undoubtedly melancholic in its appropriation as a metaphor of intense Christological suffering, releases in Jarman’s mind a deluge of further memories and associations. This medieval woman’s *Revelation* thus provided Jarman with a critical resource to rethink his own encounters with perceived apocalypse. Julian’s voice, contemplated against the backdrop of the sounds emitted by a modern household appliance, gave him human succour in the face of encounters with events conceived in his own time as a harbinger of doom.

My final example, *The Ruin*, appears uniquely in a tenth-century anthology of Old English poetry known as the Exeter Book. The poem’s speaker begins by meditating on the glory of a fallen city, its buildings crumbling into ruin. The narrator then conjures a vision of the city’s and its onetime inhabitants’ former glories, its bright halls and bathhouses full of ‘mondrēama’ [human pleasures] and ‘hereswēg’ [sounds of war], which have subsequently succumbed to the vicissitudes of ‘wyrd’ [fate]:

Crungon walo wīde, cwōman wōldagas,
swylt eall fornōm secgrōfra wera;
wurdon hyra wīgsteal wēstenstaþolas,
brosnade burgsteall. Bētend crungon,
hergas tō hrūsan.
[Slaughter was widespread, pestilence was rife,
And death took all those valiant men away.
The martial halls became deserted places,
The city crumbled, its repairers fell,
Its armies to the earth.]⁸⁸

The quoted passage, from an edition and translation of the poem that Jarman owned, speaks of the role played by ‘wyrd’ or fate in extinguishing human splendour. In the late 1980s, following his HIV diagnosis, Jarman had considered making a film based on *The Ruin* or *The Wanderer*. The latter, another poem whose sole witness is the Exeter Book, shares with *The Ruin* an investment in the meanings to be extracted from a world laid waste; both works are centrally concerned with the motif of fate. In a 1992 diary entry, Jarman contemplated how this concept, as filtered through the prism of early medieval poetry, provided him with a framework for comprehending his illness. Reflecting on a trip to St Bartholomew’s Hospital in London to receive HIV medication via a drip, he

recalls being ‘haunted by memories from *The Ruin* and other Anglo-Saxon poems, fate is the strongest, fate, fated. I resign myself to my fate, even blind fate’.⁸⁹ Similar words turn up again in a poem incorporated into the narration of *Blue*, which presents HIV infection as something to be endured not conquered.⁹⁰ Underpinning these statements is *The Ruin* poet’s allusion to devastating ‘wōldagas’ [days of pestilence], a tragedy that takes the lives of ‘secgrōfra’ [valiant men]. As already discussed, coverage of AIDS in the British media had initially identified the syndrome as a ‘gay plague’, as if its cause were somehow homosexuality. Responding to these allegations by repositioning them within the frame of Old English poetry, Jarman categorically rejected representations of gay men as culpable plague carriers. Setting aside apocalyptic characterisations of AIDS as a manifestation of moral as well as physical contagion, an idea that also arguably finds a parallel in interpretations of Sodom’s destruction as a punishment for sexual sin, the filmmaker attributed the sufferings he experienced to fate alone.

The Ruin centres on an apocalyptic vision of a city laid waste and emptied of inhabitants. Depictions of devastated urban landscapes similarly loomed large in films such as *The Last of England* or indeed, in biblical texts such as John’s Apocalypse and the Sodom story. Ultimately, however, as Jarman’s interest in medieval literature demonstrates, there was also a reparative dimension to his engagement with such imagery. For, as I have already hinted, Jarman’s encounters with ruins might aptly be described as melancholic.⁹¹ Typically, in psychoanalysis, melancholia is defined as a state of suspended mourning in which the grieving subject refuses to give up on the lost object. Characterised by Freud as an unconscious and generally pathological process, it contrasts with ostensibly more healthy modes of mourning and letting go.⁹² In an analysis of queer ecological responses to loss, however, the environmentalist Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands has hailed Jarman as an example of an artist who, especially through his engagements with gardens and garden history, deliberately refused to ‘get over’ the multiple losses he experienced.⁹³ Insistently maintaining his grasp of the lost objects for which he grieved, Jarman endeavoured instead, through his various artistic and horticultural pursuits, to highlight the generative potential that can be found even in hostile environments. This essentially ecological project extended to the cultivation of queer lives and sexualities, to their remembering and reanimation in the face of impending threats and the compulsion to forget.

The seaside garden Jarman created in Dungeness explicitly mobilised these strategies (Fig. 18). Planted in a seemingly barren setting, an expanse of shingle—not dissimilar to the Dead Sea shoreline in Hunt’s painting of *The Scapegoat*—that has often been described as Britain’s only desert, the garden nonetheless teems with vital signs. The inanimate objects positioned within its porous boundaries—sculptures created from pieces of driftwood and rusted metal washed up on the beach, or pebbles arranged in shapes and patterns (Fig. 17)—were conceived, in the first instance, as memorials: reminders of recently departed friends, experiences and sensations. As Jarman remarked

in one of his journals, ‘each stone has a life to tell’.⁹⁴ Comparable to the inhospitable environment at Dungeness, HIV attacks creativity, breeding melancholy. Yet the artist’s various gardening and other creative projects, especially towards the end of his life, can be interpreted as an outgrowth of his responses to the virus. They signalled the lingering presence of a life in ruins.⁹⁵

This, then, was Derek Jarman’s revelation. His responses to media representations of AIDS were filtered, in part, through the lens of medieval texts, which provided him with a vocabulary for resisting the dominant apocalyptic mode whereby a medical condition ended up being reconceived as a punishment for immorality. Moreover, the Middle Ages represented, as he puts it, ‘the paradise of his imagination’, implying that for the artist heaven consisted not in sweeping away the old but in living with and in history. Jarman’s response to the Sodom story similarly challenged apocalyptic readings that treated the city’s decimation by fire and brimstone as a prefiguration of the world’s destruction at the end of time. Instead of simply wallowing in the imagery of doom that such biblical texts engendered, Jarman viewed a work such as *The Last of England* as a ‘healing fiction’. And the Book of Revelation itself became, in Jarman’s hands, a resource for imagining survival, living *with* experiences of loss and pain that cannot be simply wiped away.

This essay partly draws on research conducted at Prospect Cottage between 2014 and 2017. Keith Collins, Derek Jarman’s companion and carer in his final years, kindly granted me access to the library and archive there. I was also accompanied on my first visit to Prospect Cottage by Roger Cook, a contemporary of Jarman’s who appeared in some of his late films and whose subsequent insights and encouragement proved invaluable to my research. Sadly, Keith passed away in 2018 and Roger in 2021 and this article is dedicated to their respective memories.

1. Gray Watson, ‘An Archaeology of Soul’, in Roger Wollen (ed.), *Derek Jarman: A Portrait* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), p. 43.
2. Roger Cook, in an obituary in *Art Monthly* 174 (March 1994), characterises Jarman as a Blakean figure who ‘identified the ecstasy of human sexuality with freedom and protested its bondage’ (p. 34). The library at Prospect Cottage includes modern editions of Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The Book of Urizen*, as well as several studies of the artist, which Jarman mainly acquired around 1980. For Jarman’s broader engagement with the work of Blake, see Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker, *Radical Blake: Afterlife and Influence from 1827* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 84–7; Mark Douglas, ‘Queer Bedfellows: William Blake and Derek Jarman’, in Steve Clark and Jason Whittaker (eds.), *Blake, Modernity and Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 113–26; Michael O’Pray, *Derek Jarman: Dreams of England* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), p. 12.
3. All biblical quotations are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments. Catholic Edition* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1966), an edition of the text that Jarman used and owned.
4. Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955).
5. John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality: Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 4 n3, 93–7.
6. Notably Jarman draws on Boswell’s scholarship in *Queer Edward II*, the companion volume to his film of Marlowe’s play *Edward II* which charts the downfall of the eponymous medieval king. See further Robert Mills, *Derek Jarman’s Medieval Modern* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2018), pp. 15–16, 169, 182 n27.
7. Derek Jarman, *At Your Own Risk: A Saint’s Testament*, ed. Michael Christie (London: Vintage, 1993), p. 4. See also Derek Jarman, *Modern Nature: The Journals of Derek Jarman* (London: Century, 1991; repr. London: Vintage, 1992), p. 239, comparing the Church of England to the inhospitality of Sodom.
8. See above n3.
9. Valerie Andrews, Robert Bosnak and Karen Walter Goodwin (eds.), *Facing Apocalypse* (Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1987), p. 1 (italics in the original). Jarman acquired the book in December 1987.
10. Jim Ellis, *Derek Jarman’s Angelic Conversations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 67. See also Steven Dillon, *Derek Jarman and Lyric Film: The Mirror and the Sea* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), pp. 74–81.
11. Derek Jarman and Lee Drysdale, ‘Neutron’ (1983), in Derek Jarman, *Up in the Air: Collected Film Scripts* (London: Vintage, 1996), pp. 145–82. See also Tony Peake, *Derek Jarman* (London: Little, Brown and Co., 1999; repr. London: Abacus, 2001), pp. 291–6, from which the quoted phrase is drawn; Dillon, *Derek Jarman and Lyric Film*, pp. 84–8; and, on the Jung’s *Aeon* and the Book of Revelation as sources of inspiration, Derek Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 182.
12. Jarman and Lee Drysdale, ‘Neutron’, p. 182. As he acknowledges in *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 184, however, Jarman was ‘never completely satisfied’ with the film’s ending. On *Bob-Up-a-Down*, see further Mills, *Derek Jarman’s Medieval Modern*, pp. 17–19, 42–3.
13. My analysis of the *GBH* series is based on viewing several of the paintings when they featured in an exhibition at Void Gallery, Derry, ‘The Last of England’ (15 November 2019 to 18 January 2020). I have also benefited from photographs and a condition report supplied by Vic Allen, arts director of the Dean Clough complex in Halifax, where the paintings were on long-term loan between the mid-1990s and c.2013.
14. Peake, *Derek Jarman*, p. 318.
15. On the latter, see Raphael Samuel, ‘Mrs Thatcher’s Return to Victorian Values’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 78 (1992): pp. 9–29.
16. Science and Security Board, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 2021 Doomsday Clock Statement, ‘This is your COVID wake-up call: It is 100 seconds to midnight’, accessed 16 September 2021, <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/>. In 1984, the Clock was set at three minutes to midnight.
17. It is beyond the scope of the present essay to address Jarman’s ecological sensibility in greater depth, but it exerts a noteworthy presence also in his journals and published writings, from the threat of nuclear power, as embodied in the reactors at Dungeness and the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, to the blighting of the landscape through insensitive development. See, e.g., *Kicking the Pricks*, p.130 (reproducing a photograph of a nuclear weapon test in 1953, identified as featuring Jarman’s own father), p. 136 (on the destruction of the landscape through commercialisation and its transformation into ‘heritage’) and p. 239 (on the power stations at Dungeness, Chernobyl and the Hinckley Point reactors). Late large-scale paintings such as *Oh Zone* and *Acid Rain*, both from 1992, were also prompted by Jarman’s awareness of the effects of climate change on his activities as a gardener.
18. William Blake, ‘The Ancient of Days’ (1794). Multiple copies of the etching exist but for an example, see Copy D, plate 1, in the British Museum (1859,0625.72), reproduced at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1859-0625-72. The palette of works in the *GBH* series also echoes Blake’s painting *Satan Calling Up His Legions*, c.1800–1805, in the collection of Petworth House, West Sussex, which illustrates a scene from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.
19. Michael Charlesworth, *Derek Jarman* (London: Reaktion, 2011), pp. 94–101. As well as linking to the Hereford *mapa mundi*, Charlesworth also discusses the Blakean resonances.
20. John Roberts, ‘Painting the Apocalypse’, *Art Monthly* 75 (April 1984): p. 7, reprinted in *Afterimage* 12 (1985): pp. 37–8. Roberts also compares what he interprets as a ‘large missile sight circle’ to a photomontage by Peter Kennard (presumably *Under the Glass*, 1980) in which a map of Britain is anatomised through the lens of a magnifying glass.
21. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 190, first published as *The Last*

- of *England* (London: Constable, 1987), discussing Böcklin's *Die Toteninsel* [Isle of the Dead], several versions of which were painted between 1880 and 1901.
22. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 202. Edgar Allan Poe, 'The City in the Sea' (1845), in T. O. Mabbott, *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, volume 1: *Poems* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), pp. 196–204; an earlier version of the poem had been published in 1831 as 'The Doomed City'.
 23. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 202.
 24. H. G. Cocks, *Visions of Sodom: Religion, Homoerotic Desire, and the End of the World in England, c.1550–1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), pp. 202–35, citing F. De Saulcy, *Narrative of a Journey Round the Dead Sea and in the Bible Lands in 1850 and 1851*, 2 vols, trans. Edward de Warren (London: Richard Bentley, 1853).
 25. Cocks, *Visions of Sodom*, pp. 232–5; Dominic Janes, *Picturing the Closet: Male Secrecy and Homosexual Visibility in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 87–94.
 26. De Saulcy, *Narrative*, p. 473.
 27. William Holman Hunt, journal entry for November 1854, quoted in Carol Jacobi, *William Holman Hunt: Painter, Painting, Paint* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 51–2. See also Tom Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998; rev. edn., 2012), pp. 140–42.
 28. See, for instance, a recent statement on the web pages of *The Modern House* that 'the phrase "post-apocalyptic" and Dungeness go together like fish and chips', accessed 9 April 2021, <https://www.themodernhouse.com/journal/a-residents-guide-to-dungeness>.
 29. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, pp. 190, 193, discussing Ford Madox Brown, *The Last of England*, 1850s, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.
 30. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 164.
 31. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 166. About an hour into Jarman's *The Last of England*, the soundtrack also incorporates news coverage referring to James Anderton alongside references to Jesus and snippets of what appears to be evangelical preaching.
 32. Debate on second reading of Local Government Act 1986 (Amendment) Bill, published in *Lords Hansard* 483 (18 December 1986), columns 310–38, accessed 14 April 2021, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1986/dec/18/local-government-act-1986-amendment-bill>.
 33. *Lords Hansard* 483, col. 310.
 34. *Lords Hansard* 483, col. 325.
 35. Another of the film's working titles, *Victorian Values*, which shares its title with the inscription on the 1986 work *Grievous Bodily Harm*, reproduced as Figure 3, similarly conveyed perceived links between the Thatcherite state and ideas of moral crisis. See Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p.190; and, for an overview of the moral and religious dimensions of Thatcherism, Matthew Grimley, 'Thatcherism, Morality and Religion', in Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders (eds.), *Making Thatcher's Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 78–94.
 36. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, pp. 16–17; Peake, *Derek Jarman*, p. 376–8.
 37. A reference to Thatcher's re-election campaign in summer 1987.
 38. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, pp. 226, 229. The poem continues for another ninety-nine lines after those quoted.
 39. Thomas L. Long, *AIDS and American Apocalypticism: The Cultural Semiotics of an Epidemic* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), esp. pp. 1–21.
 40. Quoted in Long, *AIDS and American Apocalypticism*, p. 8.
 41. Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media* (London: Methuen, 1987), p. 8.
 42. Watney, *Policing Desire* (1987), p. 49.
 43. Simon Watney, *Policing Desire: Pornography, Aids and the Media*, 3rd ed. (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 156.
 44. Simon Watney, *Policing Desire*, 3rd ed. (1997), pp. 151,

156. In another context, Watney also observes how the spectacle of AIDS was being 'stage-managed as a sensational didactic pageant', a dynamic which both fuelled the apocalyptic tone of media discourse and rendered AIDS utterly banal through its appropriation as a tabloid staple, designed to sell newspapers, and as a rallying point for politicians looking to preserve 'family values' from the contagion of social, cultural and sexual difference. See Watney, 'The Spectacle of AIDS', in Douglas Crimp (ed.), *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism*, special issue of *October* 43 (Winter, 1987): p. 80. On representations of AIDS as apocalypse, see further Peter Dickinson, "'Go-go Dancing on the Brink of the Apocalypse": Representing AIDS. An Essay in Seven Epigraphs', in Richard Dellamora (ed.), *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp. 219–40.
45. Derek Jarman speaking in 1989, quoted in Karim Rehmani-White, 'Third Eye Centre Glasgow 1989', in Seán Kissane and Karim Rehmani-White (ed.), *Derek Jarman Protest!* (London: Thames & Hudson; Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2020), p. 207. On the Glasgow show, see also Melissa Larnier (ed.), *Derek Jarman: Brutal Beauty*, exh. cat., curated by Isaac Julien (London: Koenig Books/Serpentine Gallery, 2008), pp. 71, 74–5.
46. For more on Jarman's techniques in the *Queer* and *Eril Queen* series and the collaborative process of the paintings' creation, see Joanna Shephard, 'Painting on Borrowed Time: Jarman's Media and Techniques', in Kissane and Rehmani-White, *Derek Jarman Protest!*, pp. 96–9.
47. On the Warhol/Twombly connections and Jarman's subversion of modernist aesthetics in this and related paintings, see further Chris Townsend, *Art and Death* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), pp. 91–5.
48. Jarman, *At Your Own Risk*, p. 111.
49. Derek Jarman, *Queer Edward II* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), pp. 104–5.
50. The education sequence also appears earlier in the film with different backdrops. On apocalyptic themes in *The Garden*, see also Stephen Carr, 'Doing Queer Theology in *The Garden*: Derek Jarman and Christianity', *Theology and Sexuality* 8 (1998): pp. 20–24.
51. Anthony John Kinik, "'That Unbearable Recurring Apocalyptic Nightmare": Crisis and Apocalyptic Visions in British Film, 1987–1994' (MA dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1997), pp. 92–4, accessed 19 September 2019, <https://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0088193>.
52. Derek Jarman, *Blue: Text of a Film by Derek Jarman* (London: Channel 4 Television and BBC Radio 3, 1993), pp. 11–12; Derek Jarman, *Chroma: A Book of Colour—June '93* (London: Century, 1994), p. 112.
53. Jarman, *Blue*, p. 26; Jarman, *Chroma*, p. 121–2.
54. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 17. See also Peake, *Derek Jarman*, pp. 376–7.
55. For a useful recent account of Jarman's efforts to foreground human perseverance in *The Last of England* against a backdrop of ruination, see Francesca Balboni, 'Burning Through: Derek Jarman's Realism in *The Last of England* (1987)', *Oxford Art Journal* 42:2 (2019): pp. 217–31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxartj/kyz003>; Balboni discusses Swinton's mourning bride scene, with its Diamanda Galás soundtrack, at p. 229.
56. Hunt also had *The Scapegoat* framed with another biblical quotation: 'Surely he hath borne our Griefs and carried our Sorrows; Yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted' (Isaiah 53.4). These quotations are from the King James Version.
57. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 188. For a more detailed analysis of the reparative dimensions to Jarman's post-apocalyptic vision in *The Last of England*, see Avery Slater, 'Apocalyptic Commons: Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*', *Transformations: Journal of Media and Culture* 28 (2016), accessed 19 September 2019, http://www.transformationsjournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Slater_Transformations28.pdf.

58. Rowland Wymer, *Derek Jarman* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 112. The footage of the Brixton riot was filmed by Richard Heslop, one of Jarman's camera operators on *The Last of England*, as noted in the DVD commentary.
59. Kinik, 'The Unbearable Recurring Apocalyptic Nightmare', p. 88. On the significance of fire in *The Last of England*, see also Peter Wollen, 'The Last New Wave: Modernism in the British Films of the Thatcher Era', in Lester D. Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*, 2nd ed. (London: Wallflower Press, 2006), p. 139.
60. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 207.
61. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, pp. 55, 223. Jarman cites in this context Turner's *The Burning of the Houses of Parliament*, documenting the catastrophic fire that destroyed much of the Palace of Westminster in 1834. Imagery in *The Last of England* of raging fires or candescent skies superimposed over urban landscapes seems deliberately to echo the appearance of Turner's painting.
62. The track's title is inspired by the first line of *Artémis*, a poem by the nineteenth-century French poet Gerard de Nerval in which the narrator laments the death of his beloved while lauding 'La sainte de l'abîme' (the saint of the abyss); this poem also provides the inspiration for the title of this instalment in Galás's *Masque of the Red Death* album trilogy.
63. For his biting critique of the ideology of 'Heterosoc', see especially Jarman's *At Your Own Risk*.
64. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 203.
65. For other analyses of the apocalyptic dimensions to these scenes, see also Ian Christie, 'Celluloid Apocalypse', in Frances Carey (ed.), *The Apocalypse and the Shape of Things to Come* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), p. 338; Kinik, 'The Unbearable Recurring Apocalyptic Nightmare', pp. 85–9; and an insightful review by Jim Clark, posted to his *LGBTQ+ Literature and Film* site (published 8 February 2006; revised 19 October 2020), accessed 14 April 2021, <https://jclarkmedia.com/jarman06>.
66. Jarman reflects on the film's use of sites in London's 'Millenium [sic] Wharf' in *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 200; other scenes of urban decay were filmed on a housing estate in Liverpool. A month after Jarman captured footage in Millennium Mills for *The Last of England*, as discussed by James Mackay on the DVD commentary, the same location was also chosen as the setting for his medieval-themed video for the song 'It's a Sin' by Pet Shop Boys.
67. In *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 207, Jarman suggests that Leigh's dress echoes that of the 'heretic' garrotted in Goya's *Disasters of War* etchings, presumably a reference to plates 34 and 35 representing executed prisoners. The pointed hat itself, however, was more likely inspired by plates 23 and 24 in Goya's *Los Caprichos* series, or possibly his painting *The Inquisition Tribunal*, 1812–19. A still from *The Last of England* representing Leigh in his 'heretic's hat' is reproduced in *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 183. In the DVD commentary for *The Last of England*, the producer James Mackay also cites Goya's black paintings as an influence on the film, Jarman having seen the works in Madrid a year before the film's completion. The conical hat also reappears as a dunce cap in Jarman's *The Garden*, traditionally used as a disciplinary tool in schools, as seen in Figure 11.
68. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 196.
69. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 68. The context for the remark is a reflection on his earlier film of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, featuring Elisabeth Welch performing a rendition of the 1930s torch song 'Stormy Weather'. Asking 'where did the refugees of *The Last of England* go?', he reflects, 'Should there be a great calm, after the stormy weather? I think of the film taking place after *The Tempest*. Did Miranda's marriage solve the world's problems?'.
70. Resonating with this interpretation is Jarman's comment, in *Kicking the Pricks*, p. 203, that Swinton's dancing bride is

- a figure who 'projects and protects love's idyll, a mother, my mother'.
71. Peake, *Derek Jarman*, p. 71.
 72. See, for instance, Watson, 'An Archaeology of Soul', p. 44, commenting that 'Jarman's mythicization of England was rooted in a very real patriotism, almost a form of cultural High Toryism, which was unexpected in the light of some of his other attitudes'.
 73. The quoted phrases are from Derek Jarman, with photographs by Gerald Incandela, *Derek Jarman's Caravaggio* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p. 45.
 74. Jarman, *Derek Jarman's Caravaggio*, p. 44. I discuss these ideas more extensively in *Derek Jarman's Medieval Modern*.
 75. During an early and ultimately unsuccessful bid to be elected as a Conservative member of parliament in the 1950 General Election, decades before becoming Prime Minister, Thatcher announced to would-be voters that it was 'time to make Great Britain great again'. For a concise but compelling analysis of this slogan's political legacy, and the scapegoating rhetoric that underpins it, see Yascha Mounk, 'Make Britain Great Again, Again', *New America Weekly*, 10 March 2016, accessed 16 September 2021, <https://www.newamerica.org/weekly/make-britain-great-again-again>.
 76. See further Grimley, 'Thatcherism, Morality and Religion'.
 77. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).
 78. Constance B. Hieatt (ed. and trans.), *Beowulf and Other Old English Poems* (New York: Bantam, 1983), p. 5. Jarman also owned Michael Alexander (trans.), *Beowulf: A Verse Translation* (London: Penguin, 1984).
 79. Jarman, *Kicking the Pricks*, pp. 209–11.
 80. Mills, *Derek Jarman's Medieval Modern*, pp. 117–21. In this longer analysis I also discuss a connection with T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, which may account for Jarman's transposition of Bede's sparrow into a swallow and which provides a further context for the film's engagement with apocalyptic themes. For another take on Jarman's engagement with *Beowulf* and other medieval literary texts, see Jodi-Anne George, 'Derek Jarman, Trance Films and Medieval Art Cinema', in Paul Newland and Brian Hoyle (ed.), *British Art Cinema: Creativity, Experimentation and Innovation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp. 324–52.
 81. Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. D. H. Farmer, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 129–30. Jarman acquired a copy of the 1968 edition of this translation of Bede's text in 1978.
 82. Mark W. Turner, 'Derek Jarman in the Docklands: *The Last of England* and Thatcher's London', in John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (ed.), *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 77–97.
 83. Jarman, *Modern Nature*, p. 207. Jarman owned the following edition of Julian's text: *A Revelation of Love*, ed. Marion Glasscoe, Exeter Medieval English Texts (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1976; rev. edn., 1986).
 84. Studies that evoke plague as a relevant context for understanding Julian's *Revelation* include John Aberth, *A Knight at the Movies: Medieval History on Film* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 213; and Janina Ramirez, *Julian of Norwich: A Very Brief History* (London: SPCK, 2016). Interestingly, while Julian's text makes no explicit mention of plague as such, a spate of religiously motivated blog posts published in spring 2020, as the Covid-19 virus took hold, discovered in Julian's text lessons on how to survive a pandemic. See, e.g., Carl McColman, 'Advice for Surviving a Pandemic from Julian of Norwich', *Anamchara* website (16 March 2020), accessed 9 April 2021, <https://www.anamchara.com/advice-for-surviving-a-pandemic-from-julian-of-norwich>.
 85. Julian, *Revelation*, ch. 27, ed. Glasscoe, p. 38.
 86. Jarman, *Modern Nature*, p. 207 (italics original), paraphrasing Julian, *Revelation*, ch. 7, ed. Glasscoe, pp. 10–11.
 87. Jarman, *Modern Nature*, p. 207.

88. *The Ruin*, lines 21–29, in Richard Hamer (ed. and trans.), *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 26–7.

89. Derek Jarman, *Smiling in Slow Motion*, ed. Keith Collins (London: Century, 2000; repr. London: Vintage, 2001), p. 191.

90. Jarman, *Blue*, p. 9; Jarman, *Chroma*, 111.

91. Mills, *Derek Jarman’s Medieval Modern*, pp. 124–9.

92. Sigmund Freud, ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (1917), in James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14 (1914–16): *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works* (London: Hogarth Press, 1957), pp. 237–58.

93. Catriona Mortimer Sandilands, ‘Melancholy Natures, Queer Ecologies’, in Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson (eds.), *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 331–58.

94. Jarman, *Modern Nature*, p. 178.

95. A few passages in the preceding paragraphs are adapted from Mills, *Derek Jarman’s Medieval Modern*, pp. 102–3, 125–6. I have purposefully reproduced contemporary photographs of the Prospect Cottage garden, rather than the images produced in Jarman’s lifetime, as a means of capturing the site’s lingering vitality and significance as a site of queer memory and history.

Apocalypse, Now
Queer hope for the end of the world
and Dew Kim’s *Succulent Humans*

ANDREW CUMMINGS

Introduction

At the Seoul Queer Culture Festival (SQCF), held annually since the year 2000, anti-LGBTQ+ protestors often hold signs emblazoned with apocalyptic slogans such as ‘same-sex love spells the collapse of the nation’.¹ Formerly the Korea Queer Culture Festival, SQCF has seen an explosion in numbers of attendees in the last decade and is now accompanied by events in other cities and regions across South Korea (henceforth Korea), such as Incheon and Jeju.² There has undoubtedly been an increase in the visibility and awareness of queer people and politics in the country—that is, people engaging in non-normative sexual practices or expressions of gender.³ But in tandem with this shift, the Protestant Right has emerged as a loud and powerful anti-LGBT minority.⁴ In 2007, under pressure from conservative Christian groups, the Ministry of Justice removed ‘sexual orientation’ from the Korean Human Rights Bill, effectively decriminalising discrimination on the basis of sexuality.⁵ Their slogans at protests like the SQCF draw upon a longer history in Korea of framing homosexuality as a threat to national security, external to the national body whose integrity it threatens. As historian Todd A. Henry writes, discrimination against sexual and gender nonconformity in Korea ‘extend[s] far beyond the stigmatizing confines of one’s biological family, transforming individual expressions of non-normative sexuality or gender variance into national threats that purportedly demand vigilant surveillance, repeated punishment, and even further marginalization’.⁶

Apocalyptic pronouncements about queer people—in particular, gay men—can also be found online. Over on Ilbe, the country’s prime right-wing forum, one user lists their ‘legitimate reasons to oppose same-sex love’, observing that queer people, and especially those who engage in anal sex, are a ‘zombie force that is driving the nation to ruin’ and an evolutionary anomaly that ‘disrupts the order of humanity’.⁷ Extreme conservative narratives are the stuff of sci-fi horror, framing homosexuality as dirty, diseased, and antithetical to the ‘natural’ human condition. These narratives posit that gay men, especially those perceived as effeminate, have contracted an anus worm with a voracious homosexual appetite (and indeed, a common slur for gay men is *ttongkekoch’ung*, or ‘anus worm’). For example, reporting on the activities of Hong Seok-cheon—one of South Korea’s first publicly gay celebrities who came out in the early 2000s and consequently retired from public appearances for almost a decade—one blog user wrote in 2017 that Hong ‘contracted an anal worm at the age of 11, before infecting over three hundred more people’.⁸ For the socially conservative, non-normative expressions of sexuality and gender threaten to unravel the fabric of the national, social, and even human orders. No wonder, then, that queer people in Korea and elsewhere have often found themselves described in apocalyptic terms, figured as less-than-human beings with depraved desires which tease apart the threads of civilisation as it is known and, if these beings are left to flourish, risk shredding it apart completely. As this chapter contends, implicit in this



Fig. 1
Dew Kim. *A Succulent Human* (2018). Sponge, polyurethane foam, artificial plants, silicone, collected toys, sand, single channel film, 1m 18s (looping), dimensions variable. Installation view. Art Space Grove, Seoul, South Korea. Image courtesy of the artist.

apocalyptic homophobia is a utopia of the ideal human body as bounded, discrete, and sovereign, and the monstrous queer body as open, porous, and intimately enmeshed with non-human existence.

What, though, might the apocalypse look like from the perspective of a *ttongkekoch’ung*, a zombie, a sexual deviant? This chapter focuses on one example of a queer response to conservative framings of homosexuality as an apocalyptic threat: *Succulent Humans*, a collection of works by the Korean contemporary artist Dew Kim (b. 1985, Korea). Kim has repeatedly described his practice in terms of queerness, for its critical engagement with norms of gender and desire and its often irreverent references to queer popular and sexual cultures, often focusing on the Korean context, specifically. His work has been displayed across Europe, South America, and Asia; more recently, he has exhibited in various institutions in Korea, where he is based, including Seoul’s Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art.⁹ *Succulent Humans*—his first solo exhibition—marks his most pronounced engagement with the apocalypse through the lens of ecology. In the exhibition, the end of life on Earth and the accompanying breakdown of the social and ecological orders become the occasion for imagining the body and social relations beyond fixed and highly stratified categories of biology, gender, desire, and the human. The body of work consists of a foam landscape with pink sand spilling out from its side (Fig. 1); several glittering polyvinyl wall hangings, emblazoned with cartoons, photographs, and bursts of white (Figs. 2 and 3); an acrylate polymer island, shot through with neon lighting and housing a series of toy figurines, entitled *The Survivors* (Fig. 4); and layers of acrylate polymer arranged into the shape of a pelvis (Fig. 5). Artificial succulents that seem to be growing from ribs are nestled in glass planters, suspended from the gallery ceiling using translucent nets (Figs. 6 and 7). The

Fig. 2
Dew Kim. *Faster than a Kiss* (2018).
Digital printing
on polyvinyl
chloride, silicone
tubes, epoxy putty,
artificial plants,
digital printing
on wallpaper,
dimensions
variable. Installation
view. Art Space
Grove, Seoul,
South Korea. Image
courtesy of the
artist.



Fig. 3
Dew Kim. *Zero Gravity* (2018).
Digital printing
on polyvinyl
chloride, silicone
tubes, aluminium,
chains, dimensions
variable. Installation
view. Art Space
Grove, Seoul,
South Korea. Image
courtesy of the
artist.



eerie purple lighting, the wallpaper displaying a gloomy grey landscape, and the empty space opened up between the sculptures all make the gallery space appear desolate and cold (Fig. 4).

In the future envisioned in *Succulent Humans*, ecological destruction has muddled the borders between bodies, be they human or not; likewise, fixed and striated categories of sex, gender, and desire have also dissipated. In the exhibition's story, the last remaining humans are unable to reproduce as before, and survive only by bioengineering a new generation of post-gender plant-human hybrids, or 'succulent humans'. From a cisheteropatriarchal perspective, this future is monstrous, apocalyptic, and 'failed': rather than hoping for the successful reproduction or perfection of the existing social and biological order, the exhibition appears to fantasise about its end. Thus, in the narrative Kim writes which draws the exhibition's works together, environmental catastrophe and the accompanying breakdown of social life form the very foundation upon which a queerer world can be built. This chapter traces the ascendancy of the notion of the body, in tandem with the development of capitalist modernity in Korea, as autonomous, bounded, and sovereign. It then mobilises Paul B. Preciado's notion of a 'countersexual' queer utopia to examine the alternative, more fluid understanding of the body, its organs, and its orifices as displayed in *Succulent Humans*. In its proliferation of near-indecomposable materials such as silicone and plastic, the exhibition also foregrounds the body's porosity vis-à-vis its increasingly polluted environment. It playfully deploys and transforms tropes from eco-horror and the science-fictional grotesque which—as uncanny reminders of the body's permeability and plasticity, and of the instability of hierarchical categories such as male and female, human and non-human—would typically evoke fear and disgust. Thus, this chapter also explores the ecological implications of understanding the body as open and porous and asks how *Succulent Humans* intervenes in mainstream environmentalist discourses of pollution and toxicity. My conclusion examines how queer reimaginings of disastrous and monstrous futures might bolster us against the supposed doom of the apocalypse and its harbingers (queer people among them), or perhaps even carry us beyond this doom, by transcending fatalistic narratives of utopia versus apocalypse, life versus death, and 'us' versus 'them'.

Preciado's story of (counter)sexuality is avowedly 'Western', drawing upon philosophers and theorists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Michel Foucault, and Guy Hocquenghem; thus, this chapter begins by sketching a brief history of sexuality in Korea, focusing on its military modernity in the latter half of the twentieth century. This history includes the increased visibility of LGBTQ+ people in Korea, the more widespread awareness of LGBTQ+ issues, and the development of an LGBTQ+ movement, particularly since the 1990s. My sketch also explores historical connections between homosexuality, disease, and dirtiness in the Korean context, and suggests that modern discourses on homosexuality are underwritten by the notion of an ideal, bounded, sanitised body.

Fig. 4
Dew Kim. *Succulent Humans* (2018).
Installation view.
Art Space Grove,
Seoul, South Korea.
Image courtesy of
the artist.



Constructing the Modern Body in Twentieth Century Korea

During its colonisation by the Japanese from 1910 to 1945, the Korean Peninsula—not yet divided into North and South—witnessed the dissemination of novel knowledge concerning the body, gender norms, and hygiene.¹⁰ During this time, bodies were categorised, standardised, and differentiated in the service of colonial capitalist modernity. The Japanese state explicitly desired to emulate and adapt the Western model of development, Enlightenment, and modernisation, which, as philosopher Rosi Braidotti and others have argued, developed from Humanism.¹¹ At its centre, Braidotti continues, was the ideal of a ‘perfectly functional physical body’, modelled on ideals of (white) masculinity, heterosexuality, and health. Three points are significant when discussing the ‘perfectly functional physical body’ in the context of Korea’s colonial modernity. Firstly, men and women in Korea came to be defined in increasingly binary and biologically dimorphic terms. Ideals for male bodies focused on virility and strength; the ideal woman, meanwhile, was one who could reproduce, maintaining colonial capitalism and increasing Japan’s forces against its foes. Secondly, the male body became an icon of the healthy body, while the female body was consistently portrayed as unruly, the icon of illness, and the object of remedy and reform.¹² Finally, though traditional eastern medicine (*hanuibak*) continued to be practised and adapted, Western biomedicine and its various cures were essential in the colonial state’s construction, maintenance, and enforcement of bodily norms and ideals centring around reproductive heterosexuality.¹³ As the scholar of gender and sexuality Ed Cohen has argued, biomedicine constructs a ‘modern body’ limned by a ‘bellicose ideology’ which defines the organism ‘as a

Fig. 5
Dew Kim. *To Find the Missing Horn or Tail* (2018). Digital printing on acrylate polymer, 50 x 35 cm. Installation view. Art Space Grove, Seoul, South Korea. Image courtesy of the artist.



defensible interior which needs to protect itself ceaselessly from a hostile exterior’.¹⁴

As many scholars have noted, the norms and disciplinary mechanisms deployed by the Japanese Empire intensified during the postcolonial period in the newly-established Republic of Korea (or South Korea), and in particular during the three decades of authoritarian rule lasting from Park Chung-hee’s rise to power in 1963 until the first democratic election in 1988.¹⁵ Sociologist Seungsook Moon coins the notion of ‘militarised modernity’ to refer to the coexistence in Korea of Foucauldian disciplinary power and militarised violence against those who did not conform during the country’s formation as a modern, industrialised nation-state.¹⁶ The dynamics of Cold War politics meant that the South Korean state equated modernity with strengthening the military to protect the nation against its Northern communist aggressor.¹⁷ In its pursuit of its own modernity, the state constructed and mobilised its subjects as a unified people composed of *kungmin* (‘people of the state’), and interpellated them along rigid gendered and heteronormative grounds.¹⁸ This mobilisation selectively invoked and reshaped principles of neo-Confucian social relations which had been the state ideology from 1392 to 1910, especially the patriarchal family—and not the individual—as the base unit of society. Men were mobilised as ‘providers’, employed by the military to fulfil various roles in service of industrialisation; conscription was mandatory, and military service remains compulsory for men even today. Women, on the other hand, were mobilised as ‘reproducers’ or ‘breeders’, but also worked in factories, where their labour was marginalised.¹⁹ Though examples of non-normative sexual practices, intimacies, and expressions of gender can be found throughout Korean history, during the authoritarian era, images of the nation in popular culture began to explicitly disavow queer subjects to bolster the cisheteropatriarchal bases of anti-communist development.²⁰ Meanwhile,

Fig. 6
Dew Kim.
*Incubation
Experiment* (2018).
Ceramic, glass,
silicone tubes,
artificial plants,
sand, dimensions
variable. Installation
view. Art Space
Grove, Seoul,
South Korea. Image
courtesy of the
artist.



the state redoubled its attempts to intervene in and govern the bodies of its people through an extensive family planning programme (*kajok kyeboek*), including the mass distribution of new birth control technologies, knowledge about contraception, and the anti-abortion law.²¹ There were also anti-parasite initiatives (*kisaengch'ung pangmyŏl*), in which schoolchildren were required to send stool samples twice annually until 1995.²² The 'military model' for the body discussed by Cohen in the European context was bolstered by the dynamics of Cold War binary logic in militarised Korea, which relied on strategies of otherness and exteriority in its formation.²³ Thus, Korean bodies were increasingly considered as bounded, and in need of defending from infectious diseases and parasites, for the well-being of the nation. In the 1980s and early 1990s, women sex workers and gay men were the targets of anxieties relating to AIDS, coded as foreign and exterior to the nation: one scholar writes that the perception of gay men during this time was as 'AIDS-spreading aliens hiding in the dark'.²⁴

The decade immediately following the post-authoritarian period witnessed significant shifts in the ways that bodies were conceived, categorised, and organised, owing to the transition to democracy, accelerated globalisation, and advances in science and technology. First, civil society was revitalised; as Moon writes, Koreans moved from 'people of the state' towards 'citizens', 'willing to struggle and negotiate to obtain and protect rights and fulfil obligations' and 'able to redefine the substance of entitlements and obligations'.²⁵ Second, and in particular, since Korea hosted the Olympics in 1988 and eased restrictions on overseas travels for its citizens, there were the increased and uneven flows of people, ideas, and capital, known as globalisation. Importantly, the democracy (*minjung*) movement of the 1970s and 80s, the transition to democracy, neoliberal individualism, and globalisation all enabled the emergence

Fig. 7
Dew Kim. Detail
from *Incubation
Experiment*.



of a dedicated Women's Movement in Korea in the 1990s. Born out of the struggles over labour rights in the previous decades, the Women's Movement focused on the reduction of women's economic marginalisation.²⁶ Meanwhile, the enduring legacy of heteropatriarchal values and disciplinary mechanisms from the colonial and authoritarian periods meant that in the 1990s, as sociologist and cultural critic Seo Dong-Jin wrote at the time, 'homosexuality had no social existence', no presence in public discourse.²⁷ A small number of identity-based social and activist groups were established, including *Maum001*, *Ch'odonghoe*, *Ch'ingusai*, and *Kkirikkiri*.²⁸ These groups were moreover not connected to the Women's Movement, which at the time valorised the 'pure heterosexual woman' and positioned non-heterosexual women as abnormal.²⁹ The IMF crisis had lasting effects on the women's and (much more nascent) LGBTQ+ movements. 1997 witnessed the beginning of the IMF crisis and the mass layoffs of men, the traditional and legal 'family heads'. As many scholars have argued, this event heightened the sense of crisis felt among conservatives regarding gender, the family, and the nation's future, and has had enduring consequences for Korean society and queer politics. On the one hand, government-led economic and legislative restructuring revalorised what anthropologist Jesook Song calls 'heteronormative familism' as the basis of personal survival.³⁰ This included the passing of the 'Healthy Family Act' for the 'maintenance and development of healthy families'.³¹ On the other hand, LGBTQ+ activists responded with renewed vigour, organising the Queer Culture Festival and actions to raise awareness about the discrimination they face.³² A 'sexual politics of difference' also emerged in the Women's Movement, which began to display a wider recognition of the experiences of non-heterosexual women.³³

Today, cisheteropatriarchal norms continue to subordinate queer individuals and

Fig. 8
Dew Kim. *Analufu*
No. 33 (2018).
Digital printing on
paper, frame, 59 x
85 cm. Installation
view. Art Space
Grove, Seoul,
South Korea. Image
courtesy of the
artist.



communities, justified through the politics of national division. Notable examples that scholarship has spotlighted are the resident registration system and the military. Transgenderqueer scholar Ruin argues that the resident registration system—which took root during the reign of Park Chung-hee (1961–79) as a means of justifying violence against ‘anti-communist’ individuals but which became entangled in Korea’s systems of military conscription, labour mobilisation, family registration, and medical regulation (structured around dimorphic conceptions of biological sex), and which remains in place to this day—renders transgender and intersex Koreans as internal exiles in a post-authoritarian society that continues to define itself in rigid terms of anti-communist militarism and cisgender heteropatriarchy.³⁴ To this day, all men are required to undertake two years of military service, usually in their early twenties; transgender women who have chosen not to or who have yet to undergo gender confirmation surgery (that is, the majority of trans women conscripts, since they tend to be in their early twenties) are forced either to serve as men during their compulsory two-year conscription, or else need a ‘severe’ diagnosis of gender identity disorder, provided by a medical doctor.³⁵ Moreover, as Timothy Gitzen shows, those whose sexual practices and gender embodiments fail to conform to military norms suffer torment and persecution during mandatory military service, and even ‘pre-traumatic stress’.³⁶ This includes many cisgender gay men. Notably, in 2017, a top-ranking official encouraged his subordinates to infiltrate GPS-based gay dating apps to ‘out’ soldiers seeking same-sex encounters. A clause in the Korean military penal code was also used to imprison dozens of soldiers who had purportedly engaged in anal sex, even though they met partners when on leave and using off-base facilities.³⁷ As Henry summarises, then, ‘pursuing a gay life can still turn a soldier on his path to becoming a glorified citizen into a stigmatized criminal and

an enemy of the state’.³⁸

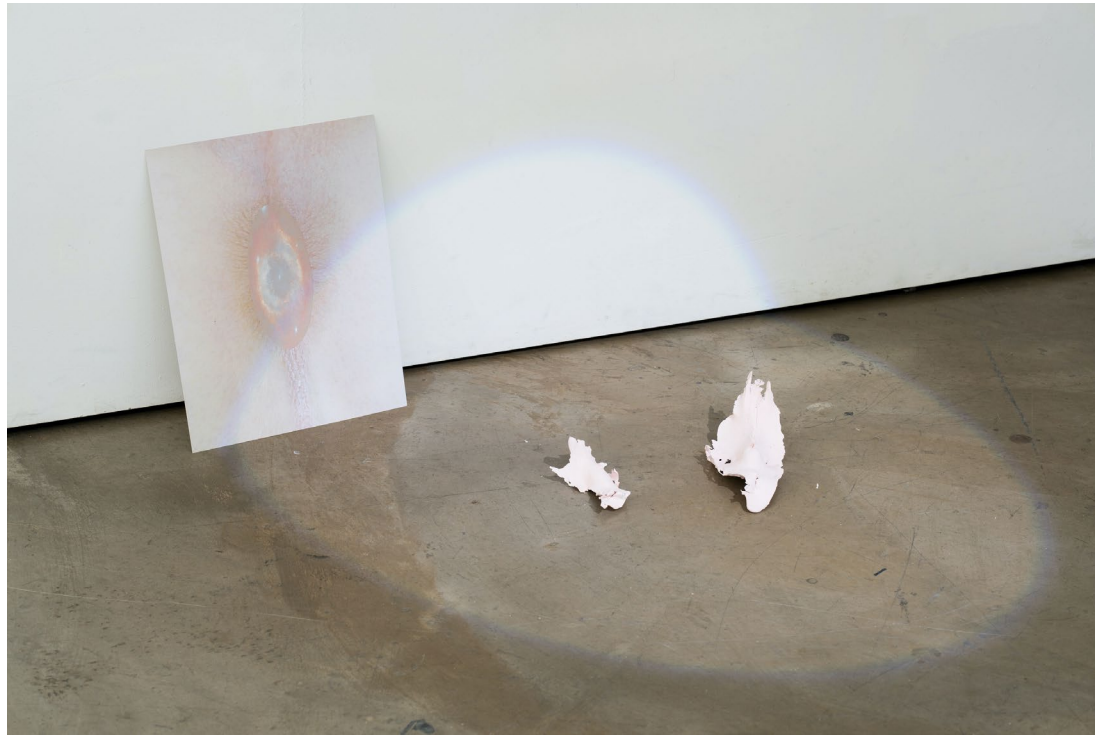
Thus, Korean socio-politics still foreground ‘healthy’, closed, individualised, heteronormative bodies and pathologise ‘defective’, queer, porous bodies and practices. Like several of Kim’s other works, *Succulent Humans* interrogates the parameters of success and failure that these biopolitics establish, pivoting particularly around the queer contexts that have arisen in the contemporary cultural moment in Korea and globally. The exhibition takes an apocalyptic scenario and transforms it into a queer utopia: here, the breakdown of the human body’s supposed sovereignty, the obsolescence of its reproductive capacities, and its subsequent entanglement with the nonhuman bodies of plants all offer the possibility of conceiving of the body and social relations beyond fixed and stratified categories of gender, desire, and the human.

Succulent Humans, Anal Utopia, and Phallic Apocalypse

In the same spirit of perversion that characterises *Succulent Humans*, I begin my analysis with the (rear) end: the image of the anus that depicts the survivors’ spaceship (Fig. 8). This image has a history in Kim’s work: it appeared in his 2017 installation *The Peach Blossom Land* (Fig. 9). The title of that installation is taken from a fifth-century Chinese fable, known in Korea as *murūngdowŏn*, about a man who squeezes through an orifice in a cave surrounded by peach trees and discovers a thriving community living in harmony on the other side. Teasing out the peach’s historical connections with paradise in Korean history, and its more recent associations with buttocks (via the ‘peach’ emoji), Kim’s exhibition *The Peach Blossom Land* playfully examines the subversive and utopian potential accorded to the anus by the Spanish philosopher Paul B. Preciado, whose work Kim recommends as further reading in his description of that exhibition.³⁹ I take the ‘upcycling’ of this anus in *Succulent Humans* as an invitation to use Preciado’s work to think through *Succulent Humans*, too, in particular, what Preciado has called an ‘anal’ or ‘countersexual politics’ in his writing over the last decade or so, in particular in his essay ‘Anal Terror’ (first published in Spanish in 2009) and his *Countersexual Manifesto* (first published in French in 2000).

Preciado posits sexuality as a ‘technology’ or ‘machinery’ which ‘prescribes the context in which the organs acquire their meaning (sexual relationships) and are properly used in accordance with their “nature”’.⁴⁰ In the Western context Preciado describes, ‘natural’ sexuality is reproductive and therefore heterosexual, and so the sex organs are the reproductive organs—the penis and the vagina—organised into a hierarchy. By the same token, other organs are understood as nonsexual, and erotic practices involving these organs (in particular the anus) are deviant or abject. Preciado’s playfully overwrought tale of the construction of the modern body—not dissimilar to Kim’s own storytelling—relates that the anus needed to be ‘close[d] up’ or ‘castrate[d]’ for the ‘honourable and healthy’ flow and expression of sexual energy. The bodies of women

Fig. 9
Dew Kim. *How Homo Sapiens Can Evolve* (2017). Digital printing on paper, acrylic acid, dimensions variable. Installation view. Art Space O, Seoul, South Korea. Image courtesy of the artist.



and queer men, moreover, are considered particularly deviant and in need of disciplining because of their openness.⁴¹ Preciado compares sexualities to languages: both are ‘complex systems of communication and reproduction of life’ and ‘historical constructs with common genealogies and biocultural inscriptions’. And ‘like languages, sexualities can be learned ... we can learn any other sexual language with a greater or lesser sense of alienation and strangeness, of joy and appropriation’.⁴² Preciado draws upon a Western history of sexuality shaped by particular psychoanalytic, medical and juridical discourses, among others. As this chapter has already demonstrated, heterosexual, reproductive sexuality was naturalised in Korea in the formation of ‘modern’ bodies during the twentieth century. Preciado looks to language as a reflection of the primacy of reproductive heterosexuality (in his case, Spanish). The Korean language also reflects this primacy, to the same extent that it does in Spanish: *Uri mal saem*, the largest Korean-language dictionary, defines the penis (*ŏmgŏng*) as ‘the male’s external reproductive organ’, while the vagina (*chil*) is ‘the female’s reproductive passageway’ that ‘receives the penis during intercourse’ and ‘becomes the route by which the child emerges during birth’.⁴³ Business as usual, then: the vagina is merely a receptacle for the comings and goings of the penis (and the child being born).

Preciado asserts that prevailing understandings of gender, sex, and sexuality—like many of the objects in Kim’s exhibition—are plastic: that is, they are artificial but also malleable. They are also prosthetic: again, artificial or constructed, but also organic, an extension of the body. Through what he has called an ‘anal politics’, Preciado invites us to estrange ourselves from predominant topographies of the body and its desires, to recognise these topographies as plastic and prosthetic, and to invent other prostheses or sexual technologies. Practising anal or countersexual politics means reclaiming as sexual

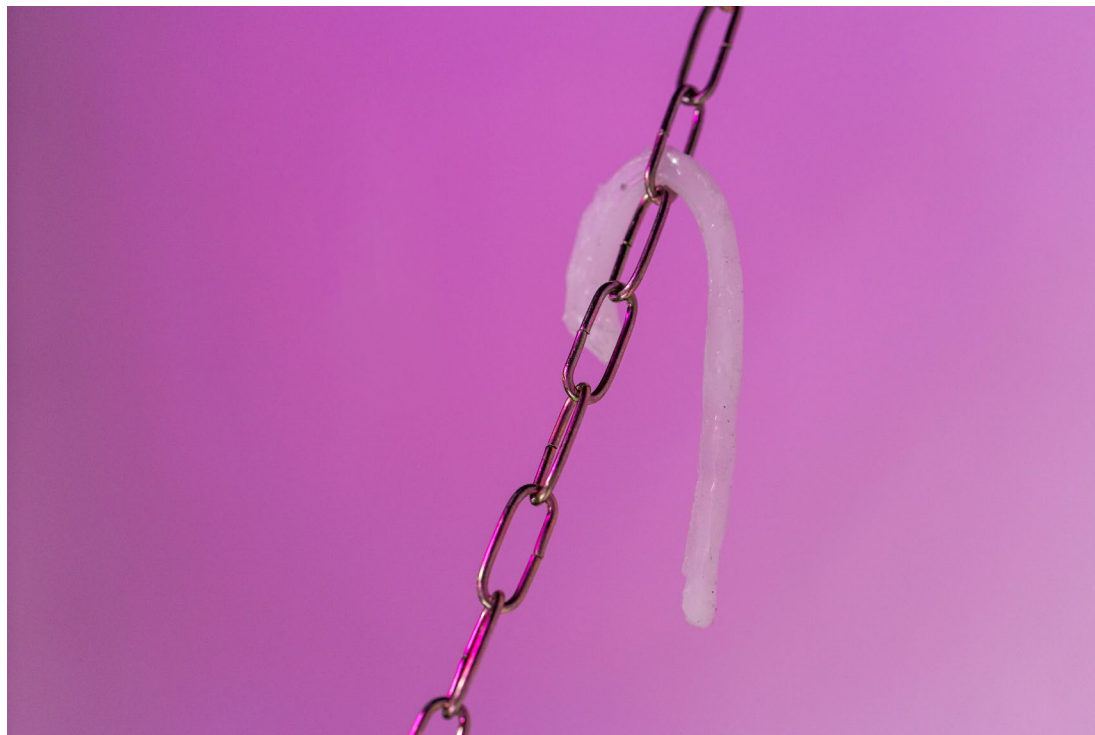


Fig. 10
Detail from *Zero Gravity*.

‘any organ (organic or inorganic) that has the capacity to channel the *potentia gaudendi* [orgasmic force] through a nervous system connecting a living body to its exteriority’.⁴⁴ It means acknowledging the body’s porosity, that is, its openness to penetration and sensual pleasure by means of various erogenous zones beyond the reproductive organs. The anus is especially useful for Preciado because it escapes the rhetoric of sexual difference—every body has one—and because it has historically been maligned, unlike the mouth, for example. Beyond this, sexual practices involving the anus allow for fluid and reversible sexual roles: anyone, regardless of their genitalia, can be a penetrator and a receptor. In short, the goal of an anal politics is the end of the social order predicated on phallocentrism.

Echoing Preciado, Kim has stated that he considers the work ‘a democratic symbol representing all regardless of sex and gender’, a ‘sexual communist symbol of public joy’, and ‘the symbol of the liquidity of power from behind and from below’.⁴⁵ In a knowing wink to Preciado, in *Succulent Humans* the anus is literally the vehicle for a community whose relations are not predicated primarily on heterosexual reproduction, nor, therefore, on fixed and striated categories for gender, sex and desire. The anus may represent the end of one kind of social order, but it is the beginning of another one. In the scenario that the exhibition imagines, the last surviving humans’ reproductive organs—the ‘natural’ sex organs—no longer function as such, and so the discursive scaffolding that designates these as the primary or only zones for pleasure is weakened. The interrogation of hegemonic technologies for understanding the body is sustained in the sculpture of a pelvis, which consists of several layers of acrylate polymer laid atop one another (Fig. 5). The sculpture can be likened to a Rorschach test, in which individuals are asked to identify images from an ink blot. The shadows the

Fig. 11
Detail from *Zero Gravity*.



acrylate polymer casts on the wall obfuscate the sculpture's shapes, layers, and lines, redoubling the effects of illusion and estrangement. In its evocation of the disciplines of psychology and medicine, the sculpture critiques these frames for understanding the body.

The exhibition is populated, as well, with references to sexually nonreproductive practices. A transparent sheet embroidered with silicone tubes and suspended from chains (Fig. 3) recalls the slings associated with BDSM practices which, as Preciado has written, 'expose the erotic power structures underlying the contract that heterosexuality has imposed as natural'.⁴⁶ A clear studded fisting glove hangs from one of the chains, while over another chain hangs a viscous glob of semen, 'wasted', in reproductive terms (Figs. 10 and 11). Meanwhile, a video embedded in a Styrofoam landscape portrays a person, naked apart from a pair of shoes, wandering around a lush forest, now freely, now stealthily (Fig. 12). The video's images are suggestive of cruising: walking or driving around a public space in search of a sexual partner, a practice historically associated with gay men. The wide shot of the camera imitates the furtive glance of someone peering through the foliage while cruising, implicating the viewer in the act. Preciado connects the castration or closure of the anus and sexual repression to the suffocating division between public and private, and the relegation of sexual pleasure to the private; thus, cruising espouses an anal or countersexual politics because it makes public space the site of a supposedly private, erotic act and enacts the 'public redistribution of pleasure'.⁴⁷ The video sculpture's title, *A Succulent Human*, draws a connection between the practice of cruising and the alternative understanding of the body and desire represented in the idea of the plant-human hybrid.

The turn towards the vegetal in *Succulent Humans*, represented in humanity's

Fig 12
Detail from *A Succulent Human*.



becoming-vegetal for its survival, also gestures to the expansive possibilities for sex and sexuality beyond the binary of penetration and/or reception. The video component of *A Succulent Human* may evoke the act of cruising, but no recognisable sex act is pictured here. The fact that succulents reproduce asexually through propagation does however imply that sex, in this world, is not only, or not primarily, penetrative-receptive or even genital. Indeed, the succulent human offers a way of thinking about human sexuality in terms of what Michael Marder describes as 'the fluidity, pliability, and plasticity of vegetal sexuality', for instance, the hermaphroditism of many plants, or their ability to change between masculine and feminine in their lifetimes.⁴⁸ Nor is there a clear indication of the roving figure's potential sexual partner; the distorted, undulating effect added to the video, however, suggests that the desiring gaze of the camera is a more-than-human or not-quite-human one, and, by extension, that desire and the erotic in this world are directed at more-than-human bodies and lifeforms. The only glimpse here of arousal and the channelling of orgasmic force comes when the figure runs its hands through a body of water, recalling the notion of ecosexuality practised and described by artists Elizabeth Stephens and Anne Sprinkle.⁴⁹ As Michael J. Morris summarises, the artists' project *The Love Art Laboratory* frames ecosexuality as an orientation towards the nonhuman that views it as something with which the human is materially entangled in a reciprocal relationship.⁵⁰ This porous model for the body, therefore, has wider, ecological implications for sex and desire beyond the human, moving beyond ideologies regarding where human and nonhuman bodies begin and end, as this chapter will shortly address.

While a kind of reproduction survives in *Succulent Humans*, the exhibition's celebration of the end of the world aligns it somewhat with queer fantasies about

apocalyptic futures, where the apocalypse has typically been understood as the end of biological and social reproduction. Emblematic in this regard is Lee Edelman's 2004 polemic *No Future*, in which the queer theorist famously critiques what he calls 'reproductive futurism' and the figure of the Child that it deploys. The Child, Edelman argues, is 'the organizing principal of communal relations' and 'remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention.'⁵¹ The logic of reproductive futurism makes appeals on behalf of children (in Edelman's case, American children) impossible to refuse at any point on the political spectrum; it also ensures that the future exists only as the 'mere repetition' of the heteronormative social order with the Child at its centre.⁵² In other words, reproductive futurism is the very powerful fantasy that the social, economic, and cultural frameworks of power that organise life should remain the same. Considering the exhibition's narrative of ecological destruction, it is pertinent to note, as well, that a great deal of mainstream environmental activism continues to appeal to the assumption of continued heterosexual reproduction as the norm. Here, as scholar of culture and media Heather Davis writes, 'the notion of reproductive futurism' and 'a particular way of life' are 'precisely what we are called to protect, in the almost ubiquitous appeals to "protect our children."⁵³ Environmental humanist Nicole Seymour, too, acknowledges that reproductive futurism is the 'fundamental rhetoric of environmentalism', and that 'such sentimentalized rhetoric ... suggests that concern for the future qua the planet *can only emerge*, or *emerges most effectively*, from white, heterosexual, familial reproductivity'.⁵⁴ Edelman's critique of reproductive futurism proposes a queerness that "knows nothing about 'sacrifice now for the sake of future generations'" and even 'delights in that mortality as the negation of everything that would define itself, moralistically, as pro-life'.⁵⁵ In its staging of a post-apocalyptic queer utopia, *Succulent Humans* heeds Edelman's polemical call for queers to embrace the apocalypse, death, and negativity with which they have historically been associated, including in Korea.⁵⁶

At the same time, *Succulent Humans* also differs from Edelman's conception of queerness in *No Future* in which, as Bernini writes, the theorist 'condemns the queer to a solitary existence' and champions a queerness that is 'a purely negative force, compulsively geared toward fracturing ties with the other, indiscriminately, without judgement, without imagination'.⁵⁷ This fracturing of ties is, I think, its own kind of 'barricading', 'a fiction of independence and impenetrability', to use Davis's phrasing.⁵⁸ Instead, *Succulent Humans* turns towards and not away from the other, particularly non-human others. It does this in part by clinging to a form of reproduction without reproductive futurism, asexual reproduction *with a difference*, one which sees humans becoming vegetal and more obviously porous.

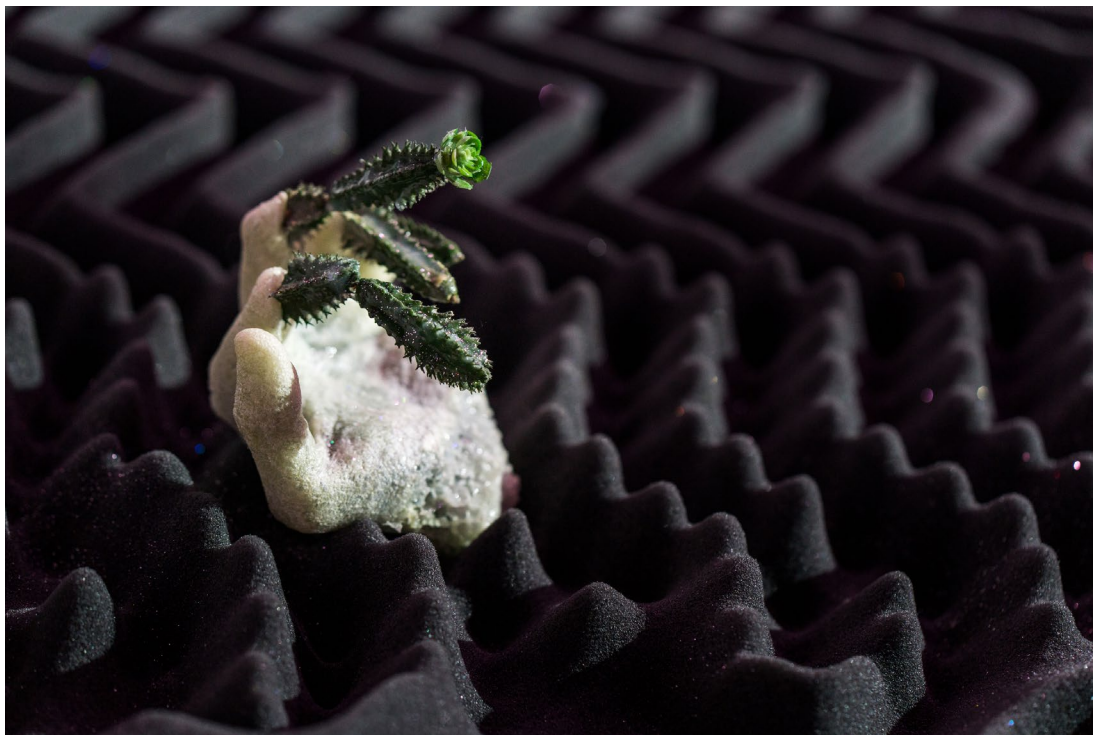
Indeed, and as the remainder of this chapter will contend, *Succulent Humans* highlights that, much like the succulent, the human body is porous, not only in terms of its openness to penetration through multiple zones of pleasure, but also vis-à-vis the so-

called 'natural' environment, which is exterior to and supposedly separate from it. And although the exhibition seems to revel in environmental collapse, in its divestment from discourses of toxicity and the alternative understanding of the body, ecology, and the human that it presents, the exhibition nonetheless has something to offer us as we move forward into an uncertain ecological and social future. It suggests that the notion of the independent, closed, sovereign body, with its emphasis on the ideal (white, male) body as inviolable and impenetrable, denies the fact that bodies, human and non-human alike, are being altered and queered by toxins released by environmental pollution. Thus, the same thinking that sanctions and undergirds discrimination against queer people (who, incidentally, are considered 'toxic' for the social order) also contributes to the ongoing destruction of the environment and the extinction of the lives of those who are most vulnerable to it. Therefore, while *Succulent Humans* appears to celebrate the body's vulnerability to alteration by toxins, it also turns a lens on the heteronormative anxieties that produce discourses of toxicity and cleanliness.

Porosity, Plasticity, Ecology, Toxicity

Although the reasons for the ecological apocalypse in *Succulent Humans* are not divulged, the exhibition's orgy of non-biodegradable synthetic materials suggests that the catastrophe is of human provenance. The proliferation and saturation of plastic and silicone here trigger anxieties about the unbridled consumption and disposal of near-indecomposable materials in the Anthropocene, anxieties which today seem more heightened than ever.⁵⁹ While plastics do decay over an extremely long timeframe, the continued and abundant production of them effectively renders them eternal. The consumption, disposal, and circulation of plastics are closely linked to the global economy, which, even in the age of so-called 'sustainable development', permits no 'unproductive' release of energy. For Davis, for example, plastic indexes the cheap replication and distribution of goods under global capitalism; for contemporary art historian Amanda Boetzkes it is 'the new material of the Anthropocene par excellence'.⁶⁰ As I have argued, this same system, according to Preciado, naturalises heteronormative, reproductive sexuality, and consolidates a hierarchy of the organs which places the reproductive organs at the top and the anus—the waste-producing organ—towards the bottom. In *Succulent Humans*, the enlarged image of the artist's anus is one reminder that humans are not, in environmental humanities scholar Stacy Alaimo's words, 'rarefied rational beings distinct from nature's muck and muddle'.⁶¹ Rather, we are waste-producing beings, and our waste must go somewhere—or (more precisely still) nowhere. For while plastic circulates in the global economy and is designed for disposability, it cannot be disposed of, owing to its near-indecomposability. In other words, plastic will likely outlive us. This contributes to the material's queer temporality as a 'distinctly present futural form'.⁶² Plastic's futurity is precisely its

Fig. 13
Detail from *A Succulent Human*.



existence as a tensile mass that refuses growth and degeneration', writes Boetzkes: it will never decay.⁶³ Plastic, moreover, is already altering human and non-human bodies and networks. It is already merging with the so-called 'natural world': in the ocean, for example, plastics host microbial communities and develop their own ecologies, or 'plastispheres'.⁶⁴ Further, our ingestion of plastics is affecting the body's capacity to produce oestrogen. Katie Schaag reminds us, too, that plastic particles enter the human body through the consumption of contaminated food and water, as well as via the lungs and skin, making the body 'a biochemical assemblage of performative plastic and non-plastic actants'.⁶⁵ Thus, plastic is a deeply ambivalent material, holding within it the jubilant affects of play, accumulation, and consumption, and all the while being a 'profoundly anxious substance' marking an uncertain, uncanny future of destruction, transmutation, and extinction.⁶⁶

Succulent Humans turns on the various affects and associations evoked by its plastic compositions. On one level, these compositions gesture towards the death and destruction wrought by toxicity, that is, the increased presence of plastic in the environment. Emerging, for instance, from the landscape sculpture entitled *A Succulent Human* (Fig. 1), is a zombified, crystalline hand (Fig. 13); and in a perverse twist on the flood narrative from the Book of Genesis, a slew of plastic corpses is caught in the fluorescent sand spewing from the landmass's side (Fig. 14). The plastic figurines that form *The Survivors*, meanwhile, represent the last humans marooned on a plastic island, as the sculpture's title suggests (Fig. 15). These abandoned figurines—which depict characters from Disney films (*Bambi*), children's cartoons (*My Little Pony*, for instance), and religious figures—index the circulation of plastic goods in the global economy, particularly cultural products from the West. Saint Christopher (Fig. 16) is the patron

Fig. 14
Detail from *A Succulent Human*.



Fig. 15
Dew Kim. *The Survivors* (2018).
Collected toys, neon lighting, acrylate polymer, 65 x 65 x 40 cm.
Installation view. Art Space Grove, Seoul, South Korea.
Image courtesy of the artist.

saint of travel; his presence here indicates the flow and disposal of goods on earth as much as the extraterrestrial movement of the last surviving humans in the exhibition's fictional narrative.

These elements are offset, however, by the exhibition's overriding, and at times unsettling, playfulness and irreverence. Notably, the garish colours of the figurines make them appear at once jubilant and excessive, even cloying. The figurine of Jesus,

Fig. 16
Detail from *The Survivors*.



Fig. 17
Detail from *The Survivors*.



Fig. 18
Detail from *The Survivors*.



Fig. 19
Detail from *Zero Gravity*.



Fig. 20
Detail from *Zero Gravity*.



for example, appears camped up, sporting a blonde beard, bright pink hair, and tacky, sparkling robes stoned with gold (Fig. 17). Similarly, Bambi is provocatively positioned with its rear in the air and looking coquettishly behind (Fig. 18). The appearance of similar images and plastic materials elsewhere in the exhibition yokes these figurines more closely to queer cultures and countersexual practices. Notably, Bambi also appears on the polyvinyl hanging (Fig. 19), nestled among a photograph of buttocks (Fig. 20) and images that are resonant of transnational, intra-regional queer popular and media cultures in East Asia, including queer-coded characters from Japanese anime popular among queer viewers in South Korea since the 90s, such as Kaworu Nagisa from the post-apocalyptic series *Evangelion* (Fig. 21) and Sailor Uranus from *Sailor Moon* (Fig. 22).⁶⁷ Similarly, in the landscape sculpture, the zombified hand contrasts with the jubilation of the sedimented layers of gaudy polyurethane foam (Fig. 1). The video depicting a figure cruising naked in a countersexual paradise is also embedded in this chaotic, tawdry landscape, redoubling its affective ambiguity.

To my mind, this jubilation is a call to embrace the porosity of the human body and its enmeshment with more-than-human worlds as described by Davis, Schaag, and others.⁶⁸ Davis and Schaag, in particular, are quick to question the ethics of this position even as they tentatively espouse it, and rightly so: under the current conditions of toxicity and pollution, economically privileged, white inhabitants of the Global North remain the least affected.⁶⁹ Indeed, *Succulent Humans* pictures humanity at the moment of its escape and transformation, and in so doing, it does not attend to the painful reality of the ‘slow violence’ of ecological destruction that many of the earth’s species, and humans, are already facing.⁷⁰ Any call to embrace porosity should take account of the already existing disparities in embodied experiences of porosity, which are broadly

Fig. 21
Kaworu Nagisa
(centre). Detail
from *Zero Gravity*.

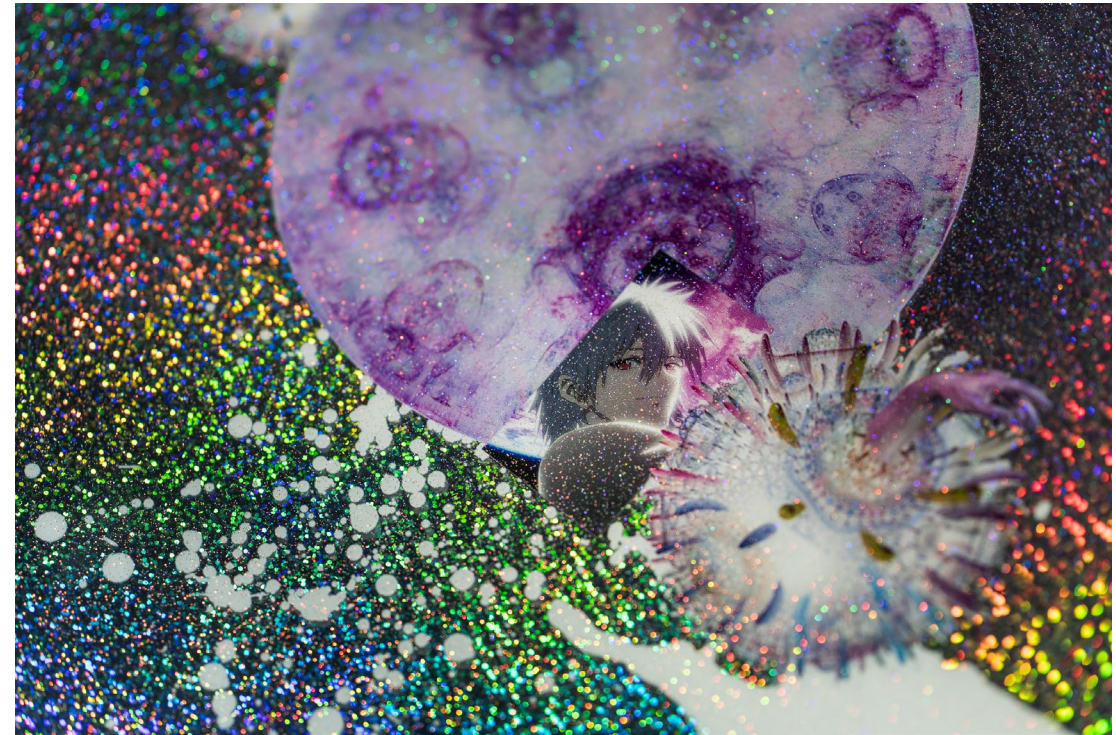


Fig. 22
Sailors Moon
and Uranus kiss
(centre). Detail
from *Faster than a Kiss*.



differentiated along the lines of class, race, and geography. These disparities are not, it should be said, accounted for in the utopia plotted in *Succulent Humans*, in which there is no longer a need to accommodate sexual or racial difference because it no longer exists: each succulent human appears the same.

Succulent Humans does, however, invite us to take pleasure in porosity. As Seymour notes, the mobilisation of affects of pleasure, irreverence, and irony may open more productive avenues for engaging with environmental crises compared to guilt and

shame.⁷¹ The exhibition invites us, too, to ask how porosity might be placed in the service of a radical politics. It tethers the respective biological and social ‘toxins’ of plastic and queerness, and suggests that a future that is more hospitable to the lives of non-human *and* queer others may lie in an alternative conception of the human body and of toxicity itself. Citing Ed Cohen, Mel Y. Chen writes that toxicity is generally ‘understood as an unnaturally external force that violates (rather than informs) an integral and bounded self’.⁷² Yet toxicity also, Davis surmises, ‘forces us to reveal the ways in which we are multiply composed—of plastic, of toxins, of queer morphologies’.⁷³ This revelation goes against the heteronormative, masculinist assumption that the body, and in particular the body sexed as male, is inviolable. It also contradicts the ‘bellicose antagonism’ that fuels the insistence of separation between self and world, between body and its environment.⁷⁴ An acceptance of the human body’s porosity entails an acknowledgement of, on the one hand, its various orifices and capacities for pleasure and existence outside of heterosexual reproduction; and, on the other, the body’s integral relation to its environment, including the toxins released into the environment by human industrial activity and a wilful ignorance of our own porosity. At the very least, Chen writes, ‘[a]n uptake, rather than a denial of, toxicity seems to have the power to turn a lens on the anxieties that produce it’.⁷⁵ An attention to queer morphologies and to porosity may, as Davis and Schaag tell us, also form the grounds for practices of care that extend not only to queer subjects but also to the various forms of life—human and nonhuman—precluded, begotten, or destroyed by conditions of environmental toxicity.⁷⁶

Succulent Humans, finally, asks after the queer ecological potential of considering not just the porosity but also the *plasticity* of the body, its capacity for transformation and mutation even as it might, like plastic, hold temporary form.⁷⁷ Pertinent here is the exhibition’s playful subversion of tropes associated with ecohorror. Christy Tidwell writes that ecohorror as a genre ‘deals with our fears and anxieties about the environment’.⁷⁸ Usually it involves an encounter with the nonhuman, which is horrifying because it is ‘inexplicable, irrational, and implacable’.⁷⁹ In their introduction to a series of articles about ecohorror in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (ISLE), Stephen Rust and Carter Soles propose an expanded definition of ecohorror beyond the limits of a genre, a definition which ‘includes analyses of texts in which horrific texts and tropes are used to promote ecological awareness, represent ecological crises, or blur human/non-human distinctions more broadly’.⁸⁰ They add that ecohorror ‘assumes that environmental disruption is haunting humanity’s relationship to the non-human world’.⁸¹ In *Succulent Humans*, the idea of the plant-human hybrid is reminiscent of ecohorror narratives such as John Wyndham’s post-apocalyptic novel *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), in which a sentient, alien carnivorous plant species begins killing humans and proliferating across the world, or the film *Annihilation* (2018, adapted from a 2014 novel by Jeff VanderMeer), in which human and animal bodies mutate and become plant-like

owing to an extraterrestrial intelligence.⁸²

What is unsettling about *Succulent Humans* is precisely its playful invitation not to give in to apocalyptic fantasies of our complete non-being, and instead to imagine a future that sees the survival of a form of human life that is also somehow botanical. As in Octavia Butler’s *Xenogenesis* series (1987–89), in which the human survivors of a nuclear disaster must either reproduce with betentacled alien beings for the sake of both species or else accept extinction, the last surviving humans of the exhibition’s story choose to become vegetal. Living like a plant, Michael Marder offers, entails ‘welcoming the other, forming a rhizome with it, and turning oneself into the passage for the other without violating it or dominating it’.⁸³ This rhizomatic existence not only disrupts staid but enduring conceptions of nature as never changing, or as having an idealised, pure form sullied by human interference and to which it must be returned.⁸⁴ It also explains, I think, the artificiality of the plants hanging in the exhibition space: coated in a plastic-looking membrane, it is as if these succulent human beings have found a way to adapt by merging with, or acting as a passage for, the plastics and pollutants which, according to the exhibition’s narrative, have flooded the earth. These plastic, test-tube succulents, moreover, represent a strange and queer ecology that transcends the limits of total human understanding or control.

On this point, it is apt to return, once more, to the cruising figure glimpsed in *A Succulent Human*. Though the figure wanders around a forest, the video depicting its perambulations is embedded in the form of a synthetic landmass, drawing the forest and the artificial landmass into a generative friction, suggestive of the strange, new, flourishing forms of more-than-human life and enmeshment evoked elsewhere in the exhibition and in its narrative. Indeed, as well as evoking a nonhuman gaze, the distortions through which the images of the forest are filtered recalls the undulations of the landscape sculpture. Jayna Brown writes of the ‘new forms of sociality and modes of being’ opened up by the practice of estranging ourselves from ‘the life of our species’ and engaging, instead, with the ‘plasticity of life’ occurring even at the cellular level.⁸⁵ We might, then, see the figure in *A Succulent Human* as cruising for untold and unknown forms of more-than-human sociality, for what Benjamin Dalton calls a kind of ‘queerness-without-us’, a porous, plastic, and entangled existence that continues beyond life as we know it.⁸⁶

Conclusion: Queer Utopias, Monstrous Futures

In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Sara Ahmed cautions against ‘idealiz[ing] queer worlds or simply locat[ing] them in an alternative space’, because ‘what is queer is never, after all, exterior to its object’.⁸⁷ In their invocation of science fiction and utopia, the works examined in this chapter might literally appear to locate queer worlds in another space and time; after all, the genre has long suffered charges of escapism and frivolity. Yet

science fiction worlds can indeed tell us about the world that is presently ‘in place’, to use Ahmed’s phrase. Braidotti writes that while science fiction representations appear oriented towards a fanciful future, they act as fantastical social imaginaries about modernity.⁸⁸ Likewise, Ursula Le Guin writes that ‘science fiction properly conceived ... is a way of describing what is actually going on’.⁸⁹ And for Ramzi Fawaz, the ‘encounters with figures of radical otherness’ engendered in fantasy worlds ‘provide tools to subvert dominant systems of power and reorient one’s ethical investments towards bodies, objects, and worldviews formerly dismissed as alien to the self’.⁹⁰ What precisely, then, can we draw from the world dreamt up in Dew Kim’s *Succulent Humans*? What does it have to tell us about the worlds already ‘in place’, about the futures these worlds are oriented towards, and about alternative orientations and futures that might be possible?

On the one hand, Kim’s works accommodate the viewer to a future that is, to quote Jacques Derrida, ‘necessarily monstrous’. Derrida explains that

the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared, you see, is heralded by species of monsters. A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the monstrous *arrivant*.⁹¹

The future glimpsed in *Succulent Humans* may appear monstrous precisely because it attests to the futility of clinging to fantasies of reproductive futurism and offers alternative fantasies of life-to-come. The exhibition’s orgy of plastic underscores that the reproduction of the social and biological order arranged by capitalism cannot continue in perpetuity, for, as we have seen, capitalism is destroying the ecological conditions for its own subsistence. Moreover, the altered levels of toxicity brought about by capitalism and industrial activity are queering our bodies, whether we like it or not. The notion of the body as independent, discrete, and bounded, as well as fantasies of a ‘future perfect’ in which this notion is sustained (as in the homophobic statements with which this chapter began), cannot account for these actualities.

Rather than the reproduction of sameness, survival, whatever it entails, will necessarily involve transformation—the unspooling of this order rather than its indefatigable continuation. Notably, survival-as-adaptation and -transformation are an altogether different kind from the survival-as-conquest that characterises many science fiction blockbuster films and, increasingly, entrepreneurial framings of space exploration.⁹² Instead of conquering, domesticating, or eradicating monstrous and non-human others, *Succulent Humans* invites us instead to draw closer to these others and to become intimate with them, in part through a recognition of our own bodily porosity and already-existing enmeshment. For Davis, embracing an ethics of porosity and permeability might open onto greater attention and hospitality towards others, both

our ‘non-filial human progeny’ and the ‘new bacterial communities’ and ‘plasticized, microbial progeny’ produced by conditions of toxicity.⁹³ Yet, as I have argued, by imagining future humans that are at once succulent and synthetic, the exhibition goes beyond Davis’s position and encourages us to recognise our own *plasticity*, as well: that is, the ‘biological plasticity of living organisms’ and ‘the capacity to adapt and change’, as Schaag puts it.⁹⁴ *Succulent Humans* suggests that we might take pleasure in this plasticity. It articulates a more hospitable orientation to an unknowable future populated by radical others and invites us to be open to becoming radically other ourselves. A hospitality to monstrous futures might also facilitate hospitality to those framed as monstrous others in the present, too—to those who do not conform to constructed boundaries of normativity and their ideals.

Succulent Humans also reminds us that the reproduction of the social and biological order also entails the foreclosure of the possibility of other orders and other lives. In this way, the exhibition evokes the necropolitical—the consigning of certain populations to physical and social death—as much as the biopolitical, or the governing of life.⁹⁵ Following a reading of Butler’s *Xenogenesis* trilogy, Neel Ahuja tells us that

reproduction is at once a negation and transition, and that the living incorporate extinct lives that could have been. At the heart of the body and the future lies the corpse.⁹⁶

Similarly, in her analysis of waste in contemporary art, Boetzkes calls for us to think of waste ‘as a systemic pattern of creating the world through the *foreclosure of life and diversity*’.⁹⁷ In other words, if ‘life’ and ‘success’ are understood as the reproduction and perfection of the existing social and biological order, then life always entails the deaths of other beings, human and non-human, who are excluded from this order, and success always entails failure: the failure of other beings to survive or thrive. The future is not a question of utopia versus apocalypse; one person’s utopia is another person’s apocalypse, as conservative, Protestant responses to LGBTQ+ activism in Korea make clear. However, as the works examined in this chapter suggest, we might yet learn another language of the body, attune ourselves to its porosity and plasticity, and bring human and non-human others into our present and into our visions for the future. Only then might we move beyond fatalistic narratives of ‘life’ and ‘death’, ‘success’ or ‘failure’, or ‘us’ versus ‘them’, as well as binaries of open, porous, and contaminated bodies versus closed, contained, uncontaminated ones. Life will go on; it just may not be human.

1. The original, a placard at the 2015 edition of the SQCF, reads ‘p’ittamhullyō saeun nara tongsōngaero munōchin-da’. Translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
2. This chapter uses the McCune-Reischauer system for transliterating Korean terms and names. For readability, I make an exception for cases for which well-known or established transliterations are already in common circulation.
3. My intention in using the English terms ‘queer’ and ‘queerness’ is neither to suggest that non-normative desires and gender expressions in Korea or East Asia more broadly are direct and belated translations of those found and theorised in North America and Western Europe, nor to affirm nativist responses to the homogeneity and cultural imperialism represented by the purported globalisation of queerness: for discussions of these, see Jung Minwoo, ‘Kwiō iron, sulp’ūn mogugō (Queer Theory, Sad Native Language)’, *Munhwana Saboe*, 13:11 (2012): pp. 53–100; and Howard Chiang, ‘Introduction’, in Howard Chiang and Ari Larissa Heinrich (eds.), *Queer Sinophone Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 32. It is relevant to note that Kim himself has repeatedly framed his practice in terms of ‘queerness’, anchored in histories of sex, sexuality, and gender in Korea and East Asia: see my article ‘The Promise of Parasites: Queer Currents, Currencies of Queerness, and Dew Kim’s *Latrinxia: A New Utopia*’, *immediations* 18 (2021), <https://courtauld.ac.uk/research/research-resources/publications/immediations-postgraduate-journal/immediations-online/immediations-no-18-2021/the-promise-of-parasites/>.
4. For more on the politicised nature of homophobia in Korea, see Judy Ju Hui Han, ‘Kwiō chōngch’iwa kwiō chichōnghak (Queer Politics and Queer Geopolitics)’, *Munhwa/Kwahak* 83 (Autumn 2015): pp. 62–81.
5. Kim, Hyun-young Kwon and John (Song Pae) Cho, ‘The Korean Gay and Lesbian Movement 1993–2008: From “identity” and “community” to “human rights”’, in Giwook Shin and Paul Chang (eds.), *South Korean Social Movements: From Democracy to Civil Society* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 218.
6. Todd A. Henry, ‘Introduction’, in Todd A. Henry (ed.), *Queer Korea* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), p. 10.
7. Amsiraeng, 2 December 2014, ‘Tongsōngae pandae-hanūn chōngdanghan iyu (Legitimate reasons to oppose same-sex love)’, Ilbe, accessed 9 October 2019, <https://www.ilbe.com/4784758398>.
8. hi7ju12, 16 July 2017, ‘Sahoeak ttrongkkoch’unge taehae arabocha (Let’s learn about the social evil of *ttinge-koch’ung*)’, Naver Blog, accessed 29 October 2020, <https://blog.naver.com/hi7ju12/221052292268>.
9. ‘Looking for Another Family’, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Seoul, n.d., accessed 17 February 2021, <https://www.mmca.go.kr/eng/exhibitions/exhibitions-Detail.do?exhId=202001140001261>.
10. Several of the following paragraphs have been adapted from my article ‘The Promise of Parasites’. With thanks to the editor of *immediations*, Bella Radenović, for permission to include the adapted paragraphs here.
11. Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2013), pp. 13–16. For an explanation of Japanese imperial models for modernity, see Michael Robinson, *Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Korea, 1920–1925* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1988). It is worth noting that the same model was embraced by the Korean nationalists, but for a contrasting purpose: they believed that a modernised, stronger Korea would free the country from colonial rule: see Jin-kyung Park, ‘Managing “dis-ease”’: Print media, medical images, and patent medicine advertisements in colonial Korea’, *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 24:4 (2017): pp. 420–39; and Todd A. Henry, ‘Introduction’.
12. Park, ‘Managing “dis-ease”’, pp. 431–432.
13. A further example is outlined by Todd A. Henry. Henry notes that towards the end of the colonial period, Japan’s ‘imperial subjects’ in Korea (*hwanguksimin*) were catego-

rised as abiding by or deviating from bodily norms aimed at maintaining colonial capitalism through reproductive heterosexuality: Henry, ‘Introduction’, p. 12.

14. Ed Cohen, *A Body Worth Defending: Immunity, Biopolitics, and the Apotheosis of the Modern Body* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 6, 14. For an example in the Korean context specifically, see Jin-kyung Park’s discussion of tuberculosis in the late 1920s, which in popular magazines was framed by nationalist intellectuals as a threat to the nation’s very existence: Park, ‘Managing “dis-ease”’, pp. 424–5.
15. The Republic of Korea was officially established in 1948: Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity and Gendered Citizenship in South Korea*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 24.
16. Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity*.
17. Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, p. 8. Moon (p. 20) also notes that the precolonial notion of *tongdosōgi* (‘Eastern way, Western technology’), which prioritised adopting advanced technology from the West to ‘modernise’ the military and financial systems, while preserving the neo-Confucian social order.
18. Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, p. 21.
19. Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, pp. 8–12.
20. Henry, ‘Introduction’, p. 18. For earlier examples of queerness, see Young-Gwan Kim and Sook-Ja Hahn, ‘Homosexuality in Ancient and Modern Korea’, *Culture, Health and Sexuality*, 8:1 (Jan–Feb 2006): pp. 59–65.
21. John P. DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies: Biomedicine, Health, and Nation-Building in South Korea Since 1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).
22. DiMoia, *Reconstructing Bodies*, p. 7.
23. Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, p. 21.
24. Youngshik D. Bong, ‘The Gay Rights Movement in Democratizing Korea’, *Korean Studies* 32 (2008): p. 89.
25. Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, p. 12.
26. Shim writes that a ‘genuine’ feminist movement, one that directly addressed sexual discrimination and inequality, solidified in Korea in the early 1990s, although there had been earlier women’s movements such as the nationalist liberation movement (1920s), the family law revision movement (1960s–1980s), and the labour movement (1970s–1980s): Young-Hee Shim, ‘Feminism and the Discourse of Sexuality in Korea: Continuities and Changes’, *Human Studies* 24 (2001): p. 144. Park-Kim, Lee-Kim, and Kwon Lee add that the women’s rights movement was bolstered by the introduction of the academic or theoretical subject of feminism in the 1990s: Soo Jin Park-Kim (Park Tong), Soo Youn Lee-Kim (Siro), and Eun Jung Kwon-Lee (Yuri), ‘The Lesbian Rights Movement and Feminism in South Korea’, *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 10:3–4 (2007): pp. 161–90.
27. Seo Dong-Jin, ‘Mapping the Vicissitudes of Homosexual Identities in South Korea’, *Journal of Homosexuality* 40:3–4 (2001): p. 66.
28. Seo Dong-Jin, ‘Mapping the Vicissitudes’, pp. 71–2. See also Kim and Hahn, ‘Homosexuality in Ancient and Modern Korea’, pp. 62–3; and Kim and Cho, ‘The Korean gay and lesbian movement’, in particular their discussion of the move towards ‘sexual citizenship’, which can be linked to the broader movement towards citizenship described by Moon in *Militarized Modernity*.
29. Joo-hyun Cho, ‘The Sexual Politics of Difference in Post-IMF Korea: Challenges of the Lesbian Rights and Sex Workers’ Movement’, in Stevi Jackson, Liu Jieyu, and Woo Juhyun (eds.), *East Asian Sexualities: Modernity, Gender, and New Sexual Cultures* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2008), p. 141; see also Park-Kim, Lee-Kim, and Kwon-Lee, ‘The Lesbian Rights Movement and Feminism in South Korea’; and Ruin, ‘Discussing Transnormativities Through Transfeminism: Fifth Note’, *Trans/Feminisms*, ed. Talia M. Bettcher and Susan Stryker, special issue, *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 3:1–2 (2016): pp. 202–211.
30. Jesook Song, *South Koreans in the Debt Crisis: The Creation of a Neoliberal Welfare Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 61. See also Layoung Shin, ‘Avoiding T’ibu

- (Obvious Butchness): Invisibility as a Survival Strategy among Young Queer Women in South Korea’, in Henry (ed.), *Queer Korea*, p. 311; and John (Song Pae) Cho, ‘The Three Faces of South Korea’s Male Homosexuality: Pogal, Iban, and Neoliberal Gay’, in *Queer Korea*, pp. 263–294.
31. Cho Uhn, ‘The Encroachment of Globalization into Intimate Life: The Flexible Korean Family in “Economic Crisis”’, *Korea Journal* 45:3 (2005): p. 9.
 32. Direct action was also taken by activists to protest the removal of sexual orientation from the Human Rights bill. Kim and Cho give the example of the ‘Rainbow Intersection Surprise Protest’ at one of Seoul’s busiest intersections in November 2007: Kim and Cho, ‘The Korean Gay and Lesbian Movement’, pp. 219–220.
 33. Cho, ‘The Sexual Politics of Difference in Post-IMF Korea’, p. 142.
 34. Ruin, ‘Mobile Numbers and Gender Transitions: The Resident Registration System, the Nation-State, and Trans/gender Identities’, in Henry (ed.), *Queer Korea*, pp. 357–376.
 35. Horim Yi and Timothy Gitzen, ‘Sex/Gender Insecurities: Trans Bodies and the South Korean Military’, *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 5:3 (2018): pp. 378–393.
 36. Timothy Gitzen, ‘Ripple of Trauma: Queer Bodies and the Temporality of Violence in the South Korean Military’, in Henry (ed.), *Queer Korea*, pp. 323–356.
 37. Gitzen, ‘Ripple of Trauma’, pp. 323–4.
 38. Todd A. Henry, ‘Introduction’, p. 29. Regarding transgender women, Seungsook Moon notes: ‘This group is treated as a category of “physical handicap,” along with serious mental illness and mental retardation, dwarfism, epilepsy, and other forms of “physical abnormalities.” This practice in military recruitment suggests that individuals with fluid sexual and gender identities, who therefore do not have a definitely sexed body that fits into the normative sex dichotomy, are not “normal” males suitable for military service: in other words, that unequivocal biological maleness, considered to be a fixed anchor of masculinity, is crucial to fitness for military service.’ See Seungsook Moon, *Militarized Modernity*, pp. 127–8.
 39. Previously, Kim had collaborated with Argentinian artist Luciano Zubillaga on their project *The Church of Expanded Telepathy*, initiated in 2016. They met when Kim was studying for his MA at London’s Royal College of Art. During their collaboration, Zubillaga introduced Kim to Preciado’s ‘Anal Terror’: e-mail correspondence with the author, 17 March 2020.
 40. Paul B. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, (trans.) Kevin Gerry Dunn (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 29.
 41. ‘Anal Terror’, in *Baedan 3*, ‘Journal of Queer Time Travel’ (Contagion Press, 2015): pp. 123–6. In this passage Preciado echoes Leo Bersani, who argued that ‘the rectum is the grave in which the masculine ideal ... of proud subjectivity is buried’, and that sexual practices involving the anus are maligned precisely because they indulge in the passivity, vulnerability, and (temporary) disintegration of the self, the value of which is denied in phallocentrism. See Leo Bersani, ‘Is the Rectum a Grave?’, *October* 43, AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism (Winter, 1987): pp. 217, 222.
 42. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, p. 8.
 43. For *ūmgryōng*, see *Uri mal saem*, accessed 2 November 2020, https://opendict.korean.go.kr/search/searchResult?focus_name=query&query=음경. The Korean reads ‘kwidu, yodogu, gohwan ttawiro iruōchin namchaŭi bakkat saengsik kigwan’. For *chil*, see *Uri mal saem*, accessed 2 November 2020, https://opendict.korean.go.kr/search/searchResult?focus_name=query&query=칠. The Korean reads ‘chil kumōng chagungmok sae itmūn yōsōngūi saengsik t’ongno. Sōnggyo ttae ūmgryōngūl badadūrigō ch’ulsan ttae agiga naonūn kiri toenda’.
 44. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, p. 12.
 45. E-mail correspondence with the author, 17 March 2020. Kim’s reference to ‘sexual communism’ here is strongly resonant of Guy Hocquenghem’s *Homosexual Desire*, the

Spanish-language version of which ‘Anal Terror’ was written to introduce.

46. Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto*, p. 31.
47. Preciado, ‘Anal Terror’, pp. 124–5, p. 165.
48. Michael Marder and Luce Irigaray, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 115. On the plasticity of non-human sexuality, see also Timothy Morton, ‘Queer Ecology’, *PMLA* 125:2 (March 2010): p. 276, and Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erikson, ‘Introduction: A Genealogy of Queer Ecologies’, in Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erikson (eds.), *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 6–12.
49. For an introduction to Stephens and Sprinkle’s practise and understanding of ecosexuality, or what they also call sexecology, see Elizabeth Stephens, ‘Becoming Eco-Sexual’, *Canadian Theatre Review* 144 (Fall 2010): pp. 13–19.
50. Michael J. Morris, ‘Material Entanglements With the Nonhuman World: Theorizing Ecosexualities in Performance’ (PhD diss., The Ohio State University, 2015), pp. 69, 96–101.
51. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 2–3.
52. Edelman, *No Future*, p. 31.
53. See Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, p. 239.
54. Nicole Seymour, *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy, and the Queer Ecological Imagination* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), p. 7, emphasis in the original. Although Davis and Seymour find Edelman’s critique of reproductive futurism somewhat useful, both emphasise the ethical limits of his analysis when transposed to debates about ecological destruction and the future of the planet: see Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, pp. 239–243; and Seymour, *Strange Natures*, pp. 7–8. Note, as well, that while appeals to the Child remain pervasive, they are not always successful, as the case of the group of young climate activists from various countries makes clear. The group, most closely associated with Greta Thunberg, has appealed to the United Nations’ convention on the rights of the child to encourage legal action on climate change. Fiona Harvey, ‘Greta Thunberg and children’s group hit back at attempt to throw out climate case’, *The Guardian*, 5 May 2020, accessed 25 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/may/05/greta-thunberg-and-childrens-group-hit-back-at-attempt-to-throw-out-climate-case>. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this example out.
55. Edelman, *No Future*, p. 31. Here Edelman cites Hocquenghem. For a powerful critique of Edelman’s invocation of Hocquenghem and an analysis of the differences between the two thinkers, see Lorenzo Bernini, *Queer Apocalypses: Elements of Antisocial Theory*, (trans.) Julia Heim (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
56. A recent book by queer Korean activist Si Woo discusses the Christian right’s framing of the LGBTQ+ movement in South Korea in detail: Si Woo, *K’wiō Ap’ok’allipsū. Saranggya Hyōmoŭi Jōngch’ihak (Queer Apocalypse: The Politics of Love and Hate)* (Seoul, South Korea: Hyunsil Munhwa, 2018).
57. Bernini, *Queer Apocalypses*, p. 78.
58. Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, p. 244.
59. Although silicone is not usually grouped under plastic because it does not derive from petrochemicals, Heather Davis connects the two, writing that they share the same issue of non-decomposability: Heather Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny: The Plasticsphere and Other Queer Futures’, *philoSOPHIA* 5:2 (2015): p. 231.
60. Amanda Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism: Contemporary Art and the Drive to Waste* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2019), p. 185. For connections between plastic, the global economy, and petrocapiatlsim, see Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, and Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, pp. 177–226.
61. Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press,

2010), p. 8.

62. Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, p. 201.

63. Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, p. 206.

64. Heather Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, p. 235. Davis takes this term from Erik Zettler, Tracy Mincer, and Linda Amaral-Zettler, ‘Life in the “Plastisphere”: Microbial Communities on Plastic Marine Debris’, *Environmental Science and Technology* 47 (2013): pp. 7137–46.

65. Katie Schaag, ‘Plastiglomerates, Microplastics, Nanoplastics: Toward a Dark Ecology of Plastic Performativity’, *Performance Research* 25:2 (2020): pp. 14, 19.

66. Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, p. 184.

67. As well as an attempt to queer mainstream science fiction, Kim frames this as an explicit attempt to de-Westernise both science fiction and queer pop culture. He states: ‘I wanted to express sci-fi stories in *my* queer culture, which is not based in dominant paradigms found in Europe and America’ (emphasis Kim’s own). E-mail correspondence with the author, 17 March 2020.

68. See, for example, Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012); Donna Haraway, *Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016); and Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016).

69. Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, p. 244; Schaag, ‘Plastiglomerates, Microplastics, Nanoplastics’, p. 20.

70. Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, p. 234. Davis takes this term from Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

71. Nicole Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2018).

72. Chen, *Animacies*, p. 195.

73. Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, p. 244.

74. Chen, *Animacies*, p. 195.

75. Chen, *Animacies*, p. 220.

76. Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, p. 245; Schaag, ‘Plastiglomerates, Microplastics, Nanoplastics’, p. 16.

77. As Benjamin Dalton notes, philosopher of plasticity Catherine Malabou distinguishes between fluidity, rigidity, and plasticity: whereas fluidity tends towards dissolution and rigidity towards an illusory reification, plasticity is situated between the two, ‘able to take form in a way that allows this form to remain open to mutation’. Benjamin Dalton, ‘Cruising the Queer Forest with Alain Giraudie: Woods, Plastics, Plasticities’, in Jon Hackett and Seán Harrington (eds.), *Beasts of the Forests: Denizens of the Dark Woods* (East Barnet: John Libbey Publishing, 2019), pp. 75–6.

78. Christy Tidwell, ‘Ecohorror’, in Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (eds.), *Posthuman Glossary* (Bloomsbury Press, 2018), p. 115.

79. Tidwell, ‘Ecohorror’, p. 115. Here Tidwell is quoting a blog from film scholar Dawn Keetley, not cited.

80. Stephen Rust and Carter Soles, ‘Ecohorror Special Cluster: Living in Fear, Living in Dread, Pretty Soon We’ll All Be Dead’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 21:3 (Summer, 2014): pp. 509–10, cited in Tidwell, ‘Ecohorror’, p. 116.

81. Rust and Soles, ‘Ecohorror Special Cluster’, p. 510, cited in Tidwell, ‘Ecohorror’, p. 116.

82. In the different incarnations of *Triffids*, various explanations are given for the creatures’ origin. In the original novel, the triffids arrive after a meteor shower but the protagonist suspects they were bioengineered in the USSR. In the 1982 TV adaptation, the protagonists’ suspicions are revealed to be true. In the 1962 film adaptation, however, the triffids are shown to be extraterrestrial lifeforms carried to Earth on comets.

83. Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 185.

84. On this point, see Schaag, ‘Plastiglomerates, Microplas-

tics, Nanoplastics’, pp. 14–15.

85. Jayna Brown, ‘Being Cellular: Race, the Inhuman, and the Plasticity of Life’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21:2–3 (2015): p. 325.

86. Dalton, ‘Cruising the Queer Forest’, p. 79.

87. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 106.

88. Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 185.

89. Ursula Le Guin, ‘The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction’, in *Dancing at the Edge of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1989), p. 154.

90. Fawaz’s study examines the figure of the superhero in American comics in the 1960s to the 1980s, specifically. Ramzi Fawaz, *New Mutants: Superheroes and the Radical Imagination of American Comics* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), p. 30.

91. Jacques Derrida, ‘Passages—from Traumatism to Promise’, in Elisabeth Weber (ed.), *Points ...: Interviews, 1974–1994*, (trans. Peggy Kamuf et al (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 386–87. Elsewhere, Derrida explains that the future is in a state of constant arrival (or deferral), drawing on the similarity between the French word for future (*avenir*), to come (*venir*), and that which is forthcoming (*à-venir*). Parallels can be drawn with the Korean word for ‘future’, *mirae* (미래), which derives from the Chinese characters *wei* 未 (‘not yet’) and *lai* 來 (‘come’). See Jacques Derrida, ‘The Force of Law: The “Mystical Foundation of Authority”’, in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 3–67.

92. I take the point regarding science fiction films and survival-as-conquest from Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 27. Regarding the business of space travel, Kim sets *Succulent Humans* against Elon Musk’s SpaceX travel initiative: Dew Kim, ‘Succulent Humans’, accessed 29 September 2021, <https://www.hornyhoney-dew.com/Succulent-Humans-2018>.

93. Davis, ‘Toxic Progeny’, pp. 244–246.

94. Schaag follows Catherine Malabou’s understanding of neuroplasticity elaborated in *What Should We Do with Our Brain* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2004), discussed in Schaag, ‘Plastiglomerates, Microplastics, Nanoplastics’, pp. 19–20.

95. For a foundational account of necropolitics, see Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2019), which appeared in a much abbreviated form in a 2003 article. For queer and feminist interventions in studies of necropolitics, see, for example, Chen, *Animacies*; Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco (eds.), *Queer Necropolitics* (Routledge, 2014); Jasbir Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, Durham (NC and London: Duke University Press, 2017); and Neel Ahuja, *Bioinsecurities: Disease Interventions, Empire, and the Government of Species* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).

96. Neel Ahuja, ‘Intimate Atmospheres: Queer Theory in a Time of Extinctions’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21:2–3 (2015): p. 380.

97. Boetzkes, *Plastic Capitalism*, p. 199 (emphasis added).

A Dystopia Called Fukushima? Sōno Sion’s The Whispering Star and the Postmodern Apocalypse

THERESA DEICHERT

Introduction¹

On 11 March 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami struck the northeastern coast of Japan and turned it into a swathe of destruction. The natural disasters in a dramatically entangled catenation with human failure caused the collapse of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant's cooling system. This resulted in a series of hydrogen explosions that catapulted tons of radioactive particles into the air and contaminated the surrounding environment.² In response, the Japanese government established a twenty-kilometre radius exclusion zone around the Fukushima power plant on 12 March 2011, which they euphemistically called 'difficult-to-return zone' (*Kikan konnan kuiki* 帰還困難区域). This led to the hurried evacuation of more than 160,000 residents of local towns such as Namie, Tomioka and Ōkuma of Fukushima prefecture.³ In the aftermath of March 2011, they turned into deserted ghost towns with the tarmac of the streets cracked open, furniture and debris spilt out of empty homes and neglected shops, frozen in time.⁴ The landscape between these towns was dominated by cleanup workers dressed in white Tyvek coveralls, gloves and masks. Moving along like extraterrestrial beings, ant-like strewn across the plains, they tirelessly dusted houses of radioactive particles and removed the topsoil of fields and gardens. The workers filled mulch and dirt into large black tare bags that they transported away to pile up to giant doomful mountains visible from a distance. Above it all, hung the invisible threat of radiation.

At the time of writing this book chapter, more than a decade has passed since March 2011. Despite remaining contaminated and sparsely populated, reconstruction efforts have returned most of the area to apparent normalcy. However, in the immediate aftermath, the Fukushima nuclear disaster and its exclusion zone seemed to foreshadow a post-apocalyptic vision of the future.⁵ Around the nuclear power plant, a toxic ecology without people manifested.⁶ The nuclear disaster, where chain reactions made geological forces collide with human technology and man-made failure to contain them, brought anew to the forefront the interconnectedness of humans, their technology and culture with nature.⁷ It revealed the arbitrariness of the boundaries between these realms.⁸ The exclusion zone's conditions, on the surface uncannily similar to the post-apocalyptic dystopias of science fiction narratives, also seemed to blur the boundaries between reality and fiction. This sense was heightened by a veil of secrecy, as the Japanese government attempted to cover up the graveness of the disaster through media censorship and the withholding of information about contamination from the public.⁹ With such conditions, the Fukushima disaster and its aftermath had an impact, on the apocalyptic science fiction imagination in Japan and abroad.¹⁰

Acknowledging the importance to attend to such narratives to unravel the societal and political dynamics of the aftermath of the nuclear disaster, this chapter focuses on the analysis of the 2015 science fiction film *The Whispering Star* (*hiso hiso boshi*

ひそひそ星; *Star* hereafter) by Japanese film director Sōno Sion.¹¹ An adaptation and realization of a script that Sōno originally conceived of in 1991, the film, shot in sepia-tinted monochrome, takes us to an undefined time in the future.¹² Humanity has been reduced to a handful, silently fading away on the eve of their extinction brought on by themselves through human failure and the irredeemable repetition of man-made disasters. The story follows a female android named Suzuki Yōko (Kagurazaka Megumi) who works for an intergalactic delivery service. As Yōko, solely accompanied by her childish board computer 6-7 M.I.M.E. (Ikeda Yuto), travels from planet to planet on her spaceship through the universe, she delivers parcels that contain ominous, seemingly worthless, objects to the last remaining humans. Rather than fabricating the landscapes of these planets, Sōno uniquely utilized the real but seemingly post-apocalyptic landscapes in and around the ghost towns of Namie, Futaba and Ōkuma as a backdrop to Yōko's voyages. Instead of casting professional actors, Sōno collaborated with disaster evacuees to embody the planets' last human residents.

Together with writing and producing the film through his own production company, Sōno undertook a crossover into contemporary art practices. In conceiving *Star* as part of a body of installation and performative works, the director hoped to bring out further messages which he could not fully address in the film.¹³ In June 2015, in the summer before its official cinematic release, segments of *Star* were put on display in a small exhibition curated by the Japanese artist collective Chim↑Pom at their artist-run gallery Garter in Tokyo's Kōenji district. The following year, Sōno exhibited several installation works that further rounded out his vision for the film from the 1990s to today in the Watari Museum of Contemporary Art (Watari-Um) in Tokyo. Thus, while *Star* is the focus of this chapter, it considers the film as integral to a series of works drawing on it to contextualize and deepen the analysis of the film.

Within the field of post-3/11 cultural production, Sōno's *Star* as a body of work stands out as unique in its combination of a post-apocalyptic cinematic film with a science fiction-inspired immersive art installation. While the exclusion zone's appearance as a landscape of post-apocalyptic science fiction narratives stirred many Japanese authors such as Kawakami Hiromi, Tawada Yōko, Genyū Sōkyū and Tsushima Yūko to write dystopian fiction inspired by the disaster there are only a few Japanese feature films that present science fiction scenarios inspired by 3/11.¹⁴ Examples are *Sayonara* (さようなら, 2015) by Fukada Kōji, *Jū-nen: Ten Years Japan* (十年 *Ten Years Japan*, 2018) consisting of five short films directed by Fujimura Akiyo, Hayakawa Chie, Ishikawa Kei, Kinoshita Yusuke and Tsuno Megumi and *Abum* (アム 阿咄, 2018) by Kajino Yu. Furthermore, while installation art has been a reoccurring genre among artists dealing with the nuclear disaster, the works of Kyun-Chome, Dokuyama Bontaro and Chim↑Pom are just some examples, Sōno is the only film maker-come-artist in Japan who combines an installation with a cinema science fiction film.¹⁵ Outside Japan, however, there are a few examples of artists who encountered Fukushima-related

subject matter through films with science fiction aesthetics. These are the British artist duo The Otolith Group's *The Radiant* (2012), *Untitled: Human Mask* (2014) by French artist Pierre Huyghe and the two-screen video installation *El Fin del Mundo* (2012) by South Korean artists Moon Kyungwon and Jeon Joonho.

Science Fiction as a Window to the Past and the Present

According to the literary studies scholar Fredric Jameson, rather than offering revelations about the future, science fiction is especially productive in making us aware of the present. Due to what Jameson identifies as the effects of our period of late capitalism, such as the loss of real historicity due to the construction of a historical past and the all-pervading images of mass culture, the present in its immediacy otherwise remains unavailable for us to fully comprehend.¹⁶ In his book *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1989), Jameson dates the emergence of late capitalism to the 1950s concomitant to postmodernism. Commonly postmodernity describes the historical period from around the late 1950s to the present, whereas postmodernism is constituted by cultural critique and related to themes in culture such as art, philosophy, literature and theory. While Jameson explicitly does not engage with the legitimacy of postmodernism itself, he sees late capitalism as pervading contemporary condition of inevitable multi-national capitalism, which penetrates both cultural and economic structures. Thus for him, postmodernism is not referring to style but a concept that periodizes, as he identifies popular culture as shaping the collective consciousness of its time.¹⁷ In contrast to the inventiveness and orientation towards the new of modernism, Jameson sees the cultural products of postmodernism as defined by a loss of historicity, a loss of a real sense of past, present and future, and a replacement of real style with imitations of style or what he terms *pastiche*.¹⁸ As the postmodern subject is defined by popular culture, without being able to orient itself towards history—grasping the past, present and future of its life experience and psyche as a unity—it thus experiences a loss of identity. With its origins in the 1990s, coinciding with the emergence of Jameson's theory of postmodernism, *Star* seems to employ some of these features of postmodernism. However, this chapter argues that Sōno's update of *Star* as a science fiction narrative to reflect on post-3/11 Japan translates the film's representations of ahistoricity, pastiche and loss of identity as constituting an inherent critique and a warning about the post-disaster conditions of Japan.

Drawing from the science fiction theorist Darko Suvin's influential concept of cognitive estrangement, Jameson explains that science fiction functions not to provide us with visions of the future, but to 'defamiliarize and restructure our experience of the present'.¹⁹ Based on these theoretical assertions, this chapter argues that science fiction narratives such as that of Sōno's *Star* can, with stylistic devices such as estrangement, serve to open up avenues for criticality from which to reflect contemporary social and

political issues of the post-disaster environment. Additionally, such narratives may foster ecological awareness by thinking through and projecting our present conditions into a future of human deterioration and environmental collapse.

How does Sōno depict the post-apocalyptic future environment and beings of *Star*? Is he successful in addressing ecological matters of concern by way of integrating the real inhabitants and landscapes of Fukushima? To attend to these questions the analysis identifies and explores the film's principal themes: the conditions of the post-apocalypse and human disillusionment with science and technology, time and memory, and the non-human embodied by the ghost-like appearance of the disaster victims and the android Yōko.²⁰ What do these depictions reveal about the social, political and cultural conditions of contemporary Japanese society? Does the film contain any criticality or political traction in reflecting on them? Regarding the film as concomitant of a network of works that Sōno conceived of at two moments in time, twenty-five years apart, how do the works interrelate and how do they extend the message and intent of the film? Mobilizing parts of Jameson's postmodern cultural critique the analysis explores, how Sōno unravels a continuity of the postmodern conditions of a loss of history and identity. In the case of Japan, these conditions originated with the country's defeat in the Second World War and were aggravated by the collapse of the unmitigated post-war economic upturn in the late 1980s, which saw Japanese society enter into decades of economic stagnation.²¹ As such, the chapter is a contribution to research into post-3/11 artistic practices.²²

After the disaster, a plethora of film documentaries was released.²³ These dealt with various topics, such as the exploration of the disaster's aftermath in the local communities, recovery and reconstruction, but also with the radioactive contamination and its effects, especially on mothers and children. In comparison, there were rather few responses through fiction films. Scholar of Japanese literature Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, moreover, points out that these mostly focused on personal drama associated with the loss of the land of one's ancestors.²⁴ Just as within the multitude of contemporary artworks conceived of in response to the disaster, many of which focused on practices of archiving, community engagement and regional revitalization, films that involved an obvious critique of political or societal post-disaster issues were few and far between.²⁵ Sōno was one of the first to openly deal with the Fukushima disaster in his films *Himizu* (ヒミズ, 2011) and *Land of Hope* (*Kibō no Kuni* 希望の国, 2012). In *Himizu*, filmed in the filmmaker's usual style full of sex and violence, Sōno resorted to using the ravaged post-disaster landscape as a reflection of the protagonist's psychological turmoil.²⁶ *Land of Hope*'s fiction went a step further in engaging with the disaster by bringing into focus the arbitrariness of the established borders of an exclusion zone and the elusiveness of radioactive contamination.²⁷ As such, elements of the film dabbled into a cautious critique of the Japanese government's handling of the nuclear disaster.²⁸ In contrast, Sōno's incorporation of the Fukushima landscape in *Star*, a film unusually quiet and slow-paced for the director, is a lot more allegorical.

Fig. 1
Yōko (Kagurazaka
Megumi) inside of
her spaceship. *The
Whispering Star*, dir.
Sōno Sion (2015).
Film still. © sion
production.



After Fukushima – *Star's* Post-Apocalyptic Premise

Star begins with a series of scenes in which we see snippets of the film's protagonist, android Suzuki Yōko, performing a simple household activity stretched out over several days. As she is making a cup of tea, she moves through what looks like a domestic living space (Fig. 1). However, it soon turns out to be the antiquated interior of a spaceship that from the outside looks like a traditional Japanese house complete with a little shrine attached to the back. It is not until ten minutes into the film that these quiet scenes are intercut with some text inserts unexcitedly informing the viewer of the post-apocalyptic setting in which they have been transported. What we learn about this future world is ambiguous. Implicit in this tranquil start seems to be Sōno's appeal to the viewer to buckle up for a narrative scarce of major plot expositions, to suspend disbelief and to read between the lines. In this sense, this first section of the work analysis is dedicated to disentangling the little information given about the conditions of the post-apocalyptic universe in which *Star's* story takes place. To do so will illustrate the film's inherent mirroring of social and political conditions of the post-3/11 Japanese society and their interweavement with the Japan of the early 1990s, the time of Sōno's conception of the original script.

The text on screen begins by informing us that '[h]umanity thus repeated their substantial disasters and monumental failures' and '[p]eople died off every time they did'. Without explicitly mentioning it, this allows for the assumption that the film's setting is a post-apocalyptic one, in which the amassing of a multitude of man-made disasters has led to some kind of apocalyptic cataclysm. The allusion to disasters and failures in the plural deliberately conjures up the multiple horrors of the current age of the Anthropocene. It is an accumulative apocalypse graven of ecological collapse, species extinction, global warming, overpopulation and (nuclear) wars.

Together with the following line of the film's introductory text, which informs us that '[s]pace is now ensconced in a quiet peace', *Star's* post-apocalyptic premise seems to mirror what the sociologist Krishan Kumar, at the end of the twentieth century, identified as slow and uncertain apocalypse of the postmodern period. According to Kumar 'the postmodern apocalypse arrives not with a bang but a whimper [...] a version of the apocalypse that dwells obsessively on the end, without any expectation of a new beginning'.²⁹ In contrast to the Christian notion of apocalypse as cleansing turnover, Kumar's contemporary secular apocalypse comes without hope or sense of the future.³⁰ Kumar, citing political scientist Francis Fukuyama, further notes that humanity will live out its final years quietly in 'centuries of boredom'.³¹ Writing at the end of the Cold War, Fukuyama in his influential essay 'The End of History?' (1989) prophesized the closure of history, thus mirroring the loss of history warned of by Jameson. While events would still occur, at this moment, Fukuyama saw liberal democracy as establishing itself as ideological monopoly without contestation.³² And really, nothing much happens in *Star*. The viewer's patience is tested with long static shots of Yōko's surroundings and her ordinary activities constituted by the unrelenting rotation of her deliveries with her pottering aboard the spaceship. In the all-encompassing renunciation of spectacle in *Star's* universe is implicit a pervading sense of ennui and emptiness.

Just as Jameson, both Kumar and Fukuyama wrote at the end of the twentieth century in the late 1980s and early 90s. While Fukuyama has recently detracted his theory, their writing might be pertinent to how *Star's* universe is depicted, as it is contemporaneous to Sōno's development of the film's 555-page storyboard of 1991.³³ Realized twenty-five years later, *Star* ultimately merges the aftermaths of two destabilizing, arguably apocalyptic, moments of Japanese society.³⁴ Keeping in mind Jameson's argument for science fiction narratives' function to make us reflect on our present through seeing it as some future world's past, this superimposition of two presents reworked as one in *Star's* future universe is underpinned by its narrative function of cognitive estrangement. Suvin identified cognitive estrangement as an integral part of science fiction and defined it as 'dynamic transformation ... of the author's environment', which is 'not only reflecting *of* but reflecting *on* reality'.³⁵ Thus, *Star's* script mirrors the period in which it was first written, which was dominated by the collapse of unmitigated economic success and security of Japanese post-war society through the burst of the bubble economy and sense of the emptiness it left behind in the 1990s.³⁶ As mentioned, Jameson identifies this as the time of postmodernism or late capitalism, a condition of loss of history and thus of individual identity.³⁷ As the text insert informs us further, in *Star's* universe '[m]achines control space, where robot A.I. account for 80%, and humans account for the other 20%'. While humans are almost extinct '[t]he pursuit of science is all but completed'. This is indicative of another moment in time on which *Star* reflects: the event and aftermath of the nuclear disaster

from 2011 to the mid-2010s. This being the time when Sōno updated and turned the script into film, it highlights the period's realization of the fallibility of science and technology, as well as the structural weaknesses of the political system and the social inequality within Japanese society.

Star's post-apocalyptic universe, arising out of man-made disasters, is revealed as deeply dystopian. The utopian vision of progress through (nuclear) technology is turned on its head and revealed as a nightmare through which humanity has nearly eliminated itself.³⁸ Instead of reaping the fruits of scientific advancement and technologically engineered immortality, human life expectancy is only a hundred years and humanity's technological forays turned on us. In *Star*, the Earth must have been rendered uninhabitable. Humans are dispersed across the universe, silently and inertly waiting, bar any autarky, kept alive only by the machines that rule them. In post-war Japan, the American occupation in association with the Japanese government worked to reframe the use of nuclear fission as mass destruction and propagated it as a way to achieve 'clean and safe' energy production needed for economic resurgence.³⁹ With its post-apocalyptic scenario, *Star* thus reflects on the post-disaster reality and its revelation of this energy promise as a myth. Moreover, the film picks up on the fragmentation of Japan's post-disaster society into those affected, who lost their communities and are isolated by their stigmatization as disaster victims, thus losing their pre-disaster identities to their status as victims and evacuees, and those ready to forget and move on.

Machines are in power, and androids move freely between planets by spaceship, while humans —mirroring Jameson's characterisation of the postmodern subject —remain immobile and have lost their ability or desire to actively think and pursue knowledge. The viewer learns this much. However, remarkably absent is any indication of what sort of dominant political system machines use to govern this universe. Who produces the Yōkos and who sets up their delivery service? This absence of explanation about a post-apocalyptic form of governance might be all the more telling, as embedded in it is a suggested failure of the political systems devised by humans. Instead of fleshing out this post-apocalyptic framework of *Star's* narrative though, as the following section will show, Sōno drifts with *Star's* story into a poetic exploration of human emotion substantiated by android Yōko's exposure to them and development of feelings of her own. The landscape of Fukushima, although turned into a post-apocalyptic dystopian space, turns primarily into a backdrop for the android's development into an empathetic sentient being, a plot development steeped in sentimentality often verging on pathos.

Encountering 'The Zone'

Let us turn to the moment when Yōko enters into the Fukushima exclusion zone, presented to us in the guise of a foreign planet, for the first time. As the spaceship



Fig. 2
View through the
windows of the
spaceship's cockpit.
The Whispering Star,
dir. Sōno Sion
(2015). Film still. ©
sion production.

approaches for landing, the iconic silhouettes of Fukushima's tsunami-ravaged landscape come into view through the windows of the spaceship's cockpit (Fig. 2). In the landscape, the floorplans of former houses overgrown by tall weeds are outlined by concrete stubs that once were walls. A ship oddly perched on land is visible in the distance. As the door of the spaceship opens and Yōko exists to deliver one of her packages, more ruins and debris come into sight. To the viewer, these vistas must be very familiar as they have become so widely known through their dissemination across social media platforms and news outlets. At the same time, the landscape is rendered strange through its presentation as the post-apocalyptic environment of another planet in the future. This is where the inherent tension of cognitive estrangement, as well as the success of *Star* as science fiction, become apparent.

Sōno himself questions whether his film belongs to the genre of science fiction, as for him, it is neither science nor fiction, but rather a film about the past, the future and the present.⁴⁰ However, as we have seen from Jameson's argument science fiction too unravels the present. Moreover, with the exception of the presence of an android, science is at least distinguished by the remarkable absence of scientific advancements in *Star's* future universe. *Star's* functioning according to the parameters of science fiction is also apparent through its congruence with the aforementioned inherent tension of cognitive estrangement to defamiliarize us from reality. There is a dichotomy latent in the concept of cognitive estrangement, as to be estranged presupposes a need for a cognitive link felt prior.⁴¹ The setting of *Star's* planets is recognizable as the ravaged ecologies of the Fukushima landscape, while through its rendering as future dystopia it appears strangely different. According to Suvin, this difference is evoked by the

Fig. 3
The landscape in
polychrome. *The
Whispering Star*, dir.
Sōno Sion (2015).
Film still. © sion
production.



inclusion of a ‘novum of cognitive innovation [...] a totalizing phenomenon of relationship deviating from the author’s and implied reader’s norm of reality’.⁴² Such a *novum* can be constituted by a new invention or, as is the case with *Star*, the setting and an agent or character, such as the android Yōko. The novum, moreover, must be feasible as a conclusion to our current state of science.⁴³ In this context, Yōko can be seen as an offshoot of twenty-first-century artificial intelligence.

As Yōko walks along a cracked overgrown road carrying her package towards its recipient, the camera’s pan shot traces and slowly reveals more of the scenery. Yōko advances towards the viewer framed by a row of skinny withered trees on the left and power masts with their tendon-like cables on the right. The only audible sound is that of her footsteps and a repetitive metallic clonk. Together with the monochrome of the film, Yōko’s entrance into the Fukushima landscape seems to reference Andrei Tarkovsky’s 1979 science fiction film *Stalker*.⁴⁴ Tarkovsky’s film follows three men, a writer and a professor led by their guide named Stalker, as they enter into a post-apocalyptic wasteland only known as ‘the Zone’ to find a room that grants their deepest wish. When the three are on their way to cross into the zone the rhythmic metallic noise of their railcar’s pump handle is the only sound that breaks the silence. Sōno’s citation of *Stalker* does not end there. Besides the slow pace and lack of information about the whys and how’s —how *Stalker*’s Zone came about is never really explained —Sōno further alludes to Tarkovsky’s work in one of the next scenes.

From inside a half-destroyed building, the camera slowly zooms in onto a window facing the tall weeds of the shore. The crashing waves of the ocean are visible on the horizon. The camera moves closer into the window frame and Yōko becomes visible as

she walks through the swaying scrubs towards the viewer. For a few brief seconds, *Star*’s sepia-tint turns polychrome (Fig. 3). Similarly, in *Stalker* colour replaces monochrome when the three men enter the Zone. In an eerie foreshadowing of the real-life nuclear exclusion zones to come, Tarkovsky’s film addresses environmental deterioration by depicting the Zone’s ecology as a toxic lifeworld where the laws of man-made science are unhinged. Only Stalker knows how to navigate its invisible dangers. In contrast, in *Star* Sōno misses the opportunity to truly engage with the exclusion zone’s toxic radioactive ecology, instead primarily turning it into an allegorical backdrop.

As the camera zooms in on the window, simultaneously with the change to polychrome, a rendition of the baroque suite *Tombeau pour Monsieur de Lully* (1701) by Marin Marais begins to play in a melancholic b-minor.⁴⁵ The reference to Tombeau, which is French for tombstone, marks a musical piece as an ode to honour a real or sometimes fictional person’s death.⁴⁶ While the film’s olive-brown hue before highlighted the antiquated look of Sōno’s future world and served to establish some distance between the viewer and the reality of the exclusion zone, the sudden burst of colour makes the landscape seem all the more real. As the silence of *Star* is lifted by the music, for a brief moment nature, now filling the entire screen, is lusciously green, bright blue. It is pulsating and swaying, alive and untamed. The stark realism of the scene all of a sudden firmly anchors us in the present highlighting what has been lost to the disaster. In a brief, painful moment of nostalgia, Sōno allows the viewer to return home, a moment of respite. All the more oppressive feels the recoil to the monochrome future, all the more pertinent is the loss of the present. This juxtaposition heightens the viewer’s cognitive estrangement from the Fukushima landscape as the film continues.

The End of Science, the End of Politics

Throughout the film, it is slowly revealed what the contents of Yōko’s packages are. In one scene she curiously starts to examine them. She picks up, parcel after parcel, gently swaying them side to side (Fig. 4). She draws each one closer to her ear, listening to the soft swishing sound the content makes as it moves inside the box. She studies the name of the recipient on one of the boxes, ‘Ingrid Coach’. Finally, she opens it and removes the content, a film negative. When she holds it towards the light, four undeveloped photographs of an elderly man with two small children become visible. Yōko continues to open and peek inside the boxes. Seemingly random, mundane things become visible: a used palette with paint and two brushes, some dead butterflies, a single pencil, a cigarette stub, a fishing bait, a used paper cup, a photograph of a little girl in a white dress. Yōko closes her eyes. She seems to understand that despite their mundanity these objects carry great intimacy, an expression of value for both sender and recipient. The conglomerate of things carry within them fragments of a time past, a

Fig. 4
Yōko (Kagurazaka
Megumi) examining
her packages. *The
Whispering Star*, dir.
Sōno Sion (2015).
Film still. © sion
production.



time before the cataclysm catapulted the remaining humans into isolated lonesomeness. As such the practice of collecting and sharing fragments of the past resembles a similar archiving and preservation practice of many people affected by the 3/11 disaster. Searching the ruins of their tsunami-destroyed or radioactively contaminated homes, victims and evacuees tried to salvage the things that once belonged to their loved ones. Collecting the objects that reminded them of a happier past, now lost to the disaster, may represent a form of self-soothing activity, a way to deal with the trauma of the cataclysm. However, to engross oneself in memories and to relive the past to such an extent as to be completely numbed from the present is dangerous as it may result in passive resignation. In how far such a retraction from reality and political agency is detrimental becomes especially apparent, when looking at the next scene of the film.

After the completion of her first delivery, back on board her spaceship, Yōko starts to tape her thoughts. It is a voice diary for the next person to rent the spaceship as we learned in a previous scene. Yōko repeatedly lights a match, watching the flames dwindle, lighting another match before the previous one extinguishes (Fig. 5). She intently observes the flames, walking along the length of her abode. Yōko reminisces in whispers about her delivery service, which feeds on humans' adoration for space and time. The packages she transports from human to human, she ponders, are the only way to convey feelings between sender and recipient. Teleportation was available, but its convenience, the conflation of space and time, led to the deterioration of human feelings. As the match extinguishes she stands in the cockpit and staring into space whispers 'the last pride of humanity may be that which comes from the impotence of machines. This adoration toward distance and time is probably ... similar to the pulsing

Fig. 5
Yōko (Kagurazaka
Megumi) recording.
The Whispering Star,
dir. Sōno Sion
(2015). Film still. ©
sion production.



of a heartbeat to a human' (0:43:28).

In Yōko's universe, human conquests into science and technology are over. However, her monologue suggests that technology advanced slightly before humans completely withdrew from technological progress in exchange for an obsession with emotions, sentimentality and nostalgia, and preservation of their 'adoration towards distance and time'. Conversely, the complete renunciation of order and logic, in favour of impulse and emotions runs the danger of the last remaining humans' regression into a state of dazed dependency. Similar to the drug 'soma' which secures a state of euphoric timelessness of the denizens of writer Alfred Huxley's science fiction dystopia *Brave New World* (1932), keeping humans in a state of emotive longing, dependent on the supply of memorabilia delivered by a machine, ultimately translates into a form of social control.⁴⁷ The trade-off is stark, as efficacy, curiosity and logical thinking are numbed. Arguably these were also traits that defined us as human beings before machines became better at them. On first impression, Sōno himself seems to equally rejoice in this nostalgia and employs tropes similarly to what Jameson termed a 'postmodernist "nostalgia" art language'⁴⁸. Rather than aiming at a faithful representation of historical content, this mode according to Jameson 'approached the "past" through stylistic connotation, conveying "pastness" by the glossy qualities of the image, and "1930s-ness" or "1950s-ness" by the attributes of fashion'.⁴⁹

Although *Star* does not display quite as glossy images as the 'nostalgia films' Jameson cites, the conglomerate of anachronistic devices in the spaceship and Yōko's fashion amount to a kind of stock representation of 'pastness', conveyed through 'stylistic connotation'. Upon the first view, the spaceship's interior with its tatami-mat floor, time-

worn kitchen unit with stove and wooden cupboard resembles the interior of a small Japanese flat from the latter half of the Shōwa period (1926-1989). This past, which includes the post-war period of unmitigated economic success and progress, seems to be the subject of *Star*'s nostalgic longing, a longing that might derive from the current state of post-disaster Japanese society as economically stagnant and ageing. Equally, the analogue technology of the spaceship's cockpit—it is full of plugs and buttons, but without digital screens—and the recorder that Yōko uses to record her tapes, seem to come from the 1950s or 60s. Yōko's loose short-sleeved blouse and high-waisted circular skirt, as well as her short wavy bob firmly locate her within that period. However, upon closer inspection, other elements within the spaceship's interior, such as the washing machine that appears to be from the 1990s reveal themselves as anachronistic. It is a past idealized and distilled from memory, in Jameson's words 'beyond real historical time'.⁵⁰ In its conglomeration of artefacts and merging of pasts, as a science-fiction dystopia, but also historical reverence, *Star*'s aesthetics seem to represent what Jameson identified as a postmodern pastiche, a pasting together of styles and genres without the socially critical element of parody.⁵¹ However, Sōno's choice to represent the future as a return to the past could also be understood as containing inherent criticism towards the current state of post-3/11 Japan. Implicit is perhaps an underlining warning. Governmental control, censorship and the majority of the Japanese complacency about political change may lead to the end of history as warned by Jameson and predicted by Fukuyama, a future without significant advancements that can only ever be regressive.

Together with the withdrawal from the present into an inner emotive world, confined to the eternal reliving of the past, comes the political blankness that *Star*'s universe portrays. No information is disclosed about the machines that govern space. Neither Yōko nor her human clients seem to have any political aspirations. The apoliticism that *Star* depicts thus seems to project a dystopian future vision resulting from the publicly accepted post-war image propagated by the Japanese government of Japanese society as harmonious and coherent. As writer William Andrews points out, the Japanese post-war government retained the official status quo, by denouncing and suppressing protest groups and ignoring large-scale protests until they would fizzle out.⁵² These same mechanisms could be observed post-3/11. The first few years after the Fukushima disaster saw a brief resurgence of anti-nuclear activism. These protests were especially distinguished through the newly enlarged participation of the younger generation of mothers, students, and working singles in their thirties and early forties.⁵³ These were people who otherwise did not identify as activists or even as having a political stance.⁵⁴ However, since 2015, this demographic largely returned to a state of apparent political disinterest and indifference to exercise their rights to vote in Japan's two party-system that lacks any real alternatives to mainstream politics.⁵⁵ Much of this low interest in activism can be attributed to frustration with the seeming ineffectiveness and the invisibility of anti-government political action due to censorship in official media and

press outlets.⁵⁶ Another factor might be the numbing out of political interest due to a focus on consumerism and postmodernist pop culture consumption. These are aspects integral to Japan as a society of late capitalism as defined by Jameson.⁵⁷

In his review of Sōno's *Star*, art critic Sawaragi Noi points out that the film's whisper (hiso hiso) represents a counterpart to the loud squawk (gagaga) of Sōno's 1993 noisy group actions *Tokyo GaGaGa* (*Tōkyō Gagaga* 東京ガガガ).⁵⁸ These were centred on guerilla-style interventions into public space made up of Sōno and others wearing costumes, waving flags and carrying large banners through the streets of Shibuya, Tokyo's hub of shopping and entertainment. They accompanied their march by screams of 'Tokyo gagaga' into several megaphones. Despite the protest-like appearance, Sōno describes his movement retrospectively as meaningless, aimless and irreligious.⁵⁹ Confirming this assessment, Sawaragi maintains that no political demands were being made by the group.⁶⁰

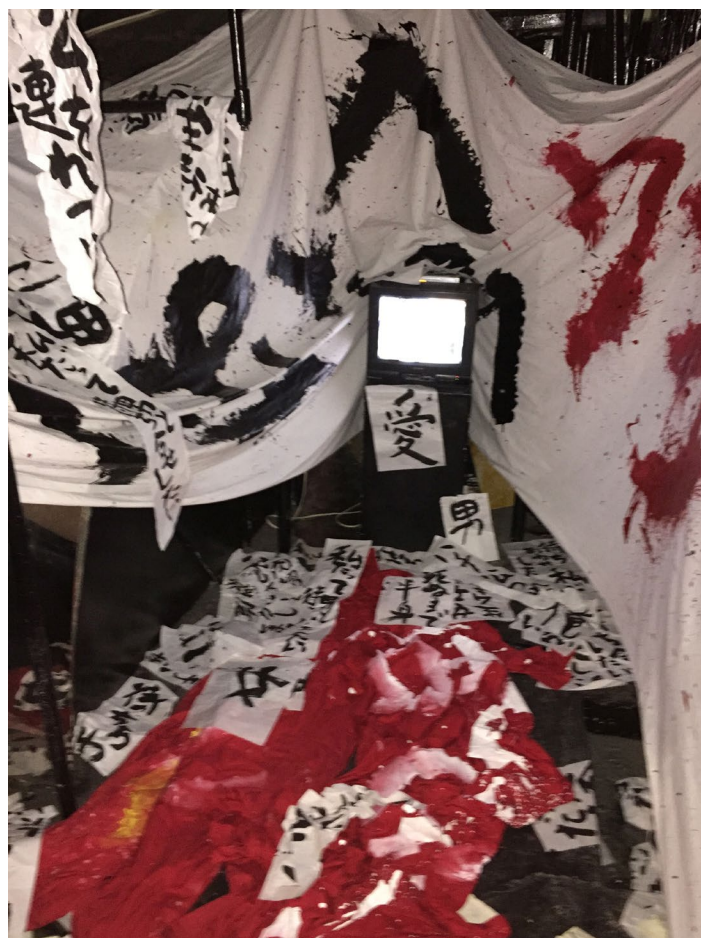
Arguably for their shocking, nonsensical and outlandish appearance, Sōno's group interventions were included in Jean-Jacques Beineix's film *Otaku* (1994).⁶¹ The documentary opens with the record of one of *Tokyo GaGaGa*'s street interventions in 1993. Sōno is visible screaming into the megaphone: 'Where do we take off? What is man's status today? Where is the town of my childhood? What is the point of living through another Sunday without an aim, when we are oppressed every other week?'.⁶² Further into the documentary, Sōno is being interviewed as the leader of the *Tokyo GaGaGa* group. He exclaims the group's interventions are a way to find an alternative route for people, a method to reclaim the streets for expression (39:34). According to Sōno, the city has lost its ability to say something and streets are now being used purely as means to get from A to B. Contrary to Sōno and Sawaragi's retrospective repudiation, *Tokyo GaGaGa* thus was deeply political at its core. It is precisely in its nonsensical, non-communicative expressiveness that it revolts against the shackles of societal pressure to conform to the system at a moment of societal turnover due to the loss of stable jobs and lifelong employment concomitant with the burst of the bubble economy in 1991.⁶³ Transporting banners with a message such as 'From here on there will be no left or right, no upper or lower, 'Tokyo GaGaGa' the movement seems to be lamenting precisely the postmodern loss of identity of the Japanese of late capitalism and the hopelessness of its drawn-out apocalypse, as identified by Jameson and Kumar respectively.⁶⁴

Considering the collapse of identity and feelings of precarity in the face of late capitalist society that Sōno experienced in the 1990s, the quiet apolitical whisper in which *Star*'s universe portrays the future comes as a logical counterpart to this situation. As Sawaragi points out, around the same time that Sōno was intervening publicly in the streets of Tokyo, he was sitting alone in his tiny 'spaceship-like' apartment foreseeing that 'at some point in the future hiso-hiso would arrive on this planet'.⁶⁵ While *Tokyo GaGaGa* was a way to revolt against the feelings of loss and hopelessness, *Star* contains

Fig. 6
Sōno Sion, *Tokyo GaGaGa* (2015).
Installation view.
Gallery Garter,
Tokyo, Japan. ©
Photo: the author.



Fig. 7
Sōno Sion, *Tokyo GaGaGa* (2015).
Installation view.
Gallery Garter,
Tokyo, Japan. ©
Photo: the author.



an underlying critique in that it mirrors Japanese society's lack of political alternatives, a resignation to conform to the status quo and the acceptance of a visionless ahistorical future without any major improvements. The pertinence of *Star*'s vision is exemplified by its easy adaptation to and representation of the post-3/11 Japan twenty-five years later. It thus projects a continuation of Japan being stuck indefinitely in the postmodern apocalypse, at least from 1991 to today.

The tie between *Tokyo GaGaGa* and *Star* was further emphasized when both were exhibited by artist collective Chim↑Pom in 2015 in their gallery space Garter in Kōenji, sub-culture hub and location of Sōno's apartment from 1991. Banners and film documentations of *Tokyo GaGaGa*'s interventions covered the front of the gallery and were displayed inside alongside several screens playing selected scenes from *Star*, then-unreleased (Fig. 6. and Fig. 7). Juxtaposed to the screaming banners, lamenting the postmodern loss of identity, the political void of *Star*'s universe becomes all the more apparent. *Star* presents a future scenario that is deeply dystopian. Therefore, the film can be considered as a warning for the impending loss of political agency of much of the Japanese public post-3/11, as anti-nuclear and anti-government activism was traded off for superficial social harmony and conformity in favour of succumbing to the pressures of the Japanese government to be the ideal diligent citizen.⁶⁶

The Fallibility of Memory and Representation

Instead of exercising political agency, the denizens of *Star*'s Universe are kept trapped in a time lost by memorabilia. Memory is the stuff they feed on, supplied to them by the machines that govern them. However, there is not just one layer to the meaning of *Star*'s theme of memory. While the focus on the reliving of memories instead of acting in the present inside of *Star*'s narrative is a way to ensure political apathy, the film itself also has a political function in keeping the memory about the Fukushima disaster and its victims alive. On the film's official website Sōno introduces *Star* by stating that his intention to make the film was to create a 'small poem for a weathered memory'.⁶⁷ In the Japanese original, the term Sōno uses for weathered is *fuka* (風化). This term, which equally refers to the erosion of geological materials and the fading of memories, carries political implications. It was frequently used as part of the post-3/11 disaster discourse to refer to the fading away of the affected area, the disaster victims and evacuees from public awareness.⁶⁸ Willful amnesia and a desire to return to business as usual rapidly gripped the Japanese public outside of the disaster-stricken area, replacing recollections of the disaster with nostalgia for a past already lost.

Memory is just as unreliable as our perception of reality is. Sōno seems to refer to this, right at the beginning of the film. When Yōko lights her gas stove to make tea, the camera shows a close-up of her fingers opening a matchbox. On the face of the box, the image of a pipe is printed, over it bold letters read 'THE PIPE' (Fig.

Fig. 8
The matchbox. *The
Whispering Star*, dir.
Sōno Sion (2015).
Film still. © sion
production.



Fig. 9
Sōno Sion, *Hachiko
Project* (2015).
Installation view.
Gallery Garter,
Tokyo, Japan. ©
Photo: the author.



8). It is the reversal of René Magritte's famous 1929 painting *The Treachery of Images* of a pipe with the slogan 'Ceci n'est pas une pipe' (This is not a pipe) beneath it. While Magritte refused to lie to the viewer of his painting, making them aware of the ambiguity of visual representation, the blatant lie of Sōno's matchbox makes us aware of discrepancies and ambiguities between what is perceptible and what is hidden underneath. Just as within post-3/11 irradiated Japan, what is visible and what we are being told is used to mask a reality hidden like the matches in their matchbox. It is then a call to read between the lines of representation and question reality. *Star's* feigned postmodern pastiche represents the past as a memory superimposed onto a dystopian future. It is a memory that is unreliable and that mixes and matches different memories to create a multiple-layered nostalgic environment, which we should not take for what it appears to be. While Sōno repeats the tropes of postmodern culture identified by Jameson, he does so deliberately. Paring them with a science fiction narrative that serves to highlight the conditions of the present, he employs these tropes to articulate a warning against a continuation of the status quo of Japanese society. This condition, he cautions, will inevitably lead to a dystopian future. Sōno thus makes apparent a shift to representation as reality, in the way that he replaces modernist painter Magritte's highlighting of the puzzling bogus effect of image likeness with a postmodernist reference to the indistinguishability between representation and reality, and the discrepancies between information, image and reality. As such, this highlights the conditions of post-3/11 Japan, where the government's discourse about 'damage by rumours', censorship and lack of information skewed the boundaries between reality and fiction.⁶⁹ Equally, the image propagated of the exclusion zone's ecology as recovering may be misleading, as the invisible threat of radiation is still continuously lingering.

Liminal Spaces of Life and Death

According to scholar of Japanese literature Tanaka Motoko, in the apocalyptic imaginary, the end of the world corresponds to the idea of one's death.⁷⁰ In postmodern times apocalypse is as immanent to life as our mortality. Undoubtedly, the Fukushima disaster brought the abstract idea of death, in form of a near-death experience or the decease of a loved one, closer to many in Japan. Such an experience in itself can represent some kind of personal apocalypse, in the sense of being a painful, upending and transformative event. Closely related to memories and time is thus, *Star's* inclusion of the opposing themes of life and death, as well as the viewer's cognitive estrangement from the victims of the disaster through their representation as living dead. Together with *Tokyo GaGaGa* and scenes from *Star*, the exhibition at Garter displayed an installation of Sōno's *Hachiko Project* (2015, Fig. 9). Sōno was inspired by the statue of Hachiko the dog, which is the marker of a popular meet-up spot in front of Tokyo's

Fig. 10:
Sōno Sion, *Hachiko Project* (2015-16).
Installation view.
WATARI-UM, The
Watari Museum of
Contemporary Art,
Tokyo, Japan. ©
Photo: the author.



busy Shibuya station. The statue commemorates a faithful dog, who would wait for his owner at the same spot every day, even after his master had died. For *Hachiko Project*, Sōno had several replicas of the statue's plinth as well as of the dog made. He positioned an empty plinth next to the original statue in Shibuya, while he transported the replica of the dog to several places in Fukushima. The installation at Garter then consisted of an empty plinth, a complete Hachiko statue and photographs of the replica Hachiko's travels. The photographs showed him on his plinth by the Fukushima Sea, next to deserted buildings of the exclusion zone and decontamination workers and in the front yard of an elderly couple, Suzuki Toyōko and Noboru, right outside of the exclusion zone.⁷¹ The Suzuki's also participated in *Star*, where they took on the roles of recipients of Yōko's packages. The project imagines a story, where Hachiko leaves Shibuya, where he was destined to wait oblivious to the fact that his master would never return, to join those who are the eternal waiting to return home to a past, which can never be restored. *Hachiko Project* thus represents a connecting link between Shibuya in Tokyo and various places in and around the Fukushima exclusion zone. As the press release to the Garter exhibition pointed out, *Hachiko Project* served to connect *Tokyo GaGaGa* and *Star*.⁷² It is the conceptual glue between the shout and the whisper, two sides of the same coin of the postmodern apocalypse.

Sōno exhibited a slightly larger version of the installation in his second solo show at the Watari-Um a year later. There he extended the work by adding another statue, which

Fig. 11
Yōko (Kagurazaka
Megumi) delivers
a package. *The
Whispering Star*, dir.
Sōno Sion (2015).
Film still. © sion
production.



shows Hachiko in mid-launch to leave his plinth. A sitting Hachiko, a leaping Hachiko and an empty plinth were presented as a trinity, the bright red wall behind the statues was filled with script in white paint (Fig. 10). The scribbles consisted of a poem by Sōno that begins with the words 'I am not here anymore'.⁷³ In the catalogue to the Watari-Um show, Sōno compares the statue of Hachiko to a tombstone, something that is waiting for the dead.⁷⁴ Hachiko visits the towns where the affected by the disaster congregate to reclaim the present that was lost to the disaster, a present that never materialized. Hachiko represents the embodiment of an unfulfilled wish, condemned to eternal waiting, unable to relieve it. Thus, Hachiko is in Sōno's eyes the harbinger of death, as people will come to realize, eternally reliving the past, they are already dead and the future is finished.⁷⁵ This loss of history is an inherent realization of postmodernism.

One strange-looking scene in *Star* shows Yōko delivering a package on a beach. Broken pieces of concrete walls, crookedly hanging to one side, raw metal poles sticking out at the top, which frame Yōko as she moves along sandy grounds, reveal themselves to be pieces of tsunami walls. However, again the landscape becomes an allegory, as Sōno uses the Fukushima shoreline with strewn blocks and half-destroyed concrete constructions as the backdrop to a scene that comes as a representation of the Fukushima victims as living dead. There is a succession of wide shots which show the victims of the disaster as beings of this planet that Yōko visits. They stand facing the camera, still immobile, ghost-like. In the next scene, Yōko walks from right to left across the beach towards the recipient of her package, an old lady (Mori Kōko) sitting atop a little plateau with stairs behind a shop-front oddly perched in the middle of the beach. As Yōko walks towards the old lady she passes several more people, just standing

or sitting frozen on the beach, facing different directions, as if waiting for something that never arrived (Fig. 11). Perhaps they are the ones who are still waiting for the arrival of their packages, packages that will keep them in the past, unable to participate in the present.

In the aftermath of the 3/11 disaster, people of the affected areas shared many stories about ghost sightings of those who had lost their lives to the mega wave.⁷⁶ However, as their representation in *Star* implies, also the evacuees of the exclusion zone, who experienced the sudden death of their lives as they once were due to the apocalyptic event of the disaster, can be considered as living ghosts. The anthropologist Tok Thompson points out that stories about ghosts are often a way to lend expression to the ‘oppressed and morally wronged’ who haunt the present due to harm experienced during their life, at the time of or after their death.⁷⁷ The evacuees of the 3/11 disaster, who faced the loss of their livelihoods but have to continue living, are survivors but at the same time doomed to persevere in an eternal state of victimhood.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the nuclear disaster continues to unfold as a long-drawn-out apocalypse. Not really alive, but not yet dead they are destined to wait, without really knowing for what. The past is forever lost, condensed to a breaking point, almost loop-like culminating to ‘that day’ stuck in time, while the present they wished for can never arrive and the future is finished. As ghost stories are the stories of the oppressed and mistreated, the estrangement of the Fukushima evacuees as ghost-like also reflects the real-life discrimination that the people of the disaster areas had to endure post-3/11. Fukushima farmers experienced a stark loss of sales in produce.⁷⁹ Evacuees that had moved to areas outside of Fukushima experienced bad mouthing and harassment due to the stigma of radiation and irrational fears that it could be passed on like a contagious disease.⁸⁰

This motif of humans inhabiting a liminal space between life and death without rootedness in the present, the condition of the subject inside postmodern apocalypse, is further explored in a scene that represents somewhat of a climax in *Star*’s storyline. As Yōko’s spaceship approaches the place of her last delivery, Planet #62678, the only remaining habitat made up solely of humans, her board computer 6-7 M.I.M.E informs her of the human rules she will have to abide by. Yōko cannot emit sounds louder than 30 decibels, the volume of a whisper. Anything louder is considered a felony and may be fatal to humans. The setting to this planet is different from all the ones Yōko visited before. Instead of using the Fukushima landscape as a backdrop, a large corridor with a plastic laminate floor, shoji screens lining it on both sides, makes up the theatre-like set (Fig. 12). These traditional Japanese paper screens are lit from behind. As within a shadow-play, the outlines of scenes from everyday life are visible. As Yōko walks, calling out for Ms Sori, the recipient of her package, the shadow silhouettes of humans in various scenes of life and death become visible: children playing, funerals, birthday parties, old people praying, a family sharing a meal.

Sōno included a version of this very set as an installation in his exhibition at the



Fig. 12
Yōko (Kagurazaka Megumi) on Planet #62678. *The Whispering Star*, dir. Sōno Sion (2015). Film still. © sion production.



Fig. 13
Sōno Sion, *The Bridge on the Edge of Death* (2016)
Installation view. WATARI-UM, The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan. © Photo: the author.

Watari-Um. There the work was called *The Bridge on the Edge of Death* (*imawa no kiwa no hashi* 今際の際の橋) (2016, Fig. 13). As a visitor, one took on the role of Yōko walking between the screens and curiously observing these scenes of everyday life. Behind one screen a whisper was audible asking in Japanese ‘This place, is it the world of the living or is it the world of the dead?’⁸¹ As visitors, we experience these haunting traces of human existence as uncanny, otherworldly, but cannot help but project ourselves onto the faceless silhouettes, mentally aligning our past and potential future, the hallmark moments of our lives, with the sights of life and death. The installation in the museum, just as the scene in the film, represents the passage between life and death. There is an eerie dream-like quality to it, just as the ghostly humans encountered before, these silhouettes are neither alive nor dead and perhaps they are not even real. Humans that have turned into their memories, representations of a past lost, a present that could have been and a future that will never materialize. Depicting human stock scenes from cradle to grave, Yōko’s entry to the corridor in the film is underlined with what sounds like the gentle chimes of a child’s musical box, perhaps signifying the beginning of life. The sound is soon replaced by Marais’s *Tombeau*, thus, referring to a life’s end, mourning and a sense of nostalgia.

Sawaragi compared the string of scenes to those that one might have encountered in the succession of rooms at a temporary shelter in the aftermath of the 3/11 disaster.⁸² Following his interpretation, the silhouettes are representations of the disaster victims, in this final scene, however, now less than ghosts, just memories of a past, present and future lost to the disaster. Strikingly, Sōno places us in the position of Yōko, making it easier to identify with the android, than with the remaining humans of *Star*’s universe. The recognition that Yōko appears to us more human than the last denizens of *Star*, leads to the final part of this analysis: the exploration of the character of Yōko and the transformation she undergoes in the course of the film.

The Human in the Machine – Android Suzuki Yōko

Androids, human-shaped robots, are a reoccurring subject of science fiction narratives. Seminal science fiction films such as Ridley Scott’s 1982 *Blade Runner* or Steven Spielberg’s 2001 *AI* employ the figure of the android in juxtaposition with the human to get to grips with the fundamental question of what it means to be human. *Star* echoes these earlier science fiction classics in the way that Sōno depicts Yōko as incredibly human-like. It is not until about twenty minutes into the film that it is slowly revealed that the thirty-something woman we are witnessing engaging in household tasks, mind you on a spaceship, is, in fact, a machine. Yōko makes and drinks tea. She cleans, enjoys a can of beer and she sneezes. Playing into gender stereotypes, Sōno equips her with somewhat motherly features in the way he depicts her, equipped with an apron and matching headscarf, performing housework and maintenance on the spaceship, as well



Fig. 14
The board
computer 6-7
M.I.M.E. (Ikeda
Yuto). *The
Whispering Star*, dir.
Sōno Sion (2015).
Film still. © sion
production.

as caring for and parenting her board computer 6-7 M.I.M.E.

The character of M.I.M.E represents a complete opposite to Yōko. Yōko, although artificial intelligence, is very much defined by her bodily appearance. M.I.M.E, however, who has the appearance of a vacuum tube radio is characterized by his disembodied voice (Fig. 14). His child-like tone, his dysfunctionality—he thinks the moths trapped in the ceiling light are the planets whose coordinates he has to configure—and the way he likes to take an inventory by counting, make him appear innocent and playful. The relationship between M.I.M.E and Yōko thus seems almost like a parody of a typical narrative pattern of the postmodern Japanese apocalyptic imaginary. The inclusion of parody would further prove that *Star* only appears to mimic a postmodern pastiche on the surface while containing inherent criticism. Tanaka points out that since the 1990s the apocalypse is often turned into an ancillary allegory for the real focus of the story, which is the love between the immature, clumsy male main character and the brave girlfriend or mother figure.⁸³ Subsequently, the inclusion of the Fukushima landscape becomes secondary to the exploration of the character Yōko and what it means to be human. Her constellation with M.I.M.E reflects the postmodern loss of and the quest for identity of the primarily male subject, addressed in *Tokyo GaGaGa*, as well as the post-war sense of emasculation of the Japanese due to their defeat in the Second World War. This interpretation seems to be confirmed by the only other male character which we get to know more closely.

On one of her voyages, Yōko gets into contact with one of the male denizens (Endo Kenji) of *Star*’s universe. He is introduced to us when he walks towards the camera along the streets of a ghost town. The nameless man is dressed in a Shōwa-style white suit with a vest, black tie, hat and beige overcoat (Fig. 15). His behaviour identifies him as somewhat of a madman or jester. He talks to a tortoise and a plastic cast of a dog that bears resemblance to Hachiko. There is also a certain infantilism about him, as he

Fig. 15
The jester (Endo
Kenji). *The
Whispering Star*, dir.
Sōno Sion (2015).
Film still. © sion
production.



whistles and walks with an empty can attached to his shoe because he likes the sound it makes. When he meets Yōko, she only reluctantly engages in a whispering conversation with him. As she gets her spaceship ready for departure, the jester appears outside the front window of her vehicle, soils it with some white paint all the while madly laughing and dancing. In a reflection of the post-disaster conditions of fragmented communities and isolated individuals, the jester's lonely existence in *Star's* post-apocalyptic universe might have contributed to his madness.

Juxtaposing Yōko with characters like M.I.M.E and the jester, but also with the ghostly appearances of the last remaining humans, makes her seem all the more human in comparison. One can look past a few odd instances where she switches her batteries in a compartment on her stomach, drinks out of a machine oil bottle or sleeps standing up. Yōko is an embodiment of the dissolution of boundaries between nature and technology. In the post-apocalyptic universe and despite her appearance as novum, Yōko seems familiar, while humans seem uncanny, cognitively estranged. The anthropologist and Japanese Studies scholar Jennifer Robertson, in the context of her research into androids in Japan, points out that the Japanese conception of *nature* helps to understand the way robots are perceived as 'natural things' in the popular culture of Japan.⁸⁴ It is somewhat reductive to say that the Japanese live in a way more closely with nature integrating it with culture and society.⁸⁵ After all, environmental pollution is as much a part of Japanese society as it is of any other late capitalist nation.⁸⁶ However, Robertson has a point in saying that the widespread Shintō-derived belief in *Kami*, 'vital forces, deities, or essences residing in, or embodied as, organic and inorganic things', makes it even easier for a Japanese audience to imagine inorganic beings such as Yōko

Fig. 16
Yōko (Kagurazaka
Megumi)
encounters death.
The Whispering Star,
dir. Sōno Sion
(2015). Film still. ©
sion production.



as imbued with sensitivity and affect.⁸⁷

Throughout the film, as the post-apocalyptic premise and its toxic ecology get more and more delegated to the background, Sōno presents Yōko as undergoing a transformation brought on by her encounters with humans and death. The android increasingly comes to grasp with the meaning of life and death, memory and emotions as she begins to develop some of her own. She displays a sense of compassion, while simultaneously referring to the fallibility of machines, a trait arguably formerly reserved for humans, when she consoles M.I.M.E about his dysfunctionality with 'Don't worry, we all make mistakes, I am a machine too' (0:25:22). Yōko also displays anger and remorse. She learns to appreciate sounds and how to ride a bike. When she records her own voice on tapes 'for the purpose of starving off boredom' and for the next Yōko that will inherit the ship from her, it suggests a sense of self, a need to communicate, document and leave a mark among the thousands of identical machines to not be forgotten.

In several instances, Yōko encounters death or grief for something that has been lost. When she is about to board her spaceship after encountering the jester and he asks her for a drink and she declines, he tells her 'Come back soon. I'll be dead before long' (0:54:17). For Yōko, however, time runs differently, her body does not age and days, weeks or years—this is how long her deliveries sometimes take—do not matter for her. When she delivers a package to a certain Mr Coach, the recipient she wanted to reach is already dead. Only a silhouette of white tape on the floor marks where his deceased body must have perished (Fig. 16). Throughout this scene, the only other musical piece of *Star*, a rendition of *Ave Maria* is audible. It is a musical piece usually dedicated to

a beloved one who passed away. Upon completing her last delivery, the scene in the corridor of Shoji screens, as Yōko hands over her package, she witnesses the grief it elicits in its recipient. As she returns to her spaceship a close-up on her face reveals that Yōko herself is tearing up. In the final scene of the movie, Yōko places a squashed can, one that she had been carrying around attached to her boot just like the jester, into a cardboard box. This suggests that she has come to understand the emotional power of memories and has turned into a truly sentient being.

Although towards the end her emotive responses become more visible, Yōko remains obscure and somewhat flat as a character. However, the juxtaposition with the ghost-like human beings makes her nevertheless seem more multi-faceted and all the more alive. Thus, the post-apocalyptic dystopia of *Star* focuses on the personal evolution of the machine into a sentient being as an optimistic outlook, because the desolateness of society and the collapse of ecology as an event that has already occurred cannot be resolved. Against this implicit warning about what the present status quo of Japan may ultimately lead to, hope persists in the thought that we as a species might not survive, but the essence of being human, which is emotions will, even if they will no longer be our own.

Conclusion

This chapter examined Sōno's film *Star* based on the importance of investigating science fiction narratives to study the contemporary social and political dynamics which they reflect in their visions of the future. Based on the coevalness of the genesis of *Star*'s script in the early 1990s, the analysis drew on Jameson's postmodern cultural critique and the social and cultural characteristics he recognizes within the age of late capitalism. Following these theoretical and methodological prerequisites, the analysis highlighted how the post-apocalyptic setting of *Star* depicted the future as postmodern apocalypse: accumulative, drawn-out and without hope for renewal. However, I identified this depiction of a future dystopia defined by a nostalgic longing for a past as a warning. In this context, the film contains an inherent critique towards the treatment of the disaster victims and the upholding of the status quo through the lack of political alternatives, as well as the destabilization of reality through censorship and representation as is the case in post-3/11 Japan.

By examining the film in juxtaposition to Sōno's artistic interventions of the 1990s and mid-2010s, in the form of *Tokyo GaGaGa* and *Hachiko Project*, a continuity and aggravation especially of the issues of lack of political alternatives —as most of Japanese society despite cataclysmic moments continued to return to a status quo of apparent complacency —effacing of historicity and loss of identity from 1990s to past the disaster became apparent. The dystopian quality of *Star*'s vision of the postmodern apocalypse became especially pertinent, in the way that *Star* does not fashion a solution

to these issues. Instead, the film warns that the future for humans might be irredeemably finished if the Japanese people continue to evade political agency, cautioning that machines will become better at being humans than humans themselves.

Finally, Sōno's inclusion of the real ravaged landscapes of Fukushima and the disaster victims serves to remind audiences of their ongoing state of precarity. However, in the course of the film, Sōno eschews engaging more deeply with the toxic ecology that is part of *Star*'s narrative premise. Warning against a loss of history as based on the lack of human political agency, as well as political, scientific and cultural advancement as portrayed by *Star* ultimately also translates into an anthropocentric perception of what constitutes history. It eschews the recognition that nonhuman agencies shape and decisively impact what we as humans retrospectively perceive as history. Foregoing engagement with the interrelationship of humans and their environment made apparent by the 3/11 disaster, Sōno transforms the real-life exclusion zone of Fukushima into a surface for an anthropocentric projection. This projection is constituted by the anxiety about the loss of identity as a real sense of past, present and future is replaced with nostalgia for an idealized past, as *Star* warns that the present and future that could have been were inevitably lost to the disaster. Additionally, non-humans, Yōko the android and animals in the form of Hachiko, turn into projective surfaces to further inquire into human emotions and what it means to be human. Therefore, while the destabilization of humans' status and place in the world is mourned, Sōno forgoes any explicit reference to radioactive contamination, ecological collapse or the extinction of animal and plant life within the exclusion zone of Fukushima.

- All Japanese names are written according to Japanese convention with surname first. Exceptions are Japanese living and working abroad or those who themselves write their names in the Western convention. These are given with first name first.
- Along with ‘Fukushima disaster’ or just ‘Fukushima’ the events have also been labeled by referring to them by their date as ‘3/11.’ As of 2021 the exclusion zone makes up only 2,5% of the prefecture of Fukushima. Therefore, to avoid conflation of the whole prefecture to a symbol for the disaster and for brevity’s sake I will refer to the event by its date.
- ‘Transition of Evacuation Designated Zones’, Fukushima Prefecture Website, accessed 26 September 2020, <https://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/site/portal-english/en03-08.html>.
- Towns close to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant have successively reopened since spring 2017. However, at the time of writing there are still large areas that are uninhabitable. See Masumi Koizumi, ‘Tohoku Tours Shed Light on Life in the Aftermath of the 3/11 Tsunami and Fukushima Nuclear Disaster’, *The Japan Times*, March 8, 2019, accessed 26 September 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/03/08/national/tohoku-tours-shed-light-life-aftermath-3-11-tsunami-fukushima-nuclear-disaster/>.
- Apocalypse, which derives from the Greek term ‘apokálypsis’, meaning to uncover, refers to a revealing event, typically involving an end of the world scenario. While the term has its origin in religion, since the twentieth century visions of secular apocalypse caused by nuclear holocaust or ecological catastrophes have increasingly been gaining ground. See, for instance, Malcolm Bull (ed.), *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, Wolfson College lectures [1993] (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995). The vision of the Fukushima exclusion zone as post-apocalyptic landscape persists as romanticised version even more than ten years after the disaster. See James Whitlow and Mike Ives, ‘Fukushima Photos: 10 Years Later’, *The New York Times*, March 10, 2021, accessed 1 September 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/10/world/asia/fukushima-japan-nuclear-anniversary.html>.
- Political language both in Japan and abroad further mirrored this predominant sense of the apocalyptic in facing the nuclear disaster. On 14 March 2011, then-governor of Tokyo, Ishihara Shintaro, told the press that he saw the tsunami as divine punishment (*tenbatsu* 天罰). See Levi McLaughlin, ‘IN THE WAKE OF THE TSUNAMI: Religious Responses to the Great East Japan Earthquake’, *CrossCurrents* 61:3 (2011):p. 291, accessed 3 November 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24461807>. Both former German chancellor Angela Merkel and then-Bundestag chairman of the Social Democratic Party Frank-Walter Steinmeier called the nuclear disaster ‘a catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions’ with Steinmeier adding that the disaster ‘radically questions certainties of the past’. See Dana Schülbe, ‘Regierungserklärung Zu Japan: Merkel: „Heldenhafter Wie Verzweifelter Kampf“’, accessed 23 September 2020, https://rp-online.de/panorama/ausland/merkel-heldenhafter-wie-verzweifelter-kampf_aid-13540203 and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, ‘Fukushima: Eine Katastrophe Apokalytischen Ausmaßes: Frank-Walter Steinmeier in der Debatte zur Reaktorkatastrophe von Fukushima’, SPD-Bundestagsfraktion, accessed 23 September 2020, <https://www.spdfraktion.de/themen/reden/fukushima-katastrophe-apokalytischen-ausmasses>.
- Environmental historian Sara B. Pritchard has termed the Fukushima disaster an envirotechnical disaster, as it occurred because of the permeability and interplay of natural and sociotechnical processes. See Sara B. Pritchard, ‘An Envirotechnical Disaster: Negotiating Nature, Technology, and Politics at Fukushima’, in Ian J. Miller, Julia Adeney Thomas and Brett Walker (eds.), *Japan at Nature’s Edge: The Environmental Context of a Global Power*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), p. 256.
- Philosopher Bruno Latour points out that the establishment of ‘Society’ and ‘Nature’ can be traced back to the seventeenth century and argues for a removal of the artificial boundary between them to fully discern non-human agency. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social:*

An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 110–11.

- Katsuya Hirano and Hirotaka Kaisai, “‘The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster Is a Serious Crime’: Interview with Koide Hiroaki 福島核災害は明らかに深刻な犯罪である—小出裕章氏に聞く’, *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* 14:6 (2016), accessed 27 July 2020, <https://apij.forg/2016/06/Hirano.html>.
- The Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, as well as the Fukushima disaster and their aftermath each resulted in multifaceted artistic responses in art, literature, music, theatre and film.
- Sōno is a prolific film-maker with rapid output, well-known for his fast-paced, sometimes campy movies. He is notorious for employing a visual language that is often shocking, full of sex and bloody gore. Sōno started his career as a poet before entering filmmaking in the 1980s. He is best known for films such as *Suicide Club* (*Jisatsu Sakuru* 自殺サークル, 2001) and *Love Exposure* (*Ai no mukidashi* 愛のむきだし, 2008).
- Sōno Sion, 園子r作品集 ひそひそ星 *Sono Shion Sakuhinshū Hiso Hiso Boshi* [*Sono Shion Collection of Works the Whispering Star*], Shohan (Tokyo: Asahi Shuppansha, 2016), p. 125.
- ‘園子r ひそひそ星 *Sono Shion Hiso Hiso Boshi* [*Sono Shion the Whispering Star*]’, WATARI-UM, The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art, accessed 25 September 2020, <http://www.watarium.co.jp/exhibition/1603sono/#ex>.
- Veronica de Pieri, ‘Dystopia as a Narrative Keyword: Tawada Yōko’s Responses to Japanese 3/11’, *paru dans Loxias*, 54 (2016), accessed 1 September 2021, <http://revel.unice.fr/loxias/index.html?id=8533>.
- For an in-depth analysis of two Fukushima-related installation works see Theresa Deichert, ‘Contested Sites, Contested Bodies: Post-3.11 Collaborations, Agency, and Metabolic Ecologies in Japanese Art’, *The Journal of Transcultural Studies* 11:2 (2020), accessed 4 November 2021, <https://doi.org/10.17885/heip.jts.2020.2.24246>.
- Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 287–88.
- Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), pp. xx–xxi.
- Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. ix; Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 17.
- Jameson, *Archaeologies*, p. 286.
- As Clélia Zernik remarks, post-Fukushima artistic production often takes up ghosts as a theme that symbolises the deceased, but also an uncanny invisible presence. Her examples include the works of Ohmaki Shinji (*Liminal Air*, 2014), Osawa Tsuyoshu (*Return of...*, 2017) and Yanagi Yukinori (*Project God-zilla ‘The Basement of Yokohama Port Opening Memorial Hall’*, 2017). See Clélia Zernik, ‘Japanese Art After Fukushima Through the Prism of Festivals’, *Critique d’art* 49 (2017): p. 116, <https://doi.org/10.4000/critiqueart.27197>.
- Tanaka Motoko argues that the defeat of the War destabilized national identity and led to a sense of immaturity as it challenged the pre-War perception of the Japanese as aggressor and colonial power. Motoko Tanaka, *Apocalypse in Contemporary Japanese Science Fiction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014). <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137373557>, pp. 3–4. While Japan emerged as an economic superpower in the post-World War II era, this identity was again lost with the burst of the bubble economy.
- Seminal publications on artistic and cultural responses to the 3.11-disaster include Lisette Gebhardt and Masami Yuki (eds.), *Literature and Art After ‘Fukushima’: Four Approaches, Reihe zur japanischen Literatur und Kultur Vol. 7* (Berlin: EB-Verl., 2014), Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (eds.), *Fukushima and the Arts: Negotiating Nuclear Disaster*, (London: Routledge, 2016), and Yasushi Kurabayashi, *Shinsai to Ato Ano Toki, Geijutsu Ni Nani Ga Dekita No Ka* 震災とアート あのととき、芸術に何ができただのか [*Earthquake Disaster and Art: What Could Art Do at That Time?*], Shohan (Tokyo: Bookend, 2013).
- For an analysis of post-3.11 documentary films see Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, *NO NUKES: ‘Posuto 3.11’ Eiga No Chikara, Ato No Chikara* <ポスト3r11> 映rの力rアrトの力 [*‘Post 3.11’ the Power of Movies and the Power of Art*], Shohan (Nagoya-shi: Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2021).

- Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, ‘Gendering “Fukushima”: Resistance, Self-Responsibility, and Female Hysteria in Sono Sion’s Land of Hope’, in *Fukushima and the Arts: Negotiating Nuclear Disaster*, Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (eds.), Routledge contemporary Japan series 63 (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 110.
- Although scholarly consensus attested greater visibility for critically engaged works of art in the aftermath of the 3/11 disaster, self-censorship continues to pervade contemporary art and film in Japan due to difficulty to receive funding or find a platform for works with precarious content. Recent incidents, such as the closure of the Aichi Biennale in 2019, further suggest a setback in the context of freedom of expression within arts and cultural production in Japan. See ‘Aichi Triennale Tests the Limits of Freedom of Expression in Japan - Biennial Foundation’, accessed 3 March 2020, <https://www.biennialfoundation.org/2019/11/aichi-triennale-tests-the-limits-of-freedom-of-expression-in-japan/>.
- Himitsu* is adapted from Furuya Minoru’s 2001 manga of the same name. After 3/11, Sōno rewrote his script to include the disaster landscape as a backdrop. See Kenta McGrath, ‘3/11 Cinema’, *Senses of Cinema*, 92 (2019), accessed 25 August 2020, <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2019/cinema-in-the-2010s/3-11-cinema/>.
- Sōno, 園子r作品集 ひそひそ星 Sōno Shion Sakuhinshū Hiso Hiso Boshi [*Sono Shion Collection of Works The Whispering Star*], p. 58.
- For an extensive discussion of *Land of Hope* see Iwata-Weickgenannt, ‘Gendering “Fukushima”’.
- Krishan Kumar, ‘Apocalypse, Millenium and Utopia Today’, in *Apocalypse Theory and the Ends of the World*, Malcolm Bull (ed.), Wolfson College lectures [1993] (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 207.
- Kumar, ‘Apocalypse, Millenium and Utopia Today’, p. 205.
- Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End of History’, *The National Interest Summer* 16 (1989): p. 18, accessed 29 September 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184> cited in Kumar, ‘Apocalypse, Millenium and Utopia Today’, p. 206.
- Fukuyama, ‘The End of History’, p. 4. Fukuyama extended his essay to a book and published it under an even more apocalyptic title. See Fukuyama, Francis, *The end of history and the last man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). It is also worth noting that there is an interesting conceptual tension here between the neoliberal discourse’s perception of history as progress and Fukuyama’s proclamation that together with the seemingly uncontested establishment of capitalism history has come to an end.
- Louis Menand, ‘Francis Fukuyama Postpones the End of History’, *The New Yorker*, August 27, 2018, accessed 2 November 2021, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/09/03/francis-fukuyama-postpones-the-end-of-history>. While social and political developments elsewhere have disproven Fukuyama’s theory, since the early 1990s Japan as a country has found itself in a period of stagnation. Immediately after 3/11 there was a sense that social and political change might be possible, however, anti-nuclear movements and public interest in political change have since died down again and Japanese society returned to the status quo.
- Further apocalyptic events for Japanese society during this period were the Great Hanshin Earthquake that devastated Kobe and the surrounding area on 27 January 1995 and the deadly Sarin gas attack in the Tokyo subway by religious cult Aum Shinrikyo on 20 March that same year.
- Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 10.
- Considering Japan’s ongoing economical stagnation, the following decades since the 1990s have subsequently been termed as Japan’s ‘lost decades’.
- Andrew M. Butler, ‘Science Fiction Criticism’, in Nick Hubble and Aris Mousoutzanis (eds.) *The Science Fiction Handbook* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), p. 179.
- Compare M. Keith Booker’s definition of dystopia in M. Keith Booker, *Historical Dictionary of Science Fiction Cinema*, (Lanham Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2010), p. 113.
- ‘Transformation of the Most Nuclear-Fearful Population to an Atomic Enthusiasts: America’s Psychological Warfare Strategies’, in Richard Krooth, Morris Edelson and Hiroshi Fukurai (eds.), *Nuclear Tsunami: The Japanese Govern-*

ment and America’s Role in the Fukushima Disaster (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

- Sōno, 園子r作品集 ひそひそ星 *Sono Shion Sakuhinshū Hiso Hiso Boshi* [*Sono Shion Collection of Works The Whispering Star*], p. 43.
- Jessica Langer, ‘Case Studies in Reading 2: Key Theoretical and Critical Texts in Science Fiction Studies’, in Hubble; Mousoutzanis, *The Science Fiction Handbook*, pp. 103–4.
- Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, p. 64.
- Langer, ‘Case Studies in Reading 2: Key Theoretical and Critical Texts in Science Fiction Studies’, p. 104.
- Stalker is an adaptation of Arkadij Strugatskii and Boris Strugatskii, *Roadside Picnic* (London: Gollancz, 1978).
- Marin Marais, *Pieces de viole du second livre*, 1701 (1701).
- Michael Tilmouth and David Ledbetter, *Tombau (I)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000028084>.
- Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (New York: Harper Collins, 1946).
- Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. 19.
- Ibid.
- Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 21.
- Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 17.
- William Andrews, *Dissenting Japan: A History of Japanese Radicalism and Counterculture, from 1945 to Fukushima* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), p. 307.
- Eiji Oguma, ‘A New Wave Against the Rock: New Social Movements in Japan Since the Fukushima Nuclear Melt-down’, *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* 14:13 (2016), accessed 6 October 2020, <https://apij.forg/2016/13/Oguma.html>.
- Sociologist Aya Hirata Kimura for instance has studied how many women to express their worries about safety post-Fukushima turned to measuring food’s radiation levels instead of engaging in direct political opposition. See Aya Hirata Kimura, *Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists: The Gender Politics of Food Contamination After the Fukushima* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
- The year 2015 marked the protests against the alteration of the self-defence article 9 of the Japanese constitution, a crucial basis of the countries pacifism. See Andrews, *Dissenting Japan*, p. 300.
- While foreign media reported, the national press barely covered the protests. See Eiji Oguma, *Tell the Prime Minister: Shusho Kantei No Mae De* 首相官邸の前で [*In Front of the Prime Minister’s Residence*] (UPLINK CO, 2015), https://www.uplink.co.jp/kanteimaie/index_en.php.
- Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. x. In this context, French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, has pointed out that the prevailing global system of capitalism contributes to what he calls the ‘general equivalence’ of catastrophes, where all catastrophes become alike. Catastrophes such as the Fukushima disaster then do not come as revelatory moments anymore. In the pursuit of technological and economic progress, catastrophes are anticipated as inevitable. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *After Fukushima: The Equivalence of Catastrophes*, (trans.) Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 6.
- Noi Sawaragi, ‘Noi Sawaragi: Notes on Art and Current Events 56: A Restatement: The Art of “Ground Zero” (Part 23) Sion Sōno and Hiso Hiso Boshi (The Whispering Star) (1)’, *Art it*, 18 May 2016, accessed 4 November 2021, https://www.art-it.asia/en/u/admin_ed_contri9/8miz13e96cbisgfcnpfy.
- Sōno, 園子r作品集 ひそひそ星 Sōno Shion Sakuhinshū Hiso Hiso Boshi [*Sono Shion Collection of Works The Whispering Star*], p. 159.
- Sawaragi, ‘Noi Sawaragi: Notes on Art and Current Events 56’.
- Tokyo GaGaGa* does not fit the categorization as ‘Otaku’ though. Otaku refers to someone who displays an obsession, verging on the pathological, with a popular culture product, such as manga, anime, science fiction or video games, to an extent that is negatively impacting the person’s social skills. See Hiroki Azuma, *Otaku: Japan’s Database Animals*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 3.
- Translation from Jean-Jacques Beineix, *Otaku* (France 2 Cinéma, 1994), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bg->

pRRibMUzQ.

63. During this time a new sort of workforce, the so-called *freeter*, consisting of young part-time workers and creatives emerged. As a young creative during that time, Sōno was arguably one of them. See Yoshitaka Mōri, ‘Culture = Politics: The Emergence of New Cultural Forms of Protest in the Age of Freeter’, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6:1 (2005), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462394042000326888>.

64. Banner translation taken from Sawaragi, ‘Noi Sawaragi: Notes on Art and Current Events 56’ It is especially curious that Sawaragi misses the political implications of Sōno’s *Tokyo GaGaGa* as he locates Sōno’s work within the lineage of Japanese avant-garde groups such as Zero Jigen, Kyushu Ha and Zero Dimension.

65. Sawaragi, ‘Noi Sawaragi: Notes on Art and Current Events 56’.

66. As Kimura points out, the Japanese government in the aftermath of the disaster for instance asked citizens to not give in to what they construed as harmful rumours about radioactive contamination of foodstuff and diligently support the recovery of East Japan through buying and consuming produce from Fukushima despite concerns over safety. See Kimura, *Radiation brain moms*, p. 5.

67. *Fuka shikaketa kioku nitaishite no chisana shi wo tsukuritai* [風化しかけた記憶に「しての小さな詩を作りたい」] Sion Production, ‘Eiga “Hiso Hiso Boshi” Kōshiki Saito 映「『ひそひそ星』公式サイト [Official Website of the Film the Whispering Star]’, accessed 11 October 2019, <http://hisohisoboshi.jp>.

68. ‘Fukushima-Ken Fūhyō Fūka Taisaku Kyōka Senryaku Ni Tsuite 福島県風評「風化対策強化戦略について [About the Strategy to Strengthen Countermeasures Against Rumors and the Fading of Memories Concerning Fukushima Prefecture]’, accessed 27 February 2019, <https://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/sec/01010d/senryaku-sakutei.html>.

69. In the post-Fukushima discourse, the term *fūhyōigai* (風評被害), damage through rumours, was often utilized by the Japanese government to justify their engineering and withholding of information about the degree of radioactive contamination. See, for instance, Katsuya Hirano and Hirotaka Kaisai, ‘The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster is a Serious Crime: Interview with Koide Hiroaki 福島核災害は明らかに深刻な犯罪である——小出裕章氏に聞く’, *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* 14:6, accessed 27 July 2020, <https://apjif.org/2016/06/Hirano.html>.

70. Tanaka, *Apocalypse*, p. 2.

71. A series of interviews with the Suzukis inspired Sōno for his film *Land of Hope*, as the demarcation of the exclusion zone ran right through the front yard of the couple’s house. Sōno, 園子「作品集 ひそひそ星 Sōno Shion Sakuhinshū Hiso Hiso Boshi [*Sōno Shion Collection of Works The Whispering Star*], p. 58.

72. Chim↑Pom, ‘Sōno Shion Solo Exhibition “Whispering Star”’, 日本の芸術家Chim↑Pomのオフィシャルサイト, accessed 15 September 2020, <http://chimpom.jp/artistrunspace/sonosion-en.html>.

73. The original Japanese is ‘*Boku wa mou koko ni hainai* [ぼくはもうここにはいない]’.

74. Sōno, 園子「作品集 ひそひそ星 Sōno Shion Sakuhinshū Hiso Hiso Boshi [*Sōno Shion Collection of Works The Whispering Star*], p. 117.

75. Sōno, 園子「作品集 ひそひそ星 Sōno Shion Sakuhinshū Hiso Hiso Boshi [*Sōno Shion Collection of Works The Whispering Star*], p. 125.

76. See for instance Hara Takahashi, ‘The Ghosts of Tsunami Dead and Kokoro No Kea in Japan’s Religious Landscape’, *Journal of Religion in Japan* 5, pp. 2-3 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1163/22118349-00502002>.

77. Tok Thompson, ‘Ghost Stories from the Uncanny Valley: Androids, Souls, and the Future of Being Haunted’, *Western Folklore: The Journal of the Western Folklore Society* 78: 1 (Winter 2019): p. 45.

78. For the problematic implications of the conceptualization of an ongoing post-3/11 victimhood see Ryo Morimoto, ‘Ethnographic Lettering: “Pursed Lips: A Call to Suspend Damage in the Age of Decommissioning”’. *criticalasian-studies.org Commentary Board*, 22 March 2021, accessed 23 November 2021, <https://doi.org/10.52698/ASPR7364>.

79. The Japanese government tried to counteract this through promoting the consumption of Fukushima foodstuff via television advertisements. See Masami Yuki, ‘Post-Fukushima Discourses on Food and Eating: Analysing Political Implications and Literary Imagination’, in Lisette Gebhardt and Masami Yuki (eds.), *Literature and Art After “Fukushima”*, pp. 37–52.

80. ‘Groundless Rumors Add to Burdens of Fukushima Evacuees’, *The Daily Yomiuri*, April 22, 2011, accessed 4 November 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120609011617/https://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/T110421006295.htm>.

81. The original Japanese is ‘*Koko wa, kono yo na no ka ano yo na no ka* [ここは、この世なのかあの世なのか]’.

82. Noi Sawaragi, ‘Noi Sawaragi: Notes on Art and Current Events 57: A Restatement: The Art of “Ground Zero” (Part 24) Sion Sōno and Hiso Hiso Boshi (The Whispering Star) (2)’, *Art it*, 29 June 2016, accessed 4 November 2021, https://www.art-it.asia/en/u/admin_ed_contri9/yhduqjyxcswflmkdhzw.

83. Tanaka, *Apocalypse*, p. 4.

84. Jennifer Robertson, *Robo Sapiens Japonicus: Robots, Gender, Family, and the Japanese Nation* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), p. 15.

85. On the myth of the harmonious coexistence of the Japanese with nature see for instance Aike P. Rots, *Shinto, Nature and Ideology in Contemporary Japan: Making Sacred Forests* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

86. See for instance Brett L. Walker, *The Toxic Archipelago: A History of Industrial Disease in Japan* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2010).

87. Robertson, *Robo Sapiens Japonicus*, p. 15.

Monstrous Ecology: Regional Iconographies and Bourbon Authority in Depictions of the Beast of Gévaudan, 1764-5

HARVEY SHEPHERD

Fig. 1
François Antoine
presenting the wolf to
Louis XV and the
court at Versailles
(1765). Etching,
Mondhare,
Bibliothèque
nationale de
France, Paris (in
*Recueil factice de pièces
relatives à la bête du
Gévaudan, formé
par Gervais-François
Magné de Marolles*).
© BNF.



In 1764, on a hot Summer's day at the end of June, a young peasant woman called Jeanne Boulet was killed by an unidentified creature while tending to her livestock. The attack occurred in a grazing pasture outside the village of Ubac in the Gévaudan:¹ a mountainous and heavily forested inland portion of the Languedoc region of Southern France. Following Boulet's death, a local priest claimed to have seen a beast that had been roaming the area for a number of weeks,² and by late September of the same year, many more peasants and shepherds were killed by the mysterious entity. Stories of the creature were at first only circulated locally in Languedoc and its neighbouring regions of Provence and Auvergne. In a matter of weeks, however, news of the Beast of Gévaudan grew more widespread. Following increasing popularity in Parisian newspapers such as the *Gazette de France*, these reports of the monster quickly struck terror into the populace of the French capital, along with the court at Versailles. On the 16th of November 1764, the *Gazette* ran its first story on the Beast, describing it as a 'cruel animal' roaming the parishes of the Gévaudan.³ Responding to a mounting sense of panic in the capital, France's monarch Louis XV deployed army captains and hunters down to the South of the kingdom to kill the mysterious creature and end the anguish and devastation it was causing.⁴ In the Summer of 1765, after several failed hunts carried out by a local dragoon captain called Duhamel,⁵ the king sent his personal *arquebusier* François Antoine down to the Languedoc region to search for the Beast.⁶ On the 20th September, after six weeks scouring the countryside, Antoine, his assistant M. Reinhard (a Swiss hunter in the employment of the duc d'Orléans),⁷ and a small band of soldiers managed to track the creature to Les Chazes where it was hiding in the land surrounding the royal abbey.⁸ After bursting out from a thicket, Antoine shot the animal and killed it,

giving an abrupt sense of closure to the year-long hunt.⁹

Following this dramatic culmination of events, the supposed monster killed by the king's hunter appeared to be nothing more than a wolf,¹⁰ and its body was preserved and sent back to Versailles for Louis XV to personally inspect.¹¹ This unusual encounter of a rural French 'monster' and the absolute Bourbon monarchy at Versailles was commemorated in a 1765 etching produced at the printing house Chez Mondhare in Paris' Rue St. Jacques [Fig. 1].¹² Standing amid a dense crowd of assembled courtiers, the figure of Louis XV is still visible in the centre of the composition directly behind the wolf, whose large jaws appears as if locked in a stiff rictus. To the left of the huddled mass of nobles, positioned close to the once deadly mouth of the animal, François Antoine stands with his hand curled in a gesture which draws the viewer's eye simultaneously towards both the *Ordre du Saint-Esprit* pinned to his jacket and the dead animal which ensured the medal's obtainment. Following this inspection, Louis XV declared that he was satisfied that the terrible *Bête du Gévaudan* had been dispatched, and soon the popular interest and panic concerning this monster began to peter out in both Paris and at the French court.¹³ In the Chez Mondhare etching, we see the creature from the perspective of its innate strangeness, presented as a savage natural specimen within the refined space of the French court, ultimately decontextualised from its wild origins in the fields and woods of Southern France. The print conveys an effective juxtaposition between the Beast and the court as the dark mass of the animal's body contrasts the refined white clothing worn by the king and the assembled nobles.

The purpose of this discussion is to examine representations of the Beast such as that etched at Chez Mondhare, produced from the Summer of 1764 until the end of the following year, asking how these depictions contextualised the creature within wider discourses concerning order, ecology, and the natural world. The story of the monster has previously received wide attention from historians, who have considered it from a variety of angles such as the growth of mass media in the mid-eighteenth century, or the persistence of superstitious beliefs within Enlightenment Paris.¹⁴ However, these discussions often omit or underemphasise the role played by visual representations of the Beast in the formation of its story at the time that it was believed to be ravaging the populations of the Gévaudan. Furthermore, the visual forms given to the creature differed between the French capital and the monster's region of origin in the South of France, contextualised as they were within localised iconographies and popular traditions. A true understanding of the Beast's depictions and their wider meanings cannot be gained by solely considering Parisian conceptions of the creature. A wider understanding of the monster's depictions will be achieved through a conscious re-regionalisation of the creature, looking at the corpus of its visual forms not as a single unit, but as a nuanced taxonomy informed by differing localised iconographies and identities. This act of comparison across geographical and cultural distances will allow us to see more clearly the changes sustained to the Beast's visual form in

the print workshops of Paris, and the larger symbolic discourses of monstrosity, anthropocentrism, and ecological (dis)order which these modifications suggest.

These narratives of beastliness and symbolic order are present across depictions of the creature, whether they were produced in Paris or in Southern France. An art historical method that is conscious of regional and micro-cultural differences allows for a more precise examination of the particular forms that these depictions took as they relate to iconographic and ceremonial traditions which were particular to each locality. Just as the monster will be considered from the specific regional iconography of Languedoc and its surrounding areas, so Paris will also be seen not as a metonym for France, but as a single region where the story of the Beast was ultimately couched in a particular visual and symbolic language rooted in historical memory and collective experience. Paris in the mid-eighteenth century was a city experiencing a number of social hardships which led to a crisis of popular faith in the absolute monarchy. The presence of a monstrous creature in the South of France seemed to compound the struggles already facing both the capital and the kingdom as a whole, as it represented an upset to the natural and ecological order: a potentially apocalyptic harbinger stalking the fields and woods of the Languedoc. However, the narrative began in the Southern region of Languedoc, and the ceremonial and iconographic traditions peculiar to the region.

Every year in towns and villages throughout the former Languedoc region and in neighbouring Provence,¹⁵ locals hold an annual procession to commemorate Sainte Marthe: the early medieval saint who delivered the town of Tarascon from a terrible monster known as the *Tarasque*.¹⁶ The creature had dismembered and eaten local people who dared to step outside of the town's walls into the countryside beyond until the divinely-appointed saint pacified the beast and bid it to not return. While the story of the *Tarasque* and the jubilant annual celebration of Sainte Marthe began in Provence, and not Languedoc where stories of the Beast of Gévaudan would originate, the two regions shared many cultural traditions which were distinct to them alone. Both Provence and Languedoc had been Medieval additions to the French kingdom which provided France's kings access to the previously inaccessible trade routes of the Mediterranean.¹⁷ Before their conquest, and persisting long afterwards, the fluvial link provided by the Rhône had in effect blurred the sharp distinctions between these regions, acting as a conduit for the transmission of culture between the towns which lined the banks of the river, such as Tarascon, Beaucaire, and Avignon.¹⁸ Furthermore, the Rhône and its tributaries acted as the primary highway of goods and people in the Southern French region characterised by the *langue d'oc*. As distinct from the Northern *langue d'oïl*, which constitutes the pre-modern base of the modern French language,¹⁹

langue d'oc was a Southern dialect whose isogloss lay as far North as Lyon and the Midi,²⁰ and which stood as a distinguishing feature of Southern French culture even after Northern France's incorporation of Languedoc and Provence in the later Medieval period. While the Beast of Gévaudan may have hailed from Languedoc, and the *Tarasque* from Provence, we can understand the two monster stories as having coexisted within a shared cultural geography which superseded the cartographic division of the two regions.²¹

Beginning in the fifteenth century in the Provencal town of Tarascon before spreading down the bustling and turbulent Rhône waterway, the feast day of Sainte Marthe coalesced around a procession which enacted the story of the local saviour and the *Tarasque* with costumed players and portable models which were manoeuvred through the town's winding medieval streets. The procession on Sainte Marthe's feast day in 1466 is the first to be recorded as having a three-dimensional model of the *Tarasque*,²² and the tradition endures to this day, taking place annually on the 24th of June.²³ When the beast of Gévaudan was first believed to have struck in 1764, its first victim Jeanne Boulet was killed on the 30th of June, only six days after the feast day, when towns throughout Provence and Languedoc would have put on parades and carnivals dedicated to not only remembering this folkloric myth, but also re-enacting it graphically for the entertainment of people in the streets. Boulet's village of Ubac was situated close to a nearby *bourg* named Sainte-Marthe after the Provencal saint, and the villagers would have been aware of the story of the *Tarasque*. Locals may even have attended celebrations for the saint in the larger town of Mende only days before the killing. In an age when the pastoral occupation such as that of Boulet was characterised by the ever-present threat of wolf attacks, it is tempting to think that the monstrous dimension attached to Boulet's killer may have sprung from a localised iconography of a killer monster that has previously gone undiscussed.²⁴ The iconographic association of the Provencal myth and the Languedoc Beast, linked through the shared cultural activities of the Rhône corridor and its surrounding areas, becomes more compelling when the depictions of the Gévaudan creature are compared to those of the *Tarasque*.

By the sixteenth century, the iconography of the *Tarasque* had been established in Tarascon and around Southern France, with official stamps on local documents,²⁵ pilgrim tokens, and the carved stone coat of arms over Tarascon's city gate all showing the monster as a creature with a semi-feline face but with a more reptilian body, replete with an armoured shell and spines.²⁶ This iconography did not exist solely within the vicinity of Tarascon, but as far away in the *langue d'oc*-speaking area as the small town of Chanteuges, near Mende and the area that was to be the epicentre of the Beast of Gévaudan's activities. In Chanteuges' Priory of Sainte Anne, built and decorated in 1137, one of the rock basalt carvings on the interior of the nave shows Sainte Marthe accompanied by the *Tarasque* [Fig. 2]. The monster has a gargoyle-like face, with bulging and eyes a bared bottom row of jagged teeth along with the scaly skin that has been

Fig. 2
*Sainte Marthe and
 the Tarasque*, Priory
 of Sainte Anne,
 Chanteuges (Haute-
 Loire) (1137).
 Stone carving (rock
 basalt). Wikimedia
 Commons (CC
 BY-SA 3.0)/Jochen
 Jahnke.



Fig. 3
 Conrad Mouren,
*The procession of
 the Tarasque in
 Tarascon* (1787). Ink
 and Watercolour
 on paper. Musée
 Arbaud, Aix
 en Provence.
 © Wikimedia
 Commons (CC
 BY-SA 4.0)/Gilbert
 Chalençon,



rendered over its hunched over body, but is not present on the creature's face. Here, in this small town on the outer edge of roads linking Montpellier to Lyon, and far from the direct influence of the Rhône and the town of Tarascon, this sculpted representation of the *Tarasque* is an early example of the consistency of the monster's iconography across the geographical range of Sainte-Marthe's popularity. While the carving at Chanteuges shows the geographical spread of *Tarasque* iconography throughout the Rhône trade route, the consistency of the monster's depictions lasted well into the eighteenth century and beyond, carrying on to the present day. A watercolour and ink sketch produced by the draughtsman Conrad Mouren in 1787 shows the popular manifestation of the *Tarasque* as it persisted in the form of wooden floats covered and decorated to look like the creature for Sainte Marthe's day parades in the towns of Provence and Languedoc [Fig. 3].²⁷

The sketch shows a float being carried by four bearers, each wearing the traditional outfit of a white shirt and red sash, tucked into red breeches and worn with a black bicorne hat. The body of the float lifts from the ground and does not appear to have any wheels or supports other than the arms of the men holding it. Just as in the Chanteuges priory sculpture, the monster's body is scaly like a reptile. In Mouren's sketch it is painted green, and its red shell is covered with spiny protuberances. The feline face of the *Tarasque* here is more prominent than the almost anthropomorphic visage of the carving at Chanteuges, and Mouren has rendered the creature with whiskers to further this association. The float has been adorned with red eyes, and the creature's mouth appears to house two striped fireworks which would have spat fire out at the assembled crowds that lined the streets to watch the procession. Mouren's sketch, then, alludes not only to the iconography of the *Tarasque* as it was understood visually as a congruous and unchanged Medieval form of imagery. The drawing also shows how the people of Languedoc and Provence would have experienced this monster: as an animated float, held by bearers as it was carried through the streets of France's Southern towns on the 24th of June every year,²⁸ spitting fire and soundtracked by the hiss of pyrotechnic effects. What the carving at Chanteuges and Mouren's sketch both allow for is a greater consideration of how the visual form of the *Tarasque* was at once distinct and also unchanged across a certain regional expanse that encompassed the Gévaudan region where the Beast was believed to be killing the peasant populations.

Following Jeanne Boulet's death in the Summer of 1764, depictions of the Beast were produced to sate a quickly growing fascination with the potential nature of the mysterious attacker. While a handful of pen and ink sketches of the creature survive,²⁹ printing techniques such as etchings, engravings, and woodcuts all acted as the primary medium through which visual renderings of the Beast were produced, both in Languedoc and also later in Paris. Engraved and etched representations were quick to make and cheap to disseminate to a wide audience, reflecting the mass popularity of the story of the monster from Languedoc as reports emanated ever-further outwards from

Fig. 4
The Beast of
Gévaudan as a
Tarasque (c.1764-
65). Coloured
woodcut.
Source: [http://
lesvieilleslettres.
com/2016/07/
hurlent-les-loups.
html](http://lesvieilleslettres.com/2016/07/hurlent-les-loups.html).



the village of Uzac on the 30th of June 1764. Geographically, the earliest depictions of the creature were produced within the Languedoc and the area linked by the tributaries of the Rhône, in pamphlets and broadsheets which supplemented the descriptions and reports being published in newspapers such as the *Courier d'Avignon*.³⁰ A coloured woodcut print produced in Languedoc contemporaneously to the attacks allows us to consider the perceived identity of the creature in comparison to the iconography of the *Tarasque* [Fig. 4].³¹ The print renders the landscape of the Gévaudan in an ochre yellow tone, conveying the parched quality of the local soil. In the background, on top of a small hill sits a church, and a man holding a rifle (perhaps the dragoon captain Duhamel, charged with coordinating the first hunts in the region) rushes in from the left side of the scene.³² In the central foreground, a naked human figure lies on the floor, their entrails being devoured by the ravenous Beast. In this woodcut depiction of the monster, a number of *Tarasque*-like characteristics stand out. A band of interlocking triangular shapes come to a point at the elbow of its forearm, appearing to be a kind of shell. In addition to this, the monster has a spiny back and tail and also possesses scales on the skin of its back legs and hind quarters. Another print, produced early in 1765 by the printmaker M. Ray, possibly in Avignon or nearby, presents the beast in the act of attacking Jeanne Boulet, stood up on its back legs (possibly even bipedal), as it holds the screaming shepherdess in its clawed hands [Fig. 5].³³ The monster in Ray's print may not have the scaly skin of the *Tarasque*, but the printmaker has decided to juxtapose the mammalian features of the head with a row of spines running the length of the animal's back, which are reminiscent of those from the floats processed at the Sainte Marthe's day parades. While this depiction may not have all of the features of the *Tarasque* which we see in the woodcut, with its shell and scaly skin, the row of spines in M. Ray's print is still considered to be essential to the overall appearance of the Beast. The caption beneath the image begins with the line 'L'on ne doit plus mettre en doute la forme & la figure de l'animal feroce qui ravage le jeuaudan (sic.)' (we should no longer doubt the form and figure of the animal which ravages the Gévaudan). While the overall form of the creature is perhaps a synthesis of multiple reports published in the *Courier d'Avignon*

Fig. 5
M. Ray, *Bête feroce qui a ravagé le Gévaudan en l'année 1764* (1764). Etching. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (in Recueil. Collection Michel Hennin. Estampes relatives à l'Histoire de France. Tome 105). © BNF.



which claimed the animal to be a panther, a lynx, or a lion, ultimately the monstrousness of the *Tarasque*, expressed in the row of spines along the creature's back, still finds a place within this synthesis and as part of a visual form which the print itself claims to be beyond doubt. Comparing the Beast's depictions to those of the *Tarasque*, it is possible to see how the two are often extremely similar, couched as they are within a regionally-specific visual discourse of monstrousness.

One final consideration of the role played by the regional iconography of monstrousness, itself derived from the popular culture of Southern French processions and carnivals, comes from the reporter Tardieu de LaBarthe. A native of the Languedoc town of Marjevols, LaBarthe discussed the story of a group of children who had chased the Beast into a bog after it attempted to eat one of their group. At the behest of their leader Jacques Portefaix, the children had beaten the monster with sticks until it released the boy and fled.³⁴ This anecdote of Portefaix and his gang of brave warrior children, while both strange and almost comical in equal measure, is a useful point of

entry into the story of the Beast as it was expressed in relation to Languedoc's popular and localised forms of ceremony. Just as the mystery creature may have borrowed some or all of its monstrousness from the iconography of the *Tarasque*, the armed gang of children also has its roots in the ritual calendar of the Languedoc region (this time distinct from the wider sphere of the Rhône). In the city of Toulouse, the capital of Languedoc, every year on rogations day a traditional event called the *Acampa* would take place, where groups of children would be armed and made to fight one another in the form of mock rival militias, taking place throughout the town and its immediate surrounding countryside.³⁵ The tradition emerged as a humorous re-enactment of the Medieval warring over internal boundaries within the city during the Albigensian Crusade in the thirteenth century,³⁶ and the arming of children for a day was a kind of symbolic subversion where the social order was briefly overturned in favour of an unusual and amusing spectacle.³⁷ The *Acampa* is a singular form of popular spectacle in Medieval and Early Modern France, and was particular to the city of Toulouse: a city which we might consider to be another localised pole of cultural influence from the towns of the Rhône.

The popular story of Portefaix and his band of fellow children fighting off the creature with sticks appears to represent a symbolic merging of various folkloric and regionally specific tropes that the people of Languedoc would have experienced at the high point of the ceremonial calendar in the Summer. The band of armed children, in the manner of the *Acampa*, clashed with the Beast, whose depictions familiarised and expressed its monstrousness in relation to the *Tarasque*: wooden representations of which would have bobbed and hissed their way through the crowds at Sainte Marthe's Day parades across the *langue d'oc*-speaking region. In this way, we can understand how the visual conception of the Beast of Gévaudan had its roots in the localised popular culture which ranged from Toulouse and Montpellier to the Provencal towns that lined the banks of the Rhône. Both in depictions, as well as the articulation of certain events in the Beast's narrative, the iconography of the *Tarasque* appears to have played a large part in this regionally specific conception of the monster in the area of its first appearance. The creature can be said to have originated in the cyclical events of Languedoc's annual calendar, coming from an unbroken Medieval tradition. In the French capital, however, the Beast would find a new context, as shifting social factors created a febrile and symbolically charged popular discourse concerning the authority of the Bourbons and the imbalance of both the social and ecological orders.

While Paris had no less of a localised culture of patron saints and public ceremonies than the Languedoc and the towns of the Rhône waterway³⁸, it could nevertheless be said that before the story of the Beast, the city during the mid-1760s had grown



Fig. 6
Abraham Ruchat,
Pierre d'un Dragon,
à LUCERNE, vue
de ses deux côtés;
in *Les Delices de*
la Suisse, une des
principales Républiques
de l'Europe...
Par le Sr. Gottlieb
Kypselor de Munster.
Divisées en quatre
tomes. Tome premier
(tome quatrième)
(1714). Etching.
Bibliothèque
nationale de France,
Paris. © BNF.

uninterested in monsters and the realm of the supernatural. One such example of this is the editorial history concerning the successive reprinting of *Les delices de la Suisse*: a guide to the Swiss cantons written and compiled by Jean-Jacques Abraham Ruchat, originally published in 1714. While this book may seem unrelated to the present discussion of Languedoc, Provence, the *Tarasque*, or the Beast, it allows us to think more critically about a Parisian interest in the extra-natural at the time when stories of the Southern monster were reaching the capital. In the first edition of Ruchat's book, along with its reprint in 1730, the author chose to include a story taken from the Swiss naturalist Johann-Jakob Scheuchzer's 1708 book *Naturgeschichte des Schweitzerlandes*,³⁹ which illustrates an episode from the fifteenth century where a peasant in Lucerne saw a dragon as he was moving in a meadow. Flying above the field, the dragon suddenly dropped an object from the sky, and when the peasant went to inspect it, he noticed that a strange marble stone: a 'pierre de dragon' (dragon stone) had been laid within a pool of blood.⁴⁰ This anecdotal story was accompanied in Ruchat's book by Scheuchzer's

original 1708 plate [Fig. 6]. The upper half of the scene is an Alpine landscape, showing the meadow in the foreground, and two cottages further back, nestled between two steep mountains. To the left, scythe in hand, we see the astonished peasant looking up at the dragon, which flies ahead with fire or smoke billowing from its mouth. Beneath the dragon, between it and the mower's scythe, we can see the spherical marble stone falling to the floor. The centre of the plate shows two views of this stone, both the outside and its cross-section, that appear to contain tadpole-like creatures that are perhaps juvenile dragons. Not including the space provided for the plate, this anecdote takes up less than one page of Ruchat's book, however, it was the only detail to be edited out in the 1764 Parisian republication, despite having been included in the previous two print runs. It has been posited that this editorial decision could perhaps be due to the rise in the Enlightenment's popularising of science and natural history, which came largely at the expense of belief and interest in superstition and folklore.⁴¹ This culture of scientific enquiry and increased focus on the observable phenomena of the natural world was the one into which the stories of the Beast of Gévaudan emerged in the Summer of 1764. By contrast to the decline in interest in Scheuchzer and Ruchat's dragons, stories of the Beast spread real terror among the French capital's population. To consider why the monster carried such direct and terrifying symbolic potential, it is first important to understand the febrile social climate of Paris at the time when printing houses were producing widely circulated images of the Languedoc creature.

During the period of 1764-5 when the Beast was roaming the Gévaudan, France was still recovering from the very recent ending of the Seven Years' War. Fought from 1756-63, the conflict saw France engaged at various times in fighting Prussia, Great Britain, and Habsburg Austria, along with Sweden, Portugal, and a collection of other states from the Holy Roman Empire and elsewhere.⁴² The war was initially a colonial conflict between France and Britain concerning their North American colonies, but this disagreement sparked a series of battles which led to a state of conflict between European powers that was further exacerbated by constantly shifting alliances, and military engagements across the globe in India, Africa, the Philippines, North America and the Caribbean.⁴³ France had entered the hostilities as Europe's premier military and political power, however, a series of poorly managed military engagements,⁴⁴ along with a reliance on an unmodernised army drained French finances and severely damaged the country's respected political position on the European stage. The French public, especially the population of Paris, blamed Louis XV for the kingdom's defeat in the war. More specifically, the involvement of the monarch's mistress the marquise de Pompadour in decisions concerning the conflict led to a wider critique of the state of the king's judgement. Louis XV had appointed court favourites of the marquise as both ministers and generals throughout the war, leading to a number of disastrous defeats such as the Battle of Rossbach in November 1757.⁴⁵

Despite France's poor performance in the Seven Years' War, Louis XV was



Fig. 7
Joseph-Marie Vien,
*Inauguration de la
statue de Louis XV
sur la place du même
nom, par le corps de
la Ville de Paris, le
20 juin 1763* (1763).
Oil on canvas, 44.7
x 60.7cm. Musée
Carnavalet, Paris
(P2085). © Paris
Musées (CC0 1.0).

determined to be seen as a valiant king who had not been defeated. This image of the monarch was to be communicated to the people of Paris with the full force of Bourbon ceremony and artistic patronage, making visible and explicit the vision of the king as a strong ruler. On the 20th of July 1763, a large equestrian statue of the monarch produced by the sculptor Edmé Bouchardon (completed by Jean-Baptiste Pigalle following Bouchardon's death)⁴⁶ was unveiled in the *Place Louis XV* in Paris.⁴⁷ To commemorate the unveiling, the painter Joseph-Marie Vien was commissioned to execute a large oil painting destined to be hung in Paris' *Hôtel de Ville*, which is now in the collection of the Musée Carnavalet in Paris [Fig. 7].⁴⁸ In Vien's painting, we see the gilded statue of the horse and rider in the background, elevated on a white marble pedestal, and depicting the king draped in classicising robes in the manner of a Roman emperor, with one arm outstretched while the other coolly yet firmly holds the reins of the animal beneath him. In the foreground, at the very centre of the painting's composition, Louis XV sits on a white horse clad in a scarlet outfit trimmed with gold brocade and a blue satin sash, subtly mirroring the sculpture behind him by extending his right arm to hold out his tricorne hat. Around the Bourbon monarch are a number of Parisian dignitaries, as well as a fanfare of trumpet blowers to the right of the scene.⁴⁹ Within this illustrious gathering of the king and his officials, the lower register of the canvas shows a different aspect of Paris following the Seven Years' War: one which perhaps contradicts the gilded opulence which Bouchardon's statue aimed to project to the city's population. Among the stomping hooves of the horses in Vien's painting, we can see the figures of three children who scabble on the floor to

collect largesse distributed by the king. The canvas was an officially sanctioned image of the king's munificence and splendour, showcasing the ceremonial unveiling of the statue as a symbol of the Bourbon monarchy's status and wealth. The painting was destined, ultimately, to function as propaganda in the interest of the king, showing him as the living echo of his glorious memorial. The figures of the children were no doubt intended to show the charity of the monarch as he made his way through the capital in July 1763, however, the anguished faces of the children, and the manner in which the two boys on the left fight one another over the silver coins is indicative of the real economic struggle and social hardships facing Paris in the wake of the war. Vien has taken pains to show the boys as being engaged in a brutal struggle for the casually tossed money, risking being trampled in the process. Alongside this painted depiction of the screaming, scrabbling children of Paris, the city's reaction to Bouchardon's statue following its unveiling is indicative of a popular backlash aimed at the sculpture's glorifying and beautified image of the absolute monarchy. In the days following the 20th of July, a sign was hung around the neck of the horse which read 'the virtues are beneath, the vices are on the horse'.⁵⁰ Another graffito—this time scratched into the base of the statue—gnomically read *statua statuae* (a statue of a statue).⁵¹ Not only does this call into more explicit terms the perception of the Bourbon monarchy as being an antique relic, but it also demonstrates how popular displeasure directed at Louis XV was not reserved exclusively to the poor or uneducated classes of Paris.⁵² Through the vandalism sustained by Louis XV's equestrian statue, the monument became just as much a physical record of Paris' popular discontentment as it was an image of Bourbon magnificence.

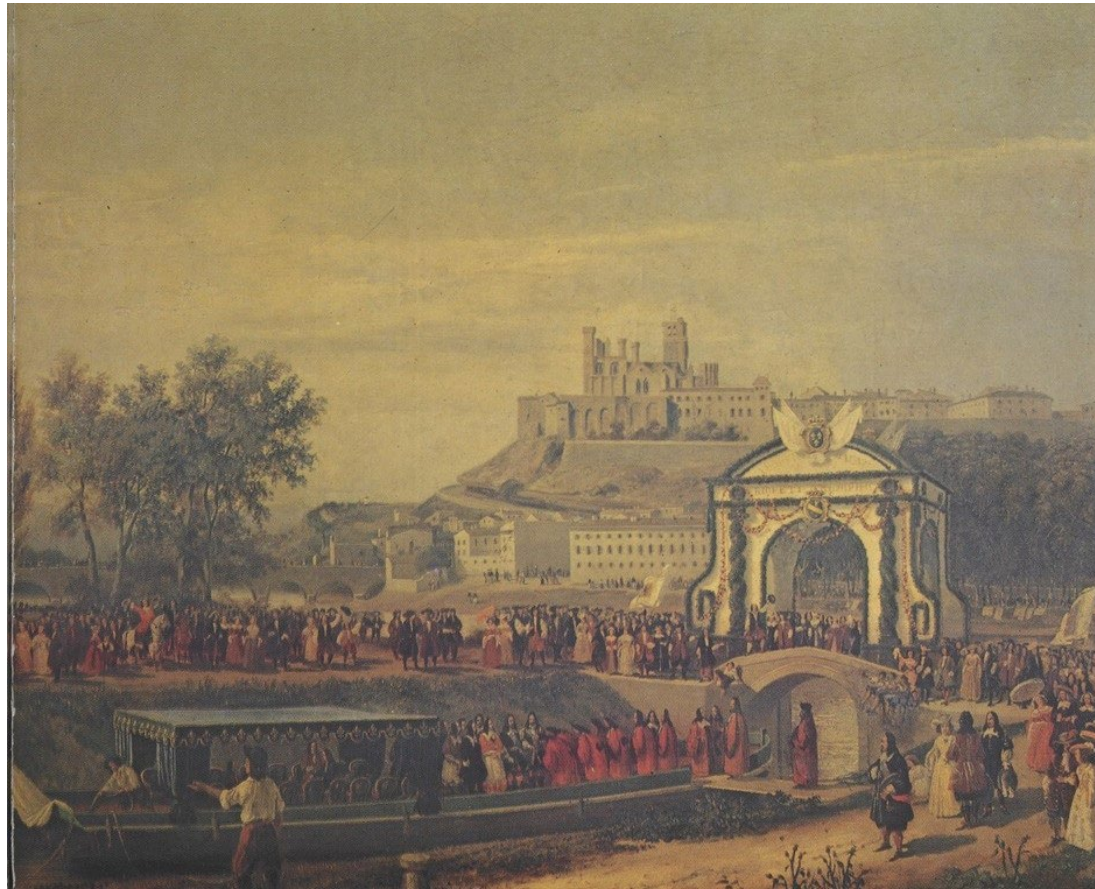
In addition to the unpopular realities left by the Seven Years' War, France was also facing the problem of widespread starvation. As opposed to the indolence which was popularly believed to be the cause of Louis XV's failures regarding the recent conflict, the famine was seen widely in Paris as a deliberate revocation of the monarch's duty to provide for his people. Food shortages had always been a fact of life in France's history, occurring regularly in contained, provincial episodes due to blight and changeable or damp weather conditions.⁵³ This was an unwanted but expected part of the seasonal existence of many people in both metropolitan and rural France.⁵⁴ Supposedly working to mitigate this perpetual unpredictability in the kingdom's food supply, Louis XIV had centralised the royal control of the grain depots in the late seventeenth century, allowing for the equal distribution of wheat to any parts of the kingdom that required it during times of hardship.⁵⁵ However, in 1763, Louis XV altered the relationship between the crown and the kingdom's store of grain.⁵⁶ Following the monetary downturn produced by the Seven Years' War, Louis XV had attempted to stimulate France's economy by deregulating the grain trade,⁵⁷ allowing shares in wheat depots to be purchased by private individuals.⁵⁸ The king himself bought up large sums of these shares, thus eschewing responsibility for the grain supply while retaining the ability to

profit hugely from it. Following poor harvests and widespread hunger in 1763, a rumour began to be circulated in Paris that claimed that the king, at the behest of the marquise de Pompadour, had concocted a 'famine plot',⁵⁹ whereby the crown was believed to be making money by deliberately producing localised wheat shortages, only to then profit from privately selling grain to meet demand.⁶⁰ Whether the famine plot rumour contained any truth or not, the feeling in the French capital was that the king had abandoned his duties, and had allowed the malign influence of courtiers to corrupt the execution of his duty of care towards his subjects.

Despite the geographical and cultural gulfs between Paris and Languedoc, the region nevertheless entered into the wider Parisian discourse concerning the dysfunction of the Bourbon-led kingdom in the mid-1760s and did so around the time of the Beast of Gévaudan's first appearance in Ubac. Languedoc, and its capital of Toulouse, was one of the last true bastions of remaining French Huguenots after the religious reforms of Louis XIV, who officially banished Protestants from the kingdom in 1685 to achieve his vision of France as a solely Catholic state.⁶¹ Because of this, the citizens of Toulouse had often lived in an uneasy arrangement, as a small Catholic minority ruled the city populated largely by Protestants.⁶² This balance of religious power in the city eventually came to a head when in 1761 a case of localised religious intolerance occurred in Toulouse which became a matter of outrage in Paris and across Europe as a whole. On the 13th of October, a *Toulousain* merchant called Jean Calas had discovered the hanging body of his son in his house. Rumours had been heard around the town that the son, Marc-Antoine, was thinking of converting to Catholicism and that his father had killed him to prevent this. Jean Calas was arrested and tortured for information, all the while protesting his innocence.⁶³ Despite this, Calas was sentenced to be executed by being publicly beaten while tied to a wheel in the main square in Toulouse, before being strangled and burned,⁶⁴ an event which occurred on the 9th of March 1762.⁶⁵ Calas' wife and family appealed to the exiled playwright and *philosophe* Voltaire, who at the time was living on the Franco-Swiss border. By sending an agent to Toulouse to investigate,⁶⁶ and collecting information regarding the case of Jean Calas, Voltaire was able to make a reasonable case that the sixty-three-year-old merchant had not killed his son, as he was weak and had been upstairs in the house the whole evening before finding his son's body.⁶⁷ In 1763, Voltaire published an essay called the *Traité sur la tolérance*, which described in detail the religious factions of the town and their involvement in the execution of Jean Calas, seeing the case as an example of the social intolerance at play within not just Toulouse and Languedoc, but Bourbon-ruled France as a whole.⁶⁸

Despite Languedoc's mid-eighteenth century association with intolerance and draconian systems of law highlighted by the Calas case, almost a century before the struggles of the 1760s, the region had in fact been a site for the display of French royal magnificence staged by Louis XV's great grandfather and predecessor Louis XIV. In an effort to divert trade from Habsburg-ruled Spain, the monarch had commissioned

Fig. 8
*L'inauguration du
 Canal Royal du
 Languedoc par Louis
 XIV à Béziers*
 (c.1681). Oil on
 canvas, Collection
 unknown. Source:
 Thierry Parant,
 from *Pierre-Paul
 Riquet et le Canal
 du Midi dans les
 arts et la littérature*,
 Jean-Denis
 Bergasse (Millau:
 Imprimeries Maury,
 1982).



the *Toulousain* engineer Pierre-Paul Riquet to build a canal that achieved the seemingly impossible task of linking the Atlantic to the Mediterranean by cutting through large swaths of rugged and rocky land.⁶⁹ Construction of the *Canal Royal de Languedoc* began in 1667,⁷⁰ and the waterway first became functional in 1673,⁷¹ (however it was not until eight years later in 1681 that the king travelled South to stage an opening ceremony).⁷² A contemporary painting of Louis XIV's inaugural use of the waterway shows the royal barge cruising down the canal at Béziers: the closest town to the village of Ensérune where Riquet's excavators had begun cutting the first course of the waterway [Fig. 8].⁷³ Past the banks lined with smartly dressed onlookers, a small bridge over the canal is topped with the temporary structure of a white triumphal arch hung with garlands and topped with a winged badge proudly displaying the Bourbon coat of arms of three gold *fleur de lys* on an azure blue background.⁷⁴ The use of classical forms for the celebration of the victorious and glorious monarch makes an interesting comparison to Bouchardon's statue and its subsequent reception. Writers composed panegyrics about Louis XIV's canal, both at the moment of its inauguration and well into the eighteenth century. At the time of the inauguration, Louis XIV's court writer of tragedies Pierre Corneille wrote that the project was the result of 'nature attachée à ses lois éternelles' (nature attached to its eternal laws), praising Riquet's conquest of the 'obstacle invincible' of the Pyrenées.⁷⁵ Continuing into the eighteenth century, the *Canal Royal du Languedoc* was still referenced as a symbol of Bourbon power displayed

through the triumph of human endeavour over the difficulties posed by the natural world. In the case of the canal, this difficulty was primarily a geological one, as the hard rock courses of Languedoc (similar to the basalt from which the sculptures in the Priory of Sainte Anne in Chanteuges are carved) proved a major obstacle in the construction of the king's vision on the form of the waterway. In 1748 the *Mercur de France* in Paris published a panegyric commemorating Riquet's abilities,⁷⁶ and in 1775 the *Académie Toulousain* commissioned a poem which talked of how the project had 'réduire en poudre le rocher d'Ensérune' (reduced to powder the rock of Ensérune).⁷⁷ While Languedoc in the mid-1760s was a site that highlighted the injustice within Bourbon-ruled France, the region a century before had provided a stage for the display of French royal magnificence, not simply by overcoming political rivals such as Spain, but through manipulating and symbolically controlling the natural world.

In the same year that Parisian editors removed the dragon egg from Ruchat's Swiss guidebook, the story of the Beast of Gévaudan became a sensation in both the capital and court, causing intrigue and concern in equal measure.⁷⁸ Was it simply that this was a *French* monster that led to the widespread fascination with the beast? Was Ruchat's dragon just too old a story, and too geographically removed from the Parisian readership to hold the same ability to terrify? The Beast as a French phenomenon, and one which originated in the kingdom's periphery far removed from centres of the absolutist state, can explain its huge symbolic potential upon its reception in the capital and court. Paris in the mid-1760s was the capital of a kingdom that was experiencing a multitude of hardships such as the ill effects of war and widespread famine. These problems were believed to have stemmed from the perceived political impotence and personal greed of Louis XV, shaking the popular faith in the absolute monarch as the protector of France and its population. Within this subversive and panicked context, the Beast of Gévaudan came to prominence as another symbol of disorder and destruction. While the creature in its regional context was largely expressed through a local iconography that focussed on monstrousness in the form of the *Tarasque*, Parisian depictions differed significantly. In the capital, the Beast's representations took on a different form grounded in natural history and the conception of animals as quarry. The visual form given to the Beast of Gévaudan in the printing houses of Paris alludes to a different conception of the story which privileges order, stability, and triumph over the seeming uncontrollability of nature.

A popular Parisian representation of the Beast claimed that it was a hyena.⁷⁹ We can see this in explicit terms in the legend at the top of an engraving that was produced in an unnamed Parisian printing house in 1765 [Fig. 9]. The title of the print simply reads '*HYENNE, Animal féroce qui ravage le Gévaudan depuis 1764 tel qu'on l'a envoyé à la*

confusion of wolf and hyena further, the animal in the two vignettes in the top corners of the engraving seem to show the Beast as a wolf, with a bushy tail, and lacking the characteristic spots. Another engraving by the printmaker B. Chinon, produced on Paris' Rue St Jacques at Chez Basset in 1765 shows even more clearly how, even in printed images where the Beast is referred to as a hyena, its ultimate form is the more familiar rural figure of the wolf [Fig. 11]. *Titled Description de l'Hiene*, the scene shows a landscape with trees on either side of a glade which opens out to reveal two faraway villages in the distance. In the space provided by this break in the trees, the foreground is nearly entirely filled by the lunging, snarling figure of the Beast, pouncing out towards the right of the page as it is pursued by François Antoine's hunting dogs. Despite the title of Chinon's engraving, the animal depicted here can only be seen as a wolf, with a thick hairy tail, dark bristly coat, staring eyes, and open jaws.

Indeed, the majority of the Parisian depictions of the Beast of Gévaudan portrayed it not as a hyena, but as a large and ferocious wolf.⁸¹ This choice was made even in spite of the *Tarasque*-like descriptions given to figures such as François Antoine by supposed eyewitnesses of the monster. During his hunt for the Beast, Antoine interviewed two survivors of the creature's attacks: Marie-Jeanne Valet, and her younger sister Therèse. The two women had fought off the creature in August 1765, piercing it with a bayonet after it had jumped out and attacked them. In their testimony, the Valet sisters remarked that the creature had a wide, flat back which, as with Tardieu de LaBarthe's reliance on the symbolic form of the *Acampa* in telling the story of Jacques Portefaix, seems like an allusion to the *Tarasque's* shell, and another deployment of region-specific iconography in the articulation of the creature's monstrousness.⁸² Antoine included the notes of this interview in a letter addressed to the Parisian-born governor based in Montpellier Marie-Joseph-Emmanuel de Guignard de Saint-Priest,⁸³ sent on the 13th of August 1765, which was then further disseminated among its recipient's circle in both the court and the French capital.⁸⁴ Despite monstrous descriptions from eyewitnesses such as the Valet sisters, the notion of the creature as a wolf would persist in both the capital and the court, ending ultimately with the king's assertion that the wolf shot by Antoine was undoubtedly the same creature that had been killing the peasants of Languedoc. As opposed to the hyena hypothesis, which touched on the notion of the exotic to connote strangeness and unfamiliarity, wolves featured in the collective Parisian historical consciousness as a real-life ecological signifier of political and social instability.

In 1450, during the Hundred Years' War, France was gripped by one of many terrible famines which had become commonplace in the kingdom for the whole of the previous century, due to a combination of poor environmental conditions and unwanted strain on grain reserves caused by the influx of invading armies.⁸⁵ In the mid-fifteenth century, just as in the mid-1760s, it could be said that hunger and war were concomitant worries for the population of Paris and the rest of the French kingdom. Due to a lack of healthy livestock in the normally abundant Paris basin, a pack of wolves suffering



Fig. 12
Véritable Fig. de la Bête féroce qui à tant ravagé le Gévaudan et l'Auvergne... (1765). Hand-coloured engraving. Paris: Chez Maillet (published with the permission of M. Antoine de Sartine, Lieutenant-Général of police), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (in *La Bête du Gévaudan*, François Fabre (Paris: Librairie Floury, 1930)). © BNF.

similarly from hunger found their way through the poorly maintained city walls and had begun to attack and eat the inhabitants. The wolves became prolific in their attacks, and were led by a large male who was missing a tail and as a result was referred to as *Courtaud*.⁸⁶ After a number of attacks, the people of Paris banded together to drive the wolf pack through the city onto the Île de la Cité, where they proceeded to kill the animals with stones and spears. This brutal culmination of events happened in front of the cathedral of Notre Dame following a mass given to ask for deliverance from the animals,⁸⁷ bestowing a sense of divine blessing to the slaughter of the famished wolves.⁸⁸ Paris' relationship to wolves that had begun to eat humans was not simply a historical fact from the fifteenth century, but something which was also beginning again to plague the outskirts of the city throughout the 1760s.⁸⁹ A wolf preying upon humans in the Gévaudan was an observable consequence of the failings of royal authority, as war and famine led to a lack of surplus grazing animals which France's wolves could be expected to prey upon without disturbing the supply of meat and animal products required by human populations. If wolves could not eat sheep, then they ate humans,⁹⁰ and the Beast appeared as the apogee of this compounded state of political, social, and ecological imbalance.⁹¹ The monster in Languedoc was conceived of as a huge wolf beyond normal proportions, whose appetite threatened whole populations, just as *Courtaud* and his pack had terrorised the famished and war-weary people of Paris three centuries earlier.

In Parisian printed images of the Beast which depicted it in the form of a wolf, the animal is co-opted into wider discourses concerning hunting, order, and the balance of mankind with the natural world. An engraving produced at the Chez Maillet workshop in Paris' Rue St. Jacques in October 1765 shows the moment when François Antoine fired on the animal as it burst out at him from the woods of Les Chazes the previous

month [Fig. 12].⁹² The wolf leaps out from the right of the composition, lunging towards Antoine and Reinhard, stretching almost the whole width of the foreground in doing so. Antoine appears to concentrate on the precision of his shot while in such close proximity to the massive figure of the animal, whose mouth is open to reveal its large fangs. The print is monochrome apart from the bullet wounds that are highlighted in sanguineous red trickles of ink. In the bottom right corner of the page beneath the caption, it is stated that this engraving was given permission to be produced by Paris' Lieutenant-Général of police Antoine de Sartine. A second print from October 1765, again bearing the commendation of de Sartine in the lower right corner, also shows the Beast as nothing more than a wolf at the mercy of its hunters [Fig. 13]. Titled *Représentation de la Bête féroce qui a été tué le 20 7.bre dans les bois de la réserve de l'Abbaye Royale de Choisé en Auvergne par Mr Antoine 1765*, the scene does not show the animal mid-lunge, as with the engraving from Chez Maillet, but instead poses the creature on its back, curled in an angular contortion of pain as it is attacked on both sides by the mounted figures of Antoine and Reinhard. Behind them, a path through the woods is lined with Antoine's hunting hounds, which peer out from around the trees. In the absence of any documents from the king or his ministers in which the appearance of the creature is discussed,⁹³ the inclusion of de Sartine's name underneath both of these prints allows us to consider the notion of an 'official' or sanctioned representation of the Beast for consumption by the Parisian public.

Alongside the everyday duties required by his role as Paris' Lieutenant-Général of police, Antoine de Sartine shared a secretive relationship with king Louis XV which revolved around a covert information network called the *cabinet noir*. The *cabinet* was an illicit initiative where letters from across all levels of Parisian society would be intercepted and steamed open to read their contents. De Sartine would then discuss the popular rumours he had unearthed in clandestine meetings held with the king in private.⁹⁴ Through his network of postmen and spies, the Lieutenant-Général of police, and by proxy the king, enjoyed an unfiltered and comprehensive perspective on the nature of popular seditious speech as it travelled through France's capital city. In this way, public declamations of discontent, such as the sign hung around the neck of Bouchardon's equestrian statue of Louis XV, were simply the tip of a wider understanding of the forms and nature of subversive thought in Paris. Through this secretive examination of the city's rumours, de Sartine may have been able to understand the concurrent popular discourses of the Calas affair, the effects of the Seven Years' war, the widely circulated rumour of the famine plot, and the popularity of the story of the Beast of Gévaudan. By eschewing any kind of supernatural, exotic, or unidentifiable qualities in the depiction of the Beast, de Sartine's sanctioned engravings show the 'monster' to in fact be nothing more than a wolf, albeit a large and particularly savage one. Furthermore, the engravings contrive to give the immediate impression of this creature as a mortal animal. This is achieved in effective and economical means in



Fig. 13
Représentation de la Bête féroce qui a été tué le 20 7.bre dans les bois de la réserve de l'Abbaye Royale de Choisé en Auvergne par Mr Antoine 1765 (1765). Engraving, Paris, (published with the permission of M. Antoine de Sartine, Lieutenant-Général of police), Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (in *La Bête du Gévaudan*, François Fabre (Paris: Librairie Floury, 1930)). © BNF.

the Chez Maillet print, as the monochrome page of the engraving is punctuated with just two spots of oozing crimson pigment. These red trickles draw the eye and focus the viewer's attention on the inescapable fact that the scene represents the death of the animal from the Languedoc. In the second engraving, the taught, uncomfortable position of the wolf as it lays on the ground conveys the discomfort and pain endured by the dying animal.

Just as Languedoc had served Louis XIV as a space for a display of the Bourbon's power through the manipulation and controlling of nature, so the prints sanctioned by de Sartine subtly used the Southern region as the setting for a battle between the unruliness of the natural order and the effective power of the king. In both the cases of the *Canal Royal du Languedoc* and the killing of the Beast of Gévaudan, the monarch's absolute power was enacted through agents of the king: respectively Pierre-Paul Riquet and François Antoine. The Beast was a monstrous symbol of chaos and danger which emerged at a time when the social and political problems facing France were bringing about a crisis of faith in the monarchy, as well as the feudal and judicial structures that upheld it. By conceiving of the monster as a mortal animal, whether a hyena or a wolf, the print houses of Paris subtly shifted the discourse away from the depictions and descriptions of it which emanated from the Languedoc, and which were couched in the region-specific iconography of the *Tarasque*. Instead, the prints produced in Paris appeared to prefer a visual discourse where the disorder and savagery of an imbalanced ecology were overcome by the brute force and deadly determination of humankind. Hunting was a particularly beloved pastime of Louis XV, who spent almost every afternoon chasing stags and other animals around the grounds of his various châteaux.⁹⁵ Through François Antoine's shooting of the Languedoc wolf, the

pastime of hunting which had previously been criticised as a distraction that took the king away from the duties of state became instead the effective show of force which reasserted an anthropocentric natural order. Through the placement of weapons in the prints approved by de Sartine, which can also be seen in the *Représentation de la bête féroce nommée hiene* engraving, the decidedly masculine character of the huntsmen's deadly force is also subtly and perhaps humorously evoked. In the print showing the Beast as a spotted hyena, M. Reinhard's dagger dangles suggestively between his legs as he lunges closer towards the shot animal. Likewise, both of the engravings approved by de Sartine make the phallic nature of the rifle itself even more explicit. In the Chez Maillet print, Reinhard's lowered weapon pokes suggestively out from the profile of Antoine, while in the *Représentation de la Bête féroce* approved by de Sartine, the Antoine's rifle is positioned to fire at an angle that places the barrel squarely between his legs. These prints' phallic contextualisation of Antoine and Reinhard's weaponry visually asserted the king's agents as men of direct, violent, and effective action. This emphasis on manhood and the ability to kill implicitly opposed the popular rumours which lingered on the lack of successful military leadership in the Seven Years' War, as well as the belief that Louis XV's judgement had been clouded by the influence of his mistress the marquise de Pompadour. By conceiving of the Beast as a man-eating wolf, itself a real and experienced symbol of social and ecological imbalance, the Parisian representations of the creature lent themselves to a conception of the natural world as something which could be corrected and balanced by the brute force of the king and his servants. This consideration of nature as secondary to the desire of the monarch had precedent in the pageantry of the Bourbon kings and can be understood as the symbolic language used also in poems to describe Pierre-Paul Riquet's achievements in constructing the *Canal Royal* for Louis XIV. In addition to their symbolic dimensions, both the killing of the Beast and the construction of the canal (an event still celebrated into the mid-eighteenth century)⁹⁶ similarly took place amidst and in spite of the harsh natural environment of the Languedoc region.

Across different geographical areas, and between two separate cultural and iconographic traditions, the Beast of Gévaudan sustained some alterations to its visual form that allow us to think more clearly about the role it played in discourses on monstrosity, ecology, and order. Originating between the sphere of influence between the towns of the Rhône waterway and the city of Toulouse, depictions and eyewitness descriptions of the monster in its immediate local context were conditioned largely by the iconography of the *Tarasque*. The visual form of this monster was not only to be seen in local religious art, as with the rock basalt carving at the Priory of St Anne in Chanteuges, but also in the street processions of models of the *Tarasque*, which

would have weaved through the thoroughfares of towns like Tarascon and Mende just six days before the discovery of Jeanne Boulet's body in the fields outside of Ubac. A creature specific only to the ceremonial and folkloric imagination of Languedoc and Provence, the correlation between the depictions of the Beast and those of the *Tarasque* allow us to consider the monster as a product of a localised language of monstrosity. By emphasising the shell, the scales, and the spines down its back, prints produced in the geographical area of the attacks reflected the Beast's extra-natural qualities through this reliance on a local iconography which positioned it outside of the ecological order.

By contrast, Parisian depictions of the Beast eschewed a visual discourse of monstrosity in favour of a more zoologically grounded approach. Whether it was a hyena or a wolf, with or without spots, and with varying forms of a tail, Paris' printing houses made sure to emphasise the mortality of the animal. This was achieved in part through a shift in the focus of the scenes in the story. The Southern French depictions of the monster show it more or less in the moment pertinent to the problems it caused in the region: the killing of peasants like Boulet. By contrast, the Parisian prints largely shift the focus of the scene onto the killing of the animal by Antoine and Reinhard. Along with this change in emphasis provided through presenting a different moment of the overall narrative, the Parisian prints also make sure to employ colour in a manner that focuses the eye on the death of the creature. Instead of the coloured scene of the woodcut, or the monochrome of M. Ray's print, the *Représentation de la bête féroce nommée hiene* and the Chez Maillet engraving approved by de Sartine both use pigment sparingly within the uncoloured space of the prints, focussing largely on the bleeding wounds of the animal.

This representational shift of the Beast across geographical distance from folkloric monster to mortal animal can be understood more within a consideration of the wider social context of Paris into which the story entered in 1764. The city was the epicentre of discontent towards the monarch, who was perceived as the cause of instability and famine through the recent war and the alterations to the kingdom's grain trade. The wolf held a particular place in the oral tradition of pre-modern Parisians, as the story of *Courtaud* served to show how social and political instability could quickly lead to environmental imbalance and the presence of wolves that were driven to eat people. By stressing the mortal, and the specifically lupine character of the creature roaming Languedoc, the printing houses of Paris symbolically reinserted the Beast of Gévaudan into an ecological discourse concerning the role played by humans in the assertion and maintenance of order. In the case of two of these prints, the patronage of Antoine de Sartine can allow us to think about the kinds of official forces operating behind the production of such imagery. As the Lieutenant-Général of Paris' police, and the lead agent of Louis XV's *cabinet noir*, de Sartine would have intimately understood the subversive mood and overall anxiety present in Paris even before stories of the Beast had begun to arrive in the city. By sanctioning the image of the monster as a large

wolf, de Sartine promoted a vision of the animal as a symbol of natural order turned to disorder. Nevertheless, this was a natural order that could be dominated and righted by the masculine pursuit of hunting, emphasised in visual form through the subtly phallic emphasis placed on the hunters’ weapons in a number of Parisian engravings. To truly understand the symbolic dimensions of the lupine form given to the Beast in the prints produced of it in Paris, it is crucial to understand that this was not the same iconography used to describe the creature elsewhere and that it was a visual discourse specific to France’s capital city. The bleeding wolf was a visual form that emphasised familiarity and mortality where the Southern French representations of the Beast clustered around its fundamental unknowability, borrowing from the set visual tropes associated with the *Tarasque*. This distinction between localised cultures and areas of production is critical to understanding the impact which the Beast of Gévaudan held upon its reception outside of its eponymous region. While it may have functioned as a monster in France’s South, it ultimately changed form upon its arrival in Paris to enter into a wider discourse concerning ecology, humanity’s perceived stewardship of the natural world, and the fine line between chaos and the perceived natural order.

1. Jay M. Smith, *Monsters of the Gévaudan - The Making of a Beast* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press, 2011), p 7.
2. *ibid*.
3. The *Gazette* said that the creature had been seen in ‘les paroisses et de son diocèse’, referring to the diocese of the Bishop of Mende (who in addition to his ecclesiastical duties was also the feudal landowner in the area of the attacks).
-Michel Louis, *La Bête du Gévaudan* (Paris: Perrin, 2003), p 45.
4. One of the teams of hunters who followed the orders of Louis XV were the father and son team of Jean-Charles and Jean-François d’Enneval, who hailed from Normandy, and were accompanied by a pack of eight bloodhounds that had been specially trained to catch the scent of wolves.
-Smith, *Monsters*, pp 137-9.
5. François Fabre, *La Bête du Gévaudan* - édition complétée par Jean Richard (Paris: De Borée, 2005), 4.
6. Smith, *Monsters*, pp 196-9.
7. *ibid*, p 189.
8. *ibid*, p 206-7.
9. *ibid*.
10. The *Gazette de France* reported on the 4 October 1765 that, following the royal inspection of the creature at Versailles, a number of huntsmen described the wolf as being ‘nothing extraordinary, neither in its size nor in its composition.’
-Jay M. Smith “Dreadful Enemies: The “Beast,” the Hyena, and Natural History in The Enlightenment,” *Modern Intellectual History* 13, Issue 1 (April 2016), p 33.
11. Fabre, *La Bête*, pp 114-5.
12. We cannot know for certain which printmaker was tasked with producing this print. However, a few names survive of the men who worked in the printing house, such as: Berthault, Arrivet, Bose, and Coupeau.
-Charles Emile Ouachée, *Catalogue de livres illustrés anciens et modernes, éditions originales d’auteurs contemporains, suites de vignettes, composant la bibliothèque de feu M. Charles-Émile Ouachée,... Première partie*, (Paris: Librairie Henri Leclerc, 1909), p 12.
-Fabre, *La Bête*, pp 114-5.
13. In the Gévaudan, however, locals remained unconvinced that Antoine’s wolf really had been the monster which had attacked and killed the local shepherds, and hunts persisted in the area until a local man named Jean Chastel killed another enormous wolf on the 19th of July 1767, largely ending the panic in South-Western France.
-Louis, *La Bête*, pp 292-3.
14. Smith, *Monsters*, pp 107-137.
15. Along with areas of North-Eastern Spain facing Languedoc across the Pyrenees.
16. The town is named after the monster that was tamed by Sainte Marthe.
-Gilbert Chalençon and Claude Roux, *La Course de la Tarasque* (Éditions Équinoxe: La Massin, 2015), p 14.
17. Languedoc became part of the French kingdom in 1271, with Provence following just over two centuries later from 1481-2.
-Fernand Braudel, *The Identity of France, Volume One History and Environment*, trans. Siân Reynolds (London: Fontana Press, 1989), p 325.
18. This interconnection did not stop official quarreling between the two provinces over rights and ownership of the river, which persisted until 1760. These disputes, however, were economic and legal distinctions, and do not reflect the wider system of the flow of cultural and material exchange which occurred constantly between the two regions.
-*ibid*, pp 281-4.
19. The words *oc* and *oïl* both mean ‘yes’ in their respective dialects, with *oïl* as the etymological precursor of the modern French word *oui*.
-*ibid*, p 86.
20. For a more comprehensive and in-depth discussion of the geography of the *langue d’oc/ langue d’oïl* isogloss, consult: Charles de Tourtoulon and Octavien Bringuier, *Étude sur la limite géographique de la langue doc et de la langue doïl* (avec une carte) (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1876).
Furthermore, the Rhône waterway and its surrounding area often operated according to political and social patterns which existed before its Medieval subsumption into the French kingdom. This balance between the social and political desires of the French crown and regional patterns of life existed well into the mid-eighteenth century. One almost comical example of this ever-shifting balance can be demonstrated when the Rhône burst its banks and flooded the area around Tarascon and Avignon in 1734. As the river was the direct property of the king, Louis XV ordered locals to erect *fleur-de-lys*: the symbol of the house of Bourbon, at the water’s new edges, taking the swollen river as an opportunity to symbolically assert royal authority in the form of the water which had claimed the surrounding land.
-Braudel, *The Identity of France*, p 284.
22. Chalençon and Roux, *La Course de la Tarasque*, p 105.
23. Louis Renard, *La Tarasque - Les temps retrouvés* (Éditions de l’Équinoxe: Marguerittes, 1991), pp 42-3.
24. Writing about the Beast in the nineteenth century, the Languedoc-based priest François Fabre specifically used the word *Tarasque* in his account of the monster, furthering the assumption that the perception of this creature was couched in a textual and visual language rooted in the local folklore and customary life of the region’s communities.
-François Fabre, *La Bête*, p 176.
25. Chalençon and Roux, *La Course*, p 107.
26. Renard, *La Tarasque*, p 5.
27. The *Tarasque*, however, was not solely an image from popular street culture. A large canvas, commissioned for an unknown reason for the residence of a noble family in Avignon called the Hôtel Barocelli-Javon shows that the monster was also known to the upper echelons of society along the Rhône, functioning perhaps as a localised heraldic device?
-Renard, *La Tarasque*.
28. The *Tarasque*, however, was an iconography formed in relation to that of Sainte Marthe. In having an accompanying monster, Tarascon’s patron saint took a place alongside a number of locally significant (mostly female) saints across France who also tamed, killed, or banished dragons for the good of the communities which they eventually came to patronise. Other monsters in this tradition include the *Mâchecroûte* of Lyon, the *Chair Salée* of Troyes, the *Vouivre* of the Jura, the *Herensuge* of the Basque region, and the Corsican *Biscia*. Many of these creatures not only look alike in their iconography, but also participate as the personification of sin in similar stories. The Corsican *Biscia*, for instance, was a large dragon-like serpent which killed members of a church’s congregation as it was summoned by the ringing of the bells. Sainte Marthe’s story is similar to that of Sainte Radegunde of Poitiers, who banished the dragon known as the *Grand Goulé* after it terrorised the city’s nunnery. Like the townsfolk of Tarascon, Medieval and Early Modern Poitevins commemorated the event with a procession on the saint’s feast day. In 1677, a local sculptor named Jean Gargot was commissioned to create a large, painted wooden statue of the snarling dragon, which terrorised the nuns in Radegund’s convent. Gargot’s sculpture was, like the parade float depicted in Mouren’s ink and watercolour sketch, made to be processed through the town’s winding Medieval streets on Radegund’s feast day, bobbing through the crowd to inject a sense of drama into the solemn religious procession. In addition to the veneration of Sainte Radegund and the *Grand’ Goulé* in the West of France, the citizens of Metz also performed an annual procession to mark St Clement’s battle with the *Graoully*: another dragon-like demon which was believed to have plagued the city in the Medieval period, and a processional model of the *Graoully* from 1697 survives in

- Metz's St Stephen cathedral. Predating the popular feast day celebrations commemorating either Sainte Marthe or Sainte Redegunde, the first procession of the *Graoully* occurred in 1105, and continued until the early nineteenth century.
- Chalençon and Roux, *La Course*, p 7.
- Dorothy Carrington and Leslie Grinsell, "The Folklore of some Archaeological Sites in Corsica," *Folklore* 93, no. 1 (1982), p 63.
- Jennifer C. Edwards, *Superior Women: Medieval Female Authority in Poitiers' Abbey of Sainte-Croix* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), p 220.
- André Bellard, "Le Graoully de Metz à la lumière de la paléontologie," *Mémoires de l'Académie de Metz* (1965-66), p 140.
29. Fabre, *La Bête*, pp 103-4.
30. Louis, *La Bête*, p 45.
31. Fabre, *La Bête*, p 176.
32. Smith, *Monsters*, p 78.
33. *ibid*, p 40.
34. In recognition of his heroic actions, the *parlement* of Toulouse bestowed Jacques Portefaix with a title, making him Jacques Portefaix de villeret.
- Smith, *Monsters*, pp 159-67.
35. Robert A. Schneider, *The Ceremonial City, Toulouse Observed 1738-1780* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1995), p 64.
36. *ibid*.
37. This kind of symbolic and performative community-wide subversion of cultural and societal norms was often referred to as a *charivari*. *Charivaris* were a form of procession or collective event which took place in towns throughout Medieval and Early Modern Europe. At their core, these celebrations represented the staged upturning of the social order for a day or perhaps sometimes even more.
- Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1994), p 200.
38. For further discussion of the ceremonial life of eighteenth century Paris, consult: Moshe. Shluhovsky, *Patroness of Paris: Rituals of Devotion in Early Modern France* (Amsterdam: BRILL, 1998).
39. Ariane Devanthery, "The Swiss as European Savages?," in *Exotic Switzerland? Looking Outward in the Age of Enlightenment*, eds. by Noémie Étienne, Claire Brizon, Chonja Lee and Étienne Wismer (Zurich: DIAPHANES, 2020), p 273.
40. Jean-Jacques Abraham Ruchat, *Les Delices de la Suisse, une des principales Républiques de l'Europe ; où l'on peut voir tout ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable dans son pays & dans celui de ses allies, qui composent avec elle le louable corps Helvetique. Volume 2 / ; Comme la description des villes, bourgs, châteaux ; les antiquitez du pays & les raretez de la nature la qualité de l'air & du terroir; le naturel, les moeurs, & la religion des habitants ; leurs gouvernemens différens ; leurs alliances mutuelles; & leurs intérêts communs. Le tout enrichi de figures en taille douce, dessinées sur les lieux mêmes. Avec un mémoire instructif sur les causes de la guerre arrivée en Suisse l'an 1712. Par le Sr. Gottlieb Kypselier de Munster. Divisées en quatre tomes. Tome quatrieme* (Leiden: Pierre Vander, 1714), p 281.
41. Devanthery, "The Swiss as European Savages?," p 273.
42. Shaun Regan and Frans de Bruyn, 'Introduction', in Frans de Bruyn and Shaun Regan (eds.), *The culture of the Seven Years' War – Empire, Identity, and the Arts in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Toronto, Buffalo, and New York: University of Toronto Press, 2014) p 3.
43. *ibid*.
44. Christine Pevitt Algrant, *Madame de Pompadour - Mistress of France* (London: Harper-Collins, 2003), pp 245-291.
45. To further compound the popular sense of bathos surrounding the recently ended hostilities, the Treaty of Hubertusburg, signed in 1763 as one of the many treaties ending the conflict, reverted the borders of the European powers back to the state they were before the fighting had begun. As a result, the suffering of the French people had cost the kingdom its status and achieved no tangible

- victories. In addition to this, the Treaty of Paris signed at the ending of the war in 1763 lost many of France's colonial territories to Great Britain, including most of the French-controlled areas of the Caribbean, India, and Canada.
- Walter Oppenheim, *Habsburgs and Hohenzollerns 1713-1786* (London, Sydney & Auckland: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993), pp 72 & 77.
46. It was Bouchardon's deathbed wish that Pigalle should succeed him in the execution of the equestrian statue.
- Thomas W. Gachtgens and Jaques Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien, Peintre du Roi (1716-1809)* (Paris: Arthena, 1988), p 184.
- Marc Jordan, "Paris, Pigalle at the Louvre," *The Burlington Magazine* 128, no. 996 (March 1986), 236.
47. Following the Revolution, the *Place Louis XV* was renamed the *Place de la Concorde*.
48. After the inauguration of the statue on the 20th of July, Vien's contract was drafted and signed just over a month later on the 23rd of August. After first confirming the design and layout of the work based on the submission of an oil sketch to the Hôtel de Ville's painting committee, the artist agreed to produce two canvases of the scene (one now being lost), along with eight individual portraits of the dignitaries depicted in the larger work, with each portrait being valued at an additional 30 sols. This contract was agreed upon in 1763, but was not completed until 1769, when the painting was unveiled in the salon of that year and received mixed critical reception.
- Gachtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, pp 185-186.
- Jean-Marie Bruson and Christophe Leribault, *Peintures du Musée Carnavalet - Catalog Sommaire* (Paris: PAris Musées, 1999), p 411.
49. The men represented in the work are J.B.E. Camus de Pontcarré de Viarmes, and the ducs de Mercier, de Babilé, de Varenne, de Chevreuse, de Vannes, and de Taitbout.
- Gachtgens and Lugand, *Joseph-Marie Vien*, p 186.
50. Jane Graham, *If The King Only Knew: Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV*, (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2000), p 213.
51. Pevitt-Algrant, *Madame de Pompadour*, p 278.
52. In fact, many of the most prominent critics of Louis XV were educated members of the middle classes, such as Pierre Denis de Rivoire, a Parisian barrister who was arrested in 1770 for sending a letter to the king which, among other things, stated that 'it is justice that makes kings; without it they are nothing but tyrants, usurpers, and oppressors, whose power, founded on violence, finishes with their force and never passes on to posterity'.
- Graham, *If the King Only Knew*, p 213.
53. Pierre Goubert, *Louis XIV and Twenty Million Frenchmen* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), p 24
54. *ibid*.
55. Jean Meuvret, "Le commerce des grains et des farines a Paris et les marchands parisiens a l'époque de Louis XIV," *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 3, no. 3 (July-September 1956), pp 169-203.
56. Steven Laurence Kaplan, *Provisioning Paris: Merchants and Millers in the Grain and Flour Trade During the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p 422.
57. Steven Laurence Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris and the Bread Question, 1700-1775* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), pp 28-30.
58. Anne Muratori-Philip, *Parmentier* (Paris: Plon, 1995), pp 82-3.
59. These rumours were not just reserved to the lower classes most affected by the grain shortages, and were considered to be true by wealthy and educated members of French society. In 1771, a retired lawyer called Pierre Denis de Rivoire was arrested for sending Louis XV letters saying that the monarch had tried to starve his people.
- Lisa Jane Graham, *If the King Only Knew - Seditious Speech in the Reign of Louis XV* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p 221.
60. Kaplan, *The Bakers of Paris*, pp 28-30.
61. In 1685, Louis XIV had revoked the Edict of Nantes.

- The Edict had been signed in 1598 by Louis XIV's grandfather Henri IV: the first of the Bourbon monarchs. The proclamation ended the religious conflicts which had violently impacted France throughout the sixteenth century, allowing the lawful and peaceable coexistence of Catholics and Protestants. Louis XIV wished to have a pure Catholic kingdom, so revoked the Edict, forcing huge numbers of French Protestants to emigrate abroad to England, Holland, Germany, and other religiously tolerant or majority Protestant European countries.
- Elizabeth Israels Perry, *From Theology to History: French Religious Controversy and the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* (Berlin and Heidelberg: Springer Science and Business Media, 2012).
62. The winnowing of Protestant officials from positions of power was a common thing in the reign of Louis XIV, and had occurred all over France. One example of this occurring in Toulouse is the case of the Protestant official Pierre Magnol, who in 1667 was denied both the position of chancellor, and a seat on the council because of his faith. Catholic churchmen were a fixture of the political life of the region, and can even be seen sitting in a serid row wearing pink shawls and berettas on the right-hand side of the speaker in Toulouse's *parlement* in a 1760 print titled *Assemblée Générale des États du Languedoc* (assembly of the Estates General of Languedoc).
- James Gerard Livesey, *Provincializing Global History: Money, Ideas, and Things in the Languedoc, 1680-1830* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), p 69.
- William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
- Stephen S. Miller, "Lords, Peasant Communities, and the State in Eighteenth-Century Languedoc," *French Historical Studies* 26, no. 1 (Winter 2003), pp 55-85.
63. Kegan, Paul C, "IV -- The Story of Jean Calas," *The Theological Review: A Journal of Religious Thought and Life* 7, issue 30 (July 1870), pp 378-409.
64. In addition to the story of Calas' trial and execution as it was published in the *Traité sur la tolérance*, printed images were also produced and widely distributed which depicted Calas' fate. The *Traité* and prints contributed to a popular feeling of sympathy for the poor *Toulousain* trader whom the people of France increasingly believed had been wrongly executed in the name of religious zealotry. After many appeals led by Voltaire's legal council on behalf of the Calas family, Louis XV met with the Calas family in 1764, and officially gave a posthumous pardon to Calas the following year.
65. Ian Davidson, *Voltaire in Exile - The Final Years, 1753-1778* (Grove Press: New York, 2004), p 94.
66. Being in exile at the time, Voltaire was unable to personally carry out an investigation in Toulouse, so he sent an investigator called Jean Ribote-Charron.
- ibid*, p 100.
67. *ibid*.
68. These factions included the four brotherhoods of Catholic penitents in the Languedoc region: 'la blanche, la bleue, la grise, & la noire.'
- Voltaire (François-Marie Arouet), *Traité sur la tolérance*, 1763, p 6.
69. The canal linked the ports of Narbonne and Cette on the Mediterranean to Toulouse, where the Narbonne river took the waterway out to the Atlantic at Bordeaux.
- Joseph J. Ermenc, "The Great Languedoc Canal," *The French Review* 34, no. 5 (April 1961), p 455.
70. With a local opening ceremony held at Toulouse.
- Chandra Mukerji, *Impossible Engineering: Technology and Territoriality on the Canal du Midi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p 78.
71. René Gast, *The Canal du Midi and the Navigable Waterways from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean* (Rennes: Editions Ouest-France, 2000), p 18.
72. The project was eventually finished and opened for boats to go down the waterway in 1684.
- Michel Cotte, *Canal du Midi - Marvel of Europe* (Paris: Belin, 2003), p 53.
73. Jean-Denis Bergasse, *Pierre-Paul Riquet et la Canal du Midi dans les arts et la littérature* (Paris: Imprimeries MAURY, 1982), pp 135-6.
74. For further research regarding the classicising pageantry attached to the opening of the canal, consult: Chandra Mukerji, "The New Rome: Infrastructure and National Identity on the Canal du Midi," *Osiris* 24, no. 1 (2009).
75. At the same time, the writer and poet Nicolas Boileau penned a short couplet which read 'J'entends déjà frémir les deux mers étonnées; de voir leurs flots unis au pié des Pyrénées' (I can already hear the two astonished seas quivering; to see their waves united to the foot of the Pyrenees).
- Bergasse, *Pierre-Paul Riquet*, p 133.
76. *ibid*, p 134.
77. *ibid*.
78. Even among Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire, who discussed the monster in his correspondence.
79. Louis, *La bête*, p 273.
80. This mode of depicting an animal in side-profile, stood motionless on a clod of its habitat against the blank page surrounding it is borrowed from the plates of the comte du Buffon's *Histoire naturelle*, which was serialised to huge acclaim in Paris from 1749-67.
- Thierry Hoquet, *Buffon illustré - les gravures de l'histoire naturelle (1749-1767)*, (Paris: French National Museum of Natural History, 2007).
81. An elaboration on this conception of the beast was that it may have been the hybrid of a wolf and a dog.
- Louis, *La bête*, pp 266-272.
82. Smith, *Monsters*, p 205.
83. *ibid*, p 9.
84. *ibid*, p 205.
85. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The French Peasantry, 1450-1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), p 9.
- Philip T. Hoffman, *Growth in a Traditional Society: The French Countryside, 1450-1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p 135.
86. In many ways, *Courtaud* was the prototype for the *Bête du Gévaudan*: a ferocious man-eating wolf, which was the symbol of the king's failure to reign peacefully and to provide for the needs of his people.
- Albert J. Guerard, "The Rabbit and the Tapes," in *The Sewanee Review* 80, no. 2 (Spring 1972), p 316.
87. Daniel P. Mannix, *The Wolves of Paris* (Lake Oswego: eNet Press, 1978), p 201.
88. Alongside the city's historic relationship to hungry wolves, the threat of these animals was reiterated closer to Paris in April 1765. At this high point in the popular interest in the Beast of Gévaudan, a large and deadly wolf attacked and killed a number of peasants in the town of Soissons between the capital and Versailles. The wolf was killed shortly after, but the incidents in Soissons only further ignited a popular feeling of fear, as the vastly decreased geographical distance to the capital made the problem of man-eating wolves ever more present.
- Jean-Marc Moriceau, *Histoire du méchant loup: 3000 attaques sur l'homme en France (XVe-XXe siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), p 463.
89. The problem persisted, and in 1768 a cavalry captain named Nicolas de Lisle de Moncel published his book *Méthodes et projets pour parvenir à la destruction des loups dans le royaume* in Paris.
- Nicolas de Lisle de Moncel published his *Méthodes et projets pour parvenir à la destruction des loups dans le royaume* (Imprimerie Royale: Paris, 1768).
90. Val Plumwood has written about how the consideration of humans as prey animals within a larger non-anthropocentric conception of ecology has the ability to subvert notions that humans hold over their perceived mastery of nature.
- Val Plumwood, "Meeting the Predator," in *The Eye of the Crocodile*, edited by Lorraine Shannon (Canberra: Australian National University E Press, 2012), pp 9-22.
91. For further discussion concerning the Beast and its

relationship to the ecology of wolves and humans in eighteenth-century France, consult: Meret. Fehlmann, ‘The Beast of Gévaudan as a History of the Changing Perceptions of Fatal Human-Wolf Interaction,’ in Michaela Fenske and Bernhard Tschöfen (eds.), *Managing the Return of the Wild - Human Encounters with Wolves in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2020) pp 12-29.

- 92. Smith, *Monsters*, pp 206-7.
- 93. Louis XV himself never made any verbal or written comments concerning his own opinions as to the nature of the monster, however we can read his readiness to believe the credibility of Antoine’s dead wolf as perhaps an indication that the king believed the monster to be a wolf, a belief no doubt compounded by the convenient ending of the popular panic which the specimen provided.
- 94. The *cabinet* had begun in the 1740s during the intendency of Nicolas-René Berryer as Lieutenant-Général of Paris’ police. One of the earliest rumours which the interception of the capital’s mail had brought to Louis XV’s attention was the popular belief in 1749 that street children were being abducted and murdered to provide blood for a Bourbon prince to bathe in as a cure for leprosy.
-Pevitt-Algrant, *Madame de Pompadour*,p 95.
-Charles de Mazade, “Les misères du pouvoir absolu - La politique secrète de Louis XV,” in *Revue des Deux Mondes* 67, no. 2 (1867), p 385.
- 95. Louis XV’s favourite places to hunt were Compiègne, Versailles - which originally built as a hunting lodge by Louis XIII, and Fontainebleau.
-F. Hamilton Hazlehurst, “The Wild Beasts Pursued: The Petite Galerie of Louis XV at Versailles,” in *The Art Bulletin* 66, no. 2 (June 1984), p 224.
- 96. Bergasse, *Pierre-Paul Riquet*, p 134.

Apocalyptic Themes in Guyanese Art

IAN DUDLEY

‘to paint antecedents and unborn worlds’

Wilson Harris, *The Tree of the Sun*¹

‘paintings with no death in them’

Aubrey Williams, statement²

Introduction: Prolepsis Now

Commentators on Aubrey Williams (1926–1990) often link the painter’s practice to the writings of Wilson Harris (1921–2018).³ These connections reflect how the formative experiences of both artists in Guyana’s interior catalysed a similarly complex dialogical address towards the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial histories of Amazonia, the Caribbean and wider Americas in their works. This essay extends these discussions around the apocalyptic themes structuring this volume. As poet and critic Nathaniel Mackey identifies in an illuminating interview with Harris, which concludes art historian Kobena Mercer’s 2006 collection, *Discrepant Abstraction*, fictional and real-world artists play a key role in the novelist’s persistent attention to the dynamics and dialectics of creative histories. Such treatments should necessarily inform understandings of his engagements with Williams and their shared contexts.⁴ Accordingly, one of Harris’s artist characters, the painter Da Silva da Silva, provides a viewpoint for developing the revelatory discussion with Williams here. The text takes an anfractuous route drawing on many sources beyond da Silva as it weaves its way towards an essential shared core amidst a plateau of elemental vitality and expressive collectivity. While Harris’s comments on Williams were multiple, little exists of the latter’s appraisal of the former. However, discussion with the artist’s daughter Maridowa Williams suggests a strong sense of kinship felt by Aubrey Williams for Harris’s experience and vision. It is hoped that through these pages the paintings can be seen as speaking, or rather singing for themselves alongside the texts.⁵

Approaching the Colonial Apocalypse⁶

In 1987 the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris was the subject of an experimental documentary called *Da Silva da Silva*.⁷ Directed by Colin Nutley (1944–present) to emulate the significant multivalency, narrative layering, and historical poly-vocalism of Harris’s prose, the film intercut critical and biographical material about the author with dramatized scenes from his 1977 work, *Da Silva da Silva’s Cultivated Wilderness*, a semi-visionary, semi-realist novella depicting a Brazilian diaspora artist living in contemporary London.⁸ Reflecting Harris’s interest in colonial cross-culturality, expansive temporal connections, and quantum irony, da Silva is described as an ‘orphan’ of European and African ancestry – that is of ‘Spanish and Portuguese parents, invisible black antecedents as well’, who, ‘at the age of four and a half to five’ is charitably adopted



Fig. 1
Wilson Harris
looking at statue
of Lord Holland,
Da Silva da Silva
(1987), dir. Colin
Nutley. Film
still. © Bandung
Productions, Tariq
Ali Archive.

by the British Ambassador, Sir Giles Marsden-Prince, and paternalistically carried to England by plane, after the orphanage where he had been deposited aged two ‘collapsed under a cyclone and a flood’.⁹

Amidst the film’s multifaceted montage portraying the fictional postcolonial artist, Harris makes his own on-screen appearances journeying between the Holland Park area of Kensington in London and Chelmsford in Essex. Harris lived in the latter when the film was made, but resided in the former when writing the novel, which was also home to his da Silva character.¹⁰ Harris moves briskly via the streets, cabs and trains of the metropolitan transport system, pausing occasionally at significant sites. One stoppage occurs in Holland Park before the statue of Lord Holland (1773–1840), an aristocratic Whig politician and owner of enslaved African peoples in Jamaica (Fig. 1).¹¹ In the novel his statue features amidst evocations of colonial slavery in Berbice, Guyana, particularly the 1763 uprising of the enslaved led by Coffij, a significant ancestral presence in the narrative.¹² Coffij had been represented symbolically squeezing the life out of colonizer greed in his own statue by the artist Philip Moore (1912–2012) atop a major national monument erected in Guyana in 1976 to celebrate ten years of Independence, which was achieved in 1966 after a long and bitter struggle against British imperial power.¹³ The Berbice river was also the location of Harris’s birthplace, New Amsterdam, a name reflecting Guyana’s earlier period of Dutch colonialization from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries when the 1763 war took place.¹⁴

Alongside fictional episodes, Nutley interrupted Harris’s mobile stalking with short monologues by the author, which frame the portrayal of the creative and existential

struggles driving his da Silva character as he contends with the myriad layers of present and historical disaster, which implicate him. Among these interjections, the opening monologue is especially striking. Harris speaks directly to the camera addressing the collective human predicament in the late twentieth century:

We have come to a very serious time in our history, in which we have to ask ourselves whether the direction we are pursuing is wrong. Whether the sails we have put up, under which we move, are orientated to the wrong trend, the wrong wind, the wrong tide? Whether we have to turn and go in a different direction, a completely different direction? The questions we have to ask ourselves about nature – nature ails. If one looks for example at the fantastic films of outer space which are simulated, what do you see? You see meteors striking planets, gauging out great bits of planets, causing explosions as if those planets are vomiting their ill. There is an ailment running through nature and we have to see that all of us in some degree have caught the virus.¹⁵

Harris's references noticeably mirror their time. The sense of a looming human-caused environmental crisis reflects the increasing urgency around such issues during the 1980s, which were starkly summarised by the United Nations report *Our Common Future* the same year.¹⁶ Meanwhile, imagery of planetary annihilation recalls the infamous world-destroying 'Death Star', a central technological character within George Lucas's (1944–present) *Star Wars* film trilogy, whose consecutive releases in 1977, 1980 and 1983 parallel the gap between the *Da Silva da Silva* novel and its film adaptation.¹⁷ Finally, the metaphorical language of pandemic channelling these anxieties suggests the viral currency of the AIDs crisis in the period. Beyond such immediate preoccupations, this apocalyptic premonition echoes thinking present in Harris's work since the 1950s, although it occurs increasingly consistently in novels and critical writings from the 1970s. An example of the former is a brief meditation upon themes of human self-destruction and community recreation located in a tribute to the Guyanese artist E R Burrowes (1903–1966) that appeared in *Kyk-Over-Al* journal in 1954.¹⁸ Harris recalled a conversation between himself, Burrowes and another Guyanese artist, Denis Williams (1923–1998), which took place in London in 1950, when the British Council Scholarships that Burrowes and Williams had to study in Britain overlapped.¹⁹ Whereas Burrowes felt inspired by the ebullient colours of paintings by Georges Rouault (1871–1958) seen while visiting Paris, Harris was preoccupied with the heavy impression left after encountering the imposing *Moai* figures of the Rapa Nui people of Rapa Nui, or 'Easter Island' ('Isla de Pascua'), in London's 'Museum of Man', since incorporated in the British Museum.²⁰ He recalled: 'I do recollect my own dwelling on the strange and terrible genius in these unsmiling forms that seemed to look into a historyless pit of times past or generations drowned or lost'.²¹ Harris described the ensuing discussion as

leading to a stark conclusion about the social function of art:

that there were only two ways open to human society – that of self-destruction when there remains only the cold flame of the seasons like a congealed stone the spirit retains to warn passersby near the fatal spot – or the community of re-creation, the spirits of optimism and renewal and noble discipline.²²

Though less concerned with the shady imperial origins of the Museum's 'acquisition' of the Rapa Nui ancestor stones, or the devastating impact of European colonialism on the island and its people, their stereotypical moralistic appropriation as icons of a supposed 'self-destruction' exhibits a flavour of the widespread existential anxieties occupying artistic imaginations in the wake of the Second Imperialist War (1939–1945).²³ The shadows of the Holocaust and the Atom bomb loomed heavily inside this consciousness, alongside prior colonial traumas, which were redoubled and complicated by overlapping contexts of the Cold War, decolonization, protracted civil rights struggles, and endless booms and busts within industrial, economic and technological spheres. Such intensifications of malaise are evident in recurrent references to notions of cosmic sickness and wounding in Harris's 1985 novel *Carnival*, which appeared two years before the *Da Silva* film with its striking diagnostic monologue.²⁴ The novel revisits conversations between a fictional Guyanese author, Everyman Masters, who has recently deceased, and his anonymous English biographer, who is still living. Within this dialogue between the dead and the living, Masters's own lifetime (1917–1982), which, not unlike Harris's, stretches between colonial-era Guyana and postcolonial Britain, specifically Holland Park in Kensington, is constantly positioned as haunted by 'the spectre of a wounded age'.²⁵ The fictional biographer recalls that 'we sat in Holland Park and discussed the psychology of power and the nature of Ambition at the heart of diseased politics around the globe'. Elsewhere, the writer is reported to declare 'it is as a tormented colonial age that the twentieth century will be remembered', or refers to 'conventions of fame within which the so-called great actors or statemen of history mimic universal death or love as they pursue statistics of world hunger, world charity, nuclear wealth, nuclear poverty'.²⁶ Despite Harris's deliberate indeterminacy, but consistent with other works, these allusions cumulatively suggest that capitalist modernity and its attendant political cultures, variously conjoining fascist and liberal tendencies, were inextricably bound up with colonial and neo-colonial histories. Their underlying logic of what Harris called 'progressive realism' had set humanity on the wrong course, entrapping consciousness and creative production on the way, as he explained soon after in a 1990 lecture series entitled 'Cross-Cultural Crisis: Imagery, Language and the Intuitive Imagination'. Here Harris outlined his diagnosis while identifying possible escapes through creative work:

when Cortez burnt his ships before the conquest of ancient Mexico he burnt his bridges with Europe. He was prepared to do that in order to seize the gold of ancient Mexico. He burnt the ships in an image of progressive realism, of linear bias – in which everything is directed straight to a specific target. There is no way back. The bridges have been burnt. A century or two later we see ships coming through the Middle Passage – slave ships. In the nightmare sanctuaries afforded by these ships we see another image of progressive realism. In opposition to this runs the opportunity to perceive intuitively that a sailing vessel, that one's *craft*, has to be linked in some way with some unconscious force, some sacramental energy, that has been suppressed and lost. The revisionary strategy therefore discloses the deprivations within progressive realism, the deprivations of linear bias, deprivations endemic to a ruling story-line by which historical conquest (sometimes refined into a model of absolute persuasion) gains its cultural and material ends at the expense of all other perspectives. ... It seems to me that progressive realism erases the past. It consumes the present and it may very well abort the future with its linear bias. That is why I think that the threat of pollution which exists now on our globe will not be solved simply by believing that we can make mechanical adjustments, we can do this, we can do that. Our civilisation is geared to progressive realism and therefore the solutions to the pollution of the globe will be mechanical. They won't address the psyche ... A civilization which is geared to progressive realism cannot solve the hazards and dangers and the pollution which it has inflicted upon the globe in terms of progressive realism.²⁷

References to pollution and sailing-directionality recalled the then-recent figurative admonitions from the *Da Silva da Silva* monologue. The monologue's sailing metaphor can consequently be re-understood as alluding to the colonial and neo-colonial histories inherent within 'progressive realism', which were not voiced explicitly but carried by implication through the imagined vessel that was itself haunted by the imperialist spectre of the Death Star. This reflects the centrality of such themes in the *Da Silva da Silva* novel and Harris's wider writings. In the former, they are linked to a psychoanalytic-archaeology of the artistic-oneiric visions generated by the protagonist's background, experience and consciousness in their intersections with the complex histories of 'circumnavigational flight', as imperialist mobility is semi-euphemistically termed, a technique recurrent in other authorially-themed works like *Carnival*.²⁸ For Harris, the ship was the emblematic means through which 'progressive realism's' global subjection and erasure of cultures was enacted by successive waves of genocidal European imperialism from the fifteenth century onwards, but also concealed hidden inextricable potentialities. This thematic centrality echoed contemporaneous works by other Guyanese artists, including Grace Nichols's (1950–present) poem cycle, *I Is A*



Fig. 2
Theodor De
Bry, *De Insula
Hispaniola* (c.1598),
from Bartolomé
de las Casas,
Theodor de Bry
and Johanne Saur,
*Narratio Regionum
Indicarum Per
Hispanos Quosdam
Devastatarum
Verissima*
(Frankfurt: John
Theodor and John
Israel de Bry, 1598).
Engraving. Photo
courtesy Library
of Congress, Jay I.
Kislak Collection,
Washington.

Long Memoried Woman (1983), which variously mobilised ships, vessels and journeying within its poignant mnemonic excavation of colonialism and slavery.²⁹ In Harris's *Carnival*, 'the ship of Night' appears on the horizon off the Guyana littoral as another form of spectre, an ominous emblem of colonial modernity from Columbus to the Cold War, that docks at the harbour of the reader's historical consciousness:

I looked through the blackened fire into the ships the Arawaks had seen. Night fell in consistency with the ship of Night moored to the Market-place of the globe. The Spanish came in that Night, then the French, then the Dutch, then the English, then the Americans, and in 1926 – on the very dream-day, dream-night, of the burning schooner and the capsized basket of eggs – a Russian vessel appeared and anchored in the New Forest mid-river.³⁰

The arrival of this ship constructed from compressed historical vision announces the dark night of modernity as the 'time of imperialism' – the epoch, rhythm and historicity through which 'progressive realism' proceeds. The linear biases of the colonial monoculture it carries as cargo erases all other pasts, all other perspectives and all other temporalities in their relations with nature and cosmos.³¹ Here the Other-perspectivalism is embodied in the imagined viewpoint of the Arawak, who were

Fig. 3
Guaman Poma,
*Coregidor de Minas:
en las minas*,
Drawing 211 in
*El Primer Nueva
Corónica I Buen
Gobierno* (c.1615).
Manuscript. Royal
Danish Library,
Copenhagen,
GKS 2232 kvart,
p. 525 [529].
Photo © Royal
Danish Library,
Copenhagen.



among the main Indigenous peoples of the Guayana coastal regions and connected populations of the Caribbean islands at the point of European ‘contact’. Today their descendants, self-identifying as Lokono in their own language, meaning ‘the people’, constitute significant parts of the Indigenous populations in Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana.³² Beyond this geographical-historical specificity, their presencing evokes other victims of ‘progressive realism’ that Harris elsewhere signalled, including the abovementioned 1990 lecture series highlighting the Nahua and adjacent peoples, whose worlds were shattered by the Spanish, alongside enslaved African peoples violently torn from their own cultural spheres.³³ The layered imagery of ‘blackened fire’ and Spanish arrival recalls the brutal scenes of annihilation described by Dominican monk

Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566) in his account of the post-Colombian Indigenous genocide, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552).³⁴ In his estimation, this genocide encompassed 3–4 million dead across the Caribbean islands and 12–15 million across the American mainland in half a century.³⁵ Its fiery bloody scenes of murder and torture executed within the larger context of abuse, disruption, dispossession and disease-spread, were gruesomely visualised by Theodor De Bry (1528–1598) in his 1598 Latin translation of the *Relación* among other works.³⁶ Closely following Las Casas’s text, the image of Hispaniola’s invasion foregrounds thirteen Indigenous women and men being hung and burned alive while a baby is smashed against a nearby building and other victims are massacred in the background by the Spanish, whose ship is anchored offshore (Fig. 2).³⁷ Rare corresponding accounts by Indigenous voices portray a similar picture, such as Guaman Poma’s *El Primer Nueva Corónica I Buen Gobierno* (c.1615), which the Andean author wrote and illustrated under Spanish occupation in the ‘Viceroyalty of Peru’.³⁸ A characteristic drawing such as *Coregidor De Minas: en las minas* shows the Spanish colonial administrator overseeing the brutal systematic torture of Andean bodies in pursuit of extractive profits (Fig. 3).³⁹ Despite its polemical dramatisation, the disastrous and far-reaching scale of the ‘infiernos’ (‘hells’), which Las Casas described being unleashed across the new ‘American’ space, has been reiterated by contemporary scholars in their assessments of the impact of successive European invasions across the hemisphere.⁴⁰ The cumulative effects of lethal epidemics alongside the direct violence of warfare and forced labour, interruptions to traditional social-economic systems and attendant lowering birth rates, caused a demographic collapse with reductions of over 90 per cent from first contact-point to average nadirs in the mid-seventeenth century affecting pre-Columbian populations estimated to have totalled between 50 to over 100 million.⁴¹ A recent scientific study examining this collapse in relation to the history of human-caused climate change, estimates that, in the context of a pre-contact population of 60.5 million, ‘55 million indigenous people died following the European conquest of the Americas beginning in 1492’, sufficient to cause a global cooling event by the early 1600s.⁴² These unfathomable numbers are the background to the parallel disaster of African slavery. Between 1500–1865 around 12 million captive African people were purchased by Europeans for transportation into slavery, with around 2 million dying through the ‘Middle Passage’, leaving 10 million to be sold into the forced labour, torture and death of the plantation regimes and wider colonial economy. There were about 6 million enslaved people across the Americas by the mid-nineteenth century.⁴³ Alongside Indigenous genocide, De Bry visualised Spanish exploitation of enslaved African labour in mines and sugar plantations, incorporating scenes of punishment and executions of escapees.⁴⁴ It is however famous Abolitionist-inspired imagery that has provided the most impactful visual accounts of this horror, including variations of the slave-ship *Brookes* (1788–1789), which rendered plain the industrialised scale of this genocidal dehumanisation, and William Blake’s closeup visions of sadistic torture in the

plantation zone, which illustrated John Gabriel Stedman's account of colonial Suriname (1796).⁴⁵ The former underlay Harris's reference to the 'nightmare sanctuaries' of the Middle Passage in the 'Cross-Cultural Crisis' lectures, while the latter appeared as visions of 'the furies of history' emerging from the Guyanese landscape in his 1970 novel, *Ascent to Omai*.⁴⁶

Considering the histories encompassed by these capitalist-imperialist crimes against humanity, it is unsurprising that Harris defined them as the arrival of and tormented passage through an enveloping shadowy darkness. The euphemistic shield of nocturnal journeying suggests oneiric allusions to psychoanalytic ideas of ongoing repression connected to such magnitudinous trauma and guilt. The association of colonialism and the attendant monoculture of 'progressive realism' with an enclosing darkness chimes with Enrique Dussel's contemporaneous refashioning of the so-called 'discovery' of the Americas, not as *descubrimiento*, but rather as *encubrimiento*, or 'covering', and more particularly 'the covering of the other', precisely in relation to the lack of recognition connected to its violent erasures.⁴⁷ Walter Mignolo's similarly conceived *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995) or *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011) provide equivalent counters to European cultures' self-presentation of these epoch's of 'progress' as moments of 'Enlightenment'.⁴⁸

While literary-philosophical accounts such as Harris's constitute a speculative historical tradition, the forms of obscurity and erasure they imply resonate with concrete examples of colonial monoculture described by other Guyanese writers. Historian Walter Rodney (1942–1980) identifies the centrality of economic monoculture in colonial Africa as an imperialist tool for the control and domination of social relations and environment towards intensifying resource and produce extraction for increased European profits, which distorted the diversity of traditional socially-orientated economies and left the continent exposed to threats of famine, economic insecurity and ultimately, postcolonial dependency. As Rodney underlines 'monoculture was a colonialist invention ... there was nothing "natural" about monoculture'.⁴⁹ This mirrored the broader system of imperialist monoculture in the Americas and beyond through plantation slavery, mining, and like areas. Harris echoes this in *Carnival*, when he centres plantation monoculture as grounding relations between Imperialist West and Global South: 'The plantation is the cornerstone of the economy of the poor world. The factory is the cornerstone of the economy of the rich world'.⁵⁰ Returning to the Guyanese context in his 1996 novel *Jonestown*, Harris also stressed the environmental dimension of this human tragedy, recording how successive applications of a rationalised geometry to the rich ecosystems of coastal rainforests by the Dutch and British in the construction of their plantation field and drainage systems had 'smothered the breath-lines in a living landscape', causing 'disfigured catchments, in the coastal river systems, that would occasion excessive floods and droughts'.⁵¹ As Michael Niblett suggests, this landscape desecration can also be understood within conceptions of

colonial trauma across the region.⁵²

These practices of imperialist-materialist efficiency overlapped with connected forms of ideological conditioning as Rodney and others describe.⁵³ A related use of the term 'monoculture' by the Guyanese author, pedagogist and psychotherapist Beryl Gilroy (1924–2001) occurs in her description of the experience of colonial higher education in the imperial metropolis of London during the 1950s:

We were token students on a monocultural trip. We had to fit ourselves into the text offered us. The seminars did not even hint at the difference of culture, class, socio-economic status and race, all of which affected life-chances and educational outcomes. The books were written by Europeans for Europeans, and we were expected to paint ourselves into various corners of the findings.⁵⁴

Notably, Harris concluded 'the ship of Night' vision and its sequence of colonial monocultures in 1926 with the ambiguous appearance of the 'Russian vessel'. Initially, its presence hints towards disruption of the historical trend by Marxist-inspired revolutions within Guyana and the Caribbean, most famously in Cuba. These hopeful glimmers are however countered by related ideas of menace evoked via the spectre of 'Soviet domination', exemplified by the near-miss of the 'Cuban Missile Crisis' and the apocalyptic threat of the Cold War nuclear arms race, which the event highlighted and is likewise foretold in Harris's final image of foreign ship arrival. The mid-1920s date of its appearance accordingly floats between the optimism generated by the 1917 Revolution and descent into the totalitarian nightmare of 'Stalinism'. When Harris wrote *Carnival*, the Soviet Union, a transformation of earlier Russian imperialisms, was rapidly approaching collapse, opening the way for the Pyrrhic 'victory' of Western neoliberalism and military-backed consumerist democracy. Harris implies that the former, through its militarism, hyper-industrialised relationship to nature and peoples, its culture of propaganda, individual and artistic constraint, operated in a dialectical complicity with the latter, which it was not so removed from as a variant of monocultural power and still distanced from the cultivation of healthy psychic life and material relations, which the author envisioned as a basis for liveable, convivial futures.⁵⁵ When *Carnival* was published, the Chernobyl disaster was just a year away. Its 1986 occurrence and blowing of radioactive fallout across surrounding regions adds another significant layer to Harris's phrase the 'the wrong wind' spoken a year later in the *Da Silva da Silva* monologue. Immediate references to the disaster in *Carnival's* 1987 sequel, *The Infinite Rehearsal*, reinforce this.⁵⁶

What was needed to break from these phases of 'imperialist time' is what Harris referred to above in his Cortez indictment as a 'revisionary strategy' of psychic culture. Creative artistic practices, the arts of originality, imagination and intuition offered a decolonizing antidote to this psychological conditioning. In the passage out of

colonial monoculture, their interruptive potential, complex revelations and alternative temporalities were essential for generating new forms of consciousness that might uncover and recover erased pasts while envisioning new possibilities to steer towards away from the pathological trajectory of 'progressive realism'. The same lecture described:

there is another necessity: to come to grips with the intuitive potential that may reside in an image and to find links, links with the past. The thing to note is this: there is no mechanical formula for those bridges which I spoke of between the craft and the sacrament. We have to rediscover it in every century. We have to find protean ways of visualising what those links are.⁵⁷

These notions renewed earlier theorisations such as 'History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guiana', which Harris delivered in post-Independence Guyana in 1970, where he unveiled similar ideas underlying his ambitious utopian confidence in artistic-creative practices. He stated, 'I believe a philosophy of history may well lie buried in the arts of the imagination'. Harris linked this philosophy to potential forms of cross-culture and ideas of sovereign inner time existing within artworks themselves, encompassing radical connections with diverse and deep pasts, as well as futures unborn, and operating across different perceptual planes, in a manner that would enjoy recurrent simulation in novels, such as *Da Silva da Silva*, *Carnival* and others, during the interim before the 'Cross-Cultural Crisis' lectures.⁵⁸ One particularly resonant legacy of Harris's 1970 lecture was his quoting the warning offered to the decolonizing Caribbean by Guyanese historian Elsa Goveia (1925–1980): 'we are courting defeat when we attempt to build a new heritage of freedom upon a structure of society which binds us all too closely to the old heritage of slavery'.⁵⁹ This anticipated Harris's 1990 statement that the problems of 'progressive realism' cannot be addressed by 'progressive realism'. The key difference is that Goveia's warning and its use by Harris addressed Caribbean Independence, whereas Harris's later adaption expanded the structural crisis globally. This underlined how legacies of colonialism were not discrete problems of the formerly colonised but implied all humanity in their continued operation and expansion, just as the history of globalised capitalism is inseparable from imperialism. This underpins conscious overlapping and remapping of 'colonial' and 'non-colonial' spaces in Harris's novels from the 1970s, and reiterative reconfiguration of cross-culture as a disruptive counter to 'progressive realism' precisely as the immediate postcolonial moment slid into the jubilatory atmosphere of the post-Cold War neoliberal democratic consumerist boom with the millennium's close. In 1998 he continued:

Cross-culturality, in my view, begins in perceiving how one-sided and biased are the targets that seek to condition our sensibility. There is, so to speak, an inner



Fig. 4
Aubrey Williams,
Hymn to the Sun V
(*Olmec-Maya and*
Now) (1984). Oil
on canvas, 119 x
178 cm. Private
collection. © Estate
of Aubrey Williams.
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courtesy October
Gallery, London.



Fig. 5
Robert Matthew
Johnson-Marshall
& Partners,
Commonwealth
Institute (1962).
Photograph by
Sarah J Duncan.
London. ©
Sarah J Duncan
Photography.
Photo courtesy The
Twentieth Century
Society.

and outer chorus and theatre and narrative of realities that diverge from, and break, the monolithic domain of absolute individualism and parochialism.⁶⁰

Harris made this cross-cultural comment in connection with Aubrey Williams on one of several occasions writing about his fellow Guyanese artist during this transition period. Harris saw in Williams's protean, metamorphic visualisations, a unique orchestration of dynamic perceptual events, which overlapped visual, sonic and haptic planes through an address of the historical-aesthetics of Indigenous America, which set connected phenomenological, ontological and cosmological aspects in relation to themes of collapse and renewal across precolonial, colonial and postcolonial contexts. The staggering, dramatic density of Williams's 'living canvases', as the painter framed his late practice, appealed to Harris's complex conceptions of cross-culture and through their implicit critique of neocolonial materialism, realism and temporality, aligned symbiotically with the authors' own theoretical-textual revelations.⁶¹

Paintings like *Hymn to the Sun V* (1984, Fig. 4), with their characteristic evocations of astronomical forces, planetary collision and primordial elemental reactions, are reminiscent of Harris's diagnostic psychologising of science fiction cataclysm in the opening *Da Silva da Silva* monologue. This accords with the apocalyptic, eschatological and entropic themes that were essential concerns of the *Olmec-Maya* series, which it belonged to. Williams first showed its forty paintings at the Commonwealth Institute Art Gallery, London in 1985, his tenth occasion exhibiting at the Kensington venue since its 1962 opening.⁶² Designed by Robert Matthew Johnson-Marshall & Partners, its building formed part of the cultural rebranding of the British Empire in its terminal phase (Fig. 5).⁶³ Harris had lived near the Institute like the protagonist of his *Da Silva da Silva* novel. The venue provided the architectural setting for its climactic chapter, where, during a frenzied painting session, the artist undertakes a dramatic psychic journey through a wasteland of colonial history and memory. *Da Silva* ascends the gallery floors as the decks of a ship while it makes a sweeping global tour around the fossilised remains of derelict plantations, extractive industries, and imposing engineering infrastructure, including a hydroelectric dam, sailing over the 'violated bodies of history' as it goes. The artist visualises this floating modernist cathedral as the 'skeleton stage of dying empire', but also a 'cradle' of renewal.⁶⁴ Harris's fascination with the architectural-institutional concept extended to his including a curiously annotated diagram, in which the building's tent-like structure is pictured as a microcosmic memory-map of the rapidly fading British imperial space (Fig. 6). Harris's, or rather *da Silva*'s 'painter's note' intuitively detects a 'mutation' as having taken place, through which future worlds transcending colonial and neocolonial conditioning might unfold.⁶⁵ Like Harris and fictional characters such as *da Silva*, Williams viewed art as a last resort of human freedom and a vital source of cultural recovery and renewal in the postcolonial age. Yet by the time of the *Olmec-Maya* series' exhibition at the Commonwealth Institute, an

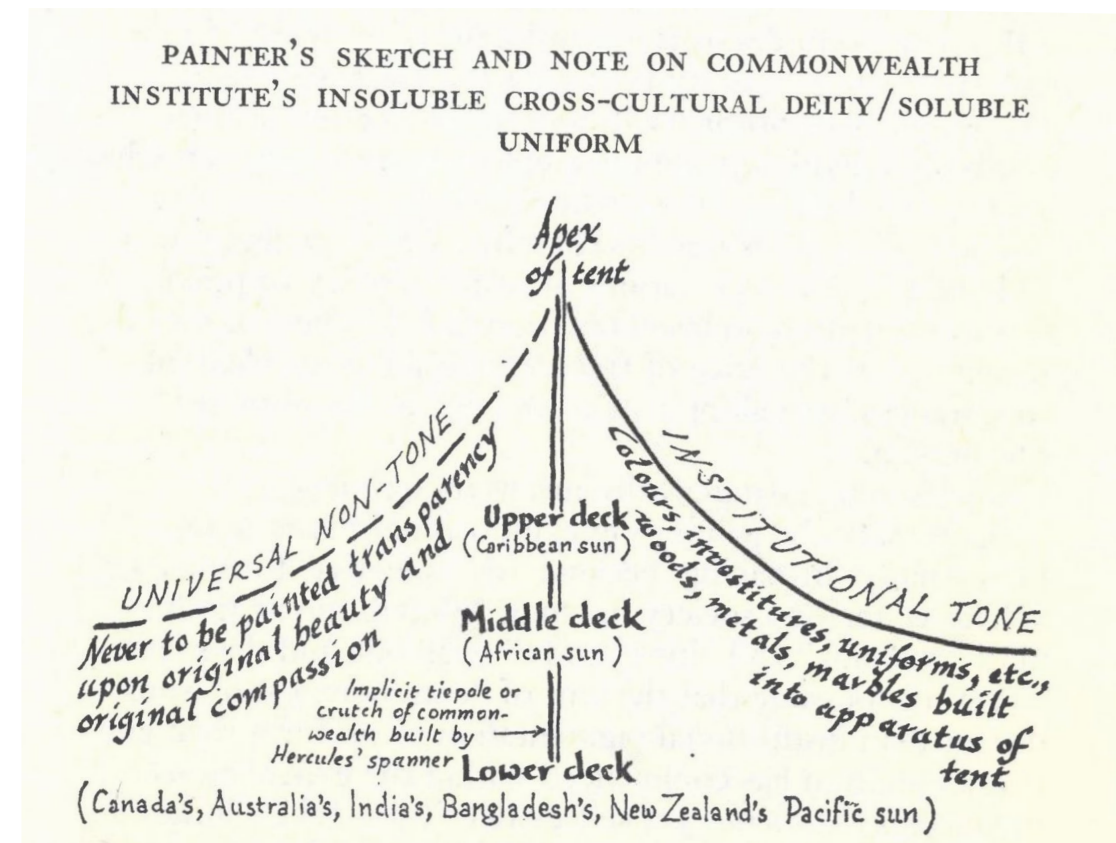


Fig. 6
Wilson Harris,
*Painter's Sketch
and Note on
Commonwealth
Institute's Insoluble
Cross-Cultural Deity
/ Soluble Uniform*
(detail), from *Da
Silva da Silva's
Cultivated Wilderness*
(London: Faber and
Faber, 1977), p. 69.
Book illustration.
© Estate of Wilson
Harris, Faber and
Faber.

anxious pessimism had similarly arisen.⁶⁶

These factual-fictional overlaps reflect close parallels and interconnections between Harris's and Williams's trajectories. During the 1940s and 1950s, both had civil service jobs working on 'development' projects in pre-Independence British Guiana. Harris was a surveyor in the coastal regions where sugar and rice production dominated the economy, but also, as he described in one *Da Silva da Silva* monologue, 'led many expeditions into the heartland of the Guyanas'.⁶⁷ Williams worked as Field Officer for the Department of Agriculture, first on coastal sugar estates, but between 1947–1949 headed an experimental agriculture station at Hosororo in the colony's remote North-West district, sent as 'punishment' for attempting to help poor farmers against the interests of the corporate power structure of the dominant colonial elite.⁶⁸ Such occupations afforded both extensive experience of Guyana's imposing interior environment of rainforests, rivers, cataracts, mountains and savannas, while directing their consciousness towards Indigenous peoples and their deep cultural engagement with the landscape despite colonialism's ongoing impacts. These experiences resonated across the work both produced after moving to London in the 1950s to pursue their artistic careers against the backdrop of the independence struggle and subsequent decades of national formation. Giving clues to the development of his psycho-geographical-archaeological writing, Harris described how boat journeys up Guyana's rivers implanted a sense of the 'divine' meaning of quest as searching for value itself, but noted his surprise that 'many members of the crew were oblivious of the great

Fig. 7
Aubrey Williams,
Hosororo III (1957).
Oil on canvas, 62
x 65 cm. Private
collection. © Estate
of Aubrey Williams.
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courtesy October
Gallery, London.



voyages that had occurred that had in a sense deposited them in the Americas'.⁶⁹ Williams described his experience of Hosororo's Warao Amerindian community as providing an aesthetic epiphany through their integration of art, myth, religion, cosmology, social and environmental practices. He was suspicious of the Warao's increasing assimilation into the colonial economy via missionary influence and the labour demands of the area's expanding plantation culture.⁷⁰ Though concentrating on citrus cultivation in Williams's time, the Hosororo experimental station's original establishment in 1907 was connected to failed attempts by the British colonial government to capitalise on the global rubber boom of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which was notorious for its devastating impacts upon Indigenous peoples across Amazonia and beyond, before imperialist markets and technologies moved on.⁷¹

Williams's early painting *Hosororo III* (1957) epitomises the overlapping physical and cultural histories that he and Harris transformed into a vital insurgent synthesis against the destructive forces of 'progressive realism' (Fig. 7). The dancing white lines between the pile of black irregular polygonal marks evoke water cascading through the dark rocks constituting the fall after which Hosororo is named. In Warao, the noun *bo*

Fig. 8
Aubrey Williams,
*Logos (The Warwick
Logos)* (1985). Oil
on canvas, 61.1 x
45.7 cm. University
of Warwick
Art Collection,
Coventry. © Estate
of Aubrey Williams.
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courtesy University
of Warwick Art
Collection.



means 'water', and *sororo* 'that which gushes or is gushing', from the verb *sororó*, 'to gush' or 'to squirt', from which come translations of *Hosororo* as 'gushing water' or 'falling water'.⁷² Williams lived next to the fall and bathed in its waters, and aptly rendered the name as 'noisy water' after these sensorial experiences.⁷³ The idea of musicality, which Williams linked to this feature and echoes in the wider rainforest chorus evoked by the painting, was a characteristic that Harris identified as the essence of the painter's abstraction.⁷⁴ The importance of cataracts and waterfalls as symbolic sites of lifegiving fertility, renewal and transcendent passage into eternity via their divine oracular music was regularly thematised in Harris's novels, from the early *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), composed close to *Hosororo III*, to later works, such as *Carnival* and its sequels.⁷⁵ These ideas of cosmic fertility resound with Julio Lavandero's rendering of the Warao name for their homeland, *jobaji*, as 'fertile land' or 'fertile earth' – combining *jo* ('water'), *ba/bu* ('abundant/plentiful'), and *ji/je* ('fire/light'), which is said to refer to the fertilising power of the sun upon the damp riverine environment of the coastal rainforest. Lavandero writes: '*Jo* is the passive element, the support, the material; *ji*, the active, dynamic, distinguishing element, the form'.⁷⁶ The combination in *Hosororo III* of a fiery solar centre enlivening the glistening surrounding of watery lightness and verdant

vegetal greens echoes these vital elemental relationships.⁷⁷ Williams discussed connected ideas in his descriptions of later paintings incorporating Guyanese Indigenous iconography, such as *Logos* (*The Warwick Logos*) (1985, Fig. 8). Here he referred to the Sun as ‘the giver of life’ and the river water as ‘the maintainer of life – the blood of the earth’.⁷⁸ Equally, there is a similar correspondence between *Hosororo III*’s elemental structuring and Williams describing the rituals carried out by the Warao, which he witnessed, as being organised around the use of four elements, fire, earth, water, and a changeable fourth component.⁷⁹ The relation to the numinous forces involved within these cosmological conceptions and ceremonial actions are strengthened by the animated appearance of the painting’s structuring rock elements, on account of this recalling Indigenous viewpoints, which perceive geological formations as the abodes of powerful spirits.⁸⁰ This is intensified by the character of the marks simultaneously evoking the abstract calligraphy of Guyana’s ancient Indigenous petroglyphs, known as *timebri*. Though varying in form and antiquity, it is suggested that some *timebri* examples may date back as far as 5000–7,000 BP.⁸¹ The word originates in the Karinya (Carib) language, where *tymere* means ‘having figures’ or ‘decorated’.⁸² Williams described *timebri* as ‘the word for art’ and translated it poetically as ‘the mark of the hand of man’, whereas Harris interpreted it as ‘the hand of god’ after their associations with divine ancestors and shamanism.⁸³ These definitions and *timebri* themselves emphasise the deep continuity of Indigenous presence and resource usage within the Amazonian landscape. Alongside other archaeological monuments, like the ancient shell mounds littering Guyana’s coastal regions, they underline this landscape’s long status as a ‘cultural artefact’ rather than a ‘pristine wildness’.⁸⁴ *Timebri* was a key form of Indigenous art that Williams reconfigured through his paintings, though he drew on many others, including basketry, pottery and featherwork. One of Williams’s familiar motifs, featured in *The Warwick Logos* and other works, shows a snake chasing a frog, and was likely taken from Warao, Karinya and Lokono basketry patterns illustrated in the studies of colonial anthropologist Walter Roth (1861–1933) (Fig. 9).⁸⁵ His motif source, Roth, also featured in Harris’s novels among a pantheon of figures from Guyana’s historical geography, including surveying predecessors like Robert Schomburgk (1804–1865).⁸⁶ Their presence implied the shadow of imperialism as continuing to condition environmental vision and imagination. Countering such viewpoints, Williams linked the motif to Indigenous conceptions of cosmic fertility and reproduction, connecting human, plant and animal worlds. The snake was referred to as ‘phallus’, and the frog as the ‘female symbol of fecundity’.⁸⁷ These links were influenced by mythical aetiology alongside aforementioned ideas concerning the existence of controlling spirits within and beyond the visible and material world.⁸⁸ Various accounts of the Warao and neighbouring peoples speak of figures like *Wauta*, the shaman frog woman, who practised cassava agriculture, an important staple, while *Nanyobo*, also a frog, produced fire from her mouth or vagina, and starch from her neck.⁸⁹ Snakes often have phallic and masculinist

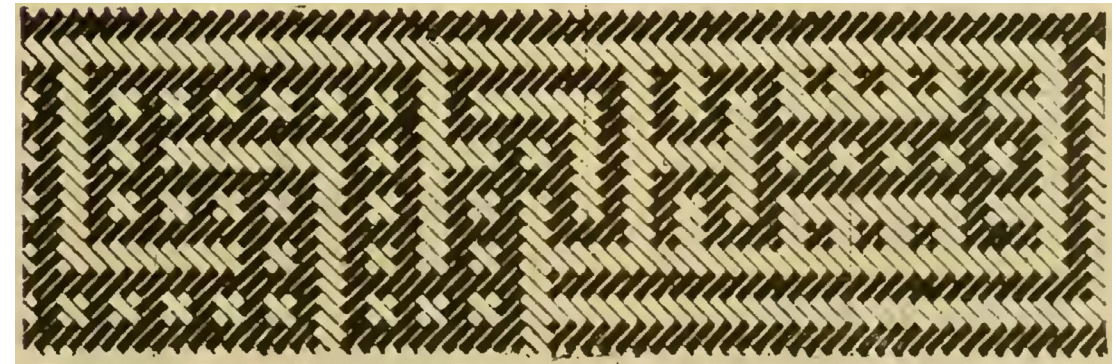


Fig. 9
Anonymous, *Snake Following a Frog* (from a selection of Warao, Karinya and Lokono basketwork), in Walter Roth ‘An Introductory Study of the Arts, Crafts and Customs of the Guiana Indians’, *Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1916–17* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), p. 359, Fig. 173D. Smithsonian, Washington.

associations and connections to ideas of regeneration and time arising from their abilities to shed their skin.⁹⁰ Though generally deployed in later paintings, sexual themes connected to the motif were central to Williams’s work from early on, as Donald Locke emphasised during the 1960s, and as *Hosororo III* abstractly illustrates.⁹¹ This echoed contemporaneous literary representations of Guyana’s interior in the work of Jan Carew (1920–2012), whose 1958 novel, *The Wild Coast*, the cover of which Williams illustrated, described the rainforest in similar bodily terms: ‘The forest is a womb in which life is lived in an eternal, dark gestation, only the undulating belly of the treetops is exposed’.⁹² These themes of life-creation and continuity, as they developed across Williams’s protean abstraction, activated a paradigm of transformation and genesis running throughout Indigenous mythologies in Guyana and beyond, which he was influenced by, particularly from his time with the Warao. Williams described the ‘surrealistic’ mythology he became familiar with as having a ‘profound philosophic content’.⁹³ In explaining this content, anthropologist Johannes Wilbert underlines the importance of the etiological concept of *namonina*, or ‘transformation’:

Warao mythical geography, transmitted from one generation to another in oral lore, is a lesson in human ecology and resource management. ... a particular genre of Warao folk literature, known as *namonina a re*, transformation stories, ... delineates the etiology of a large number of plants and animals and the physical features of Warao land. *Namonina* descriptions of life-forms are often quite detailed. They explain, for instance, where a particular tree originated, why it grows in one spot rather than another, why it looks the way it does, what special properties it has as food or as raw material, and who are the tree’s companions – birds, animals, insects, snails and so on. In other words, *namonina* lore expresses the Warao conception and interpretation of the physical, botanical, and zoological environments and their interrelationships in the Warao universe.⁹⁴

Antonio E Vaquero Rojo similarly underlines the fundamental importance of *namonina*, which he defines in terms of an essential significative duality. *Namonina* can mean both ‘transformation’ as a sudden and magical mutation as typically found in myth, but also

Fig. 10
Aubrey Williams,
*Night and the
Olmec* (1983). Oil
on canvas, 126 x
185 cm. Private
collection. © Estate
of Aubrey Williams.
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DACS 2021. Photo
courtesy DACS.



‘the beginning of life through fertilisation and growth’, both ‘vegetable or animal’.⁹⁵ This definitional duality resonates interestingly with one of Williams’s key statements about the influence of Warao philosophy upon his artistic awakening, which he made to the art and literary historian Anne Walmsley:

It was in the North West District, with the Warrau Indians, that I realised art. When I heard the Indians talking about colour and form, and how man makes things according to his own image, I started to understand what art really is. It is at once the creation of something that has never been in the world before – and yet nothing new, just a rearrangement.⁹⁶

This paradigm of transformation and genesis became a foundation for the consistent dynamic of being as continual difference, which adorns Williams’s ‘living canvases’ in non-figurative and figurative modes in dialogue with other forms of morphological discourse and abstraction.⁹⁷ It clearly encapsulates his experiencing art as a cultural transformation of natural materials, which Warao creative practices exemplified as an illustration of their wider traditional resource usage.⁹⁸ This accordingly engendered Williams’s celebratory rendering of alternative ways of seeing and interacting with the world beyond the cerebral grave of what he called the ‘colonial brainwashing’, or ‘progressive realism’ in Harris’s terms.⁹⁹ Investigating how such ontological questions and their relationship to the eternal might be reconciled with historical process, especially relating to colonialism and the interactions of continuity and discontinuity within it, consequently emerges as a core theme within the artist’s painting and its overlaps with Harris. These interests resonated with, but also challenged, the apocalyptic

discourse framing Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1908–2009) account of the historical destruction of Brazil’s Indigenous peoples in *Triste Tropics*, which was published in 1955 and translated into English as *A World on the Wane* in 1961. Lévi-Strauss’s pessimistic conclusion describes anthropology as the study of processes of cultural disintegration that would be better known as ‘entropologie’ (‘entropology’), after the thermodynamic concept of entropy, which establishes the horizon of the universe’s ultimate heat death.¹⁰⁰

Among Williams’s oeuvre, Harris selected the *Olmec-Maya* series to address such questions, specifically through one painting, *Night and the Olmec* (1983), which he wrote about several times (Fig. 10).¹⁰¹ The oneiric floating of fragments of Pre-Columbian Mesoamerican art over a protean abstract background is characteristic of the more figurative examples in the series, which complemented more abstract works like *Hymn to the Sun V*. Here an Olmec colossal head sculpture appears in the lower left, while a profile of a Mayan relief orbits in the upper right above a red and yellow graphic sign. The relationship between the elements emerging over this glistening nocturnal abyss pertains to lineage. The Olmec existed in Mexico’s southern Gulf coast area during the early pre-Classic period around 1450 to 400 BC and were represented within mainstream archaeology as the regional ‘mother culture’, or first ‘civilization’. This reputation was due to early site dates and associated innovations within integrated systems of monumental architecture, writing, astronomy, agriculture, religious ceremonialism, and rulership, that became defining characteristics of Mesoamerican cultural development preceding the Spanish invasion. The Maya to the south and east were recognised as flourishing after the Olmec demise from the later pre-Classic onwards and consequently considered inheritors and refiners of their legacy.¹⁰² Williams’s focus on these pre-colonial Indigenous worlds celebrates the hemisphere’s ancient foundations but also reflects upon their waxing and waning. This acknowledgement had postcolonial political resonance as symbols of cultural autonomy, especially in terms of their material and spiritual embeddedness within what Williams called ‘their living environment and ecology’, which was outside of and preceded European colonialism, while simultaneously memorialising their disruption by its violent arrival.¹⁰³ The ‘Night’, which Williams uncovers, resonates with both aspects. Firstly, the calendrical hieroglyph, possibly a stellar symbol, recalls integrated cycles of astronomical observation, temporal marking and agricultural practice shared by the work’s respective Mesoamerican entities.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, the void aspect clearly indexes the erasures of colonial genocide, anticipating Harris’s vision of ‘the ship of Night’. The living animated qualities of the Olmec and Mayan presences relatedly connect with the aforementioned psychoanalytic notions of uncovering suppressed voices and events. This names not only Indigenous pasts, but equally the work’s present and the ongoing oppression and dispossession of contemporary descendants of the historical cultures, which Williams represented, within the context of Guatemala’s civil war during the

1980s, as recorded in testimonial literature like *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, published the year that *Night and the Olmec* was painted.¹⁰⁵ The fragmentation, which Williams depicts, suggests the violence directed towards Mayan cultures and the peoples and bodies through which they are lived, as Menchú (1959–present), a member of the K’iche’ Mayan people, painfully describes. Simultaneously the evocation of ancestral landscapes recalls the sustaining and restorative powers of the community of nature and tradition running throughout Menchú’s account.¹⁰⁶

Harris’s reading of the painting in the ‘Cross-Cultural Crisis’ lectures and connected theorisations similarly addressed colonial legacy. Particularly, he saw the Olmec head as channelling themes of complex ancestry inflected by the human and environmental devastation wrought by ‘progressive realism’. Conventional archaeological understandings, he suggested, were complicated by traditions of pseudo-archaeological interpretation, which claimed the Olmec heads recorded a pre-Columbian African presence in the Americas. Despite robust rejection by mainstream archaeology, such ideas enjoyed a resurgence during the 1970s through works like Ivan Van Sertima’s (1935–2009) *They Came Before Columbus* (1976). Harris’s interest was not the truthfulness of the claims, but their consequent rendering of Williams’s Olmec head motif as a complex interweaving of precolonial, colonial and postcolonial histories and identities across Atlantic spaces and temporalities. The ‘New World Olmec’, as Harris named this dawning universal being, symbolised both Indigenous and African (and potentially other) heritage in the American context – the shared histories of loss, trauma, resistance and survival through the Colonial Apocalypse, but also the combined living potentiality and agency emerging from this complex inheritance.¹⁰⁷ Williams himself alluded to the Olmec head in these terms and in relation to personal identity. Though Guyanese of mainly African heritage, he described the essential multicultural of his background, including Indigenous ancestry on his mother’s side.¹⁰⁸ Harris’s biographical notes also underlined diversity, referring to his ‘mixed parentage (Amerindian, European, African)’.¹⁰⁹ Such lineages obviously recall the complex of ‘New World’ identifications, which Harris attached to his fictional diasporic artist da Silva, and even suggest re-reading his biographical description as containing hints towards Indigenous ancestry also. These are immanent within descriptions of his European and African heritage as ‘seminal shadows ... in the madonna pool extending back into the Andes where fire was snow’, and of his being ‘orphaned by the sun’.¹¹⁰ The primal Andean allusion towards the Incas is reinforced by the solar reference, which recalls mythological conceptions of their descent from the sun.¹¹¹ The latter simultaneously indicates the Guyanese Indigenous context, specifically accounts of divine ancestors, the Makunaima, embarking on a quest to find their father, the Sun, who departs leaving them orphaned.¹¹² Like da Silva, Harris was himself twice paternally-orphaned by the death of his father and later step-father.¹¹³ Looking aside to Mayan conceptions, Menchú also refers to the sun, ‘the heart of the sky’, as a benevolent father or grandfather figure.¹¹⁴

The Makunaima link extends into references to da Silva’s being reborn from a tree, in which he hid during the flood caused by the cyclone that destroyed his orphanage. This account recalls the massive flood event unloosed by the Makunaima irresponsibly chopping down the World Tree to access its abundant food resources. They and various animal helpers similarly use trees to escape until the water subsides. The fragmented remnants of this disastrous felling remain visible as various of the Pakaraima mountains around the border of Venezuela, Brazil and Guyana, an idea alluded to in Harris’s reference to a ‘Trunk parallel to the Andes’.¹¹⁵ Readings of *Hymn to the Sun V* in terms of intergalactic cataclysm imagined in Harris’s da Silva monologue might accordingly be re-visioned and re-heard as sun reflecting on the water’s surface in echo of the primal imagery and song of the ‘madonna pool’. In the series’ Mesoamerican context this recalls the Mayan *Cenote*, from *dz’onot* in Yucatec Mayan, the sacred life-sustaining wells found across the Yucatan peninsula, in which sacrificial offerings were deposited.¹¹⁶ Williams referenced *Cenote* as a utopian image of the rich cultural well of ancestral American histories from which new lifeways and identities could be built out of the colonial wreckage. Indigenous traditions and landscape connections should be the grounding model for this reconstruction.¹¹⁷

The catastrophic deforestation theme carried within the Makunaima cycle anticipated Harris’s ecological reading of the Olmec head, which he linked to Indigenous forest associations permeating the painting’s glistening nocturnal abstraction:

The Olmec head is ancient but alive, it becomes a living presence, and the strange rebuke it brings summons a chorus born of diverse Self. Not only Olmec but tree-gods from which we fashion tools and become insensible to the silent rhythms with which they still address us.¹¹⁸

The Olmec monument’s framing as spirit-protest against a deforestation driven by globalised consumerist economy remembers Harris’s earlier interpretation of the Rapa Nui Ancestor Stones as icons of self-destruction. It should be noted, however, that in the interim the *Moai* had more appropriately reappeared in *Ascent to Omai* in the context of post-Columbian devastation rather than self-imposed fall.¹¹⁹ Ideas of resource exhaustion and premonitory channels between the living and the dead accorded with Williams’s conceiving a ‘warning’ within the ancient Mayan presences in the series. This followed conceptions of their suffering a catastrophic decline at the end of the so-called Classic period, around 900 AD, often termed the ‘Maya collapse’ or ‘Classic collapse’. In his catalogue statement and again hinting towards a rainforest-corporeal, Williams suggested this resulted from ‘their inability to cope with their technology and the changes their achievements engendered within the metabolism of their living environment and ecology’, which was ‘exactly the position we find ourselves in today’.¹²⁰ Williams saw this contemporary failure to keep up with technology evidenced in ozone

Fig. 11
Aubrey Williams,
*Sketch of two
Indigenous people
looking out over a
landscape with some
forms of industrial
activity taking place*
(undated [1959]).
Ink on paper, 15.7
x 9.1 cm. Tate,
London. © Estate
of Aubrey Williams.
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Photo: Tate.



depletion, environmental pollution, deforestation, species loss and global pandemics, describing them as the essence of the ‘modern human predicament’ and the source of ‘anxiety’ informing his work. Like Harris, these anxieties reflected the broader picture of post-war environmentalist concern but were sharpened through exposure to the exploitative realities of colonial capitalism in contrast with traditional Indigenous resource practices and modes of existence.¹²¹ Speaking in 1987, Williams criticised the neo-colonial extension of the trans-Amazonian highway: ‘We have now also punctured the last source of oxygen which is the South American Selvas by building that stupid road through Amazonas’.¹²² Sketches dating from the same year, which probably depict Yanomami Indigenous people, may respond to the impact of this roadbuilding.¹²³ A goldrush in the north Brazilian state of Roraima, which borders Guyana, and the invasion of the Yanomami’s territory to devastating effect on people and landscape, garnered considerable international attention towards the end of the decade.¹²⁴ An

estimated 15% of the Yanomami population died within a period of just a few years, and as Yanomami shaman Davi Kopenawa (c.1956–present) has explained, the harmful *xawara* spirits unleashed through mining and other extractive activities of the polluting outsiders, not only bring sickness and death to the Yanomami, but undermine relations between their shamans and protective *xapiri* spirits, which maintain the forest and hold up the sky, and consequently apocalyptically threaten the end of the world itself.¹²⁵ Such themes inform a much earlier 1959 sketch showing two Indigenous people looking over a rainforest landscape stripped of vegetation by a road and mining or logging infrastructure (Fig. 11). The work illustrated lines written by Carew in a review connected with Williams’s solo exhibition at London’s New Vision Gallery the same year: ‘The Indians say that when the green skin of the living world is peeled off, then the earth becomes a coffin for the dead’.¹²⁶ These ideas pre-echo Harris’s readings of *Night and the Olmec* and Indigenous accounts like Menchú’s that relate human and environmental abuse and the deleterious effects of Western technologies.¹²⁷

Final aspects of the cross-culture uniting Harris’s and Williams’s postcolonial-apocalyptic visions are highlighted by a poetical treatment of *Night and the Olmec* by Grace Nichols, called ‘Guyana Dreaming’ (2009).¹²⁸ Developing Harris’s reading, the poem imagines a world-tree of rainforest references, interconnecting ornithology, hydrology, geology and cosmology through ascending layers of pre- and post-Columbian history intertwined with artistic biography. These references recall various overlapping interests, which Williams expressed through his painting alongside Indigenous sources, from birds and agronomy to astronomy and music. Via an apt image of the bone-flute, a key Harris motif representing the idea of ancient conceptual crossovers between Amazonian and Mesoamerican Indigenous worlds, Nichols sings the inner musicality of Williams’s painting repeatedly highlighted by the novelist.¹²⁹ Remembering the implicit threat to these forest worlds, Nichols describes this musicality as ‘sometimes growing apocalyptic as your love of Shostakovich’.¹³⁰ This refers to the artist’s major series of 30 paintings made after the Russian composer’s 15 symphonies and 15 string quartets, which Williams also premiered at the Commonwealth Institute Art Gallery in 1981, before the *Olmec-Maya* series exhibition.¹³¹ Williams noted ‘there is a great apocalypse in Shostakovich, all the time. That is why I say, there are parallel anxieties involved in both our work’.¹³² Nichols’s reference in relation to Guyana’s majestic waterfalls, such as Kaitum, also remembers illuminating sequences in Bakari’s *The Mark of the Hand*, which powerfully mixes shots of the falls and the paintings overlaid with the mobile drama and emotive crescendos of Shostakovich’s music.¹³³ It also echoes Williams’s comment from the following year that waterfalls, like lightening, have an essentially ‘free-form’ nature, from which visual abstraction could be deduced.¹³⁴

This synthesis of apocalypticism, sonic dynamism and Guyanese interests is variously embodied in Williams’s *Shostakovich 3rd Symphony Opus 20* (1981, Fig. 12). The beautiful primary colour arrangement of red, blue and yellow gathered into the central triangular

Fig. 12
Aubrey Williams,
*Shostakovich 3rd
Symphony Opus
20* (1981). Oil on
canvas, 138.6 x
209.6 cm. Tate,
London. © Estate
of Aubrey Williams.
All rights reserved,
DACS 2021. ©
Photo: Tate.



Fig. 13
Anonymous,
*Feather crown
with macaw
feathers* (Waiwai,
c.1980s). Feathers,
basketwork and
cotton. Walter
Roth Museum,
Georgetown.
Photographed with
permission by the
author (2011).



form resonates with Amerindian featherwork headdresses made from macaws and other birds, just as the background emerald greens, ochres and browns over charcoal depths suggests their rainforest home (Fig. 13). Headdresses have strong celestial associations through their avian connections, but particularly symbolize the sun as divine order and continuity.¹³⁵ A simultaneous discontinuity is implied however by the way these four red macaw feathers strike down at and penetrate the black ground like lightning-bolts or arrows, in simulated image of a radical destruction event with its accompanying powerful reverberations. Warao origin accounts relate their living in the sky until a strong primordial archer-ancestor pierced the ground with an arrow while hunting for birds. The arrow's difficult extraction opens a hole revealing a world of abundant food resources below, which they decide to access. As people descend, a pregnant woman gets stuck in the hole, which closes up, permanently separating those on earth, who became the Warao, from those left behind, who were transformed into angry spirits and sources of sickness requiring constant propitiation through shamanic intervention. In this respect, these events have continued underpinning fundamental aspects of Warao religious practices, as Vaquero Rojo emphasises. As a reminder of this division between visible and invisible worlds, the pregnant woman's backside remains present in the sky as the Morning Star.¹³⁶ The postcolonial painting of this dramatic rupture also evokes the destructions and traumatic separations founding American colonial time – from invasion to slavery. The red macaw feather lightning-bolt arrows remember two stages of Guyanese history preceding British involvement. Firstly, they recall the four oblique notched red branches of the *Aspa de Borgoña* (Cross of Burgundy), flag of the Spanish American Empire and emblem of the brutal original fracturing of Indigenous America (Fig. 14). Its emerging use is closely tied to the period of Spain's early imperial expansion



Fig. 14
*Flag with the Cross of
Burgundy*. Image file
created by Ningyou
(2006).

Fig. 15
Willem Henrik
Wilhelmus van
Royen, *Red Macaw
with Other Birds*
(c.1665–1723). Oil
on canvas, 121.7
x 112 cm. The
Wallace Collection,
London. © The
Wallace Collection.
© Photo: The
Wallace Collection/
Bridgeman Images.



in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries through its connection to the marriage of Juana I of Castille (1479–1555) to the Duke of Burgundy, Felipe I (1478–1506).¹³⁷ Juana was the daughter of the Catholic monarchs Isabel I of Castille (1451–1504) and Fernando II of Aragon (1452–1516), who had commissioned Cristóbal Colón (c1451–1506), and mother of Holy Roman Emperor Carlos V (1500–1558), whose reign oversaw the invasions of Nahua and Inca territories among others. These red elements also evoke Dutch genre painting's mobilisations of macaws and other parrots as exotic symbols of American imperial possession in Guayana and beyond (Fig. 15). According with Dussel's concept of 'encubrimiento', such exoticisation was itself another form covering that obscured such possession's underpinning by slavery and dispossession, Indigenous and African. The transformation of a people and dramatic rupture with the past accords perfectly with the theme of Shostakovich's *Third Symphony*, subtitled the 'First of May', which climaxes with a stirring libretto declaring the rebirth of the new Soviet people from the revolutionary fire, a partial antecedent of the complex struggles for political, aesthetic and spiritual identity that take place within the postcolonial contexts concerning Williams and Harris.¹³⁸ Dynamic glimmers of Constructivist artist El Lissitzky's (1890–1941) *Red Wedge* (1920) balancing flashes of Cold War nuclear missile strike reinforce these Soviet thematics with the loaded ambiguity of Harris's

'Russian vessel'. Indeed the historical sequences, ruptures and spatio-temporal syntheses suggested by Williams's painting, from Guyana's Indigenous foundations to the Russian Revolution can be seen as pre-echoing the compressed vision of 'the Ship of Night' in *Carnival*, as its evocation of generative separation follows the multiple births and rebirths of *Da Silva da Silva*. It recalls Williams, Harris and others transforming their separation from original sources of inspiration into vital visionary art from the ruins of the Colonial Apocalypse. The living canvas is adorned with the luminescent shimmering music of the eternal waterfall that flows out from the revelatory walls of the Palace of the Peacock.¹³⁹ As Williams remarked, 'this Guyanese diaspora is active in the arrowhead of change in strange countries they find themselves in'.¹⁴⁰

1. Wilson Harris, *The Tree of the Sun* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 5.
2. Ian McDonald et al., 'In Memoriam – Aubrey Williams', *Kyke-Over-AI* 42 (1991): pp. 43–44.
3. Errol Lloyd, 'Aubrey Williams: Myth and Symbol', *Artrage* 9:10 (1985): pp. 4–5; Errol Lloyd, 'The Olmec–Maya and Now', *Race Today* 16:5 (1985): p. 26; C.L.R. James, 'Search for the Guyanese Reality', in Anne Walmsley (ed.), *Guyana Dreaming: The Art of Aubrey Williams* (Sydney, Mundelstrup and Coventry: Dangaroo Press, 1990), pp. 79–80; Anne Walmsley, 'Bridge of Sleep: Continental and Island Inheritance in the Visual Arts of Guyana', in Hena Maes-Jelinek, Gordon Collier & Geoffrey V. Davis (eds.), *A Talent(ed) Digger: Creations, Cameos, and Essays in Honour of Anna Rutherford* (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 261, 269–270; Kobena Mercer, 'Black Atlantic Abstraction: Aubrey Williams and Frank Bowling', in Kobena Mercer (ed.), *Discrepant Abstraction* (London and Cambridge: Institute of International Visual Arts (iIVA) and The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 183, 187–192; Leon Wainwright, *Timed Out: Art and the Transnational Caribbean* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp. 46, 48, 49–50.
4. Nathaniel Mackey, 'Quantum Ghosts: An Interview with Wilson Harris', in Mercer, *Discrepant Abstraction*, pp. 206–221.
5. My deepest thanks and appreciation to Maridowa Williams, Anne Walmsley, Errol Lloyd, Ishaq Imruh Bakari, Kobena Mercer, Chili Hawes, Gerard Houghton, Michael Mitchell, Tim Cribb and Rasheed Araeen. Sincere gratitude also to the Editors, Eddie Coomasaru and Theresa Deichert, for their extraordinary efforts and vision. Additional thanks for images to Liz Dooley and Sarah Shalgosky at the University of Warwick Art Collection, Thomas Hvid Kromann at the Royal Danish Library, Sarah J. Duncan at Sarah J. Duncan Photography, Margherita Manca at the Twentieth Century Society, Jennifer Wishart at the Walter Roth Museum, Tariq Ali and the Tariq Ali Archive, and Paige Ashley and Alex McNamee at October Gallery.
6. The phrase 'Colonial Apocalypse' is adapted from the poem 'The Border' in Ishaq Imruh Bakari, *Without Passport or Apology* (Ripon: Smokestack Books, 2017), pp. 90–91. I thank Eddie Coomasaru for pointing out a connected claim made by Christopher Columbus in a letter from 1500, where he wrote: 'Of the new heaven and earth, which our Lord made, as St. John writes in the Apocalypse (after that which was said by the mouth of Isaiah) he made me the messenger, and showed me the way'. My translation from Giovanni Spotorno (ed.), *Codice Diplomatico Colombo-Americano* (Genoa: Ponthenier, 1823), pp. 296–299. Columbus's imposition of Biblical temporality onto the 'new' 'American' space had a geographical equivalent relevant to this essay in his referring to his reconnaissance of the Orinoco delta region of the Guayana littoral as the rediscovery of the Garden of Eden. See M. Fernández de Navarrete (ed.), *Viajes de Cristóbal Colón* (Madrid: Calpe, 1922), pp. 279, 286–292.
7. Colin Nutley (dir.), *Da Silva da Silva* (London: Bandung Productions, 1987); Wilson Harris, 'An Autobiographical Essay', in Joyce Sparer Adler, *Exploring the Palace of the Peacock: Essays on Wilson Harris* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2003), pp. xxix–xxx.
8. Wilson Harris, *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness and Genesis of the Clowns* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977).
9. Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, p. 6.
10. Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, pp. 8, 13, 76; Harris, 'Autobiographical Essay', pp. viii, xxix–xxx.
11. 'Henry Richard Vassal-Fox, 3rd Baron Holland, Profile & Legacies Summary, 1773–1840', *Legacies of British Slave-ownership*, UCL, accessed 10 August 2020, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/46368>; Catherine Hall, 'Troubling Memories: Nineteenth-Century Histories of the Slave Trade and Slavery', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 21 (sixth series, 2011): pp. 153–157.
12. Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, pp. 9, 31–32, 53–54, 59–60. Rather than Harris's 'Cuffey', my spelling follows Marjoleine Kars, *Blood on the River: A Chronicle of Mutiny and Freedom on the Wild Coast* (New York: The New Press, 2020), pp. 67–69.
13. Moore's visionary sculpture was accompanied by five plaques, entitled *Seeking Inspiration*, *Uniting the People*, *Destroying the Enemies*, *Control*, and *Praise and Thanksgiving*. They collectively narrate the 1763 Revolution as an archetype for twentieth century Guyanese anticolonialism. For a description of the work's complex iconography, see the commemorative leaflet, Denis Williams et al., *The 1763 Monument: Unveiled on Sunday 23rd May, 1976 To Mark the 10th Anniversary of Independence of Guyana* (Georgetown: Guyana Printers Ltd, 1976). For Guyana's Independence struggle, see Cheddi Jagan, *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana's Freedom* (London: Joseph, 1966).
14. Wilson Harris, *The Guyana Quartet* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 1; Harris, 'Autobiographical Essay', p. x; Tim Cribb, 'T.W. Harris – Sworn Surveyor', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 29:1 (1993): pp. 39–41.
15. Nutley, *Da Silva da Silva*.
16. World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future* (New York and Oxford: United Nations and Oxford University Press, 1987).
17. George Lucas (dir.), *Star Wars* (San Raphael: Lucasfilm, 1977); Irvin Kershner (dir.), *The Empire Strikes Back* (San Raphael: Lucasfilm, 1980); Richard Marquand (dir.), *Return of the Jedi* (San Raphael: Lucasfilm, 1983).
18. Harris et al., 'Bouquet for Burrowes', *Kyke-Over-AI* 6:18

- (1954): pp. 8–9.
19. Harris et al., ‘Bouquet for Burrowes’, pp. 3–14; Evelyn A Williams, *The Art of Denis Williams* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2012), pp. 10–39.
 20. Two basalt figures approximately dated 1000–1600 are held in the British Museum: ‘Hoa Hakananai’a (‘lost or stolen friend’)/Moai (ancestor figure)’, ‘Moai Hava (‘Dirty statue’ or ‘to be lost’)/Moai (ancestor figure)’, Museum numbers Oc1869,1005.1, Oc1869,1006.1, The British Museum, accessed 10 August 2020, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Oc1869-1005-1, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Oc1869-1006-1.
 21. Harris et al., ‘Bouquet for Burrowes’, p. 8.
 22. Harris et al., ‘Bouquet for Burrowes’, p. 8.
 23. ‘Imperialist wars’ follows Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington: Howard University Press, 1981), pp. 183, 187.
 24. Wilson Harris, *Carnival* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985).
 25. Harris, *Carnival*, pp. 9, 12–13, 17.
 26. Harris, *Carnival*, pp. 13, 26, 28, 30–31, 35–36, 125.
 27. Wilson Harris, *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks* (Liège: Department of English, University of Liège, 1992), pp. 71–73.
 28. Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, p. 6.
 29. See poems ‘One Continent/To another’, ‘Web of Kin’, ‘Each Time They Came’, ‘Eulogy’, ‘Of Golden Gods’, ‘Epilogue’, in Grace Nichols, *I Is A Long Memoried Woman* (London: Karnak House, 1990 [1983]), pp. 5–7, 8–9, 15, 16–17, 59–60, 87. For similar thematisation, see Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1996 [1993]); Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016).
 30. Harris, *Carnival*, pp. 46–47.
 31. ‘Imperial time’ is elaborated from Cheddi Jagan, *Forbidden Freedom, The Story of British Guiana* (London: Hansib Publishing Limited, 1989 [1954]), p. 104. For connected discussion of alternative temporalities and Indigenous America in Harris’s work, see Michael Mitchell, ‘Introduction’, in Wilson Harris, *Ascent to Omai* (Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2018 [1970]), pp. 11, 20–21.
 32. On historical and present Arawak, see Neil L. Whitehead, ‘Arawak Linguistic and Cultural Identity through Time: Contact, Colonialism, and Creolization’, in Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero (eds.), *Comparative Arawakan Histories: Rethinking Language Family and Culture Area in Amazonia* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 51–73; Jonathan D. Hill and Fernando Santos-Granero, ‘Introduction’ in Hill and Granero, *Comparative Arawakan Histories*, pp. 1–22; Konrad Rybka, ‘State-of-the-Art in the Development of the Lokono Language’, *Language Documentation & Conservation* 9 (2015): pp. 111–114.
 33. ‘Nahua’ over ‘Aztec’ follows historical and present patterns of Indigenous self-definition as described in James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 1.
 34. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, (eds.) José Miguel Martínez Torrejón and Gustavo Adolfo Zuluaga Hoyos (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2011 [1552]).
 35. Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, pp. 12–18.
 36. Bartolomé de las Casas, Theodor de Bry and Johanne Saur, *Narratio Regionum Indicarum Per Hispanos Quosdam Devastatarum Verisissima* (Frankfurt: John Theodor and John Israel de Bry, 1598).
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 38. Guaman Poma, *El Primer Nueva Corónica I Buen Gobierno Compuesto por Don Phelipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, Señor I Príncipe* (c. 1615), Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen, GKS 2232 kvart, accessed 5 August 2020, <http://www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/en/frontpage.htm>; Rolena Adorno, ‘Waman Puma: El autor y su Obra’, in Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *Nueva crónica y buen gobierno*, (eds.) John V. Murra, Rolena Adorno and Jorge L. Urioste (Madrid: Historia-16, 1987), vol. 1, pp. xvii–xlvi.
 39. Poma, *Nueva Corónica*, p. 525 [529], accessed 5 August 2020, <http://www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/529/es/text/>.
 40. Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*, pp. 41.
 41. Linda A. Newson, ‘The Demographic Impact of Colonization’, in Victor Bulmer-Thomas, John Coatsworth, Roberto Cortes-Conde (eds.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 143–148; David E. Stannard, ‘Disease and Infertility: A New Look at the Demographic Collapse of Native Populations in the Wake of Western Contact’, *Journal of American Studies*, 24:3 (1990): pp. 325–350.
 42. Alexander Koch et al., ‘Earth Systems Impacts of the European Arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492’, *Quaternary Science Reviews* 207 (2019): pp. 17, 30.
 43. Robin Blackburn, *The American Crucible: Slavery, Emancipation and Human Rights* (London and New York: Verso, 2011), pp. 16–17.
 44. See illustrations 1–4 in the Second Section of Theodor de Bry, *Americae Pars Quinta* (Paris, 1595).
 45. *Stowage of the British Slave Ship “Brookes” under the Regulated Slave Trade Act of 1788* (Plymouth: Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1788); *Plan and Section of a Slave Ship*, and *Description of a Slave Ship* (London: James Philips, 1789); William Blake, ‘The Execution of Breaking on the Rack’, ‘A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows’, and ‘Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave’, in John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America; from the year 1772, to 1777* (London: J Johnson and J Edwards, 1796), vol. 1, pp. 107–110, 325–327, Plates XI, XXXV, and vol. 2, pp. 294–298, Plate LXXI.
 46. Harris, *Ascent to Omai*, p. 42.
 47. My translation from Enrique Dussel, *1492 El encubrimiento del Otro: Hacia el origen del “mito de la Modernidad”* (La Paz: Plural editores, 1994).
 48. Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).
 49. Rodney, *How Europe*, pp. 232–238.
 50. Harris, *Carnival*, pp. 128.
 51. Wilson Harris, *Jonestown* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), pp. 171–172; Harris, ‘Autobiographical Essay’, pp. xvii–xviii; Harris, *Radical Imagination*, pp. 74–75; Cribb, ‘Sworn Surveyor’, pp. 36.
 52. Michael Niblett, “‘When you take thing out the earth and you en’t put nothing back”: Nature, Form and the Metabolic Rift in Jan Carew’s *Black Midas*”, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 46:2 (2011): pp. 238–243, 251–253; Michael Niblett, ‘The “impossible quest for wholeness”: sugar, cassava, and the ecological aesthetic in *The Guyana Quartet*’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 49:2 (2013): pp. 150–152.
 53. Rodney, *How Europe*, pp. 199–200, 205, 225, 229–230, 238–275.
 54. Beryl Gilroy, ‘Living, Learning and Working in Fifties London’, in Joan Anim-Addo (ed.), *Leaves in the Wind: Collected Writings of Beryl Gilroy* (London: Mango Publishing, 1998), p. 196.
 55. Mitchell, ‘Introduction’, pp. 18–21.
 56. Wilson Harris, *The Infinite Rehearsal* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. 45, 54–55, 59; World Nuclear Association, ‘Chernobyl Accident 1986’, updated April 2020, accessed 4 August 2020, <https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/safety-and-security/safety-of-plants/chernobyl-accident.aspx>.
 57. Harris, *Radical Imagination*, pp. 72–73.
 58. Wilson Harris, ‘History, Fable and Myth in the Caribbean and Guiana’, *Caribbean Quarterly* 16:2 (1970): p. 7.

59. Harris, ‘History Fable Myth’, p. 29; Elsa Goveia, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969 [1965]), p. 338. Harris’s endorsement of Goveia was limited by its being set amidst his lectures’ wider criticisms of what he described as the prosaic and constricted character of Caribbean political and philosophical historiography, which also encompassed C.L.R. James, Eric Williams and Cheddi Jagan.
60. Wilson Harris, ‘Aubrey Williams’, *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 2:1/2/3 (2000): p. 27.
61. Harris, ‘Aubrey Williams’ (2000), pp. 26–27. ‘Living canvas’ is adapted from Williams’s statement to critic and curator Guy Brett that ‘the canvas is becoming more and more alive for me’, which is the final resonant line of Imruh Bakari’s (1950–present) 1986 documentary about the artist, *The Mark of the Hand*. See Imruh Bakari (dir.), *The Mark of the Hand* (London: Kuumba Productions, 1986).
62. Guy Brett and Aubrey Williams, *The Olmec-Maya and Now: New Work by Aubrey Williams* (London: Commonwealth Institute, 1985); Anne Walmsley, ‘Chronology’, in Andrew Dempsey, Gilane Tawadros, and Maridowa Williams (eds.), *Aubrey Williams* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts, 1998), pp. 94–95, 102–105.
63. Mark Crinson, *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 100–126.
64. Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, pp. 61–77. Harris had in fact briefly written about Williams in a catalogue text for the Commonwealth Institute’s inaugural exhibition, *Commonwealth Art Today*, in 1962. See Wilson Harris, ‘British Guiana’, in Eric Newton, *Commonwealth Art Today* (London: Commonwealth Institute, 1962), pp. 25–26.
65. Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, pp. 69–70.
66. Aubrey Williams, ‘The Olmec-Maya and Now’, in Brett and Williams, *Olmec-Maya and Now*. On the struggle for post-Independence identity and cultural renewal, see Harris, ‘History Fable Myth’; Aubrey Williams, ‘The Predicament of the Artist in the Caribbean’, in Walmsley, *Guyana Dreaming*, pp. 15–20; Aubrey Williams, ‘Caribbean Visual Art: A Framework for Further Inquiry’, in Walmsley, *Guyana Dreaming*, pp. 21–28; Anne Walmsley (ed.), *Transcript of Interview with Aubrey Williams for Guyana National Radio* (1970), 5–6; Rasheed Araeen, ‘Conversation with Aubrey Williams’, *Third Text* 2 (1987/88): pp. 49–52.
67. Nutley, *Da Silva da Silva*; Harris, ‘Autobiographical Essay’, pp. viii–x, xvi–xx, xxii; Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement, 1966–1972* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1992), pp. 24–26; Andrew Bundy, ‘Introduction’, in Wilson Harris, *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1–7, 16–19; Cribb, ‘Sworn Surveyor’, pp. 33–46.
68. Walmsley, ‘Chronology’, pp. 68–69; Araeen, ‘Conversation’, pp. 28–31; Bakari, *Mark of the Hand*; Anne Walmsley (ed.), *Typescript of Interview with Aubrey Williams for book Great West Indians* (1972), pp. 3–6; Anne Walmsley (ed.), *Typescript of Interview with Aubrey Williams for book Great West Indians with corrections/additions by Aubrey Williams* (1972), pp. 3–5, 7.
69. Nutley, *Da Silva da Silva*; Harris, ‘Autobiographical Essay’, p. x.
70. Walmsley, *Typescript*, pp. 3–4, 6; Walmsley, *Typescript with corrections*, pp. 3–4, 7; Araeen, ‘Conversation’, p. 30.
71. E.B. Martyn, ‘Experimental Cultivations in the North West District – 1928–1938’, *Agricultural Journal of British Guiana* X:3 (1939): pp. 124–138; W.E. Harden, *The Putumayo: The Devil’s Paradise: Travels in the Peruvian Amazon Region and an Account of the Atrocities Committed Upon the Indians Therein* (London and Leipsic: T Fisher Unwin, 1913).
72. My translations from Basilio de Barral, *Diccionario Warao-Castellano, Castellano-Warao* (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 2000), pp. 141, 204, 407; S.J. Cooksey, ‘The Indians of the North Western District’, *Timebri* 2:1 (third series, 1912): pp. 330, 333–334.
73. Bakari, *Mark of the Hand*; Walmsley, *Typescript*, p. 3;
74. Harris, ‘History Fable Myth’, p. 18; Harris, ‘Aubrey Williams’ (2000), pp. 26–27; Wilson Harris, ‘Aubrey Williams’, *Third Text* 10:34 (1996): pp. 79–80; Wilson Harris, ‘The Amerindian Legacy’, in Harris, *Selected Essays*, p. 162.
75. Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, in Harris, *Guyana Quartet*, pp. 32, 62–63, 79, 100–110; Harris, *Ascent to Omai*, p. 35; Harris, *Carnival*, pp. 128, 131, 135–136, 144, 147, 170; Wilson Harris, *The Four Banks of the River of Space* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990), pp. 33–39, 43–46, 122–123, 132–134, 143; Harris ‘Autobiographical Essay’, p. xvi; Harris, *Genesis of Clowns*, pp. 114–115, 124–125, 128–136; Tim Cribb, ‘Kaïeteur: place of the *pharmakos* and deconstruction’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 49:2 (2013): pp. 198–208; Tim Cribb, ‘The Two Anchors’, in Gordon Collier et al. (eds.), *The Cross-Cultural Legacy: Critical and Creative Writings in Memory of Hena Maes-Jelinek* (Leiden: Brill and Rodopi, 2016), pp. 49–65.
76. My translations from Julio Lavandero Pérez, *Noara y otros rituales* (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 2000), pp. 41–44. Barral defines *jobaji* as meaning ‘the earth’, ‘the first plane’, ‘the vegetable earth/land’, literally ‘surrounded by water’, combining *jo* (water) and *baji* (to turn, to surround, to encircle). My translations, from Barral, *Diccionario Warao-Castellano*, pp. 49, 204, 207. See also Johannes Wilbert, *Mystic Endowment: Religious Ethnography of the Warao Indians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 10; Johannes Wilbert, *Folk Literature of the Warao Indians* (Los Angeles: Latin American Centre, University of California, 1970), p. 220.
77. A similar colour scheme occurs in *Waterfall* (1943) by Arshile Gorky, the Abstract Expressionist whose ‘perception’ Williams said resonated closest with his own. See Araeen, ‘Conversation’, p. 36.
78. Aubrey Williams, *The Warwick Logos*, handwritten note (1985), University of Warwick Art Collection; Aubrey Williams, *Dalhousie Murals*, typescript (1978), p. 2.
79. Araeen, ‘Conversation’, p. 30.
80. Peter Rivière (ed.), *The Guiana Travels of Robert Schomburgk 1835–1844, Volume I: Explorations on Behalf of the Royal Geographical Society 1835–1839* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2006), p. 53; Peter Rivière (ed.), *The Guiana Travels of Robert Schomburgk 1835–1844, Volume II: The Boundary Survey 1840–1844* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 2006), pp. 78, 158; Walter Roth, ‘An Inquiry into the Animism and Folk-lore of the Guiana Indians’, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1908–1909* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1915), pp. 235–240; John Gillin, *The Barama River Caribs* (Cambridge: Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1936), pp. 154–160; Davi Kopenawa, *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman* (Cambridge: The Bellknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 62–64.
81. Mark Plew, ‘The Archaeology of Iwokrama and the North Rupununi’, *Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 154 (2005): pp. 8, 11; Rafael A Gassón, ‘The Archaeology of the Orinoco River Basin’, *Journal of World Prehistory* 16:3 (2002): p. 285; Denis Williams, *Prehistoric Guiana* (Kingston and Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), pp. 91–97, 147–206, 238–240, 301–302, 410. The difficulties of dating regional rock art are underlined in Philip Riris, ‘On Confluence and contestation in the Orinoco interaction sphere: the engraved rock art of the Atures Rapids’, *Antiquity* 91:360 (2017): pp. 1610–1612, 1616.
82. Henk Courtz, *A Carib Grammar and Dictionary* (Toronto: Magoria Books, 2008), p. 400.
83. Bakari, *Mark of the Hand*; Harris, ‘Aubrey Williams’ (1996), pp. 79–80; Harris, *Ascent to Omai*, pp. 30, 37; Harris, *Genesis of Clowns*, p. 144; Roth, ‘Animism and Folk-lore’, p. 237; Cesáreo de Armellada, *Tauron Panton, Cuentos y Leyendas de los Pemón* (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 1989 [2nd edition]), p. 57. Early Williams paintings

- like *Death and the Conquistador* (1959) or *Untitled* (1956) show clear correspondences with illustrations of typical *timebri* examples. See Everard Im Thurn, *Among the Indians of Guiana* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, & Co., 1883), pp. 392–393, 400; Richard Schomburgk, *Reisen in British-Guiana in den Jahren 1840–1844* (Leipzig: J.J. Weber, 1847), vol. 1, pp. 320–321.
84. Williams, *Prehistoric Guiana*, pp. 8–10; Neil L. Whitehead, ‘Three Patamuna Trees’, in Neil L. Whitehead (ed.), *Histories and Historicities in Amazonia* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), pp. 61–64, 70–72; Gordon Macmillan, *At the End of the Rainbow? Gold, Land, and People in the Brazilian Amazon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 6–10.
 85. Walter Roth, ‘An Introductory Study of the Arts, Crafts and Customs of the Guiana Indians’, *Thirty-Eighth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution 1916–17* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), pp. 354–361, Figure 172D, 173A–D. Conversations with Maridowa Williams suggest the artist may have seen such examples also.
 86. Harris, *Jonestown*, p. 33; Harris, *Four Banks*, pp. 135–137.
 87. Williams, *Dalbousie Murals*, p. 2; Williams, *The Warwick Logos*; Aubrey Williams, *Notes on Guyana Tryptych*, typescript (1976).
 88. Gillin, *Barama River Caribs*, pp. 154–180; Wilbert, *Mystic Endowment*, pp. 87–181.
 89. Wilbert, *Mystic Endowment*, pp. 15–16, 18–19, 22–23; Wilbert, *Folk Literature*, pp. 103–104, 231–232, 281–296, 301–307, 354–362, 440–442; Daisy Barreto and Esteban E. Mosonyi, *Literatura Warao* (Caracas: Ediciones del Consejo Nacional de la Cultura, Coordinación de Literatura, 1980), pp. 146–147; Roth, ‘Animism and Folk-lore’, pp. 122–125, 130–135, 370; William Henry Brett, *Legend and Myths of the Aboriginal Indians of British Guiana* (London: William Wells Gardner, 1880), pp. 77–78; Colin Henfrey, *The Gentle People: A Journey Among the Indian Tribes of Guiana* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p. 56.
 90. Roth, ‘Animism and Folk-lore’, pp. 139, 143–144, 149–150, 369–370; Wilbert, *Mystic Endowment*, pp. 15, 23, 65, 174, 177; Wilbert, *Folk Literature*, pp. 78–82, 198–199; Johannes Wilbert, *Mindful of Famine: Religious Climatology of the Warao Indians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 37, 71–73; Neil L. Whitehead, ‘The Snake Warriors – Sons of Tigers Teeth: A Descriptive analysis of Carib Warfare. Ca. 1500–1820’, in Jonathan Haas (ed.), *The Anthropology of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 148; Brett, *Legends and Myths*, pp. 64–74; Henfrey, *Gentle People*, p. 56; Gillin, *Barama River Caribs*, pp. 187, 192–194; C.H. De Goeje, *What is Time?* (Leiden: E J Brill, 1949), p. 35.
 91. Donald Locke, ‘Contemporary Guyanese Painters: Aubrey Williams’, in Walmsley, *Guyana Dreaming*, p. 72. For discussion of Indigenous Amazonian conceptions of cosmic fertility and reproduction, including the Warao, see Wilbert, *Mystic Endowment*, pp. 133–182; Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff, *Amazonian cosmos: the sexual and religious symbolism of the Tukano Indians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); Kopenawa, *Falling Sky*, pp. 32, 381–400.
 92. Jan Carew, *The Wild Coast* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1958), p. 112; Walmsley, ‘Chronology’, p. 72. A manuscript in Aubrey Williams’s archive contains an unfinished six-page poem entitled *Hosororo*, possibly dating to the latter 1940s, which describes the waterfall’s magical formation and musicality in similar mytho-corporeal terms.
 93. Williams, *Dalbousie Murals*, p. 2; Walmsley, *Typescript*, p. 4; Walmsley, *Typescript with corrections*, p. 4.
 94. Wilbert, *Mystic Endowment*, p. 19–20.
 95. My translations from Antonio E Vaquero Rojo, *Manifestaciones religiosas de los Warao y mitología fundante* (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 2000), pp. 102–103, 176–177.
 96. Walmsley, *Typescript with corrections*, p. 4; Walmsley, *Typescript*, pp. 3–4. For similar comments on the Warao influence upon his aesthetic perception and sensibility,

particularly relating to colour, spirituality and the organic, see Aubrey Williams, *Untitled Statement*, typescript (May 4, 1967).

97. Locke, ‘Contemporary Guyanese Painters’, p. 72; Jan Carew, ‘Portrait of the Artist – Aubrey Williams’, in Walmsley, *Guyana Dreaming*, p. 67; Guy Brett, ‘A Tragic Excitement’, in Dempsey, Tawadros, and Williams, *Aubrey Williams*, pp. 30–31.
98. Walmsley, *Typescript with corrections*, pp. 3–4; Walmsley, *Typescript*, pp. 3–4; Araeen, ‘Conversation’, p. 30.
99. Williams, ‘Caribbean Visual Art’, p. 22; Araeen, ‘Conversation’, p. 52.
100. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955), p. 496; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *A World on the Wane*, (trans.) John Russel (London: Hutchinson and Co, 1961), p. 397.
101. Ian Dudley, ‘Olmec Colossal Heads in the Paintings of Aubrey Williams’, *Art History* 43:4 (2020): pp. 828–855.
102. Dudley, ‘Olmec Colossal Heads’, pp. 840–841.
103. Williams, ‘Olmec-Maya and Now’; Guy Brett, ‘Aubrey Williams’, in Brett and Williams, *Olmec-Maya and Now*; Dudley, ‘Olmec Colossal Heads’, pp. 845–849; Brett, ‘Tragic Excitement’, p. 31.
104. The sign evokes an array of celestial symbolism found across Mayan architecture (e.g. Uxmal) and codices (e.g. Madrid, Dresden) of the Classic and Post-Classic periods, which connect Venusian, rain and solar cycles, although it may be adapted from Olmec sculpture. Its use in the painting *Olmec Stasis* (1984–1985) suggests additional associations with sacrifice and Chacmools. See Iván Šprajc, *Venus, Lluvia y maíz: simbolismo y astronomía en la cosmovisión mesoamericana* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1998 [1996]), pp. 75–79; Jeff Karl Kowalski, *The House of the Governor: A Maya Palace at Uxmal, Yucatan, Mexico* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), pp. 182–202; Miguel León-Portilla, *Tiempo y Realidad en el Pensamiento Maya: Ensayo de Acercamiento* (México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2003 [1968]), pp. 36–43, 70, 79–80, 91–92, 138–139; Dudley, ‘Olmec Colossal Heads’, pp. 836–838.
105. Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos, *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú y Así Me Nació La Conciencia* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1993 [1983]). Aubrey Williams’s archive contains a copy of a four-page article kept by the artist, entitled ‘Olmec Maya Civilisations’, by John Phillips. It quotes Menchú’s book amidst its summary description of a continuous Mayan history from the pre-Columbian period to the Guatemalan genocide of the late 1970s–early 1980s. While the originating publication remains unknown, the article’s reading list suggests its likely dating from around 1984.
106. Menchú and Burgos, *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, pp. 22, 25–28, 32, 34–35, 69, 80–83, 86, 92, 98, 107, 176–178, 195, 214, 220–226, 237, 245, 267.
107. Ivan Van Sertima, *They Came before Columbus: The African Presence in Ancient America* (New York: Random House, 1976); Harris, *Radical Imagination*, pp. 89–91; Dudley, ‘Olmec Colossal Heads’, pp. 829–833, 841–843, 845–853.
108. Araeen, ‘Conversation’, pp. 42–43; Dudley, ‘Olmec Colossal Heads’, pp. 842–843.
109. Harris, *Guyana Quartet*, p. 1; Harris ‘Autobiographical Essay’, pp. xiv–xv. Jan Carew’s biographical note describes similar diversity, see Carew, *Wild Coast*, back-matter.
110. Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, p. 6.
111. Sabine MacCormack, ‘From the Sun of the Incas to the Virgin of Copacabana’, *Representations* 8 (1984): pp. 35–41.
112. Armellada, *Tauron Pantón*, pp. 27–69, 245; Roth, ‘Animism and Folk-lore’, pp. 130–136.
113. Harris, ‘Autobiographical Essay’, p. ix; Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, pp. 6, 64.
114. Menchú and Burgos, *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, pp. 34–35, 81–82.
115. Harris, *Da Silva da Silva*, pp. 6–7; Armellada, *Tauron Pantón*, pp. 51–57; Roth, ‘Animism and Folk-lore’, pp. 144–148; Theodor Koch-Grünberg, *Vom Roraima zum Orinoco* (Stuttgart: Verlag Strecker und Schröder, 1924), vol. 2, pp. 33–38. Similar allusions to World Tree mythology occur among other Indigenous Guayanes, Andean and Mesoamerican references in the sequel to *Da Silva da Silva*. See Harris, *Tree of the Sun*, pp. 3–12.
116. Robert J Sharer, *The Ancient Maya, Fifth Edition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), pp. 42, 129, 359–361, 368, 388, 397–401, 411, 415, 479, 534, 540–546.
117. Williams, ‘Caribbean Visual Art’, p. 28; Walmsley, *Transcript of Interview*, pp. 5–6. Williams’s catalogue notes describe the *Hymn to the Sun* paintings as ‘a series to the Maya symbol of life’ and *V* particularly as ‘Sun emblems and heat atmosphere.’ See Aubrey Williams, ‘Exhibits’, in Brett and Williams, *Olmec-Maya and Now*.
118. Harris, ‘Aubrey Williams’ (2000), pp. 29–30; Cribb, ‘Sworn Surveyor’, p. 37.
119. Harris, *Ascent to Omai*, pp. 32–33.
120. Williams, ‘The Olmec-Maya and Now’; Dudley, ‘Olmec Colossal Heads’, p. 845.
121. Araeen, ‘Conversation’, pp. 30, 38–46, 50–52; Bakari, *Mark of the Hand*; Walmsley, *Typescript*, pp. 3–6; Walmsley, *Typescript with corrections*, pp. 3–5, 7; Dudley, ‘Olmec Colossal Heads’, p. 845. On contrasting cultures of colonial sugar and Indigenous cassava in Harris’s work, see Niblett, ‘impossible quest’.
122. Araeen, ‘Conversation’, p. 51.
123. See Tate Archive, *Taruma* (1987); *Sketches of Amerindians, including a woman carrying a child* (1987); *Sketch of two Amerindian women, one with facial piercings breastfeeding a baby* (1990). See also *Sketch of three men, two holding weapons or staves* (c1970s) showing Yanomami sacred narcotic usage connected to seeing powerful *xapiri* spirits, as described in Kopenawa, *Falling Sky*, pp. 19–21, 31–33, 42–45, 55–60, 64, 70, 77–96, 492, 495. The label ‘Taruma’ may be a poetic allusion to an idea of an erased culture, although it remains possible that these sketches represent other peoples than the Yanomami.
124. Macmillan, *End of the Rainbow?*, pp. 1–54; Kopenawa, *Falling Sky*, pp. 19, 221–239, 252–253, 261–281.
125. Macmillan, *End of the Rainbow?*, pp. 48–51; Kopenawa, *Falling Sky*, pp. 19, 22–23, 26, 29–33, 55–74, 83, 94, 150, 159–163, 287–296, 310, 350–351, 389, 391, 394, 397–398, 401–411, 493. I thank Dr Arthur Valle, whose epigraphic use of the ‘*Falling Sky*’ prophecy at the *Imagining the Apocalypse* conference directed my attention towards Kopenawa’s vital text.
126. Carew, ‘Portrait of the Artist’, p. 67. Though listed as undated by Tate the sketch seems to be an alternative version of the first of two illustrations on themes of environmental and cultural destruction made by Williams that respectively accompany two articles by Carew published in *The Listener* in 1959. The first of these shows that Carew’s review statement is adapted from a quote attributed to an unnamed Warao village leader at Warrimuri. The *Listener* version is particularly interesting for containing additional ideas that resonate strikingly with the Yanomami ‘*Falling Sky*’ prophecy: ‘All that lives must wear green ... and when you peel off the green skin from the land then the sky will close in and the earth will be a coffin for the dead’. See Jan Carew ‘The Forgotten Province’, *The Listener*, LXII:1590 (September 17, 1959): pp. 435–436; Jan Carew, ‘Klautkys, Allicocks, and Hamiltons’, *The Listener*, LXII:1591 (September 24, 1959): pp. 479–480.
127. Menchú and Burgos, *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, pp. 26, 51–60, 70, 86, 92–98, 115–117, 132–133, 150, 184–185, 193–194, 215, 220–226.
128. Grace Nichols, *Picasso, I Want My Face Back* (Tarset: Bloodaxe Books, 2010 [2009]), pp. 21–24.
129. Nichols, *Picasso*, p. 23; Wilson Harris, *The Sleepers of Roraima: A Carib Trilogy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 61–81; Harris, *Radical Imagination*, pp. 74, 77–78, 83–86, 93–94, 113.
130. Nichols, *Picasso*, p. 23.
131. Robert Atkins and Aubrey Williams, *Shostakovich: An Exhibition of New Paintings by Aubrey Williams* (London:

Commonwealth Institute, 1981); Walmsley, ‘Chronology’, pp. 91–94, 102.

132. Araeen, ‘Conversation’, p. 48; Bakari, *Mark of the Hand*. Different ideas of time counting, creation and destruction represent key pathways of interaction between Williams’s musical and Mesoamerican series. Given his related comments to Brett in *The Mark of the Hand* about his sensing Shostakovich’s music in visual colour terms, as well as Wilson Harris’s aforementioned emphasis on the painter’s musicality, it may be interesting to note two further complementary discursive examples. These include, in the context of Indigenous Guyana, George Mentore’s discussion of overlaps between the eye and ear within Waiwai epistemology and social ontology, and, following Williams’s astronomical interests and Mercer’s connected discussion of them in the context of astrophysics, the understanding within that field of light and sound as being two forms of wave. They are both energy. See George Mentore, ‘Tempering the Social Self: Body Adornment, Vital Substance, and Knowledge among the Waiwai’, *Archaeology and Anthropology* 9 (1993): p. 29; Michael Zeilik, *Astronomy: The Evolving Universe, Ninth Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 201; Kobena Mercer, ‘Aubrey Williams: Abstraction in Diaspora’, *British Art Studies* 8 (2018), accessed 10 November 2021, doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-08/kmercerc/p17.
133. Bakari, *Mark of the Hand*. The film uses the opening of Symphony No.8 and the fourth movement of Symphony No.7.
134. Lorraine Griffiths, ‘Bridging the Artistic Gap’, in Walmsley, *Guyana Dreaming*, pp. 91–92.
135. Koch-Grünberg, *Vom Roraima*, vol. 2, pp. 11, 51–53, 230–238, vol. 3, pp. 282–283; Barral, *Diccionario Warao-Castellano*, pp. 161–162, 215–216, 473, 489; Niels Fock, *Waiwai: Religion and Society of an Amazonian Tribe* (Copenhagen: The National Museum, 1963), pp. 33–35; Cesáreo de Armellada, *Diccionario Pemón* (Caracas: Corpoven and Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, 1981), pp. 20, 78; Mentore, ‘Tempering the Social Self’, p. 26–28. Various macaws and other species used for featherwork, such as toucans, appear among lists connected with Williams’s *Bird Paintings* series.
136. Vaquero Rojo, *Manifestaciones religiosas*, pp. 86–98, 152–157, 159–162, 197–207; Wilbert, *Folk Literature*, pp. 216–220, 290–296, 307–311; Roth, ‘Animism and Folk-lore’, p. 142. Winslow Craig’s wood-carving *Discovery* (1989) provides a powerful figurative portrayal of this story. See Alim Hosein (ed.), *Panorama: A Portrait of Guyana, Images from the National Collection of Guyana* (Georgetown: Castellani House, The National Gallery of Art, 2014), p. 17. A version of the myth recounted by Roy Heath also appears in Andrew Salkey’s 1980 compilation *Caribbean Folk Tales and Legends*, to which Williams contributed text and illustrations. See Andrew Salkey (ed.), *Caribbean Folk Tales and Legends* (London: Bogle L’Ouverture Press, 1980), 119–126.
137. Juan Álvarez Abeilhé ‘La Bandera de España’, *Revista de Historia Militar: El Origen Militar de los Símbolos de España* (Extraordinary Number, Year LIV, 2010): pp. 16–68.
138. Dimitri Shostakovich and Semen Kirsanov, *Symphony No. 3: “First of May”, Opus. 20*, (Moscow: State Publishers, Music, 1975).
139. Harris, *Palace of the Peacock*, pp. 99–117. In the context Guyana’s historical geography, given the celestial allusions, which, alongside alchemical symbolism, Harris associated with the Peacock image, it is worth noting the existence of the Peacock constellation (Pavo) in the southern sky, which was first named in print alongside other ‘new’ constellations, such as ‘Dorado’ and ‘Toucan’, in Johann Bayer’s 1603 celestial atlas, based on observations from Dutch colonial voyages of the 1590s. See Harris, ‘History Fable Myth’, p. 20; Wilson Harris, *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Publications, 1967), pp. 32–33; Johann Bayer, *Uranometria: Omnium Asterismorum Continens Schemata, Nova Methodo*

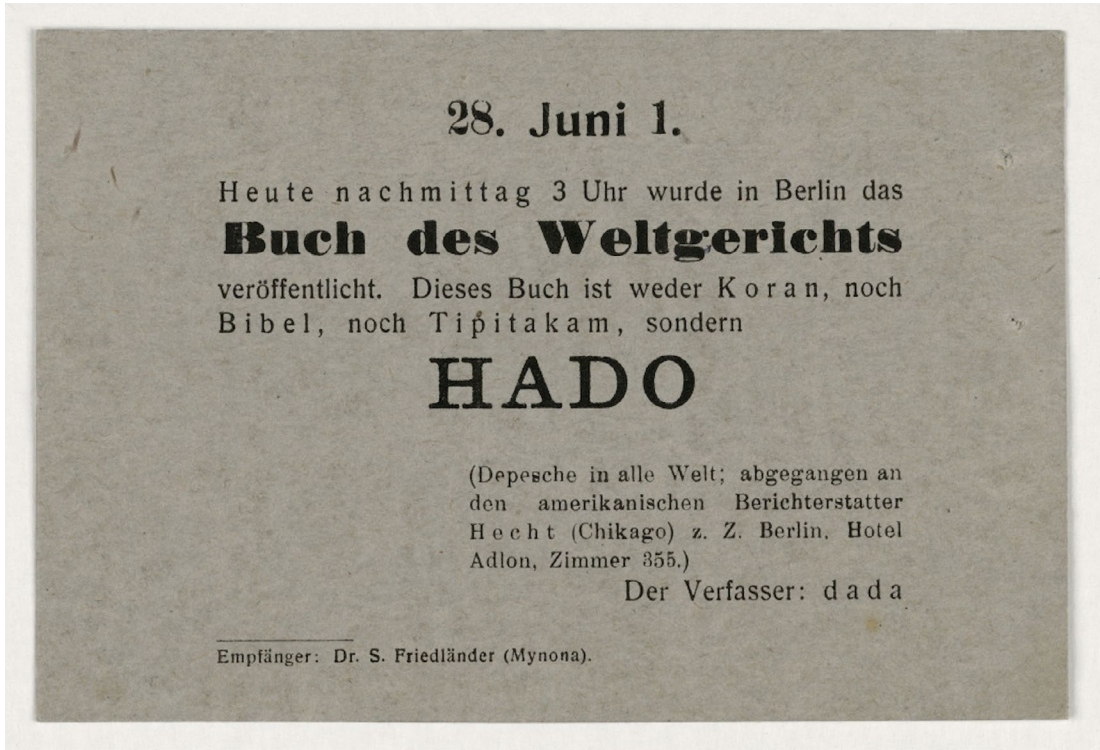
Delineata, Aereis Iaminis Expressa (Augsburg: Christoph Mang, 1603), table 49.

140. Aracén, 'Conversation', p. 49.

Dada Millenarianism: Johannes Baader's Intervention at the National Assembly in Weimar, 1919

LUCY BYFORD

Fig. 1
Johannes Baader,
*Advertisement
for Handbook
of the Oberdada*
(Handbuch
des Oberdada,
abbreviated to
HADO) (28 June
1919). Grey card,
9.2 x 13.6 cm.
Berlinische Galerie,
Berlin. Reproduced
with the kind
permission of
Bernd Baader.



‘Dada is the Creator of all things and God and the World Revolution and the Last Judgement simultaneously, all in one. It is not fiction, it is within man’s reach’.¹

Johannes Baader, ‘Dada-Spiel’ (Dada-Game) (1919)

On 16 July 1919, Berlin Dadaist Johannes Baader (1875-1955) staged a sudden intervention during a sitting of the National Assembly, the interregnum parliament tasked with drafting a constitution for Germany’s newly-founded Weimar Republic. For most of 1919, the assembly did not meet in the Reichstag, instead gathering in the Deutsches Nationaltheater (German National Theatre), a site strategically removed from the revolutionary turmoil in Berlin.² During his brief performance, Baader released a selection of self-authored Dada texts from the highest gallery in the theatre, announcing that he had ‘material for minister Naumann’, one of the Republic’s founding fathers.³ The Dadaist then swiftly left the chamber, continuing to talk loudly as he made his exit, after which he was promptly arrested.⁴ Among the Dada ‘material’ which fluttered down to the galleries and stalls below was a series of ‘grey cards’.⁵ These were most likely the grey promotional postcards, which Baader printed at the end of June to publicise his *Handbuch des Oberdadaismus* (*Handbook of Supreme Dadaism*, abbreviated to *HADO*), 1919-1920 (Fig. 1). The thick ‘handbook’ consisted of montaged headlines from Berlin newspapers, collected during the first six months following the November Revolution (1918-19).⁶ Baader also threw out a double-sided flyer titled *Sonderausgabe: Grüne Leiche* (*special issue: Green Corpse*). This short polemical text is sometimes known by its subtitle, ‘Dadaisten gegen Weimar’ (Dadaists against Weimar), but is more commonly cited as the *Green Corpse* handbill. One side of the flyer declares the ‘Oberdada’ (Superdada),

Fig. 2
Johannes Baader,
*Grüne Leiche:
Dadaisten gegen
Weimar* (Green
Corpse: Dadaists
against Weimar)
[front] (February
1919). Letterpress,
23.5 x 20.7 cm.
Kunsthaus Zurich,
Zurich. Reprinted
in *Dada: Zurich,
Berlin, Hannover,
Cologne, New
York, Paris*, ed.
Leah Dickerman
(Washington:
National Gallery of
Art, 2006), p. 137.
Reproduced with
the kind permission
of Bernd Baader.

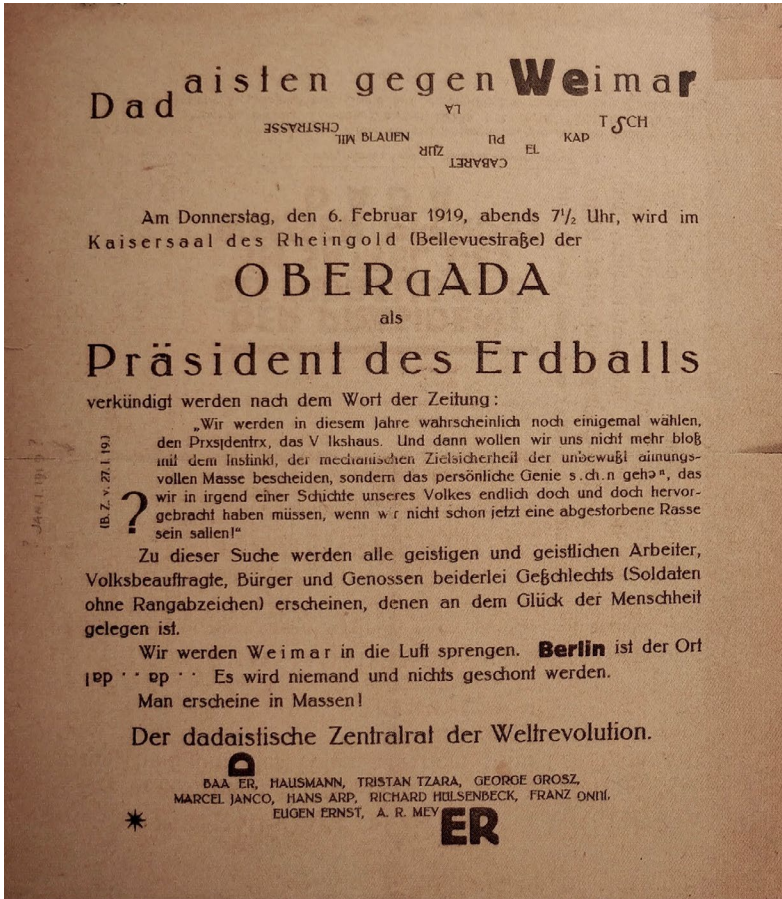
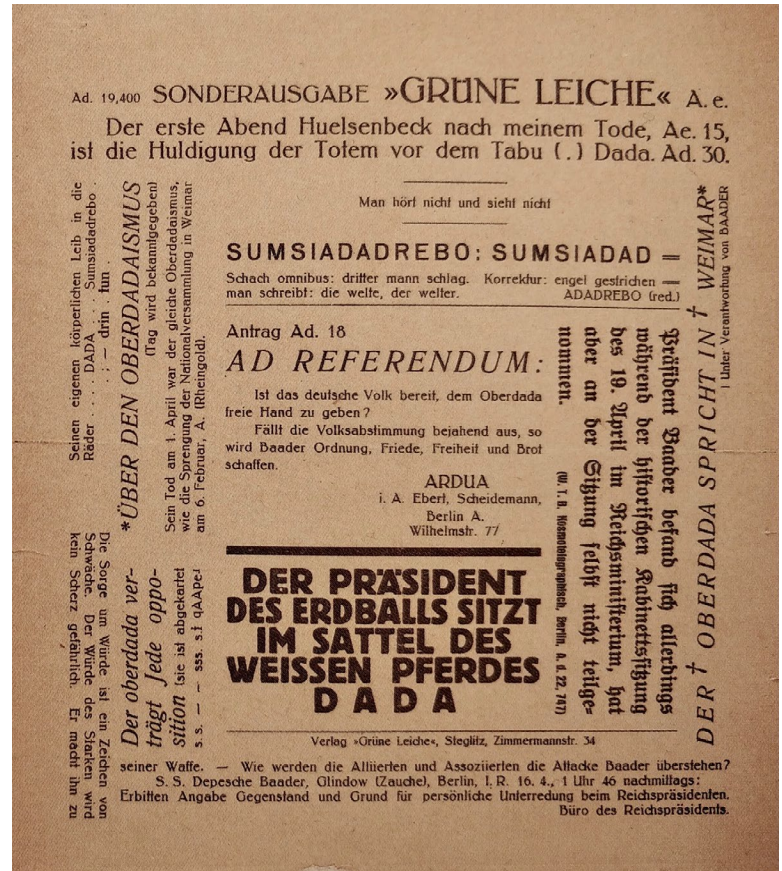


Fig. 3
Johannes Baader,
*Grüne Leiche:
Sonderausgabe* (Green
Corpse: special
edition) [reverse]
(February 1919).
Letterpress, 23.5 x
20.7 cm, Kunsthaus
Zurich, Zurich.
Reprinted in *Dada:
Zurich, Berlin,
Hannover, Cologne,
New York, Paris*, ed.
Leah Dickerman
(Washington:
National Gallery of
Art, 2006), p. 137.
Reproduced with
the kind permission
of Bernd Baader.



Baader's Nietzschean alias, as 'Präsident des Erdballs' (president of the globe). On the reverse, an upper-case statement blends the political and the cosmic: 'der Präsident des Erdballs sitzt im Sattel des Weissen Pferdes Dada' (the president of the globe sits in the saddle of the white horse Dada) (Figs. 2 and 3).⁷ Baader's act of hurling Dada pamphlets into the midst of a live parliamentary session remains a key episode in the history of Berlin Dada, featuring prominently in Dadaist Hans Richter's *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (1964), one of the wider movement's most significant histories. In this text, the impact of Baader's intervention is described thus: 'Dada had insulted the country's leading politicians, and the whole nation heard about it. The resulting laughter strengthened opposition, sowed confusion and weakened authority'.⁸ Richter and others' accounts of the action paint a picture of Dada chaos disrupting dry political formalities, an injection of Dionysian dynamism into a thoroughly Apollonian affair.⁹ However, a closer reading of the full assembly debate, published in the Berlin daily, the *Berliner Börsen-Courier* (hereafter, the *Courier*), discloses how Baader's action in fact took place during an already highly charged session at the National Assembly. The sitting saw such uproar that the stenographer was occasionally unable to distinguish what the assembly members were saying, ambiguities reflected in the debate transcript.¹⁰ Far from the account of the action offered by Dada scholar Stephen C. Foster, of a 'ceremony' whose 'proceedings gave the appearance of sanity and stability', Baader's intervention appears to have taken place in a rather chaotic assembly session.¹¹

Following the 'Dada incident', noted in a brief five-sentence segment in the *Courier*, the assembly schedule quickly resumed as planned. The outburst certainly created a brief moment of confusion, but hardly derailed the proceedings in any meaningful sense. Were the significance of Baader's action to be measured according to the metric introduced by Richter—its political impact—it would stand as an episode of little importance. Yet such a reading of the performance would be altogether at odds with its significance to the historiography of Berlin Dada. The present chapter will correct the record by qualifying the action's prominent place in the history of the Berlin group. In doing so, it will address Foster's proposition that the avant-garde's public interventions, rather than their interest in art and literature, reveal the 'centre of their radicalism'.¹² Also of relevance is the assertion by scholars David Hopkins and Michael White, who argue that many of the characteristics of the avant-garde were 'taken to their extreme' in Dada, noting how the movement is considered a 'paradigm case' of the avant-garde.¹³ If Dada is 'paradigmatic' of the avant-garde, and if performed interventions reveal the core of avant-garde radicalism, then a Dada intervention in the German parliament is surely of importance even beyond Dada scholarship. However, avant-garde studies will not be the focus here.

To properly qualify the importance of this episode in Dada history, I consider three core aspects throughout in the following discussion. First, I revisit the reportage surrounding the action to provide a more precise reconstruction of the event. To aid

the reconstruction, I extrapolate from performance scholar Susan Bennett's notion of theatrical 'frames'. When determining audience reception, Bennett describes two distinct 'frames' in a performance. The 'inner frame' comprises the direction, set, props, actors, and script, and the 'outer frame' is made up of factors external to the piece itself, but which nonetheless condition its reception, such as wider geographical and political contexts.¹⁴ In this somewhat unconventional performance, I view the immediate elements in the parliamentary chamber as the performance's 'inner frame', while contextual factors, in addition to incidents and writings from Baader's total oeuvre comprise the performance's 'outer frame'. Second, a close reading of the revolutionary, anti-pacifist language used in the handbill facilitates a more in-depth political reading of the overall action. Finally, I analyse Dadaist engagements with eschatological themes, such as, in the case of Baader, prophecy and Christian iconography of the horsemen of the apocalypse. The discussion recalls how the Dada movement in Berlin understood themes of apocalypse as bound up with notions of revolution. Scholars, such as White and Katharina Hoins, have analysed Baader's manipulation of the press as a tool for the construction and destabilisation of received realities during and immediately following Germany's November Revolution.¹⁵ Yet the relationship between these practices and the artist's engagements with Christian mysticism are comparatively underexplored. A chapter by Dada scholar Debbie Lewer entitled 'Dada, Carnival and Revolution' is a key, highly productive, exception to this trend.¹⁶ As shall be made evident, there are significant overlaps between the topics of mysticism and apocalypticism in the work of Berlin Dada. Building on Lewer's approach, the present reconstruction is designed to open up the National Assembly intervention to fresh interpretation. Subsequently, the following study seeks to demonstrate the value of returning to the precise circumstances of Dada's more ephemeral public performances, where at all possible.

A Contested Legacy

In his account of the intervention in the National Assembly, Richter recalls how Baader's 'sheer lack of inhibition' was 'exactly what Berlin Dada needed in order to carry out its "programme" of protest and resistance'.¹⁷ Much later, Foster similarly argued for Baader's importance to the movement as the individual who 'offered the most consummate formulation of the Dada event'.¹⁸ The understanding that Baader created situations deemed quintessentially 'Dada' is greatly at odds with the limited scholarly attention garnered by the action, and, indeed, Baader's career in general. Dada scholar Adrian Sudhalter's PhD dissertation, completed in 2005, remains the most extensive and comprehensive examination of Baader's work.¹⁹ There are two reasons for this relative neglect. The first is addressed by Foster when he observes that the art 'event', while 'rarely overlooked by the avant-garde artist, ... has, alas, been largely ignored by these same artists' historians'. He suggests that this may be a result of the natural tendency of

Fig. 4
Photographer
unknown, *Session
of the National
Assembly at Weimar*
(1919). Postcard.
© Süddeutsche
Zeitung, August
Scherl archive,
Munich. Bridgeman
Images.



these performances to ‘largely abandon historically sanctioned aesthetics’.²⁰ The second reason why previous scholarship has not analysed this action in detail relates to the fact that scholars have, until fairly recently, tended to dispute the significance of Baader himself. This has its roots in a rift between Berlin Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck (1892–1974) and the ‘Oberdada’, a feud which came to a head in February 1919, triggered by the initial circulation of Baader’s *Green Corpse* flyer.²¹

From early 1919, Huelsenbeck went to substantial lengths to ostracise Baader from the movement. Writing to Zurich Dadaist Tristan Tzara, he claimed that Baader ‘has nothing to do with our thinking’.²² Huelsenbeck began openly questioning Baader’s sanity, referring to him as a ‘crafty inmate of a lunatic asylum’ in the *Dada Almanac* (1920).²³ This portrayal of Baader as mentally unsound permeates some of the secondary literature. Scholar John D. Erickson, for example, describes the artist as ‘psychotic’.²⁴ Although Baader committed himself to psychiatric institutions on numerous occasions, Sudhalter has shown how his medical records cannot be interpreted as concrete evidence for genuine psychosis. In her thesis, Sudhalter analyses Baader’s first psychiatric diagnoses from 1907 alongside his idolisation of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche from that period. She identifies how Baader was attended to in Jena by the same psychiatrist who treated Nietzsche in this same city, Dr Otto Binswanger, ‘nineteen years earlier, to the day(!), in January 1889’.²⁵ Sudhalter also connects Baader’s practice of writing letters to figures of authority to similar letters penned by

Nietzsche after the philosopher suffered a nervous breakdown in 1889.²⁶ She notes that medical professionals and art historians alike failed to notice Baader’s ‘copy-cat’ actions, each of which he cannily orchestrated to mirror the life of the philosopher.²⁷ A mark of the success of Baader’s deception is the continuing tendency among some Dada commentators to uncritically accept his performances as symptomatic of mental instability.

Uncertainties surrounding Baader were also exacerbated by a more general reluctance to explore Dada’s engagements with mysticism during the post-war period, a trend inherited from critical theory and originating, according to White and Hopkins, in Theodor W. Adorno’s essay ‘Theses against Occultism’ (1947).²⁸ As art historian Andréi Nakov explains, ‘philosophical endeavours of a mystical character [resembled] the philosophical-mystical deceptions of National Socialism’.²⁹ In the case of Baader specifically, Lower notes how his self-fashioned mystical, messianic identity has been read as a form of megalomania close to the ‘esoteric end of völkish-nationalistic thought’.³⁰ Such dubious affiliations are not helped by an instance in 1943 when Baader wrote a letter to Adolf Hitler, in which he claimed that the Gestapo had misjudged Dada due to the regime’s defective programme of public enlightenment.³¹ Dada scholar Richard Sheppard addresses these valid concerns. He identifies the particular vein of mysticism pursued by Berlin Dadaism. Sheppard notes how the group, ‘having recognised the dangers of the Expressionist cult of ecstasy’ subsequently ‘feared that such ecstatic states of mind would either destroy their sense of balance, or take them away from the realities of society and politics, or lead them towards totalitarianism of one kind or another’.³² To prevent this, they diverged from Expressionist engagements with mysticism which, because they ‘stress[ed] spiritual inwardness’, were more at risk from the influence of mythic realities, instead moving more towards a practice of ‘extraverted natural exuberance’.³³

The analysis here examines Baader’s activities alongside the interests in mysticism harboured by other members of the Berlin cohort. This shows firstly that Dadaist engagements with mysticism could indeed manifest as ‘extraverted exuberance’, as Sheppard suggests. Secondly, it demonstrates how Baader’s particular extraverted practice coheres, in many ways, with that of his Dadaist peers, despite their attempts to distance him from the movement. As such, the present reconstruction is part of a wider project of rehabilitation of the Dadaist by scholars Sudhalter, Hanne Bergius, White and Hoins.³⁴

Baader in the ‘Besuchertribüne’ (Tribunal Gallery)

On 16 July 1919, in the Weimar National Theatre, interim cabinet members Hugo Preuß, Eduard David and Johannes Bell sat at desks placed on the stage. They faced

theatre stalls occupied by the remaining assembly members in the temporary parliament (Fig. 4). Seats for reporters from the press were reserved in the front row of the 'erster Rang' (lower circle), and the main section of the 'zweiter Rang' (upper circle). The general public occupied the remaining rows of the lower circle and all of the 'dritter Rang', an area of elevated seats at the back of the upper circle. These areas reserved for the public were known as the 'Besuchertribüne' (tribune for visitors, or tribunal gallery), and it was from the 'dritter Rang', the worst seats in the house occupied by members of the public, that Baader released his Dada texts (Fig. 5).³⁵ In this tribunal set up, democracy itself was set on stage and performed before a select audience, a practice dating back to the mid-nineteenth century in Germany.³⁶ Foster has demonstrated how the theatrical setting adopted by the assembly served Baader well in underscoring his message that the assembly itself was little more than 'a piece of theatre', tacitly justifying the Dadaist's institution of 'his own superior, non-theatrical reality' and 'mock jurisdiction over the Weimar authorities'.³⁷

The significant amount of space reserved for members of the public in the assembly surreptitiously asserts the idea of a transparent democratic process. However, the body's claims to political legitimacy were flatly rejected within Berlin Dada circles. For example, in the Dadaist-edited magazine *Die Pleite (Bankruptcy)*, Carl Einstein described the provisional legislature a few months before Baader's action in evocative terms. Einstein addresses the assembly: 'National assembly of the drowned corpses, meeting of the decelerating old wretches; your nimble mouths oozed four-year-old blood sludge, chattering ... Did your word threshing bring us bread?'³⁸ This bile directed at the National Assembly shows Einstein vocalising a key complaint of the radical left at the time, as this faction supported a model of workers' councils over a parliamentary democracy.³⁹ Despite gestures of transparency and democratisation by the National Assembly, the reality on the ground in Weimar painted a very different picture. While it hosted the National Assembly, access to the town was granted only upon the presentation of documents of identification bearing specially stamped passes.⁴⁰ The exterior of the theatre was guarded by officers from the *Freikorps* paramilitary who had been subsumed into the Berlin police, and *Landjägerkorps*, another rank of militarised policemen, with additional police officers checking entry tickets of the members of the parliament, press and public on the door.⁴¹ These tight security measures make the infiltration of the space by Baader all the more remarkable, particularly as the Berlin authorities had certified him as clinically insane back in November 1918.⁴² In a discussion on the careful planning and coordination required to execute a performance of this ilk, scholar Roy F. Allen describes how the organisers behind avant-garde events are generally 'entrepreneurs' and 'manipulators of the organisational and promotional services crucial to public success as much as articulators of a new conception of reality'.⁴³ Richter reinforces this impression when he characterises Baader's 'innate unreality' as 'curiously linked with an extraordinary practical awareness'.⁴⁴



Fig. 5
Photographer
unknown, *National
Assembly at Weimar*
(view of the 'third
gallery' of the
Besuchertribüne)
(1919). Photograph.
© Süddeutsche
Zeitung, August
Scherl archive,
Munich. Bridgeman
Images.

Baader's position in the tribunal gallery is also reminiscent of the failed attempt to set up a 'Rat der geistigen Arbeiter' (council of intellectual labourers) by Activist Expressionist Kurt Hiller (1885-1972). This project was initiated in 1917 and came to fruition during the November Revolution in 1918.⁴⁵ Activist Expressionism promoted the vision that, in a post-revolutionary society, representatives of *Geist* (intellect, in the sense of the intelligentsia) should defend values of pacificism and rationalism.⁴⁶ According to scholar Seth Taylor, representatives of *Geist* would gather to form a council, an 'upper house', entrusted with encoding a philosophy of 'principles and norms'. These guiding principles would then be followed by a 'lower house' whose task it was to draft laws addressing material concerns.⁴⁷ During its three days of existence at the height of the November Revolution, this council of the intelligentsia briefly represented a viable channel through which members of the avant-garde might effect political change. Huelsenbeck was one of many artists among their number, meaning that, during the revolution, members of the Dada group in Berlin came tantalisingly close to real political power. For the Dadaists, the National Assembly arguably embodied the failure of the revolution, a perception surmised in their construal of the conference as, in the words of Bergius, 'a restitution of feudal-monarchical stakeholders and nationalist powers'.⁴⁸

In Berlin, Hiller became the poster boy for this failure due to his attempts to form a council of representatives of *Geist*. The resulting ire towards Hiller's 'Activist' camp of Expressionism is palpable in the *Green Corpse* handbill. The bill functions an 'inner frame' prop on which the whole performance hinges. The contents of the handbill

parody Activist prose by painting a picture of the German people forgoing the instinct of the brutish masses to seek out representatives of *Geist*,

... And then we will no longer wish to be content merely with instinct, the mechanical purposefulness of the unconscious, foreboding masses, but will instead seek out the personal genius [of intellect], which we must finally have produced in some class of our people.⁴⁹

Though Huelsenbeck initially allied himself with Hiller, both Baader and Raoul Hausmann (1886-1971), the latter being a possible co-author of the handbill and Baader's closest Dada peer, were long-term sceptics of Hiller's ideas. This position is defined most succinctly in a passage by Sheppard worth quoting in full,

Just as the late Expressionists tried to cover up the darker sides of human nature by affirming that revolutionary *Geist* was emerging after a disastrous war to create a new, redeemed humanity, so the Weimar Republic, with its claim to be based on the ideals of classical modernity inherited from Goethe and Schiller, actually covered up the fact that nothing in Germany had changed fundamentally.⁵⁰

Sheppard's comment on the 'ideals of classical modernity' leads us to another 'outer frame' consideration related to Baader's intervention. The classicism referenced by Sheppard drew heavily from the late eighteenth-century literary and cultural movement of Weimar Classicism, which was named after the residence of the movement's two primary luminaries, Goethe and Schiller.⁵¹ Dominating the square in front of the National Theatre in Weimar stands a statue of both figures, the *Goethe-Schiller Denkmal* (*Goethe-Schiller Monument*), sculpted by Ernst Rietschel in 1857, a looming reminder of the town's '*genius loci*'.⁵² This reputation was duly exploited by the National Assembly sixty-two years later during their temporary encampment in the town. Between Goethe and Schiller, it was the latter who elevated theatre to a position of unrivalled pre-eminence in German culture. Schiller promoted the idea of the theatre as a site for the moral and spiritual nourishment of a people. He contended that the medium of theatre could exert the 'moral influence' necessary for doctrines of law to be upheld by a nation.⁵³

Chancellor Scheidemann alluded to these associations between theatre and the stability of the state when he quoted a line from Schiller's 1789 poem, 'Die Künstler' (The Artists), before the National Assembly in May 1919: 'The Dignity of Man into your hands is given - Its keeper be!'⁵⁴ In response, Baader promptly sent a large portrait of Schiller to Scheidemann, lampooning the chancellor's use of the literary figure in his plea for morality and civility. This preliminary act is yet another component of the core action's 'outer frame'. Equipped with a keen sense of the politics of place, the radical figure of Baader delivered his portrait of Schiller to mock the way in which the assembly was decked out with the trappings of German high culture.

An inscription on the portrait sent by Baader purportedly read, 'Since you despise the rights of the spirit, you are in no way entitled to lay claim to any other rights. The people whom you represent deserve no better fate than utter destruction ... the Entente will die of Dada!'⁵⁵ In his reference to the Allies, Baader tapped into deepening tensions surrounding the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. This issue led to Scheidemann's early resignation on 20 June 1919 when he refused to pass the peace treaty into law due to overwhelming public backlash against its highly punitive terms.

Baader repeatedly articulated his rejection of the republic in expressly violent language. The threat of 'utter destruction' featured in the inscription on the Schiller portrait is but one example. In a line from the *Green Corpse* handbill, Baader wrote that the Dadaists, because they were 'against Weimar', intended to 'detonate it into the air', sparing 'nothing and no one'.⁵⁶ He then animated this threat in a series of spoof newspaper reports written in conjunction with the handbill's original creation in February 1919. The articles, composed in the style of news bulletin entries reporting on two warring factions, present a fanciful write-up of a 'Dada Coup' in the Haus Rheingold, a cavernous Berlin restaurant with a capacity of four thousand.⁵⁷ In one report, the Rheingold, along with several other cafés, including the popular avant-garde haunt, the Café Josty, was stormed and occupied by the Dadaists. The second report relays the Dadaists' seizure of power, reporting that,

President Scheidemann was detonated along with the whole of Weimar ... The lavish funeral service of the ill-fated National Assembly will take place on 6 February in the Dada graveyard.⁵⁸

This violent rhetoric mocks the assembly's pretences to morality and civility and goads the pacifist, humanist rhetoric of Hiller's Activism. It also alludes to resistance against rampant nationalism and nation-building projects. This anarchistic undercurrent to Baader's writing is most apparent in a letter he sent to Tzara, in which he described himself as a 'dadaistic bomb' whose purpose it was to explode 'every nationality and every domain of power, but above all the German [regime]'.⁵⁹ It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that Baader's anti-pacifist language in this letter to Tzara; the *Green Corpse* handbill; and his faux reporting all recall the anarchist strategy of 'propaganda by the deed'. This term refers to violence perpetrated in order to spark revolutionary action, an anarchist tactic primarily seen in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁰ Erickson, though he does not mention Baader's action specifically, outlines similarities between Dada 'events' and anarchist tactics of propaganda by the deed, accounting for how the latter term evolved into the more general, less violent idea of 'direct action'.⁶¹ He contends that 'the legacy of anarchism for Dada lay ... in [anarchism's] translation of cultural-political belief into direct action' whose most effective means, in turn, 'lay in performance'.⁶² Richter similarly recalls how Baader made works 'designed purely for "direct action"', prompting him to destroy his creations after they had served this purpose.⁶³ We have seen how during the action, Baader targeted the assembly and its

bourgeois pretensions from his marginalised position in the tribunal gallery, adopting a strategy partly inspired by anarchist praxis. But his writings elsewhere provided the opportunity to re-write himself into historical accounts as a clear protagonist.

Like his reports of a fictional coup, the long-form piece by Baader entitled ‘Reklame für mich’ (Advertisement for Myself), published in the ‘little magazine’ *Der Dada* 2 in December 1919, also contains a fantastical account that places Dada at the centre of contemporary political events. This constitutes an intertextual element of the ‘outer frame’ of the performance, as, though it did not feature in the performance itself, it directly references the action, thereby deepening our understanding of Baader’s artistic intent. In weaving Baader’s recollection of his intervention into the narrative, the prose recycles terms used in his *Green Corpse* handbill. For example, ‘Advertisement for Myself’ frames the episode as a proclamation by the ‘Presidency of the Universe’ that ‘the President of the Globe sits in the saddle of the white horse of Dada’.⁶⁴ In this text, Baader blends an account of his intervention into a fabricated retelling of the world war’s escalation and peace negotiations. In this narrative, the Oberdada is a central diplomat, working alongside figures such as the Pope and generals ‘Hindendorf und Ludenburg’ (caricatures of Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff).⁶⁵ Baader renegotiates his marginal position in the assembly chamber by writing a lectern into the tribunal gallery, thereby implying that all the assembly members were turned in his direction and looking up at him during his assembly address. In his account of the action, Baader delivers a wordless sermon of laughter from the lectern, indiscriminately directing his derision at ‘German socialism, Communism [and] Nationalism’. He thereby scorns the multiple conflicting ideologies jostling to align themselves with the new German state.⁶⁶

The German Constitution and Cinematic Smut

In the following section, I examine the ‘inner frame’ aspects of Baader’s performance that further rationalise the Dadaists’ anarchistic disillusionment with the state and its parliamentary parties. Previously unconsidered, these aspects, such as the particular timing and circumstances in the chamber during the action, reveal Baader’s specific concerns enabling a more precise interpretation of the action. One of the few ‘inner frame’ variables that Baader was able to control during his intervention was the timing of the release of his Dada ‘materials’. The full parliamentary debate, published as a transcript in various contemporary newspapers, including the *Courier*, shows that Baader released his handbill ‘während der Abstimmung’ (during the vote) at the moment when ministers were voting on an amendment to article 118 of the constitution.⁶⁷ This article ostensibly secured freedom of speech in the Weimar Republic, but the vote was on whether to retain restrictions around film and certain types of performance. Baader chose this moment over several more dramatic interludes when he could have

released his texts. For example, one moment of high drama presented itself when the assembly voted to reject the Social Democrat (SPD) motion to ban the death penalty in the Weimar Republic. At another, Independent Socialist (USPD) Oskar Cohn accused the democratic liberalist Conrad Haußmann (DDP) of corruption, claiming that the German film industry was subject to government control.⁶⁸ By forgoing these moments of high tension in the debate, the timing of Baader’s action challenges the idea that the performance was primarily a stunt engineered to cause maximum sensation.⁶⁹ I contend that the timing of the action indicates that the intervention should instead be viewed as a calculated critique of a key clause in the constitution. The contents of an earlier press announcement linked with the original circulation of the *Green Corpse* handbill similarly suggest that Baader was concerned with the broader issue of censorship in the months before the intervention. This press release outlined details of the imaginary Dada ‘coup’, describing a coronation ceremony of Baader as ‘President of the Globe’ on 6 February. Baader selected this date to symbolically coincide with the inaugural sitting of the National Assembly. The opening lines of this press release reads, “‘What is satire permitted to do?’” was a question that appeared in the press the other day. The answer was: Everything!⁷⁰

Baader’s concern surrounding the legislation is made clear by the assembly debate on the issue. After a brief discussion, the ministers agreed that film should be exempt from freedom of expression clauses in the Weimar constitution. They reasoned that this medium posed the risk of ‘degeneration’, which would result in a general ‘moral decline of the people’, with the vulnerable minds of minors deemed to be particularly at risk.⁷¹ In its proposed censorship of film, the constitutional article curtailed rights that had been promised to the German people in late 1918, when acting President Friedrich Ebert lifted all censorship measures.⁷² Both Bergius and White link Baader’s action to the constitutional article promising ‘freedom of the press’ for the Republic, a liberty that the Dadaists believed they did not enjoy.⁷³ More specifically, however, Baader is referring to the hypocrisy written into the fine print of the article, with its implicit restrictions of artistic freedoms. In its final form, article 118 initially reads: ‘Every German is entitled ... to express his opinion freely in word, writing, print, image ...’.⁷⁴ However, a contradictory caveat followed stating that ‘In case of the cinema, other regulations may be established by law. Also, in order to combat trashy and obscene literature, as well as for the protection of the youth in public exhibitions and performances, legal measures are permissible’.⁷⁵ Baader’s action, therefore, seems to comprise a response to the moral panic projected onto cinema and its perceived links to smut, pornography and, more broadly, ‘cabaret and certain cosmopolitan products of the press’.⁷⁶ In this way, his action highlighted the fact that imperial-style, draconian restrictions were already forming the legal foundations of the Republic.

Baader was undoubtedly concerned by what impact this censorial clause might have on avant-garde activities. Innovations in film had already started to transform visuality

long before Walter Benjamin was to write on the cultural implications of the medium in his famous 1935 essay.⁷⁷ In his ‘Synthetisches Cino der Malerei’ (Synthetic Cinema of Painting) manifesto of 1918, Hausmann called for artists to move away from oil painting. His appeal hints at how the dynamism and shifts in perspective generated by film partly inspired the Dadaists’ preferred visual medium of photomontage.⁷⁸ Dada scholar Matthew Biro notes how the aesthetic and technical advances exhibited by film, a medium which had developed from circus sideshow *Wanderkino* in the late 1890s to feature-length cinema by 1919, translated into social and revolutionary potential in the eyes of the Berlin Dadaists:

[C]inema ... revealed the power of photographic montage to fragment and reassemble reality ... allow[ing] its practitioners to ... imagine new forms of individual and collective existence.⁷⁹

Alongside cultivating class consciousness, film was also emerging as a powerful tool for state propaganda. The accusation levelled during the debate of collusion between the state and the film industry was not altogether unfounded, despite the assembly’s outraged dismissal of this claim. Between 1917 and early 1919, the German government had employed Berlin Dadaists George Grosz (1893-1959) and John Heartfield (1891-1968) to produce now lost war propaganda and advertising animation films for UFA (Universum Film A.G.).⁸⁰ As such, the Dadaists were generally aware of this medium’s ability to variously serve or challenge nationalistic ideology. This awareness likely caused Baader to regard any attempts by the state to stunt or control cinema’s capacity for imagining new political realities as high stakes indeed.

Parties from across the political spectrum raised concerns about the film’s capacity for moral corruption during the debate. The unanimously pro-censorship views expressed by ministers go some way to explaining Baader’s disenchantment with political ideologies represented by the assembly.⁸¹ For example, a representative from the leftist USPD party, Wilhelm Könen, supported censorship on the grounds that ‘the excesses of film are nothing more than the excesses of our capitalist economic system’.⁸² Little wonder, then, that Baader depicts himself laughing at socialism and Communism in his ‘Advertisement for Myself’ piece. Scorn towards most forms of modern entertainment was widespread among the radical left. Its proponents held that popular culture was a mere capitalist sideshow designed to distract from revolutionary struggle.⁸³ Dadaist Wieland Herzfelde later attempted to lobby against this position from within the KPD (German Communist Party).⁸⁴ Given Baader’s campaigning work with Hausmann on behalf of the USPD in 1917, two years before the intervention, the ‘philistine’ attitudes towards film displayed by the party in the chamber must have been bitterly received by the Dadaist.⁸⁵ The political influence of the USPD had been in decline since the suppression of the Spartacist uprising in January 1919 by *Freikorps* units, a move sanctioned by the SPD. As White points out, Baader obliquely references this power shift in his *Green Corpse* handbill, erroneously listing Eugen Ernst as one of

its signatories.⁸⁶ This move was intentionally provocative as the SPD politician Ernst had recently replaced the USPD member Emil Eichhorn as head of the Berlin police.

Returning again to the retelling of Baader’s action in his ‘Advertisement for Myself’ text, we have seen how his image of a lectern set up from the viewing gallery reconfigures the space of the temporary parliament. This set-up promotes him to the focal point of the assembly as an impassioned high priest looking down on his unsuspecting congregation. By the close of the tale, the reign of the Oberdada, ‘arbiter of the Last Judgement’, is established, signalling the first year of world peace.⁸⁷ The millenarian accolade, the ‘arbiter of the Last Judgement’ hints at a further supra-framing of the intervention: a leitmotif of apocalypse. Ideas of apocalypse form a steady undercurrent through the Berlin Dadaists’ work. By reviewing Dada interpretations of the end of days, we can gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between the action and the Dadaists’ wider oeuvre in Berlin.

Baader’s idiosyncratic Millenarianism

In addition to Dadaist interests in mysticism from non-Western religions, Sheppard also discusses Dada engagements with Christian mysticism, citing, in particular, recurrent evocations of the Book of Revelation and the Old Testament in Huelsenbeck’s early work. When analysing these references, Sheppard remarks that the god in Huelsenbeck’s writing is ‘a wrathful being who judges and destroys rather than redeems’.⁸⁸ Visions of a violent god perhaps analogue the Dadaist worldview that, to again quote Sheppard, ‘the *élan vital*’ which Dada understands to be pervasive to all life, is ‘capricious and impersonal’.⁸⁹ Huelsenbeck’s prose piece, ‘Ein Besuch im Cabaret Dada’ (a visit to the Dada cabaret), featured in *Der Dada* 3 in 1920, represents an important development in his use of the topos of apocalypse. This is due to the fact that, in this text, Huelsenbeck inserts the character of Baader as arbiter of the Last Judgement into the centre of his eschatological conceit. The text accordingly depicts a ‘great procession of the Dada Last Judgement’ led by the Oberdada, who appears under a ‘mighty baldachin’.⁹⁰ Huelsenbeck’s use of Baader in his ‘Cabaret Dada’ piece is particularly notable due to the aforementioned animosity between Huelsenbeck and Baader seen from early 1920.

Baader developed Huelsenbeck’s newfound mode of apocalyptic parody into a sustained critical practice, aestheticising biographical or current affairs in eschatological terms.⁹¹ Sheppard, Bergius and White have all discussed Berlin Dada’s interest in apocalypticism, but it is Lewer whose analysis is most relevant to the present discussion.⁹² In her aforementioned chapter on Dada and revolution, Lewer considers references to carnival, revolution and apocalypse in the work of the German Dadaists. She argues that Baader in particular interpreted the German revolution of 1918-1919 as a ‘rupturing of time’, which naturally found ‘its most extreme form in the Apocalypse

and the end of days'.⁹³ According to Lewer, Baader announced his own death, and subsequent resurrection, as part of his eschatological reading of and response to the revolutionary period. Parallel to this, he developed a personal calendar system to represent the beginning of, what he pronounced as, a 'new act in the divine comedy' of mankind.⁹⁴ Lewer accounts for the link drawn by Baader between time, revolution and apocalypse by explaining how Baader 're-writes in order to mock with irony a time of violence – the present – as a time of "world peace"'.⁹⁵ Additionally, she suggests that Baader's allusions to apocalypse may also operate as a 'carnivalisation of the profoundly serious but, for many, impotent, Expressionist discourse of Apocalypse'.⁹⁶ Like Sudhalter, Lewer is careful not to read Baader's use of millenarian language too literally. This is appropriate given Baader's searing critique of Christianity. Baader believed that the Church, in choosing not to resist the war, was complicit in its suffering. It was this conviction that prompted his previous action in the Berlin Cathedral in November 1918.⁹⁷ Given these 'outer frame' aspects, any allusions to apocalypse in Baader's work must be considered bearing in mind his animosity towards the institution of the Christian church and his subsequent interest in alternative spiritualities.

In his 1999 study, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus (Avant-garde and Anarchism)*, scholar Hubert van den Berg elaborates on Baader's position. Van den Berg discusses how Baader saw the 'foreign rule' of organised religion as a threat to the 'sovereign "I"'. Baader had derived these anarchist ideas from the 'radical individualism' of Max Stirner.⁹⁸ Such perspectives, elided with Nietzschean thought, led to Baader's own identification as a Christ-like figure. More specifically, Sudhalter additionally views Baader's self-deification as a provocation to the atheism championed by many Nietzscheans at the time, such as the magazine editors Michael Georg Conrad and Otto Julius Bierbaum.⁹⁹ She notes, however, that Baader did not adopt this identity to discard spirituality altogether. Rather, he sought to reimagine faith as an individual spiritualism guided by the principles of monism, a philosophy developed in the eighteenth century as a rebuttal to Cartesian dualism.¹⁰⁰ Monism provided a dynamic, egoist alternative to rigid institutionalised religion. Baader's urge to discard Christianity in favour of a new belief system is evident in many passages in his collected works. For example, his 'Ak. 12' document, advertising an upcoming lecture on 12 October 1919, states,

One knows that the cross rose in Germany ... on which the former emperor was celebrated as the bringer of world peace. [T]he date 1914 appeared in the middle. Then the cross disappeared and in its place came the pyramid of the five fixed stars ... through the open tip of which the seed of the new birth flows...¹⁰¹

In his astronomically encrypted prophecy, the First World War is revealed as the turning point when Baader is destined to abdicate the false prophet of the Kaiser. In the prophecy, Baader replaces the imperial crucifix with his own idiosyncratic monist symbol of a pyramidal constellation.¹⁰² Here we begin to see the ways in which Baader's

use of apocalyptic imagery diverged from that of his Dadaist peers. Where Huelsenbeck employed millenarianism to communicate the chaos of the universe, Baader used the idea of heavenly visitations on Earth to advocate for guiding monist principles.

Monist thought sought to unite the material and spiritual realms and promoted the belief that spirit resides in matter.¹⁰³ Baader was not the only member of the Dada circle in Berlin with an interest in slippages between the perceived and metaphysical worlds. The group's other resident Nietzschean, the Neo-Kantian philosopher Salomo Friedländer (1871-1946), also frequently explored these themes through his literary grotesques.¹⁰⁴ The monist view of reality as a kind of 'Metachemie' (metaphysical chemistry), popularised by honorary president of the German monist League Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), is most strongly evident in Baader's short text from 1919, *Die acht Weltsätze (The Eight World Statements)*. Here the Dadaist blends monism and millenarianism to determine that, if 'chemical and physical transformations' in the body are 'magical processes', then people are, in effect, 'angels'. As a result, Baader formulated his motto that the new age ushered in by war and revolution will be a time when 'the people know that they are in heaven'.¹⁰⁵ White traces Baader's interest in the monism of Haeckel back to Expressionist writer Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915). Scheerbart's influence is particularly evident in Baader's numerous references to cosmology.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Bergius cites the eschatological imagery in Scheerbart's *Das Paradies (Paradise)* (1889) as a significant influence for Baader's own 'chiliastic utopias'.¹⁰⁷

The starlit vision of a pyramid usurping a crucifix is one example of Baader stylising his texts as prophecies. Baader commonly employed this approach following the start of the war. For example, on 1 August 1914, Baader wrote in response to the outbreak of war, 'The result of the world war, which is now beginning, has been identified by the council of Souls for millions of years'.¹⁰⁸ The figure of the prophet was occasionally used by the Dadaists in a parodic manner. One of the large poster images in the Dada-Messe exhibition of 1920, for instance, shows Heartfield putting his hands up to his mouth while shouting, 'Down with Art!'. The caption below reads, 'DADA is GREAT, / And John Hartfield [sic] is its prophet'.¹⁰⁹ However, the theme of prophecy was also employed more authentically when it expressed Dada's privileged status as beholden to enlightened insight beyond the reach of others. For example, in 1920, for an article entitled 'Die Dadaistische Bewegung: Eine Selbstbiographie' (The Dadaist Movement: An Autobiography), Huelsenbeck writes,

The poor lives did not hear the sound of the Last Judgment which ... was screamed loud and clear for the insightful, raved and shouted from Dadaism.

The great relativity of things and ideas ... the "downfall of the Occident".¹¹⁰

The Berlin group even reiterated these ideas in their private correspondence, as shown by the contents of a letter penned in September 1918 by Hausmann. This letter notes how, 'There are so many true secrets in our writings, compressions of all world events, which, as far as humans are concerned, cannot be understood all at once; but have such

a *future* meaning as had Brahmanism or Buddhism or Christianity ...'.¹¹¹

Regarding the link between text and event in Baader's work, Foster makes the observation that, '[his] activities, almost all of them employing the text, are marked by his *interception* of "real world" *events* in ways that deflected their development on behalf of the *reception* of his *texts*.'¹¹² I argue that the topos of prophecy serves as an additional means of bridging text and performance in Baader's work. For Baader, the avant-garde text is not constrained to criticism and observation, but exerts its agency over events as they unfold. The text may do this by alluding to a future performance, or by introducing themes that are then developed during a performance. For example, in a letter to the rector of the University of Berlin, sent in advance of his intervention in the Berlin Cathedral, Baader wrote, 'The Last Judgement, gentlemen, is a reality on the globe. But it is not Wilson, the American, who is the judge of the world, but he who returned to the clouds of heaven to judge the dead and the living according to Dadaist principles.'¹¹³ Here, Baader again thematises monist imagery of heavenly visitations, deploying the image of himself and Wilson as competing arbiters of the Last Judgement to alert the rector ahead of his cathedral action. Just like in his letter to the rector, Baader appeared in the cathedral, judging the priest 'according to Dadaist principles', thereby highlighting the Church's hypocrisy in facilitating World War I and its militarism. In this case, Baader also forwarded his advance notice to the culture minister, sending ahead a transcript of his prepared speech.¹¹⁴

Beyond the purpose of promoting his own polemical Dada literature, these advance notices functioned as a form of prophetic framework as they involved the placement of a pre-distributed text alluding to the action within the action itself. In the case of the National Assembly action, Foster notes that Baader was acquitted following his arrest partly due to his certification as clinically insane, but also because he was able to evidence previous 'correspondence with various statesmen involved'.¹¹⁵ This suggests that Baader repeated his practice of providing advance warnings for his intervention in the National Assembly, with minister Naumann seeming to be the most likely target for this advance notice. The *Green Corpse* pamphlet was itself publically distributed in the Haus Rheingold café several months before the National Assembly action. One line on the pamphlet contains the prophetic line, 'Der Oberdada spricht in Weimar ... über den Oberdadaismus' (The Supreme Dada speaks in Weimar ... on Supreme Dadaism) (Fig. 2). It was through such moments of contrived clairvoyance that Baader interlaced aspects from 'inner' and 'outer' frames, anchoring the total meaning of his performances to his texts. He fulfilled self-authored prophecy by acting as its organ and spokesperson, stepping into the roles of both prophet and alternative Son of God. If, as Foster notes, 'the event' or performance generates 'transition points between past, present and future', it is the prophetic framework set up by Baader that binds these temporal elements together in his actions.¹¹⁶

In addition to stylising the props of his texts as prophecies, both texts also contained

more direct millenarian allusions. The first of these was the aforementioned 'grey cards'. There are several indications that these 'inner frame' props are the promotional postcards that Baader produced for his *Handbook of Oberdadaism* (*HADO*) project, which served as placeholders for the handbook in the action. For instance, the description of *HADO* items in the catalogue for the International Dada Fair from the following year explicitly links the handbook to the action in the National Assembly. The description recorded how, 'The book was offered as a gift to the National Assembly on July 16, in Weimar by the Oberdada himself. The MP Friedrich Naumann, who was supposed to deliver the gift, refused and therefore died'.¹¹⁷ Naumann did in fact die shortly after the intervention. Baader exploited this fluke, portraying the incident as a curse triggered by Naumann's rejection of the handbook. Further to this, in a joint 1920 photomontage created with Hausmann entitled, *Club der blauen Milchstrasse* (*Blue Milky Way Club*), Baader also presented a printed *HADO* 'Erklärung' (Explanation) sheet alongside a copy of the *Green Corpse* handbill.¹¹⁸ While White refers to *HADO* as 'Baader's version of the Bible', the Dadaist ersatz scripture is perhaps more specifically defined as a modern-day 'doomsday book'. Baader described the work in his grey postcards as 'neither Quran nor Bible' but a 'Buch des Weltgerichts' (Book of the Last Judgement) (Fig. 1).¹¹⁹ In a 1919 circular on the project, Baader outlined how he designed the handbook to capture 'the whole Domsday orgy', compressing revolutionary time through the filter of the media 'like an overture in a single prelude'.¹²⁰ By montaging not just visual fragments, but successive headlines as a form of narrated history, *HADO* comprised Baader's magnum opus after years of media hoax appearances in the press. The idea, posited by Baader, that Naumann's rejection of *HADO* triggered the minister's death may be read as a foreboding warning to heed Dada wisdom. The *HADO* piece, considered together with the action's targeting of the censorship clause, demonstrates how Baader's action provided a commentary on the republic's past, present and future.

In addition to the action's links with the Dada doomsday book *HADO* and its promotional grey cards, the *Green Corpse* handbill also contained references to Christian millenarianism. In this bill, Baader presents himself as 'seated in the saddle of the white horse of Dada'. Hausmann's account of the National Assembly intervention suggests that the 'white horse of Dada' at least partially alludes to the first horseman of the apocalypse described in the Book of Revelation. In a text entitled 'Dada riots, moves and dies in Berlin', Hausmann encouraged these links with the biblical text, indicating how Baader's pamphlets 'announced the arrival of the Ober-Dada on the "white horse" of the Supreme Arbiter of the Last Judgement'.¹²¹ This 'conqueror horseman', bestowed with bow and crown and riding a white horse, is summoned in the Revelation of St John at the breaking of the first seal and sent to vanquish nations and empires immediately prior to the Last Judgement.¹²² In the Book of Revelation, just as in Baader's wider artistic practice, the sealed 'text' plays a pivotal role, as the opening of the first seal conjures the vision of the horsemen. The suggested identity of Baader as a conqueror

horseman reinforces a reading of the action as an infiltration by the bombastic figure of the Oberdada, tasked with the deliverance of divine justice. Among the four horsemen, the first presents an appropriate subject for Baader. This rider's identity is most widely disputed out of the four horsemen, with commentators variously interpreting him as Christ, a rival pagan god, or the Anti-Christ.¹²³ According to historian John Court, the most plausible identity of this fearsome rider is Mithras, the celestial 'unconquerable' warrior god of a tauroctonic mystery cult.¹²⁴ While the extent of Baader's interest in this New Testament figure is unknown, a pagan, warring sun god-cum-Antichrist seems a fitting identity for the Oberdada. This reading is consistent with Bergius' classification of the mysticism displayed by Baader as 'monistic-pantheistic'.¹²⁵

Baader's work repeatedly includes the motif of a white steed of Dada with the 'Oberdada' as its triumphant rider. For example, it re-emerges in a publicly published letter by Baader. The letter dates from more than a year after the National Assembly intervention and was addressed to the Dresden-based circus and zoo director Hans Stosch-Sarrasani (1873-1934).¹²⁶ From the late nineteenth century, zoos functioned as spectacular displays of colonial and imperial domination. Baader himself had worked on the design of a zoo in Berlin for circus director and exotic animal trader Carl Hagenbeck in 1912.¹²⁷ In his letter to the ringmaster Sarrasani, Baader offers a striking vision of the Dada horse:

The steed Dada is totally white, painted, has green eyes and looks like a cross between a German tank and a little French Christmas rocking horse. It is eight metres tall, spits fire from its mouth and nostrils ... Around its upper body is a gallery ... From here ... the supreme Dada will hurl his poems and speeches ...¹²⁸

In his public correspondence, Baader transforms the horse from a destructive servant of the apocalypse into a mechanical colossus. This imagery again appears to be partly derived from the otherworldly mechanical-architectural constructions populating the works of Scheerbart.¹²⁹ Baader thus developed the figure of the white horse into an ideological instrument for imposing his reign of 'Panem et Circenses' (bread and circuses).¹³⁰ In this imagined scenario, just as in the National Assembly, Baader also proclaims ideological doctrine from a balcony. However, in the fantastical setting described in the correspondence, his is the voice of a ruling tyrant, not an unknown eccentric shouting from the margins.

On 20 January 1921, during a carnival ball hosted by Baader just over two months after the public exchange with Sarrasani, the white horse surfaced once again in the Marmorsaal at Zoologischer Garten. The horse was realised as a ramshackle, mobile sculpture, painted white and constructed from papier-mâché. Bergius has interpreted this makeshift sculpture as a visual pun on one of the translations of the word 'Dada', the French name for a hobby horse.¹³¹ During a simultaneous poem performed by Baader from a stand, the model horse was wheeled around the ballroom, as if animated

by Oberdada's incantations.¹³² Given Baader's architectural training, the steed appears to have been executed in an unnecessarily dilettantish manner. The metamorphosis of this allegorical steed recalls a discussion by anthropologist David Graeber on the ongoing tradition of creating giant puppets for protests. Graeber proposes that while the ephemerality of these carnivalesque and often humorous puppets undoubtedly parodies monumentality, the very act of erecting totemic statues has the effect of materialising new values for a prefigured society.¹³³ Judging from an underwhelmed review of the ball in the *Courier*, Baader's sculpture left the impression of a tragicomic caricature akin to the protest puppets analysed by Graeber. Moreover, his sculpture contrasted greatly with the triumphant, conquering horse depicted in his correspondence to Sarrasani and the *Green Corpse* handbill. After the National Assembly action, the colossal white horse in the letter and the sculpture at the carnival ball demonstrate the range of interpretation we can apply to the white horse in the *Green Corpse* handbill. Baader's action encapsulated this range.¹³⁴ It was simultaneously a deeply tragicomic display of the limited political power of the Dadaists, but also an instance of direct action which aimed to illuminate the cracks in the constitutional foundations of the Republic and forewarn of their consequences.

Conclusion

To conclude, the reconstruction of both the 'inner' and 'outer' frame aspects of Baader's intervention reveals the need to interrogate established historiographies, as these can contribute to the mythologisation surrounding such avant-garde groups, obscuring their genuine cultural contributions. Through his politically radical intervention, Baader distributed Dada literature containing threats of violence against the government in the high-security setting of the Weimar Republic's first parliament. Scenographic analysis of the 'inner frame', focusing on Baader's position in the tribunal gallery, reveals how the performance constituted an outright rejection of the passive, observer role assigned to the public in parliament. Through both the contents of the *Green Corpse* handbill and his facetious accounts of the assembly intervention, Baader framed his performance as an act of anarchist pseudo-violence intended to rebuff the pacifism of Activist Expressionism. His act protested the fact that even the assembly's most left-wing members voted in favour of a censorial article in the new constitution.

The specific timing of the release of the handbills also confirms that the performance was not a simplistic, sensationalist stunt. Instead, as has been argued here, Baader's action constituted a targeted critique of a constitutional clause, which threatened to criminalise avant-garde activities. Baader's intervention subsequently underscored the wider illegitimacy of the incoming government at the precise moment that it ratified old prejudices into the new constitution. Through the same reem of news headlines which Baader compressed in his *HADO* piece, the Berlin Dadaists quickly

grasped how the ‘ruptured time’ of the war did not herald an ‘apocalypse’ in the sense of the death of an old world order. Rather, it drove imperial ideology to mutate and re-emerge in the visage of the *Spießler* (bourgeois philistine). Baader reacted by delivering his flyer and *HADO* advertisements to the assembly, selecting the minister Naumann as his conduit. In so doing, he devised the performed apogee of his correspondences with political, imperial or religious dignitaries. In the guise of a vengeful horseman of the apocalypse, his handbills and doomsday book advertisements in hand, Baader burlesqued this state of affairs as a means of agitating for genuine revolution.

Baader co-opted political proceedings to perform a critique of regime change and power, a theme which the text in his handbill grotesquely exaggerated to fantastical new heights through violent, millenarian language. The marbling together of the sublime vision of the ‘Oberdada’ as the arbiter of the Last Judgement and references to contemporary politics evokes Erickson’s observation that, ‘rather than a cultural rebellion grafted onto a political rebellion, the two are inextricably elided in Dada activity’.¹³⁵ Ultimately, then, this instance of avant-garde extremism seen in the National Assembly is significant for deepening our understanding of the Dada movement in Berlin. It illustrates how Baader’s millenarianism was not an eccentric flourish to be glossed over or dismissed. Nor was it the manifestation of mental disturbance, staged or otherwise. Rather, monist ideas, or variants thereof, were fundamental to Dadaism. Sheppard surmised this notion in his discussion on the role of mysticism in Dada. As concluded by Sheppard, ‘where Christian mysticism must ultimately tend toward a distinction between God and Creation, soul and matter, Dada is much more monistic, affirming the unity of the life force and the material world’.¹³⁶ In his *Vierzehn Briefe Christi* (*Fourteen Letters of Christ*), published on the eightieth birthday of Haeckel in 1914, Baader accordingly identified Christianity’s core fallacy as its separation of the ‘true world’ of immortal heaven from the ‘apparent world’ of earthly mortality.¹³⁷ Through his action, Baader deployed an idiosyncratic millenarianism, scripting and delivering his own cosmic portent at the dawn of Germany’s first democracy.

- Johannes Baader, ‘Dada-Spiel’, *Der Dada* 1, June 1919, quoted in Hanne Bergius, ‘Zur phantastischen Politik der Antipolitik Johannes Baaders’, in Hanne Bergius, Norbert Miller and Karl Riha (eds.) *Johannes Baader, Oberdada: Schriften, Manifeste, Flugblätter, Billets, Werke und Taten* (Gießen: Anabas Verlag, 1977), p. 185. ‘Dada ist der Schöpfer aller Dinge und Gott und die Weltrevolution und das Weltgericht in einem gleichzeitig. Es ist keine Fiktion, sondern den Menschen greifbar.’ Translations author’s own, unless otherwise stated.
- Before 21 August 1919, the parliament met in the court theatre in Weimar, which was known after 19 January 1919 as the Deutsches Nationaltheater. See Heiko Bollmeyer, *Der steinige Weg zur Demokratie: Die Weimarer Nationalversammlung zwischen Kaiserreich und Republik*, vol. 13 of Wolfgang Braungart et al. (eds.), *Historische Politikforschung* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2007), pp. 200; 202.
- ‘Deutsche Nationalversammlung, Weiterberatung der Verfassung’, *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 17 July 1919, p. 3. ‘Hier ist Material für den Abg. Naumann!’ According to Baader’s account, he also read out some of the contents of the *Green Corpse* handbill. See Johannes Baader, ‘Reklame für mich’ (Advertisement for myself), *Der Dada* 2, December 1919, p. 7. University of Iowa Digital Library, accessed 22 September 2019, https://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/islandora/object/uiu%3Adada_25147.
- ‘Nationalversammlung’, p. 3. ‘Der Zettelwerfer entfernte sich erregt sprechend, ohne weiter behindert zu werden.’ Stephen C. Foster, ‘Event Structures and Art Situations’, in *‘Event’ Arts and Art Events*, Stephen C. Foster (ed.), vol. 57 of *Studies in the Fine Arts: Avant-Garde* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1988), p. 9.
- ‘Nationalversammlung’, p. 3. ‘Während der Abstimmung warf plötzlich ein Besucher des dritten Ranges ein großes Paket Flugblätter und graue Karten.’
- Hanne Bergius, *Dada Triumphs! Dada Berlin, 1917-1923, Artistry of Polarities*, in vol. 5 of Stephen C. Foster (ed.), *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada* (New York and London: G.K. Hall & Co., 2003), pp. 121-2. The handbooks, of which at least three were produced, are now lost. See Hanne Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas: Die Berliner Dadaisten und ihre Aktionen* (Gießen: Anabas-Verlag, 1989), p. 154.
- Johannes Baader, ‘Grüne Leiche: Sonderausgabe’ [front and reverse], 1919, Kunsthau Zurich, Zurich. The name ‘Oberdada’ was coined as a slight by editor of the *Weltbühne*, Siegfried Jacobsohn, and reappropriated by Baader. See Michael White, *Generation Dada: The Berlin Avant-Garde and the First World War* (New Haven and New York: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 225-6.
- Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (1965), Michael White (ed.), (trans.) David Britt (London: Thames and Hudson, 2016), p. 126. Richter refers to the title of the handbill as ‘Das grüne Pferd’ (the Green Horse), conflating the two phrases “‘Grüne Leiche” A.e.’ and ‘im Sattel des weissen Pferdes Dada’. Richter also conflates the intervention in July with the earlier circulation of the handbill at the Haus Rheingold, Berlin, on the day of the assembly’s inauguration on 6 February 1919, an elision replicated in some of the secondary literature.
- The action is briefly referenced in Matthew Biro, *The Dada Cyborg: Visions of the New Human in Weimar Berlin* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 63; Adrian Sudhalter, ‘Johannes Baader and the Demise of Wilhelmine Culture: Architecture, Dada, and Social Critique, 1875-1920’, (PhD. diss., University of New York, 2005), p. 250, f. 65; and Hanne Bergius, *Dada Triumphs*, pp. 57-8.
- ‘Deutsche Nationalversammlung’, pp. 2-3. During the debate there was, ‘Beifall rechts, Unruhe links, Zuruf: Scharfrichter!’ (Applause from the right, noise from the right, calls of ‘executioner!’). Accusations of government corruption also caused ‘langandauernde lärmende Unterbrechungen’ (long, noisy interruptions).
- Stephen C. Foster, ‘The Prerequisite Text’, *Visible Language* 21 (1987): p. 329. References to a ‘ceremony’ are due to a conflation of two separate interventions by Baader, see note 8.
- Foster, ‘Art Situations’, p. 6.
- David Hopkins and Michael White, introduction to *Virgin Microbe: Essays on Dada*, David Hopkins and Michael White (eds.), vol. 36 of *Avant-Garde & Modernism Studies* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014), p. 3.
- Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 17.
- Katharina Hoins, ‘Johannes Baader’s Postwar Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama and German War Exhibitions during World War I’, *Dada/Surrealism* 21 (2017): p. 9, accessed 3 March 2021, doi.org/10.17077/0084-9537.1336. Michael White, ‘Johannes Baader’s Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama: the Mysticism of the Mass Media’, *Modernism/modernity* 8.4 (2001): pp. 590-600.
- Debbie Lewer, ‘Dada, Carnival and Revolution’, in *Regarding the Popular: Modernism, the Avant-Garde and High and Low Culture*, vol. 2 of *European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies*, Sascha Bru and Peter Nicholls (eds.) (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), p. 107-11.
- Richter, *Anti-Art*, pp. 125-6.
- Foster, ‘Art Situations’, p. 9.
- Sudhalter, ‘Baader’, [note 9].
- Foster, introduction to *‘Event’ Arts*, p. xiv; Foster, ‘Art Situations’, p. 5.
- See Hans Baumann (Richard Huelsenbeck), ‘A personal Dada Matter’, in *The Dada Almanac* (1920), (trans. and ed.) Malcom Green (London: Atlas Press, 1993), pp. 37-43. For Baader’s response, see Johannes Baader, ‘A public instead of a private matter’, *Dada Almanac*, p. 43. The feud is further discussed in Sudhalter, ‘Baader’, pp. 249-52; and in White, *Generation Dada*, pp. 228-30.
- Richard Huelsenbeck to Tristan Tzara, undated letter, February 1919, trans. in White, *Generation Dada*, p. 229, repr. in Richard Sheppard (ed.), *Zürich – Dadaco – Dadaglobe: The Correspondence between Richard Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara and Kurt Wolff (1916-1924)* (Tayport: Hutton Press, 1982), p. 14.
- Baumann (Huelsenbeck), *Dada Almanac*, p. 37.
- John D. Erickson, ‘The Cultural Politics of Dada’, in Stephen C. Foster (ed.), *Dada: The Coordinates of Cultural Politics*, vol. 1 of *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada* (G.K. Hall & Co.: New York, 1996), p. 25.
- Sudhalter, ‘Baader’, p. 134; see also pp. 15-17.
- Sudhalter, ‘Baader’, pp. 133-6.
- Sudhalter, ‘Baader’, p. 136.
- Hopkins and White, *Virgin Microbe*, p. 6. See Theodor W. Adorno, *The stars down to earth: and other essays on the irrational in culture*, Stephen Crook (ed.) (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 172-80.
- Andréi B. Nakov, ‘Dada ist eine Geisteshaltung’, in Eva Züchner (ed.), *Der Deutsche Spiesser ärgert sich: Raoul Hausmann (1886-1971)* (ex. cat. Berlinsche Galerie, Berlin, 1994), p. 36. ‘[P]hilosophische Bestrebungen mystischen Charakters [ähnelten] einer philosophisch-mystischen Irreführung des Nationalsozialismus’.
- Lewer, ‘Carnival’, p. 109.
- Baader, ‘Lieber Hitler!’, in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 146. ‘Es ist nicht meine Schuld, wenn ... Ihres Ministeriums für Volksaufklärung ... so mangelhaft aufgebaut ist, dass sie Ihnen nicht melden kann, was wirklich hier ... los ist.’
- Richard Sheppard, *Modernism—Dada—Postmodernism*, Marjorie Perloff et al. (eds.), vol. 13 of *Avant-Garde & Modernism Studies* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000), p. 280.
- Sheppard, *Modernism—Dada*, p. 280.
- Sudhalter, ‘Baader’; Bergius, ‘Phantastischen Politik’, pp. 181-91; Bergius, *Lachen Dadas*, pp. 144-65; White, ‘Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama’, pp. 583-602; Hoins, ‘War Exhibitions’.
- Bollmeyer, *Steinige Weg*, p. 204.
- Hans Wilderrotter, ‘Der lange Weg zur Demokratie: Stationen deutscher Parlamentsgeschichte’, in Wolfgang Kessel, *Der Deutsche Bundestag im Reichstagsgebäude*, Georga Rauer (ed.) (Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag, 2018), p. 85.

37. Foster, 'Prerequisite Text', p. 329. For a contemporary account of the new government's theatricality, *see* Brigid Doherty, 'Figures of the Pseudorevolution', *October* 84 (1998): pp. 69-70.
38. Carl Einstein, 'Pleite plotzt euch an, restlos', *Die Pleite* 1, March 1919, p. 1. 'Nationalversammlung der Wasserleichen, Meeting der bremsenden Jammergreise; quasselnd quollen ihre flinken Münder aus vierjährigem Blutschlamm auf ... Brachte euer Wortdrusch uns Brot?'
39. Gaard Kets and James Muldoon, 'The "Forgotten" German Revolution: A Conceptual Map', in Gaard Kets and James Muldoon (eds.), *The German Revolution and Political Theory* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 5.
40. Bollmeyer, *Steinige Weg*, p. 202.
41. Bollmeyer, *Steinige Weg*, pp. 201-2; Kessel, *Bundestag*, p. 44.
42. Foster, 'Art Situations', p. 9.
43. Roy F. Allen, 'From Energy to Idea: the Origins of "Movement" in the Event', in *'Event' Arts*, p. 67.
44. Richter, *Anti-Art*, p. 125.
45. Seth Taylor, *Left-wing Nietzscheans: the politics of German Expressionism, 1910-1920*, vol. 22 of *Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung*, Mazzino Montinari et al. (eds.) (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 81-2.
46. *See* Kurt Hiller, 'Ein deutsches Herrenhaus', *Das Ziel*, Jahrbuch 2 (1918): pp. 388; 410-11; 419.
47. Taylor, *Nietzscheans*, p. 80.
48. Bergius, 'Phantastischen Politik', p. 189. '... [R]estitution der feudal-monarchistischen Kreise und der nationalen Kräfte.'
49. Baader, *Grüne Leiche: Dadaisten gegen Weimar*. '... Und dann wollen wir uns nicht mehr bloß mit dem Instinkt, der mechanischen Zielsicherheit der unbewußt ahnungsvollen Masse bescheiden, sondern das persönliche Genie s.ch.n (suchen) gehen, das wir in irgend einer Schichte unseres Volkes endlich doch und doch hervorgebracht haben müssen.'
50. Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada*, p. 255. A postcard sent by Hausmann to Tzara on 2 February 1919, referring to an upcoming 'Dadaists against Weimar' soirée on February 6, indicates that Hausmann was at the very least aware of Baader's plans for an event in the Haus Rheingold. Reproduced in Richard Sheppard (ed.) *New Studies in Dada: Essays and Documents* (Driffield: Hutton Press Ltd., 1981), p. 108.
51. Simon Richter, introduction to *The Literature of Weimar Classicism*, Simon Richter (ed.) (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), pp. 3-44.
52. Bollmeyer, *Steinige Weg*, p. 203. Between 1906 and 1908, the court theatre was rebuilt in a neoclassical style befitting of Weimar Classicism.
53. Friedrich Schiller, 'The theatre considered as a moral institution', (trans.) John Sigerson and John Chambliss, The Schiller Institute, Washington, date accessed 30 September 2020, https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/transl/schil_theatremoral.html. These ideas were first expressed in a lecture held in 1784 and subsequently published in a 1785 essay.
54. Friedrich Schiller, 'The Artists' (1789), (trans.) Marianna Wertz, *Fidelio Journal of Poetry, Science and Statecraft* 4.1 (1995): p. 60. President Friedrich Ebert also referenced Weimar Classicism in his inaugural assembly speech on February 6: 'Now the spirit of Weimar, the spirit of the great philosophers and poets, must once again has to? imbue our lives.' (Jetzt muß der Geist von Weimar, der Geist der großen Philosophen und Dichter, wieder unser Leben erfüllen.), quoted in Bollmeyer, *Steinige Weg*, p. 199, n. 67.
55. Johannes Baader, 1919, (trans.) Green, in *Dada Almanac*, p. 139. Green notes that Baader sent the portrait after the Chancellery refused Baader's requests for a meeting.
56. Baader, *Grüne Leiche: Dadaisten gegen Weimar*. 'Wir werden Weimar in die Luft sprengen ... Es wird niemand und nichts geschont werden.'
57. The 'coup' is poorly recorded; beyond Baader's fantastical account, there is no evidence of what took place. *See*
- Sudhalter, 'Baader', p. 250.
58. Baader, in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, pp. 50-1. 'Mit ganz Weimar ist auch der Ministerpräsident Scheidemann in die Luft geflogen ... Die Beerdigung der am 6. Februar in Weimar verunglückten Nationalversammlung wird auf dem Friedhof Dada unter großem Gepränge erfolgen.'
59. Johannes Baader, letter to Tristan Tzara, 12 December 1920, (trans.) in Sudhalter, 'Baader', p. 240.
60. *See* Constance Bantman, 'The Era of Propaganda by the Deed', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism*, Carl Levy and Matthew S. Adams (eds.) (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), pp. 371-87.
61. Erickson, 'Cultural Politics', pp. 23-4.
62. Erickson, 'Cultural Politics', pp. 23-5. On the relationship between Dada and anarchism, *see* Hubert van den Berg, *Avantgarde und Anarchismus: Dada in Zürich und Berlin* (Heidelberg: Heidelberg Universitätsverlag, 1999), pp. 157-243; Daniela Padularosa, 'Anti-Art? Dada and Anarchy' in *Anarchism and the Avant-Garde: Radical Arts and Politics in Perspective*, Carolin Kosuch (ed.), *Avant-Garde Critical Studies*, Hubert van den Berg et al., vol. 38 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), pp. 99-126.
63. Richter, *Anti-Art*, p. 127.
64. Baader, 'Reklame', pp. 5-7. die Präsidentschaft des Weltalls ... Der Präsident des Erdballs sitzt im Sattel des weissen Pferdes Dada.
65. Baader, 'Reklame', p. 5.
66. Baader, 'Reklame', p. 7. 'Ich [Baader] lachte über den deutschen Sozialismus, Kommunismus, Nationalismus ...'
67. The article is no. 117 in the debate and no. 118 in the final constitution. On 31 July 1919, two weeks after Baader's action, the Weimar constitution passed into law, and on August 14 these changes came into effect.
68. 'Nationalversammlung', pp. 2-3. 'Redner [Abg. Dr. Cohn, USPD] führt weiter aus, daß der Vorstand der UFA [Universum Film-Aktien Gesellschaft] im engsten Zusammenhang mit der Regierung arbeitet, bei der Reichskanzlei bestehe sogar ein Filmdezernat, das aus dem Fonds des Reichspräsidenten, einer Art Korruptionsfonds bestritten werde.'
69. 'Nationalversammlung', p. 3. For example, Foster comments on how Baader wished to construct a 'sensational incident to report' in Foster, 'Prerequisite Text', p. 329.
70. Baader, in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 46. "'Was darf Satire?'" lautete eine Frage, die neulich durch die Presse ging. Die Antwort hieß: "Alles!'" This press release is also cited in White, 'Commentary' in Richter, *Anti-Art*, p. 267.
71. 'Nationalversammlung', p. 3. 'Ruschke (Dem.): "Zur Bekämpfung der Entartungen der Lichtspiele ..." ... Könen (U.S.) "... moralischen Niedergang des Volkes." Historian Robert Beachy notes how these suggestions were likely formulated in response to the film *Anders als die Andern* (*Different from the Others*), which premiered in May 1919. The film depicts the plight of a criminalised gay man, and was produced by the sexologist and gay rights advocate, Magnus Hirschfeld. *See* Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), p. 166.
72. Friedrich Ebert et al., 'Aufruf des Rates der Volksbeauftragten an das deutsche Volk vom 12. November 1918', repr. in Michael Kotulla, *Deutsches Verfassungsrecht 1806–1918: Eine Dokumentensammlung nebst Einführungen*, vol. 7 (Berlin: Springer, 2006), p. 1326. 'Eine Zensur findet nicht statt. Die Theaterzensur wird aufgehoben. 4. Meinungsäußerung in Wort und Schrift ist frei.'
73. Bergius, *Dada Triumphs*, pp. 57-8. White, 'Commentary' in Richter, *Anti-Art*, p. 267.
74. Weimarer Verfassung, Artikel 118: Meinungsfreiheit, (trans.) in Sascha Bru, *Democracy, Law and the Modernist Avant-Garde: Writing in the State of Exception* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 167.
75. Weimarer Verfassung, Artikel 118, in Bru, *Democracy*, p. 167.
76. 'Deutsche Nationalversammlung', p. 3. '... [A]uch der

- Kabarets und gewisser großstädtischer Presserzeugnisse, die zum Teil einen direkt pornographischen Charakter haben.'
77. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt (ed.), (trans.) Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 217-51.
78. Raoul Hausmann, 'Synthetisches Cino der Malerei', 1918, in *Raoul Hausmann: Bilanz der Feierlichkeit: Texte bis 1933*, Michael Erlhoff (ed.), vol. 1, *Frühe Texte der Moderne*, Jörg Drews et al. (eds.) (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1982), pp. 14-17. Biro, *Dada Cyborg*, p. 87, f. 56.
79. Biro, *Dada Cyborg*, p. 88.
80. Andrés Mario Zervigón, *John Heartfield and the Agitated Image: Photography, Persuasion, and the Rise of Avant-Garde Photomontage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 98-111.
81. 'Nationalversammlung', pp. 2-3. These views were expressed by members from the arch-conservative German National People's Party (DNVP), liberal German Democratic Party (DDP), centrist Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) and left-wing Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany (USPD).
82. 'Nationalversammlung', p. 3. 'Die Auswüchse der Lichtspiele seien nichts weiter als Auswüchse unserer kapitalistischen Wirtschaftsweise...'
83. Barbara McCloskey, 'Teach your children well: Hermynia Zur Mühlen, George Grosz, and the art of radical pedagogy in Germany between the world wars' in Barbara McCloskey, Deborah Ascher and Elisabeth Otto (eds.), *Art and Resistance in Germany* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 87.
84. *See* Sherwin Simmons, 'War, Revolution, and the Transformation of the German Humour Magazine, 1917-27', *Art Journal* 52.1 (1993): pp. 46-50.
85. White, *Generation Dada*, p. 163.
86. White, *Generation Dada*, p. 228.
87. Baader, 'Reklame', p. 7. 'Somit fiel der Kapitalismus in sich zusammen ... Eine ganz neue Weltordnung erhob sich ... und dies dankt die Welt allein ... [der] Oberdada ... Leiter des Weltgerichts.'
88. Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada*, p. 271. *See* Richard, Huelsenbeck, 'Ende der Welt', in *Phantastischen Gebete* (Berlin: Malik-Verlag, 1920), and in *Der Dada* 2, December 1919, p. 4. Huelsenbeck's poem was partly inspired by Expressionist Jakob van Hoddis' 1911 poem 'Weltende'. For more on Expressionist engagements with apocalypse, *see* Eberhard Roters, *The Apocalyptic Landscapes of Ludwig Meidner*, Susan L. Caroselli (ed.) (ex. cat., Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, 1989) and Fredrick S. Levine, *The Apocalyptic Vision: The Art of Franz Marc as German Expressionism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).
89. Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada*, p. 280.
90. Richard Huelsenbeck, 'Ein Besuch im Cabaret Dada', *Der Dada* 3, April 1920, p. 8. '... da begann der große Einzug des dadaistischen Weltgerichts ... Unter einem mächtigen Baldachin brachten sie ... Baader.'
91. For explicit mentions of the apocalypse in Baader's collected works, *see* Baader in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, pp. 34-5; 37; 43; 55-57; 87; 92; 94.
92. Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada*, p. 276; Bergius, *Lachen Dadas*, pp. 151-4; Bergius, 'Phantastischen Politik', p. 187; Bergius, *Dada Triumphs*, pp. 122; 260-7. White, 'Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama', p. 587. White, *Generation Dada*, p. 251. White identified how an apocalyptic vision in the Book of Matthew is used in Baader's 'Ak. 12' document, a clipping of which Baader reused in his self-portrait in *Der Dada* 2, *Das ist die Erscheinung des Oberdada in den Wolken des Himmels* (This is the appearance of the Supreme Dada in the Clouds of Heaven). For a transcription of Baader's 'Ak. 12' handbill, *see* Baader in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 35.
93. Lewer, 'Carnival', p. 109.
94. Lewer, 'Carnival' p. 107. This statement was itself taken from Baader, 'Die Acht Weltsätze' (Eight World Statements) 1919, in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 43. 'Es hat angefangen ein neuer Akt der göttlichen Komödie und sein Leitspruch lautet: Die Menschen wissen, daß sie im Himmel sind'.
95. Lewer, 'Carnival', p. 109.
96. Lewer, 'Carnival', p. 109. *See* note 88.
97. *See* Gesellschaft Freie Erde (Johannes Baader), 'Offener Brief an den Kultusminister von Berlin', November 1918, repr. as item 10.112 in vol. 1 of *Hannab Höch: Eine Lebenscollage*, Cornelia Thater-Schulz (ed.) (Berlin: Argon with the Berlinische Galerie, 1989), pp. 454-7.
98. Van den Berg, *Anarchismus*, p. 200. Religionen als Fremdbestimmungen des Einzelnen ... Souveränität des Ich.
99. Sudhalter, 'Baader', p. 185.
100. Sudhalter, 'Baader', pp. 187-9.
101. Baader, 'Ak. 12', c. October 1919, in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 35. 'Weiß man, daß das Kreuz aufstieg in Deutschland, riesengroß aus acht Sternen, an jenem vierten September 1912 an dem der gewesene Kaiser in Zürich gefeiert ward als der Bringer des Weltfriedens. Und am zehnten Dezember 1912 erschien in der Mitte die Jahreszahl: 1914. Dann verschwand das Kreuz und an seine Stelle trat ... die Pyramide der fünf Fixsterne, durch deren offene Spitze der Same der Neugeburt ... strömt.'
102. For his line drawing of this vision, *see* Baader, *Dada Almanac*, p. 102.
103. For a contemporary account of the German Monist League, *see* Otto Herrmann, 'The Monism of the German Monistic League', *The Monist* 23.4 (1913), pp. 543-66.
104. Thomas O. Haakenson, "'The Merely Illusory Paradise of Habits'": Salomo Friedländer, Walter Benjamin, and the Grotesque', *New German Critique* 106 (2009): pp. 119-147. *See also* Bergius, 'Phantastischen Politik', pp. 185-7.
105. Baader, 'Die Acht Weltsätze' (The Eight World Statements), quoted in Lewer, 'Carnival', (trans. Lewer), p. 107.
106. White, 'Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama', p. 597-8.
107. Bergius, *Lachen Dadas*, p. 149. '[C]hiliastische Utopien'.
108. Baader, in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 30. 'Das Ergebnis des jetzt beginnenden Weltkriegs ist seit Millionen von Jahren festgelegt im Rate der Seelen...'
109. White, *Generation Dada*, p. 260. 'Nieder die Kunst! ... DADA ist GROSS ... Und John Hartfield [sic] ist sein Prophet!'
110. Richard Huelsenbeck, 'Die Dadaistische Bewegung: Eine Selbstbiographie', *Die Neue Rundschau* 31.8 (1920): pp. 978-9. 'Die Armen hörten nicht den Ton des Weltgerichts, der, so paradox das klingt, für den Einsichtigen deutlich aus dem Dadaismus herausbrüllte, schrie und tobte. Die große Relativität der Dinge und Ideen, ... der "Untergang des Abendlandes".'
111. Raoul Hausmann to Johannes Baader, 12 September 1918, quoted in Bergius, *Das Lachen Dadas*, p. 152. 'Es stehen in unseren Schriftstücken soviele wirkliche Geheimnisse, Verdichtungen des gesamten Weltgeschehens, soweit es den Menschen betrifft, dass sie auf einmal – nicht verstanden werden können; sie haben aber eine so zukünftige Bedeutung, wie es der Brahmanismus oder Buddhismus oder das Christentum hatte...' Emphasis mine.
112. Foster, 'Prerequisite text', p. 331. Foster's emphasis.
113. Baader to Rector of Berlin University, 21 October 1918, repr. in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 37. 'Weltgericht, meine Herren, ist Wirklichkeit auf dem Erdball. Aber nicht Wilson, der Amerikaner, ist Richter der Welt, sondern der da wiederkam in den Wolken des Himmels zu richten die Toten und die Lebendigen nach dadaistische Grundsätzen.' For another reference to apocalypse and the Treaty of Versailles, *see* Baader, in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 56.
114. Baader in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 40.
115. Foster, 'Art Situations', p. 9.
116. Foster, introduction to *'Event' Arts*, p. xiii.
117. Baader, in Bergius (ed.), *Oberdada*, p. 87. 'Das Buch ist am 16. Juli in Weimar vom Oberdada selbst der Nationalversammlung zum Geschenk angeboten worden. Der Abgeordnete Friedrich Naumann, der das Geschenk

übermitteln sollte, hat sich geweigert und ist deshalb gestorben.’

118. Johannes Baader and Raoul Hausmann, *Club der blauen Milchstrasse*, 1920, photomontage, repr. in Bergius, *Lachen Dadas*, p. 160.

119. White, ‘Plasto-Dio-Dada-Drama’, 599.

120. Baader, ‘Zirkular zum HADO vom 1. Juni 1919’, repr. in *New Studies in Dada*, quoted in Bergius, *Dada Triumphs*, (trans.) Brigitte Pichon, p. 122.

121. Raoul Hausmann, ‘Dada moves, riots and dies in Berlin’, *The Twenties in Berlin: Baader, Grosz, Hausmann, Hüch* (ex. cat. Annely Juda Fine Art, London, 1978), p. 26.

122. 2. Rev 6:2 (King James Bible). ‘And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.’

123. John Court, *Myth and History in the Book of Revelation* (London: Fakenham Press Limited, 1979), pp. 61-2.

124. Court, *Revelation*, p. 61.

125. Bergius, ‘Phantastischen Politik’, p. 182. ‘[M]onistisch-pantheistisch.’

126. Johannes Baader, ‘Sarrasani, das Nilpferd und das Weiße Pferd Dada’, *Neues Berliner 12-Uhr-Mittag-Blatt*, 3 November 1920, repr. in Hanne Bergius, ‘Articles about Dada Berlin in Daily Newspapers: Selected Bibliography’, appendix in Hanne Bergius, ‘Dada Berlin and its Aesthetic of Effects: Playing the Press’, in Harriet Watts (ed.), *Dada and the Press*, vol. 9 of *Crisis and the Arts: The History of Dada*, Stephen Foster (ed.) (New Haven: Thomson and Gale, 2004), p. 109. ‘Der Präsident des Erd- und Weltballs sitzt im Sattel des weissen Pferdes Dada!’.

127. Sudhalter, ‘Baader’, pp. 165-6.

128. Baader, ‘Sarrasani’, pp. 109-110. ‘Das Roß Dada ist ganz weiß, gestrichen, hat grüne Augen und sieht aus wie eine Kreuzung von deutschem Tank und französischen Weihnachtsschaukelpferdchen. Es ist acht Meter hoch, speit Feuer aus Maul und Nüstern ... Rings um den Oberleib läuft eine Galerie ... Von ihr aus wird der Oberdada seine Dichtungen und Reden ... schleudern.’

129. Kate Armond, ‘A Paper Paradise: Ernst Bloch and the Crystal Chain’, in *Utopia: The Avant-Garde, Modernism and (Im)possible Life*, David Ayers, Benedikt Hjärtarson, Tomi Huttunen and Harri Veivo (eds.), vol. 4 of *European Avant-Garde and Modernism Studies* (Berlin and Boston Walter de Gruyter, 2015), p. 260.

130. Baader, ‘Sarrasani’, p. 109.

131. Bergius, *Lachen Dadas*, p. 148.

132. Ri. [sic], ‘Dadaisten-Ball’, *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, January 22 1921, p. 7. ‘... Baader von eine Tribüne mitten im Saal sich die Kehle wund schrie, ... und das riesenhafte, aus Pappe geschnittene „weiße Pferd“ häufig herumgefahren wurde.’

133. David Graeber, ‘On the Phenomenology of Giant Puppets: Broken Windows, Imaginary Jars of Urine, and the Cosmological Role of the Police in American Culture’, in *Possibilities: Essays on Hierarchy, Rebellion and Desire* (Edinburgh, Oakland: AK Press, 2007), pp. 375-418.

134. Ri., ‘Dadaisten-Ball’, p. 7. ‘... eine Tanzveranstaltung ... wie tausend andere ... Es war banal.’

135. Erickson, ‘Cultural Politics’, p. 23.

136. Sheppard, *Modernism-Dada*, p. 281.

137. Bergius, *Lachen Dadas*, p. 150. Sudhalter, ‘Baader’, p. 187.

‘The Abbey in Ruins and Ablaze’: Staging Disaster at the 1924 & 1925 British Empire Exhibitions

TOBAH AUKLAND-PECK

In July 1924, Westminster was bombed daily at the British Empire Exhibition. The venue of its ruin was the Admiralty Theatre in the British Government Pavilion. This space was outfitted with the latest technology; audiences were thrilled by electrically powered miniature ships and cinematic lighting effects. The bombing of Westminster was part of a show organized by the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the War Office, a spectacle of ruin called *The Defences of London*. It opened with a dramatically lit nighttime scene of the House of Parliament and Big Ben. Suddenly, fighter planes from an unnamed enemy descended. As they dropped a sustained barrage of bombs, the familiar outlines of government buildings crumbled, leaving a smoking ruin in their place.

Once the dust had settled, the show restarted; Westminster reverted to its original form as if it had not been decimated moments before. This time, the bombers were repelled by blazing anti-aircraft guns and a squad of RAF planes that swooped in to defend the city and avert destruction. A standing air force, *The Defences of London* argued, was key to meeting the existential threat of modern warfare. The local setting of this dystopian fiction was an aberration in the triumphant tone of the Empire Exhibition. A perilous future in which Westminster—and the British identity that it represented—could be destroyed exhibits the resonance of apocalyptic imagery with the cultural climate of mid-1920s Britain.

The British Empire Exhibition, located in Wembley (a suburb of London), opened in April 1924. It was initially intended to last a year, but its popularity, as well as the significant government expenditure during the first year, compelled the organizers to extend it for a second season in 1925.¹ The 216 acres of the exhibition site purported to encompass the power, products, and people of an empire that covered nearly a quarter of the globe.² Dominions and colonies were spread out over a series of pavilions, while the commercial interests of the empire were represented in the Palace of Engineering and the Palace of Industry. The Empire Stadium could hold an audience of 30,000 and was host to sports games, pageants, and military exercises. In 1925, it was also the venue of a life-sized iteration of the imagined aerial attack on London; *The Defences of London* reborn in open air. *London Defended*, this larger sequel with actual planes, was billed as a ‘stirring Torchlight and Searchlight display’.³ In the aerial bombardment, enemy airplanes (played by RAF fighter planes) were successfully rebuffed by RAF planes (playing themselves), though not before two towers on the stadium floor were set alight with incendiary bombs. The display ended with a reenactment of the Great Fire of London of 1666 during which a model of the Old St. Paul’s Cathedral was consumed by flames.

These three episodes of imagined and historical urban apocalypse—the attack on Westminster at the Admiralty Theatre, the RAF display during *London Defended*, and the recreation of the Great Fire of 1666—used the beauty and existential terror of sublime spectacle to instruct the audience in the conventions of British civic duty. In the face of disaster, the performances urged good morale, adherence to government

decisions, and calm. This chapter demonstrates that the behavior modeled in the shows was a corrective to an underlying concern: that social chaos could emerge from the disruption of apocalyptic experience. In the aftermath of urban disasters (including historical examples such as the 1666 fire and the 1834 fire in the Houses of Parliament), there was a backlash against those who agitated for systematic social change, including religious and political dissenters. Instability and physical violence spurred a fear—on the part of politicians, the media, and the public—of internal conflict. Following the catastrophic events, it was thought, populist groups could seize the opportunity to revolt against establishment institutions. Challenges to the status quo, such as those that would materialize at the Empire Exhibition during an early worker’s strike, became a greater threat when seen through the lens of the nation’s potential vulnerability.

The Wembley exhibition ground was filled with objects that distilled imperial and civic engagement into a tangible experience. In this context, the image of the Houses of Parliament in *The Defences of London* was a symbol for British power.⁴ Yet *The Defences of London* and *London Defended* demonstrated an inward-looking fear of political and societal change that conflicted with the global assumptions of the Empire Exhibition. In this way, the themes of the displays extend the tension between the British nation and the wider world that, according to Andrew Thompson, defined the three major London exhibitions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: 1851, 1924/25, and 1951.⁵ The external narratives proposed by the exhibition were clear: Britain could eschew the typical ‘world’s fair’ because the borders of the British Empire encompassed the world. Scenarios that visualized Westminster’s destruction, however, evoked several contemporaneous threats to Britain’s social and political integrity that were also undercurrents in the spectacular optimism of the fair.

This chapter establishes that the apocalyptic performances alluded to three key conflicts: the continued reverberations of the First World War, the dissolution of Britain’s Empire, and the internal threat of class-based political disputes. The productions suggested, I argue, that without a significant change in domestic defence policies, London (or the ‘heart of Empire’ as it was sometimes called) could be physically and ideologically exposed.⁶ I propose that the visual depiction of the future apocalypse gained effectiveness through a relationship to historical events, including devastating fires in London 1666 and 1834 and the more recent World War I Zeppelin attacks. These occasions provided a pictorial and symbolic precedent for a future in which the same ruin could be wrought, not by natural forces or accident, but by a politically motivated attack. These shows leveraged the experience of immersive spectatorship to unify visitors, steeped in this past and aware of the geographical proximity of Wembley and London, against the unknown enemy of the future.

This chapter will first situate the visual strategies of *The Defences of London* in the context of the Government Pavilion and Admiralty Theatre. I will go on to show that *The Defences of London* responded to and extended the tropes of apocalyptic fiction,

especially speculative narratives related to the Zeppelin attacks of the First World War. The performance reinterpreted these written themes in visual form. Turning to the 1925 *London Defended* show, I relate the full-size aerial spectacle to accounts of British aerial power in the colonial realm. The next section highlights the class conflicts of the Empire Exhibition through the 1924 Wembley worker strike. Finally, I draw on histories and images of the Great Fire of 1666 and the fire in the Houses of Parliament in 1834 to establish that natural disasters bring with them the fear of social unrest. This chapter concludes that the narratives put forth by both Wembley performances incorporated similar political implications.

‘Pictorial Realism’: The Admiralty Theatre

The Government Pavilion, home to the Admiralty Theatre, crowned one of the primary axes of the exhibition grounds. The critic for *The Architectural Review* noted that it served as an ‘index to the volume’ that was the exhibition.⁷ The colonial pavilions, like those of India or Australia, primarily exhibited raw materials, cultural artifacts, local crafts, and exported goods. The Government Pavilion, on the other hand, projected imperial might as an accomplishment of English bureaucratic hegemony. A range of government departments contributed exhibits, with topics ranging from the abolition of tropical disease to weather reporting.⁸ The branches of the military—the enforcer of these bureaucratic projects—also had a significant presence, which included the much-admired Admiralty Theatre.

Critics emphasized the impressive size of the Admiralty Theatre stage, which rivalled that of Covent Garden. They were, however, careful to tout its practicality. *The Times* wrote

One can scarcely believe that the stage of the Admiralty Theatre is among the largest anywhere ... But scepticism gives way under the figures of actual measurement. The Wembley stage looks relatively small because unnecessary top space is cut away. It is a model, as some hold, of the stage of the future—long, low, workmanlike.⁹

As the venue for reenactments of historical battles, in addition to the speculative drama of *The Defences of London*, it was necessary to distance the Admiralty Theatre from the entertainment of conventional theatre. The ‘workmanlike’ stage could, instead, immerse its audience in a substantive pedagogical narrative and perform a role in educating British citizens.

The Times also pointed to the advantage that the Admiralty Theatre enjoyed over the new technology of the moving picture. They claimed that its dynamic interplay of light, sound, and image overcame the sensorial lack inherent in black and white cinema.¹⁰ The Government Pavilion planning committee evidently agreed, and they scrapped a plan for a separate cinema in favour of centralizing programs in the Admiralty

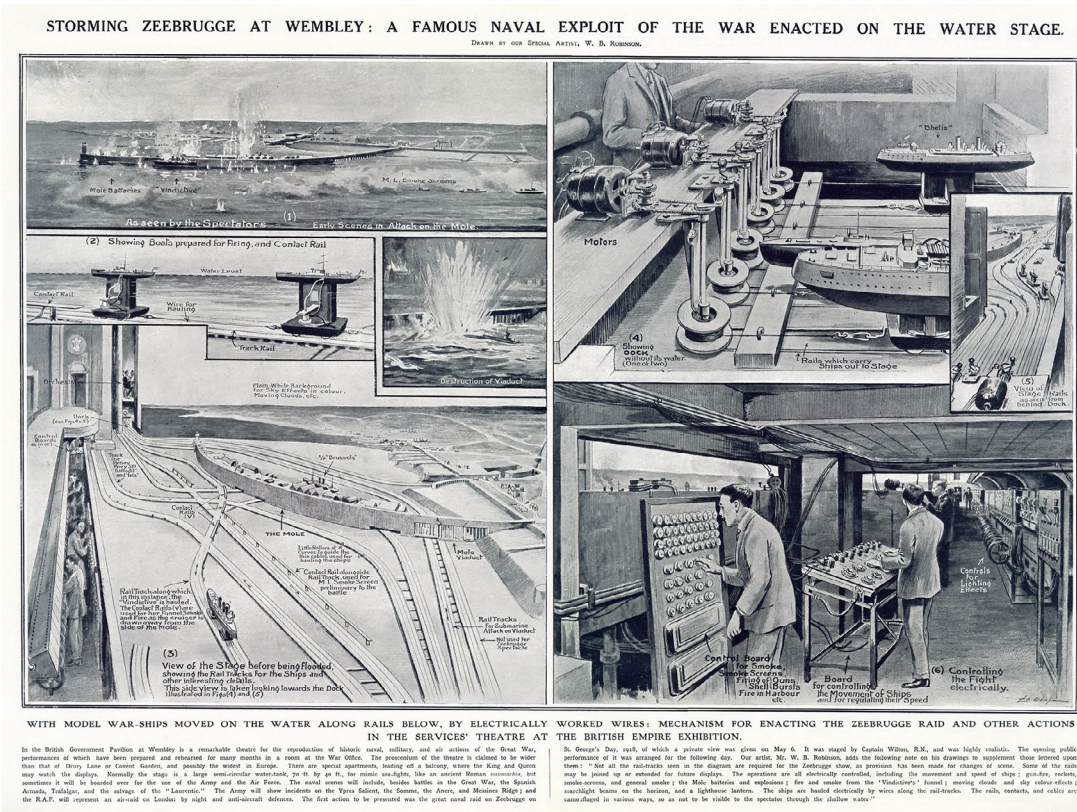


Fig. 1
Storming
Zeebrugge at
Wembley, *The
Illustrated London
News* (24 May 24
1924). © Illustrated
London News Ltd/
Mary Evans.

Theatre.¹¹ In the Admiralty Theatre, the magic of the stage lights created atmospheric effects—moving clouds and rays of sunshine—that bolstered the verisimilitude of the scene. These illuminations were augmented by electrically powered objects carried around the stage on rails, which were moved remotely from a board in the control room. An image of the theatre in *The Illustrated London News* showed the hidden control panels filled with complicated buttons and knobs (Fig. 1).¹² The complexity of the scene recalls the interior of a warship or plane, showing entertainment as a mirror of the command centres of battle.

The Admiralty Theatre performance that most captured the attention of the press was the reenactment of the World War I naval battle of Zeebrugge. The action took place on the Theatre’s water stage and the boats moved about on submerged rails. On stage, the dynamic texture of the water was augmented by smoke machines, lights, and off-stage sound effects. A live orchestra provided dramatic musical accompaniment.¹³ As the battle raged, a narrator explained the movement of the British and German ships while text and images were projected onto an accompanying screen. The scene introduced an intimate experience of war and was calibrated to appear as if the audience stood upon a naval ship three miles offshore.¹⁴ Outside the Admiralty Theatre, there were a set of more conventional panoramic models of the First World War which depicted battles at Ypres, the North-West Frontier of India, and Messines Ridge. These were the nineteenth-century ancestors of the theatre, pioneering the multimedia approach that would bring the Battle of Zeebrugge to life.

Fig. 2
Wembley Presents
the Case for Air
Raid Defence, *The
Illustrated London
News* (19 July 19
1924). © Illustrated
London News Ltd/
Mary Evans.



In the Admiralty Theatre performances, the panorama met conventional theatre and technological advances in electricity to create a unique all-encompassing experience.¹⁵ In preparation meetings for the Government Pavilion, members of the interdepartmental planning committee carefully distinguished between the experience of viewing events as models and as performances in the Admiralty Theatre. The ‘more spectacular events’, they concluded, would be better suited to the immersive Admiralty Theatre.¹⁶ This was an effective strategy, and *The Times* wrote ‘it makes one rapacious for a similar sight of every memorable action, naval and military, in our history. Never was there such pictorial realism in any theatre’.¹⁷ ‘The spectacle’, *The Times* concluded, ‘seems less a reproduction of what happened than a resurrection’.¹⁸ Such ‘pictorial realism’ defined an experience of collective spectatorship that imbued theatregoers, many of whom had no first-hand experience of the terrors of the Great War, with an illusion of battle-hardened nationalism. If the resurrective capacity of the theatre could bring history to life, it could also be used to imagine future events.

The Defences of London was the War Office and Air Ministry’s contribution to the rotation of performances in the Admiralty Theatre. It was unique in its form, its focus on the domestic sphere, and its evocation not of a historical event, but a potential threat. The pictorial realism of the Battle of Zeebrugge was redirected towards a speculative future. To include the *The Defences of London* was a striking choice on the part of the War Office and Air Ministry and it challenged the careful political calculations of the Government Pavilion. The planning committee was concerned with producing a unified message, and often reminded the various departments involved that they were required to ‘ensure that the nature and presentation of any exhibits or displays are

unobjectionable on political or general grounds’.¹⁹ Yet, during a February 1924 meeting, the committee discussed the fact that ‘possible objections may be raised to the inclusion ... of an imaginary air attack on the House of Commons’. The politics of the display had come close to flouting the committee guidelines.²⁰

While contemporaneous newspaper accounts, including *The Times* and *The Illustrated London News*, detail the technical specifications for the water stage and the reenactment of the Zeebrugge raid, they did not record the theatre’s transition to the attack on Westminster.²¹ However, models of the Houses of Parliament were ordered for the stage, which makes a similar combination of miniatures, lights, film, and explosives the likely tools of the *The Defences of London*.²² To convert the theatre from the Zeebrugge Raid, the water stage was covered and replaced with a miniaturized model of the Westminster skyline as viewed across the Thames from the London City Council building.²³ Like the placement of the viewers of the Zeebrugge raid three miles out to sea, the set designers carefully chose a realistic vantage point for the audience to take in the scene.

The Illustrated London News published a drawing and description of the scene on July 19, 1924:

Lights go up in the House of Commons. A moment later there is a faint rumble, and there are strange flashes in the sky. Raiders are coming, and they are already dropping bombs. With little to hinder them—nothing but a few anti-aircraft guns, position-revealing searchlights, and fighting aeroplanes in insufficient numbers—they sweep and swoop over the city, and their bombs still the heart of Empire, leaving it a blackened, shrivelled, useless thing.²⁴

The accompanying illustration presented the moment of final disintegration (Fig. 2). Swirling smoke tinged with fiery pinks and reds draws both the audience and the newspaper reader towards the strange beauty of destruction. Yet the raiders themselves are gone from the sky and the viewer is left to imagine the presence of the enemy. While the outline of Big Ben remains intact, it only serves to emphasize the ruin of the Houses of Parliament. The neo-gothic edifice is crumbled and skeletal, still consumed by fire. Hazy light from the smoke-filled screen falls on the audience. It most visibly highlights the profile of a well-dressed woman in a red hat who, enthralled, raises her hand to her mouth. For women like her (who had probably never seen the battlefield), the radical dissolution of familiar space was intended to produce a dramatic immediacy. It transposed the experience of war gleaned from the static dioramas of Ypres and the Somme, which sat just outside the theatre, into the present moment. The imminence of ‘resurrection’ turned this conjectural event into something resembling lived history.

The Air Ministry intended to use the emotional reaction to this dystopian drama to increase support for national air defence. The headline from *The Illustrated London News* concentrated on this aspect of the event, declaring ‘Wembley Presents the Case for Air-Raid Defence: A Dramatic Object Lesson, in the Government Building’.²⁵ *The*

Defences of London argued that the horror of war could quickly enter the home front. The message was made clear through the second half of the program, which saw the skyline saved by the efforts of the Royal Air Force. Because of this intervention, the program concluded with the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben intact (likely much to the relief of the woman in the red hat).

However, in 1924 there was no comprehensive aerial defence force and, like the entire show, the denouement was only an imagined alternative scenario. Aerial defence was a contentious issue in the 1920s. Brett Holman points out that between the First World War and the early 1920s, military theorists and political commentators, including RAF officers and amateur airpower strategists, advanced the theory of the ‘knock-out blow’ as an existential threat to the home front.²⁶ The concern was that an enemy force could plan a surprise air raid to preempt the declaration of war. Bombing in London and major industrial areas would limit production capacity, confuse the government response, and lower the morale of the civilian population. The enemy could essentially win a war before it began.²⁷ In 1924, without a defending air force, Britain seemed unprepared for the demands of future aerial combat.²⁸

The German Zeppelin raids of the First World War were a key precedent for the knock-out blow theory and had piqued anxiety about the threat to civilian populations in modern warfare. With these attacks, the Germans aimed to diminish morale and disrupt the noncombatant labour force. Whereas locations distanced from the battlefield had previously been protected, these air raids, as Susan Grayzel argues, created the notion of the home front as its own sphere of battle.²⁹ The German Zeppelin raids in London began in March 1915 and took place sporadically throughout the First World War. The bombs caused visible damage, with over five hundred people killed and various English towns and cities sustaining damage. However, the technological limitations of the Zeppelins and the novelty of air attacks, as Ariella Freedman has pointed out, made the imagined threat of the raiders more significant than the reality of their reach.³⁰ Crucially, as Grayzel notes, the bombs disrupted the feeling of safety previously borne of England’s island geography. Civilians could now face the same danger as soldiers at the front.³¹

Compared to conventional warfare, however, the tools of aerial bombardment were diffuse and mysterious. The Zeppelins flew high above the ground and this distance prompted many contemporaneous observers, according to Freedman, to liken them to weather or gods rather than tools of earthbound combat.³² In this way, I argue, aerial bombardment took on the mantle of potential apocalyptic destruction previously reserved for natural disasters and acts of God. An encounter with the flying instruments of war was similar to the terror of the sublime.³³ These machines represented a future in which technology could challenge geographical boundaries and the patterns of warfare.

The technological intrigue of aerial warfare provoked conjecture about the dystopia that it could create. Martin Ceadel, Uri Bialer, and Christopher Simel have

shown that these fears were codified through both changes in government policy and contemporaneous cultural interpretations in art and literature.³⁴ Because of the unprecedented nature of the Zeppelin raids, they contend, these cultural reactions are significant historic documents. The aerial turn played out in the public sphere and, as a result, demanded a robust cultural response. This included, I argue, *The Defences of London* and *London Defended*. Bialer underscores the scholarly relevance of inventions such as these, asserting that there was little difference between the administrative responses to the potential crisis of aerial warfare and the scenarios put forward in speculative literature.³⁵ To this end, literature scholars have identified a body of interwar science-fiction and futuristic writing that directly responded to Zeppelin raids and the aerial threat.³⁶ While there is less evidence of this trend in performance or the visual arts, the capacity of the Admiralty Theatre for lifelike resurrection made it an ideal venue for evoking the dystopian possibilities of aerial combat.

The Defences of London, facilitated by the advanced technology of the Admiralty Theatre, made the potential destruction of the city tangible in order to attune audiences to the importance of home defence. In addition, however, the aerial spectacle could have aided the Air Ministry itself in envisioning the form of a future aerial apocalypse. John Ferris points to the theoretical nature of aerial warfare in the interwar period. He quotes the 1934 Chief of Air Staff, who noted that

The RAF had to rely on ‘pure guess-work’ and ‘arbitrary assumptions’ about every detail of strategic air warfare, ‘as we have no practical experience of air warfare on a major scale under modern conditions to provide us with definite conclusions capable of mathematical expression’.³⁷

These circumstances bolster Bialer’s argument that in the novel sphere of aerial warfare the line between professional analysis and the larger cultural imagination was blurred. *The Defences of London* used the Admiral Theatre’s ‘pictorial realism’ to instruct the audience. It also could have given concrete form to the elements of ‘pure guess-work’ that defined the RAF’s preparation for the modern conditions of air warfare. ‘Nothing could illustrate more realistically what might happen to London were it inadequately defended in time of war’ wrote *The Illustrated London News*.³⁸ This level of realism could have helped both the audience and the RAF understand and plan for an otherwise inscrutable future. The visual power of the Admiralty Theatre made the speculative future real.

‘Their bombs still the heart of Empire’: Air Power and Empire

If the unknown fighters in *The Defences of London* evoked the recent history of German Zeppelin aggression, the air battles depicted at the Empire Exhibition also recalled the RAF’s engagement in the British Empire. After the First World War, many RAF fighter planes and bombers were quickly redeployed around the empire to control

British colonial interests.³⁹ The planes had a significant tactical advantage over infantry troops. The RAF could cover large swaths of unpredictable topography and could be deployed from a limited number of bases, which required a smaller commitment of manpower. A military presence in the colonial realm was especially important for Britain because of growing nationalist movements in India and the Middle East, which were encouraged by the upheaval of World War I and the Communist revolution in Russia.⁴⁰ Faced with the threat of losing previously stable colonial holdings, the British reallocated their military assets to foreign soil instead of focusing on the home front.⁴¹ Air control was essential to imperial stability.

A performance in which Westminster (as a symbol of the Golden Age of British colonialism) was destroyed spoke to a broader concern over Britain's role in the twentieth-century world. 'Their bombs still the heart of Empire,' *The Illustrated London News* intoned, 'leaving it a blackened, shrivelled, useless thing'.⁴² Despite the confidence expressed by the Empire Exhibition, the early 1920s saw a slew of significant changes in Britain's imperial role. While the decade following the Second World War was the apex of decolonisation, changes in world politics after the First World War brought Britain's global dominance, and the internal relevance of the empire, into question. The heart of empire was susceptible to a future in which it might be 'blackened, shrivelled [and] useless'.⁴³

The territorial peak of the British Empire was in 1921.⁴⁴ As the decade progressed, however, multiple instances undermined Britain's identity as the invincible global power put forth by the Empire Exhibition. Tensions with Ireland, independence movements in India, the end of the British protectorate in Egypt in 1922, and the 1923 creation of the Commonwealth were all an uneasy backdrop to the imperial performance of the Empire Exhibition.⁴⁵ Alexander Geppert argues that tensions between Britain and the colonial nations manifested in the operation of the exhibition, as bureaucratic conflicts broke out between the exhibition's organizers and the administrators of the colonial pavilions.⁴⁶ This was, he writes, an early sign of imperial dissolution. At the same time, the imperial project as a cornerstone of British identity was being challenged internally by left-wing and communist groups, who, as Sarah Britton demonstrates, wrote and rallied in opposition to the imperial project represented by this kind of exhibition.⁴⁷

In the second year of the Wembley Exhibition, which opened in May 1925, most of the programs remained in continuity with 1924. Exhibitions of timber stayed in the Canadian pavilion just as the world relief map and Admiralty Theatre remained in the Government pavilion.⁴⁸ The Empire Stadium, the large sports and performance arena that anchored the exhibition grounds, continued its program of Torchlight Spectacles. These were a series of nighttime shows in the stadium that used music, performers, monumental lighting effects, and aeroplane flyovers to create a spectacular variety show.⁴⁹ To that end, the 1924 Wembley Torchlight Spectacle included an RAF

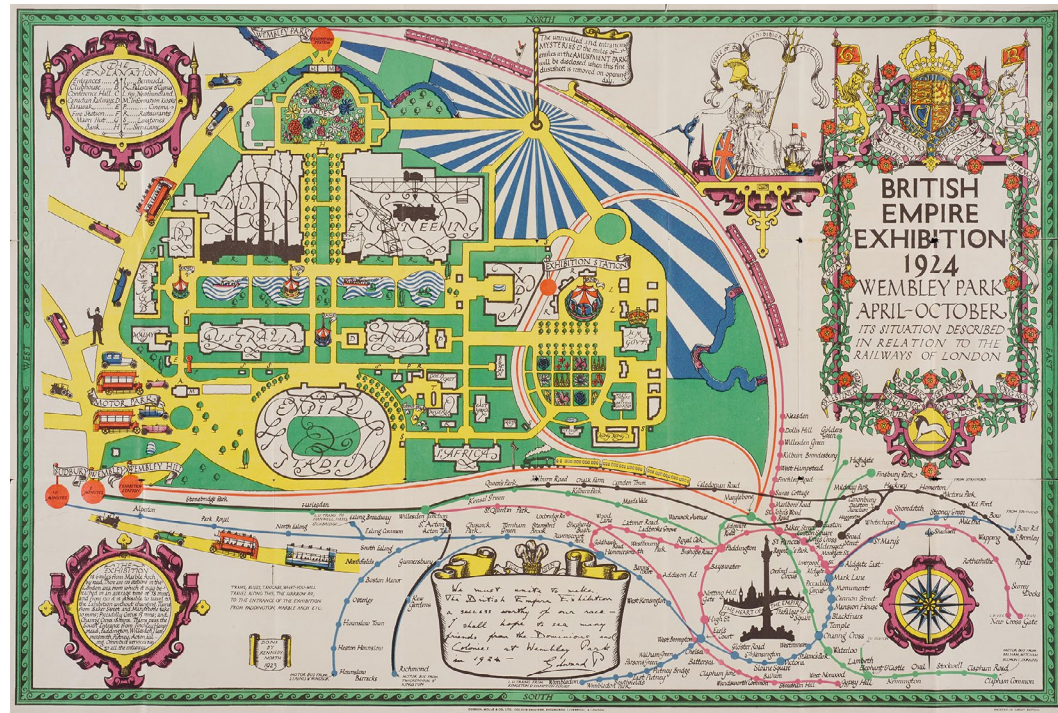
performance in the guise of an air battle.⁵⁰ In 1925, however, the show reappeared as *London Defended*, a life-size reprisal of an aerial attack against the London skyline.⁵¹ In a departure from the 1924 Torchlight Spectacle, the audience would now see aerial combat in their home city.

The success of *The Defences of London* in the Admiralty Theatre may have spurred the expansion of the performance into *London Defended* the following year.⁵² The 1925 performance showed a similar raid on London from unnamed enemy aeroplanes. However, as the promotional brochure highlights, instead of the miniatures and magical projections of *The Defences of London*, *London Defended* included full-size searchlights, real air fights, and simulated bombs.⁵³ The cover of the program shows aeroplanes dramatically silhouetted against the dark sky. Wembley Stadium and its bright searchlights glimmer below. If the Admiralty Theatre was praised for the immersive products of its stage management techniques, the Empire Stadium promised yet greater thrills. The drama of *London Defended* was intensified by the sights, sounds, and vibrations of actual RAF planes. The spectacle also included a display of horsemanship by the Metropolitan Mounted Police, a two-hundred-person choir, and military marching bands.⁵⁴ The Admiralty Theatre took its cue, but then departed from, conventional theatre. Similarly, the RAF section of the *London Defended* program, which included both 'aerial acrobatics' and a simulated defeat of an enemy air attack, related to another familiar format that was intimately related to imperial politics: the air show.⁵⁵

Fictitious RAF spectacles were institutionalized in annual displays at Hendon Air Base located outside London to the northeast of Wembley.⁵⁶ These performances used elaborate sets and costumed actors to transport the viewer into various spheres of combat. The focus on foreign combat—first Germany and then Middle-Eastern colonies—was an important precedent for the internal threat detailed in *London Defended*. The yearly series at Hendon began in 1920, following the end of the First World War. There was a similar audience base for the Hendon shows and the Empire Exhibition, as there is an advertisement for the June display at Hendon in the 1925 booklet for *London Defended*.⁵⁷

While Hendon also promoted a program of aerial stunts, an aeroplane race, a bombing attack, and an air battle, the domestic location of the action in the *London Defended* show was a notable departure from the Hendon series. The Hendon Aerial Pageants in 1920 and 1921 directly referenced the First World War, with scenes set at the Front and in enemy territory – comfortably far from London. Trenches were bombed in 1920 and in 1921 organizers built a German village out of scrap metal.⁵⁸ During the performance, the village was destroyed by RAF bombers. In 1922 and 1923, the action shifted to the imperial realm; bombings now took place in simulations of Britain's Middle Eastern colonies.⁵⁹ Just as the 1920 and 1921 shows were preoccupied with the German military, this new geographic focus reflected the political debate over the RAF's role as an enforcer in the British Empire. The 1922 Hendon spectacle turned away from

Fig. 3
Stanley Kennedy
North, *British
Empire Exhibition
Poster and Map*
(1924). Colour
lithograph,
50.3 x 75.0 cm.
National Museum
of Singapore,
Singapore. Courtesy
of the National
Museum of
Singapore, National
Heritage Board.



the near history of World War I toward the future represented by imperial dominions.⁶⁰ Hendon shows the extent to which entertainment mirrored foreign policy priorities, and these performances used the threat of imperial insurgence as justification for military exercises in the colonial realm. While the Hendon shows pivoted to the colonies, the 1925 air display in the Empire Stadium at Wembley looked inward.

London Defended recreated a domestic urban scene, and a large tower was built on the stadium floor.⁶¹ Unlike the sets at Hendon, however, the recreation was a sight much closer to home for most viewers. Unlike the first act of *The Defences of London*, the enemy attack in this performance was met with some domestic defence. There were anti-aircraft guns and searchlights, each adding to the impressive quality of the nighttime event.⁶² The audience would have heard the planes approaching the stadium. At Hendon, the enemy had been clear – German uniforms were easily recognizable just as the architecture of the 1922 show signalled the Middle East. In the darkened Empire Stadium, however, the identity of the enemy remained elusive. Like the Zeppelin raiders of the First World War, the planes were high up, mechanical participants rather than costumed actors. The raiders coming could be anyone, from anywhere. The omission of a specific identity heightened the drama while simultaneously dispersing the identity of the opposing force.

When searchlights picked up the enemy planes in the stadium, the drama increased. An airfight ensued and the RAF was victorious. The enemy bombers, however, left the tower on the stadium floor in flames. The London Fire Brigade saved the day through their modern fire-fighting methods.⁶³ Just as the Admiralty Theater transformed from the site of foreign battles (such as the Battle of Zeebrugge) to one of internal destruction (*The Defences of London*), the RAF spectacle pivoted from Hendon's

imperial dramas to the domestic menace of *London Defended*. Despite the imperial focus of the Wembley exhibition, in this performance, the triumph of British aerial power abroad was challenged by the necessity of home defence.

The 'Wembley Squint': Class Conflict at Wembley

If the Exhibition was intended to signal Britain's imperial accomplishments on a global stage, it also attempted to recapture the attention of the British working class. As Geppert points out, the suburban location of Wembley and the amusement-park style fair attractions encouraged working- and middle-class visitors to take part in the imperial project.⁶⁴ An official map of the exhibition grounds drawn by Kennedy North heightened the exotic drama of the peripheral town (Fig. 3). North's drawing used tube routes to connect London and Wembley. The brightly coloured lines tied the fairgrounds to a stylized image of the London skyline. Beneath a banner reading 'The Heart of Empire', Nelson's Column rises above the geographically outsized forms of Westminster, St. Paul's Cathedral, and the Tower Bridge. For British citizens unable to travel to the outer reaches of the empire, the empire could come to them in the capital city.

North's map shows the gaily festooned tents, lush gardens, and enticing pavilions from colonies ranging from Burma to the Gold Coast. This visually cohesive space belied the fractures in both the colonial and domestic realm. Visitors to the exhibition were often enthralled by these performative aspects of imperial identity. This was a calculated strategy intended to implicate members of the working- and middle-classes in the commercial project of the empire.⁶⁵ But the experience was sometimes overshadowed in the public imagination by the accusations of financial mismanagement that dogged the exhibition.⁶⁶ Organizations such as the Trade Unions Congress and Labour Party Executive recorded their frustration with what they saw as a fundamental contradiction between the principles of the Commonwealth and the working conditions of the fair.⁶⁷ They highlighted the contrast between the significant cost of the pavilions and the low pay and poor working conditions for those who built and operated the fair.

The concern over labour rights in the exhibition was a challenge for Britain's first Labour government under Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, who took office in January 1924 three months before the exhibition opening.⁶⁸ In winter 1924, the future of Wembley was imperilled by a strike. It began with a group of electricians agitating against non-union labour employed by exhibition organizers, but the protest soon expanded to encompass wage disputes and workplace safety.⁶⁹ Newspapers reported that the strike would likely slow the opening of the Empire Exhibition.⁷⁰ The Wembley strike was part of a larger effort by labour groups to develop the power of unions across geographic areas and sectors, and the electricians were soon joined by plasterers and carpenters.⁷¹ As was the case with many collective actions of the time, the local

police force was called in to protect the exhibition grounds from the supposed threat.⁷² A photograph of the strike shows exhibition workers milling around a construction site strewn with raw stone slabs, lumber, and dirt (Fig. 4). A large group of policemen looms above them. In the background, the skeletal towers of various pavilions under construction highlight the stakes of the conflict. The image triangulates between the idle workers, the arm of the law, and the unfinished buildings, using the contrast to put forth a narrative that political radicalism was obstructing the core mission of the exhibition.

In the House of Commons, Members of Parliament invoked patriotism and imperial unity to compel the strikers to restart the construction process.⁷³ Though MacDonald's government was generally cautious about imperialistic displays, the fact that funds had already been poured into the construction from private individuals, dominion governments, and the British government made it politically vital that the work on the exhibition continued.⁷⁴ The British Empire Exhibition was an important symbolic centre. Though the Labour government valued the exhibition's focus on industry and production, the Communist Party saw an opportunity to expose the poor treatment of British workers.⁷⁵ Communist organizers wanted a public demonstration that imperial success was contingent upon the labour of the worker, in Britain and abroad.⁷⁶ What better venue, they reasoned, to jumpstart a national effort for worker's rights? Implicit in this critique was distrust in the political project of empire writ large.⁷⁷ In September 1924, T.A. Jackson, writing in *The Communist Review*, noted the hypocrisy of an empire made up of disenfranchised subjects supposedly united under a democratic Parliament.⁷⁸ Jackson termed this fallacy the 'Wembley Squint', stressing that the exhibition enforced the idea of the empire as a positive global force rather than a complicated political entanglement.⁷⁹

Opponents of the union strike, including Conservative news sources and politicians, argued that the strike demonstrated the inconsistency between Communist allegiance and British citizenship. Moreover, despite the efforts of the Labour government to bring the strike to a satisfactory conclusion, right-wing publications implicated them in the goals of the Communist party. The fears stoked by some Conservative publications and politicians lay in the impression that, in the aftermath of the 1917 Russian Revolution, sympathy to the rights of the working class would lead to a transnational Communist takeover. In describing the 1924 strike, the unionist *Belfast Telegraph* wrote 'The strike at the British Empire Exhibition Wembley is the latest eruption of the spirit of unrest that is abroad, illustrating the tactics of the small, but ceaselessly active band of Communists who are carrying on propaganda inside the trade unions'.⁸⁰

The Northern Whig and Belfast Post speculated that the Communist Party, working at the behest of Moscow, had supported the Labour party's rise. Now that Labour was in power, the unions were leveraging the 'sinister events at Wembley' to incur a full-scale revolution.⁸¹ The small group thought to be disrupting the undertakings of the Empire



Fig. 4
George W.F.
Ellis, *Wembley
Strike* (1924).
Image © London
Metropolitan
Archives (City of
London).

Exhibition became an allegorical shorthand for the Communist threat to the British Empire as a whole. In this politically charged climate, the conflagration of the seat of government (Westminster, and then London itself), gained another layer of meaning. Taken in tandem with the nationalistic narratives derived from the story of the 1666 Fire of London, which I will discuss shortly, I argue that the implied faceless threat to Britain's capital in these apocalyptic scenes could be conceived as a warning about internal political dissent, shown starkly against the backdrop of Wembley's striking workers.

After the First World War, members of the Labour party questioned both the morality of a protracted aerial campaign in the colonial realm and the wisdom of engaging in an aerial arms race with other nations.⁸² After the Labour party victory of 1923, Conservatives argued that this attitude in a sitting government would undermine the safety of Britain. In the first weeks of March 1924, as the final plans for the British Empire Exhibition were being executed, both the House of Commons and House of Lords debated the government's commitment to aerial infrastructure. The Marquess of Londonderry and Sir Samuel Hoare, both of the Conservative Party, introduced a motion for the Government to affirm their dedication to maintaining a substantial domestic air force. Though the Labour Secretary and Under-Secretary for Air firmly stated that the government would support a reasonable growth policy, many remained suspicious of these claims.⁸³

The Labour party's supposedly willful resistance to domestic air defence was the chief plot point of *The Battle of London*, a novel first published in fall 1923 by Harry

Collinson Owen, writing under the pseudonym Hugh Addison.⁸⁴ *The Battle of London* tapped into the cultural concern over aerial warfare and documents how the aerial threat was manipulated to fit a variety of political goals. In contrast to the German threat from H.G. Wells's *The War in the Air* or the imperial concerns of Hendon, the enemy in this narrative was the British Communist Party. Owen leveraged the same symbolic triggers that would appear in *The Defences of London*: The Houses of Parliament burned in an aerial apocalypse.

Owen's book collected alarmist discourses over imperial decay, Communism, and the aerial menace from Germany into one symbolic centre – Westminster. In the denouement of the novel, the Germans seized the opportunity of civil war to attack London.⁸⁵ The ensuing aerial raid decimated the Houses of Parliament, as it would in *The Defences of London*. Owen's insinuation that the debate on aerial defence would lead to this future conflict was clear to readers. *The Battle of London*, one reviewer noted in November 1923 'Can be read with advantage in these election days. Bolshevism, it is argued, can be met and conquered chiefly by the efforts of the citizens themselves'.⁸⁶ To protect the country from internal (Communist) and external (German) threats, it was incumbent upon Owen's reader to ensure a Conservative victory. While Owen's book is an extreme example, any performance that argued for increased domestic air defence, as did *The Defences of London*, evoked these public political debates.

Sublime Conflagration

The drama of ruin and redemption in *The Battle of London* and *The Defences of London* had precedent in the Great Fire of London of 1666 and the burning of the House of Commons and House of Parliament in 1834. The vision of Westminster obscured by fiery smoke in *The Defences of London* recalled popular prints and paintings of the 1834 fire, which circulated widely in the nineteenth century. Artist JMW Turner was an eyewitness to the fire, and his depictions of the event were particularly notable for their dramatic beauty. The concept of the sublime was a key tenant of eighteenth-century British aesthetic theory and the sublime object or vista incorporated both horror and beauty. It could fascinate and attract the observer against their will, lending even terrible destruction the role of a spectacle. Just like Turner's depictions of the 1834 disaster, *The Defences of London* demonstrated the emotional power of apocalyptic spectacle.

The scene of *The Defences of London* that was illustrated in *The Illustrated London News* had a strikingly similar framing to Turner's paintings of the event, both titled *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons October 16, 1834* (Figs. 5 and 6). In *The Defences of London* and *The Burning of the Houses of Lords and Commons October 16, 1834*, Westminster is viewed from across the Thames. These images all use the dark water to reflect the uncanny brightness of the fiery scene. In *The Burning of the Houses of Lords*



Fig. 5
JMW Turner,
*The Burning of the
Houses of Lords and
Commons*, October
16, 1834 (1834-
35). Oil on canvas,
92.1 × 123.2 cm.
The Philadelphia
Museum of Art,
Philadelphia.

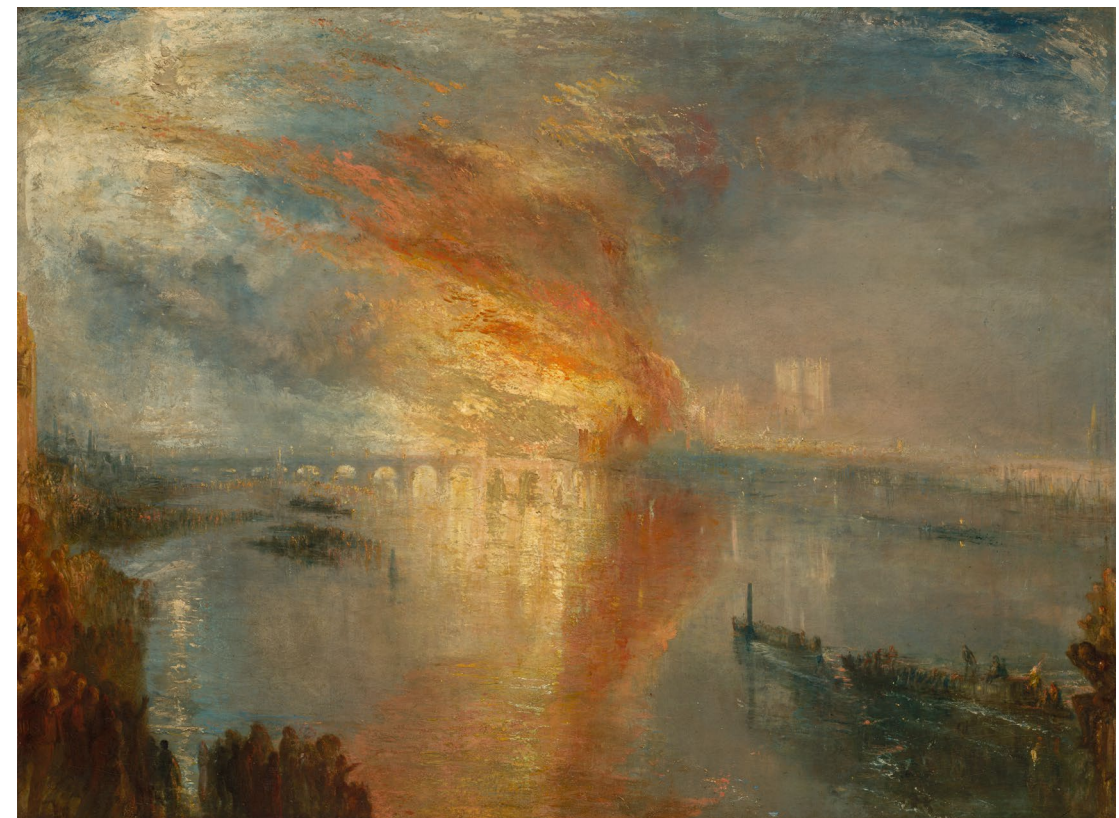


Fig. 6
JMW Turner,
*The Burning of the
Houses of Lords and
Commons*, October
16, 1834 (1835).
Oil on canvas, 92
x 123.2 cm. The
Cleveland Museum
of Art, Cleveland.

and *Commons* October 16, 1834, the red light of the fire animates the human figures who line the bank, implicating the rapt viewers in the terrible event. *The Illustrated London News* similarly positions the experience of the spectator as a vital aspect of destruction. At the Admiralty Theatre, the magic lights and real smoke bring the Wembley visitors into the events unfolding on the stage. Unlike the organizers of *The Defences of London*, however, Turner was disinterested in individual emotional response. Rather, he depicts the spectators—or the mob, as some accounts portrayed those watching the fire—as a natural force unto themselves.

The 1834 fire was started to dispose of wooden tally sticks, an obsolete form of tax records. It soon burned out of control and the flames overtook the Parliament buildings.⁸⁷ That these bureaucratic materials destroyed the seat of government was an irony not lost on contemporary commentators. As an article from *The Morning Herald* highlights, some, however, saw a more nefarious subtext in the events.⁸⁸ In the aftermath of the fire, some newspapers voiced a fear that the disaster was a destabilizing force that would facilitate the growth of dissident movements. Subversive elements, they believed, could manipulate the public response to the violent destruction. In the days after the fire, *The Morning Herald* called attention to the mystery of the fire's unknown origins and the strange fact that no one had raised the alarm until much of the building was already aflame.⁸⁹ While the article conceded that there was no implication whatsoever that it was a case of arson, the paper nevertheless cast a group of onlookers as suspicious villains of the drama: 'Our accounts from the scene of destruction inform us that the mob, upon witnessing the progress of the flames, raised a savage shout of exultation'.⁹⁰ The massed onlookers in Turner's paintings seem to embody the chaotic power of the urban spectacle.

The phrase 'mob' was a weighty one in 1834.⁹¹ It evoked the spectre of working-class revolt, both in the context of foreign revolutions in France and America and more recent riots in Britain.⁹² Alighting on the largely fictitious celebrating mob as complicit in, if not responsible for, the annihilation of a building that represented centuries of British political history, *The Morning Herald* weaponized existing paranoia about the power of the working class. The unpredictable reaction of the crowd to urban apocalypse, represented by *The Morning Herald's* cheering mob, was also a consideration for the Air Ministry in the 1920s. Grayzel argues that RAF studies of the public attitude towards Zeppelin raids demonstrated a belief that the 'others' in the city—the poor, immigrants, or Jews—were constitutionally unfit to deal with aerial threats.⁹³ Official reports implied that the lack of morale could, itself, be a significant threat to a future war effort. Ferris also notes that RAF officers 'held [that] bombing would spark upheaval among 'volatile' peoples'.⁹⁴ The instability of the 'volatile' crowd in the aftermath of disaster could prove as destructive as the falling bombs.

In addition to raising awareness about domestic defence, *The Defences of London* and *London Defended* prepared viewers for the possibility of future aerial attacks. By

exposing the British public to the threat of domestic disturbance within the controlled setting of the Empire Exhibition, the performances encouraged the audience to maintain equanimity in the face of attack and to trust in the government's military strategy. Political dissent, however, took on a further layer of menace. In the apocalyptic future, strikes (like the one that stalled the early construction of Wembley), anti-imperial advocacy, and immigrant communities could be perceived as threats that could fracture society. Britain's social structure could be susceptible to both the distant enemy and the internal one.

The final act of *London Defended* opened with a scene of the city in the seventeenth century. A baker's shop was ablaze, an echo of the tower burned down by the aerial raid earlier in the show.⁹⁵ This was the 1666 Great Fire of London. If *The Defences of London* gestured obliquely to the fire of 1834, *London Defended* explicitly linked the danger of aerial raids with this historical catastrophe. In the seventeenth century, the large-scale destruction of the city quickly became an exemplar of God's wrath, with preachers and laypeople alike drawing comparisons to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁹⁶ Nature was, in this telling, wielded as a tool of divine judgement. The parliamentary investigation of the 1666 fire deemed that it was evidence of 'the hand of God upon us, a great wind and the season so very dry' and ascribed the event to nature's inscrutable power.⁹⁷

However, some news accounts characterized the fire as an intentional attack.⁹⁸ Treachery and conspiracy were common concerns as tensions in England ran high due to sectarian violence and the ongoing wars in Europe. Guy Fawkes' attempt to blow up the Houses of Parliament had taken place sixty years earlier and remained a symbol of Britain's religious divisions. As the fire raged through London's streets, rumours spread about a Catholic attack on the city.⁹⁹ In 1666, England was also at war with France and the Netherlands, and these conflicts spurred intense xenophobia. The *London Gazette* reported in the aftermath of the fire that 'Diverse strangers, Dutch and French were, during the fire, apprehended, upon suspicion that they contributed mischievously to it, who are all imprisoned and information prepared to make a severe inquisition'.¹⁰⁰ Like *The Morning Herald* in the days after the burning of the Houses of Parliament, the *London Gazette* took advantage of the opportunity to push their political agenda. The seventeenth-century disaster, just like the RAF's analysis of London's urban population, bred a reaction against what the establishment perceived as threatening and undesirable elements: the foreign and the politically deviant. In the days after the fire, this manifested in violent attacks on foreign citizens living in London.¹⁰¹ Disaster was, in each of these real and imagined events, entwined with anxiety over the hidden internal threat.

London Defended ended with a message that celebrated national unity. When the enemy planes were defeated and modern firefighters subdued the flames of the 1666 fire, a final scene showed King Charles II visiting a camp of displaced London

Fig. 7
*London Defended:
 Torchlight and
 Searchlight Spectacle*
 (London: Fleetway
 Press, 1925).
 © The British
 Library Board
 YD.2010.b.3011.



citizens.¹⁰² A brochure of the production explained, 'As he arrives the smoke is transmuted into a blue haze, through which shines the dome of the new St. Paul's with its golden cross'.¹⁰³ The hallucinatory image of this scene, with the two versions of St. Paul's rising out of the smoke, adorned much of the show's promotional material (Fig. 7). In this juxtaposition, the resilience of modern England was concrete and immutable. The continuity of the royal line, between King Charles II and George V, and the consistency of geographical space, with the two iterations of the Cathedral, implied a stable narrative that overcame even drastic destruction. The propaganda value of this

image, which obliterated political strife and imperial decline, belied a future apocalyptic moment where the worry over aerial attacks was incontrovertibly real.

Conclusion

Just fifteen short years later, the famous blitz photograph 'St. Paul's Survives' taken by Herbert Mason in December 1940 had an almost identical framing to the 1925 print – the dome of the Cathedral rising above the shells of burning buildings. Mason's photograph was used in Britain as an image of resilience.¹⁰⁴ 'War's Greatest Picture' the *Daily Mail* proclaimed, 'St. Paul's Stands Unharmed in the Midst of the Burning City'.¹⁰⁵ The symbolic juxtaposition of Cathedral and smoke was an obvious one in both 1925 and 1940. Britain would, like a phoenix, rise from the ashes. But who, the performances of the British Empire Exhibition demanded, is part of that rebirth? What place do the rapt spectators, or the unruly mob, play in the reintegration of postwar Britain? The dystopian fictions of the British Empire Exhibition showed the enduring power of apocalyptic imagery in the British imagination—through 1666, 1834, 1924, 1925, and 1940—in uniting a populace in nationalistic fear and awe. These scenes, however, betrayed a political subtext to both natural disaster and acts of war. Apocalypse renders vast societal shifts, pushing some to embrace ruin and destruction in an attempt to excise opposing views from the public realm.

1. In addition to the public enthusiasm for the second year of the exhibition, there was a complicated financial calculation in the reopening. The initial output on the exhibition grounds was so significant that the first year of the fair lost money. In reopening in 1925, the government, who had taken on financial responsibility for the event, hoped to recoup some of their investment.
2. Many aspects of the Imperial politics evident in the Exhibition have been addressed by scholars including Anne Clendinning, 'On The British Empire Exhibition, 1924-25.' BRANCH: Britain, Representation, and Nineteenth-Century History, (2012), accessed 8 October 2021, http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=anne-clendinning-on-the-british-empire-exhibition-1924-25; Deborah L. Hughes 'Kenya, India and the British Empire Exhibition of 1923.' Race & Class 47:4 (2006): pp. 66-85; David Simonelli, "[L.]Aughing Nations of Happy Children Who have Never Grown Up": Race, the Concept of Commonwealth and the 1924-25 British Empire Exhibition', *Journal of Colonialism & Colonial History* 10:1 (Spring, 2009); Daniel M. Stephen, "'The White Man's Grave': British West Africa and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924-1925', *Journal of British Studies* 48:1 (2009): pp. 102-128.
3. *London Defended: Torchlight and Searchlight Spectacle* (London: Fleetway Press, 1925).
4. Tony Bennett argues that, from the nineteenth century, the visual power of worlds fairs and exhibitions was used to impress systems of knowledge upon visitors. Fairgoers were given easily digestible narratives of the world through the objects that they encountered in the exhibitions. The ideological power of these objects gave tangible form to otherwise abstract concepts. Bennett famously termed this system the 'exhibitionary complex.' Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), pp. 59–88.
5. Andrew Thompson, "'A Tale of Three Exhibitions': Portrayals and Perceptions of 'Britishness' at the Great Exhibition (1851), Wembley Exhibition (1924) and the Festival of Britain (1951),' in Gilbert Millat (ed.), *Angleterre ou alblion, entre fascination et repulsion: de l'Exposition universelle au dome du millenaire, 1851-2000* (Université Charles-de-Gaulle-Lille III, 2006).
6. Regarding the importance of the term 'heart of Empire' in the context of the British Empire Exhibition, Alexander Geppert points to the intertwined relationship between London and Wembley. He emphasizes, however, that Wembley was ultimately a suburban site that remained at a remove from the capital city. Alexander C. T. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities: Imperial Expositions in fin-de-Siècle Europe* (Hampshire, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 144-145.
7. Harry Barnes, 'The British Empire Exhibition' *Architectural Review*, 1 (1924), pp. 208-217.
8. *Guide to the Pavilion of His Majesty's Government: British Empire Exhibition 1925* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1925).
9. 'Huge Stage at Wembley', *The Times*, June 27, 1924.
10. 'Huge Stage at Wembley'.
11. Minutes of meeting discussing government participation in the British Empire Exhibition, January 23, 1924, MT 9/1602, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.
12. 'Storming Zeebrugge at Wembley', *The Illustrated London News*, May 24, 1924.
13. Minutes of meeting discussing government participation in the British Empire Exhibition, March 14, 1924, MT 9/1602, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.
14. 'Storming Zeebrugge at Wembley'.
15. Erkki Huhtamo, Stephen Oettermann, and Denise Oleksijczuk each describe the history of the panorama in the United Kingdom. Huhtamo's account of the relationship between panoramas and media culture is especially relevant to the genealogy of the Admiralty Theatre performances. Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archaeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013); Stephan
- Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, (trans.) Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books, 1997), pp. 99–142; Denise Blake Oleksijczuk, *The First Panoramas: Visions of British Imperialism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minneapolis Press, 2011).
16. Minutes of meeting discussing government participation in the British Empire Exhibition, July 5, 1923, MT 9/1602, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.
17. 'Seeing the World, The Government Pavilion', *The Times*, May 24, 1924.
18. 'Seeing the World'.
19. Minutes of meeting discussing government participation in the British Empire Exhibition, November 14, 1923, MT 6/1602, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.
20. Minutes of meeting discussing government participation in the British Empire Exhibition, February 28, 1924, BT 60/5, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.
21. 'Storming Zeebrugge at Wembley'; 'Huge Stage at Wembley'.
22. Admiralty Tank Budget, MT 9/1602, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.
23. 'Wembley Presents the Case for Air Raid Defence', *The Illustrated London News*, July 19, 1924.
24. 'Wembley Presents the Case for Air Raid Defence'.
25. 'Wembley Presents the Case for Air Raid Defence'.
26. Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, pp. 23-24.
27. Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, pp. 38-39.
28. Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, p. 129.
29. Susan R. Grayzel, *At Home and under Fire: The Air Raid in Britain from the Great War to the Blitz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), introduction. See also Brett Holman, *The Next War in the Air: Britain's Fear of the Bomber, 1908-1941* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 23-54.
30. Ariella Freedman, 'Zeppelin Fictions and the British Home Front,' *Journal of Modern Literature* 27: 3 (Winter 2004): pp. 47–62; Barry Powers, *Strategy without Slide-Rule* (London: Routledge, 1976), p. 51.
31. Grayzel, *At Home and under Fire*, p. 22.
32. Freedman, 'Zeppelin Fictions', pp. 50-52
33. Freedman, 'Zeppelin Fictions', p. 50
34. Uri Bialer, 'The Danger of Bombardment from the Air and The Making of British Military Disarmament Policy 1932-34,' in Brian Bond and Ian Roy (eds), *War and Society: A Yearbook of Military History* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1975), p. 204; Martin Ceadel, 'Popular Fiction in the Next War, 1918-39,' in Jon Clark et al. (eds), *Culture and Crisis in Britain in the Thirties* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979); Christopher Joel Simer, 'Apocalyptic Visions: Fear of Aerial Attack in Britain, 1920–1938' (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 1999).
35. Bialer, 'The Danger of Bombardment', p. 204.
36. Bialer, 'The Danger of Bombardment'; I. F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars, 1763-3749* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Ceadel, 'Popular Fiction in the Next War'; Freedman, 'Zeppelin Fictions'; Grayzel, *At Home and under Fire*; Simer, 'Apocalyptic Visions'. The progenitor of fictional iterations of the aerial apocalypse was HG Wells, who envisioned a global ruin wrought by German airships in his 1908 *The War in the Air*. This serialized novel anticipated, though overstated, the wholesale destruction of civilian targets that would ensue from a global aerial arms race. Wells' predictions, whilst resonant in the First World War, would come closer to fruition in the bombing campaigns of the Second.
37. John Ferris, 'Achieving Air Ascendancy: Challenge and Response in British Strategic Air Defence, 1915-40.' In Peter Gray and Sebastian Cox (eds.), *Air Power History: Turning Points from Kitty Hawk to Kosovo* (New York: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), p. 24
38. 'Wembley Presents the Case for Air Raid Defence'.
39. Priya Satia, 'The Defense of Inhumanity: Air Control and the British Idea of Arabia,' *The American Historical Review* 111:1 (February 2006): pp. 25-27.
40. Satia, 'The Defense of Inhumanity', p. 25.
41. David E. Omissi, *Air Power and Colonial Control: The Royal Air Force 1919–1939* (Manchester and New York:

- Manchester University Press, 1990).
42. 'Wembley Presents the Case for Air Raid Defence'.
43. 'Wembley Presents the Case for Air Raid Defence'.
44. These early pushes for decolonization were formative. However, Britain often retained its outsize influence even in countries to which it had formally granted independence. These tools of control included close economic ties and military connections. See Andrew Thompson (ed.), *Britain's Experience of Empire in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), introduction.
45. The extent to which the empire functioned as a primary actor in the consciousness of the British public is a matter of debate amongst historians, who are divided between those, like John Mackenzie, who argue that the empire remained a fundamental basis of early-twentieth-century British thought and those, like Bernard Porter, who argue that the empire was primarily an abstract concept distinct from everyday British identity. John MacKenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986); Bernard Porter, 'Popular Imperialism: Broadening the Context,' *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 39:5 (2011): pp. 833-845, accessed 10 October 2021, doi:[10.1080/03086534.2011.629091](https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2011.629091). For a summary of the debate, see S.J. Potter, 'Empire, Cultures and Identities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Britain,' *History Compass*, 5 (2007): pp. 51-71, accessed 10 October 2021, doi:[10.1111/j.1478-0542.2006.00377.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2006.00377.x). However, in the context of public exhibitions like the British Empire Exhibition, John Mackenzie and John McAleer demonstrate that cultural productions, like the performances at Wembley, played a material role in communicating imperial identity British citizens. John McAleer and John M MacKenzie, *Exhibiting the Empire: Cultures of Display and the British Empire* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).
46. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, p. 162.
47. Sarah Britton, "'Come and See the Empire by the All Red Route!': Anti-Imperialism and Exhibitions in Interwar Britain,' *History Workshop Journal*, 69 (Spring 2010): pp. 68–89.
48. G.C. Laurence (ed.), *British Empire Exhibition, 1925 Official guide* (London: Fleetway Press, 1925).
49. 'Torchlight Tatoo', *The Lancashire Evening Post*, August 28, 1924.
50. 'Torchlight Tatoo'.
51. *London Defended*, p. 10.
52. The same interdepartmental group who had responsibility for the performances of the Government Pavilion dictated the displays at the Empire Stadium. The Stadium and the Pavilion were seen as part of the same larger government programme. Minutes of meeting discussing government participation in the British Empire Exhibition, August 30, 1923, MT 9/1602, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.
53. *London Defended*, p. 10.
54. *London Defended*, pp. 4-6.
55. *London Defended*, p. 10.
56. Holman, *The Next War in the Air*, pp. 170-72. Holman argues that the attendance number at Hendon in the first years of the 1920s are evidence of a public interest in the RAF.
57. *London Defended*, p. 12.
58. *Flight*, July 7, 1921, p. 456 cited by Brett Holman, 'Ending Hendon — I: 1920-1922,' *Airminded* (blog), November 9, 2011, accessed 10 October 2021, <https://airminded.org/2011/11/09/ending-hendon-i-1920-1922/>.
59. Holman, 'Ending Hendon — I: 1920-1922'.
60. The relationship to contemporary politics is evident as Mandatory Iraq, under British colonial control, had been created in 1921.
61. *London Defended*, p. 10.
62. *London Defended*, p. 10.
63. *London Defended*, p. 11.
64. Geppert, *Fleeting Cities*, p. 169.
65. The British Empire Exhibition was intended to increase working- and middle-class commitment to empire. Contemporaneous accounts evidence the excitement generated by the possibility of 'visiting' all corners of the empire. John Mackenzie argues that the theatre of empire that played out in England, through 'royal pageantry, warfare, sport, and even architecture,' was evidence of working-class enthusiasm for the imperial project, John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880–1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984). Indeed, Mackenzie identifies Wembley as emblematic of this trend. Though Mackenzie argues for the pervasive awareness of empire within the working-class, the British Empire Exhibition lend some ambivalence to the assertion that imperial entertainment was conducive to imperial identity. Andrew Thompson argues that, in fact, 'Wembley may reflect a concern about the extent of the public's ignorance of the empire, or the failure of previous propaganda to fully persuade people of its value,' in Andrew Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 87. Scholars including Bernard Porter and David Cannadine point to how English class systems were determinative of the power structures of Empire in a way that excluded the working-class, Bernard Porter, *The Absent-minded Imperialists*, pp. 265-66; David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Jonathan Rose also demonstrates that the lack of knowledge about imperial structures was borne from lack of newspaper access, geographic isolation, and insufficient public education, Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 321–64.
66. The Daily Herald did an ongoing series on the finances and working conditions of the exhibition. See 'Inhuman Wembley Conditions. Pitiful Tales', *Daily Herald*, May 14 1924; 'Bad Management Somewhere', *Daily Herald*, December 8, 1925. The financial burden of the exhibition was also debated in Parliament including the session on December 10, 1925, United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 189 (1925), pp. 802-836. Sarah Britton also discusses this controversy, Britton, 'Come and See the Empire', pp. 76-77.
67. Britton, 'Come and See the Empire', pp. 75-77.
68. Cabinet Meeting Notes, April 2, 1924, CAB 23/47/18, The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom.
69. 'Big Wembley Strike', *Daily Herald*, March 24, 1924.
70. 'Wembley Menace', *Edinburgh Evening News*, April 2, 1924.
71. 'A Strike Threat', *Sheilds Daily News*, April 8, 1925.
72. 'Big Wembley Strike'.
73. 'Violence at Wembley', *The Lancashire Daily Post*, April 2, 1924.
74. United Kingdom. *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 189 (1925), pp. 802-836
75. 'Communists at Work, Southampton and Wembley', *The Times*, April 2, 1924.
76. 'Colonial Resoluton' (Sixth Congress of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Manchester, May 17-19 1924).
77. JR Campbell, 'Must the Empire Be Broken Up? The Reply to Labour Imperialism', *The Communist Review*, 5 (September 1924): pp. 216–24.
78. T.A. Jackson, 'The Sudan Scandal', *The Communist Review*, no. 5 (September 1924): pp. 236-41.
79. Jackson, 'The Sudan Scandal', p. 237
80. 'Industrial Chaos', *The Belfast Telegraph*, April 2, 1924.
81. 'The Wembley Strike: Communists Behind Industrial Trouble', *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, April 3, 1924.
82. Alex M. Spencer, *British Imperial Air Power: The Royal Air Forces and the Defense of Australia and New Zealand between the World Wars* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2020), pp. 117-121.
83. 'Air Defence', *The Times*. March 5, 1924; 'Air Defence', *The Times*, March 12, 1924.
84. Hugh Addison, *The Battle of London* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1923).
85. The appearance of the Germans at the end of *The Battle*

of London echoes other invasion scare literature including H.G. Well's *The War from the Air* (1908) and the earlier *Battle of Dorking* (1871) by George Tomkyns Chesney.

86. 'Gift Books', *The Western Morning News and Mercury*, November 30, 1923.

87. The Westminster complex had served as Parliament's home since its creation in the late thirteenth century. The fire that consumed the building the night of October 16, 1834 began in the basement furnaces. That day, two workers had been tasked with the burning of wooden tally sticks, a primitive form of tax records. In October 1834, almost fifty years after they fell out of use, the Treasury finally ordered their destruction. The large fire they created in the basement furnace burned out of control, and by morning the compound was largely destroyed. For a full description see Caroline Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

88. Caroline Shenton outlines the fear of populist movements in the days after the fire, most notably the Swing rioters, Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burned Down*, pp. 193-197.

89. The Morning Herald's description of the fire was syndicated in 'Friday's Post. Destruction of the Houses of Lords & Commons by Fire', *Ipswich Journal*, October 18, 1834.

90. 'Destruction of the Houses of Lords & Commons by Fire'.

91. E.P. Thompson, in his classic *Making of the English Working Class* distinguishes between a 'mob' and 'revolutionary crowd' in England during the aftermath of the French Revolution; 'In 18th-century Britain riotous actions assumed two different forms: that of more or less spontaneous popular direct action; and that of the deliberate use of the crowd as an instrument of pressure, by persons 'above' or apart from the crowd.' He goes on to argue that 'The employment of the 'mob' in a sense much closer ... 'hired bands operating on behalf of external interests' ... [and] was an established technique in the 18th century; and—what is less often noted—it had long been employed by authority itself.' The Morning Herald used both definitions of the word, implying that it was both spontaneous popular uprising and that it was dictated by opposition political groups. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), pp. 62-76.

92. In 1831, anti-government demonstrations followed the failure of the House of Commons to pass the Great Reform Act. The prospect of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, which would establish punitive workhouse systems and undermine existing welfare opportunities, further galvanized the working population.

93. Grayzel, *At Home and under Fire*, p. 128.

94. Ferris, 'Achieving Air Ascendancy', pp. 24-25.

95. *London Defended*, pp. 10-11.

96. Jacob F. Field, *London, Londoners and the Great Fire of 1666: Disaster and Recovery* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2017), p. 145.

97. Rebecca Rideal, *1666: Plague, War, and Hellfire* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books/St. Martin's Press, 2016), p. 212.

98. Adrian Tinniswood, *By Permission of Heaven: The Story of the Great Fire of London* (London: Cape, 2003), pp. 58-64; *The London Gazette*, September 8, 1666.

99. Tinniswood, *By Permission of Heaven*, pp. 58-64.

100. *The London Gazette*, September 8, 1666.

101. Field, *Disaster and Recovery*, pp. 15-16.

102. *London Defended*, p. 16.

103. *London Defended*, p. 16.

104. Tom Allbeson, 'Visualizing Wartime Destruction and Postwar Reconstruction: Herbert Mason's Photograph of St. Paul's Reevaluated', *The Journal of Modern History*, 87:3 (2015): pp. 532-78.

105. 'War's Greatest Picture', *The Daily Mail*, December 31, 1940.

Weird Weather and Biblical Floods: The Inundation of the American Megachurch

KATE PICKERING

Fig. 1
Lakewood
Church, Houston,
Texas (2013). ©
ToBeDaniel



The sub-tropical climate of Houston in hurricane season is an enveloping weight, a soft wall that seeps into the skin. We are slowed and placated in its' embrace. Let us join a surge of people moving from the concrete multi-storey car park toward Lakewood's eight sets of glass double doors. Despite the oppressive humidity, the air inside is clinically crisp and dry. Stepping out from the coruscating sun, skin prickles with the chill of an air-conditioned atmosphere. The vents are giant pores cooling the body of the building. They are also gullets through which profane whispers will drift. Friendly stewards welcome the crowd with smiles, greetings and hand-shakes. Within the glass-fronted, double-storey reception area a wide staircase leads up to a mezzanine floor, beyond which are more stairs to the main worship space known as the Sanctuary. Leaving behind the light, glass-fronted hallway, we move toward the arena doors. We pass through the hard exoskeleton, moving into soft, fleshy interior, a gestational space, and enter inside the Sanctuary.

The scale of the space registers in the body as a visceral shock. It is capacious, artificially bright, spectacular. Rows upon rows of upholstered seating laid out in huge grids encircle the crowd in a bowl-like structure. Giant high definition screens hang above a wide luminous stage, bracketed by choir stalls to the left and right, big enough to house 250 singers. A giant multi-cultural, multi-generational family assembles in the space below. The lights above shine through a vast expanse of undulating nylon fishing nets hung from the ceiling to form rippling clouds. The colours resemble a magnificent sky. They soften from deep red to orange and now to pale yellow. Above the choir stalls are midnight blue screens punctuated with an array of tiny lights, simulating a celestial realm.

The lights suddenly plunge the congregation into semi-darkness as the stage is brilliantly lit up. Sixteen white spotlights search across the sea of bodies. At the same moment, a tsunami of noise hits us as the worship band starts up with its opening song. The auditory oversaturation is unprecedented. We feel the

heavy thud of the bass vibrating up from the floor into our feet and legs and up through the chest. We look towards the stage. A smoke machine is sending out white drifts around the legs of the performers.

The high definition screens are relaying song lyrics set against sublime images of the natural world, filtered to maximize effect. The lyrics repeatedly tells us that we are not adrift, we are anchored, we are safe. An image of an eye in a storm is overlaid with the words:

CHRIST ALONE
CORNERSTONE

The atmospherics of the megachurch worship service produce what might be conceptualised as a climate of belief, a weather front contained within and produced by the actants in a space charged with affect. The congregants experience liquid waves of sound, colour, repetitious words, images and metaphors that create deep wells of feeling. Within this fluid atmosphere, song lyrics and sermons frequently refer to God as a rock, as solid and stable, offering divine protection from the watery unpredictability of storms and seas. This produces a collective imaginary of territorial rescue, of orientation amidst life's uncertainties.

For Eva Horn, author of *The Future As Catastrophe*, a collective imaginary refers to the ways that communities understand themselves and the world around them, not only in the past and present but also in relation to the future. For Horn, this imaginary might consist of: 'shared conceptions, attributions, narratives, images, and metaphors'.¹ These provide multiple forms through which we navigate and interpret the 'reality' we perceive. Collective imaginaries, whilst abstract, have material ramifications – they draw on the past, materialize in the present and shape our futures. At Lakewood in Houston, Texas, an evangelical church and the United States' largest megachurch, an imaginary of orientation arises, generated from congregants' sensory perception of the site, both inside and out. Within the church, a collective imaginary is formed through a shared narrative, communicated via a range of visual and material texts. Its overarching message is that God saves: if we can have faith, all will be well. This orienting construction is communicated in disorienting ways during worship, leading to a dynamically affective atmosphere in which embodied response leads to belief formation. However, this stabilising and consoling narrative occludes the more complex reality of a climate crisis that has already reportedly breached the bounds of the building during Hurricane Harvey in 2017. Studies of white evangelical attitudes in the US to the apocalyptic scenarios of climate crisis, of intensifying floods, wildfires, hurricanes and tsunamis, have consistently shown a lack of concern, mistrust or outright rejection of the science on climate change. Several reasons have been posited for this seeming reticence and rejection, from end-times theology (eschatology) creating apathy due to the belief that we are experiencing the earth's last days as ordained by God, to a

concerted effort by right-wing Christian leadership to frame climate crisis as an attempt by left-leaning secularists to discredit Christianity. However in Houston, the threat of extreme weather events, flooding and subsidence pose an ever greater threat to a city located on the gulf coast.

This paper will address how the affective space of Lakewood's worship service — in which a narrative of redemption, dominion over climatological forces and material success is communicated through a range of visual and material forms — both occludes and invokes the more-than-human world outside of its confines. I consider why this might be important within a wider context of a white evangelicalism that foregrounds the apocalypse as part of God's plan for humanity alongside intensifying climate crisis. As an 'Exvangelical' (ex-evangelical) artist and writer, I outline how my experimental, speculative writing practice re-thinks the denials and exclusions of the church space by bringing the more-than-human generatively into the site.² Through my long-form prose text, *There is a Miracle in Your Mouth* — extracts of which are interspersed throughout this chapter — I revisualize the sacred space of the megachurch as having its boundaries breached by a flood and entering a transformative oceanic submersion. I imagine the site as a more-than-human entity, serving to undo the nature/ culture binaries within the site, and birthing it into a new form of hybrid, connected existence. In this I avert a destructive apocalypse, instead reorienting the site within a new imaginary. This speculative writing creates an experiential, performative space based on embodied research, alongside my theoretical analysis, enabling the reader to experience the site in both current and possible forms.

The Evangelical Megachurch

Lakewood is a non-denominational Charismatic evangelical church. Charismatic Christianity is defined as a trans-denominational movement that can intersect with evangelicalism. It is typified by a belief in the supernatural intervention of the Holy Spirit or God's power to perform miracles in the here and now.³ One of the central tenets of evangelicalism (meaning 'good news'), a worldwide, rapidly spreading trans-denominational form of Protestant Christianity, is conversionism, a fundamental belief in the spreading of the gospel to the ends of the earth through telling others the 'good news' of Jesus Christ.⁴ From 1970 to 2021, the global growth of the number of evangelicals increased at a faster rate than global population growth of 119% at 180%. Along with Pentecostals⁵ and Charismatics (often overlapping with evangelicalism), this is the fastest-growing religious group, apart from Islam, at 192%.⁶ There are approximately 600 million evangelicals represented by the World Evangelical Alliance, a global network of churches across 129 nations.⁷ The United States has the largest concentration of evangelicals, mostly based in the Bible Belt in which Lakewood is situated.



Fig. 2
Lakewood Church,
Houston, Texas
(2019). © Photo:
the author.

Evangelicalism is also the dominant form of religious expression in the United States with estimates ranging between 25.4% (2014 Pew Religious Landscape survey) and 37% (2019 Gallup survey) of the population identifying as evangelical or 'born again' Christians.^{8 9} As a result, evangelicals form a significant voting block and wield considerable political and socio-cultural power.

The standard definition of the megachurch is typically a Protestant Christian church with 2,000 or more congregants in weekly attendance although in the US there are currently approximately ninety 'gigachurches' that exceed 10,000 congregants per week.^{10 11} In the US, megachurches are undergoing a rapid increase in size.¹² Up to 52,000 people attend Lakewood every week and millions more access the services via TV broadcast, online and podcasts from around the world.¹³ Beyond its' own particularities of history and culture, in its scale and reach it visualises and materialises the global evangelical movement in its idealised form. Whilst not all megachurches are evangelical—the vast majority of protestant mainline denominations have at least one megachurch—many megachurches, both denominational and non-denominational hold beliefs consistent with evangelicalism.

Non-denominational evangelical megachurches such as Lakewood tend to present low tension with the surrounding secular culture, enabling the unchurched and religious seekers to feel at ease once inside the bounds of the site and the ever-growing embrace of global evangelicalism. The communication of the Biblical redemption narrative through the visual, material and auditory immersion of the evangelical megachurch creates a sense of orientation for the congregant. The authorised narrative of the good news story creates a perception of being grounded or stabilised. On conversion, life stories become held within the structure of the redemption story. Within the church,

architecture, stage and interior design, projected imagery, music lyrics, preaching and teaching, intensified by the visual spectacle of crowd, lighting and scale, all repeatedly reinforce the evangelical narrative creating an intense embodied experience.¹⁴ In this dynamically affective, occasionally disorienting experience the orienting narrative of the good news story is foregrounded as a solid foundation. Bodily and cognitive responses to spectacle, music and persuasive rhetoric coningle to create positive feelings of hope, comfort, consolation and a sense of belonging. Megachurches frequently adopt an appealing sheen of contemporary culture, for example utilising cutting-edge audio-visual technologies to communicate and disseminate practical and therapeutic preaching centring on self-actualisation and positive thinking rather than Biblical exegesis.^{15 16} The preacher's therapeutic, quasi-religious narrative provides a means to cement a new identity as an individual within a global crowd, offsetting the disorientation of rapid social and political change in contemporary culture.

The US megachurch further replicates its socio-political context by prioritizing the comfort and choice of consumer capitalism.¹⁷ A significant proportion is led by wealthy entrepreneurial pastors ('pastorpreneurs')¹⁸ employing business and marketing strategies to enable their churches to grow in members, wealth and influence. The Christian marketplace for books, music, conferences and training, and other products has expanded, alongside the preaching of the 'prosperity gospel'—the supposed Biblical basis for health and wealth—creating an emphasis on success, wellbeing and positive thinking. Joel Osteen for example, senior pastor of Lakewood Church and America's leading Christian minister according to Luke Phillip Sinitiere, is a best-selling author, celebrity and multi-millionaire.¹⁹

Whilst many megachurches are monoracial and 90% of US evangelicals are white,²⁰ Lakewood is notable for its' racial diversity. Non-denominational evangelical megachurches like Lakewood are more likely to be diverse than mainline congregations, reflecting their urban/exurban locations,²¹ yet structural racism is yet to be adequately addressed from the pulpit by white church leaders²² and racism is unwittingly perpetuated by well-meaning white evangelicals.²³ Despite racial diversity (also reflecting its Pentecostal heritage) and black, Latinx and female speakers and worship leaders frequently appearing on stage, there remains within Lakewood a theological conservatism. As a legacy church handed down through the family from father to son, the male heir is still the head of the church and it is still largely men who preach. Heterosexual marriage and the family are promoted, reflecting evangelical conservative values. Whilst Osteen is famed for his refusal to be drawn on political issues, political scientists Wald, Owen and Hill found that even without including overt political content in sermons, churches still conveyed political attitudes to members, creating a convergence in congregants' beliefs and attitudes over time.²⁴

Within the body building, Joel Osteen, son of Lakewood founder John Osteen and now Senior Pastor,



Fig. 3
Joel Osteen, 'Call it in', Lakewood Church (28 July 2019). © Photo: the author.

takes the stage. He is smartly dressed in a dark blue suit, his diminutive stature offset by an expansive Texan warmth and a beguiling charisma. His voice, rehearsed to perfection, is familiar but carries a gentle authority. He settles the congregation into the message with humorous anecdotes, but this playful introduction is set aside to begin the serious business of reinforcing the shared foundations of the community once again. Lakewood's interpretation of the evangelical narrative is inherited from the Word of Faith movement: positive thinking to acquire an abundant life. Osteen thoughtfully paces the stage, opens his arms wide, brings his hands together under his chin. He occasionally punches the air, constantly underlining his words with his gestures. At times he abruptly pauses, his cadence increasingly inflected with passionate emphasis. Congregants respond by murmuring approval, calling out, clapping.

Today's message is 'Call it in', focussing on the power of words to affect positive material change: "Call in health, abundance. Call in promotion, opportunity. Say what you want, not what you have. It is already happening. Don't call in the negative." He wants us to be financially blessed, to have a breakthrough, to be healthy and have all that we desire. He wants this for us because this is what God wants. Through using a rhetorical repetition of the same persuasive phrases over and over again he embeds these truths into the bodies in the crowd. His voice is pure affect for both speaker and listener, summoned from veins, muscles and organs, an embodied will to communicate. Towards the end of his preach Joel's voice breaks with emotion, his chin folds up towards a mouth that contorts with the effort of holding back tears. Here is a man deeply invested in the significance of the telling. His body carries the weight of it.

Whilst evangelicalism is a broad, heterogeneous group consisting of various traditions and not all evangelicals are conservative, white traditionalist evangelicalism²⁵ (also referred to as the Christian Right although this can also include non-evangelicals) is both socially and politically conservative and is historically entangled with Republicanism.²⁶

81% of white evangelicals voted for Trump as president,²⁷ proving decisive in his success, and creating an exodus of people of colour from predominantly white, Republican supporting evangelical congregations.²⁸ White traditionalist evangelicals account for approximately half of evangelicals in the US. They are from historically white denominations who are politically engaged, take the Bible literally, and hope to restore Christian values in American law and culture. The Christian Right are vocal and influential, acting to influence politics on the basis that Anglo-Christian identity is under threat from several enemies including progressive secularism.²⁹ Evangelicals have therefore developed an ‘embattled’ mentality: a perception of being culturally under attack and that they must fight for the Christian soul of the nation. One significant aspect of this confluence of politics and theology is the issue of climate crisis. Robin Globus Veldman has highlighted how Christian Right leadership has deployed a large-scale campaign in the evangelical mass media to suggest that the crisis is nothing more than a liberal hoax. This message reaches millions of global evangelical Christians daily. The attitudes, beliefs and imaginaries of this heterogeneous but sizeable group are formed through an entanglement of theological, local and national contexts.

Apocalypticism in Evangelicalism

The warm, moist air above the Atlantic, significantly warmer than historical averages for this time of year, is unstable. Cumulonimbus or ‘thunderhead’ clouds begin to form and grow, heavy topped and anvil-shaped, a dark shadow that looms, blocking out the sun. A large wave to the east of the Lesser Antilles builds and grows, drawing water up into its’ peak. On satellite imagery the tropical depression appears as several areas of cloud expanding, dispersing and then expanding again, a cloudy milk swirling into the blue. The white blooms and intensifies, one area in particular grows into a large and defined vortex spinning relentlessly around a central black eye. Body building senses its movement as a quietening, a waiting in the ether.

In the Biblical book of Revelations, the end times are described as a time of tribulation including wars and natural disasters to be followed by Christ’s return when a new heaven and earth will be instated.³⁰ 58% of white evangelicals in America believe that Jesus will return before 2050 and 41% of Americans *as a whole* believe that Jesus Christ definitely (23%) or probably (18%) will have returned to earth by 2050.³¹ The particularities of Lakewood’s relationship to the more-than-human world are enclosed within a broader evangelical context in which an apocalyptic imaginary has a significant impact on belief and culture. This imaginary, based on Revelations, is shaped by historical forces.

The Christian Right rose in influence from the late 1970s, forming partisan organisations such as The Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family and the Family Research Council to promote conservative moral reform in response to the perceived secularisation of culture. A sense of moral outrage at progressive cultural and political shifts combined with the Republican recognition that evangelicals formed a significant voting bloc created an ongoing entanglement between Church and state.

Evangelicalism, rather than fragmenting in response to the shifts of modernity, became a mass movement that defined itself in a fight with pluralism in a series of ‘culture wars,’³² causing it to thrive in its sense of embattlement. In the drive to define itself in relation to a perceived enemy, evangelical defence of white traditional America became conflated with the Christian position. The perception that a war against anti-Christian forces is required is made urgent by the belief that pluralism has been prophesied in Revelations as a sign of the ‘end times’.

This sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’, of inclusion and exclusion, materialises repeatedly within evangelical culture. Late Southern Baptist pastor and one of the most powerful propagandists of the Christian Right Tim LaHaye has opined: ‘It is no overstatement to declare that most of today’s evils can be traced to secular humanism.’³³ Along with prolific author Jerry Jenkins, LaHaye authored a best-selling series of sixteen novels titled *Left Behind*.³⁴ The series is the most popular Christian fiction of the past fifty years, selling an estimated eighty million copies with seven books taking the number one spot on the *New York Times* bestseller list. The novels were also turned into a film *Left Behind* (2000) and a violent video game series beginning with *Left Behind: Eternal Forces* (2006) in which gamers kill the unsaved and the army of the Antichrist on the streets of New York.³⁵ LaHaye and Jenkins took details of the rapture from Revelations (where true believers are taken up into heaven, leaving behind nominal Christians and unbelievers) and extrapolated them into a gruesome and visceral imagining of the last days. In the ‘Left Behind’ novels, the antichrist is in league with the United Nations, the European Union, Russia, Iraq, all Muslims, the media, liberals, freethinkers and international bankers. America is viewed as overtaken by secretive and immoral forces behind organisations that seem democratic. This enacts a reversal in which ‘others’ are seen to

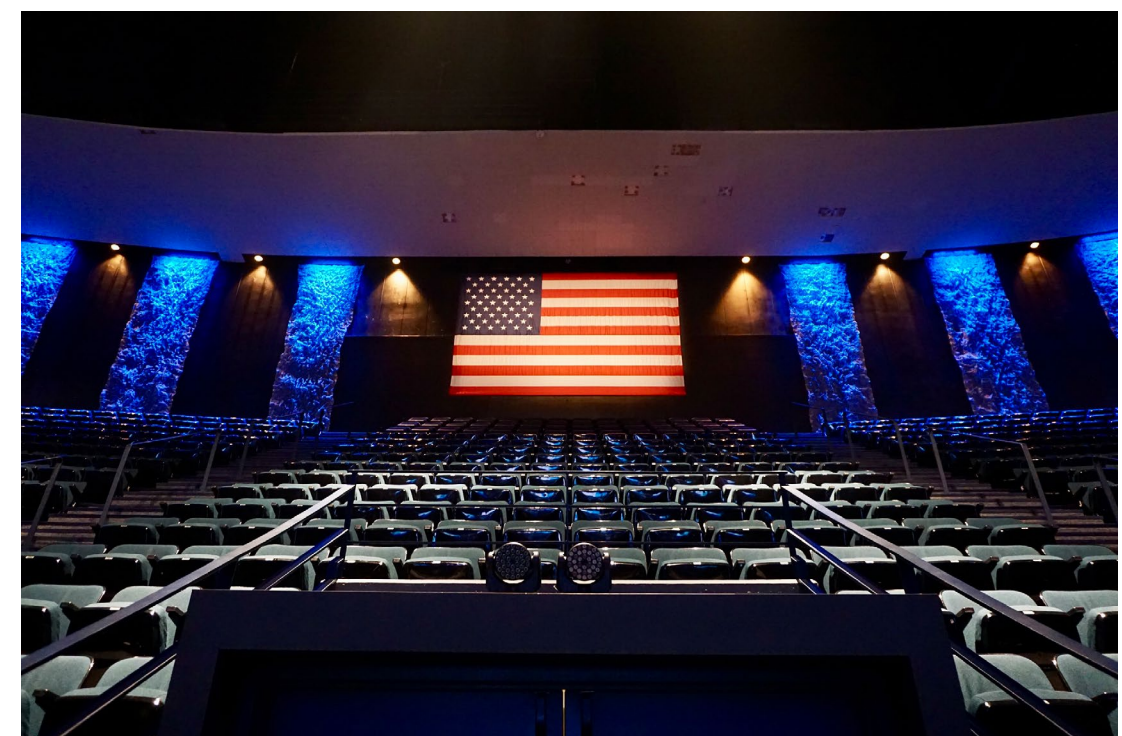


Fig. 4
American flag
at the back of
the Sanctuary,
Lakewood's main
worship auditorium
(July 2019). ©
Photo: the author.

be intent on world domination and then creates a logic for militant repression.

The perceived destabilisation of the ‘Christian’ American way of life produces a sense of threat and a fear of the other, creating both a collective nationalistic identity and increasingly militant behaviour. Andrew Whitehead and S.L. Perry write that Christian nationalism is: ‘a cultural framework – a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems – that idealizes and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life’.³⁶ They further define Christian nationalism as different from white conservative Protestantism, instead: ‘it includes assumptions of nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, along with divine sanction for authoritarian control and militarism. It is as ethnic and political as it is religious’.³⁷ In a large-scale sociological study, Whitehead and Perry quantify American attitudes towards Christian nationalism into four categories: Rejecters, Resisters, Accommodators and Ambassadors. Ambassadors are categorised as being ‘wholly supportive’ of Christian nationalism and believe that Christians should urgently act to hasten the ‘glory’ of the new heaven and earth.³⁸ According to the study they comprise 19.8% of the population.³⁹ Whilst nationalistic and dominionist views are not held by all evangelicals, Chris Hedges argues that conservative evangelical churches enable its growing influence in US politics by failing to call out what he terms an ‘American fascism’—the idea that ‘there is only one way to be a Christian and one way to be an American’⁴⁰—and presents an ever-growing threat to democracy, freedom and tolerance. Hedge writes:

As long as scripture, blessed and accepted by the church, teaches that at the end of time there will be a Day of Wrath and Christians will control the shattered remnants of a world cleansed through violence and war, as long as it teaches that all nonbelievers will be tormented, destroyed and banished to hell, it will be hard to thwart the message of radical apocalyptic preachers.⁴¹

Unsurprisingly, polarised attitudes toward the apocalyptic scenarios of climate change have also formed, with scepticism, denial and apathy toward environmentalism largely comprising the evangelical response. A 2015 Pew Research Centre poll found that only 28% of white evangelicals believe the earth is warming due to human activity in comparison to 64% of the non-religiously affiliated.⁴² The Christian right’s theological framing of several political positions—including the idea that climate change is a hoax made up by liberals—has increased scepticism within American evangelicalism at large toward climate crisis.⁴³ The Cornwall Alliance, for example, is a conservative Christian think tank that actively works to promote climate science scepticism and to lobby against Christian environmentalism. Their ‘Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming’—signed by 500 prominent evangelical leaders—frames global warming as part of naturally occurring cycles. The Alliance argues that to take steps to address this would increase poverty, a persuasive claim for Christians charged by the Bible to feed

and clothe the poor. The Cornwall Alliance’s twelve-part film series featuring a number of influential evangelical leaders, titled *Resisting the Green Dragon: A Biblical Response to One of the Greatest Deceptions of our Day* (2013), similarly frames climate activism as anti-Christian.⁴⁴

In Globus Veldman’s study of traditionalist evangelical laity attitudes to climate change in Georgia, she largely dismisses the long-held view that evangelical rejection of climate change is due to what she terms the ‘end-time apathy hypothesis’: the idea that due to the imminent return of Christ and destruction of the world evangelicals care little about the environment.⁴⁵ Some of her participants were convinced that apocalypse was nigh and readily viewed climate change as evidence of this fact. These ‘hot millennialists’ however were in the minority. The majority, ‘cool millennialists’, were predominantly climate sceptics who believed that the timing of the end could not be predicted. Highlighting climate change as another battleground in the war on secular culture, Globus Veldman writes:

For these individuals, climate change was ... instead a hoax—a competing eschatology concocted by secularists who sought to scare people into turning to government instead of God ... this *sense of embattlement with secular culture* explained why so many of my informants rejected climate change on religious grounds.⁴⁶

Key to this scepticism is, for Globus Veldman, the outsize influence of Christian right leadership through the evangelical mass media, impacting millions of global evangelical Christians. In framing climate change theologically, they ‘helped transform climate skepticism and denial from a political opinion into an aspect of evangelical identity’.⁴⁷

However, Sophie Bjork-James’ ethnographic study of evangelical attitudes in Colorado foregrounds how competing understandings of the end times produce different responses within evangelicalism and appears to back up the end-times apathy hypothesis. Bjork-James writes that:

In over a year of ethnographic research on evangelicalism ... I found the future is ever-present in evangelical discourse. Believers regularly speculate and debate about the end of time—what it will entail, when it will occur, how to tell that it is coming. It is the subject of countless books, podcasts, radio broadcasts, sermons, Bible study groups, and informal conjecture.⁴⁸

Bjork-James outlines two distinct approaches amongst the evangelicals she researched in Colorado, one she frames as ‘lifeboat’ theology – the idea that God will completely destroy the earth and usher in a new heaven. This predominating viewpoint of a ‘redundant earth’ was more focussed on individual salvation and might be compared with Globus Veldman’s ‘hot millennialist’ group in their excitement at the prospect of an

Fig. 5
Buffalo Bayou,
Houston (July
2019). © Photo: the
author.



imminent new beginning. Bjork-James writes about the exceptionalism of this group:

In this view, God is the ultimate agent (see Bjork-James 2018), and humans are seen as occupying a privileged position vis-à-vis God. This understanding is central to evangelical views on the environment, for human life is always the foreground in this ethical order, everything else is background. Human life is the important cargo on this sinking ship of a planet, not the quality of life, but the fact of life. The environment here remains the unmarked background.⁴⁹

Furthermore, the idea that humans have the power to disrupt the environment was seen as arrogant (an idea echoed in Globus Veldman's study), a denial of God's omnipotence and therefore challenging the authority of evangelicalism.⁵⁰

Secondly, a different interpretation of the Biblical text led to the belief that an apocalypse will remake the earth rather than destroy it. This minority view, more common amongst younger evangelicals, produced a greater likelihood of adherents' involvement in environmental causes.⁵¹

Within an evangelicalism that takes the Bible literally, the end of the world as we know it is conceived of as a reality to come. I posit that despite varying Biblical interpretations and political influences, the evangelical imaginary of life as a temporary and shadowy version of a more glorious world in waiting, and the human as exceptional over other forms of life impacts on engagement with climate crisis. Furthermore, in the sense of a clear-cut division between the sacred world of evangelical church culture and the profane world outside, anything that escapes the bounds of evangelicalism, including the surrounding animate landscape, is viewed as a potential threat to God's

sovereignty.

The black eye, surrounded by a whirling field of white, moves westward on an erratic course. It increases to a category 4 hurricane moving toward the south coast of North America, approaching the Texan coastline. Satellite technology tracks its progress, the hurricane appearing as like a swirl of white mycelium, silken fingers drawing energy inwards, mushbrooming up into a fluffy domed cap.

The Dis/Orientations of Lakewood's Ecological Imaginary

Lakewood's iteration of the evangelical narrative — a narrative that I consider to be an orienting construction visualised and materialised in dis/orienting ways — impacts on belief and behaviour within a locality that is increasingly impacted by severe weather events. Rather than an eschatological narrative, Lakewood adopts a prosperity gospel narrative. I propose that this is a linear teleology of success and progress, one in which both an individual and a global body of believers will overcome and predominate against a world that needs divine help and power.

Encircling Lakewood are commercial office buildings housing petroleum distributors, drilling contractors, petrochemical manufacturers, energy and health insurance companies and real estate trusts. The ten office towers of Greenway Plaza, where Lakewood resides, are connected by an extensive system of air-conditioned skyways, tunnels, and underground parking garages. Greenway Plaza overlays the grasslands that extend beyond the Buffalo Bayou. The topography is wide and flat, a sprawling web of roads bracketed by super-sized buildings, behind which central Houston's skyscrapers reach heavenward, colonising the blue.

Lakewood is anchored into grassland that tops sand, silts and clay loams deposited by waterways over the last 35,000 years, and the remains of a river delta from the last ice age. Much further below are the salt layers that occasionally rise to the surface to form anticlines, or salt domes. The Harris-Galveston region, in which Houston is located and through which the Buffalo Bayou snakes, lies to the north of the Gulf Coast and the west of Galveston and Trinity Bays. Beneath most of Harris County lies an immense saturated zone formed of aquifers. Aquifers are porous rock from which water can be readily extracted. The surface of the land has been slowly deforming and subsiding as the aquifers compact due to over-extraction of groundwater for domestic, commercial and industrial consumption, altering the flows of the creeks and bayous and creating an increased likelihood of severe flooding. 190 billion gallons of water from industrial and municipal wells are drawn annually. However, the water is an essential part of the clay and sand structure under the ground, and the inability of annual rainfall to replace the ever-diminishing water supplies has led to areas of Houston sinking almost two feet in the last decade alone. Parts of Harris County have sunk ten to twelve feet in the last century. Over 20,000 acres of land in the Houston-Galveston region has been lost to the encroaching shorelines of Galveston Bay and its tributaries as the land has sunk, and flash flooding has increased as a threat due to the impact on drainage. Houston is not built on a solid foundation of bedrock but is instead floating on an unsteady scaffold of fine-grained Beaumont clay. Locating a populous city and the plants and industries of the world's largest petrochemical complex upon this shifting, watery platform has triggered the natural instability of a land which is the coastal equivalent of earthquake country.⁵² The depleting aquifers are called Chicot, Jasper and Evangeline.

The space of the Sanctuary, during a worship service, is temporarily closed off from the

landscape in which the building is situated. The land has been slowly subsiding along with an increase in the likelihood of severe flooding in a region that has grown wealthy as a result of the extraction of fossil fuels.⁵³ Traditionalist evangelical imaginaries of endless extraction of resources and wealth generation, the world as merely a backdrop for the perfection of believers, appear tenuous within an increasingly perilous climate. As I will outline, Lakewood performs a simplified and unproblematic version of this landscape, comforting believers, consoling them with a message that through trusting in God he will deliver them through the storms, both metaphorical and literal. Contrasting with the sub-tropical humidity of Houston snaked through with the swampy bayou, is the vast air-conditioned, artificially lit space of the Sanctuary, a site of orienting repetitions, but also frequently awash with atmospheric emotion across the thousands of bodies.

Surrounded by the dark bowl of the room, the brightness, movement and noise from the front begin to kaleidoscope towards us. Despite our distance from the stage, the sound and the dazzling light seem closely intimate. The illusion that we are rational, detached outsiders rapidly dissolves. We are no longer spectators, but instead, we experience a revelation, it stirs deep within, we are helpless to resist. It produces a stinging in our eyes, a tight constriction within our chest. Behind the sternum, a contraction of feeling forms a dark spot. Tears sting at the back of eyelids and if we don't let them out they will burst through the pores in our cheeks. As we sing simple but laden lyrics, the waves of sound translate into a wash of emotion. The words repeat and repeat in various configurations, puncturing any resistance within us, opening up a breach within the wall of disbelief. We sing that the God of breakthrough is on our side. The lyrics, carrying profound meaning, flow and settle, becoming word-concretions within us:

Fig. 6
Worship Service,
Lakewood Church,
Houston (28 July
2019). © Photo: the
author.



*You are the solid ground;
Firm through the flood of uncertainty;
You are a fearless hope;
Holding my future;
You won't let go...*

*When the earth gives way;
When foundations shake;
My hope stands on Your promises;
There's no fear I face;
That could break my faith;
My soul stands on Your promises*

I propose that the repeated narrative of the 'solid ground' of God creates a form of embodied orientation in the believer. To convert is literally to do an about-turn, to turn to face the other way (the Latin term *conversio* means 'turned about'), enacting a spatial and embodied metaphor towards the 'nomos', a meaningful, orienting construction of reality.⁵⁴ Religious culture, built on the foundations of a shared language through which we interpret the world, forms an orientation that creates an embodied perception of a stable ground in a world in flux. For religious sociologist Peter Berger, 'nomos' is the social construction of reality through the collective world-building of a meaningful order of experience. This ordering is conceived of by Berger as a fundamentally orienting construction. Religion is the ultimate form of this orientation, a turning away from the chaos of meaninglessness.⁵⁵

Jesus Christ, the 'Corner Stone'⁵⁶ and central figure around whom the narrative of creation, fall, resurrection, and second coming configures, provides a foundation upon which a religious worldview is built. Within the US framing of evangelicalism, the foundational texts of the Bible, the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, create a seemingly solid base on which collective identities are formed. For the evangelical white majority, tradition and religious belief combine to create a powerful set of ideas. Historian James Davison Hunter's asserts that:

The evangelical heritage has long identified itself with the hopes and promises of America. Evangelicals view themselves as having helped to create and sustain all that is good in America: its traditions of moral virtue; its ethic of work, commitment, and achievement; and its political and economic institutions.⁵⁷

The Lakewood narrative of God as a solid ground is communicated as universally significant through design mimicking natural phenomena, often to hypernatural effect.

Fig. 7
Worship Service,
Lakewood Church,
Houston (28 July
2019). © Photo: the
author.



This mimicry seems to suggest a world within the Sanctuary, highlighting the world-building at work. Within the darkened space of the Sanctuary, the congregants' eye is deliberately drawn down through sightlines designed to focus on a brightly lit stage foregrounding emotively performed music and visual effects. Previous iterations of the stage design include a rock and water feature bracketing the stage that appears to reduce the world to its' essential parts of land, sky and water. In this former design craggy brown rocks are dotted with plant life, a small stream works its way down the façade. High-definition screens raised high above the stage relay images of white cumulus clouds scudding across a blue sky. In the current iteration, a dazzling array of lights against a dark background brackets the stage, conjuring a brilliant cosmological display.

Fig. 8
Phil Munsey,
'Practice Makes
Imperfect',
Lakewood Church
(31 July 2019). ©
Photo: the author.



Above the Sanctuary coloured lights shift through a series of undulating wire mesh screens made from fishing nets, a construction which alternatively suggests a sea and a rippling sunset, further intensifying the feeling of being enclosed in a simplified, (hyper) natural world.⁵⁸

Repetition in real life and through a mise en abyme effect on screens above the congregation images a seemingly limitless number of bodies, an expanding global crowd. A slowly rotating eleven-foot-wide bronze globe sculpture, located centrally on the stage behind the preacher, images a map and orientation device. Despite its rotation, it depicts a stable ground from which the preacher re-tells a redemption and rescue narrative, speaking the world as an enduring and unassailable truth. The oration of the preacher and the performance of worship leaders create a vocal and gestural animacy. As the preacher re-tells the redemption narrative it materialises as a foundational stratum. He channels, through performative vocalisation and gesture, a seemingly global message. Simple phrases encouraging belief in divine intervention despite life's uncertainties and victory through faith are repeatedly reinforced through multiple texts of teaching, preaching, authoring, song lyrics, social media, radio transmissions, podcasts and interviews.

Whilst climate change is not addressed, watery, oceanic metaphors in the song lyrics underline the historical symbol of the church as a ship navigating the shifting, dangerous waters of life: 'Let faith be the song that overcomes the raging sea, let faith be the song that calms the storm inside of me', and: 'You call me out upon the waters... In oceans deep, My faith will stand...' ⁵⁹ The church is an ark, a place of sanctuary and survival. Furthermore — echoing the beliefs of Globus Veldman and Bjork-James' participants — the ecological imaginary at Lakewood reflects the evangelical belief in

the omnipotence of God. To doubt this or to worry is to demonstrate a lack of faith. Osteen has stated: 'It is easy to get into agreement with the negative, with what the experts say. "They've given me the facts", "They have a lot of experience",...God can do the impossible'.⁶⁰ Believers are encouraged not to surrender to fear despite material realities.

This orienting narrative is however frequently communicated in disorienting forms. During worship, bodies are literally moved as the bass vibrates up from the floor. A flood of feeling is prompted by the massive visual and auditory overload of the worship spectacle that kaleidoscopes out from the stage. The shifts between an orienting story and a disorienting experience in the worship service create a dynamic tension in the individual and collective body. The sense of overwhelm highlights the solidity of the narrative, the collective affect appears to materialise as an unseen presence. An atmosphere, like a contained weather system arises, qualitatively different from that outside the bounds of the church. It reinforces binaries of inclusion/ exclusion, sacred/ profane and saved/ unsaved.

The approaching hurricane, designated at category four with winds between 130 and 156 miles per hour, prompts hurricane, extreme wind and storm surge watches in Texas. As the storm bears down, a state of emergency is declared along with mandatory evacuation for many residents. People leave work early, board up windows and sandbag doors. Queues begin to form at gas stations to leave the state, but the oil refineries have closed in the advent of the storm, and there is not enough fuel for all the vehicles. Flights are cancelled. The airports close. As the storm approaches, small eddies of wind pick up on the ground, picking up leaves, dust and light rubbish. Some of these eddies dissipate, whilst others build, pulling upwards, stretching into mini tornadoes rotating within the larger cyclone. The roaring wind of the eyewall, ten miles wide, is moving towards Houston. Eyewall tornadoes twist and spin within the vortex, flattening and destroying sections of land, whilst others nearby are left unscathed.

As a church within Scott Thumma and Dave Travis's 'seeker' category of megachurch,⁶¹ representing those tailored to the unchurched, especially those alienated by traditional organized religion, I propose that whilst Lakewood does not overtly embody a politicised nationalistic evangelicalism, it exists as a gateway into evangelical culture. It entangles with mainstream secular culture in numerous ways from its positive thinking, therapeutic ethos and its marketing and technological proficiency. It is the soft sell of evangelicalism, where dark messages such as the end of the world are, publicly, entirely avoided. Against the wider backdrop of white evangelical eschatological belief, climate change denial and Christian nationalism, there is not an overt eschatological focus at Lakewood in the manner of churches such as those outlined in Bjork-James' study. However, in Lakewoods' adherence to Biblical literalism, it is likely to include both hot and cool millennialists within its' membership and leadership. Repeated allusions to God as a stable ground and a rescuer foreground the divine protection of the Sanctuary as a sacred lifeboat from the threat of stormy seas overlaps with Bjork-James' lifeboat eschatology. God rescues both in this life and for those who believe



Fig. 9
60 years of Lakewood
display, first floor
atrium, Lakewood
Church (July 2019).
© Photo: the
author.

in Christs' imminent return, in the new world to come. Song lyrics, projected imagery and preaching soothingly narrate Godly intervention and protection in a hurricane and flooding vulnerable locality.

Whilst evangelicalism frames belief as arising from an individual response to the truth of Biblical texts, I contend that belief arises from a much wider set of influences, including the material-spatial-visual communication of the Lakewood narrative within the Sanctuary. David Abram distinguishes the constructed world of human design from the animate world, believing that the human-made world quickly loses its ability to speak and enchant.⁶² Contrary to Abrams suggestion, I would argue that Lakewood makes use of both designed and performative animacy to produce feelings of orientation and disorientation, creating affective atmospheres which speak to and enchant the body of believers in a powerful and sustained way. How Lakewood visualises and materialises God's intervention in troubled times impacts belief formation in relation to the threat of climate crisis.

Whilst visiting Lakewood in July 2019 during the '60 years of Lakewood' celebration, I asked Osteen what he envisioned the next sixty years of Lakewood might involve. Unsurprisingly for an evangelical, he replied he was excited about getting the message out to even more people via the use of new technological platforms. I then asked him to consider using his platform to address climate crisis, mentioning the vulnerability of Houston. Looking visibly uncomfortable he exited the conversation, stating that other people on his team deal with this area of responsibility. My suggestion of inviting in evangelical Christian and climate scientist/ educator Katherine Hayhoe from Texas Tech University was firmly but politely and prayerfully declined via email. Subsequent emails were not responded to. How long the Osteens can continue to overlook the

more complex realities that surround Lakewood without losing their appeal remains to be seen. Metaphors of arks and oceanic rescue can be both productive, prompting believers to replicate Christ-like behaviour and lead to complacency concerning climate crisis. Despite often misinformed controversies over Lakewood's response to the effects of severe weather, the church regularly offers its' own rescue, assisting displaced and affected Houstonians, opening the building for shelter and providing beds, blankets, food and supplies.⁶³ However, in failing to directly address the causes of and complicity in increasingly disastrous weather, Lakewood's narrative only acts as a sticking plaster on an ever-growing wound for those most vulnerable, often demarcated by gender, race and ableism. In its' focus on individual faith, it fails to address the wider structural causes of poverty and inequality. Feminist scholar Astrida Neimanis uses the term 'weathering' to conceptualize how body, site and the weather enmesh in a world threatened by climate change. She also considers weathering a strategy, a way to pay attention to how bodies and sites make and respond to weather and to consider how we might weather differently. Neimanis and Hamilton write:

Weather is pervasive in ways that makes distinctions between the meteorological and the social rather leaky, not unlike the much-critiqued nature/culture divide... weathering means learning to live with the changing conditions of rainfall, drought, heat, thaw and storm as never separable from the 'total climate' of social, political and cultural existence of bodies.⁶⁴

The weather both inside and outside of Lakewood constitutes how bodies live, believe and behave. I would argue that the repeated metaphors, images and narratives of protection within Lakewood create a passivity, a sense that believers can rest easy knowing that whatever the instabilities of the more-than-human world, God is able to grant them victory, success and peace.

World Re-building Through Alternative Fictions

As our voices combine, led by powerful well-rehearsed vocalists who sing the same roster of songs known to charge the crowd, an urgency develops. Desire to bring down a divine presence begins to summon the weather inside. As our intonations produce an increase in the difference in atmospheric pressure, the air conditioning vents perform a reversal and the outside air begins to funnel inside. The chilled atmosphere begins to alter, but it is so subtle as to go unnoticed. A humid atmosphere begins to mingle with collective elation.

...

The Sanctuary is sweating, suffering from overexertion, vent-pores disgorging trickles of contaminated water from flood water run-off, leached from industrial complexes and sewers. Droplets of water begin to bead on the ceiling and the lighting fixtures. The water begins to dribble down the walls and pools on the

carpet. The small streams build into rivulets. As the worship band draws us through a choreographed arc of feeling, the heat continues to rise. The dampness is producing a fast-spreading mould. It shifts out from the vents across the ceiling and adjoining walls curling its way around the mesh fishing nets and lighting arrays. It spots and blooms in disturbing patterns, marking the fabric of the upholstered seating, and mottling the carpet with a dark tinge, as if a large purple bruise is spreading into the fibres. The seating and the mid-blue of the carpet now have a mottled pink tinge, not a consistent pink. In certain areas the pink form fine red tendrils and flourishes. The corporate polish of the Sanctuary is losing its sheen.

As an Exvangelical artist who writes experimentally, I creatively address the complexity of a site like Lakewood and how it intersects with a white evangelical apocalypticism. Within the space of speculative fiction, I can bring the more-than-human world into the consecrated space of a site that views this natural world as merely a backdrop for the prosperity gospel narrative and human exceptionalism. Due to Houston's coastal location, without any attempt to address climate crisis and sea-level rise, it is plausible that large parts of Houston may one day be submerged. However, my aim is to re-think the site, not to annihilate it. Feminist multi-species theorist Donna Haraway, in *Staying with the Trouble*, her recent book on ways to think-with, live-with and be-with other inhabitants of the earth in troubling times, rejects the sublime and thrilling visions of destruction conjured by the apocalyptic imaginary – whether secular or religious.⁶⁵ Instead of endings in which we refuse responsibility, she offers the provocation of staying with the damaged earth on which we reside, building messy, difficult but liveable futures through human non-human collaborations. Haraway dismisses both hope and despair: the hopeful faith in easy technofixes that will rescue us from ongoing climate crises, and also the destructive fatalism that these horrors are insurmountable and that there is no sense in working towards a resurgent world. Without glossing over the dire realities of population increase and its burdens, Haraway argues that we eschew an abstract futurism and stay with the trouble, working with the non-human to collaborate and co-create, making 'oddkin' through strange and risky action. Central to this effort for Haraway is imaginative, speculative fabulation that conjures potential futures.⁶⁶

Speculative fictions create a space for new imaginaries to arise, challenging old, outmoded ways of thinking and being. Armen Avanessian and David Farrier consider the relation of poetics—language's world-making potential—to the future. For both Avanessian and Farrier, speculation doesn't just imply imagining the future, it also implies an alteration of that future. Avanessian contends that language, literature and thought aren't abstract phenomena but are ontological – part of the world: 'Speculative poetics is then, oriented toward the future, alters our view of the past, and interacts with the present ... the literary takes on the task of creating a global, social and political present'.⁶⁷ Language expressed in the literary becomes a kind of laboratory for growing new cultures.

The temperature now settles on an uncomfortable 98 degrees Fahrenheit. The cherry wood trim around the seating and the architraves warp and swell. The fire doors of the Sanctuary seal shut. What appear

to be hairline cracks are fingering their way along the interior walls. They are a deep red in hue, a network of filigree thin branches, disrupting the smooth surface of the walls and spreading down into the flooring, seeming to inscribe the building with their own language. The walls appear to have taken on the tone of wet interior skin, through which a network of veins is visible.

David Farrier utilizes the term ‘Anthropocene Poetics’ to think through the potential of language within poetry to affect our relationship to deep geological time, enabling us to better comprehend our place in relation to the earth, through the thickening of time that occurs in poetic compression.⁶⁸ The potential of the lyric within poetry to compress meaning and time, to hold multiple temporalities and scales within a single frame, produces uncanny and giddy affects but also acts as a prism through which to view climactic crisis.⁶⁹ These approaches might be applied to a site where the more-than-human world—both its wonder and its precarity—is cut off from the divine space of worship. In my experimental writing practice, I take the material of the narrative foundations, site-based exclusions and collective imaginary of Lakewood and weirdly remake its space and time. As Nelson Goodman states: ‘Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking’.⁷⁰

The many rows of seating seem more dense, as though both multiplying and shrinking into an infinite regress. Other bodies within the congregation kaleidoscope into two and three and four, birthing themselves over and over into refracting patterns, an endlessly morphing crowd. Within the fog, the song lyrics seem to distort. The words fruit and expand into weird assemblages. An outpouring of singing in tongues overlays song lyrics, unknown vocalisations congealing into brief pools of meaning, then dispersing.

Re-imagining the Site of Lakewood: There Is a Miracle in Your Mouth

I reorient, through experimental writing, towards a story world in which metaphors of orientation and disorientation, enclosure and openness, liquidity and fixity shape form and content. In my writing, I combine mythic histories of Lakewood and the Osteen family within the context of Houstonian/ Texan history with an account of an oncoming tropical cyclone based on research into Hurricane Harvey. In the text, as Exvangelical, I identify with the site of the church. The building becomes my body. I write my faith loss into the body-building of Lakewood, which becomes a character that thinks and dreams, moving from rigidity to flux. The body-building’s heretical female voice becomes a foil to the dominating male voice of Lakewood’s patrilineal leadership. It is interred within the fixity of concrete building foundations, slowly becomes aware that a hurricane is bearing down upon it bringing with it the contamination of the profane outside. It enters an oceanic submersion, eventually



Fig. 10
Buffalo Bayou,
Houston (2019).
During Hurricane
Harvey, the bayou
rose by thirty nine
feet after fifty one
inches of rain
fell over parts of
Houston. © Photo:
the author.

transforming into ‘oddkin’.⁷¹ This troubles the narrative simplicity that creates such a solid bodily orientation within megachurch culture. For Mark Fisher, the weird connotes that ‘which does not belong’, bringing into the space of the familiar something which would ordinarily lie beyond it, the joining of two things that do not belong together.⁷² ‘Through my writing I attempt to undo: ‘the solid, the fixed, the reliable, the static’ habits of evangelical storytelling.’⁷³ I overwrite both the eschatology of evangelicalism and the simple, teleological redemption narrative of Lakewood through a transgressive ‘letting in’ of the weather, bringing with it a weird bodily otherness. The inundation of the flood—a metaphor for a global crowd and the immersive space of the megachurch experience—serves to reorient both Lakewood and myself, breaking us out of our current impasse, our straightness and fixity. This new world created in my writing blurs the separations and displacements of insider/ outsider, holy/ unholy, nature/ culture, suggesting that there are no such easy distinctions. I align with Harraway to resist: ‘the sterilising narrative of wiping the world clean by apocalypse or salvation’.⁷⁴

The Sanctuary is awash. The speakers relay distorted noise. Vowels elongate, the Texan accent protractions grow overlong and monotone. Time stalls. Water curls its way around the curves of the Sanctuary, echoing the yellow spirals in the carpet. The electric spark and fizz, then cut out. The stage, streaked with water and with a sheen of pink, appears to shift, a giant tongue. The globe resembles an epiglottis behind which a hole has opened up, a fleshy man. We can no longer distinguish between our bodies and the building, we feel ourselves to be both rooted into the ground and to contain a vast interior space of pure feeling, a climate that is charged with affect.

Body-building dreams:

I go fully into the water. I see underwater creatures that resemble those in the midnight zone. Transparent and tendrilly, otherworldly beings with strange protrusions and bulbous heads. I am becoming like one of them. I move back towards the steps and climb out. I have become rubbery and translucent. I am pale and have the texture and frill-like spine of a gyoza.

1. Eva Horn, *The Future as Catastrophe: Imagining Disaster in the Modern Age* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 27
2. See Bradley Onishi, 'The Rise of #Exvangelical' *Religion and Politics*, accessed 2nd March 2021, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2019/04/09/the-rise-of-exvangelical/>. Whilst Exvangelical suggests a rejection of Evangelical as an identity, it has permanently altered my sense of self, and therefore use the designation 'dis/' in dis/identity to describe the complexity and complicity of my position. Here I draw on Jose Esteban Muñoz's conception of 'disidentification' in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). Whilst recognising my white and heteronormative privilege in relation to Muñoz's minoritarian position, and also the fact that Evangelicalism in the UK has a markedly different claim on wider structures of power than it does in the US, I situate myself as neither accepting or rejecting, celebrating or denouncing the culture once held a sway over me. I may have physically left the church, but its influence still bears upon me.
3. See: 'Charismatic Christians' *Christianity*, accessed 11th November 2021, <https://christianity.org.uk/article/charismatic-christians>
4. See Bebbington's quadrilateral definition of Evangelicalism: David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s*. (London: Routledge, 1995) pp. 2-17. Bebbington defines Evangelicals as believing in Biblicalism: the truth of the Bible; Crucicentrism: the need for the atonement of Christ; Conversionism: the need for all of humanity to be converted; and Activism: the need to act on the truth of the gospel.
5. Pentecostalism is part of the Charismatic movement, but specifically believes that baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues (glossolalia) are signs of an authentic conversion. See: J. Gordon Melton, 'Pentecostalism' *Britannica*, accessed 11th November 2021, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pentecostalism>
6. See 'Annual Statistics: Status of Global Christianity 2021', *Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary*, accessed 3rd March 2021, <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/resources/status-of-global-christianity/>
7. 'Who We Are' *World Evangelical Alliance*, accessed 16th September 2021, <https://www.worlddea.org/>
8. 'America's Changing Religious Landscape', *The Pew Research Centre*, accessed 16th September 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>
9. 'Religion', *Gallup*, accessed 16th September 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>
10. 'The Definition of a Megachurch' *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*, accessed 13th September, 2021 <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html>
11. 'Megachurch database' *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*, accessed 13th September 202, <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/database.html>
12. Stephen Ellingson, 'New Research on Megachurches: Non-denominationalism and Sectarianism' in Bryan Turner *New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons Incorporated, 2010), p. 248
13. Stoyan Zaimov, Joel Osteen's Lakewood Church Ranked America's Largest Megachurch With 52,000 Weekly Attendance' *The Christian Post*, accessed: 25 September 2019, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/joel-osteens-lakewood-church-ranked-americas-largest-megachurch-with-52k-in-attendance.html>
14. See Susan Bratton, *ChurchScape: Megachurches and the Iconography of Environment*. (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2016); Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Anne C. Loveland, and Otis B. Wheeler, *From Meetinghouse to Megachurch: A Material and Cultural History*. (Columbia, Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2003).
15. See Miranda Klaver, 'Media Technology Creating "Sermonic Events." The Hillsong Megachurch Network', *CrossCurrents*, 65: 4, (2015): pp. 422–433. doi: [10.1111/cros.12164](https://doi.org/10.1111/cros.12164); Matthew Wade, 'Seeker-friendly: The Hillsong Megachurch as an Enchanting Total Institution', *Journal of Sociology*, 52: 4, (2016): pp. 661–676. doi: [10.1177/1440783315575171](https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783315575171). Whilst the Australian megachurch brand Hillsong embodies its' own particular history and culture, there are a number of parallels with Lakewood. They are both charismatic evangelical non-denominational megachurches with a drive to globalize and deploy technology, social media and marketing strategies to do so.
16. See Katja Rakow, 'Therapeutic Culture and Religion in America', *Religion Compass*, 7(11), (2013): pp. 485–497; Katja Rakow, 'Religious Branding and the Quest to Meet Consumer Needs: Joel Osteen's "Message of Hope"?' in Jan Stievertmann, Philip Goff, and Detlef Junker (eds.) *Religion and the Marketplace in the United States*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015)
17. See Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Marion Maddox, 'Prosper, Consume and Be Saved'. *Critical Research on Religion* 1, no. 1 (April 2013): pp. 108–15. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303213476108>; George Sanders, 'Religious Non-Places: Corporate Megachurches and Their Contributions to Consumer Capitalism'. *Critical Sociology* 42, no. 1 (January 2016): pp. 71–86. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514531605>.
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19. Phillip. L. Sinitiere, *Salvation with a Smile: Joel Osteen, Lakewood Church, and American Christianity* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), p. 8
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22. Campbell Robertson, 'A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches'

- New York Times*, accessed 11th November 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/09/us/blacks-evangelical-churches.html>
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 25. Robin Globus Veldman, *The Gospel of Climate Skepticism: Why Evangelical Christians Oppose Action on Climate Change*. (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019).
 26. See William C. Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*. (New York: Broadway Books, 1996); Francis FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017); Angela Denker, *Red State Christians: Understanding the Voters Who Elected Donald Trump*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019); James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. (New York: BasicBooks, 1991) et al.
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 28. Robertson 'A Quiet Exodus: Why Black Worshipers Are Leaving White Evangelical Churches'
 29. See Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Christian Right and the War on America*. (London: Vintage, 2008); and Martin, *With God on our Side* et al.
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Apocalypse in Brazil: Jair Bolsonaro and the End of Days imagery

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The contemporary global situation, plagued by the COVID-19 pandemic—a disease caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2—simultaneously evokes anguishing uncertainties and unsettling feelings of *déjà vu*. This is particularly true when we consider some images related to the disease that seem to emulate works of art depicting the End of Days. For example, in the early stages of the pandemic, corpses and coffins were littering the streets of the city of Guayaquil in Ecuador, left there due to the collapse of the local funerary system,¹ and images of these scenarios could be compared to details taken from Pieter Bruegel's horrific *The Triumph of Death* (1562-63).² The checkerboards of open graves in cemeteries in São Paulo or New York evoke the central section of a famous depiction of the *Last Judgment* (c. 1431) painted by Fra Angelico.³ The pandemic also brought to mind the numerous movies that portray deserted towns with missing or confined inhabitants, from *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1959),⁴ directed by Randal MacDougall, to *I am Legend* (2007),⁵ directed by Francis Lawrence.

Moreover, amid the vast and gloomy iconography related to COVID-19, sometimes a specific public figure prominently appears.⁶ In Brazil, this is the case regarding the current President, Jair Messias Bolsonaro, a far-right politician and retired military officer. According to data from the World Health Organization,⁷ at the beginning of November 2021 the toll of fatalities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil surpassed 600,000, being lower only than the number of deaths registered in the USA. Bolsonaro's erratic policy regarding the pandemic—a toxic mixture of negationism, disrespect for practices of social distancing, promotion of inefficient treatment methods (such as hydroxychloroquine), and incompetence in the purchase of vaccines—is widely credited by his opponents as the main factor that led to such a deadly situation. As a result, a 'Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito' (parliamentary committee of inquiry)⁸ was set up in April 2021 to investigate alleged omissions and irregularities in the actions of the Brazilian Federal Government regarding the pandemic.

A cartoon by the São Paulo based artist Luiz Gê published on his *Facebook* account on 31 May 2020, illustrates well the connection between Bolsonaro and the Brazilian COVID-19 catastrophe. Entitled *Apocalipse Brasileiro* (Brazilian Apocalypse) (**Fig. 1**),⁹ the cartoon shows four fiercely galloping horsemen. With his cartoon Gê thus reinterpreted the famous imagery from the sixth chapter of John of Patmos' *Book of Revelation*. The cartoon recalls traditional compositions that appear in works by several European artists, such as Albrecht Dürer¹⁰ or Arnold Böcklin.¹¹ However, Gê's interpretation of this iconography includes significant particularities, which update the imagery to reflect on the contemporary Brazilian context. In the background, on a skeletal horse, we see 'Crise' (crisis), represented by a black hooded figure carrying a scythe. The figure references the classic iconography of Death, which Gê seems to relate to the current state of economic crisis that has spread over Brazil since the mid-2010s. Beside 'Crise', we see 'Golpe' (military coup), depicted as the ghostly image of a soldier with a sword in his hand, mounted on a hybrid being, a mixture of horse and war tank. Here, Gê

seems to emphasize the recurrent disruptive role that military forces present to the Brazilian democratic order.¹² Next, we see 'Peste' (pestilence), personified as a monster that, with their characteristic fringes of bulbous projections recalling the solar corona, is explicitly based on microscopic images of the coronavirus. Finally, the last horseman is a caricature of Bolsonaro who sits on a pink, inflatable toy horse. The cartoon's caption qualifies this last horseman as a 'Besta Quadrada'. While this title translates into *complete imbecile*, the literal meaning of the Portuguese word 'Besta' as *beast* also connects this caricature of Bolsonaro to the Biblical Apocalypse.

Although represented on a smaller scale than his frightening companions, Bolsonaro is nevertheless the protagonist in Gê's cartoon. Shown in the foreground, without being hidden by any visual element, the Brazilian President can be understood as the true leader of the destructive forces that were already galloping over Brazil in May 2020. As I will show in the following analysis, the *topos* of Bolsonaro as a 'Horseman of the Apocalypse' is a widely used trope. However, images connecting him to Doomsday are more varied and began to appear much earlier than the devastating spread of COVID-19.

Indeed, even before Bolsonaro was elected President in late 2018, the impressive growth of his popularity was understood—both by his supporters and his opponents—as an omen of the end of the period of political stability and economic growth that Brazil had experienced in the 2000s and early 2010s. Since then, the country's future has increasingly become uncertain. As if responding to the longings and fears that Bolsonaros's political ascension aroused, his climb to the political zenith was accompanied by the emergence of images across diverse media, such as internet memes, cartoons, video games, animations and comics that linked him to the End of Days' myth. This should not be a surprise. As Robert Hamerton-Kelly stresses, 'from the Bible we learn that apocalypse and politics are intimately connected from the start; indeed, in most cases, *apocalypse is an interpretation of politics in the form of a coded narrative*'.¹³

In this chapter, I strive to unpack some aspects of the apocalyptic imagery connected to Bolsonaro. I thereby aim to identify the deeper meanings lurking under its surface. As it is well known, before referring to destruction, 'the root meaning of the Greek term *apokalypsis* is "unveiling" or "disclosure"'.¹⁴ If something about the current Brazilian situation is being 'unveiled' by the images that constitute my object of study, what exactly would this be? I try to answer this question by pointing out how these images simultaneously testify to threats to the Brazilian democratic order, while they also actively contribute to its present instability. Before diving into the analysis, however, it is important to briefly introduce the protagonist of this chapter for those who might not be familiar with his persona.

Bolsonaro, his ideas and their reception

Jair Messias Bolsonaro was born in the state of São Paulo, in 1955. In 1974, he enrolled at the Agulhas Negras Military Academy, from which he graduated in 1977. Bolsonaro's period of training at the Military Academy coincides exactly with the pivotal years of the dictatorship imposed on Brazil in 1964. Although led by members of the Brazilian Armed Forces, this dictatorship can be better understood, according to René Armand Dreifuss, as a project proposed, advanced, and supported by the Brazilian 'organic elite',¹⁵ made up of parcels of the local hegemonic classes. Bolsonaro moved to the reserve acquiring the rank of captain in 1988, the same year that a new Brazilian Constitution was promulgated, marking the end of the military dictatorship.

A few years later, in 1991, Bolsonaro began to serve in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies representing the state of Rio de Janeiro. Until 2018, his parliamentary career consisted largely of speeches advocating controversial policies such as the death penalty, lower age of criminal responsibility, and easier access to guns. In his speeches, Bolsonaro also attacked left-wing parties, and LGBT+, Black and Indigenous activisms. In line with a revisionist interpretation of the aforementioned military dictatorship—an outlook that has come to spread in recent years¹⁶—, he further extolled it as a legitim movement. In 2018, Bolsonaro was elected the 38th president of Brazil and has been in office since 01 January 2019. Although elected as a member of the right-wing *Partido Social Liberal* (Social Liberal Party), Bolsonaro broke with it in November 2019, and after a failed attempt to found his own party *Aliança pelo Brasil* (Alliance for Brazil), at the time of writing this chapter has no official party affiliation.

With an almost 30-year-long political carrier, Bolsonaro was already famous for his polemic pronouncements even before applying for the Presidency. In a paper that was aimed at English-speaking readers and presented the context of Bolsonaro's ascension to power, Perry Anderson listed some of his most controversial statements:

... the president-elect of Brazil has extolled his country's most notorious torturer [the army officer Carlos Brilhante Ustra]; declared that its military dictatorship should have shot thirty thousand opponents; told a congresswoman she was too ugly to merit raping; announced he would rather a son killed in a car accident than gay; declared open season on the Amazon rainforest; not least, on the day after his election, promised followers to rid the land of red riff-raff [i.e., left-wing politicians].¹⁷

In Brazilian society, the reception of Bolsonaro and his statements such as the ones cited above is largely characterized by a strong polarization. To a certain extent, this mirrors a broader political polarization that has fractured Brazilian politics since at least 2013.¹⁸

On the one hand, we have Bolsonaro's supporters. Tacitly or openly, powerful

members of the Brazilian elite—made up of the business community, extractive industry, military forces, and Christian fundamentalist—support him in order to advance their agendas by reducing obstacles posed by laws that guarantee civil, labour or environmental rights. More relevant to my discussion is, however, the mentality of ordinary people who support Bolsonaro. In May 2018, Esther Solano conducted a survey in which she tried to identify this group's reasoning for the support of Bolsonaro.¹⁹ For his followers, Bolsonaro is opposed to the 'corrupt political class' and personifies the honest politician, a sort of rebel who fights against the entire Brazilian political system. Identifying with the model of the 'self-made man', Bolsonaro's supporters disapprove of public policies that help the poorest or determine the introduction of university racial quotas, because in their eyes such policies would encourage passivity, laziness, and clientelism. Despite recognizing that ethnic or gender minorities suffer from racism and prejudice, Bolsonaro's supporters believe that these same groups use victimization to obtain state benefits and to shake the moral convictions of those who do not belong to them.

On the other hand, we have Bolsonaro's opposers. On the eve of the 2018 election, they feared that Bolsonaro would carry out his bravados, such as implementing a Neoliberal agenda of austerity, attacking Venezuela, and abandoning the Paris Agreement, a famous international treaty on climate change. They anticipated that Bolsonaro would thus contribute to the Brazilian people's precariousness, a war in Latin America, and global climate collapse. As the cartoon by Luis Gê and other images demonstrate, these fears remained in force after the 2018 election and were accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Bolsonaro's controversial pronouncements and actions also led his opponents to qualify him as 'fascist'. Although this denomination may be considered anachronistic, even scholars such as Mike Godwinor Federico Finchelstein seem to agree that Bolsonaro and his political agenda deserves to be connected to, for example, Hitler and Nazi policies.²⁰ Furthermore, it is possible to associate Bolsonaro's political performance with what Umberto Eco dubbed "Ur-Fascism," or "eternal Fascism".²¹ As I will demonstrate, drawing on fascist ideologies helps us to understand some apocalyptic images discussed in this chapter, especially the ones produced and spread by Bolsonaro's supporters. Keeping the characterisations of Bolsonaro, his supporters and opponents in mind, I will now turn to further analyse these images in the next sections.

Fears of the opposition

The apocalyptic images produced and/or spread by Bolsonaro's opponents have relatively straightforward implications, usually depicting him and his allies as End of Days' heralds. Many of these images are variations on the *topos* of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Besides Gê's cartoon, another example is a digital montage that juxtaposes

Bolsonaro and three of his sons (Carlos, Flávio and Eduardo) to the four Horsemen (**Fig. 2**).²² This image was created by the amateur cartoonist Bessinha and published in the left-wing web portal *Conversa Fiada* on 09 December 2018, just a few weeks after Bolsonaro's election as President. The presence of Bolsonaro's sons in this image has largely to do with their political performances as they were championing far-right rhetoric akin to that of their father. Moreover, all three are currently under investigation by the Brazilian Federal Justice: Carlos and Flávio are accused of corruption and Eduardo of spreading fake news and financing anti-democratic acts.²³

A second image closely follows the main concept of Bessinha's montage. However, its composition differs from Bessinha's and is visually closer to the one of Gê's cartoon (**Fig. 3**).²⁴ This image was produced by Renato Aroeira, a well-known cartoonist based in Rio de Janeiro. Aroeira posted the image to his *Facebook* account on 12 May 2019. Here, Bolsonaro and his sons are depicted as the Horsemen themselves: against a cloudy and gloomy sky, the four politicians appear riding on skeletal horses, wearing dark clothes and carrying sickles. They are arranged along a diagonal descending line, creating the impression of a dynamic and fast downfall towards an unidentified target (Brazil itself?) located outside of the image plane, and underscoring the cartoon's menacing message. On the one hand, the responsibility for the 'Apocalypse' is here distributed between Bolsonaro and his sons; on the other, through the evocation of traditional iconography, the connotations of all four members of the sinister cavalcade are reduced to represent Death.

A more complex formulation of the Four Horsemen's *topos* appears in an anonymous meme that started circulating at the beginning of 2021 when the pandemic of COVID-19 was already devastating Brazil (**Fig. 4**).²⁵ Divulged by left-wing politicians and sympathizers, this meme is based on an illustration by the artist Dudu Torres and was published on the cover of the magazine *Mundo Estranho* in November 2017.²⁶ While the original illustration closely respects the description of the Horsemen in John of Patmos' *Book of Revelation*, the meme replaces their scary faces with those of contemporary public figures.

Emerging from a desert landscape, reminiscent of depictions of the Christian Hell and tinged with vivid orange hues, the four Horsemen advance towards the spectator, threatening to run him over. In the foreground, we see the 'rider on a white horse'²⁷ who has been commonly associated with contagious diseases at least since the beginning of the twentieth century.²⁸ This Horseman has the features of Eduardo Pazzuello, a military man who served as Bolsonaro's Minister of Health between May 2020 and March 2021. Widely criticized for his ineffectiveness in fighting the pandemic, Pazzuello appears accompanied by the caption 'Incompetência' (incompetence). The second Horseman—often taken to represent war and bloodshed in the *Book of Revelation*—is another military man, the Vice President Hamilton Mourão, a reserve general of the Brazilian Army. His tacit acceptance of Bolsonaro's policies seems to be the reason why

in the meme Mourão is related to the word 'Descaso' (neglect).

On the left, the third Horseman is Bolsonaro's Minister of the Economy Paulo Guedes, who is a former student of Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago and famous for championing outdated Neoliberal ideas. He holds a burning work card and is accompanied by the caption 'Fome' (famine). Thus, the depiction of Guedes reflects the common understanding of the *Book of Revelation*'s third Horseman. Finally, on the right in the background, we see Bolsonaro, who carrying again a sickle as an insignia—as in Aroeira's cartoon—is identified as 'Morte' (death), the Biblical epithet of the fourth Horseman.²⁹ In his hand, Bolsonaro brandishes a box of hydroxychloroquine, a substance that the Brazilian President insistently advocated as a treatment of COVID-19, while disregarding the scientific body of literature that suggested that there was no clinical benefit for the substance's use against the disease. The horses' depictions underscore the allegoric character of their riders: Guedes's squalid horse connotes famine; Pazuello's rotting horse, devoured alive by maggots, connotes pestilence; Mourão's burning horse, wearing an iron helmet, connotes war; and Bolsonaro's skeleton horse connotes death. However, different from what we saw in the cartoons by Luis Gê or Aroeira, in this meme Bolsonaro is no longer the leader of the Horsemen. Even more ominously, by being represented as following behind the three other figures, he seems to embody the final consequence of what his opponents qualify as literal necropolitics.³⁰

It is important to stress, however, that Bolsonaro's opponents not only depict him as a Horseman of the Apocalypse. An alternative example can be seen in the image of an 'Apocalyptic Beast' published in July 2019 by the cartoonist Osmani Simanca (**Fig. 5**),³¹ who was born in Cuba but has taken on Brazilian citizenship and works for the Bahia-based newspaper *A Tarde*. An exercise in the teratology of political imagination, Simanca's hybrid beast has a pig-like body and four legs with hooves but moves thanks to two pairs of wheels adorned with Nazi swastikas. Pointing with its right hand forwards and holding a burning cross in his left, the beast has multiple heads, as do some of its predecessors mentioned in the descriptions of the Biblical Apocalypse.³² The first one, hidden under a white Ku Klux Klan hood, is that of former US President Donald Trump, identifiable by a yellow lock of hair peeking out of the top of his hood. This lock of hair plays a second role as the spitting tongue of the beast, as it protrudes from the toothed mouth-like opening of the hood. Thus, posing as the head of the animal, following the direction of the beast's little arms and hands, Trump stands in as the leader of the pack of heads that are stacked onto the back of the beast. In the middle, next to Trump, we see two other heads whose mouths foam like those of rabid dogs. These heads have the faces of Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Italian politician Matteo Salvini. Finally, to the right, near the beast's hindquarters, we can identify the head of Bolsonaro. His face contorted into an ugly grimace, he is depicted dropping small toxic green heaps from his mouth. This is probably an allusion

to the misconceptions and problematic statements frequently expressed by the Brazilian President throughout his long political career. The politicians and their more or less important roles in the composition transform Simanca's apocalyptic beast into a visual summary of the transnational rise of the so-called Alt-Right in politics.³³ According to Simanca's image, in mid-2018 Trump could still be considered the leader of this political trend, followed by Orban and Salvini, while Bolsonaro, distinguished through his 'shit spitting' rhetoric, merely represented its shameful rear-guard.

Finally, I turn to another image by Aroeira, published in the newspaper *O Dia* on 01 August 2018 (**Fig. 6**).³⁴ It is part of a larger series of cartoons in which Aroeira shows Bolsonaro as the summoner and leader of a horde of bloody and decrepit zombies. In this particular cartoon, Bolsonaro's legs—he is comically depicted as having four instead of two—form the shape of a swastika. His entire body shines as a 'Fogo Fátuo' (will-o'-the-wisp), the ghostly light often seen over swamps and said to mislead unwary travellers by resembling a flickering lamp or lantern.

At first glance, Aroeira's brainless and gawkily stumbling zombies are an obvious reference to Bolsonaro's followers, who are widely regarded as deprived of critical thinking and euphorically endorsing even the most extreme opinions of their leader. Although it would further be possible to relate Aroeira's zombies to the dead who return at the End of Days as prophesied by John of Patmos,³⁵ the use of zombies as a visual metaphor in this and other cartoons by Aroeira seems more in line with the wide diffusion of the motif in the contemporary imagination, as witnessed by post-apocalyptic television series, movies, and video games, such as, for example, *The Walking Dead* (2010-2021)³⁶ or *28 Days Later* (2002), directed by Danny Boyle.³⁷ Considered in this broader context, Aroeira's zombies seem to acquire more suggestive connotations. For instance, the metaphor of the walking dead occurs frequently in the criticisms of Neoliberal policies, such as those proposed by the Bolsonaro administration. Despite the profound questioning of its material and ideological foundations after the financial crash of 2007-2008, Neoliberalism keeps staggering forward. As Japhy Wilson has pointed out, '[i]n the absence of a rational explanation for this uncanny persistence, critics have resorted to gothic representations of the undead. [...] Among these morbid metaphors, the figure of the zombie has acquired peculiar prominence'.³⁸

The hastening climate collapse linked to Neoliberalism also seems to play a role in the contemporary spread of zombie iconography.³⁹ In this sense, the undead could be understood as outgrowth of a more profound angst, symptoms 'of a sick, asphyxiated, apocalyptic imaginary, obsessed with the degradation of bodies, with the slow destruction of the biosphere, and with our conditions of survival as biological species'.⁴⁰ In this context, one may recall Bolsonaro's reckless environmental policy as an additional inspiration for Aroeira depicting the followers of the current Brazilian President as zombies.

Messias as Messiah

In contrast to the relatively straightforward visual vilification in the images by Bolsonaro's opponents, the apocalyptic images produced and/or spread by Bolsonaro's supporters tend to be more complex, thus asking us to take a closer look. In some of the cases, which I will turn to discuss in the following, Bolsonaro is depicted as 'Messiah', a true saviour and liberator. It is worth remembering that the translation of 'Messiah' in Portuguese is 'Messias', precisely Bolsonaro's middle name. Along this line, most of Bolsonaro's supporters see and venerate him as the only one capable of rescuing Brazil from the political, economic, and moral upheaval supposedly caused by former left-wing governments. In a broader sense, the images that I will discuss in this section update the old idea of 'culture wars', popularized by authors such as James Davison Hunter.⁴¹ Since the 1990s, 'culture wars' usually refer to the conflicts between opposing social groups over hegemonic values, beliefs, and lifestyles, which often revolve around issues such as abortion, homosexuality, women, and transgender rights; racism etc. Moreover, in the images discussed in this section, we can recognize the afterlife of a series of resentful emotions usually connected to the fascist imagination since the first decades of the twentieth century, such as fear regarding communism and rebellious working class, as well as hate and contempt for women.⁴²

Bolsonaro's image as a contemporary Messiah is well visualized, for example, in a digital montage entitled *Eu sou o Mito* (I am myth) by the artist Raphael Souza (**Fig. 7**).⁴³ It is the reinterpretation of a poster for the aforementioned film *I Am Legend*, starring Will Smith. The movie's story is set in New York after a virus has wiped out most of mankind and created a horde of nocturnal and hostile mutants that infest the city. Smith, who plays the role of a US Army virologist immune to the virus, strives to develop a cure and fights the mutants. In Souza's work, the qualities of the lone hero who, in post-apocalyptic times, stoically battles for the survival of humanity are thus projected upon Bolsonaro.

On the top of Souza's montage, we read the phrase: 'Em uma Nação tomada pela doença, ele será a cura' (In a Nation ravaged by disease, he will be the cure). Below, in larger letters, the word 'myth'—an epithet widely used by Bolsonaro's supporters to refer to him since the 2018 presidential election—replaces the word 'legend' in the original movie's title. Mirroring the depiction of Smith in the original movie poster, with his head held high and a rifle close to his body emphasizing his virility, Bolsonaro advances confidently into a bleak landscape. Behind him, we can recognize the buildings of the Palace of the National Congress, which is located in the city of Brasília and was designed by the famous Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer. The building is in ruins. Smoke ascends from its remains, and the red flag of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party), in tatters, is unfurled over its twin towers. In the bottom left of the image, we see a dog peeing on a poster displaying a photo of the former President Dilma Rousseff, a member of the *Partido dos Trabalhadores*. In 2011, Rousseff was the

first Brazilian woman to assume such a position, from which she was later removed by a controversial impeachment process, in 2016.⁴⁴ The hatred and contempt against women are juxtaposed with Bolsonaro's staged virility to produce an image that seems to strongly appeal to his electorate's fantasies. Souza's montage was, in fact, printed on T-shirts to be purchased and worn by his supporters.⁴⁵

Most of the persuasive power of an image such as 'Eu sou o Mito' stems from a specific interpretation of what caused the current Brazilian political and economic crisis widespread among Bolsonaro's supporters. According to this interpretation, which oversimplifies historical processes that are much more complex, the crisis was due to the political and economic elites that took command of Brazil after the military dictatorship ended in 1988. The action of these elites is summarized as follows in the Government Plan proposed by Bolsonaro in 2018: 'Over the past 30 years, Cultural Marxism [sic] and its derivations like Gramscism [sic] have allied with corrupt oligarchies to undermine the values of the Nation and Brazilian family. ... [For thirty years] the left has corrupted democracy and stagnated the economy'.⁴⁶

In short, Bolsonaro's plan states that the left's corruption and disrespect for traditional values led Brazil to the brink of a disastrous situation. The use of terms such as 'Cultural Marxism'—a conspiracy theory that claims Marxism as the basis of efforts to subvert the so-called Western culture—is also revealing.⁴⁷ As Bolsonaro himself stated during the 2018 Presidential campaign, his main target was the overthrow of what he identified as the cultural hegemony of the left in Brazil.⁴⁸ João Cezar de Castro Rocha recently highlighted how Bolsonaro turned the aforementioned idea of 'culture wars' into the very heart of his campaign. In this, as in many other ways, he was following a global trend: 'in fact, in the international rise of the right and the far-right, culture wars are intelligible only in the context of authentic ideological battles for the establishment of normative (even reactionary) models of family, art, education, law and politics'.⁴⁹ In political terms, the most important element here is the notion of anti-communism, evident in Bolsonaro's rejection of vague ideas such as 'Cultural Marxism' and 'Gramscism'. However, we must remember, as Rocha does,⁵⁰ that his aversion to communism is older, stretching back at least to his training period at the Agulhas Negras Military Academy in the 1970s.

The ideas of 'culture wars' and anti-communism are even more explicitly presented in a series of apocalyptic images from the pixel-art platform game titled *Bolsomito*, developed by BS Studios and released in October 2018.⁵¹ The protagonist is an avatar of Bolsonaro, as indicated by the game's title coupling the first part of his name to the epithet 'mito'. *Bolsomito* is presented by its creators as follows:

The game is inspired by the current Brazilian political moment and its protagonist is a good citizen who is tired of the growing corruption and inversion of values that undermine society.

Your main objective is to wipe out the leaders of the dreaded Red Army, which is responsible for alienating and indoctrinating much of the nation ... To get to the heads of the organization, Bolsomito must face diverse groups whose mission was to defend the people, but who today are nothing but puppets of the Red Army.⁵²

Bolsomito, the 'good citizen' ('cidadão de bem' in Portuguese) referred to in this description, appears in the game's opening screen as a white man with blue eyes wearing a suit and tie (**Fig. 8**). He sits among rocks and holds a scorched Brazilian flag in his right hand. Flames can be seen in the landscape behind him. The scenery evokes the city of Brasília hit by some cataclysm, and is similar to that of the landscape shown in 'Eu sou o Mito'. Among the flames, we can glimpse some of Brasília's main monuments, such as the Planalto Palace—workplace of the Brazilian President and another project by Niemeyer—and a sculpture by the artist Bruno Giorgi, which is shown partly melted by the fire.

The 'diverse groups' mentioned above are the minorities against which Bolsonaro has positioned himself throughout his political career: homosexuals, feminists, blacks. For most of the game, Bolsomito must beat them until they die.⁵³ However, the main enemies of Bolsomito, the bosses that he fights at the end of each of the ten stages of the game, are the 'leaders of the dreaded Red Army'. These are meant to represent mostly left-wing politicians, such as Jean Willys, a famous LGBTQ+ advocate, Dilma Rousseff or the former Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva. In the game, these figures are depicted as evil demons and grotesquely caricatured.

In the animation created to promote the game (**Movie 1**),⁵⁴ the Brazilian people are shown in miserable conditions, barely surviving in a devastated landscape. The voice-over of the animation states that the situation is due to the demonic leaders of the 'Red Army', against whom the game's hero rises. In a frame, this army is figured as a metaphorical 'red flood' (**Fig. 9**): a promiscuous, wild, and chaotic mingling horde that breaks down the barriers of traditional values. The depiction of the Red Army retrieves an old metaphor that was used by German proto-Nazis to describe communist advances in Europe from the 1910s.⁵⁵ Amid the raging 'red flood', only Bolsonaro stands as the ultimate bastion: upright, firm, fearless.

The last and most ambivalent set of apocalyptic images which I would like to discuss in this section can be found on a Facebook page titled 'Fanfics do apocalipse bozomiro',⁵⁶ launched just a few days after the first round of the 2018 election. One of the images used as a profile photo on this page shows Bolsonaro as a typical Christian demon (**Fig. 10**).⁵⁷ In this case, it is him (and not left-wing politicians) who is depicted with red skin and two horns protruding from his forehead. His eyebrows draw together over hollow eyes, and he can be seen sporting a Hitler-like moustache above his mouth, which is twisted into an angry grimace. At the time of writing the first draft of this chapter, in late 2018, the page's cover photo showed an illustration of the Palace of

the National Congress being destroyed by a meteor shower (**Fig. 11**).⁵⁸ The dome on the left of the image is already broken, while the hemisphere on the right looks as if on the brink of collapse.⁵⁹ Between dome and hemisphere, not much remains of the twin towers that occupy the centre of the building: the one on the left is about to fall, while half of the other on the right is already destroyed, and a dense cloud of smoke emerges from it. The illustration could be compared to a long series of older ominous images, such as some paintings attributed to the seventeenth-century painter François de Nomé;⁶⁰ the cataclysmic fantasies of John Martin;⁶¹ or the iconic photographs of the destruction of the World Trade Centre's twin towers of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attack.

At first, one might think that the juxtaposition of these particular profile and cover images in Facebook is meant to convey Bolsonaro as a kind of 'Antichrist' who would bring the 'political' Apocalypse to Brazil, evoked by his seat of government in Brasília. But surprisingly the Facebook page in question is not a warning against the harmful consequences of Bolsonaro's government. Rather, the page mostly supports him, mocking the many denounces regarding the aggression perpetrated by Bolsonaro's followers, made by Bolsonaro's opponents and proliferated in the press and social media at least since September 2018.⁶² In this context, the image of Bolsonaro as a devil reveals itself as a deliberate irony. It does not claim that the current Brazilian president is, in fact, an evil being. Rather, Bolsonaro only appears as such in the view of his opponents, which according to Bolsonaro's supporters and the authors of this page would be distorted by their biased moral, cultural and political principles.

The irony is already evident in the title of the page, which designates the denounces against Bolsonaro's followers as 'fanfics', as fictions. In this way, the authors of the page portray these denounces as hysterical and unreasonable reactions to imaginary threats, mere manifestations of victimism. Not by chance, one of the page's favourite targets is denounces made by women, giving the posts a largely misogynist undertone. It is difficult to assert whether the denounces reproduced in 'Fanfics do Apocalypse Bozomiro' are exaggerated or even false. It is certain, however, that they serve well to translate the mood of violence that has characterized Brazil since the 2018 presidential election.⁶³

Final remarks

This chapter cannot exhaust the growing iconography that connects Jair Bolsonaro and the myth of the End of Days. My aim has been, however, to indicate some of the main connotations of this corpus of images and how heterogeneous they can be.

These images' heterogeneity becomes clear when we compare Aroeira's cartoon that shows Bolsonaro as the leader of an army of zombies marching to the right (**Fig. 6**), with the imagery of *Bolsomito's* animation (**Fig. 9**), in which the politician is depicted as the last obstacle to the chaotic 'Red Army' heading to the left, towards him. In their

divergence, these opposing images challenge the very notion of their inspirational source being the same man. In fact, however, such a contrast could be interpreted as a symptom of the deeply divided collective conscience of Brazilian society. Bolsonaro did not create such a polarization solely by himself; rather, a very unequal society that is still characterized by widespread sexism and racism contributed to the configuration of such polarization. Nevertheless, Bolsonaro has systematically taken advantage of his position as President to accentuate instability and conflict.

The only factors that unify, albeit tenuously, this corpus of images are very generic concepts, such as destruction and hatred. If we consider the usually prophetic nature of apocalyptic images, the prognosis shown by those discussed here is bleak. As authentic Horsemen of the Apocalypse, pestilence, famine, and death are already a reality in Brazil, and their effects tend to get worse.

Furthermore, if Brazilian ideologies akin to Fascism maintain their strength, a peaceful social coexistence seems increasingly infeasible. As Umberto Eco has summarized,

For Ur-Fascism there is no struggle for life but, rather, a 'life for struggle'.

Pacifism is therefore collusion with the enemy, pacifism is bad, *because life is a permanent war*. This, however, brings with it an Armageddon complex: since the enemy can and must be defeated, there must be a last battle, after which the movement will rule the world.⁶⁴

Will the current Brazilian Apocalypse have its own Armageddon? It is maybe too early to say. We know, however, that, in Bolsonaro's speeches, an armed conflict was many times proposed as the ultimate solution to Brazilian problems. Since the late 1990s, he claims that '[Brazil] will only change, unfortunately, when we go into a civil war... And do a job that the military regime did not do: killing 30,000 [opponents]!'.⁶⁵ Conversely, confronted by Bolsonaro's more recent threats against Brazilian institutions, some of his opponents advocate increasing polarization and seem to agree that violent conflict is imminent.⁶⁶

In my opinion, however, it is more likely that, as occurred in the US during the Trump administration, the political climate in Brazil will remain strained at least until the next Presidential election, in 2022. Notwithstanding, whatever the outcome of this historical process will be, I believe that the apocalyptic images discussed in this chapter will retain their revealing power as they are simultaneously witnesses to and agents that contribute to reifying the conflicts already at stake.

1. John Otis, ‘COVID-19 Numbers Are Bad In Ecuador. The President Says The Real Story Is Even Worse’, *NPR*, 20 April 2020, accessed 01 November 2021; Gideon Long, ‘Ecuador’s virus-hit Guayaquil is grim warning for region’, *Financial Times*, 05 April 2020, accessed 01 November 2021.
2. Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Triumph of Death*, (1562-63). Oil on panel, 117 x 162 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid.
3. Fra Angelico, *Last Judgement*, (c. 1431). Tempera on panel, 105 x 210 cm. Museo di San Marco, Florence.
4. *The World, the Flesh and the Devil*. Direction Randal MacDougall. Production: Sol C. Siegel et al.. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1959.
5. *I am Legend*. Direction: Francis Lawrence. Production: Akiva Goldsman et al.. Village Roadshow Pictures et al., 2007.
6. A good example is the former US President Donald Trump. A Google Images search for ‘Trump Covid Cartoons’ shows several images relating him to the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. ‘WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard’, World Health Organization, accessed 01 November 2021, <https://covid19.who.int/table>
8. In Brazil, a ‘Comissão Parlamentar de Inquérito’ is an investigation conducted by the Legislative Power, which transforms the Parliament into a commission to hear testimonies and gather information.
9. ‘Luiz Gê’, *Facebook*, 31 May 2020, accessed 01 November 2021.
10. See, for example, Dürer’s fourth woodcut of his *Apocalipsis cum figuris* series: Albrecht Dürer, *The Four Horsemen, from The Apocalypse*, (1498). Woodcut, 38.8 x 29.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
11. Arnold Böcklin, *War*, (1896). Oil on limewood, 100 cm x 69.5 cm. Galerie Neue Meister in the Albertinum, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
12. On this topic, see José Murillo de Carvalho, *Forças Armadas e Política no Brasil* (São Paulo: Todavia, 2019). Regarding the military support to Bolsonaro’s election, see Piero Leirner, *O Brasil no Espectro de uma Guerra Híbrida: Militares, Operações Psicológicas e Política em uma Perspectiva Etnográfica* (São Paulo: Alameda Editorial, 2020).
13. Robert Hamerton-Kelly, ‘An Introductory Essay’, in Robert Hamerton-Kelly (ed.), *Politics & Apocalypse* (Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 2007), p. 5, emphasis in original.
14. Hamerton-Kelly, ‘An Introductory Essay’, p. 2.
15. Quoting Antonio Gramsci, Dreyfus thus defines ‘organic elite’: ‘... if not all the techno-entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs and military, “at least an elite amongst them had the capacity to be the organizers, of their interests and of society”’. This elite of the organic intellectuals (referred to hereafter as the organic elite of the multinational and associated economic bloc) became a social force, aware that its “own corporate interests in their present and future development transcend the corporate limits of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too”’. René Armand Dreifuss, ‘State, class and the organic elite: the formation of an entrepreneurial order in Brazil 1961-1965’ (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 1980), p. 245.
16. On this topic, see, for example, Gilberto Grassi Calil, ‘O revisionismo sobre a ditadura brasileira: a obra de Elio Gaspari’, *Ségle XX. Revista catalana d’història*, 7 (2014), pp. 99-126.
17. Perry Anderson, ‘Bolsonaro’s Brazil’, *London Review of Books*, 41:3 (February 2019), accessed 01 November 2021
18. Pablo Ortellado, Esther Sollano and Marcio Moretto, ‘Uma sociedade polarizada?’, in Ivana Jinkings, Kim Doria and Murilo Cleto (eds.), *Por que gritamos Golpe? Para entender o impeachment e a crise política no Brasil* (São Paulo: Boitempo, 2016), pp. 193-200; Breno Bringel, ‘Crisis política y polarización en Brasil: de las protestas de 2013 al golpe de 2016’, in Breno Bringel and Geoffrey Pleyers (eds.), *Protesta e Indignación Global* (Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2017), pp. 141-54.
19. Esther Solano, *Crise da Democracia e extremismos de direita* (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Brasil: São Paulo, 2018), p. 1.
20. Anna Virginia Balloussier, ‘Criador da Lei de Godwin diz que é ok chamar Bolsonaro de nazista’, *Folha de S. Paulo*, 17 October 2018, accessed 01 November 2021; Federico Finchelstein, ‘Jair Bolsonaro’s Model Isn’t Berlusconi. It’s Goebbels’, *Foreign Policy*, 5 October 2018, accessed 01 November 2021.
21. Umberto Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’, in Umberto Eco, *Five Moral Pieces* (San Diego, New York, London: Harvest ed., 2002), Epub edition.
22. Joaquim Xavier, ‘Governos que acabam antes de começar’, *Conversa Fiada*, 09 December 2018, accessed 01 November 2021.
23. ‘Saiba quais as investigações que pesam contra os quatro filhos do presidente Jair Bolsonaro’, *O Globo*, 17 March 2021, accessed 01 November 2021.
24. ‘Renato Aroeira’, *Facebook*, 12 May 2019, accessed 01 November 2021.
25. ‘Guilherme Boulos’, *Facebook*, 16 January 2021, accessed 01 November 2021.
26. ‘Revista Mundo Estranho’, *Facebook*, 06 November 2017, accessed 01 November 2021.
27. *Revelation* 6:2.
28. For instance, ‘a white horse appear, with a rider holding a bow (representing, probably, *Pestilence*)’. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Funk and Wagnalls, 1916), v. 10. p. 392, emphasis added.
29. ‘When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him’ (*Revelation* 6:7-8)
30. Achille Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, *Public Culture*. 15:1 (2003), pp. 11–40.
31. POLITICALCARTOONS.COM, accessed 01 November 2021, <https://politicalcartoons.com/sku/227875>
32. For example, ‘[I] saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy’ (*Revelation* 13:1).
33. Patrik Hermansson et al., *The International Alt-Right: Fascism for the 21st Century?* (New York, Routledge, 2020).
34. ‘Renato Aroeira’, *Facebook*, 01 August 2018, accessed 01 November 2021.
35. ‘And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them’ (*Revelation* 20:13)
36. *The Walking Dead*. Direction: Frank Darabont et al.. Production: Jolly Dale et al.. Idiot Box Productions et al. 2010-2021.
37. *28 Days Later*. Direction: Danny Boyle. Production: Andrew Macdonald. DNA Films and UK Film Council, 2002.
38. Japhy Wilson, ‘Neoliberal gothic’, in Simon Springer, Kean Birch and Julie MacLeavey (eds.), *The Handbook of Neoliberalism* (Abingdon, Routledge, 2016), p. 578.
39. On this topic, see, for example, Pat Brereton, ‘Cultural and Visual Responses to Climate Change: Ecological Reading of Irish Zombie Movies’, in D. Robbins, D. Torney and P. Brereton (eds), *Ireland and the Climate Crisis. Palgrave Studies in Media and Environmental Communication* (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-47587-1_11; Elaine Chong, ‘Facing the Sublime: The Zombie Figure, Climate Change, and the Crisis of Categorization’, *Emergence: A Journal of Undergraduate Literary Criticism and Creative Research*, 5 (2014).
40. Pierre Déléage, ‘Histoire politique du zombi’, *Lundinatin*, 190 (May 6), 2019. In the French original, we read: ‘... d’un imaginaire malade, asphyxié, apocalyptique, obsédé par la dégradation des corps, par la lente destruction de la biosphère, de nos conditions de survie en tant qu’espèce biologique ...’. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
41. James Davison Hunter, *Culture wars: The struggle to define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

42. Klaus Theveleit, *Male fantasies. Volume 1: women, floods, bodies, history* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1987).
43. ‘Eu sou o mito’, *Márcio Brasil*, 31 October 2014, accessed 01 November 2021
44. Anderson, ‘Bolsonaro’s Brazil’.
45. See, for example, *Mercado Livre*, accessed 01 November 2021.
46. *O Caminho da Prosperidade. Proposta de Plano de Governo* (2018), accessed 01 November 2021. In the Portuguese original, we read: ‘Nos últimos 30 anos o marxismo cultural e suas derivações como o gramscismo, se uniu às oligarquias corruptas para minar os valores da Nação e da família brasileira. ... [Por 30 anos] a esquerda corrompeu a democracia e estagnou a economia’.
47. Martin Jay, ‘Dialectic of Counter-Enlightenment: The Frankfurt School as Scapegoat of the Lunatic Fringe’, *Salmagundi Magazine*, 168/169 (2010), pp. 30-40.
48. Adriana Ferraz, ‘Entrevista de Bolsonaro ao “Estado” com elogios a Chávez mobiliza militância’, *Estadão*, 12 December 2017, accessed 01 November 2021. In the Portuguese original, we read: ‘hegemonia de esquerda no Brasil’.
49. João Cezar de Castro Rocha, *Guerra Cultural e Retórica do Ódio: Crônicas de um Brasil Pós-Político* (Goiânia: Caminhos, 2021), p. 116. In the Portuguese original, we read: ‘De fato, na ascensão internacional da direita e da extrema-direita, as guerras culturais somente são inteligíveis no âmbito de autênticas batalhas ideológicas pelo estabelecimento de modelos normativos (reacionários até) de família, arte, educação, lei e política’.
50. Rocha, *Guerra Cultural e Retórica do Ódio*, pp. 207-318.
51. *Bolsomito*. Development and distribution: BS Studio. Plataform: Steam, 2018. When it was first released, the game was entitled *Bolsomito 2K18*.
52. BS STUDIOS, ‘Bolsomito’, *Steam*, game released on 05 October 2018. In the Portuguese original, we read: ‘O jogo é inspirado no atual momento político brasileiro e tem como protagonista um cidadão de bem que está cansado da crescente corrupção e inversão de valores que abala a sociedade. | Seu objetivo principal é acabar com os líderes do temido exército vermelho, responsável por alienar e doutrinar grande parte da nação, ... para chegar nos cabeças da organização, o Bolsomito deverá enfrentar diferentes grupos que tinham como missão defender o povo, mas hoje, nada mais são que marionetes do exército vermelho’.
53. The reference to minorities being spanked to death provoked indignation among sectors of Brazilian society, which demanded the suspension of the game’s sale. On 19 December 2018, this demand was accepted by the Judge Álvaro Ciarlini, who justified his decision by considering that the game promoted racial discrimination, as well as oppression, prejudice, and violence, including the practice of homicide and intolerance. As a result, the game was removed from the Steam store search and its selling was suspended. See Rafael Arbulu, ‘Jogo “Bolsomito 2K18” é suspenso após pedido do Ministério Público’, *Canaltech*, 21 December 2018, accessed 01 November 2021.
54. The animatio is available [here](#), accessed 01 November 2021.
55. Theveleit, *Male fantasies*, pp. 229-35.
56. ‘Bozo’ is the name of a famous clown who presented television programs in the 1980s and 1990s. It is one of the many Bolsonaro’s nicknames that his opposers use to make fun of him.
57. ‘Fanfics do apocalypse bozomiro’, *Facebook*, 15 August 2019, accessed 01 November 2021.
58. ‘Fanfics do apocalypse bozomiro’, *Facebook*, 10 October 2018, accessed 01 November 2021. This image was originally published on the cover of the magazine *Superinteressante* in December 2011.
59. In the real building, the Federal Senate’s plenary chamber is located under the dome, while the Chamber of Deputies meets under the hemisphere.
60. See, for example, François de Nomé, *King Asa of Juda Destroying the Idols*, (undated). Oil on canvas, 82,5 x 126 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
61. See, for example, John Martin, *The Great Day of His Wrath*, (1851-1853). Oil on canvas, 197 cm × 303 cm. Tate Britain, London.
62. Alice Maciel et al., ‘Apoiadores de Bolsonaro realizaram pelo menos 50 ataques em todo o país’, *Exame*, 11 October 2018, accessed 01 November 2021.
63. Such violence struck Bolsonaro himself, who was the victim of a knife attack on 06 September 2018. See: ‘Jair Bolsonaro leva facada durante ato de campanha em Juiz de Fora’, *G1*, 06 September, 2018, accessed 01 November 2021. The violence also resulted, for example, in the death of the Capoeira master Moa do Katendê, murdered by a Bolsonaro supporter during a political discussion, soon after the first round of the 2018 election. See: ‘Investigação policial conclui que morte de Moa do Katendê foi motivada por briga política: inquérito foi enviado ao MP’, *G1*, 17 October 2018, accessed 01 November 2021.
64. Eco, ‘Ur-Fascism’, emphasis in original.
65. olsonaro’s original sentences, in Portuguese, were: ‘Você só vai mudar, infelizmente, quando um dia nós partirmos para uma guerra civil aqui dentro. E fazendo um trabalho que o regime militar não fez: matando uns 30,000!’ Rocha, op. cit., p. 232. The television interview where Bolsonaro states this can be seen on <https://youtu.be/e-AeMiyLe-8>, accessed 01 November 2021.
66. See, for example, Vladimir Safatle, ‘O golpe começou’, *El País*, 08 September 2021, accessed 01 November 2021.

Biographies

Tobah Aukland-Peck is a PhD candidate in Art History at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Her dissertation, *Mineral Landscapes: The Mine and British Modernism*, examines the work of artists in mid-twentieth-century Britain who were drawn to the subject of mining, through which they explored pressing issues of labor, class, and environmental degradation through experiments with the formal qualities of modernism. She has presented work, including papers about extraction and the industrial provenance of artistic materials, at the Frick Symposium, the Paul Mellon Centre, and the College Art Association annual conference. She was a Fall 2021 Junior Fellow at the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art.

Lucy Byford is a doctoral candidate at the University of Edinburgh. Her research focuses on the print culture and performance of Berlin Dada. Her thesis, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, uses archival material to reassess Berlin Dada's magazines and performance in light of their satirical forefathers: Witzblätter (humour magazines) and German cabaret from the Wilhelmine period. She has previously published on stage designs created by John Heartfield for Friedrich Wolf's epic theatre play, *Tai Yang erwacht*, which was directed by Erwin Piscator in Berlin in 1931. In July and August of 2019, Lucy received a grant from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), providing funding for a research fellowship based at the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich. Before commencing her doctoral studies, she worked for the Commission for Looted Art in Europe, conducting provenance research on Nazi-looted art in the archives of the imperial collection in Berlin.

Edwin Coomasaru is a historian of modern and contemporary art. He has been awarded Postdoctoral and Research Fellowships at Edinburgh University (2022), the Paul Mellon Centre (2020-22), and the Courtauld Institute of Art (2018-19) — where he earned his PhD in 2018. In 2021 he also worked as a Freelance Research Assistant on an anti-racist and decolonial resource portal for the Association of Art History. He co-convenes the Courtauld's Gender & Sexuality Research Group. He has contributed to *Third Text*, *British Art Studies*, *Oxford Art Journal*, *The Irish Times*, *Irish Studies Review*, *The Irish Review*, *Photoworks Annual*, *Burlington Contemporary*, *Architectural Review*, and the Barbican's *Masculinities: Liberation Through Photography* (2020) exhibition catalogue.

Andrew Cummings researches queerness, globalisation, and speculative fiction in contemporary art. Andrew's doctoral project, undertaken between The Courtauld and Tate's Hyundai Research Centre: Transnational, focuses on recent video, installation, and performance art from East and Southeast Asia and their diasporas. Andrew's writing has been published by Pilot Press, Tate Research, and *immediations* journal.

Theresa Deichert is an art historian specializing in contemporary art and ecology. In her practice, she has aimed to cross boundaries between spaces of knowledge production and dissemination, working both in academic and cultural institutions. Her Ph.D. research project at the Heidelberg Center for Transcultural Studies of Heidelberg University (funded by the DAAD-German Academic Exchange Service) investigates collaborative strategies and practices of Japanese artists engaging with the ecologies of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Her research has been published in [The Journal of Transcultural Studies](#). Theresa has worked in cultural institutions in the UK and Germany and concluded a two-year curatorial traineeship at the Institut Mathildenhöhe in Darmstadt. Most recently, she supported a research project with the artists Alexandra Baumgartner and Maria Sturm on art, ecology and urban spaces at Heidelberger Kunstverein.

Ian Dudley is an art historian whose research focuses on histories of art and imperialism from the early modern period to the present. He has worked as a lecturer at Birkbeck and the University of Essex, where he remains a Visiting Fellow. Recent work includes a study of Olmec colossal heads in the paintings of Aubrey Williams, published in *Art History*, and an examination of slavery visualisation in the sculpture of Stanley Greaves, published in *Third Text*. His 2017 doctoral thesis investigated Edward Goodall's Sketches in British Guiana within the context of colonial geography and anthropology during the 1830-40s. He also curated the exhibition *Southern Press: Prints from Brazil, Paraguay and Chile* with the Essex Collection of Art from Latin America (ESCALA) at Firstsite gallery, Colchester.

Robert Mills is Professor of Medieval Studies and Head of the History of Art Department at UCL. Between 2015 and 2018 he directed [qUCL](#), UCL's LGBTQ+ research network, and previously he was director of the [Queer@King's](#) research centre at King's College London. His publications include *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (2005), *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* (2015) and *Derek Jarman's Medieval Modern* (2018). He is also co-editor of several volumes including *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (2003) and *Rethinking Medieval Translation* (2012), and has published articles on topics ranging from medieval hagiography to queer theory and museums.

Kate Pickering is a London-based artist, writer and PhD researcher (CHASE scholarship) in the departments of Art and Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. Pickering writes experimental prose poetry which she develops into performative readings exploring notions of embodiment, belief and sacred space. Her text (in progress) 'There is a Miracle in Your Mouth' moves between the dis/believing body of an exvangelical, a spectacular Texan evangelical megachurch and a fourteenth century anchorite cell in which St. Julian of Norwich is permanently

enclosed. Pickering's writing has featured in various publications, including *soanyway magazine*, *Misery Connoisseur*, *EROS journal*, *Yellow Pages* (Copy Press) and *KJNESH*, and has been performed at Tenderpixel, ASC Gallery, X Marks Le Bokship, Library Gallery (Winnipeg, Canada), the Barbican and the ICA. She has presented her research at conferences at Goldsmiths, Birkbeck, the Courtauld Institute of Art and the University of Essex and has a forthcoming book chapter on her research methodologies in 'Fieldwork for Future Ecologies' (working title) to be published in 2022 by Onomatopée (eds. Dr. Bridget Crone, Sam Nightingale and Polly Stanton). She initiated [Peer Sessions](#), a peer critique group for artists, the [Writing for Practice Forum](#) for artists who write.

Harvey Shepherd is an art historian researching seventeenth and eighteenth century France. His PhD at The Courtauld Institute of Art seeks to understand ways in which France's distinct regional cultures influenced the aesthetic and cultural discourses taking place in Paris during the reigns of both Louis XIV and his successor Louis XV. The project examines five distinct regions: Brittany and the Atlantic West, Alsace, the Flemish North-East, the Alps, and finally Corsica and the Mediterranean South. Throughout, emphasis is placed on visual representation, interrogating the role played by images in the translation and conceptualisation of intra-cultural otherness within the French kingdom as a whole in the Early Modern period. Harvey has also worked as an editor on the journal *Immediations* for their 2021 edition.

Arthur Valle teaches Art History at the Art Department at the Rio de Janeiro Federal Rural University/Brazil. He earned his PhD in Visual Arts from the Rio de Janeiro Federal University and was a postdoctoral fellow at the Fluminense Federal University in Niterói/Brazil and at the New University in Lisboa/Portugal. He is a member of the Brazilian Committee of Art History (CBHA) and of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). He edits the digital journal *19e20* (<https://www.doi.org/10.52913/19e20>). His main research topics are: Rio de Janeiro's artistic field (1890s-1930s); transnational artistic exchanges; political iconography; relations between Afro-Brazilian religions, sacred art, racism and police repression.