

Into Future II

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Oh my God. I'm back. I'm home. All the time, it was... We finally really did it.
You Maniacs! You blew it up! Ah, damn you! God damn you all to hell!

George Taylor (Charlton Heston), *Planet of the Apes* (1968)

The epiphanic vision of Lady Liberty buried in the sand marks the moment of *Planet of the Apes* in which, along with the audience, George Taylor (Charlton Heston) discovers with horror that humans had destroyed their civilisation, and that the hostile planet he travelled was, in fact, a remote future of the Earth, where the telling vestiges placed human fate in retrospect. This verbal tense of *what will have happened*, known as Future II, is the mysterious, open-ended temporal dimension in which *Sun Rise | Sun Set* takes place as well, and perhaps, not by chance, since, according to Timothy Morton, author of *Dark Ecology. For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (2016), ecological awareness occurs in the form of a loop¹. *Sun Rise | Sun Set* is definitely concerned with the distress of our planet in the Anthropocene (the current geological epoch, defined by the noticeable global effects of human activities on the environment²), but its aim is not to document or illustrate these matters. Almost as an enterprise of future archaeology, it presents an exploration of a speculative time ahead seen from the other side. In this actualisation of potential futures, humans, as we know them, are practically extinct, leaving behind only a few traces of their obsolete primate anatomies. Nevertheless, they remain, atomised and subsumed in a brand new techno-natural world, where the whole planet breathes and proliferates in fertile, intelligent infections that ensure survival.

This uncanny Earth is, as Vladimir Nabokov would put it, “but the obsolete in reverse”³, future yet arcane, beginning and ending in the same abysmal unknown. Like in Max Ernst’s *Swampangel* (1940), its landscape might be at once terrestrial I aquatic, desolate I fecund, deserted I sensually animated by unfathomable creatures. A sole human skeleton in Pierre Huyghe’s *Cerro Indio Muerto* (2016) bears witness to what our hominid configurations will have used to be. Meanwhile, Karrabing Film Collective’s video *The Mermaids, or Aiden in Wonderland* (2018), tells an equally meta-crepuscular story: that of a boy set free after being part of a medical experiment to *save the white race* once the planet will have become inhabitable for peoples with low melanin. But what is the bygone I deferred Apocalypse implied in eerie images such as Anj Smith’s *Nachträglichkeit* (2010)?

¹ See Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology. For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), p. 160.

² Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer, *The International Geosphere–Biosphere Programme (IGBP): A Study of Global Change of the International Council for Science (ICSU) – The Anthropocene*, in: *Global Change Newsletter*, No. 41, Mai 2000, p. 17f., online: <http://www.igbp.net/download/18.316f18321323470177580001401/1376383088452/NL41.pdf>.

³ Vladimir Nabokov, *Lance*, in: *Nabokov’s Dozen: Thirteen Stories*, Ebook accessed May 10, 2020, online: https://books.google.es/books/about/Nabokov_s_Dozen.html?id=_vpDvgAACAAJ&redir_esc=y

We can have our pick. Like all science-fiction, *Sun Rise | Sun Set* speaks about the present, a moment in which it has become urgent to rethink how we conceptualise and inhabit the world. The ongoing ecological crisis not only instantiates this necessity, but also the negligence of our ethos and actions. Though the disastrous environmental consequences of our undertakings are patent, the climate question has become an arena for commerce, opportunism, and a matter of cultural negotiation nefariously entwined with questions of national identity and sovereignty⁴. Nevertheless, the looming catastrophe is a death *foretold*, unfolding slow enough not to perceive its full outcome immediately, which creates a space for denial and mercenary eco-procrastination. Danger response in humans takes place in the ancient mammalian and reptilian brains, preparing us to fight, flee, or freeze, removed from higher functions like memory, social conduct, or abstract thinking. Apparently, we are too primitive to act against perils that are not an instant threat to our physical integrity, which is underscored by our reaction to the current SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, both on the side of our governments, and regarding our personal responsibility. The dire environmental situation and the pandemic are two of the many systemic crises affecting our planet that are catalysed, if not generated, by our individualistic modes of thought. Our activities as a species, ranging from social organisation, to industrial development, to problem-solving strategies, are a consequence of a *Weltanschauung* in which man is seen as separated from nature and superior to it, and reality is divided by rational boundaries that we take as a given. As Bruno Latour often implies, we seem to be yet under the spell of René Descartes's dualistic ontology, which defines a fundamental division between *res cogitans* (things related to human activity) and *res extensa* (natural, objective things)⁵.

In *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Donna Haraway envisions a time to come in which our species will no longer stand above nature and at the centre of the cosmos, but will learn to actively survive in these increasingly hostile conditions by creeping into the earth and “making generative oddkin”⁶, unexpected mongrel families with other critters and things, building fertile alliances to find temporary solutions to habitation. *Sun Rise I Sun Set* is lusciously plagued by these aberrant tribes, forming an unhallowed *garden of earthly delights* that lives and breathes in bizarre unison, a rhythm marked like a metronome by Ryuichi Sakamoto's *ZURE* (2017), a seismic melody with a piano tuned by telluric forces. What is at stake for Haraway as well as Latour, is the redefinition of subjectivity: to be able to continue living in this world, we must rethink the boundaries that define it, and ourselves in it, find new demarcations for our bodies, minds, and spaces, *reterritorialize* reality, so to speak. In the seventies and eighties, Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Body without Organs* rebelled against the established order of the body and put forward experimental configurations (“breathing with the belly, seeing through the skin...”) ⁷. The BwO exemplified the politico-psychological project of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1977, 1987): to wage a war against fascism in society and in ourselves,

⁴ See Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth. Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018), p. 3.

⁵ See Bruno Latour, *Spheres and Networks: Two Ways to Reinterpret Globalization*, in: *Harvard Design Magazine*, no. 30 (Spring/Summer 2009), 142, online: <http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/145>

⁶ Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 3.

⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi. (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 151.

“the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us”⁸.

Though the BwO might well be a monstrous ancestor of Haraway’s arachnid cyborgs and their hybrid families, the latter belong to a world in which the priority is now down to Earth, practical and concrete: in what *forms* can we still dwell on this planet?

The weird blossom of a fictional proto-spring is *Sun Rise I Sun Set*’s pledge, a promise of life(-forms) to quench our longings in this ominous winter that started in Wuhan about a year ago. For how are we to survive such prolonged uncertainty and grief if not through fantasy, projection and desire? This is the *third darkness* of Morton’s *dark ecology*: the sweet one. “We need to find within horror some form of *laughter*”⁹, he writes. And eros, one might add, some sprout of *jouissance* pushing its way through this barren wasteland. The love life of cephalopods, exquisitely sensitive creatures according to the latest reports¹⁰, is the argument of Jean Painlevé’s *Les amours de la pieuvre* (1967), while, beyond the carnal, Monira al Qadiri merges psycho-sentimentally with an octopus in *Divine Memory* (2019). These zoophilic blendings of bodies and souls bring to mind *The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife* (1814), Hokusai’s Shunga masterpiece displaying an erotic entanglement between a woman and an amorous squid, and though this piece is not included in the show, Henri Rousseau’s *La Belle et la Bête* (1910) depicts a similar scene, with a lady and a wolf amid a passionate encounter. Whether through the delicate exploration of the nuances of memory and emotion, or through the immodest confrontation of the bestiality taboo, these works blur the line between sapiens and fauna, but the limits of flora are interrogated in the exhibition as well. Torbjørn Rødland’s *Frost no.4* (2001) shows the embrace of human arm coated with fetish attire, leather and spikes, reminiscent of underworlds in the dungeons, while this time, the erotic counterpart is a tree. Joan Fontcuberta’s *Braohypoda frustrata* (1984) emulates Karl Blossfeldt’s classical botanical photographs of the book *Wunder in der Natur (Miracles in Nature)* (1928-52 / 1942), though, uncannily, the Spanish’s versions are pure artifice: they look organic but are made out of plastic and other residues. What strange world awaits us, artificial, yet fecund? Jean-Paul Sartre uses slime (*substance visqueuse*) to symbolise the ontological crisis that humans experience when confronted what with lies in-between identifiable categories¹¹. Slime is abject because it threatens the sense of integrity of one’s body and of the world. Rocky slime pours out of Rachel Rose’s *Borns* (2019), cracking the world into a magma of possibility. The slit between *Sun Rise I Sun Set* might well be entered by Precious Okoyomon’s verses: fuck / the / Sun / fucker¹² - her *Ditto, ditto* (2020) is a womb of Earthworms resuscitating the Earth. Pamela Rosenkranz’s *Infection (Calvin Klein Obsession for Men)* (2020) intoxicates our toxoplasmotic cells, dissolving our selfhood into multitudes of microorganisms that reterritorialize us into unknown colonies.

⁸ Michel Foucault, Preface, in: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. xiii.

⁹ Morton, p. 140.

¹⁰ See Katherine Harmon Courage, *Octopus Genome Reveals Secrets to Complex Intelligence*, in: *Scientific American*, August 12, 2015, accessed January 28, 2021, online: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/octopus-genome-reveals-secrets-to-complex-intelligence/>

¹¹ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), p. 777.

¹² Precious Okoyomon, *Sky Song*. For fred moten, _AH, accessed January 31, 2021, online: <https://ah-journal.net/02/sky-song>

“What is realised in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming”¹³, writes Jacques Lacan about future II, or *futur antérieur*. In becoming, Dora Budor’s *Something To Remind Me* (2020) claims an iteration of time in which the *ready-made*, that pivotal (found) object of art that we’re all the offspring of, is at least, co-authored by a woman. The moment for ill-fated introverts will have come, like Richard Oelze, who returns from the entrails of history among the Surrealist fogs of his *Baumlandschaft* (1935), claiming an undead time that waits, congealed, for revolution. Emma Kunz’s clairvoyant (and overlooked) visions of a sentient-sapient ecosystem will have crystallised in alter-Darwinian habitats like Pierre Huyghe’s *Circadian Dilemma (Dia del Ojo)* (2017), a smart vivarium of sightless fish. Artificial biology could self-regulate through bio-technical solutions, such as Neri Oxman’s intelligent melanin, and beget mechanical araneae like Max Hooper Schneider’s *Fossil Epizoon (Dyrosaurus)* (2020), weaving a membrane of space-time that coils unendingly. We slide down the Möbius strip of Being into the genesis of *what we shall have been for what we are in the process of becoming*.

In *Videodrome*’s final scene (David Cronenberg, 1983) the silky Nicki Brand (Debbie Harry) lures Max Ren (James Woods) into going *all the way* by effecting *total transformation*. Surrendered and armed with his bio-technical enhancements, Ren is shown on the television screen the fatal *future perfect* that he will immediately re-enact and utters:

“Long live the new flesh!”

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¹³ Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), p. 63.