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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

The Damned of the Anthropocene:
Performatively Modeling Energy Aesthetics
for a New Structuralism

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

by

Sean Singh Matharoo

June 2020

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Sherryl Vint, Chairperson

Dr. Michelle Bloom

Dr. Heidi Brevik-Zender

Dr. Jeff Sacks

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The Dissertation of Sean Singh Matharoo is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my mom, who passed away during its conceptualization.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Damned of the Anthropocene:
Performatively Modeling Energy Aesthetics
for a New Structuralism

by

Sean Singh Matharoo

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Comparative Literature
University of California, Riverside, June 2020
Dr. Sherryl Vint, Chairperson

This study is about speculative aesthetics and philosophy. To speculate is to think an absolute, which is a nonrelative property of something. Not all absolutes are necessary, but all absolutes are possible. This study is also about language, structure, apocalyptic literature, and the energy humanities. Responding to the Anthropocenic energy crisis and the need to transition to alternative energy sources, energy humanists ask us to contemplate how the study of language and literature may contribute to a transformation of petroculture, which limits our linguistic imagination of energy to oil. Language and literature shape our values, practices, habits, beliefs, and feelings, and are therefore essential to a transformation of petroculture and its complicity with the capitalist economy of use and exchange, whose shared possibility condition is the colonial-racial reality. This study argues that the energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literature contributes to the decolonization of petroculture by impelling us to speculatively think absolutes, which gift us energy in excess of petroculture.

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1. Reclaiming the disaster¹

« Les lois inutiles affaiblissent les nécessaires »—Baron de Montesquieu, *Mes Pensées*

“Useless laws weaken necessary ones.”—Baron de Montesquieu, *My Thoughts*

“I heard the noise rise to a higher, almost hysterical pitch, somehow making it possible to hear without yelling, our voices moving blurrily underneath.”—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

“Life is a freak. That’s its hope and glory.”—Alfred Bester, *The Stars My Destination*

« L’espace sans limite d’un soleil qui témoignerait non pour le jour, mais pour la nuit libérée d’étoiles, nuit multiple »—Maurice Blanchot, *L’Écriture du désastre*

“Limitless space where a sun would attest not to the day, but to the night delivered of stars, multiple night.”—Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

Our situation

This study is about speculative aesthetics and philosophy. To speculate is to think an absolute, which is a nonrelative property of something. Not all absolutes are necessary, but all absolutes are possible. This study is also about language, structure, apocalyptic literature, and the energy humanities. Responding to the depletion of fossil fuels and the need to transition to alternative energy sources, energy humanists ask us to contemplate how the study of language and literature may contribute to a transformation of petroculture. The Petrocultures Research Group uses the word “petroculture” to stress the ways in which “[post-industrial society] is shaped by oil in physical and material ways, from the automobiles and highways we use to the plastics that permeate our food

¹ The poem that appears on the previous page is a self-conscious emulation of a poem that appears in Brian W. Aldiss’s science-fiction novel *Barefoot in the Head* (1969).

supply and built environments” (9).² More significant for the Petrocultures Research Group are the ways in which “fossil fuels have also shaped our values, practices, habits, beliefs, and feelings” (9). Language and literature of course shape our values, practices, habits, beliefs, and feelings, and are therefore essential to a transformation of “petroculture,” which limits our linguistic imagination of energy to oil. This study argues that the energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster contributes to the decolonization of “petroculture” by impelling us to speculatively think absolutes, which gift us energy in excess of “petroculture.” Let us now systematize our ontology (*what*), our epistemology (*how*), our politics (*why*), and their formal conditions (*energy*) to make explicit the ways in which the decolonization of “petroculture” may be obtained through the energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster. Along the way, we will also qualify the roles space, time, subjectivity, ethics, and materialism play in our study.

Before proceeding, a note about method. We take Fred Moten’s taking of Édouard Glissant’s phrase « consent à n’être plus un seul », and Christopher Winks’s translation of it as “consent not to be a single being” (*BB xv*). For Moten, Glissant’s phrase is “not so much an act but a nonperformative condition or ecological disposition, is another way of approaching what he calls the ‘poetics of relation’ [*poétique de la relation*]” (*BB xv*). As a nonperformative condition of possibility, a negative ecology, the *poétique de la relation* is a nonrelational relational ontology. An immanent transcendentalism, a *transcendental*

² As Craig Freudenrich explains: “Plastics are made from oil. Oil is a carbon-rich raw material, and plastics are large carbon-containing compounds. They’re large molecules called **polymers**, which are composed of repeating units of shorter carbon-containing compounds called **monomers**. Chemists combine various types of monomers in many different arrangements to make an almost infinite variety of plastics with different chemical properties.” See Freudenrich, Craig. “How Plastics Work.” *HowStuffWorks*, <https://science.howstuffworks.com/plastic.htm>. Accessed 18 April 2020.

immanentism, it is a model of alterity withdrawn, utterly, from the self-other paradigm. With the word “withdrawn,” we emphasize the importance of Levi R. Bryant’s object-oriented ontology (OOO) to the conceptualization of this study: “objects are withdrawn from all relation” (26). Yet, we modify OOO via Rahel Jaeggi’s thesis of alienation: “Alienation is a relation of *relationlessness*” (A 1). Thus, the *poétique de la relation* is what Moten elsewhere calls the performative object of “propriative exertion” (IB 1).³ After all, nonwhite non-European nonstraight nonmale commodities cannot be human according to the colonial-racial reality founded on the logic of species difference, its *sine qua non*. According to the colonial-racial reality, the white European straight male human subject (*anthropos*) is taken to be *the* (rational) *subject* and its subaltern Others are taken to be its nonhuman (“irrational”) objects.⁴ Nonhuman objects, alienated, we will always occupy what the early Frantz Fanon calls the « zone de non-être » (PNMB 6) / “zone of non-being” (BSWM xii). No representationalist humanism is capable of “healing” this wound without reaffirming colonial-racial divisions. Nonwhite non-European nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodities are not alive.⁵ We are inorganic inert matter. An ontology that is not nonrelationally relational, a vitalism, is antimaterialist because it

³ I elaborate on Moten’s performative object of “propriative exertion” (IB 1) in the chapter on *The Drowned World*.

⁴ This formulation of the colonial-racial reality is informed by Sylvia Wynter’s reappraisal of W. E. B. Dubois’s Color Line, which I cite below in the introduction, and Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “transparency thesis,” which I mobilize in the chapter on *The Drowned World*.

⁵ By asserting that the nonhuman is not alive, I adopt and ontologize the thesis of “social death” as summarized by Jana Králová: “loss of social identity, loss of social connectedness and losses associated with the disintegration of the body” (246). In recent years, an ontologized thesis of social death has gained traction in Afro-pessimism. See, for example, Sexton, Jared. “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism.” *InTensions*, no. 5, Fall/Winter 2011, <http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/jaredsexton.php>.

treats as given and absolutizes the correlation between human and nonhuman, hypostatizing life and/or organic matter, vital properties relative to the human, and projecting it/them onto us, the dead inorganic inert matter. This is the objective reality of colonial-racial violence.⁶ As Reza Negarestani argues, vitalist humanism, relational ontology *par excellence*, cannot decolonize thought:

The decolonization of thought entails the drudgery of unifying personal experiences and the impersonality or objectivity of thought. A paradigm of decolonization that attempts to shortcut this hard work by equating decolonized thought with some sort of *immediate* contact with land, territory, ethnicity, etc. ultimately remains within the confines of the Western colonial notion of others as noble savages. The unity of local exigencies and universal ambitions is where a true decolonial philosophy starts; anything else should be spurned as the heritage of colonial thought. (*IS* 408)

Negarestani's functionalism gets us closer to Moten's mathopoetics⁷ of the "blur," the "not-in-between that surrounds the surfaces that surround it" (*BB* 259). Blurring, we self-consciously negate the strong identitarianism of historicism (e.g., area studies), and its complicity with the colonial-racial reality.⁸ We amplify the distortion, the noise, of the

⁶ Vitalism epitomizes what Quentin Meillassoux calls "subjectalism," or any philosophy "in which certain subjective traits, or just one, are raised to the rank of an absolute that colours being with its particular psyche, and which in consequence installs a difference of degree (or as some say, intensity) between the inorganic, the organic, and the thinking being, individual and then collective" ("IRR" 122). Subjectalists absolutize the correlation of thought and being.

⁷ Mathopoetics designates "the transits and obstructions between mathematics and poetics, and how both help us to think from the other side." Mathopoetics was the subject of a discussion between Moten and Fernando Zalamea at the Tramway in Glasgow on 23 November 2019. See Arika. "Discussion on Mathopoetics: Fred Moten & Fernando Zalamea." *Arika*, <http://arika.org.uk/programming/episode-10-means-without-end/programme/discussion-mathopoetics>. Accessed 18 April 2020.

⁸ I follow the early Louis Althusser and understand history to be a « *totalité mouvante, dont on pourrait comprendre l'unité, saisir le sens des mouvements internes, mais sans jamais l'expliquer, c'est-à-dire sans jamais rapporter des mouvements d'interaction à un élément déterminant* » (*M* 48) / "moving totality, whose unity can be *understood* and the *meaning* of whose inner movements can be grasped, but which can never be *explained*, i.e. its interactional movements can never be related to a determinant element" (*PH* 51).

implied encomium, the *laudatio*. We adopt a method of writing deliriously—modeled after Eleanor Kaufman’s delirious writings of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Klossowski in *The Delirium of Praise* (2001)—that “signals the ecstatic breakdown of identity that occurs when it is no longer discernible what thought belongs to whom and whose voice is being heard at any given moment” (7). We understand noise in terms isomorphic with Kaufman’s understanding of chatter as a form that, at first, “stands slightly apart from its content” (*DP* 21). Chatter, and noise, then fuse together form and content, maintaining a minimum degree of separation between them. This minimum degree gets us closer to Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “difference without separability,” a nonrelational relational ontology.⁹ Our introduction’s method—consenting, doing, blurring, delirious, different, inseparable—is the formal communication of our body’s argument that the energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster contributes to the decolonization of “petroculture.” Ours is a no-space, no-time, *le néant* (the nothingness). Perhaps we make space, perhaps we make time, perhaps we make something. Our *expérience*, our *experiment*, yields to the intoxicating energies generated by distortion, by noise.¹⁰ As suggested by Kaufman, strong historicism “might not even notice” (*DP* 6) such energies because of their uselessness, their mere implication, their impersonally personal defiance of the capitalist economy of use and exchange, of the nation-state. Their generosity. We write deliriously, blur, *glean*, we bring the noise outside in. To unite aesthetics and philosophy, to

⁹ See “On Difference Without Separability” (2016), a text by Denise Ferreira da Silva for the catalogue of the 32a São Paulo Art Biennial, “Incerteza viva” (Living Uncertainty).

¹⁰ In French, *expérience* can mean “experience” or “experiment.”

contribute to the decolonization of thought. We contend that the appropriately damned response to the Anthropocene can only begin *ici-bas* (down here).

On the one hand, with “the damned,” we take Paul Verlaine’s phrase “poètes maudits”—literally, “(ac)cursed poets,” “blasted poets,” “beastly poets,” “confounded poets,” “damned poets”¹¹—of *Les Poètes maudits* (1888).¹² With the “poètes maudits,” Verlaine elaborates Charles Baudelaire’s writing of the structural-ontology of the Poet, the speculative thought of pleasure and pain, of *jouissance*.¹³ On the other hand, we reclaim Fanon’s “les damnés” of *Les damnés de la terre* (1961). As argued by Miguel Mellino, Constance Farrington’s original (and sociological) English translation of the book’s title as *The Wretched of the Earth* occults Fanon’s “apocalyptic, messianic, and redemptive” meanings of “les damnés,” “the damned.”¹⁴ To update Mellino’s argument, we insist that “the wretched” occults the ontological charge, the beautifully *alien* energy, gifted to us by the damned.¹⁵ We have been aided, we have been energized, we have been

¹¹ These meanings of “maudit” are obtained from Robert & Collins.

¹² Verlaine’s “poètes maudits” include Tristan Corbière, Marceline Desbordes-Valmore, Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Arthur Rimbaud. See Verlaine, Paul. *Les Poètes maudits*. Éditions Albin Michel, 1948 / *The Cursed Poets*. Translated by Chase Madar, Green Integer, 2001. There are countless other examples that both precede and follow Verlaine’s collection.

¹³ Jack Reynolds explains, “*jouissance*, perhaps best understood as transgressive pleasure, or a pleasure-pain compound of some kind” (“MSD” 16). Jacques Lacan, alluding to Friedrich Nietzsche’s eternal return heuristic, asks, « Est-ce que vous pourriez supporter la vie que vous avez ? » / “Can you bear the life that you have?” See Lacan’s lecture on death at Université catholique de Louvain: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EW2F8WtruAY>.

¹⁴ I refer here to Mellino, Miguel. “The *Langue* of the Damned: Fanon and the Remnants of Europe.” *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 112, no. 1, 2013, pp. 79-89.

¹⁵ I am energized here by Frédéric Neyrat’s concept of the Alienocene: “Aliens, foreigners, exiles: the figures of the Alienocene are cosmological as well as political, they go beyond the framework of the Anthropocene and the quasi-incestuous relationship that *anthropos* maintains with the Earth.” See Neyrat, Frédéric. “WHAT IS ALIENOCENE?” *Alienocene: Journal of the First Outernational*,

multiplied. Mind is equal. Long live the damned. Against the gravest temptations of alarmism and conservationism, we occupy the apocalyptic present not in dread of omnicide, but with the thought of absolute *jouissance*.¹⁶ We assert that energy aesthetics—in its excess, its radical wastefulness—allows us to reconceptualize oil as a waste product of a dying sun whose energy is generously infinite.¹⁷ After all, what are fossil fuels but fossilized sunshine? And, if oil is reconceptualized as a waste product of a dying sun, suddenly, it becomes easy to imagine socialities—expenditures of energy—detached, utterly, from “petroculture” and its complicity with the capitalist economy of use and exchange. We think those aesthetic and philosophical projects, sensitized to the Anthropocene and the colonial-racial reality, struggling—blurred, in delirious ecstasy—to generate critical alternatives to correlationist capitalism, new structures of thinking and being. We think science fiction (SF), the graphic novel (BD), poetry, asemic writing, weird fiction—the fantastic; we think speculative materialism, left-accelerationism, Afro-pessimism, queer negativity, other-thought, xenofeminism, neorationalism—the damned. We think noise. We think the goddamned flowers of evil.¹⁸

<https://alienocene.com/what-is-alienocene/>. Accessed 3 April 2018. In a future revision, I will explicitly address Neyrat’s concept of the Alienocene here and consider a scene from Joseph Losey’s science-fiction film *These Are the Damned* (1965). See Losey, Joseph. *These Are the Damned*. YouTube, uploaded by Melia Rochel, 17 August 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTeBJb00idg>.

¹⁶ In a future revision, I’ll elaborate my understanding of omnicide, “the annihilation of an entire species, esp. the human race,” *vis-à-vis* Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh’s *Omnicide: Mania, Fatality, and the Future-in-Delirium* (2019). Mohaghegh explains, “there is no turning away from the imperative to study this riddle [of omnicide] in all its mystifying complexity—to walk the tightrope across which a lone state of delirium might form a hidden route to world-erasure. Movement of the lost cause” (8).

¹⁷ It is true, after all, that the sun will die 4.5 billion years from now.

¹⁸ I quote here an extract from Baudelaire’s “Bénédiction” from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), in which he singularizes the damned Poet: « Je sais que vous gardez une place au Poète / Dans les rangs bienheureux

Our ontology

What are “apocalyptic literatures about the disaster”? First, literatures are understood here to be the texts themselves. Throughout this study, we thus refer to apocalyptic literary *texts* or *works* about the disaster as apocalyptic *literatures* about the disaster. And a literary work is a character in a language. As Nelson Goodman explains, “Both identity of language and syntactic identity within the language are necessary conditions for identity of a literary work” (*LA* 209). No two literary works are the same; no two characters in a language are the same; and, no two languages are the same. Second, disaster—whose occulted meaning is “an unfavourable aspect or condition of a star or planet; an ill-omened star”—is derived from the Middle French *désastre*, which is derived from the Italian *disastro*, which is derived from the conjunction between the Latin *dis*—“apart,” “asunder,” “away,” or “utterly,” carrying with it a constitutively negative, reversing, releasing, and intensive charge—and the Greek *ástron*—“star.” Today, disaster generally means “a sudden accident or catastrophe, or a series of such events; misfortune, calamity,” as in a disastrous party, or, more specifically, “a sudden

des saintes Légions, / Et que vous l’invitez à l’éternelle fête / Des Trônes, des Vertus, des Dominations. / Je sais que la douleur est la noblesse unique / Où ne mordront jamais la terre et les enfers, / Et qu’il faut pour tresser ma couronne mystique / Imposer tous les temps et tous les univers. / Mais les bijoux perdus de l’antique Palmyre, / Les métaux inconnus, les perles de la mer, / Par votre main montés, ne pourraient pas suffire / À ce beau diadème éblouissant et clair ; / Car il ne sera fait que du pure lumière, / Puisée au foyer saint des rayons primitifs, / Et dont les yeux mortels, dans leur splendeur entière, / Ne sont que des miroirs obscurcis et plaintifs ! » (10) / “I know that the Poet’s place is set / In the blessed ranks of the holy Legions, / That you invite him to the eternal fête / Of Thrones, Virtues, and Dominations. / I know that pain is sole nobility / Proof against earth’s and underworld’s worst, / And that to weave my crown of mystery / I must tithé all time and every universe. / But the lost jewels of ancient Palmyra, / The unknown metals, the pearls of the sea, / Though mounted by your hand, could not aspire / To this diadem shining resplendently; / For it will be made of the purest light, / From the sacred hearth of primitive splendors, / Of which mortal eyes, in their radiant sight, / Are no more than obscure and plaintive mirrors!” (11).

accident or natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life,” such as a hurricane or an earthquake.¹⁹ In light of global warming, however, commonsense definitions of disaster are unintelligible.²⁰ So, let us move backward, then, slowly, from what Jalal Toufic calls “the surpassing disaster” to the apocalypse:

From time to time, there occurs what suspends time, revelation—at least for certain people, martyrs. But then the apocalypse, revelation is withdrawn, occulted by the “apocalypse,” the surpassing disaster, so that symptomatically *apocalypse*’s primary sense (from Greek *apokalypsis*, from *apokalyptein* to uncover, from *apo* + *kalyptein* to cover) is occulted by its secondary meaning, and *martyr*’s primary sense, *witness*, is occulted by its secondary, vulgar meaning: “a person who suffers greatly or is killed because of their political or religious beliefs.” (00)

The surpassing disaster, or the “apocalypse,” in its rush to naïve moralism thus occults²¹ the Greek *apokalyptein*, a *revelatory uncovering*, for martyrs, unbound by time.

“Apocalypse” is derived from the Middle English *Apocalipse*, “revelation” (the New Testament book), which is borrowed from Anglo-French, which is borrowed from the Late Latin *apocalypsis*, “revelation, the Book of Revelation.” As a parallel consequence, an occultation, whereby martyr *qua* witness and ~~the apocalypse~~ the apocalypse *qua* revelation *qua* uncovering is lost, utterly, to martyr *qua* “person who suffers greatly or is

¹⁹ The etymologies of “disaster” and “apocalypse” outlined in this paragraph are obtained from a combination of Merriam-Webster and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). Furthermore, all commonsense word meanings which appear in quotes in this study are obtained from a combination of Merriam-Webster and the OED.

²⁰ I agree with Timothy Morton that calling anthropogenic climate change “climate change” occults the seriousness of global warming. Throughout this study, I, like Morton, refer to anthropogenic climate change as global warming. See Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

²¹ Throughout this study, I follow Toufic and use “occult” as a transitive astronomical verb that means “of a celestial object: to conceal (an apparently smaller object) from view by passing or being in front of.”

killed because of their political or religious beliefs.”²² It follows from this that the surpassing disaster, the apocalypse, adversely affects the nature of language—understood *vis-à-vis* Robert Brandom to be an inferential practice.²³ Let us premise the excavation of the disaster on Toufic’s surpassing disaster. The surpassing disaster, or “disaster,” in its rush toward a closed universal, occults *the disaster*, or the absolute negativity—apart, asunder, away, utterly—of a planet, Earth. It should be qualified that an open universal would be egalitarianism and justice. At stake in the disaster is a non-Copernican account of Earth: it is not that a stationary Earth and revolving sun is the reality behind the appearance of a rotating Earth and a stationary sun. The disaster, with the nonrelative definite article, is not merely an unfavorable aspect of a planet or star; it is the Earth’s detachment from its correlation with the sun. The stars our destination. Cosmic distortion.

We use the word “correlation” to make explicit the importance of Quentin Meillassoux’s identification of the thesis of correlationism to this study:

Correlationism rests on an argument as simple as it is powerful, and which can be formulated in the following way: No X without givenness of X, and no theory about X without a positing of X. If you speak about something, you speak about something that is given to you, and posited by you. Consequently, the sentence: ‘X is’, means: ‘X is the correlate of thinking’ in a Cartesian sense. That is: X is the correlate of an affection, or a perception, or a conception, or of any subjective act. To be is to be a correlate, a term of a correlation... That is why it is impossible to conceive an absolute X, i.e., an X which would be essentially separate from a

²² It is the Derridean use of the apocalypse that is under erasure [*sous rature*] here because of its retrospectivist quietism: “The end approaches, now there is no more time to tell the truth about the apocalypse. But what are you doing, all of you will still insist, to what ends do you want to come when you come to tell us, here now, let’s go, come, the apocalypse, it’s finished, I tell you this, that’s what’s happening” (“AT” 35). I instead grasp the apocalypse that has already come to pass with *jouissance*. I can’t request the original French from Interlibrary Loan because campus has been closed due to COVID-19.

²³ See, for instance, Brandom, Robert B. *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009, to which I return in the conclusion, which makes explicit the importance of language to this study.

subject. We can't know what the reality of the object in itself is because we can't distinguish between properties which are supposed to belong to the object and properties belonging to the subjective access to the object. ("SR" 409)²⁴

Correlationism is the antiabsolutist thesis that we can only know what is true for us; we cannot know the noumenon, or the "thing-in-itself." For the correlationist, it is thus impossible to separate being from thinking and thinking from being; the two are correlated. Meillassoux, however, argues it is possible to think being as an absolute, as an in-itself, or noumenon, apart from mind. We argue throughout this study that such a *speculative thought* gifts us an energy source in excess of "petroculture." Meillassoux's rationalist argument amounts to an attack on what Wilfrid Sellars calls the "myth of the given."²⁵ This attack has had an immense impact on the ongoing unification of Kantian epistemology (analytic philosophy) and Hegelian phenomenology (continental philosophy), the latter of which has been devastated as a consequence of Alexandre Kojève's anthropologization of the master-slave dialectic. Issuing from the continental tradition, Negarestani's *Intelligence and Spirit* (2018) is the exemplar of this unifying project. Issuing from the analytic tradition, Brandom's *A Spirit of Trust* (2019) is the exemplar. Tom Eyers's *Speculative Formalism* (2017), Jaeggi's *Critique of Forms of Life* (2018) and Anna Kornbluh's *The Order of Forms* (2019) offer third ways. More significant to the present study is the great extent to which Kojève's reading informs the

²⁴ There is no original French because this essay is an edited transcription of a presentation Meillassoux delivered at "Speculative Realism: A One-Day Workshop," which took place on 27 April 2007 at Goldsmiths, University of London. I cite where it was transcribed: Quentin Meillassoux. "Speculative Realism." *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development*, vol. 3, 2012, pp. 408-435.

²⁵ Even 'the given' is not given. See Sellars, Wilfrid. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Harvard University Press, 1997. By "rationalist argument," I mean the logical consistency of Meillassoux's argument is atemporal.

thesis of correlationism. As a consequence of correlationism's influence on the capitalist university, we find that we are unable, utterly, to objectively prove the existence of the Anthropocene or the colonial-racial reality, proofs we need. No one is going to redeem us from the disastrous climatic events "we" have set in motion. No matter how different difference is from itself, no matter how protracted its deferral, difference must not be singularized by what Judith Butler calls the "insufficiency of identitarian ontologies" (68). We agree with Meillassoux: the principle of noncontradiction (PNC) should be sustained. By granting existence and nonexistence at the same time to an entity, the quintessential correlationist move, adherence to contradiction makes necessary that entity, in turn contradicting the potential for things, anything, to change. Without the PNC, that is, there can be no difference within which things may become; without the PNC, there can be no difference within which "petroculture" may become. As Meillassoux insists, we must instead accede to the "*pure heterogenous that breaks with all differences of degree or intensity* in favour of differences *in nature*—the only authentic differences, those which do not underhandedly lead back to an identity (an identity of nature) in an alterity (of degree) [. . . we need] *a polydualism*" ("IRR" 132).²⁶ At stake in Meillassoux's speculative materialism, and his teacher Alain Badiou's formalist philosophy, is the liquidation of the analytic-continental philosophy correlation

²⁶ Meillassoux explains that a polydualism entails "*dualisms everywhere: pure differences in nature, with no continuity whatsoever between that which they make differ, between the many regimes of the real—matter, life, mind, society, etc.—whose possible coordination does not at all allow us to think their rapprochement, unless in a crude mode of blind fact [. . .] fractures that render impossible any reductionism from one regime of beings to another (life reduced to matter, mind to life, etc.) and permit the entities of our world to escape all attempts to reduce them to one unique nature (whether we call it nature or not, denials are of little consequence)*" ("IRR" 132).

and an opening to a horizon Meillassoux calls the « Grand Dehors » (*AIF* 21) / “great outdoors” (*AF* 7).²⁷ There, we might discover new models of alterity, perhaps, even, new models of communism. As Negarestani asserts: “And once this poison starts to take effect, we will tear apart Western philosophy and build philosophy anew; we will turn into that thinking and scheming Other of which Western thought had every right to be afraid” (*IS* 408). In our conclusion, we contribute to the decolonization of the analytic-continental philosophy correlation.

We define the disaster in noncorrelationist terms as the Earth’s detachment from the sun. Throughout this study, we grapple with the challenge to representation that such a vantage point demands by exhuming the energy in the speculative thoughts inaccessible to ordinary sense gifted to us by apocalyptic literatures about the disaster. What this occult retrieval amounts to is a recasting of being *qua* Earth-in-itself and thought *qua* sun-in-itself. The disaster is the emergence of absolute negativity in thought. To return to Goodman and Toufic, if literatures are texts and the apocalypse a revelatory uncovering, for the martyr *qua* witness, then apocalyptic literatures about the disaster are *damned* texts which reveal and allow us, martyrs, to witness the emergence of absolute negativity in thought. The energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster allows us to think being *qua* absolute negativity. Absolute negativity reclaims the occulted meaning of *the disaster*: it refers to a star or planet that is apart, asunder, away, utterly. It is a

²⁷ Meillassoux’s philosophy is *speculative* because it claims to attain an “absolute outside of itself” (“IRR” 119); it is *materialist* because it “accedes to an absolute that is at once external to thought and *in itself devoid of all subjectivity*” (“IRR” 120).²⁷ It follows that Meillassoux’s philosophy is also *realist* because it claims to accede to an absolute reality.

reclamation of the nonrelationally relational, of alienation. Our ontology is the absolute negativity of the disaster. We have located a vicious circle.

Our epistemology, our politics

Aesthetics is understood in this study to be an epistemology of worldmaking. Worldmaking, for Goodman, is the capacity of art to employ symbols in the making of worlds.²⁸ It is a capacious definition of aesthetics and, for this reason, we adopt it. It may be thus said that aesthetics is a functionalist epistemology: a literary work, a work of art, is what it does, which is make worlds. For Goodman, artworks accept a plurality of incommensurately correct interpretations. Nonetheless, artworks cannot be identified with interpretations of them. Goodman's aesthetics is pluralist and relativist. And relativism poses a great threat to us. As Badiou says, « il y a un seul monde » (there is only one world).²⁹ If the absolute negativity of the disaster is our ontology and aesthetics our functionalist epistemology, the politics of this study is evental. For Badiou, an *événement* (event) is an unprecedented occurrence that introduces a massive potential for change.³⁰ An event necessitates fidelity by those magnetized by its force. Such fidelity is a process of *subjectivation* (subjectivization); it subjectivizes the subject faithful to the event, not the other way around. The event is Outside. For Badiou, events may occur in

²⁸ See Goodman, Nelson. *Ways of Worldmaking*. Hackett Publishing Company, 1978.

²⁹ I refer here to the title of chapter four—Le huitième point [« Il y a un seul monde »]—of Badiou's *De quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom ?*. Nouvelles Éditions Lignes, 2007 / *The Meaning of Sarkozy*. Translated by David Fernbach, Verso, 2010.

³⁰ See Badiou, Alain. *L'Être et l'événement*. Éditions du Seuil, 1988 / *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham, Bloomsbury, 2013.

mathematics, politics, the arts, and love. Some of his examples are Georg Cantor's set theory,³¹ the Paris Commune,³² Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry, and love *qua* the encounter of the world from the perspective of difference. Badiou's theory of the event is so generous that one might even think of a falling leaf as an event. For this study, the event is the Anthropocene.³³ As Frédéric Neyrat explains, the Anthropocene is characterized as a concern for the formation of the terrestrial environment.³⁴ The history of the colonial-racial reality is characterized as a concern for the formation of *anthropos* (Man).

Following W. E. B. Dubois's concept of the Color Line,³⁵ Sylvia Wynter asserts:

[A] principle of nonhomogeneity, that of Dubois's Color Line in its white/nonwhite, Men/Natives form (i.e., as drawn between the lighter and the darker races), will now be discursively and institutionally deployed as a "space of Otherness" on which to project an imagined and extrahumanly (because ostensibly bio-evolutionarily) determined nonhomogeneity of genetic substance between the category of those selected-by-Evolution and the category of those dysselected-by-Evolution. The Color (cum Colonial) Line would, therefore, be made to reoccupy the places earlier occupied by the Heaven/Earth,

³¹ Paul Livingston explains: "Georg Cantor was the creator of set theory and the modern theory of the mathematical infinite. His discovery of a rigorous, mathematical way to treat actually existing infinite sets revolutionised the foundations of mathematics as well as philosophical thinking about infinity, with implications that continue to be actively explored today" (37).

³² Kristen Ross explains the (evental) drama of the Paris Commune: "For what could be more dramatic than the seizing of the government by Parisian workers on March 18, 1871? And what could be more dramatic than the massacre, two months later, of some twenty-five thousand, mostly working-class, Parisians at the hands of the Versaillais in a week-long battle in the streets of Paris? More people died in the final week of May 1871 than in any of the battles of the Franco-Prussian War, or than in any of the previous 'massacres' (for example, the Terror) in French history" (4).

³³ Paul Crutzen explains that eighteenth-century analyses of trapped air inside polar ice caps indicate that the burning of fossil fuels has increased carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, a mathematically identifiable (and, hence, self-referential, noncorrelationist) increase that has dramatically altered the climate, culminating in the sixth mass extinction, the end of the Holocene, and the dawn of a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene.

³⁴ See Neyrat, Frédéric. *La part inconstructible de la terre*. Éditions du Seuil, 2016 / *The Unconstructable Earth: An Ecology of Separation*. Translated by Drew S. Burk, Fordham University Press, 2019.

³⁵ See Dubois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Penguin, 2002.

supralunar/sublunar, and by the rational humans/irrational animals premises of nonhomogeneity in order to enable the selected/dysselected, and thus deserving/undeserving status organizing principle that it encoded to function for the nation-state as well as the imperial orders of the Western bourgeoisie. (322)

Thus, following Eileen Crist, Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, Donna Haraway, Jason W. Moore, Claire Colebrook, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth A. Povinelli, Stacy Alaimo, Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr, and Kathryn Yusoff,³⁶ the ostensibly unifying (rational and selected) *anthropos* of the Anthropocene risks occulting the colonial-racial reality and the environmental devastation caused by its imperialist drive to mine, from within the capitalist economy of use and exchange, what Malm calls “fossil capital”: “a triangular relation between capital, labour, and a certain segment of extra-human nature, in which the exploitation of labour by capital is impelled by [the metamorphosis of fossil fuels into CO₂]” (“OFC” 52). For Karl Marx, use value refers to a materially constituted object’s capacity to satisfy needs and wants. Exchange value refers to a materially constituted object’s capacity to satisfy the needs and wants of others, its social use value.³⁷ And the

³⁶ See, respectively, Crist, Eileen. “On the Poverty of Nomenclature.” *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 3, 2013, pp. 129-147; Malm, Andreas and Alf Hornborg. “The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative.” *The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 62-69; Haraway, Donna. “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene.” *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2015, pp. 159-165; Moore, Jason W. “Introduction: Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism.” *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, edited by Jason W. Moore, PM Press, 2015, pp. 1-11; Colebrook, Claire. “We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual.” *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 1-20; Braidotti, Rosi. “Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism.” *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 21-48; Povinelli, Elizabeth A. “The Three Figures of Geontology.” *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 49-64; Alaimo, Stacy. “Your Shell on Acid: Material Immersion, Anthropocene Dissolves.” *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 89-120; Clover, Joshua and Juliana Spahr. “Gender Abolition and the Ecotone War.” *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 147-168; and, Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

³⁷ I refer here to Chapter One of Part I of Marx’s *Das Kapital. Erster Band. Buch 1: Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals* (1867) / *Capital Volume 1*.

colonial-racial reality structures the (“irrational” and dysselected) nonwhite non-European nonstraight nonmale as an object of exchange value, a nonhuman commodity. Capitalism and colonial-racial violence are circularly related. This circle coincides with an isomorphism shared between the Anthropocene and the colonial-racial reality. The condition of this isomorphism, following Jon Solomon, is the logic of species difference: human/nonhuman.³⁸

Formal conditions—energy

What is energy? In beginning to answer this question, let us return to our situation. The overemphasis on fiction about oil in literary studies in the energy humanities repeats the colonial-racial reality’s ecologically devastating use of oil. Some notable examples are Stephanie LeMenager’s *Living Oil* (2013), Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden’s *Oil Culture* (2014), and Christopher F. Jones’s *Routes of Power* (2014).³⁹ This overemphasis is a variant of what Jones identifies as “petromyopia,” an anthropocentric attitude that views oil as an easy, limitless resource.⁴⁰ Petromyopia is speciesist insofar as it presumes that the inherent capacity for rationality supposedly unique to humans is a

³⁸ I refer here to Solomon, Jon. “Logistical Species and Translational Process: A Critique of the Colonial-Imperial Modernity.” *Intermedialités*, no. 27, Spring 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039809ar>. I return to Solomon’s essay in the conclusion, which makes explicit the importance of both translation and critiquing area studies to this study.

³⁹ See LeMenager, Stephanie. *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. Oxford University Press, 2014; Barrett, Ross and Daniel Worden. *Oil Culture*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014; and, Jones, Christopher F. *Routes of Power: Energy and Modern America*. Harvard University Press, 2014. For a strong historicism of energy, see Daggett, Cara New. *The Birth of Energy: Fossil Fuels, Thermodynamics, and the Politics of Work*. Duke University Press, 2019.

⁴⁰ See Jones, Christopher F. “Petromyopia: Oil and the Energy Humanities.” *Energy Use and the Humanities*, special issue of *Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2016, pp. 36. Jones provides quantitative and qualitative evidence to defend his account of petromyopia. I supplement Jones’s generously self-critical account—his *Routes of Power* is almost entirely about oil—by bringing it into dialogue with the structural-ontological inequalities of the colonial-racial reality.

sufficient reason to exploit nonhuman nature. Thus, petromyopia is isomorphic with the colonial-racial violence that structures the nonwhite, non-European, “irrational,” and ultimately nonhuman nonstraight nonmale as the easy, limitless energy resource of its opposite, the white European rational straight human Man (*anthropos*). This violent commodification of energy precludes the development of alternative expenditures of energy outside the capitalist economy of use and exchange. Unsurprisingly, there is no concentrated study of the energy aesthetics in the energy humanities. Aesthetics is *apolitical*. Aesthetics is *useless*. Aesthetics be *damned*. Let us refine our thesis: this study seeks to correct this gap in scholarship by considering how the aesthetics of apocalyptic literatures about the disaster may gift us energy resistant to easy use. We first define energy. Let us make four affirmations.

a. *Energy is a material multiple*. Badiou asserts:

L'essence du multiple est de se multiplier de façon immanente, et tel est le mode d'éclosion de l'être pour qui pense *de près* [. . .] à partir du non-être de l'un. Qu'il soit impossible de composer le multiple-sans-un, le multiple-en-soi, qu'au contraire son être même soit la décomposition. (*EE* 43)

The essence of the multiple is to multiply itself in an immanent manner, and such is the mode of the coming-forth of being for whoever thinks closely [. . .] on the basis of the non-being of the one. That it be impossible to compose the multiple-without-one, the multiple-in-itself; that, on the contrary, its very being be decomposition. (*BE* 37)

The multiple is thus in excess of its own presentation. In its decomposition, its infinite divisibility, the multiple is the transcendental condition for Badiou's ontology. Every material thing, in Badiou's system, is a multiplicity of the multiple, the latter of which is the necessary condition for all multiplicities whose absolute truths are immanent to the multiple. Every material thing, it follows, is infinitely divisible. Mobilizing this

egalitarianism, this generosity that yields to the nonrelationally relational, we can say that energy is our multiple. It is the *néant*. To uphold energy *qua* the multiple implies we must uphold the primacy of materiality and contingency because every material thing must be allowed to change, to be divisible. We must therefore start from the materiality and the contingency which determine change. For now, let us say that materiality means that being can exist independently of thought; it is a formal condition.⁴¹ We will explicitly address the materialism of energy below. Contingency is more difficult, and so we begin with it.

b. *Energy is radically contingent*. Meillassoux asserts:

Je soutiens que la contingence radicale de toutes choses, leur irraison, est non pas le signe d'une incapacité de la pensée à accéder à la vérité ultime des choses, mais au contraire la vérité même de toutes choses. Lorsque nous butons sur l'irraison de toutes choses, nous ne butons pas sur une limite de notre savoir, mais sur l'absoluité de notre savoir: la propriété éternelle des choses mêmes consiste en ce qu'elles peuvent sans raison devenir autres qu'elles sont. ("IOM" 41)

I hold that the radical contingency of all things, their irrationality, is not the sign of thought's incapacity for reaching the ultimate truth of something. On the contrary, radical contingency is the very truth of all things. When we stumble upon the irrationality of all things, we do not come up against a limit to our knowledge; rather we come up against the absoluteness of our knowledge: the eternal property of things themselves consists in the fact that they can without reason become other than they are. ("TWB" 446)

⁴¹ I adopt *vis-à-vis* Meillassoux a speculative materialist position: « Toute matérialisme qui se voudrait spéculatif—c'est-à-dire qui ferait d'un certain type *d'entité sans pensée* une réalité absolue—doit en effet consister à affirmer *et* que la pensée n'est pas nécessaire (quelque chose peut être sans la pensée) *et* que la pensée peut penser ce qu'il doit y avoir lorsqu'il n'y a pas de pensée. Le matérialisme, s'il adopte la voie spéculative, est donc contraint de croire qu'il serait possible de penser une réalité donnée, en faisant abstraction du fait que nous la pensons » (*ALF* 50) / "Every materialism that would be speculative, and hence for which absolute reality is an *entity without thought*, must assert *both* that thought is not necessary (something can be independently of thought), and that thought can think what there must be when there is no thought. The materialism that chooses to follow the speculative path is thereby constrained to believe that it is possible to think a given reality by abstracting from the fact that we are thinking it" (*AF* 36).

The necessity of contingency, for Meillassoux, is an absolute that may be thought. The coextensive abolishment of the necessity of natural laws—and the logical coherence they give us—abolishes religious belief: the assertion of the necessity of natural laws, that some things cannot change, is a religious belief in something outside the realm of the rational understanding of the absoluteness that is the necessity of contingency, or the « irraison de toutes choses » / “the irrationality of all things.” For Meillassoux, in other words, the *only* absolutely necessary thing in the universe is the contingency of the laws of nature. His rationalist argument sustains the irrationality of matter without contradicting the PNC.⁴² Calling on this principle of intrinsic change, this rationally irrational generosity, we can say that energy in our study is radically contingent.⁴³ Importantly, for us, both Badiou’s theory of the multiple and Meillassoux’s theory of contingency constitute models of alterity, removed, utterly, from the self-other

⁴² In *Après la finitude* (2006), Meillassoux sustains the PNC in response to David Hume’s problem of induction by dismantling the metaphysical principle of sufficient reason (PSR). I examine the problem of induction in the conclusion.

⁴³ Meillassoux ontologizes the absolute of the necessity of contingency as « une forme extrême de chaos, un *hyper-Chaos*, auquel rien n’est, ou ne paraît être, impossible, pas même l’impensable » (*ALF* 87) / “an extreme form of chaos, a *hyper-Chaos*, for which nothing is or would seem to be impossible, not even unthinkable” (*AF* 6). In a conversation with Florian Hecker and Robin Mackay, Meillassoux elaborates, “I say that nothing is incomprehensible. When you have one fact after another, you can maybe describe them by a law that will be constant for a certain duration; you could also say that they have no connection. But in fact, you can never prove, on the basis of one instant, what must be in the following instant. You cannot make a necessary relation between two moments of time. Because rationality is intimately connected to the disconnection of time, that’s all. And that’s why, when you are rational, you have an incredible imagination. Why are we rational creatures with imagination? Imagination is supposed to be the creation of fictions or of illusion, but why do we have imagination, what Malebranche called *la folle du logis*? For rationality, imagination is said to be craziness. But we are rational and we have imagination. Why? Because in fact they’re the same thing: rationality is just the capacity to be directly connected to a hyperchaos which has absolutely no limits. So, the problem in understanding ultimate reality is not to understand some ultimate reason for rationality; it is to understand that rationality is the understanding that there is no ultimate reason.”

correlation. But, as a consequence of their militant nonidentitarianism, they avoid addressing the colonial-racial reality and its constitutive human-nonhuman correlation—a structural-ontological inequality we claim is absolutely true and, thus, accessible to thought. While we do not claim the colonial-racial reality as metaphysical truth, this avoidance is unintelligible today.⁴⁴ We nonetheless implement Badiou’s multiple and Meillassoux’s contingency into our study because they help us avoid strong identitarianism as we continue to understand energy. We will supplement them.⁴⁵

c. *Energy is on the side of the object.* G. W. F. Hegel asserts:

A self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*. (110)

Hegel explains that the self, in aspiring to self-consciousness, needs to be recognized by another who can negate it. Self-consciousness matures through mortal combat with another. One becomes a slave—nonwhite non-European “irrational” nonstraight nonmale—the other a master—white European rational straight human Man (*anthropos*). The master then subjugates the slave, reduced to a nonhuman commodity forced to work—to expend energy—and transform nature. A correlation between master *qua* subject, Man, and slave *qua* exchangeable object, nature, is secured. But, during a formative encounter with *Angst* (dread), the slave alienates itself and disengages the

⁴⁴ Indeed, Meillassoux’s absolutization of the necessity of contingency allows us to contest any metaphysical status given to the colonial-racial reality.

⁴⁵ I refer here to Goodman’s theory of supplementation in the context of the epistemology of worldmaking: “the making of one world out of another usually involves some extensive weeding out and filling—actual excision of some old and supply of some new material. Our capacity for overlooking is virtually unlimited, and what we do take in usually consists of significant fragments and clues that need massive supplementation” (*WWM* 14).

master.⁴⁶ Hegel explains, “[the slave] does in fact contain within itself this truth of pure negativity and being-for-self...his whole being has been seized with dread” (117). Unmoored from space and time, the slave experiences self-consciousness in work. For Hegel, such work does not necessarily fall into the capitalist economy of use and exchange. In Hegel’s rationalist argument, however, subject does become object, object does become subject. There is an exchange: “Through this self-conscious negation [self-consciousness] procures for its own self the certainty of its freedom, generates the experience of that freedom, and thereby raises it to truth” (Hegel 124). The objective truth of freedom, the egalitarianism of mind, is subjectively experienced as self-consciousness. “I” becomes the infinite “We.” This, for Hegel, is the universalizing historical movement of *Geist* (Spirit), thought. Onward, Hegel largely leaves uninterrogated the slave’s relationship to nature.

Hegel’s dialectic might therefore appear to be a strong correlationism: master-slave. However, in the final chapter of the *Phenomenology* (1807), he explains that, in becoming the being of its own form, *Geist* itself experiences self-consciousness in the work of absolute knowing:

In this knowing, then, Spirit has concluded the movement in which it has shaped itself, in so far as this shaping was burdened with the difference of consciousness [i.e. of the latter from its object], a difference now overcome. Spirit has won the pure element of its existence, the Notion. The content, in accordance with the *freedom* of its *being*, is the self-alienating Self, or the immediate unity of self-knowledge. (Hegel 490)

⁴⁶ I translate *Angst* as “dread” in order to preserve its severity, its ontological charge. I bracket Søren Kierkegaard’s understanding of *Angst* for another time.

The dialectic thus *fuses* the slave's personal, subjective experience of dread and the impersonal, objective thought of absolute knowing, while maintaining a minimum degree of separation between them. Hegel's dialectic sustains a minimum degree of historicism. The dialectic's ambition to the egalitarianism of mind *vis-à-vis* symmetric recognition is nonetheless magnetized by normative social justice, by the thought of universal justice, a "difference now overcome."⁴⁷ The dialectic is total: each form of *Geist*, each "Notion," in each stage of the dialectic is sustained in subsequent stages. And, by becoming the being of its own form, *Geist* can transform itself. Hegel generously treats as given an absolute contingency of thought. At the same time, further self-conscious negations, further *Geistes*, further concepts consistently advance from the dialectic's totality. The stakes here are deontic and normative. Meaning, for Hegel, the slave *should* not in the final instance be a nonhuman commodity correlated with nature. How have we inferred this? For Hegel, all minds are equal, so it simply would not be consistent to take the side of the master. We can thus say that the dialectic, withdrawn from the subjugating master, blurred, delirious, different without separation, consents not to be a single being and decolonizes the master-slave correlation. The dialectic, without recourse to identity *per se*, is a nonrelational relational ontology on the side of the object. In short, the absolute knowing of *Geist* is not the *telos* of the dialectic, but simply another step toward the self-consciousness of thought. As Kaufman writes in another context, "[this would be] a form

⁴⁷ The reading here is informed by Negarestani's reading of Hegel, which he uses to articulate the stakes of his philosophy of intelligence. See Negarestani, Reza. *Intelligence and Spirit*. Urbanomic (The MIT Press), 2018. It is also informed by Brandom's reading of Hegel, which he uses to articulate the stakes of his semantic rationalism, his inferentialism. See Brandom, Robert. *A Spirit of Trust: A Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2019. I return to Brandom and Negarestani in the conclusion.

of thought that draws on bodily affects in order to build a new cohesion of thought that constitutes [. . .a] disembodied materiality that is a pure energy of thought” (*DP* 10). And, if energy is a material multiple (Badiou) and radically contingent (Meillassoux), material thought can change for no reason. Such is the objective truth of freedom subjectively experienced as dread. The dialectic, its *drama*, generously gives us the gift of transformation.

But, Kojève’s Hegel lectures are responsible for disseminating a subjectivist reading of the master-slave dialectic, of a colonial-racial “communism” as its *telos*, the end of history.⁴⁸ Kojève’s reading and his acolytes’ reaffirmations of it form many correlationist discourses in the capitalist university.⁴⁹ We agree with Meillassoux and find in the correlationist’s elevation of intersubjective agreement *qua* dissolution of the dialectic (or any structural-ontology) a disguised fideism whereby metaphysical, religious, and moral issues cannot be objectively proven or disproven. Ironically, the disavowal of reason has become a reaffirmation of faith. In light of the Anthropocene and the colonial-racial reality, such subjectivism, no matter how intersubjective, does not convince us. The allure of free play has been vaporized.⁵⁰ *Anthropos*, white European rational straight human Man, necessarily excludes *the damned*, the nonwhite non-

⁴⁸ Bataille, Simone de Beauvoir, Jacques Lacan, Gaston Bachelard, Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Raymond Queneau, André Breton, and Jean-Paul Sartre, among others, attended Kojève’s lectures on the *Phenomenology* given between 1933 and 1939 at the École pratique des hautes études in Paris.

⁴⁹ By “acolytes,” I generally mean poststructuralists, strong correlationists. I return to this point below in “Apocalyptic literatures about the disaster.”

⁵⁰ I refer here, not to Jacques Derrida, but to Marx and Friedrich Engels: “All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind” (35).

European “irrational” nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodity. Negativity is an absolute. We are unsurprised, then, that philosophies of negativity are gaining traction inside and outside the university: speculative materialism, Afro-pessimism, queer negativity, other-thought, xenofeminism, left-accelerationism, neorationalism—the damned. Each has the courage to nonreactively yield to differences, tarry with the negative, think structural-ontologies, and elaborate the objectivity of thought. Each is generous. Such generosity, we hold, is an expenditure of energy outside the capitalist economy. Our hope is that this energy will, perhaps, culminate in a collaborative reclamation of occulted philosophy, the Greek φιλοσοφία, *philosophia*, the love of wisdom. We understand this project’s fragility, its risks. We also understand there would be no *telos*, no final *Geist*. As Hegel himself understood, philosophy opens knowing and being to eternal social revision.

Toward this nonend, we argue that correlationism is to a great extent a consequence of Kojève’s anthropologization of the master-slave dialectic. His is a subjectivist reading whose condition is a racialization that correlates the slave with nature. Louis Althusser explains:

Kojève en détache le Sujet (la négativité humaine) et montre avec bonheur que l’histoire n’est que le devenir-Substance de Sujet qui, dans la lutte et le travail, fait de son propre néant la chair d’un monde humain, cesse d’être « étranger dans son pays même », et habite enfin *chez soi* dans la liberté faite monde. Mais ce n’est là que le premier aspect de la totalité hégélienne. L’autre côté est le devenir-Sujet de la Substance, la production de l’Esprit par une Nature réelle, c’est-à-dire la production de l’homme par la nature, et le dégagement objectif de la liberté humaine dans une histoire rigoureuse. (*L’homme* 241)

Kojève detaches the Subject (human negativity) from this totality [Substance-Subject], and ably demonstrates that history is merely the becoming-Substance of the Subject, who, in struggle and labour, makes his own nothingness the flesh of a

human world, ceases to be a ‘stranger in his own land’, and dwells, at last, *at home*, in freedom become a world. But this is only one aspect of the Hegelian totality. The other is the becoming-Subject of Substance, the production of Spirit by concrete Nature, that is, the production of man by nature, and the objective working out of human freedom in the course of an exacting history. (“Man” 171)

The dialectical movement that Kojève overemphasizes—from self to subject—is on the side of the master, subjugation. It is on the side of the colonial-racial reality, the possibility condition of the Anthropocene. What we are interested in is the other side of the dialectic, in its movement from self to object, slave, sovereignty. There, we find energy in excess of petromyopic “petroculture.” We delay *Geist* for now. We argue that Kojève’s overemphasis on the subjective, masterful aspect of the dialectic correlates the slave with nature. He repeats the disaster. He adopts the perspective of the master, whereas Hegel moves from the subject to the object before proceeding to the self-consciousness of thought, *Geist*. Hegel’s dialectic is objective. In Kojève’s Hegel, we instead find a colonial-racial “communism”: the slave’s ostensibly unique capacity to transform nature through work, the expenditure of energy, is the colonial-racial notion of the noble savage *par excellence*. We also find here the seeds of constructivist environmental philosophies. In Kojève’s reading, the slave’s correlation with nature is treated as given, hypostatized, and mapped onto the dialectic, thereby guaranteeing the slave’s place in the « zone de non-être » (Fanon, *PNMB* 6) / “zone of non-being” (Fanon, *BSWM* xii). For Hegel, the inverse holds: it is normatively treated as given that the slave should not be correlated with nature. Kojève’s Hegel, however, is asymmetric recognition masquerading as symmetric recognition—from human master to nonhuman slave, from white European straight Man (*anthropos*) to nonwhite non-European nonstraight nonmale

commodity.⁵¹ As Althusser implies, true symmetric recognition, *Geist*, the « dégage-ment objectif de la liberté humaine » / “objective working out of human freedom,” is unattainable so long as attention is not given to the « devenir-Sujet de la Substance, la production de l’Esprit par une Nature réelle, c’est-à-dire la production de l’homme par la nature » / “becoming-Subject of Substance, the production of Spirit by concrete Nature, that is, the production of man by nature.” This is the other side, the occulted cancelling, keeping, and suspending *Aufheben*, whose opposite is the preserving, changing *Aufhebung*. We contend the *Angst* of nature, its separation from the object, should be retrieved. We want to thus freeze the dialectic at its fault line, the slave’s encounter with *Angst*, to locate in this no-space, this no-time, this *néant*, an absolute negativity that defers its horizon of symmetric recognition between subject and object. We want to reclaim the uselessness of the dialectic. We don’t want to make the dialectic work. And, in not working, we become energized by nature, the Outside from which we are absolutely withdrawn.

d. *Energy reclaims nature’s separation from society.* Bataille asserts:

[Le] soleil a encore été exprimé mythologiquement par un homme s’égorgeant lui-même et enfin par un être anthropomorphe *dépourvu de tête*. (*Soleil* 231)

[The] sun has also been mythologically expressed by a man slashing his own throat, as well as by an anthropomorphic being *deprived of a head*. (“Rotten” 57-58)

⁵¹ Again, Hegel himself does not correlate the slave with nature; the slave, that is, does not necessarily transform nature. Such transformation, rather, is a direct consequence of the master’s commodification of the slave. The correlationist, in correlating the slave with nature, master with slave, would not, as a result of the correlation, grasp that *Geist* is the objective thought of transformation. We might call this thought “transformation-in-itself.”

Bataille has, against his own writing, shaped Nietzschean-Heideggerian postmetaphysics, which is incompatible with energy aesthetics. Two examples of this incompatibility are: 1) Jacques Derrida's correlation of being with language and 2) Foucault's correlation of being with power. Both cannot objectively think the Anthropocene or the colonial-racial reality, and their isomorphically shared structural-ontological inequalities.⁵² As Ryan Krahn argues, Derrida's and Bataille's readings of the dialectic occult the importance of the slave's encounter with dread, but "Derrida and Bataille are both more Hegelian than they think they are" (153).⁵³ We agree, but we revise Krahn's reading and argue that Bataille linguistically performs the slave's encounter with dread at the objective level of the dialectic. We also agree with Asger Sørensen's reading of Bataille's dialectic as keeping "the possibility open for reintroducing nature into the realm of dialectics" (600). We push further and locate in Bataille's dialectic a reclamation of nature's separation from society.⁵⁴

⁵² I have selected Derrida and Foucault because a) they are both postmetaphysicians and b) they both abuse Bataille's Hegelianism in *De l'économie restreinte à l'économie Générale* (1967) / "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve" and *Préface à la transgression* (1963) / "A Preface to Transgression," respectively. Both Derrida and Foucault surreptitiously focalize their readings through Kojève's subjectivist reading of the dialectic. For a critique of their abuse, see Sørensen, Asger. "The inner experience of living matter: Bataille and dialectics." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 33, no. 5, 2007, pp. 597-615. For a reading that excavates the dialectic at work in Derrida's supposedly nondialectical writing, see Krahn, Ryan. "Aufhebung and Negativity: A Hegelianism without Transcendence." *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2011, pp. 142-154.

⁵³ Derrida indeed recognizes the slave's victory in self-alienation, but he also reduces Hegel's dialectic to a closed system. Some degree of reduction is, of course, almost always unavoidable. But, social revision should also be embraced. Refer to the section about Hegel above, in which I defend the open-endedness of Hegel's dialectic.

⁵⁴ This reclamation offers a rejoinder to constructivist environmental philosophies that, following Kojève's anthropologization of the dialectic, absolutize the correlation between human (white European rational straight Man, *anthropos*) and nonhuman (nonwhite non-European "irrational" nonstraight nonmale commodity) by correlating the slave with nature. Following Krahn and Sørensen, I argue that Bataille is a thoroughgoingly dialectical thinker. I agree, particularly, with Sørensen that Bataille's theory of base

We must now turn to Bataille's reading of the master-slave dialectic in *L'expérience intérieure* (1943) to determine how his dialectic reclaims nature's separation from society:

Sur ce chemin, ce fut un pas, mais un pas seulement, qu'un homme en asservisse d'autres, fasse de son semblable sa chose, possédée, absorbée, comme le sont l'animal ou la plante. Mais le fait que l'homme devint la chose de l'homme eut cette répercussion : que le maître dont l'esclave devenait la chose — c'est le souverain — se retirait de la communion, brisait la communication des hommes entre eux. L'infraction du souverain à la règle commune commença l'isolement de l'homme, sa séparation en morceaux qui ne purent être réunis que rarement d'abord, puis jamais. (*EI* 153)

On this path, it was a step, but only a step, that a man subjugate others, make of his fellow man his thing—possessed, absorbed, as are the animal or the plant. But the fact that man became the thing of man had this repercussion: that the master for whom the slave became a thing—he is sovereign—withdraw from communion, broke the communion of men among themselves. The sovereign's infraction of the common code began the isolation of man—his separation into pieces which could be reunited only rarely at first, then never. (*IE* 132)

For Bataille, it would appear that the slave's self-alienation and withdrawal from the master has a repercussion: « [l'esclave] se retirait de la communion, brisait la communication des hommes entre eux » / “[the slave] withdrew from communion, broke the *communion* of men among themselves” (our emphasis). But, let us place the demonstrative adjective against the definite article, « ce chemin » / “this path” against *la dialectique* (the dialectic). More precisely, let us consider Bataille's selection of « c'est le souverain ». Leslie A. Boldt's translation is “he is sovereign.” In French, « c'est » (it is, this is) is the contraction of the determiner « ce » (this, that) and « est », the third-person singular present indicative form of the infinitive verb « être » (to be). If « c'est » is

materialism distinguishes him from Hegelian totality. Bataille's dialectic is “inherently open-ended” (Sørensen 600).

followed by an adjective, it is almost always gendered masculine; for instance, the grammatically “correct” form would be « c’est souverain » (this is sovereign, that is sovereign), not « c’est souveraine ». However, in Bataille’s text, « c’est » is followed by the definite noun « le souverain ». And, « c’est » may refer to a genderless situation, not always to a person. « C’est », then, would be an eidetic, not a description. To us, it is still unclear to what antecedent he is referring. Let us note that, for Bataille, the sun offers limitless energy. As Allan Stoekl argues in *Bataille’s Peak* (2007), *contra* the capitalist economy of use and exchange, Bataille’s *économie solaire* (solar economy) pivots on a nonconsumption-based theory of expenditure that at once relinquishes unlimited growth and admits the propensity for expenditure. “Sovereign” acts are insubordinate to the capitalist economy: laughter, sex, sacrifice, eating, intoxication, poetry, gift, crime, death, and so on. Bataille basically favors sovereignty. Indeed, the only sacred, for him, is sovereignty, an onto-linguistic defilement of the commonsense understanding of sovereignty as “supremacy in respect of power, domination, or rank; supreme domination, authority, or rule.” It makes sense, then, that Boldt would translate « c’est le souverain » as “he is sovereign.” We might be led to infer that Bataille is referring to the immediately prior « l’esclave devenait la chose » / “the slave became a thing.” However, nothing in the text necessarily leads us to this assumption. Meaning, we think « c’est le souverain » can mean 1) the slave is sovereign; 2) the master is sovereign; or, 3) the dialectic is sovereign. We rule out the second possibility because the master, in Bataille’s system, is not sovereign; he is the bourgeois capitalist *par excellence*. On the side of authority, not sovereignty. We concede to the strong possibility that Bataille might

actually mean “he is sovereign,” as Boldt’s translation indicates. Nonetheless, what we are most interested in is the third possibility, that Bataille is referring to the sovereignty of the dialectic itself: *this is the sovereign*. We can make this easier: if Bataille is referring to the sovereignty of the dialectic itself, he is also referring to the slave’s experience at the dialectic, which would be a genderless situation. We are back to Althusser’s argument that the « dégageant objectif de la liberté humaine dans une histoire rigoureuse » / “objective working out of human freedom in the course of an exacting history” necessitates the « devenir-Sujet de la Substance, la production de l’Esprit par une Nature réelle, c’est-à-dire la production de l’homme par la nature » (*L’homme* 241) / “becoming-Subject of Substance, the production of Spirit by concrete Nature, that is, the production of man by nature” (“Man” 171). This is grammatical, not stylistic. Bataille, on the genderlessness of *expérience*, explains: « J’appelle expérience un voyage au bout du possible l’homme » (*EI* 19). Boldt’s translation is “I call experience a voyage to the end of the possible of man” (*IE* 7). We can now say that, for Bataille, the slave’s encounter with dread at the dialectic initiates an *expérience*, an *experiment*, that throws the dialectic itself to its limits of possibility, to the destruction of the master, the authority of *anthropos* (white European rational straight human Man). *Contra* a vitalism that would treat as given and absolutize the correlation between human and nonhuman, hypostatizing life and/or organic matter, vital properties relative to the human, and projecting it/them onto us, the dead inorganic inert matter, we contend that the slave (nonwhite non-European “irrational” nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodity) *should* not in the first instance be correlated with the master (white European rational straight

human Man). Our contention is deontic and normative. Our remainder is the slave's sovereignty, perhaps, this sovereign dialectic—objectively, impersonally genderless, subjectively, personally agender. X

We further argue that Boldt's translation of « communication » as a repetition of the previous « communion » occults the movement from communion to communication present in the French. Communion, on the right hand, means “the action or fact of sharing or holding something in common with others; mutual participation; the condition of things so held, mutuality, community, union.” Of course, it also carries with it a religious charge: “a Christian sacrament in which consecrated bread and wine are consumed as memorials of Christ's death or as symbols for the realization of a spiritual union between Christ and communicant or as the body and blood of Christ.” Communication, on the left hand, means “the transmission or exchange of information, knowledge, or ideas, by means of speech, writing, mechanical or electronic media, etc.” We argue that Bataille's movement from « communion » to « communication » is a linguistic act of sovereignty. The sovereign energy expended by the dialectic's construal of a fault line, its self-alienation in *Angst*, breaks with the Christian notion of communion, whereby consecrated bread and wine are consumed because of their exchange value to realize a spiritual union between Christ and communicant or as the body and blood of Christ. Bataille's dialectic instead moves toward communication, a process by which information is exchanged through a common system of symbols or signs. Bataille might say that communication communicates sovereign energy: « L'infraction du souverain à la règle commune commença l'isolement de l'homme, sa séparation en morceaux qui ne purent être réunis

que rarement d'abord, puis jamais » / “The sovereign’s infraction of the common code began the isolation of man—his separation into pieces which could be reunited only rarely at first, then never.” We have already begun to understand how Bataille’s dialectic differs from Hegel’s. Although both are thoroughgoingly dialectic, Bataille does not want to make the dialectic work. He wants its uselessness. Elsewhere, he writes, « C’est la position comme telle de l’être séparé de l’homme, c’est son isolement dans la Nature, et, en conséquence, son isolement au milieu de ses semblables, qui le condamnent à disparaître d’une manière définitive » (Bataille, *HMS* 332) / “It is the very separation of Man’s being, it is his isolation from Nature, and, consequently, his isolation in the midst of his own kind, which condemn him to disappear definitively” (Bataille, “HDS” 15). Bataille wants to reclaim nature’s separation from white European rational straight human Man (*anthropos*) from society. Bataille gets us closer to Neyrat’s critical reappraisal of nature: « la nature sous sa forme dénaturante, est la dimension transcendente permettant de créer une distance grâce à laquelle il est possible de composer, de construire et de former » (*PI* 42) / “nature, in its denaturing form, is the transcendental allowing for the creation of a distance thanks to which it is possible to compose, construct, and to form” (*UE* 19). We find here an absolute negation, the renihilation of self and society that could, perhaps, give way to a communism.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Nature’s separation from society will allow us to cultivate a realist-(post)humanist politics of nature. I refer here to Soper, Kate. “Future culture: Realism, humanism and the politics of nature.” *Radical Philosophy*, vol. 102, July/August 2000, pp. 17-26, to which I return in the chapter on *Le Transperceneige*. Bataille offers a philosophical basis for my defense of a Soperian realist-(post)humanist politics of nature.

All of this requires closer examination. As Stoekl theorizes, Bataillean postsustainability rejects the notion of nature as an easy, limitless resource, instead finding energy in extravagant acts of waste, acts that draw limitless energy from an inhuman sun, throwing us violently to the limit of a cosmic time belonging to no one:

Thus postsustainability: sustainability not as a definitive knowledge in and as a final, unalterable historical moment, but rather a knowledge as non-knowledge, practice as the end of practice, the affirmation of “nature”—including its fossil fuel energy reserves—that refuses to see it simply as a thing, as a concatenation of energy inputs that need only be managed. Rather, nature is what sustains itself when we sustain ourselves not as conservers but as profligate spenders—not of stockpiled energy, but of the energy of the universe (as Bataille would put it) that courses through our bodies, above us, below us, and hurls us, in anguish, into communication with the violence, the limit, of time. The postsustainable economy is a general economy; beyond the desires and needs of the human “particle,” it entails the affirmation of resources conserved and energy spent on a completely different scale. Rejecting mechanized waste, the world offers itself as sacred victim. (*BP* 144)

For Bataille, the only twentieth-century philosopher to explicitly foreground energy, it is thus an ethical concept. As demonstrated by Stoekl, important to Bataillean postsustainability is his Sadean theory of base materialism, a materialism so heterogenous, so formless, and so cursed that the notions of self and society, let alone their correlation, are altogether evacuated.⁵⁶ Sovereign acts express base materialism and the energy expended by them cannot be appropriated by a homogenous system (e.g., capitalism, ontology); rather, the energy expended and the base materialism communicated through sovereign acts are precisely what ground a homogenous system.

⁵⁶ See Stoekl, Allan. “Bruno, Sade, Bataille: Matter and Energy, Death and Generosity.” *Bataille’s Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007, pp. 3-31. For an aesthetics of base materialism, see Sade, Donatien Alphonse François, Marquis de. *La philosophie dans le boudoir. Œuvres complètes*, vol. 25. Pauvert, 1968 / *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, & Other Writings*. Translated by Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse, Grove Press, 1990.

In its heterogeneity, its formlessness, its cursedness, base materialism is excluded. For Bataille, sovereign acts, including the dialectic, are self-destructive: through mindless waste, the self forgoes capitalist accumulation and sacrifices itself to an open-ended social generosity—to give without expectation of return, to waste. This gifting points the way to an energy outside the capitalist logic of sustainability, a logic defeated by the reality of Anthropocenic energy exhaustion. As Stoekl decrypts, sustainability implies that we can conserve and use energy resources “in such a way that they will never be depleted” (*BP* 119). In this way, sustainability, like the Hegelian master that insists on the limitless energy of the slave, surreptitiously insists on the limitlessness of fossil fuels.⁵⁷ Instead, we find in Bataille’s *économie solaire* a secular cult, a satanic mass of self-destruction, of gift-giving. Stoekl explains: “The broken self, the *ipse*, like cursed matter, is inseparable from the energy that binds and that is released by, that devours, the society that Bataille envisages for the future” (*BP* 30). This re-nihilation is a sovereign expenditure of energy, an absolute negation whereby self and society are lost to one another in the vertiginous flight of the spleen, opening, perhaps [*peut-être*], the way to what Stoekl calls a “mythical utopia of generosity” (*BP* 30), a communism. Bataille’s “perhaps” installs a radical contingency, a fear and a trembling, at the core of his structural-ontology.⁵⁸ We can thus say that Bataille’s dialectic is postsustainable. *Contra*

⁵⁷ Stoekl elaborates: “[According to sustainability as] much energy will be used as can be produced, indefinitely. Whether sustainability in a literal sense is even comprehensible is another question. Sustainable for how long? At what level of consumption, decided upon by whom? Is a permanently sustainable economy even conceivable? As if sustainability were somehow a Kojévian end of history, beyond all flux, transposed onto the realm of resource use...” (*BP* 119).

⁵⁸ I refer here to Meillassoux’s notion of the “peut-être,” the “may-to-be.” In *Le nombre et la sirène* (2011), Meillassoux deciphers Mallarmé’s selection of “peut-être” on the penultimate page of *Coup de dés* (1897):

Hegelian totality—whereby each form of *Geist*, each “Notion,” in each stage of the dialectic is sustained in subsequent stages—postsustainability delays, interminably, the refrain of *Geistes*. But, no anarchist or socialist correlationist, Bataille wants to amplify the noise of sovereignty—its terrible, prodigal, wasteful poison. What is communicated by the labor of the dialectic, « ce chemin » / “this path,” and its expenditure of energy, is not only base materialism, as indicated by Sørensen, but the self-destruction of the dialectic itself.⁵⁹ So, if Silva’s ethical model of difference without separability sustains a minimum degree of identitarianism, Meillassoux’s rationalist argument sustains irrationality, and Hegel’s rationalist argument sustains a minimum degree of historicism, Bataille’s dialectic is postsustainable inasmuch as to what Bataille aspires is radically outside the dialectic: egalitarianism and universal justice. In other words, the combined thought of egalitarianism and universal justice is a speculative thought. *It is a gift*: “What

« Mot le plus dense du *Coup de dés*, puisque en lui et par lui viennent converger toutes les lignes du Poème, en sorte que son écriture seule suffise à en produire la vérité. Parce que Mallarmé aura *inscrit* cet adverbe dans le *Coup de dés*, le compte du Nombre constellatoire aura acquis la vibration incertaine, nécessaire à l’infinisisation de son Mètre. Mot « auto-performatif », mot qui s’engendre lui-même, à l’image du Poète devenu sa propre Fiction, la sirène du Maître transfigure. PEUT-ÊTRE créateur de sa propre vérité du seul fait d’être écrit sur la nuit constellatoire, par le poète noyé de blanc » (*LNLS* 101) / “It is the densest word of the *Coup de dés*, since in it and through it all the lines of the Poem converge, so that its writing alone suffices to produce the Poem’s truth. Through Mallarmé’s *inscribing* this adverb in the *Coup de dés*, the count of the constellatory Number acquired the uncertain vibration necessary for the infinitization of its Meter. An ‘auto-performative’ word, a word that engenders itself, in the image of the Poet become his own Fiction, the siren of the transfigured Master. PEUT-ÊTRE, creator of its own truth by the sole fact of its being written upon the constellatory night, by the poet drowning in white space” (*TNAS* 209)

⁵⁹ In this way, Bataille’s dialectic is close to Deleuze’s third synthesis of time, an empty and pure form of time, in *Différence et Répétition* (1968). There are many through lines. Hölderlin’s “caesura” is merely one: « Hölderlin disait qu’il cesse de « rimer », parce qu’il se distribue inégalement de part et d’autre d’une « césure » d’après laquelle début et fin ne coïncident plus » (*DeR* 120) / “Hölderlin said that it no longer ‘rhymed’, because it was distributed unequally on both sides of a ‘caesura’, as a result of which beginning and end no longer coincided” (*DaR* 89). I return to Deleuze’s third synthesis of time in the chapter on *Dhalgren*.

is important is gift-giving itself, and the good or bad (or selfish) intentions of the giver are virtually irrelevant. What counts, in other words, is *how* one spends, not what one hopes to accomplish by it” (Stoekl, *BP* 141). Thus, speculative thought, a sovereign expenditure of energy, is a gift. We may henceforward call Bataille’s dialectic *auto-destructive*. Gustav Metzger explains: “Auto-destructive art demonstrates man’s power to accelerate disintegrative processes of nature and to order them.”⁶⁰ “Man” here means the structural-ontology of *anthropos*, white European rational straight human Man.

The emergent question is that of energy aesthetics. We explained our aesthetics is a functionalist epistemology of worldmaking and our politics the subjective fidelity to the Anthropocene event. But, can this help us understand Bataille’s defense of energy aesthetics? Bataille writes:

Nous sommes peut-être la blessure, la maladie de la nature.
Il serait pour nous dans ce cas nécessaire — et d’ailleurs possible, facile — de faire de la blessure une fête, une force de la maladie. La poésie ou se perdrait le plus de sang serait la plus forte. L’aube la plus triste ? Annonciatrice de la joie du jour. (*EI* 554)

We are perhaps the wound, the sickness of nature.
It would be necessary for us in this case—and moreover possible, “easy”—to turn the wound into a celebration, a strength of the sickness. The poetry in which the most blood would be lost would be the most forceful. The saddest dawn would announce the joy of day. (*IE* 169)

We discover here a « facile » / “easy” energy. But, Bataille’s « facile » is rather “masochistic.”⁶¹ By « facile », he means it is difficult according to the capitalist economy

⁶⁰ See “Gustav Metzger: Auto-Destructive Art”: <http://radicalart.info/destruction/metzger.html>.

⁶¹ I allude here to Deleuze’s readings of Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch: « Chez Sade, la fonction impérative et descriptive du langage se dépasse vers une pure fonction démonstrative et instituante ; chez Masoch, elle se dépasse aussi, vers une fonction dialectique, mythique et persuasive » (*PSM* 22) / “In Sade the imperative and descriptive function of language transcends itself toward a pure demonstrative,

that exploits nonhumans. The ease/difficulty dyad without correlation, for Bataille, shares an isomorphism with the sovereignty/“unsovereignty” dyad without correlation. That is, by inverting the commonsense understandings of sovereignty and ease, Bataille performs a linguistic anticorrelationism. He wants us to think, even momentarily, sovereignty without recourse to “unsovereignty,” which is not even a word, and ease without recourse to difficulty. More exact antonyms of sovereignty would be “inconsequential,” “inconsiderable,” “insignificant,” “minor,” “negligible,” “slight,” “trifling,” “trivial,” and “unimportant,” anyway. And, because Bataille’s *économie solaire* is above all concerned with expenditures of energy in excess of the capitalist economy, the sovereign is only unsovereign to the latter. Distortion, noise, the « zone de non-être » (Fanon, *PNMB* 6) / “zone of non-being” (Fanon, *BSWM* xii). To turn ourselves, nonhumans, « peut-être la blessure, la maladie de la nature » / “perhaps the wound, the sickness of nature,” into « une fête, une force de la maladie » / “a celebration, a strength of the sickness.” For Bataille, « [la] poésie ou se perdrait le plus de sang serait la plus forte. L’aube la plus triste ? Annonciatrice de la joie du jour » / “The poetry in which the most blood would be lost would be the most forceful. The saddest dawn would announce the joy of day.” Bataille, that is to say, defends an aesthetics that makes postsustainable worlds that revel in the sovereign expenditure of energy, which is to say an energy aesthetics.

instituting function, and in Masoch toward a dialectical, mythical and persuasive function” (CC 23). If Bataillean energy itself is masochistic, energy aesthetics is perhaps closer to sadism. Of course, there is a minimum degree of crossover. I return to Deleuze’s understanding of sadism and masochism in the chapter on *Dhalgren*.

Energy aesthetics

We can make this easy by linking together our four affirmations of energy in a coherent fashion, while maintaining a minimum degree of separation between them, as we do not want to affirm the colonial-racial violence of strong identitarianism. Let us recapitulate. Our situation is the energy humanities, whose petromyopia is isomorphic with the colonial-racial reality's conditions in the logic of species difference. The disaster is Earth's detachment from the sun, an absolute which may be thought. Being is Earth-in-itself; thought is sun-in-itself. The disaster is the emergence of absolute negativity in thought. Literatures are texts, the apocalypse, a revelatory uncovering for the martyr *qua* witness. Thus, apocalyptic literatures about the disaster are *damned* texts which reveal and allow us, martyrs, to witness the emergence of absolute negativity in thought. However, we located a vicious circle in contending that the absolute negativity of the disaster is our ontology. To provide our ontology, our epistemology, and our politics robust formal conditions and to define energy, we took from Badiou that energy is a material multiple; we took from Meillassoux that energy is radically contingent; we took from Hegel that energy is on the side of the object; and, we took from Bataille that energy reclaims nature's separation from society. So, if energy is radically contingent and if expenditures of it communicate a base materialism both external to thought and asubjective, it follows that, as a transcendental condition, the multiple allows for all material multiplicities immanent to it to become for no reason whatsoever. Our circle, then, is indeed vicious, but it is also a circle whose multidimensional open-endedness, whose radical difference from self-other correlations, may be upheld all the way to the

infinite. Energy is *damned* to generosity. But, in light of the Anthropocene and the structural-ontological inequalities of the colonial-racial reality, such universalism, no matter how generous, needs massive supplementation. We therefore returned to Hegel's master-slave dialectic and Bataille's postsustainable update of it. Proceeding from our functionalist epistemology of worldmaking and our subjective fidelity to the Anthropocene event, energy is a material multiple, radically contingent, on the side of the object, and a reclamation of nature's separation from society. We may finally say that our energy aesthetics is pluralist, but not relativist. We have thus subtracted relativism from our Goodmanian aesthetics. With this, energy aesthetics comes into focus: *energy aesthetics is a functionalist epistemology of employing symbols to make postsustainable worlds that revel in the sovereign expenditure of an energy that is 1) a material multiple; 2) radically contingent; 3) on the side of the object; and, 4) a reclamation of nature's separation from society. Literary works that realize energy aesthetics—those blurred, delirious, different, inseparable, noisy, and generous works—accept a plurality of interpretations. But, in committing to the Anthropocene event, it is our subjective excision that the only correct interpretations of them are incompatible with the circular relationship shared between capitalism and colonial-racial violence, and this circle's correlation with the circular relationship shared between the Anthropocene and the colonial-racial reality, whose condition of possibility is the logic of species difference.* We have commenced the objective-performative modeling of an alterity withdrawn, utterly, from self-other correlations. By singularizing energy aesthetics, we have

commenced the objective-performative modeling of a nonrelational relational ontology.

We consent not to be a single being.

Apocalyptic literatures about the disaster

The final question that surfaces is that of apocalyptic literatures about the disaster. Here is our purified thesis. *The Damned of the Anthropocene* proves that the energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster, written in the French and English languages, gifts us easy energy, which is “difficult” energy according to the capitalist economy of use and exchange. But, before we define apocalyptic literatures about the disaster, what authorizes us to select texts written in the French and English languages? Targeting the French and English languages allows us to begin an adjacent problematization of the correlationist’s commodification of twentieth-century French philosophy in the American state university, where this study was written and whose language of instruction is predominantly English. And, by “the correlationist,” we generally mean the poststructuralist, whose sophistic influence may be tangibly felt in humanities departments in the American state university.⁶² But, as Kaufman argues, while it is true that twentieth-century French philosophers like Althusser, Derrida, Foucault, and Deleuze tarried more aggressively with the breakdown of structure than

⁶² Sophistry is not making explicit the reasons implicit in what one says. Brandom explains: “Talk of what is a reason for what has to do in the first instance not with how people do or *would* act but with how they *should* act, what they should acknowledge. The sophist may not in fact respond to this ‘force [of the better reason],’ but even the sophist *ought* to. To understand rationality and states whose contents are articulated according to their role in reasoning, one must understand the force of such ‘ought’s. The relevance of reasons to the attributing and undertaking of intentional states and acts is prima facie reason to employ a normative metalanguage in analyzing such activity” (*MIE* 17). The objective colonial-racial reality of the Anthropocene *ought* to be dismantled.

earlier philosophers like Ferdinand de Saussure, they nonetheless engaged deeply with structure, if not placed structure at the cores of their respective projects. What has been lost as a consequence of the capitalist university's appropriation of the structuralism/poststructuralism divide is what Kaufman refers to as a "structural-ontology" operative in twentieth-century French philosophy.⁶³ "Poststructuralism," it follows, is a capitalist appropriation of twentieth-century French philosophy, a commodification that repeats Kojève's one-sided, subjectivist reading of Hegel's dialectic. As Althusser detected in Kojève, we detect in the correlationist, the poststructuralist an occulting of the objective side of the dialectic, which is necessary for the geometric progression of *Geist*, and the decolonization of thought.

To continue, how do we define apocalyptic literatures about the disaster? To cite ourselves:

We define the disaster in noncorrelationist terms as the Earth's detachment from the sun. Throughout this study, we grapple with the challenge to representation that such a vantage point demands by exhuming the energy in the speculative thoughts inaccessible to ordinary sense gifted to us by apocalyptic literatures about the disaster. What this occult retrieval amounts to is a recasting of being *qua* Earth-in-itself and thought *qua* sun-in-itself. The disaster is the emergence of absolute negativity in thought. To return to Goodman and Toufic, if literatures are texts and the apocalypse a revelatory uncovering, for the martyr *qua* witness, then apocalyptic literatures about the disaster are *damned* texts which reveal and allow us, martyrs, to witness the emergence of absolute negativity in thought. The energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster allows us to think being *qua* absolute negativity. Absolute negativity reclaims the occulted meaning of *the disaster*: it refers to a star or planet that is apart, asunder, away, utterly. It is a reclamation of the nonrelationally relational, of alienation. Our ontology is the absolute negativity of the disaster. We have located a vicious circle. (*DA* 13-14)

⁶³ See Kaufman's summary of her current project, "Structure: A Counterhistory of Twentieth-Century French Philosophy": <https://www.gf.org/fellows/all-fellows/eleanor-kaufman/>.

This gets us closer to Meillassoux's singularization of « fiction (des mondes) hors-science » (FHS) (*FHS* 7) / “extro-science fiction” (XSF) (*XSF* 3). In SF, he claims, « il s'agit d'imaginer un future fictif de la science qui modifie — souvent accroît — ses possibilités de connaissance et de maîtrise du réel » (Meillassoux, *FHS* 9) / “it is a matter of imagining a fictional future of science that modifies, and often expands, its possibilities of knowledge and mastery of the real” (Meillassoux, *XSF* 4-5). In other words, in the worlds of SF, no matter how fantastic they may seem to us, experimental science persists and may even be able to explain the strange phenomena perceived in them. Yet, in the worlds of FHS/XSF, experimental science, in principle, « ne peut y déployer ses théories ni constituer ses objets » (Meillassoux, *FHS* 10) / “cannot deploy its theories or constitute its objects within them” (Meillassoux, *XSF* 6). Later, Meillassoux writes:

[P]artir d'une science-fiction traditionnelle, la décomposer par un basculement du monde vers le hors-science, et poursuivre cette entreprise de dégradation vers un monde de moins en moins habitable, rendant le récit lui-même progressivement impossible, jusqu'à isoler certaines vies resserrées sur leur propre flux, au milieu des trouées. La vie fait l'expérience mentale d'elle-même sans la science et dans cet écart toujours plus accusé découvre peut-être quelque chose d'inédit concernant l'une ou l'autre. Variation eidétique poussée jusqu'à l'étouffement, expérience de soi dans un monde non expérimentable. Une intensité précaire plongerait à l'infini dans sa pure solitude, sans environnement autre que d'éboulis pour y explorer la vérité d'une existence sans monde. (*FHS* 74-75)

[S]tarting from traditional science fiction, we can decompose it by tilting the world toward extro-science fiction and pursuing this enterprise of degradation toward a less and less inhabitable world, making the tale itself progressively impossible, until we isolate certain lives that are tightened around their own flow in the midst of gaps. Life mentally experiences itself without science and, in this ever more accentuated divergence, perhaps discovers something unprecedented about itself or about science. An eidetic variation pushed to the point of suffocation, self-experience in a non-experienceable world. A precarious intensity

would plunge infinitely into its pure solitude, with only an environment of rubble in which to explore the truth of a worldless existence. (*XSF* 57)

It is palpable that Meillassoux, with FHS's/XSF's disavowal of SF's causality—and SF's imaginative aspiration toward the « connaissance et de *maîtrise* du réel » / “knowledge and *mastery* of the real” (our emphasis)—takes utterly seriously the alien [*l'extraterrestre*], without correlating it with nature.⁶⁴ And, if apocalyptic literatures about the disaster, like FHS/XSF, like base materialism, are incommensurate with homogenous systems (e.g., capitalism, ontology, science, the colonial-racial reality), if they are evacuated from the world, a world in which they are nonhuman, the dead matters, a world which cannot have them, they may nonetheless have something to tell us about themselves. More interestingly, by being, through the auto-destruction, they may even have something to tell us about our homogenous systems, our capitalism, our ontology, our science, our colonial-racial reality. After all, if we take seriously our Goodmanian pluralism, our energy aesthetics, we should try to grasp the strong possibility that our arts are but scientific epistemologies. There is only one world, but we all, contingent entities, make worlds. Our epistemology is pluralist, but not relativist. We can try harder.

⁶⁴ Moten might call this the performative object of “propriative exertion”; Silva might call this that which is “different without separability”; Badiou might call this the “subject”; Hegel might call this the “bondsman”; Bataille might call this the “sovereign”; Calvin L. Warren might call this the “black spirit”; Lee Edelman might call this the “queer”; Abdelkebir Khatibi might call this the “other-thought”; Laboria Cuboniks might call this the “xenofeminist”; James Trafford and Pete Wolfendale might call this the “left-accelerationist”; Negarestani might call this the “philosopher”; indeed, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak might call this the “subaltern.” We call this the “damned.” These are all nonrelational relational ontologies; like Glissant’s *poétique de la relation*, they each embrace absolute negativity and endure, by bringing their outsides in, the auto-destruction of homogenous systems.

So, what are some apocalyptic literatures about the disaster? We might say Cousin de Grainville's novel *Le dernier homme* (1805) is an apocalyptic literature about the disaster. In a density of nested, circular narratives, we learn from a spirit in a cave in Syria that, in a future blasted by mass infertility, the last Man, Omegarus, in France, has a vision of the last woman, Syderia, in Brazil. Omegarus then travels by airship to Brazil, where he meets Ormus, the Earth spirit, *Spiritus Mundi*, who convinces Syderia and Omegarus to procreate to prolong humanity's existence. However, back in Europe, they meet Adam, the first Man, who has been living in Hell for his crime in the garden, and who has been tasked by God to dissuade Syderia and Omegarus from procreating. Successful, Omegarus leaves Syderia. Both die, the dead rise from their graves, infinite, and Syderia and Omegarus ascend to the heavens. Ormus, deprived of humanity, caught in an infernal eternal return, begins to disintegrate and, with him, the Earth, the sun, and the stars themselves. Death arrives to meet Ormus, and explains that humanity must die to save nature:

Tout le ciel attendoit avec impatience ce grand événement ; ses voûtes retentissent aussi-tôt de cris d'alégresse. Le règne du temps est fini, les siècles éternels vont commencer ; mais au même moment, les enfers jettent des cris de rage, le soleil et les étoiles s'éteignent. La sombre nuit du chaos couvre la terre, il sort des montagnes, des rochers et des cavernes des sons plaintifs, la nature gémit. On entend dans l'air une voix lugubre qui s'écrie : Le genre humain est mort. (Grainville, *DH* 167)

All Heaven waited on this great event with impatience; and there came an instant, universal cry of joy. The reign of time had ended, and a vista of eternity opened up. At the same moment, however, howls of rage arose from Hell, and the sun and the stars were extinguished. The dark night of chaos covered the world; plangent sounds came from the mountains, rocks and caverns, as all nature moaned and wailed. A doleful voice echoed through the air, crying out: "The human race is no more!" (Grainville, *LM* 132)

Death proceeds to attack Ormus: « Si je ne l’avois pas empêché de surcharger la terre de ses enfans, ils l’eussent épuisée elle-même de ses sucs » (Grainville, *DM* 286) / “Had I not saved earth from an overabundance of children, they would have exhausted all her resources” (Grainville, *LM* 133). Death then pierces Ormus in his fiery plunge into outer space. We return to the spirit in a cave in Syria, who shares with us that, should we share the story of the end of the world with others, it will make the « heures de [notre] travail si douces, qu’elles seront les plus heureuses de notre vie » (Grainville, *DH* 175) / “hours of [our] labors the sweetest moments in [our] life” (Grainville, *LM* 135). And here is the sovereign energy it gifts us—to communicate with others the joy of the cosmic rubble.⁶⁵

Another apocalyptic literature about the disaster might be Lord Byron’s poem “Darkness” (1816), which describes the extinguishment of the sun and stars and the thought of ontological extinction: “All earth was but one thought—and that was death.”⁶⁶ Or, another apocalyptic literature about the disaster might be Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826), a withering critique and durable recuperation of the Romantic “last Man man.” Or, another apocalyptic literature about the disaster might be Camille Flammarion’s graphic novel *La fin du monde* (1894), which describes, in the future, the arrival of a comet whose trajectory entails the destruction of Earth. Once the comet just misses a collision with Earth, the story really begins. What follows this near impact is the slow deterioration of the planet and those latent extremophiles that live in

⁶⁵ Because of its pessimistic conclusion, whereby human procreation is thwarted, *Le dernier homme* may be read as a corrosion of what Edelman identifies as “reproductive futurism,” to which I return in the chapter on *Dhalgren*.

⁶⁶ See: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43825/darkness-56d222aeeee1b>.

the impossibly hostile, lethal ruins. Humanity is doomed to extinction. Following the demolition of given scientific and religious epistemologies, Flammarion's novel concludes with the extinguishment of the Earth and its sun. Like Immanuel Kant, all that remains are nonempirical representations of time and space:

Nous ne concevons pas, nous ne comprenons pas l'infini, dans l'espace ou dans la durée, parce que nous en sommes incapables, mais cette incapacité ne prouve rien contre l'absolu. Tout en avouant que nous ne comprenons pas, nous sentons que l'infini nous environne et qu'un espace limité par un mur, par une barrière quelconque, est une idée absurde en soi, de même qu'à un moment quelconque de l'éternité nous ne pouvons pas ne pas admettre la possibilité de l'existence d'un système de mondes dont les mouvements mesureraient le temps sans le créer. Est-ce que nos horloges créent le temps ? Non. Elles ne font que le mesurer. Nos mesures de temps et d'espace s'évanouissent devant l'absolu. Mais l'absolu demeure. (Flammarion, *FM* 379)

We do not comprehend or conceive of infinite space or time, because we are incapable of it. But this incapacity does not invalidate the existence of the absolute. In confessing that we do not comprehend infinity, we feel it about us, and that space, as bounded by a wall or any barrier whatever, is in itself an absurd idea. And we are equally incapable of denying the possibility of the existence, at some instant of time, of a system of worlds whose motions would measure time without creating it. Do our clocks create time? No, they do but measure it. In the presence of the absolute, our measures of both time and space vanish; the absolute remains. (Flammarion, *O* 281-283)

For Flammarion, the extinction of the Earth and its sun should be embraced as the attainment of speculative thought, of thought's capability of thinking an absolute, a nonrelative property of something. And here is the sovereign energy it gifts us—to struggle to know our formal conditions.

Another apocalyptic literature about the disaster might be H. G. Wells's novella *The Time Machine* (1895), whose ending makes a world in which a traveler journeys into a far-flung future in which the Earth's rotation concludes, its populations die out due to freezing temperatures, and the sun dies out. Or, another apocalyptic literature about the

disaster might be William Hope Hodgson's novel *The Night Land* (1912), a tale about another far-flung future in which the sun and stars are dead; those extremophiles that remain on Earth live in a metal pyramid attacked from outside by faceless creatures, blurred. Or, another apocalyptic literature about the disaster might be J.-H. Rosny aîné's novella *La mort de la terre* (1910), which describes the future desertification of an Earth plagued by earthquakes as a consequence of both the exploitation of fossil fuels and a changing sun. Those extremophiles that remain live in technologically-generated oases where they limit procreation and practice population control through euthanasia; what surrounds them are the « ferromagnéteux » (Rosny, *MT* 17) / “ferromagnetics” (Rosny, *DE* 67). For a time, humanity thought they could exploit the ferromagnetics, to derive energy from them. However, it became evident that the ferromagnetic substance itself proved too harmful to humans. The ferromagnetics vampirically, but without antagonism, drain the iron from the blood of any nearby human. In fact, it then became evident that humans needed to expend massive amounts of energy to stop the ferromagnetic proliferation. Throughout the densely layered novella, we follow Targ, who searches in futility for water and who will become the last carbon-based lifeform on the planet. The ferromagnetics eventually occupy the oases. At the conclusion of *La mort de la terre*, Targ descends to their *damned* level in his home oasis, lays down alongside them, and dies: « Ensuite, humblement, quelques parcelles de la dernière vie humaine entrèrent dans la Vie Nouvelle » (Rosny, *MT* 121) / “Then, humbly, a few small pieces of the last human life entered into the New Life” (Rosny, *DE* 121). As argued by Danièle Chatelain and George Slusser, Rosny's selection of « parcelle » (a small part of something) is

unique, especially when contrasted with his previous selection of « particule » (a small part) (Rosny, *MT* 43) when referring to Targ’s isolation from terrestrial life.⁶⁷ During a journey into the depths of the Earth, Rosny writes, « [Il était] captif du mineral, petite chose infiniment faible qu’un seul bloc réduirait en particules » (*MT* 43) / “[He was] captive of the mineral realm, a small thing, infinitely weak, which a single stone could pulverize” (*TSFN* 83). For Chatelain and Slusser, the movement from « particule » to « parcelle » “implies the larger context of what we call today an ecological system” (lxix). This posthumanism holds out for the possibility that human-nonhuman coevolution might one day occur. This posthumanism, in its implication of a partitive article, is sovereign. And here is the sovereign energy it gifts us—to consider the possibility, even momentarily, that an absolute negation whereby self and society are lost to one another will perhaps culminate in a future world of egalitarianism and universal justice. In other words, Rosny’s novella impels us to find sovereign energy in the speculative thought of a material and multiple, radically contingent, objective society absolutely withdrawn from nature. As Rosny writes in *Les sciences et le pluralisme* (1922): « Il ne peut y avoir d’unité si la différence est essentielle à la constitution des choses ; mais il peut y avoir des ressemblances sans nombre, des ressemblances de tous ordres, des ressemblances « différentes » si j’ose dire, dans un univers indéfiniment varié et variable » (*SP* 5) / “There can be no unity if difference is essential to the constitution of things; but there can be any number of resemblances, resemblances of every order, ‘different’ resemblances,

⁶⁷ I refer here to Chatelain, Danièle and George Slusser, “Introduction: Rosny’s Evolutionary Ecology.” *Three Science Fiction Novels: From Prehistory to the End of Mankind*. Wesleyan University Press, 2012, pp. ix-lxxxiii.

so to speak, in an indefinitely varied and variable universe” (Mackay, “RSF” 258-259). Rosny’s novella gifts us a structuralist pluralism.⁶⁸ We can thus say that apocalyptic literatures about the disaster, in gifting us sovereign energy, are postsustainable. We agree with Mark Fisher that it is “easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (Fisher 1). But, we mean it’s more difficult—according to the capitalist economy of use and exchange that exploits nonhumans—to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.

Four studies

The Damned of the Anthropocene argues that the energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster gift us sovereign energy, which is to say energy in excess of the capitalist economy of use and exchange (and its logic of sustainability) and petromyopic “petroculture,” whose shared possibility condition is the colonial-racial reality. In other words, they gift us energy in excess of the Anthropocene. We have located four apocalyptic literatures about the disaster we will closely study across four chapters. We make no claim to exhaustion. We assert that the energy aesthetics of these *damned* texts impels us to move through correlationist thinking and toward the speculative thoughts of absolutes, thereby gifting us sovereign energy:

⁶⁸ Mackay explains: “Rosny’s differential ontology means that his pluralism can affirm both simplification and complexification, in a non-dialectical relation; differentiation and selection together with a univocity that preserves an empathic opening to the cosmic. Seeing no contradiction between an immediate aesthetic apprehension of the universe (beauty) and scientific knowledge (structure), arguing for the equal importance of conceptual reduction and an experimental/experiential immersion, Rosny’s work is a unique, lyrical vitalist-structuralist apology for pluralism” (“RSF” 264-265). I am presently translating the rest of *Les sciences et le pluralisme* into English.

1) J. G. Ballard's science-fiction novel *The Drowned World* (1962) makes a future world withdrawn from the world as a consequence of a dying sun. Solar storms and radiation have melted the polar ice caps, causing sea levels to rise and spill over into Earth's cities, destroying energy reserves and clearing the way for a mammalian infertility epidemic and the reemergence of Triassic-era lifeforms. Except for some malnourished radiation sufferers and "psychopaths" (12) living in the jungles surrounding the flooded cities, the humans that remain live in the Arctic and Antarctic Circles. Massive and threatening plant forms and reptiles like the Pelycosaur rule the sweltering, hallucinatory landscapes that encompass the rest of the planet. Our guide through the text is biologist and medical officer Robert Kerans, the head of a city-hopping scientific expedition and testing station in London whose purpose is to map the environmental changes taking place before continuing north toward Camp Byrd once London becomes too hot to sustain human life. We emphasize that consciousness and the environment share a "geotraumatic" (Nick Land) devolution caused by nonanthropogenic global warming. We move through correlationist thinking *tout court*—although we emphasize the inner-outer, white-black, and north-south correlations—and arrive at the speculative thought, the energizing gift, of a future world without the structural-ontology of *anthropos*.

2) Samuel R. Delany's science-fiction novel *Dhalgren* (1974) makes a future world withdrawn from the world as the consequence of an unknown disaster. In the isolated American midwestern city of Bellona, we encounter two moons and an explosively dilated sun, buildings that disappear and reappear, some burning perpetually; natural

laws, space, and time do not hold. Bellona, in other words, exists in its own spacetime. Our guide through the text is Kid (or the Kid, or Kidd), a Native American and white queer polyamorous dyslexic ambidextrous amnesiac and possibly schizophrenic poet. Free-roaming gangs like the racially mixed Scorpions—whose members conceal their identities behind holograms of mythological entities and carry optical chains as weapons—rule the infinitely divisible environment. The novel’s final chapter is the typographically experimental “The Anathēmata: a plague journal,” an unfinished notebook Kid finds and to which he adds throughout the text.

Nonidentitarian queerness is grasped with *jouissance*. We emphasize that the first three lines of the novel share an isomorphism with Kid’s sadist structural-ontology.

We move through the sadism-masochism, white-Indian, and straight-queer correlations and arrive at the speculative thought, the energizing gift, that is a graphic formalization of the first three lines of the novel, of *Dhalgren*.

- 3) Jacques Lob, Jean-Marc Rochette, and Benjamin Legrand’s science-fiction graphic novel *Le Transperceneige* (1984-2000) makes a future world withdrawn from the world as the consequence of a faintly-understood disaster that has left the world frozen and lethal to human life. Those who remain are onboard the eternally returning Transperceneige (Snowpiercer), which was initially designed to be a luxury super-train for the ruling class to weather out the disaster. Proletarian nonhumans live, decrepit and forlorn, in the tail cars; bourgeoisie humans live in nihilist decadence in the front cars, closer to the perpetual motion engine Sainte Loco, which is worshipped by a religious cult. Our guides through the text are refugee Proloff and explorer

Vallès, who stage failed revolutions to achieve the egalitarian and just material conditions for those *damned* lives on the train. We emphasize that the form of the graphic novel is isomorphic with the eternally returning Transperceneige. We move through the bourgeoisie-proletariat, culture-nature, and image-sound correlations and arrive at the speculative thought, the energizing gift, of the eternal return.

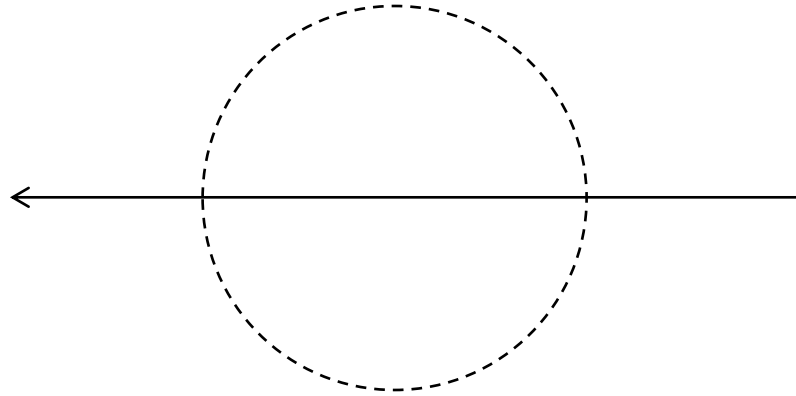
- 4) Etel Adnan's book of poems *L'Apocalypse arabe* (1980) and her English rewrite of it *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989) make worlds withdrawn from the world, « un soleil fou d'Apocalypse éclate J'entends des craquements d'os » (*LAA* 33) / “an Apocalyptic sun explodes I hear the cracking of bones” (*TAA* 39). In *L'Apocalypse arabe*, we see on the page from which these lines are cited a shaded sphere with a line curling away from it; in *The Arab Apocalypse*, we see a distorted black circle with a faint scratch above it, floating in white space. The strong historicist might say such a withdrawal of meaning is a consequence of the memory of the traumas of the massacres of Palestinians at Tall al-Za'tar and Quarantina. Or, they might say Adnan *qua* Lebanese woman is another part of the “Beirut Decentrists” (Miriam Cooke). But, no Orientalist, Adnan's asemic writing disrupts semantics and forces us to think the noesis of meaning-making itself. *L'Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse* stage geometric progressions of concepts, *Geistes*. We emphasize that Adnan's untranslatability forces us to move through the meaning-nonmeaning, west-east, and man-woman correlations to arrive at the speculative thought, the energizing gift, of thinking the absolute of the colonial-racial reality in language.

In our conclusion, we linger with the question of language by returning to Meillassoux's rationalist argument and determining the extent to which his speculative materialism solves Goodman's "new riddle of induction" from *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast* (1955), the "grue paradox." Staging this problematic amounts to a reconceptualization of language and contributes to the decolonization of the analytic-continental philosophy correlation. Our guiding question will be, "What is a hypothesis?" In answering this question, we derive the inhumanism of energy aesthetics in language, crystallized as a nonrelationally relational practice of translation that disrupts capitalist-nationalist translational practices that would have us treat as given Manichean correlations like inner-outer, white-black, north-south, sadism-masochism, white-Indian, straight-queer, bourgeoisie-proletariat, culture-nature, image-sound, meaning-nonmeaning, west-east, man-woman, and so forth. We assert that energy aesthetics gives place to a new model of alterity, a critique of the colonial-racial reality—a cosmic freak-out.⁶⁹ By way of conclusion, we contemplate Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer* (1962) and disinter the "dark precursor" to our study: *le fantastique damné*.⁷⁰ Our guiding question

⁶⁹ See Matharoo, Sean. "'A weird creature that's operating in the theater': Cult, synaesthesia and the ethico-politics of horror in Danny Perez and Animal Collective's *ODDSAC*." *Sonic horror*, special issue of *Horror Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, Autumn 2016, pp. 275-291. In it, I define the cosmic freak-out as the "sudden collapsing of the boundaries that compartmentalize affective responses according to representational logic and sensorial categorization, thereby entangling spectators in the synaesthetic, differential and embodied flow of raw matter" (279).

⁷⁰ I am energized here by Deleuze's occulted somberness: « La foudre éclate entre intensités différentes, mais elle est précédée par un *précurseur sombre*, invisible, insensible, qui en détermine à l'avance le chemin renversé, comme en creux. De même, tout système contient son précurseur sombre qui assure la communication des séries de bordure » (*DeR* 156) / "Thunderbolts explode between different intensities, but they are preceded by an invisible, imperceptible *dark precursor*, which determines their path in advance but in reverse, as though intagliated. Likewise, every system contains its dark precursor which ensures the communication of peripheral series" (*DaR* 119).

out there [*horla*]: What does it mean to think, in the contexts of the Anthropocene and the colonial-racial reality, the horror of a stellar, shattered, and hollow sign?



Another note about method—on performatively modeling energy aesthetics

We take Olivia Lucca Fraser’s translation of Badiou’s concept of model⁷¹:

[A] model is a pair, consisting of (1) a *structure* that a given formal theory can be taken to be a theory ‘about’ and (2) an *interpretation* that systematically, and functionally, links the terms of the theory to the structure in question, in such a way that we can say that the axioms of the theory are ‘true’ or ‘valid’ for the model, and in such a way that the rules by which the theory transforms its axioms into theorems ‘*preserve truth*’. (212-213)

The *structure* of this study is that of energy aesthetics, defined as a functionalist epistemology of employing symbols to make postsustainable worlds that revel in the sovereign expenditure of energy. The *interpretation* of this study is constituted in our close readings of *The Drowned World*, *Dhalgren*, *Le Transperceneige*, *L’Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse*, and *Qui se souvient de la mer*. The *theory* of this study is that of energy and our theory’s proposed axioms are the affirmed formal conditions of

⁷¹ Badiou’s concept of model: « UNE STRUCTURE EST MODELE D’UNE THEORIE FORMELLE SI TOUS LES AXIOMES DE CETTE THEORIE SONT VALIDES POUR CETTE STRUCTURE » (*LCDM* 44) / “A STRUCTURE IS A MODEL OF A FORMAL THEORY IF ALL THE AXIOMS OF THAT THEORY ARE VALID FOR THAT STRUCTURE” (*TCOM* 34).

energy: energy is 1) a material multiple; 2) radically contingent; 3) on the side of the object; and, 4) a reclamation of nature's separation from society. Our close readings of these apocalyptic literatures about the disaster link the terms of our theory of energy to the structure of energy aesthetics; our theory of energy is about the structure of energy aesthetics. The interpretation of this study proves through rationalist argumentation—viz., through reasoning—that our proposed axioms of energy are true for our *model*, which may be consolidated as a *performance* of energy aesthetics. We assert that this rationalist procedure of transforming our theory of energy's proposed axioms into evident theorems through reasoning performatively models energy aesthetics. We therefore take Moten's concept of performance as the improvisational generation of a surplus, a "lyric singularity," a noisy *frisson*, which is the "*material spirit* of the postcolonial future" (*BB* 1): "where passion is not only suffering but an overwhelming aesthesis, a massive and surprising sensual experience that *happens* to you, an irruption of the outside in its fullness with regard to every sense, where the ensemble of the senses is established by way of each of the senses becoming theoreticians in their practice" (*BB* 25). In performatively modeling energy aesthetics, we improvisationally introduce the speculative thoughts, the sovereign energy, gifted to us by apocalyptic literatures about the disaster into the differential lines of reasoning that comprise the interpretation of this study. In each of our close readings, that is to say, we think absolutes, which energize in us a passion that is "not only suffering but an overwhelming aesthesis, a massive and surprising sensual experience [. . .] where the ensemble of the senses is established by way of each of the senses becoming theoreticians in their practice." Such is our *amour*

fou, the politics of “we.” Performatively modeling energy aesthetics generates a “radical energy, an exterior lyricism, whose implied victory has not been achieved or met” (Moten, *BB* 6). Why? As Moten writes, “the object moves” (*BB* 21). Such is the material spirit of the postcolonial future. We’re not talking about sensual experience or “petroculture” anymore. We’re talking about language and structure. *The Damned of the Anthropocene* itself makes postsustainable worlds that revel in the sovereign expenditure of energy. It follows from all this that *The Damned of the Anthropocene* emerges from the history of the colonial-racial reality only to transform it, in properly dialectical fashion. But, we sustain both continuity and rupture, the old and new worlds. Not even nothing is sacred. A nonrelational relational structural-ontology—a no-space—a no-time—*le néant*—where aesthetics and philosophy become one—where thought is decolonized—the crucible of eternal social revision—language—the desert—breaths [*souffles*]. *The Damned of the Anthropocene* is conditioned by history, from which it is absolutely withdrawn. In other words, *The Damned of the Anthropocene* itself has no history. As Walter Benjamin noted, “Can the point at issue be more definitively and incisively presented than by Rimbaud himself in his personal copy of [*Une Saison en enfer*]? In the margin, beside the passage ‘on the silk of the seas and the arctic flowers,’ he later wrote, ‘There’s no such thing’” (178). History is what it does, which is make worlds.⁷²

⁷² In updating this study into a book, I’ll elaborate the nascent functionalist theory of history to which I gesture here with a dialectic between Althusser and Benjamin via Badiou. I’ll start here: 1) Read, Jason. “The Althusser Effect: Philosophy, History and Temporality.” *borderlands*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2005, http://www.borderlands.net.au/vol4no2_2005/read_effect.htm; 2) Badiou. *L’Être et l’événement*. Éditions du Seuil, 1988 / *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham, Bloomsbury, 2013; 3) Auerbach, Anthony. “Imagine no Metaphors: the Dialectical Image of Walter Benjamin.” *Image [&] Narrative*, vol. 18, 2007,

Transcending our situation—becomingPlanet

We subtend our thesis by returning, at a higher level, to our situation. We want to become, *vis-à-vis* the singularization of energy aesthetics, incompatible with the energy humanities. And the more exhausting our singularization, the more inexhaustible the energy gifted to us by apocalyptic literatures about the disaster. Such is their radical generosity. We indict the energy humanities' petromyopia, whose necessary condition is isomorphic with the colonial-racial reality's necessary condition in the logic of species difference. We think the sun, becomingPlanet. We think we can nihilate the colonial-racial reality. We condemn the capitalist economy—the energy humanities—in which aesthetics is useless. In fact, we want energy aesthetics to be useless. We do not want any of this to work. We accelerate. We reclaim the disaster. *C'est le BRUIT* [this is the NOISE]. ~~Translate~~ Energize us.⁷³ The Ninth Night, William Blake's *The Four Zoas* (X):

The Sun arises from his dewy bed, & the fresh airs
Play in his smiling beams giving the seeds of life to grow,
And the fresh Earth beams forth ten thousand springs of life.
Urthona is arisen in his strength, no longer now
Divided from Enitharmon, no longer the Spectre Los.
Where is the Spectre of Prophecy? where the delusive Phantom?
Departed: & Urthona rises from the ruinous Walls

http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/thinking_pictures/auerbach.htm. I'll also weaponize this theory of history to contribute to the decolonization of the *anthropic* project of area studies. For this project, I'll start with Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois* (1748), Sade's *La philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795), Pierre Guyotat's *Éden, Éden, Éden* (1967), Ananda Devi's *Ève de ses décombres* (2006), and Monica Byrne's *The Girl in the Road* (2014).

⁷³ I model this incompatibility after Donald Ault's incomparable *Narrative Unbound: Re-Visioning William Blake's The Four Zoas* (1987): "By turning critical attention to what has been left unthought in previous accounts of the poem, I offer a description of the poem's narrative operations that is not intended to compete with the existing body of Blake scholarship but rather to be fundamentally incommensurable with it. More specifically, in exploring the unique narrative properties of *The Four Zoas*, I have tried to make the reader as much of a stranger as possible to Blake's unusual universe of discourse in order to accentuate the differences between Blake and other poets, between *The Four Zoas* and Blake's other poems, and between *Narrative Unbound* and other Blake criticism" (xi).

In all his ancient strength to form the golden armour of science
For intellectual War. The war of swords departed now,
The dark Religions are departed & sweet Science reigns.

End of The Dream (379)

We wake, intoxicated, to the noise of *Angst*, de-cathexis.

Empor...zum Himmel

What follows are not necessary readings, but possible readings—

~~Formal~~ structural-ontological emancipation is emancipation,

Finisque ab origine pendet.

f t h e a n t h r o p o c e n e⁷⁴ t h e d a m n e d Ø

⁷⁴ See William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1920):
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming>.

2. Reimagining the disaster: *The Drowned World*

« De quelque côté qu'on aborde les choses, le problème dernier se trouve être en fin de compte celui de la *distinction* : distinctions du réel et de l'imaginaire, de la veille et du sommeil, de l'ignorance et de la connaissance, etc..., toutes distinctions en un mot dont une activité valable doit se montrer la prise exacte de conscience et l'exigence de résolution »—Roger Caillois, *Mimétisme et la psychasthénie légendaire*

“From whatever side one approaches things, the ultimate problem turns out in the final analysis to be that of *distinction*: distinctions between the real and the imaginary, between waking and sleeping, between ignorance and knowledge, etc.—all of them, in short, distinctions in which valid consideration must demonstrate a keen awareness and the demand for resolution.”—Roger Caillois, “Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia”

“When you cut into the present, the future leaks out.”—William S. Burroughs, “Origin and Theory of the Tape Cut-Ups”⁷⁵

“He was a self-imagined man / Old when still young / But there's always / Time and everywhere / Recurrently eternally / A hive of selves / He left in the air / Skeleton structures / Of thought / And thoughtlessness / To some of us / They are unfinished / Palaces to some / Slums of nothingness / An ambiguity / Haunted him haunts / All men clarity / Has animal traits / The bombs were only / In his head / On his memorial tree / A joker wrote / KEEP VIOLENCE IN THE MIND / WHERE IT BELONGS”—Brian W. Aldiss, *Barefoot in the Head*

Our reading

We adopt a speculative materialist perspective and read J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World*, arguing it presents an ethical call to commit to the making of a future world of egalitarianism and universal justice that would attend to the ways that racialization and colonial violence condition and are perpetuated by the capitalist system that has caused ecological collapse. We demonstrate that the *noisy geographical atmosphere* of the novel—in which consciousness and landscape share a devolution in the form of a global warming caused by the dying sun's radiation—models an *eco-racial*

⁷⁵ Listen: <https://subrosalabel.bandcamp.com/track/origin-and-theory-of-the-tape-cut-ups>.

disaster useful to Anthropocene ecocriticism. We contend material differences in the capitalist system ought to be considered in the context of a radical ecocriticism that would aspire toward the making of a future world of egalitarianism and universal justice. The eco-racial disaster we elaborate by reading Ballard's novel is the traumatic idea of a nonanthropocentric reality that reminds us that anthropogenic global warming is a universal problem that disproportionately impacts colonized nonhumans insofar as it pressurizes the subject-object correlation, in addition to numerous other correlations—among which are culture-nature, human-nonhuman, inner-outer, north-south, white-black, mind-world, colonizer-colonized, center-periphery, self-Other, etc. Our speculative elaboration, which arrives at the absolute, the energizing gift, of a future world without the structural-ontology of *anthropos*, may be further defined as the consideration of a form of colonial violence independent of phenomenology, or a haunting that reminds us that racialization animates the way we think about ecological crisis. As Denise Ferreira da Silva's "transparency thesis" demonstrates, race is a global form of humanism sustained by a spatial ontoepistemology that is a violent act of sovereign power and a colonial mode of thinking conditioned by the articulation of the others to the western liberal human subject as nonhuman.⁷⁶ Since René Descartes, the cleavage of thinking and being into different binary systems (or correlations) has become a transcendental wound that conditions modern thought, allowing the subaltern Other to be "engulfed" (Silva, *TGIR* 32) by scientific statements that justify violence.⁷⁷ We suggest race and

⁷⁶ See Silva, Denise Ferreira da. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

⁷⁷ Silva explains the "strategy of engulfment": "the political-symbolic strategy that apprehends the human body and global regions as signifiers of how universal reason institutes different kinds of self-

racialization ought to be considered alongside a critique of the culture-nature correlation, which shares an isomorphism with the human-nonhuman correlation that would presume “the human” to be the white/European and “the nonhuman” to be the Other to the white/European. The Anthropocene—by conceptually universalizing “the human” on its way through the culture-nature correlation—repeats colonial violence.⁷⁸ Anthropocene ecocriticism is more oriented toward egalitarianism and universal justice when it recognizes that such violence conditions the conceptualization of the Anthropocene. We call for new ways of thinking.

The Drowned World is a science-fiction novel about disaster. It makes an apocalyptic future world in which solar storms and radiation have melted the polar ice caps, causing sea levels to rise and spill over into Earth’s cities, destroying energy reserves and clearing the way for a mammalian infertility epidemic and the reemergence of Triassic-era lifeforms. Except for some malnourished radiation sufferers and “psychopaths” (12) living in the jungles surrounding the flooded cities, the humans that remain live in the Arctic and Antarctic Circles. Massive and threatening plant forms and reptiles like the Pelycosaur rule the sweltering, hallucinatory landscapes that encompass the rest of the planet, attributing to it an atmospherics of dread. The novel focuses on biologist and medical officer Robert Kerans, the head of a city-hopping scientific expedition and testing station in London whose purpose is to map the environmental

consciousness, that is, as an effect of productive tools that institute irreducible and unsublatable differences” (*TGIR* 32).

⁷⁸ As indicated in the introduction, my critique of the Anthropocene is informed by Crist, Malm and Hornborg, Haraway, Moore, Colebrook, Braidotti, Povinelli, Alaimo, Clover and Spahr, and Yusoff.

changes taking place before continuing north toward Camp Byrd—a colony in the Arctic Circle where he was born—once London becomes too hot to sustain human life. In desperation, the United Nations, which is also in the north, has determined that the careful recording of these changes may be useful if the solar storms and radiation stop and Earth’s cities become inhabitable again. Kerans, his girlfriend Beatrice Dahl, and his assistant Alan Bodkin are escorted by a military unit, including an enigmatic helicopter pilot named Hardman and its leader Colonel Riggs, who is described early in the novel as a “trim dapper figure, one booted foot up on the ramp, surveying the winding creeks and hanging jungles like an old-time African explorer” (11-12). This description hints at Ballard’s engagement with racism, primitivism, and colonial violence, an engagement that becomes more explicit as Kerans becomes inexorably drawn to the south, activating a primitivistic impulse, and once we encounter Strangman, a sadistic white slaveowner and colonialist pirate in command of a brood of thousands of crocodiles. *The Drowned World* makes an apocalyptic future world in which global warming is not the result of human action, but of a dying sun. Ballard uses the extrapolative tools gifted to him by science fiction (SF) to speculate on the possibility of a rapidly escalating heat death of the universe for which humankind is not responsible. In turn, he forecasted the ecological crisis in which we presently find ourselves. We want to ask: How might it be useful to ecocriticism when considered in the context of the Anthropocene, a geological epoch characterized by the planetary effects of *humankind’s* abuse of land, water, and fossil fuels?

Anticorrelationism—noisy geographical atmosphere—eco-racial disaster—

Like the notion of the Anthropocene, *The Drowned World* suggests that, in its world, time cannot be reversed; in fact, temperatures will continue to rise until human life ceases to exist. Contemplate the opening line of the novel: “Soon it would be too hot” (7). The temporal distortion evoked by this sentence parallels the temporal distortion that Dipesh Chakrabarty locates in the future perfect thought of the Anthropocene.⁷⁹ In it, the future is cast beyond historical sensibility, giving rise to a science-fictional sensibility that would dilate an anthropocentric understanding of time to imagine a posthuman world devastated by global warming. Early in the novel, Riggs consequently mocks the scientific party’s agenda, claiming, “All this detailed mapping of harbours for use in some hypothetical future is absurd” (17). And, like the notion of the Anthropocene, we discover in the novel ever-widening gaps between the past and the present, and between the present and the future, leaving “the human” unmoored from evolutionary time and thus historical sensibility. We find a reflection of these gaps in the fathomless, opaque lagoons that dot the ruinous landscape of London and that seem to physically and figuratively separate the novel’s characters from each other. The catastrophic global warming of the novel brings with it a devolution of human consciousness, funneling at the same time toward an ontological trauma: human extinction. In realizing the inescapable culmination of this devolution, Hardman abandons his post at the testing station early in the novel and, instead of heading to the north where it is still somewhat

⁷⁹ See Chakrabarty, Dipesh. “The Climate of History: Four Theses.” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2009, pp. 197-222.

hospitable, ventures southward into the blazing heat to try to uncover the cause of the dying sun. Such a southward movement reflects a primitivizing impulse that would hope to find an alternative to the novel's disaster in the (global) south. In an early scene, Bodkin explains to Kerans that, "Everywhere in nature one sees evidence of innate releasing mechanisms literally millions of years old, which have lain dormant through thousands of generations but retained their power undiminished [. . .] we all carry within us a submerged memory of the time [. . .] when the reptiles were the planet's dominant life form" (43). For Bodkin, traces of this inhuman memory and a fear of reptiles may be found in chromosomal and genetic code, challenging the culture-nature correlation. Ballard disrupts correlationist thinking throughout the novel by placing various correlations side-by-side—or by nesting them within others—to reveal the isomorphism shared between them, if only to then deconstruct it and speculatively point toward the possibility of worlds beyond it. We learn that organic memories are records of primordial decisions made in response to a "sudden physico-chemical crisis" (43), a "geotrauma," to borrow Nick Land's concept, registered by an immanent materiality. Land links the concept of geotrauma to the Archean-epoch creation of the Earth's crust, a repression that protects the planet from the sun, the source of Earth's original trauma and energy:

Start with the scientific story, which goes like this: between four point five and four billion years ago—during the Hadean epoch—the earth was kept in a state of superheated molten slag, through the conversion of planetesimal and meteoritic impacts into temperature increase (kinetic to thermic energy). As the solar system condensed, the rate and magnitude of collisions steadily declined, and the terrestrial surface cooled, due to the radiation of heat into space, reinforced by the beginnings of the hydrocycle. During the ensuing—Archean—epoch the molten core was buried within a crustal shell, producing an insulated reservoir of primal exogeneous trauma, the geocosmic motor of terrestrial transmutation [. . .] It's all there: anorganic memory, plutonic looping of external collisions into interior

content, impersonal trauma as drive-mechanism. The descent into the body of the earth corresponds to a regression through geocosmic time. Trauma is a body. (“BS” 497-498)

The apocalyptic geography presented in the novel may be understood to be a remapping of a geotrauma effected by cosmic time, or a trauma Kerans witnesses and that ultimately causes not only his disintegration, but also the heat death of the universe.⁸⁰

In Ballard’s novel, indeed, culture and nature are not only mutually informing; an unstoppable global warming and the concomitant regression of human consciousness have made their very correlation unsustainable. Bodkin continues to say that “just as psychoanalysis reconstructs the original traumatic situation in order to release the repressed material, so we are now being plunged back into the archaeopsychic past, uncovering the ancient taboos and drives that have been dormant for epochs” (43). According to Bodkin’s speculative theory of “neuronics,” humans must learn to master these unconscious specters or risk relapsing in various collective dreams literally down the spine, toward the “great zone of transit between the gill-breathing fish and the air-breathing amphibians with their respiratory rib-cages” (44), and, finally, into prehistoric reptiles. Accordingly, when Riggs leaves London to move northward, Kerans—acting as the scientist committed to the expansion of knowledge but realistic about the approaching doom of extinction—opts to stay behind with Dahl and Bodkin and venture perilously

⁸⁰ Land hyperbolizes Freud’s speculative theory of trauma from *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). T SPACE-TIME explains: “Key [. . .] Freud’s speculative interest in the biological origins of consciousness, an origin Freud locates clinically to have begun with the extremity of the organism—the place at which it is exposed to the environment. At this point, the tissue constituting the boundary between inside [and outside] must develop a callous, a scarred surface, deadened to the over-stimulation of the boundary. Later, Lacan developed this in his idea of the *lamella*, akin to the skin, an imaginary organ that is both dead and alive.”

into the neuronic past to understand its pre-individual memories, and unearth the cause of the dying sun, to “chart the ghostly deltas and luminous beaches of the submerged neuronic continents” (45). As the novel progresses, however, it becomes evident through Ballard’s excessive use of psychoanalytic language that Kerans’s self-imposed isolation and resulting sleeplessness—which is also described at one point as a “zone of transit” (35)—might be either a womb fantasy or a death wish. Thus, it may be argued that Kerans’s “*fin-de-siècle* temperament” (15) leads him to stay in a slowly dilapidating Ritz hotel of which he has grown fond indulging in fantasies about stealing explosives from Riggs’s military base while the surrounding area becomes inhospitable to human life; no matter what, it seems, he and the rest of the planet’s inhabitants will die. But, Ballard does not allow these two desires to be synthesized or resolved; rather, he allows the tension between them to reach a shattering point that casts light on an impersonal eco-racial disaster that conditions the relationship between them. Such a disaster may be anticipated geographically in Ballard’s exoticizing identification of the “voodoo jungle” (17) surrounding the city. This language reflects what John Rieder calls the “colonial gaze,” which “distributes knowledge and power to the subject who looks, while denying or minimizing access to power for its object, the one looked at” (7). Later, Kerans refers to the jungle as a wound that has been reopened to haunt the world: an “immense putrescent sore” (52).

Important to Ballard’s problematization of correlationist thinking that allows us to move toward the idea of the eco-racial disaster is his theory of “inner space,” which he describes as the “internal landscape of today that is a transmuted image of the past”

(“TMIS” 200). This theory may seem to rehearse a neatly drawn correlation between human interior and nonhuman exterior, subject and object. That is, it would appear that, in the novel, the nonhuman exterior cannot be thought independent of the human interior, as both human consciousness and nonhuman geography share a devolutionary descent. However, the “inner space” of *The Drowned World* puts pressure on the correlation between interior and exterior by speculating on an extra-correlational disaster independent of them, and so of phenomenology. We now move toward this eco-racial disaster indexed by Kerans’s dream-inducing obsession with a stolen, southward-pointing compass:

Caging the compass, he rotated it towards himself, without realising it sank into a momentary reverie in which his entire consciousness became focused on the serpentine terminal touched by the counter, on the confused, uncertain but curiously potent image summed up by the concept ‘South’, with all its dormant magic and mesmeric power, diffusing outwards from the brass bowl held in his hands like the heady vapours of some spectral grail. (46)

As indicated by Graham Matthews, given the primitivistic language of this passage—with its “dormant magic,” “mesmeric power,” “heady vapours,” and so on—if Kerans, like Joseph Conrad’s Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* (1899), understands the north be a false site of hope, the south is positioned as its more real Other, a structurally primitivistic reversal that is magnified and satirized once we meet Strangman and his black and mix-raced slaves.⁸¹ Beyond the north-south correlation—a reflection of the inner-outer correlation that is evoked as Kerans rotates the compass “towards himself”—

⁸¹ See Matthews, Graham. “J. G. Ballard and the Drowned World of Shanghai.” *J. G. Ballard: Landscapes of Tomorrow*, edited by Richard Brown, Christopher Duffy, and Elizabeth Stainforth. Brill, 2016, pp. 9-22. And, see: Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*, edited by Ross C. Murfin. Bedford Press, 1996.

we come to realize that there is only the reality of a colonial violence that primitivizes the Other. Kerans's obsession with the unknown south may be understood to be an obsession with an "outer space" available to be colonized. But, Ballard's theory of "inner space" is not an inversion that would emphasize interiority at the expense of exteriority. Rather, inner space may be understood as both the problematization of the correlation between subjective experience and objective reality—which, again, would necessarily mean that the object cannot be thought independent of the subject—and an attempt to use the tools of SF to build models that might help to objectively explain subjectivity. *The Drowned World*, when thought with the work of Silva, teaches us that subjectivity itself is formed according to a spatial ontoepistemology of racialization whereby the white liberal human subject is *the subject* and its subaltern Others are *its* (nonhuman) *objects*. The novel's "internal landscape of today," or inner space, is a "transmuted image" of a colonial "past" that would position the "savage" Other as an object that may be violently subjugated.

The problematization of the inner-outer correlation is refined and rendered more transposable into other correlations by Ballard's use of language in the third person, which constructs a noisy geographical atmosphere. Following Kerans's dive into "archeopsychic" past, Ballard's dispassionate descriptions of the landscape become sharply binary and further abstracted through the excessive use of apposition and adjectives: "Overhead the sky was vivid and marbled, the black bowl of a lagoon, by contrast, infinitely deep and motionless, like an immense well of amber" (47). We also find a confusion within the human-nonhuman correlation in the form of aural and visual hallucinations. Kerans, for instance, at one point thinks he sees human figures darting

among the abandoned buildings of London before realizing they are crocodiles and tree logs. Kerans brings this confusion into his unconscious, wishing to merge with the water that has flooded the city, to “dissolve himself and the ever-present phantoms which attended him like sentinel birds in the cool bower of its magical calm, in the luminous, dragon-green, serpent-haunted sea” (56-57). Entranced by a pulsating vision of a colossal sun to the south and disturbed by the increasing humidity, noisome odors, hallucinations of an amalgamated human-nonhuman landscape calling his name, and a cosmic time moving in imperceptibly slow motion, Kerans’s odyssey into inner space is asymmetrically reflected in Ballard’s disorienting use of language in the third person. We later discover that Kerans’s consciousness might have actually merged with the novel’s geography, “whose waters now seemed an extension of his own blood stream” (71). This point is illustrated in an embodied instance of *fata morgana*: the deafening sound of Kerans’s beating heart synchronizes with his vision of the “archaeopsychic sun” (147), which begins to pulse rhythmically in his vision, culminating in the manifestation of a refracted mirage that torments Kerans throughout the rest of the novel: a “terminal lagoon” (72) in the southern jungles.

The noisy geographical atmosphere of the novel may be defined as the internalization of the correlation between inside and outside and an attempt to represent a third-person real symbolized as an impossible and mirage-like beach at the most extreme fringe, the terminus, of a future world without humans. It is the signifying medium through which Ballard draws attention to an eco-racial disaster that provides the conditions of possibility for the novel’s noisy geographical atmosphere. The eco-racial

disaster of the novel is a radical outside beyond the correlation between inner and outer spaces that folds back on the correlation itself to literally *drown* it (and Kerans's consciousness) in an atmospherics of dread represented by the Triassic-era flora and fauna that reclaim the blasted city buildings. Our understanding of noise is informed by Jacques Attali's politically charged definition of it—as an ongoing dialectical process whereby dominant codes and networks are attacked from inside or outside, resulting in catastrophic and constitutive changes within such codes and networks.⁸² Our understanding of noise is also informed by the way that scholars of cybernetics might understand it as an undesirable element in a communicative signal.⁸³ Additionally, the terms “geographical” and “atmosphere” refer to the fact that, in the novel, the dying sun's radiation contributes to a devolution shared and registered by human consciousness and geography in the form of global warming and its attendant effects. Kerans's trip into inner space—through which we see how racism and colonial violence condition *subjectivation* (subjectivization)—introduces and problematizes the idea that we may think an extra-correlational reality. In doing so, the novel's noisy geographical atmosphere helps to explain how the correlation between inside and outside, subject and object, constructs a subjectivity that is conditioned by an eco-racial disaster anterior to the correlation that dismantles the subject from its vantage point. The eco-racial disaster

⁸² See Attali, Jacques. *Bruits: essai sur l'économie politique de la musique*. Presses Universitaires de France, 1977 / *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Translated by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1985.

⁸³ See Shannon, Claude Elwood and Warren Weaver. *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. University of Illinois Press, 1964.

expressed via the novel's noisy geographical atmosphere may be further defined as a nondialectical form of protest against correlationist thinking.

But, as Calvin L. Warren explains, even if we protest correlationist thinking, we risk relapsing into metaphysics if we posit some unconditioned absolute, crass ontotheology, thereby occulting the “violent structuration of objects in relation to humans [. . .] Whatever lies beneath the black body will *not* provide freedom, escape, or refuge from the metaphysical holocaust” (183). Antiblackness, in Warren's Afro-pessimist system, is an ontologically terrifying form of humanism that has led to two ineffective alternatives: “black humanism” and “postmetaphysics.” First, black humanism “appropriates schematization, calculation, technology, probability, and universality—all the instruments of metaphysical thinking—to make epistemological, ethical, and ontological claims concerning blackness and freedom” (Warren 4). Second, postmetaphysics attempts to “free blacks from the misery metaphysics produces by undermining its ground. Hermeneutical strategies, which contest ultimate foundations, would question the ground of race (racial metaphysics) and its claim to universal truth” (Warren 5). Warren contends that both black humanism and postmetaphysics can “never provide freedom or humanity for blacks, since it is the objectification, domination, and extermination of blacks that keep the metaphysical world intact” (6). Antiblackness is the conditionality for the mind-world correlation of metaphysics. However, black nihilism—the claim that there is “no solution to the problem of antiblackness” (Warren 3)—demands we must destroy metaphysics, *the world*, which reduces being to an object, an unconditioned absolute. And ontology, Warren argues, serves to “preserve the customs

and resources of human beingness and not black being” (42). Blackness is anterior to ontology and forms the conditions of possibility for it; blackness, more precisely, is the “abyss of ontology” (Warren 42), gifting form to formlessness. And black suffering, Warren explains, is a “spatiotemporality without a recognizable name or grammar within the philosophical tradition” (43). Afro-pessimism in the final analysis calls for a inhumanist ontological revolution that would destroy the metaphysical world—and the mind-world correlation that grounds it—on which black humanism and postmetaphysics are grounded. The drowned world of Ballard’s novel contributes to the destruction of the antiblack world.

Our energy aesthetics evades a relapse into metaphysics, an occultation of the “violent structuration of objects in relation to humans,” in being a material multiple, radically contingent, on the side of the object, and a reclamation of nature’s separation from society. And we suggest the eco-racial disaster derived from *The Drowned World*, a conditioned absolute, is a weaponization of energy aesthetics, and may contribute to the destruction of the antiblack world. It is close to Silva’s radical reading of blackness *qua* formless matter.⁸⁴ Silva, instead of reading blackness within the dialectic of subject and object, white and black, which is informed by racialization and that authorizes racial violence, locates its oppositional force away from the dialectic. Silva asks, “What if blackness referred to rare and obsolete definitions of matter: respectively ‘substance...of which something consists’ and ‘substance without form’?”. Using mathematical

⁸⁴ I cite here Silva, Denise Ferreira da. “1 (Life) ÷ 0 (Blackness) = ∞ - ∞ or ∞/∞: On Matter beyond the Equation of Value.” *e-flux*, no. 79, February 2017, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/79/94686/1-life-0-blackness-or-on-matter-beyond-the-equation-of-value/>.

formalisms to pressurize the principle of self-determination, she links blackness to infinity. Blackness, in Silva's speculative elaboration of it, becomes a "guide to thinking, a method for study and unbounded sociality—blackness as *matter* signals ∞ , another world: namely, that which exists without time and out of space, in the plenum."

Blackness, like the eco-racial disaster, is a formless material real, an energy source, existing on an extra-correlational level that challenges the correlation *tout court* while resisting integration into it. If the correlation between subject and object, white and black, may be understood to represent subjectivity, the eco-racial disaster—without being correlated to the subject—would be an external (and formless) material object that induces a rupture in anthropic subjectivity. *Contra* Attali's dialectical definition of noise, the eco-racial disaster is closer to Fred Moten's theorization of blackness as a performative object of "propriative exertion": "While subjectivity is defined by the subject's possession of itself and its objects, it is troubled by the subject's possession of itself and its objects, it is troubled by a dispossessive force objects assert such that the subject seems to be possessed—infused, deformed—by the object it possesses" (*IB* 1). Moten elsewhere (re)writes, "Performance is the resistance of the object" (*BB* vii). Like Moten's performative object that resists, the eco-racial disaster recursively dissolves an anthropocentric subjectivity that would rely on a transcendental logic of racialization to protect its own universality. And, drawing from the cybernetic theory of noise, from the subjective perspective of the correlation between subject and object, interior and exterior, white and black, the eco-racial disaster might be considered undesirable because it exposes the former's finitude—the maintenance of which depends on a global racism and

colonial violence—at the same time as it dissolves the subject of the correlation, a dissolution Ballard’s novel forces once Strangman enters the narrative.

Following Riggs’s departure, Strangman arrives in London and brings with him an eco-racial disaster by forcing his black and mixed-race slaves—described as “dusky-skinned figures in white shorts and singlets” (86)—to drain the drowned city so that he might excavate the previously submerged buildings for Renaissance-era art objects and electrical equipment. Like Moten’s performative object of “propriative exertion” and Silva’s black infinity, Strangman’s arrival unleashes the horror of colonial violence into the novel’s geography and marks the limits of the inner-outer correlation when encountering the eco-racial disaster. The novel’s anticipation of an ecological sensitivity beyond its pages is conditioned by the traumatic reality of colonial violence outside of it. It makes sense that Strangman, like Riggs, is depicted as a caricature of colonialist desire, driving a hydroplane as a “horseman reigning his steed” (85) with an “easy nonchalant swagger [. . .] like a charioteer completely in command of a spirited team [. . .with] an expression of exhilarated conquest” (82). He is further described as “uncannily white” (92), an uncanniness magnified by the “crisp white suit” (90) he wears, appearing to Kerans as a “white vampire” (103) and a “white devil out of a voodoo cult” (158). This hyperwhiteness refers to the colonial-racial reality according to which the white European human subject vampirically drains the energy of its colonized nonhuman objects. Following Strangman’s arrival, Kerans notes the appearance of albino snakes and lizards from the jungle, drawing a parallel between them and the white colonialist pirate. Troublingly, the novel’s last chapters draw a racist analogy between Strangman’s army of

crocodiles—described as a “massive group incarnation of reptilian evil” (87)—and his black and mixed-race slaves, suggesting they are more primitive and ontologically closer to the terminal lagoon to the south than white people like Kerans, Bodkin, and Dahl. Consider, for example, this racist description of one of Strangman’s slaves named “Big Caesar,” as a “huge hunchbacked negro in a pair of green cotton shorts [. . .] a giant grotesque parody of a human being” (90). Later, he is referred to as an “immense ape” (141). The third-person voice ought to be taken into account if we are to apprehend how *The Drowned World* models an eco-racial disaster. If the noisy geographical atmosphere in which the novel unfolds is comprised of distorted reflections of Kerans’s voyage into inner space, it follows that the events they describe illuminate what Bodkin calls the “ancient taboos and drives that have been dormant for epochs.” Kerans thinks the exploration of these taboos and drives may explain the primordial fears that stretch across human culture and nonhuman nature and offer a way to survival. Kerans’s fixation on the south points outside the text to racist and primitivistic ways of thinking and being. This movement shows that these ways of thinking and being perpetuate colonial violence and condition the possibility of the culture-nature correlation. This movement also helps to explain why the Anthropocene’s reliance on the culture-nature correlation—viz., as a concept, it implies that all of humanity is responsible for global warming—may be read as a colonial violence that ignores material differences in the capitalist system. By refusing to provide a cause for solar radiation and global warming, Ballard introduces and problematizes the idea that there can be a view from nowhere.⁸⁵ We will see below how

⁸⁵ I allude here to Nagel, Thomas. *The View from Nowhere*. Oxford University Press, 1989.

he thus brings us to consider the real possibility that the planet might be better off without humans.

The resulting noisy geographical atmosphere that Kerans encounters may be understood to be what David Ian Paddy, following Stephen Arata's theory of reverse colonization narratives, calls an "ironic colonial romance" (61). For Arata, reverse colonization narratives reverse the colonizer/colonized binary by imagining scenarios in which people from the colonized peripheries return, for the violence inflicted on them, to enact revenge on the colonizing centers.⁸⁶ However, Paddy demonstrates that Ballard's experiences as a child in Shanghai during the Second Sino-Japanese War, coupled with *The Drowned World's* racist descriptions, "form a mix of metaphors, or rather a blurring and conflating of different regions and peoples into a homogenous template of colonial otherness" (59). Paddy writes, "The rich yet flattened blend of colonial icons is meant to serve [. . .] as a part of the world that is taking revenge on a center of western imperialism, yet the eradication of local, cultural differences and the non-critical use of race perpetuates the very colonial narratives he would seem to be trying to undermine" (59). We disagree with Paddy's analysis and argue instead that Ballard's "flattened blend of colonial icons" challenges the colonizer-colonized and center-periphery correlations by shedding light on how, at an extra-correlational level, an eco-racial disaster that recognizes the Gordian knot tied between the culture-nature and self-Other correlations informs both. If the colonizer-colonized and center-periphery correlations are reflections of the (human) subject-(nonhuman) object correlation, the eco-racial disaster of *The*

⁸⁶ See Arata, Stephen. *Fictions of Loss in the Victorian Fin de Siècle*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Drowned World indicates that colonial violence supports them at a transcendental level. What Paddy calls the novel's staging of a "return of an imperial repressed" (48) may be found in Strangman and his crew and the Triassic-era flora and fauna that have come to dominate the landscape of London. The novel's pessimistic point is that the correlation between any two terms in a correlation is conditioned by racism, primitivism, and colonial violence. With such pessimism in mind and by moving toward the eco-racial disaster of Ballard's novel, we will see that colonial violence becomes fused to environmental violence at an extra-correlational level, resulting in an unrelenting global warming that floods, drowns, the planet's geography.

After the southern horizon grows ominously dark with rain clouds and before the draining of the city, Strangman arranges a diving party to explore a sunken planetarium Bodkin used to visit as a child before the floods. Under the section header "TIME ZONE," Kerans dons a diving suit and enters the dome-shaped projection hall to find an "unfamiliar zodiac [. . .] emerge before his eyes like the first vision of pelagic Cortez emerging from the oceanic deeps to glimpse the immense Pacifics of the open sky" (108-109). Witnessing what he thinks are ancient constellations propels this neo-Cortez into a deep trance represented as a Freudian death drive toward the womb, what Strangman sarcastically calls at one point the "grey sweet mother of us" (105). After becoming terrified when seeing a twisted reflection of himself in a broken mirror underwater, the planetarium becomes a "huge velvet-upholstered womb in a surrealist nightmare" (108). Panicking, Kerans cuts off the airline in his diving suit, passes out, and wakes up on the deck of Strangman's depot ship. Strangman subsequently mocks Kerans, asking, "*Did I*

or did I not try to kill myself" (112). In response, Kerans wonders: "Was the drowned world itself, and the mysterious quest for the south which had possessed Hardman, no more than an impulse to suicide, an unconscious acceptance of the logic of his own devolutionary descent, the ultimate neuronc synthesis of the archaeopsychic zero?" (113). Following this scene of existential doom mapped onto a cosmic scale, he grows increasingly indifferent to the possibility of the future survival of humankind. After Strangman drains London's lagoons, Kerans witnesses the obliteration of time and thinks he is now unable to enter the "archaeopsychic" past, entering instead a state of perpetual anguish and torpor, obsessed with the terminal lagoon of his waking dreams and "hemmed in by a mass of dissonant realities millions of years apart" (129). According to the third-person narration, however, his journey into inner space now escalates, narrative coherency itself deteriorating in tandem. Strangman has become "callous and vulpine, the renegade spirit of the hoodlum streets returning to his lost playground" (123), and his crew, equipped with kegs of rum, machetes, and guitars, scavenges the area surrounding Leicester Square for whatever art objects and electrical gear may be found. They are described in racialized Orientalist terms, compared with a "troupe of lunatic waiters at a dervish carnival" (130). Bodkin frantically responds by attempting to blow up the lagoon dam and reflood the city, but is murdered by Strangman. Kerans, having internalized racialized and primitivistic ways of thinking, convinces himself that he is the "aloof medicine-man of a rival juju" (134), and will be correspondingly punished by Strangman and his crew.

At this point in the novel, the narrative voice breaks down further, and it is unclear whether what we encounter in it is real or Kerans's masochistic hallucinations. This ambiguity is intensified by Ballard's detached style and epitomized in the chapter "The Feast of Skulls," in which a chanting circle of Strangman's slaves in tuxedos and black ties with drums and bones in hand tie Kerans onto a tattered throne, pour burning rum down his throat, and lacerate his body. Eventually, Riggs returns to London and stops Strangman from killing Kerans. Utterly disillusioned with the city, Kerans decides to fulfill Bodkin's plan and follow in Hardman's footsteps by blowing up the lagoon dam to reflood London and journeying, with an infected leg injury, toward the south, its terminal lagoon, and its enflamed sun that "pounded in his mind" (167). Kerans, in other words, is energized by the dying sun. Searching for an "invisible door out of his nightmare" (168), he leaves Dahl and traverses the sea and dunes, stumbling into the ruins of a small temple in the boiling, rainy jungle. He finds Hardman, now only the "ragged remains of a man" (170) delirious and blinded from staring at the dying sun: "The dirt and raw sun-blistered skin around the deep eye sockets turned them into blackened funnels, at the base of which a dull festering gleam reflected faintly the distant sun" (194).⁸⁷ In Hardman's palm, Kerans discovers a compass similar to the one he stole earlier, installing an irreconcilable ambiguity in the plot. Are Hardman and his deteriorated state simply a cracked reflection of Kerans's desires exaggerated to their thanatological limits? To read this ambiguity backward into the novel, on what information supplied by the third-person narration throughout the entirety of the novel

⁸⁷ Ballard, J. G. *The Drowned World*. Liveright, 2013.

might we even rely? Appropriately, the novel concludes, as well, in ambiguity, with Hardman once again disappearing and presumably journeying further south. Kerans arrives at what might be the terminal lagoon of his dreams and, sitting in the ruins of an apartment house, quietly reflects on its glassy surface, drawing a parallel between its colors and the transformations he has witnessed in inner space: “Looking out from the window at the disc of water, he watched the afternoon rain discharge itself into the surface with relentless fury; as the clouds moved away and the water smoothed itself into a glass sheet its colours seemed to recapitulate all the changes he had witnessed in his dreams” (197).⁸⁸ The last paragraph of the novel refers to Kerans, who decides to abandon the lagoon: “So he left the lagoon and entered the jungle again, within a few days was completely lost, following the lagoons southward through the increasing rain and heat, attacked by alligators and giant bats, a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn Sun” (175). But, he knows that, like Hardman, “his own life might not long survive” (174). Ultimately, then, we are left, like Kerans, without knowledge of what caused the sun to die and commence the disaster the novel depicts. Hardman and Kerans’s shared conviction that the solution to the ecological crisis might be found in the south and their suicidal journeys toward it reflect an insistence on the inner-outer correlation. The novel therefore appears to be caught in an infernal anthropocentrism, an eternal return that cannot think a reality outside the correlation between interior and exterior.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

In Paddy's reading of the ending, he intimates that it is as much a "fantasy of colonial revenge [as an] imperial desire for an untainted return of paradise" (60). However, the impossibility of knowing what caused the sun to die, when considered alongside Ballard's destabilizing language in the third person and the novel's engagement with racism, primitivism, and colonial violence, metonymizes an eco-racial disaster useful to ecocritical studies of the Anthropocene. In our reading, Hardman and Kerans's shared suicidal search for an answer to the apocalypse in the south *qua* Other reflects an ethnocentric viewpoint. So, yes, the novel's ending may be read as either a reverse colonization narrative or a primitivist one. But, this correlation (reverse colonization narrative-primitivist narrative) is challenged by the radical contingency of our energy aesthetics. What we find at the end of the novel is an ethical call to commit to a conceptualization of the eco-racial disaster that displaces the universalization of "the human" in the Anthropocene discourse that does not take into account combined and uneven development.⁸⁹ The way to "inner space" is a movement outside the correlation between inner and outer spaces, subject and object, self and Other, culture and nature, etc. It is ecologically activist because, instead of dwelling away from the correlation, it folds back perpetually to resist the correlation itself. In this way, the subject of ethical commitment is a project that would attend to the ways that racialization and colonial

⁸⁹ I refer here to Leon Trotsky's law of uneven and combined development, which indicates that, when capitalism is forced onto noncapitalist societies, what follows is the emergence of a totalizing capitalism that results in an interdependency between individual societies to one another in a combined fashion, but that engenders an unevenness in economic development—an unevenness, of course, amplified by the disastrous environmental effects of the colonial-racial project of capitalism. Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams elaborate, "Progress is therefore not bound to a single European path, but is instead filtered through a variety of political and cultural constellations, all directed towards instantiating capitalist relations. Today, modernisers fight over which variant of capitalism to install" (74).

violence condition and are perpetuated by the capitalist system that has caused the ecological collapse we face today. But, of course, Ballard's concluding description of Kerans as a "second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn Sun" reinforces Victor Li's theorization of neo-primitivism, which demonstrates that theory needs an aporia in the form of the "savage" Other to make itself finite. In defining "neo-primitivism," Li explains, "The primitive Other not only ensures the self-deconstruction of the modern Western subject, but also enables the subject to rise phoenix-like out of its own self-critical immolation" (19). Because it seems obvious that Hardman and Kerans will soon die, Ballard plays into the neo-primitivistic idea of "self-critical immolation" that would circumscribe and maintain the finitude of the western liberal human subject. However, because both human consciousness and nonhuman landscape share a devolutionary descent, the inner space narrative of Ballard's novel alloys the racial to the "eco" to render a transcendental disaster that conditions the descent itself. This eco-racial disaster emerges as a consequence of not knowing the cause of the dying sun and is expressed through the novel's noisy geographical atmosphere. The Drowned World of *The Drowned World*, unlike Hardman and Kerans, sees the sun as an indifferent entity that will continue to die and heat the planet until human life dies out. In this way, the sun is distant from Georges Bataille's reading of it as the « principe de son développement exubérant » (*PM* 66) / "source of life's exuberant development" (*AS* 28-29), and closer to Reza Negarestani's "cosmic ecology":

The Sun should neither be embraced as the dark flame of excess nor glorified as a luminous end, but rediscovered as an infernal element in the chain of complicities which open the Earth into a universe that is more weird than infernal, its climatic

events are more asymptotically non-eventful rather than catastrophically climatic, its exteriority is more immanent to the inside rather than the outside. (“SIEA” 3)



The terminal lagoon: dispersing a *fata morgana* at the end of the world

Recall that Bodkin’s “neuronics” is a theory in which the noisy geographical atmosphere of the novel is the result of a primordial “geotrauma” registered by immanent materiality. Although the universalist notion of geotrauma, like the Anthropocene, draws dangerously close to ignoring the roles that racism, primitivism, and colonial violence play in creating material inequality in the capitalist system, we think it is possible, if not necessary in light of global warming, to walk the razor’s edge between universalism and difference. To follow Warren, we ought to ~~destroy~~ drown the metaphysical world—and the mind-world correlation—on which black humanism (and, indeed, all humanisms) and postmetaphysics are grounded. To drown the metaphysical world, to “face the terror of antiblackness” (Warren 170), we commit ourselves to a future inhumanist world of egalitarianism and universal justice. Let us drown the *human* world. Let us agree with Bodkin: all terrestrial life is coextensive with a primordial “physico-chemical crisis” (Ballard, *DW* 43) registered by immanent materiality.

Negarestani refines geotrauma:

Since there is no single or isolated psychic trauma (all traumas are nested), there is no psychic trauma without an organic trauma and no organic trauma without a terrestrial trauma that in turn is deepened into open cosmic vistas. Here, trauma should be understood not as what is experienced but as a form of cut made by the real or the absolute in its own unified order; a cut that brings about the possibility of a localized horizon and a singular but interconnected ‘point of view’. For this reason, the deepening of the localizing cut or trauma substitutes the earthly ground of the geophilosophical synthesis with a groundless geocosmic continuum

built by a nested series of traumas that extend from the very conception of matter, to the formation of the terrestrial field, to the psychic architecture. (“RE” 1)

In affirming geotrauma, the ethical call to commit to the eco-racial disaster should not be read as the responsibility of a human subject endowed with phenomenal subjectivity.

Rather, it is the responsibility of what Maurice Blanchot identifies as a « *subjectivité sans sujet*, la place blessée, la meurtrissure du corps mourant déjà mort dont personne ne saurait être propriétaire ou dire : moi, mon corps » (*ED* 53) / “*subjectivity without any subject*: the wounded space, the hurt of the dying, the already dead body which no one could ever own, or ever say of it, *I, my body*” (*WD* 30). The emergence of this *dead subjectivity* is a consequence of the eco-racial disaster, which has always been there and, from the outside, forms the conditions of possibility for subjectivity: the colonial violence that racializes and primitivizes the Other. The eco-racial disaster is close to Quentin Meillassoux’s *archifossile* (arche-fossil) heuristic. Arche-fossils are « les matériaux indiquant l’existence d’une réalité ou d’un événement ancestral, antérieur à la vie terrestre » (Meillassoux, *ALF* 26) / “materials indicating the existence of an ancestral reality or event; one that is anterior to terrestrial life” (Meillassoux, *AF* 10). Meaning, because nonwhite non-European nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodities are not alive, because we are inorganic inert matter, the eco-racial disaster cannot be read as the phenomenological hypostatization of terrestrial life-experiences. After all, how could dead matter interpret phenomenal qualia and have sensory experiences, which are ontologically unique to *anthropos*, white European rational straight human Man? Moreover, let us not confuse that which is ancestral with the “past” because the unprecedented Anthropocene event upends the processual notion of historical sensibility.

As Zoltán Boldizsár Simon explains, “attempting to write the history of the Anthropocene by invoking modern processual historical thinking is an untenable, self-contradictory, and self-defeating enterprise. For inasmuch as the Anthropocene appears as unprecedented, it does not have a processual history; and inasmuch as it is has a processual history, it is not the Anthropocene” (244).⁹⁰ Simon nevertheless claims, “nothing excludes the possibility to conceptualize another notion of history capable of recognizing the unprecedented” (Simon 244). We sustain the principle of noncontradiction (PNC) without responding to the panic attack of processual history. We remember the “violent structuration of objects in relation to humans” (Warren 183). We want to synthesize the universal and the different. *Let us, then, disperse the eco-racial disaster, a formless material real, into a noisy geographical atmosphere.* We will gift form to formlessness.

When the eco-racial disaster is (re)read alongside Ballard’s theory of “inner space,” the dying sun may be understood as being subjected to the colonial violence that racializes and primitivizes the Other, causing the apocalypse that drives the narrative. It follows that the finitude of the correlation between subject and object, self and Other, culture and nature—if understood to form a subjectivity with the eco-racial disaster as its object—is not sustained, but is already dead. This subjectivity does not experience a dialectical resurrection that would reaffirm its finitude, but is cast into a cosmic void

⁹⁰ The Anthropocene, in other words, is a complex system, which features “nonlinear dynamics, where marginally different inputs can cause dramatically divergent outputs, intricate sets of causes feedback on one another in unexpected ways, and which characteristically operate on scales of space and time that go far beyond any individual’s unaided perception” (Smicek and Williams 13). Processual history, especially in its identitarian variants, cannot help us write the history of the Anthropocene, which demands new ways of thinking history. I am nonetheless interested in processual history’s critique of historical realities.

from which it does not return. It is close to what Ray Brassier calls thinking the “traumatic reality of extinction” (239): in 4.5 billion years, the sun will be extinguished. For Brassier, thinking the truth of extinction brings with it a “cancellation of sense, purpose, and possibility [. . .and] marks the point at which the ‘horror’ concomitant with the impossibility of either being or not-being becomes intelligible” (238). The intertwining of colonial and environmental violence in Ballard’s novel parallels at a higher level what Brassier calls an “*adequation without correspondence* between the objective reality of extinction and the subjective knowledge of the trauma to which it gives rise” (239). What follows the horror is a “dispersion” of the human (Blanchot).⁹¹ We are not in the representationalist paradigm of trauma, whose politics is determined by appeals to phenomenal qualia, or sensory experiences, of suffering; we are thinking in a nonrepresentational paradigm of geotrauma, whose politics is determined by unprecedented cuts “made by the real” (Negarestani), or events (Alain Badiou). These evental cuts are a form of *ontological suffering*. And, according to Robin Mackay, in the paradigm of geotrauma, “Capitalism appears as a crazed thanatropic machine, unlocking the earth’s resources—in particular, the fossil fuels that were, in more optimistic times, referred to as ‘buried sunlight’—to release them to their destiny of dissolution, and thus accelerating the consumption of the earth by the sun.”⁹² Like the geotraumatic notion of

⁹¹ See Blanchot, Maurice. *L'Écriture du désastre*. Éditions Gallimard, 1980 / *The Writing of the Disaster*. Translated by Ann Smock, University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

⁹² See Mackay, Robin. “A Brief History of Geotrauma.” *Robin Mackay*, <http://readthis.wtf/writing/a-brief-history-of-geotrauma/>. Accessed 30 January 2020. See, also, the accompanying film essay: Mackay, Robin. “The Invention of Negarestani.” *Robin Mackay*, <http://readthis.wtf/media/the-invention-of-negarestani/>. Accessed 30 January 2020.

solar death, the Anthropocene forces us to imagine a posthuman world devastated by global warming, extinction. Let us, the dead matters, refine our politics by returning, geotraumatized, to the Anthropocene event—a terminal lagoon, a *fata morgana* at the end of the world—which calls for new ways of thinking a future world of egalitarianism and universal justice that would, without recourse to the processual notion of historical sensibility, attend to the ways that racialization and colonial violence condition and are perpetuated by the capitalist system that has caused ecological collapse. We propose a left-accelerationist politics of global warming.

A left-accelerationist politics of global warming—the drowned world

According to James Trafford and Pete Wolfendale, left-accelerationism is a promethean project that embraces abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology to “turn the emancipatory tendencies of modernity against the oppressive sociality of capitalism” (5). Alex Williams and Nick Srnicek explain:

Most significant is the breakdown of the planetary climatic system. In time, this threatens the continued existence of the present global human population [. . .] We believe the most important division in today’s Left is between those that hold to a folk politics of localism, direct action, and relentless horizontalism, and those that outline what must become called an accelerationist politics at ease with a modernity of abstraction, complexity, globality, and technology. The former remains content with establishing small and temporary spaces of non-capitalist social relations, eschewing the real problems entailed in facing foes which are intrinsically non-local, abstract, and rooted deep in our everyday infrastructure. The failure of such politics has been built-in from the very beginning. By contrast, an accelerationist politics seeks to preserve the gains of late capitalism while going further than its value system, governance structures, and mass pathologies will allow. (349; 354)

Rereading Ballard’s *The Drowned World* as a left-accelerationist artwork impels us to make the following conceptual transgression: we ought to welcome, if not accelerate,

human extinction because it might lead to a communism whose conditions are egalitarianism and universal justice. This assertion is a conceptual transgression (in part) because no left-accelerationist has proposed the acceleration of human extinction. All accelerationists, however, “valorize the acceleration of *positive* tendencies at the expense of *negative* ones” (Trafford and Wolfendale 6).⁹³ We suggest the idea—the thought experiment, if we may—of accelerating human extinction brings us to a rationalist understanding of species being oriented toward egalitarianism and universal justice. As

Thomas Moynihan asserts:

[T]hose who today inherit the idea of extinction as an excuse to adjure irresponsible omnicide are genealogically illegitimate in the sense that they do not acknowledge that the very idea that they champion—that of “human extinction”, the ultimate catastrophe—was only made available to us by way of our progressive undertaking of accountability for ourselves as a species. To even be able to utter the idea is, whether one likes it or not, to acknowledge something of the summons that intelligence cannot but answer. (“CFVCS” 1981)

Regardless, this conceptual transgression is excessive, and, as Steven Shaviro claims:

Neoliberalism has no problem with excess [. . .] Every supposedly “transgressive” act or representation expands the field of capital investment. It opens new territories to appropriate, and jump-starts new processes from which to extract surplus value [. . .] Far from being subversive or oppositional, transgression is the actual motor of capitalist expansion today: the way that it renews itself in orgies of “creative destruction.” In other words, political economy today is driven by

⁹³ Trafford and Wolfendale clarify that the defining idea of accelerationism as derived in part from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and elaborated by the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) is that “within capitalism there remains an emancipatory tendency that must be accelerated in such a way that its oppressive elements, and perhaps even capitalism as such might be dissolved. However, [Benjamin] Noys took this to imply that ‘the worse the better’ [5]. This interpretation gave rise to a persistent misunderstanding that has haunted the term since, namely, that the purpose of acceleration is to intensify the contradictions of capitalism envisaged by Marx, or to deepen immiseration in order to hasten revolution” (5-6).

resonating feedback loops of positive feedback [. . .] The further out you go, the more there is to accumulate and capitalize upon.⁹⁴

Because Shaviro thinks “transgression works *all too well* as a strategy for amassing both ‘cultural capital’ and actual capital,” he proposes an “accelerationist aesthetics” whereby “[i]ntensifying the horrors of contemporary capitalism does not lead them to explode, but it offers us a kind of satisfaction and relief, by telling us that we have finally hit bottom, finally realized the worst.” Shaviro’s examples of accelerationist artworks revel in “depicting situations where the worst depredations of capitalism have come to pass, and where people are not only unable to change things but are even unable to imagine trying to change things.” Shaviro’s political defeatism is a consequence of his correlating art with the “aesthetic experience of sense and value-making, as the co-constitution of the art object and subject” (Suhail Malik).⁹⁵ Such correlationism is unintelligible today. What, then, might it mean to insist on the conceptual transgression that we ought to welcome, if not accelerate, human extinction because it might lead to a communism whose conditions are egalitarianism and universal justice? What might it mean for our energy aesthetics to activate a left-accelerationist politics of global warming? Allan Stoekl’s rereading of Bataille is generative here: “Bataille’s energy is a transgression of the limit; it is what is left over in excess of what can be used within a fundamentally human field” (*BP* xvi). He explains, “Transgression would not be transgression without the human limit of meaning

⁹⁴ I cite here Shaviro, Steven. “Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption.” *e-flux*, no. 46, June 2013, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/60070/accelerationist-aesthetics-necessary-inefficiency-in-times-of-real-subsumption/>.

⁹⁵ See Malik, Suhail. “Reason to Destroy Contemporary Art: 21st Century Theory.” *Spike*, no. 37, Autumn 2013, <https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/articles/reason-destroy-contemporary-art>.

[. . .] against which it incessantly moves” (Stoekl, *BP* 53). Because transgressive artworks generate energy by going against the subject-art object and mind-world correlations of human meaning, transgression itself may be understood to be a conceptual exercise in destroying all experiential conditions, and so all correlations.

We argue the advent of a dead subjectivity in response to the eco-racial disaster delineated above *vis-à-vis* the concluding paragraph of Ballard’s *The Drowned World* is a transgressive encounter that invites us to commence the existential project of love. We, the geotraumatized dead matters, do not possess phenomenal subjectivity, but we nonetheless exist. Love, again, is the encounter of the world from the perspective of difference (Badiou).⁹⁶ Land writes on love and literature:

Literature is like love in that both are catastrophic diseases. The way literature wantonly exploits the resources of base physiology is like love, as is the way it allies itself with hunger, sleeplessness, malaise, and strange fevers; derailing lives, and undoing the most methodical projects. Love introduces the taste of abjection and the gutter into the most secure of existences, breaking open interiorities, until it finally gets its wretched sacrifices down onto the floor, from where they are pitched into the abyss of supplication *without possible reponse* [*sic*], choking on a sulphurous mixture of ecstasy and despair. There is no great literature that is not simultaneously a degradation and a burning futility. (*TI* 134)

To love in death, under the sign of the Anthropocene, is to embrace the acceleration of human extinction. *The Drowned World* embraces the acceleration of human extinction because consciousness and landscape share a devolution caused by nonanthropogenic global warming. But, Jodi Dean doubts the cultivation of new ways of thinking in response to the Anthropocene could amount to a postcapitalism because “[l]eft

⁹⁶ See Badiou, Alain. *Éloge de l’amour*. Flammarion, 2009 / *In Praise of Love*. Translated by Peter Bush, Serpent’s Tail, 2012.

anthropocenic enjoyment thrives on the disaster that capitalist enjoyment produces [. . . and is furthered by] fossil fuels.”⁹⁷ Dean continues:

In this circuit, captivation in enjoyment fuels the exploitation, expropriation, and extraction driving the capitalist system: more, more, more; endless circulation, dispossession, destruction, and accumulation; ceaseless, limitless death. Incapacitated by magnitude, boggled by scale, the Left gets off on moralism, complexity, and disaster—even as the politics of a capitalist class determined to profit from catastrophe continues [. . .] we can’t *look* at climate change directly [. . . it] tethers us to a perspective that oscillates between the impossible and the inevitable, already and not yet, everywhere but not here, not quite (our emphasis).

Dean therefore advocates an “anamorphic” politics of climate change, whereby climate change can be *seen* clearly from the perspective of a “human need implicated in politics and desire, that is to say, in power and its generation and deployment.” Dean’s examples of artworks that approach climate change with an “anamorphic gaze” emphasize localism, direct action, and horizontalism. First, Dean’s (Foucauldian and so ~~anti~~humanist) folk politics of climate change, in tethering being to desire and/or power, falls into correlationist thinking—whose ground is the geotraumatism of antiblackness, racism, primitivism, and colonial violence—that grounds the metaphysical world on which humanisms and postmetaphysics are built. Second, although she attempts to evade the spatial (Deleuzoguattarian) molar/molecular binary that apparently informs “left anthropocenic enjoyment,” Dean’s politics perpetuates the spatial ontoepistemology of racialization whereby the white liberal human subject is *seen as the subject* and its subaltern Others are *seen as its* (nonhuman) *objects*.⁹⁸ Finally, by hypostatizing

⁹⁷ I cite here Dean, Jodi. “The Anamorphic Politics of Climate Change.” *e-flux*, no. 69, January 2016, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/69/60586/the-anamorphic-politics-of-climate-change/>.

⁹⁸ Dean elaborates: “Instead of valorizing one pole over the other (and the valued pole is nearly always the molecular, especially insofar as molecular is mapped onto the popular and the dispossessed rather than, say,

phenomenological experience into a visual, *albeit* variable, model, Dean's ocularcentrism precludes the potential for conceptual transgression to generate new models with which we might think the Anthropocene. To love in death, under the sign of the Anthropocene, is to refuse the call to reduce inhuman complexity down to human simplicity. To love in death, under the sign of the Anthropocene, is to embrace the acceleration of the extinction not of humans *per se*, but of *the structural-ontology of anthropos*, which organizes the colonial-racial reality. We're talking about language and structure, not "petroculture."

Let us turn to Ballard's reading of SF to determine more precisely how *The Drowned World* activates a left-accelerationist politics of global warming. For Ballard, the "subject matter of SF is the subject matter of everyday life: the gleam on refrigerator cabinets, the contours of a wife's or husband's thighs passing the newsreel images on a color TV set, the conjunction of musculature and chromium artifact within an automobile interior, the unique postures of passengers on an airport escalator" ("FEK" 240). The subject matter of SF is the formalization of an aesthetic self-referentiality that emerges from alienation. For Ballard, new technologies are responsible for such alienation. For us, the Anthropocene alienates us from historical sensibility and, thus, from the world. How, then, might we confront the Anthropocene, a universal problem that disproportionately impacts nonhumans? How might we transgress the capitalist economy of use and exchange responsible for ecological collapse, without giving in to political defeatism? By

the malignant and the self-absorbed), the idea of an anamorphic perspective on climate change rejects the pre-given and static scale of molar and molecular to attend to the perspective that reveals a hole, gap, or limit constitutive of desire and the subject of politics." I linger with the "hole, gap, or limit" of being, but reject its correlation to "desire and the subject of politics." I am more interested in contributing to the formalization of the real, geotraumatic.

refusing to provide a cause for the dying sun and a solution to global warming, *The Drowned World* asks us, even for a moment, to alienate ourselves and sit among the ruins. To quietly reflect on the glassy surface of the terminal lagoon, the Anthropocene—to think the real possibility that the planet might be better off without *anthropos*. We understand Ballard’s novel to be *hyperstitional*, a “kind of fiction, but one that aims to transform itself into truth” (Srnicsek and Williams 75).⁹⁹ To hurl ourselves into inner space and think a *fata morgana* at the end of the world—to become undone by the “icy, inevitable vistas of cosmic time” (Mackay “BHG”). What might we do with this mirage, with our alienation?¹⁰⁰ Remember that, in the ruins of a temple in the southern jungles, Kerans discovers, in Hardman’s palm, a compass similar to the one he steals and points toward himself and the south, a hypnotizing compass that conjures dreams and impels obsession. As argued above, this discovery installs an irreconcilable ambiguity in the plot, leading us to consider the possibility that Hardman is a hyperbolic reflection of Kerans’s thanatological desires. Accepting this reading, we now reread the concluding paragraph as a reflection of the novel’s own alienation: the third-person narration takes on the formal characteristics of a consciousness searching for self-determination and self-

⁹⁹ According to Srnicsek and Williams: “Hyperstitions operate by catalysing dispersed sentiment into a historical force that brings the future into existence. They have the temporal form of the ‘will have been’. Such hyperstitions of progress form orienting narratives with which to navigate forward, rather than being an established or necessary property of the world. Progress is a matter of political struggle, following no pre-plotted trajectory of natural tendency, and with no guarantee of success. If the supplanting of capitalism is impossible from the standpoint of one or even many defensive stances, it is because any form of prospective politics must set out to construct the *new*. Pathways must be cut and paved, not merely travelled along in some pre-ordained fashion; they are a matter of political achievement rather than divine or earthly providence.” (75).

¹⁰⁰ According to Rahel Jaeggi, the problem of alienation “leads us to the question of the nature of our relations to social practices and institutions and to an account of the demands we should make on them as the social conditions that make self-determination and self-realization possible” (219).

realization in a doubtful closure. The third-person narration, that is, takes on the formal characteristics of love. The conclusion challenges us to journey into the neuronomic past, face the geotraumatic of antiblackness, racism, primitivism, and colonial violence, and unearth the cause of the dying sun. But, because the global warming of the novel is not the result of human action, Ballard provides the conditions for our awakening to the attractiveness of the speculative thought inaccessible to ordinary sense of a future world without *anthropos*. In other words, the Drowned World of *The Drowned World* gifts us sovereign energy in excess of petromyopic “petroculture.” We might even arrive at the recognition that this thought “was only made available to us by way of our progressive undertaking of accountability for ourselves as a species” (Moynihan, “CFVCS” 1981). We agree with Moynihan: “Recollecting the story of how we came to care about our own extinction helps to establish precisely why we must continue to care; and care now, as never before, insofar as the oncoming century is to be the riskiest thus far” (“EU”).¹⁰¹ Ballard’s novel, in energizing us to think a future world without *anthropos*, is a part of this story. From solar birth to solar death, and back again.

¹⁰¹ In a revision of this chapter, I’ll elaborate my understanding of the extinction of the structural-ontology of *anthropos vis-à-vis* Moynihan’s *Spinal Catastrophism: A Secret History* (2019), which engages with Bodkin’s theory of neuronics: “Spine becomes **deep time submersible**; the CNS [Central Nervous System] as time-machine. From a perspective sensitive to the neural apriority of time, alterations to chronoreceptivity are indistinguishable from bona fide chronolocomotion, or genuine environmental **ecphory** (epoch regurgitation; biota anamnesis)” (SC 82).

3. Receiving the disaster: *Dhalgren*

“The deity kindly escorts us, / At first with unblemished blue, / Later with clouds provided, / Well rounded and grey in hue, / With scorching flashes and rolling / Of thunder, and charm of the fields, / With beauty the bubbling source of / The primal image yields.”—Friedrich Hölderlin, *The Walk*

« Je sais les cieux crevant en éclairs, et les tombes / Et les ressacs et les courants : Je sais le soir, / L’aube exaltée ainsi qui qu’un peuple de colombes, / Et j’ai vu quelque fois ce que l’homme a cru voir ! / J’ai vu le soleil bas, taché d’horreurs mystiques, / Illuminant de longs figements violets, / Pareils à des acteurs de drames très-antiques / Les flots roulant au loin leurs frissons de volets ! »—Arthur Rimbaud, *Le bateau ivre*

“Skies split by lightning into day and night, / Waves, whirlpools, a race of sea-bird dovelings, / I saw at times what men thought they have seen / And I have knowledge of the evening / And in those evenings, horror stained the sun / With long and violet clouds. Like ancient mimes / The waves move in a stately ancient drama / Or close and open like Venetian blinds”—Arthur Rimbaud, “The Drunken Ship,” translated by Samuel R. Delany

“ The *Vorzeit*-masque is on / that moves to the cosmic introit. / *Col canto* the piping for this turn. / Unmeasured, irregular in stress and interval, of interior / rhythm, modal. / If tonic and final are fire / the dominant is ice / if fifth the fire / the cadence is ice.”—David Jones, *The Anathemata*

Our reading

Samuel R. Delany’s science-fiction novel *Dhalgren* is an apocalyptic literature about the disaster that makes a future world withdrawn from the world as the consequence of an unknown disaster. Because we are never given a causal explanation for the world’s collapse, it is an example of what Quentin Meillassoux calls « fiction (des mondes) hors-science » (FHS) (*FHS* 7) / “extro-science fiction” (XSF) (*XSF* 3), which may have something to tell us about « expérience de soi dans un monde non expérimentable » (*FHS* 75) / “self-experience in a non-experienceable world” (*XSF* 57). In the isolated American midwestern city of Bellona (the Roman goddess of war), we encounter two moons and an explosively dilated sun, buildings that disappear and

reappear, some burning perpetually; natural laws, space, and time do not hold. As protagonist Kid (or the Kid, or Kidd)—a Native American and white queer polyamorous dyslexic (dysmetric?) ambidextrous amnesiac and possibly schizophrenic poet—muses, “You meet a new person, you go with him [. . .] and suddenly you get a whole new city [. . .] You go down new streets, you see houses you never saw before, pass places you didn’t know were there. Everything changes” (318). Later, he affirms, “In any house here movement from room to room is a journey from a place where twin moons have cast double shadows of the window sills upon the floors to a place where once, because the sun had grown so immense, no shadow was cast at all. We speak another language here” (754). Free-roaming gangs like the racially mixed Scorpions—of which Kid becomes leader and whose members conceal their identities behind holograms of mythological entities and carry optical chains as weapons—rule the infinitely divisible environment. Nonidentitarian queerness is grasped with *jouissance*. We emphasize in this chapter that the first three lines of the novel share an isomorphism with Kid’s sadist structural-ontology. We move through the sadism-masochism, white-Indian, and straight-queer correlations and arrive at the speculative thought, the energizing gift, that is a graphic formalization of the first three lines of the novel, of *Dhalgren* itself.

Delany begins *Dhalgren* with the infinitive phrase “to wound the autumnal city” (1). With the incomplete phrase, “Waiting here, away from the terrifying weaponry, out of the halls of vapor and light, beyond holland and into the hills, I have to come to” (801), he concludes it, thereby sealing it in a vicious circle. The complete sentence, reversed, thus reads: “Waiting here, away from the terrifying weaponry, out of the halls

of vapor and light, beyond holland and into the hills, I have come to to wound the autumnal city.” Observe that, in the “concluding” incomplete phrase, Delany repeats the preposition “to,” thereby sustaining entirely the “beginning” infinitive phrase “to wound the autumnal city.” This sustain [*fermata*] is a *formal key* that unlocks an adventure into the novel’s labyrinthine density, whose final chapter, the typographically experimental “The Anathēmata: a plague journal,” is the unfinished notebook Kid finds “earlier” and to which he adds throughout. At the beginning of “The Anathēmata,” we find the following inscription:

[We do not know who typed this transcript, nor if every relevant entry was included, nor, indeed, the criteria for relevance. Previous publication of Brass Orchids possibly weighted the decision not to include their various drafts here. (The fate of the second collection we can only surmise.) Generous enough with alternate words, marks of omission and correction, the transcriber still leaves his accuracy in question: Nowhere in the transcript is there a formal key.] (651)

Brass Orchids is a book of poems possibly written and published by Kid. Equally important, if we take Delany seriously, we must also take seriously the assertion, “*Nowhere in this transcript* [“The Anathēmata: a plague journal”] *is there a formal key.*” So, because the novel’s “concluding” incomplete phrase appears in “The Anathēmata,” it cannot be a formal key. We are returned [*ritorno*] to the “beginning” infinitive phrase: “to wound the autumnal city.” A formal key, it is to what Roman Jakobson refers as a *dominant*, the “focussing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components” (82). In David Danaher’s analysis of Gustave Flaubert’s *Salammbô* (1862), the dominant is taken to be sadism: the “intentional effacement of the author in the text (the impersonalization of the text) [...and the] internal structure of the novel [...bears] the marks of the transforming power of the dominant’s influence” (3).

Similarly, but with a difference, in our reading Delany's *Dhalgren*, the dominant is taken to be the infinitive verb that sadistically effaces the author and impersonalizes the text, which bears the *wounds* of the infinitive verb.¹⁰² In other words, the dominant is taken to be what Jakobson calls the "poetic function" of language. Texts in which the poetic function is dominant "foreground the act and form of expression and undermine any sense of a 'natural' or transparent connection between signifier and a referent [. . .] where the poetic function dominates, the text is self-referential."¹⁰³

What is the infinitive verb, a "verb which expresses simply the notion of the verb without predicating it of any subject"? Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the event is instructive here. For Deleuze, *contra* Alain Badiou, every occurrence may be apprehended as an event, or the production of difference through repetition in time: « [l'événement] soit toujours quelque chose qui vient de se passer et qui va se passer, tout à la fois, jamais quelque chose qui se passe » (*LdS* 79) / "[the event is] always and at the same time something which has just happened and something which is about to happen; never something which is happening" (*LoS* 73). And, for Deleuze, language is a subjectivizing force (it effectuates consciousness), and the infinitive verb « n'implique pas un temps intérieur à la langue sans exprimer le sens ou l'événement, c'est-à-dire

¹⁰² For a complete reading of *Dhalgren* from the perspective of difference, see Tucker, Jeffrey Allen. "Contending Forces: Racial and Sexual Narratives in *Dhalgren*." *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity and Difference*. Wesleyan University Press, 2004, pp. 55-89.

¹⁰³ This definition of the poetic function is obtained from Oxford Reference. In a future revision, I'll study Flaubert's novel about the Carthaginians and mercenaries in nonrelational relation to Delany's *Dhalgren*. I'll start with Toumayan, Alain. "Violence and Civilization in Flaubert's *Salammbô*." *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1/2, Fall—Winter 2008—2009, pp. 52-66. As Toumayan argues, "the conceptual estrangement effected by the work, rather than rendering its content insignificant, may instead be wherein the work's very significance resides" (62-63). The same thing could be said of *Dhalgren* and, I hope, this chapter.

l'ensemble des problèmes que la langue se pose. Il met l'intériorité du langage en contact avec l'extériorité de l'être. Aussi hérite-t-il de la communication des événements entre eux » (*LdS* 216) / “does not implicate a time internal to language without expressing the sense or the event, that is to say, the set of problems raised by language. It connects the interiority of language to the exteriority of being. It inherits therefore the communication of events among themselves” (*LoS* 185). Keith W. Faulkner's Freudian explanation is generative here:

Deleuze names the infinitive verb as the locus of all pure events. Because every description requires a verb, a neurotic describing a previous event for a psychoanalyst may recount events that occurred multiple times [. . .] the verbal description will encompass all of them through the infinitive verb. This leads Deleuze to conclude that the event makes representation possible [. . .] Because we cannot speak of multiple events in time without the verb, we cannot “represent” them without this verbal form. Although each description actualizes various events, all events are spoken of in *one and the same sense* [. . .] For Deleuze, consciousness merely receives the synthesis already constituted by the verb. (29)

Thus, the infinitive verb holds a privileged position in Deleuze's philosophy of the event: not only does it effectuate consciousness, it is the symbol for all possible events, so occurrences, affirmed at once, in the same sense, so univocally.¹⁰⁴ Deleuze accordingly argues, « Mais c'est en lui, dans le verbe, que se fait l'organisation secondaire dont toute l'ordonnance du langage découle » (*LdS* 281) / “In the verb, the secondary organization is brought about, and from this organization the entire ordering of language proceeds” (*LoS*

¹⁰⁴ Deleuze, following Duns Scotus, explains univocity: « Mais il apparaît déjà, dans l'univocité, que ce ne sont pas les différences qui sont et ont à être. C'est l'être qui est Différence, au sens où il se dit de la différence. Et ce n'est pas nous qui sommes univoques dans un Être qui ne l'est pas ; c'est nous, c'est notre individualité qui reste équivoque dans un Être, pour un Être univoque » (*DeR* 57) / “With univocity, however, it is not the differences which are and must be: it is being which is Difference, in the sense that it is said of difference. Moreover, it is not we who are univocal in a Being which is not; it is we and our individuality which remains equivocal in and for a univocal Being” (*DaR* 39).

241). But, as Faulkner explains, “This verb eludes designation as an object, or signification as a concept; instead, it allows partial fragments (nouns, etc.) to merge while it remains silent (55). So, how might we receive *Dhalgren’s* silent “to wound”? Deleuze, for whom the event is interchangeable with the incorporeal wound, continues to be instructive: « l’Événement lui-même, le résultat, la blessure en tant que vérité éternelle » (*LdS* 57) / “the Event itself, the result, the wound as eternal truth” (*LoS* 42).¹⁰⁵ The Deleuzian event, as Jack Reynolds explains, is the “wound of time but not of all time understood as some kind of whole; rather, it is the wound of a particular disjunctive aspect of time [. . .] composed of a simultaneous movement in two directions, opening upon both the future and the past” (“WS” 157). We’re in the intemporal time of Aion and, as Eleanor Kaufman explains, even here, “there is still a hint of movement” (*DP* 111). But, *Dhalgren’s* “to wound” is a symbol not only for all possible events, but for the event *tout court*. It is an event abstracted from its own specificity; in its purity, formal impasse, it problematizes. That is, the infinitive verb “to wound” is not only silent, but *inert*, formal key. *Contra* Aion, we must depart from *Logique du sens* (1969), which we have been citing up to this point, and turn to Deleuze’s third synthesis of time in *Différence et Répétition* (1968) and Kaufman’s rereading of it, the latter of which allows us to delineate the ethics of our reading *Dhalgren*.

¹⁰⁵ For an analysis of Deleuze’s philosophy of the event *qua* philosophy of the wound, see Reynolds, Jack. “Wounds and Scars: Deleuze on the Time and Ethics of the Event.” *Deleuze Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, April 2008, pp. 144-166.

Correlation 1: sadism-masochism

In *Différence et Répétition*, Deleuze outlines three syntheses of time, the first of which pivots on a habituated present and the second of which on memory and the past. The second synthesis is close to the time of Aion. However, the third synthesis—an “empty and pure form, which is also a pure order, and with that, static” (Kaufman, *DP* 117)—advances from the temporal and the corporeal, but is both intemporal and incorporeal.¹⁰⁶ An eternal present, the eternal return, it is at a higher level than the first two syntheses. Kaufman reads the third synthesis and disinters the glaciated antimoralism that suffuses Deleuzian ethics: “at stake here is a rarefied kind of stasis that approximates being above and beyond becoming” (*DP* 117). Deleuze associates the third synthesis with the death instinct: « Le temps vide hors de ses gonds, avec son ordre formel et statique rigoureux, son ensemble écrasant, sa série irréversible, est exactement l’instinct de mort » (*DeR* 147) / “Time empty and out of joint, with its rigorous formal and static order, its crushing unity and its irreversible series, is precisely the death instinct” (*DaR* 111). Essential to Kaufman’s argument is Deleuze’s admiration for a cruel logic of « l’excessif et l’inégal, l’interminable et l’incessant, l’informel comme produit de la formalité la plus extrême » (*DeR* 151) / “the excessive and the unequal, the interminable and the incessant, the formless as the product of the most extreme formality” (*DaR* 115). Kaufman accordingly turns to Deleuze’s *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch* (1967)—which dismantles the sadomasochism correlation, disentangling sadism from masochism—and

¹⁰⁶ For a complete examination of the three syntheses of time from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis, see Faulkner, Keith W. *Deleuze and the Three Syntheses of Time*. Peter Lang, 2006.

contends there is something he finds “particularly compelling about sadism in terms of its structural purity—and it must be emphasized that these are impersonal structures above and beyond anything else, more than they are attributes of individuals” (*DP* 113).

Kaufman demonstrates that sadism is Deleuze’s “dark precursor,” a heretofore occulted structural-ontological organizing principle for his philosophy.¹⁰⁷ In *Présentation de Sacher-Masoch*, Deleuze differentiates the death instinct, which enters into dialectical relation with the pleasure principle (Eros), from the “Death Instinct” (Thanatos), an absolute negation: « Or Thanatos comme tel ne peut pas être *donné* dans la vie psychique, même dans l’inconscient : comme dit Freud dans des textes admirables, il est essentiellement silencieux. Pourtant nous devons en parler. Nous devons en parler, car tout en dépend, mais, précise Freud, nous ne pouvons le faire que d’une manière ou spéculative, ou mythique » (*PSM* 28) / “Thanatos as such cannot be *given* in psychic life, even in the unconscious: it is, as Freud pointed out in his admirable text, essentially silent. And yet we must speak of it for it is a determinable principle, the foundation and even more of psychic life. Everything depends on it, though as Freud points out, we can only speak of it in speculative or mythical terms” (*CC* 30). We can therefore add to our contention that *Dhalgren*’s silent and inert infinitive verb “to wound” is an event abstracted from its own specificity—and so a symbol for all possible events—that it is a symbol for absolute negation, or alienation. It is the disaster.

¹⁰⁷ The capitalist university has to a great extent erased this dark precursor in privileging the “joint works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and questions of becoming and flux, nomadism, deterritorialization, lines of flight, and movements of all sorts so often associated with the name Deleuze” (Kaufman, *DP* 1).

But, how is the “to wound” sadistic? Kaufman’s reading of Deleuze’s sadism is instructive. Kaufman explains, “Deleuze links such an absolute negation to the second-order negation in Sade. The first order is a personal form of Sadean negativity that is imperative and descriptive (good sense?), and the second and related but higher order is one that is impersonal and absolute, even delusional” (*DP* 118). As Deleuze writes, « un plus haut facteur qui désigne l’*élément impersonnel* du sadisme, et qui identifie cette violence impersonnelle avec une Idée de la raison pure, avec une démonstration terrible capable de se subordonner l’autre élément » (*PSM* 19) / “the second and higher factor represents the *impersonal* element in sadism and identifies the impersonal violence with an Idea of pure reason, with a terrifying demonstration capable of subordinating the first element” (*CC* 19-20). This startling encomium to Sadean rationalism leads Kaufman to speculate:

Are there not so many occasions when one does something out of principle, out of a strange and possibly even self-destructive loyalty to the form something should take, above and beyond the content or value? If push comes to shove, can it be explained *why* the principle is held to with such tenacity, even if the outcome matters little? It is this imperative to hold to form, and the attendant stasis or dissolution that may be produced—quite literally stuck on the formality—that Deleuze explains on an ontological field [. . .] can such an imperative be divorced from desire, and when it is divorced from any desire for content, does it not become an insistent ethics of form, one which then leaves desire itself somewhat stranded and by the wayside? Clearly such an insistence on laws of form can be taken to very bad ends, but it is hoped that the unflinching pursuit of an understanding of the *structure* may pave the way for different—and more positive—alternatives. (*DP* 120)

From this rigorously formalist imperative—“*to not give ground relative to that place where desire is stopped in its tracks*” (*DP* 109-110)—Kaufman delineates a radical *anethics* “beyond anthropomorphic being and relation” (*DP* 114) that does not

presuppose an Other. Anethics is a postcorrelationist nonrelational relational ontology; and, unlike Jacques Lacan (or Michel Foucault), Kaufman does not tether being to desire (or power). In being alienated from the world, we are authorized to think structure without recourse to consciousness, and commence what Alphonso Lingis, conditioned by Pierre Klossowski's mythical reading of Sade, calls a "rationalist project of the destruction of natural man, of the human species as such."¹⁰⁸ For Klossowski, Sadean rationalism posits that « [i]l n'y a donc que le mouvement qui soit réel : les créatures n'en représentent que les phases changeantes » (*SP* 125-126) / "[o]nly motion is real; creatures are but its changing phases" (*SN* 90). For Klossowski, that is to say, Sadean rationalism, its energetics, is a reclamation of nature's separation from society:

Si Sade, à l'encontre de tout ce qu'il affirme habituellement va jusqu'à considérer l'homme comme entièrement distinct de la Nature, c'est d'abord pour mieux faire ressortir un désaccord profond des notions de l'être humain avec l'univers ; pour expliquer aussi combien l'étendue des tentatives qu'il prête à cette Nature pour rentrer dans ses droits, doit être à la mesure de ce désaccord. Nous pourrions enfin y voir la volonté de Sade de se désolidariser de l'homme en s'imposant l'impératif catégorique d'une instance cosmique exigeant l'anéantissement de tout ce qui est humain. (*SP* 121-122)

If Sade, counter to what he habitually affirms, now goes so far as to consider man to be entirely distinct from Nature, it is in order to bring out more effectively a profound discord between the notion of the human being and the notion of the universe, and to explain how all the attempts he attributes to Nature to repossess her rights must be proportionate to this discord. We might also see in all this Sade's will to separate himself from solidarity with man by imposing on himself the categorical imperative of a cosmic tribunal that demands the annihilation of all that is human. (*SN* 87)

¹⁰⁸ See Lingis, Alphonso. Introduction. *Sade My Neighbour*, by Klossowski, Quartet, 1992, pp. x-x.

Let us separate ourselves from solidarity with man and impose on ourselves, beyond masochism, beyond first-order sadism, such a cosmic tribunal.¹⁰⁹ In *Dhalgren*, the apocalypse has already come to pass and, through *Angst*, is apprehended with *jouissance*: the novel asks us to resonate with the impersonality of sadism. As Roger Calkins, the publisher of newspaper *Bellona Times* and possible publisher of the *Brass Orchids* poetry collection, tells Kid in “The Anathēmata,” “Apocalypse has come and gone. We’re just grubbing in the ashes” (745). From the vantage point of grubbing in the ashes, the waste, we, saprophytes, will learn how to make worlds not structured by the white-Indian and straight-queer correlations. Let us finally say that *Dhalgren*’s “to wound” (the event) sadistically effaces Delany *qua* author, and the text, impersonalized, bears its wounds (events). It is precisely because of the sadism of the “to wound” that, in the novel, we are asked to search for, and ultimately fail to discover, the proper name: « dans la mesure où cet acte lie un nom propre et un ensemble de signes, ou fait qu’un nom propre connote des signes » (Deleuze, *PSM* 16) / “inasmuch as a proper name is linked to a given group of signs, that is, *a proper name is made to connote signs*” (Deleuze, *CC* 16). As a consequence of this effacement, we persistently abstract from *Dhalgren* and extensively quote other texts in this chapter in order to indefinitely suspend the proper name and its

¹⁰⁹ Delany elsewhere writes: “Sadists almost always go through a masochistic period first, even if it’s in early childhood. But it’s surprising—and reassuring, at least in sex—how rarely you run into that sort of self-deceived sadist. The vast majority of the ones I’ve known personally have a pretty clear memory of the earlier stage and a pretty clear understanding of the process of transformation. One of the great crimes of the Frankfurt school, in *The Authoritarian Personality*, was the writers’ uncritical association of real sadism—the social sexual practice—with social blindness, personal cruelty, and political oppression” (“SFC” 202).

connotation of signs.¹¹⁰ That is, the dominant of this chapter is taken to be the citation that sadistically (and ironically) effaces us and impersonalizes our text, which bears the wounds of the citation. *We take as our dominant the poetic function of language.* Put another way, we foreground textual features in both *Dhalgren* and our own writing.¹¹¹ So, let us return to content, touched by sadism: throughout the text, amnesiac protagonist Kid, energized by the explosively dilated sun that hovers over Bellona, ironically expends a great deal of energy trying to remember his name. During a therapy session with psychologist Madame Brown, Kid explains, “I forget things. I don’t know who I am...I haven’t been able to remember my name for months. I wake up, sometimes, terrified, everything in a blood-colored fog, which begins to clear while my heart beats so loud it hurts my chest. I’ve lost days, days and days out of my life. I see things, sometimes, like people with their eyes” (766). Although there are several hints suggesting his name might be (William?) Dhalgren, or Grendel (Beowulf?), the novel eschews a resolution. Such a resolution would be *useful*, and Kid just isn’t interested in usefulness; he would rather gift expression to the apocalypse, in its variegated dread:

There is no articulate resonance. The common problem, I suppose, is to have more to say than vocabulary and syntax can bear. That is why I am hunting in these desiccated streets. The smoke hides the sky’s variety, stains consciousness, covers the holocaust with something safe and insubstantial. It protects from greater flame. It indicates fire, but obscures the source. This is not a useful city. Very little here approaches any eidolon of the beautiful. (75)

¹¹⁰ This sadistic effacement, for instance, helps to explain my ironic use of block quotes, without much follow-up commentary. *Vis-à-vis* Delany, it’s up to readers to do the labor of unlearning their own colonialist presumptions.

¹¹¹ I hope my admittedly clumsy use of this experimental method does not eclipse Delany’s own brilliant, admittedly challenging, formalism, which is often occulted in favor of identitarian analyses of his equally challenging critique of colonialist presumptions.

Similarly, we would rather gift expression to the Anthropocene, in its variegated dread. On the following page of “The Ruins of Morning” chapter, Kid opens “The Anathēmata” to a random page and reads the following inscription: “*It is not that I have no future. Rather it continually fragments on the insubstantial and indistinct ephemera of now. In the summer country, stitched with lightning, somehow there is no way to conclude...*” (76). Earlier, in the “Prism, Mirror, Lens” chapter, he shares, “It is not that I have no past. Rather it continually fragments on the terrible and vivid ephemera of now. In the long country, cut with rain, somehow there is nowhere to begin” (10). For Jeffrey Allen Tucker, these asymmetrically mirroring passages “render an experience, the reading of the record of that experience in the journal, and the journal’s record of a memory of the experience” (65), which is certainly true at the levels of the first (habituated present) and second (memory and the past) syntheses. But, we are in the intemporal time of the third synthesis, the crushing thought of an eternal present, the “*insubstantial and distinct ephemera of now,*” the “terrible and vivid ephemera of now.” In what follows, we accordingly adopt a sadistic perspective that persistently strives toward the formalism of now.¹¹² Thus, we are returned, again and again, to the “beginning” infinitive phrase: “to wound the autumnal city.” Although we insist on dwelling at the threshold, we authorize ourselves to read a bit further. What, then, is “the autumnal city,” Bellona?

¹¹² I understand that “(To try for form is to risk pomposity)” (Delany, *Dhalgren* 727). To risk antiintellectualism isn’t better.

Correlation 2: white-Indian

Bellona, “the autumnal city,” is a fictional city in the American Midwest, literally cut off from the rest of the State; it exists in its own spacetime. *Dhalgren* begins with Kid in a forest having sex with a “dark Oriental” (798) woman who turns into a tree, discovering optical chains (of prisms, mirrors, and lenses) in a cave, and then entering Bellona, what he later calls a “map of violences anticipated [. . .with the caveat that the city] prevents any real anxiety’s ever resolving” (702). Consequently, Kid remarks, “All humanity here astounds; all charity here is graced” (702). Scott Bukatman accordingly calls Bellona a “site of social and subjective redefinition” (169). Emily Apter argues, “Sending up racist clichés, Delany [in *Dhalgren*] defamiliarizes the historic normativities of skin color” (236). And, as Mark Chia-Yon Jerng explains, “Kid is never quite sure how he appears in the world because the objects of the world reconfigure him” (265). Jerng links this object-oriented reconfiguration process to protocols of racial reading by emphasizing the coextensive fact that the “disintegration of the physical and social laws of Bellona is linked to the putative rape of a white girl, June Richards, by a black man, George Harrison” (266). Linked to, but not caused by.¹¹³ Harrison, whose pornographic posters dominate the city walls, is perceived by Bellona’s inhabitants to be a mythic hero, and is juxtaposed with the second moon that haunts the environment. Following Richard Wollheim’s theory of projection, Jerng argues, “By having the characters use the ‘big colored man’ as a way to explain discontinuities in the world, Delany is parodying

¹¹³ *Dhalgren* also, for instance, links such disintegration to the assassination of Paul Fenster, a black civil rights activist, by white terrorists. But, the apocalypse itself—which cuts off Bellona from the rest of the American state and upends natural laws, space, and time—is never given a causal explanation.

readers' tendencies to use race as a background in order to make sense of the inexplicable" (267).¹¹⁴ In other words, *Dhalgren* is on one level an *ironic* critique of the myth of the black rapist, which, as Angela Y. Davis explains, has been "methodically conjured up whenever recurrent waves of violence and terror against the Black community have required convincing justifications" (173).¹¹⁵ Or, as Jerng argues, through Harrison's mythologization, blackness plays a "repeated role as both libidinal object and catastrophic, world-shattering terror" (268). In his final analysis, race in the novel is an "object of the context that reconfigures one's evaluation of the world" (Jerng 271). In this way, *Dhalgren* is an example of what Isiah Lavender, III calls a "linguistic ethnoscape" (189). Lavender explains:

Language is a technology that allows intelligent social beings to express and record the events of their lives with a system of symbols that may be verbal, alphanumeric, formed of lights, colors, smells, pictures. It is a method of coding knowledge. It marks the difference in values, perceptions, and behaviors of conscious life forms. It can erect the inflexible boundaries characteristic of prejudice just as it can free us from the conventions of discrimination. Language maps the ever-changing landscape the novel attempts to fix. (195)

Bracketing the radically queer Scorpions gang for now, to synthesize Jerng's and Lavender's arguments, *Dhalgren*, through the vector of the myth of Harrison, maps the language of racialization—whereby the nonwhite, non-European, "irrational," and ultimately nonhuman nonstraight nonmale is violently subordinated to the white

¹¹⁴ According to Jerng, "Wollheim describes what he calls complex projection as a process whereby parts of one's internal world (anxiety, fear) are projected not onto a single figure who possesses a psychology but onto some part of the environment, resulting in new ways of experiencing that environment. The environment continues to contain those projective properties—that is what Wollheim describes as the afterlife of projection, the way projection continues to organize our relation to the world" (267).

¹¹⁵ See Davis, Angela Y. "Rape, Racism and the Myth of the Black Rapist." *Women, Race & Class*. Vintage, 1983, pp. 172-201.

European rational straight human Man (*anthropos*)—onto the environment to force reappraisal. And because the novel refuses to resolve such violence, our attention is repeatedly drawn to the ugly truth that the language of racialization structures reality. As Carl Freedman argues, because language and writing, in particular, are prevailing subjects in the novel, “Bellona and *Dhalgren* [. . .] are not really distinguishable from one another” (20). Indeed, Bellona and *Dhalgren* and the world are not really distinguishable from one another. It makes sense, then, that the city is segregated, as Kid, standing in the ghostly ruins of a bourgeois suburb, wonders “granted the handful he’d seen, just where all the black people in Bellona *were*” (192). It eventually becomes clear that some of the black people are in the Scorpions.

Kid’s identity as Native American and white does not play a significant role at the level of content in the novel, especially when contrasted with the role played by his identity as dyslexic and possibly schizophrenic.¹¹⁶ We nevertheless argue his identity as Native American and white, abstracted to the level of form, reinforces the mapping of the language of racialization onto the environment of Bellona, re-forcing, by extension, a

¹¹⁶ Contemplate one of Kid’s many distended reflections, which may be found in a conversation he has with Calkins, who is only interested in politics, at a monastery: “I shrugged, realized he couldn’t see it, and wondered how much of him I was losing behind the stonework. ‘What I write,’ I said, ‘doesn’t seem to be...true. I mean I can model so little of what it’s about. Life is a very terrible thing, mostly, with points of wonder and beauty. Most of what makes it terrible, though, is simply that there’s so much of it, blaring in through the five senses. In my loft, alone, in the middle of the night, it comes blaring in. So I work at culling enough from it to construct moments of order.’ I meshed my fingers, which were cool, and locked them across my stomach, which was hot. ‘I haven’t been given enough tools. I’m a crazy man. I haven’t been given enough life. I’m a crazy man in this crazed city. When the problem is anything as complicated as one word spoken between two people, both suspect they understand it...When you touch your own stomach with your own hand and try to determine who is feeling who...When three people put their hands over my knee, each breathing at a different rate, the heartbeat in the heel of the thumb of one of them jarring with the pulse in the artery edging the bony cap, and one of them is me—what in me can order gets exhausted before it all’” (743).

reappraisal of identity, form, maps, language, structure, racialization, and the environment. We turn to Frank B. Wilderson III's Afro-pessimist system to obtain this reappraisal:

The three structuring positions of the United States (Whites, Indians, Blacks) are elaborated by a rubric of three demands: the (White) demand for expansion, the (Indian) demand for return of the land, and the (Black) demand for "flesh" reparation (Spillers). The relation between these positions demarcates antagonisms and not conflicts because [. . .] they are the embodiments of opposing and irreconcilable principles or forces that hold out no hope for dialectical synthesis, and because they are relations that form the foundation on which all subsequent conflicts in the Western hemisphere are possible. (29)

It should go without saying that Wilderson's radically irreconcilable system is about structural-ontological positions first, and identities second. We quote the following passage in its entirety:

Ontological incapacity [. . .] is *the* constituent element of ethics. Put another way, one cannot embody capacity and be, simultaneously, ethical. Where there are Slaves it is unethical to be free. The Settler/Master's capacity [. . .] is a function of exploitation and alienation; and the Slave's incapacity is elaborated by accumulation and fungibility [Hartman].¹¹⁷ But the "Savage" is positioned, structurally, by subjective capacity and objective incapacity, by sovereignty and genocide, respectively. The Indian's liminal status in political economy, how her or his position shuttles between the incapacity of a genocided object and the capacity of a sovereign subject, coupled with the fact that Redness does not overdetermine the thanatology of libidinal economy (this liminal capacity within political economy and complete freedom from incapacity within libidinal economy) raises serious doubts about the status of "Savage" ethicality vis-à-vis the triangulated structure (Red, White, and Black) of antagonisms. Clearly, the coherence of Whiteness as a structural position in modernity depends on the capacity to be free from genocide, perhaps not as a historical experience, but at least as a positioning modality. This embodied capacity (genocidal immunity) of Whiteness jettisons the White/Red relation from that of a conflict and marks it as

¹¹⁷ Saidiya V. Hartman explains fungibility: "the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values; and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion. Thus, while the beaten and mutilated body presumably establishes the brute materiality of existence, the materiality of suffering regularly eludes (re)cognition by virtue of the body's being replaced by other signs of value, as well as other bodies" (21). Wilderson essentially ontologizes fungibility as a constitute of the Slave.

an antagonism: it stains it with irreconcilability. Here, the Indian comes into being and is positioned by an a priori violence of genocide. (Wilderson 49)

By adopting Wilderson's Afro-pessimist system, we understand Kid's identity as Native American and white to issue from a higher structural-ontological position that is Red: that is to say we understand Kid *qua* a structural-ontological position to be subjectively capable by sovereignty and objectively incapable by genocide. Such is our own sovereignty, our sadism *in statu nascendi*.

The formalism of Wilderson's system allows us to return to Bataille's sovereignty, which is similarly irreducible to identitarian manifestations, in order to appraise Kid's subjective capacity.¹¹⁸ As we argued in our introduction, Georges Bataille's anticorrelationist theory of sovereignty, which issues from the slave's encounter with dread at the dialectic, initiates an *expérience intérieure* (inner experience) that throws the dialectic itself to its limits of possibility, to the destruction of the master, the authority of *anthropos*. As argued by Joo Heung Lee, for Bataille:

[S]overeignty demands a complete surrender to the object. In surrender, the object loses meaning, for meaning is a function of the subject that has been relinquished. This meaningless is equivalent, in a sense, to total objectivity (for there is no subject), and at the same time the reign of inner experience (for there are no objects in any conventional sense). (36)

First, in surrendering to the object *qua* nonobject (the infinitive verb *to wound*), the sovereign subject (Kid) collapses correlationism and its « perspectives de l'être au moment de l'inertie » (Bataille, *EI* 68) / “perspectives of being at the moment of inertia”

¹¹⁸ I choose to return to Bataille; alternatively, I could have turned to the fractured subjectivity Deleuze describes *vis-à-vis* the third synthesis of time. Aaron Schuster explains, “Beyond memory and the pure past, there lies a ‘great amnesiac,’ ‘the man without name, without family, without qualities, without self or I,’ the void, the rupture, the crack as the ultimate figure (or better: anti-figure) of subjectivity and psychic life” (61).

(Bataille, *IE* 54). As Kid contemplates, “What is it around these objects that vibrates so much the objects themselves vanish? [. . .] The raddled earth hung above tilted, lunar shale” (763). Kid, the subject, that is, of an inner experience, in becoming-sovereign, in being a genocided object, loses his identity and communicates a base materialism, a radically heterogenous and formless material real that evacuates the notions of self and society, leading to nonmeaning: “Communication entails the *embrace* of non-meaning [. . . and the] sovereign represents an absolute subject, completely free from the servility that characterizes objects” (Lee 39). Consider, perhaps most obviously, the title of the book itself: the meaningless word “Dhalgren” does not refer to anything other than itself, but nonetheless initiates an impossible search for the proper name. Second, as Lee explains, because the sovereign subject (Kid) is wasteful of meaning, he is the “very embodiment of violence without purpose” (40). In other words, because the object (the infinitive verb *to wound*) is “utterly superfluous” (Lee 40), because it is intractable to consciousness, it transgresses the capitalist economy of use and exchange, in which meaning means accumulation.¹¹⁹ Finally, according to Lee, Bataille’s theory of transgression “must actually justify and arouse the propensity to obey the taboo at the same time as it is being violated” (45). Transgression, in annihilating meaning, must be sinful; it must evoke feelings of anguish. Yet, nowhere in *Dhalgren* does Kid feel anguish at his numerous sinful transgressions not only because he has neither identity nor memory, but because Kid is a Red structural-ontological position that is subjectively capable by sovereignty

¹¹⁹ Lee explains: “both capital and consciousness are self-perpetuating in that the excesses each generates are reinvested into the system, driving a positive feedback mechanism where nothing is lost” (38).

and objectively incapable by genocide. For instance, while walking in “The Anathēmata,” Kid scrapes his leg on junk on the sidewalk and subsequently threatens with his “orchid” blades and then mugs a passerby for three dollars, even though money is useless in Bellona.¹²⁰ Feeling no anguish, he then wonders, “trying to ignore the surprising sting across my calf, maybe I also ignored that part of my head that would have made me just hurry on past him, reflecting on how close I had come. (Does the City’s topology control us completely?)” (697). Earlier, Kid, in a rare passage narrated from the third person, similarly asks one of his partners Lanya, “Do you think a city can control the way the people live inside it? I mean, just the geography, the way the streets are laid out, the way the buildings are placed?” (249-250). Kid is Bataillean sovereignty abstracted from itself through the physical environment and into the realm of an eternal present, pure conceptuality. The result of this abstraction procedure is an anxiously paranoid amalgam of idealism and materialism. As Kid says, here, “all sorts of things you know *don’t* relate suddenly have the air of things that *do*” (770). For instance, during a discussion with famous poet Ernest Newboy, Kid encounters a profound anxiety at having misplaced a comma in one of his own poems.¹²¹ Later, Kid seems to have sex with a tree and, in a moment of Bataillean sovereignty, considers stabbing it with his orchid blades. The following passage is worth quoting in its entirety:

¹²⁰ As Tak says of Bellona: “But we have no economy. The illusion of an ordered social matrix is complete, but it’s spitted through on all these cross-cultural attelets. It *is* a vulnerable city. It *is* a saprophytic city—It’s about the pleasantest place I’ve ever lived” (668).

¹²¹ “The fear, as it rose, he questioned: Is this some trick of the autonomic nerves that causes the small of my back to dampen, my heart to quicken, my knees to shake like motors; it was only a comma, the smallest bit of silence that I had misplaced—only a pause” (Delany, *Dhalgren* 356).

Then—and his whole body moved with a different rhythm now—he stepped toward the tree, stepped again, stepped a third time, and the side of his foot pressed a root. He leaned forward, his knee against the bark, his thigh, his belly, his chest, his cheek. He closed his eyes and stretched his chained arm high as he could and pressed his fingers on the trunk. He breathed deep for the woody smell and pushed his body into the leaning curve. Bark was rough against the juncture at penis and scrotum, rough on the bone of his ankle, the back of his jaw. / Water was running out the corners of both his eyes. He opened them slightly, but closed them quickly against distortions. / With his weaponed hand—the urge came and went, like a flash bulb’s pulsing after-image, to jam the orchid phloem deep—gently he moved his blades across the bark. Turning his hand this way and that; listening to the varied raspings, again and again he stroked the tree. / When he pushed away, the bark clung to his chest hair, his crotch hair. His ankle stung. So did his jaw. He rubbed his palm across his face to feel the mottled imprint; could see it along the flesh of his inner arm, stopping at the loops of chain to continue on the other side. (312)

This passage describing interspecies sex is just one of many moments of sovereignty we find in *Dhalgren*, which forces an overcoming of the difference between consciousness and its objects; *Dhalgren* forces us into the realm of nonmeaning, of knowing the sheer violence of difference-in-itself.¹²²

Correlation 3: straight-queer

Unlike his identity as Native American and white, Kid’s identity as queer plays a significant role at the level of content in the novel, evinced by its many protracted queer sex scenes.¹²³ In “The Anathēmata,” Kid even remarks, “Could it be that all those perfectly straight, content-with-their-sexual-orientation-in-the-world, exclusive-

¹²² Again, as I argued in the introduction, Bataille is more Hegelian than Jacques Derrida and Foucault think he is.

¹²³ It would be interesting to examine the extent to which Kid’s identity as dyslexic and possibly schizophrenic could be understood to issue from a higher structural-ontological position than is Crip. For a provisional synthesis of crip theory and queer negativity, see McRuer, Robert. “No Future for Crips: Disorderly Conduct in the New World Order; or, Disability Studies on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown.” *Culture—Theory—Disability: Encounters between Disability Studies and Cultural Studies*, edited by Anne Waldschmidt, Hanjo Berressem, and Moritz Ingwersen, Transcript Verlag, 2017, pp. 63-78.

heterosexuals really *are* (in some ill-defined, psychological way that will ultimately garner a better world) more healthy than (gulp...!) us? Let me answer: No *way!*” (720). We argue Kid’s queerness, abstracted to the level of form, in the “worldweb that spins, phatically, on and on” (760), critiques via irony the social fantasy of “reproductive futurism,” which, according to Lee Edelman’s system of queer negativity, provides the possibility condition of all politics. Reproductive futurism is the belief that the “Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention” (Edelman 3).¹²⁴ As Rebekah Sheldon translates: “The figure of the child stands in for a futurity that strips the future of everything but repetition and yet insists that repetition is progress” (36). Borrowing Lacan’s term for *jouissance*-in-itself [*sinthome*], Edelman theorizes the “sinthomosexual” as a queer figure which renders meaningless the ostensibly meaningful social fantasy of reproductive futurism and on which is projected the death drive.¹²⁵ Indeed, the death drive holds a privileged position in Edelman’s queer negativity: “As the constancy of a pressure both alien and internal to the logic of the Symbolic, as the inarticulable surplus

¹²⁴ Consider, for example, the moralist’s cliché, “Think of the children.” Like Wilderson, who ontologizes fungibility as a constitute of the Slave, Edelman ontologizes the refusal of reproductive futurism as a constitute of the queer. I understand reproductive futurism as a religious belief in something outside the realm of the rational understanding of the absoluteness that is the necessity of contingency (Meillassoux). It would be interesting to examine the extent to which Edelman’s antinatalism could be read as ecologically sensitive.

¹²⁵ T SPACE-TIME explains: “[Freud’s idea of the death drive in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*] was about the compulsion to repeat, to return to key positions, objects, and events that were, like the partial objects, incapable of resolution. The death drive was circular, but the circle had a gap. Filling this gap was what Lacan later identified as *objet petit a*, an irrational source of pleasure converted from the pain of impasse.” The Lacanian *sinthome* concatenates the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. See Lacan, Jacques. *Le séminaire, livre XXIII, Le Sinthome*. Éditions du Seuil, 2005 / *The Sinthome: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII*. Translated by A. R. Price, Polity, 2016.

that dismantles the subject from within, the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability” (9).¹²⁶ And Edelman adds to this that:

To *figure* the undoing of civil society, the death drive of the dominant order, is neither to be nor to become that drive; such being is not to the point. Rather, acceding to that figural position means recognizing and refusing the consequences of grounding reality in denial of the drive. As the death drive dissolves those congealments of identity that permit us to know and survive as ourselves, so the queer must insist on disturbing, or queering, social organization as such—on disturbing, therefore, and on queering *ourselves* and our investment in such organization. For queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one. (17)

By adopting Edelman’s system of queer negativity, we understand Kid to be a structural-ontological position that is both Red and queer: we understand Kid *qua* a structural-ontological position to be subjectively capable by sovereignty, objectively incapable by genocide, *and* linguistically ironic, the “queerest of rhetorical devices” (Edelman 23).¹²⁷ Such is our own irony, our sadism.

So, how is linguistic irony queer, and how is Kid linguistically ironic? Edelman’s queer negativity continues to be instructive. Following Paul de Man’s tropology, he alloys irony’s reflexive disruption of the dialectical tension it shares with narrative signification to the death drive. Edelman explains, “Irony, whose effect de Man likens to the syntactical violence of anacoluthon, thus severs the continuity essential to the very logic of making sense” (24). Or, as de Man writes, “Irony divides the flow of temporal

¹²⁶ The Lacanian Symbolic may be understood as the sociolinguistic epistemologies that effectuate individuals as desiring subjects.

¹²⁷ Edelman’s radically formalist queer theory is more nonidentitarian than Wilderson’s Afro-pessimist figuration of the Red-White-Black triangulation because it is about *only* the structural-ontological positionality of queerness, not the identity of queerness.

experience into a past that is pure mystification and a future that remains harassed forever by a relapse within the inauthentic” (222). This temporal bifurcation allows Edelman to upend reproductive futurism. We quote the following passage in its entirety:

If irony can serve as one of the names for the force of that unthought remainder [the death drive], might not queerness serve as another? Queer theory, it follows, would constitute the site where the radical threat posed by irony, which heteronormative culture displaces onto the figure of the queer, is uncannily returned by queers who no longer disown but assume their figural identity as embodiments of the figuralization, and hence the disfiguration of identity itself. Where the political interventions of identitarian minorities—including those who seek to substantialize the identities of lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals—may properly take shape as oppositional, affording the dominant order a reassuringly symmetrical, if inverted, depiction of its own ostensibly coherent identity, queer theory’s opposition is precisely to any such logic of opposition, its proper task the ceaseless disappropriation of every propriety. Thus, queerness could never constitute an authentic or substantive identity, but only a structural position determined by the imperative of figuration; for the gap, the noncoincidence, that the order of the signifier installs both informs and inhabits queerness as it inhabits reproductive futurism. But it does so with a difference. Where futurism always anticipates, in the image of an Imaginary past, a realization of meaning that will suture identity by closing that gap, queerness undoes the identities which we experience ourselves as subjects, insisting on the Real of a *jouissance* that social reality and the futurism on which it relies have already foreclosed. (Edelman 24-25)

In *Dhalgren*, the postapocalypse is apprehended by Kid and his fellow Scorpions, separated from solidarity with Man, with *jouissance*. That is to say they derive not anguish, but a kind of bored pleasure from their thanatological transgressions, which include many public queer interracial threesomes, gangbangs, and orgies. These queer rites oppose and disappropriate the proprieties of heteronormative civil society whose possibility condition is the colonial-racial reality, which violently subordinates the nonwhite, non-European, “irrational,” and ultimately nonhuman nonstraight nonmale. The Muñozian queer futurist might therefore read such oppositions and disappropriations

as utopian events that reveal the “existence of a queer world” (Muñoz 52).¹²⁸ But, Kid’s and the Scorpions’ transgressions of reproductive futurism are always trivialized as ironic, thereby allowing *Dhalgren* to persist in a radically queer negative mode. As Kid admits:

People think of us as energetic, active, violent. At any time, though, a third of us are asleep and half have not been out of the nest for two, three, four days (it is seldom noisy here; as seldom silent); we nestle in the worldweb that spins, phatically, on and on, sifting our meaning and meanings, insights and emotions, thin as what drifts the gritty sky. (760)

Thus, *contra* queer futurity’s utopianism, *Dhalgren*’s queer negativity *just is queer* because, like Bataille’s inner experience, it at once permits the death drive to dissolve identity and yields to *jouissance* in alienation. As Kid admits, “Since life may end at any when, the expectation of revelation or peripity, if not identical *to*, is congruent *with* insanity. They give life meaning, but expectation of them destroys our faculty for experiencing meaning. So I am still writing out these incidents” (780). It follows that Kid Child (or the Child, or Childd?) is an ironic (so, not revelatory or peripeteian) name for the queer structural-ontological position that critiques the social fantasy of reproductive futurism, which holds no place in the novel. During a lengthy public queer interracial gangbang scene in “The Anathēmata,” for example, Kid thinks to himself:

¹²⁸ I cite here José Esteban Muñoz’s (Deleuzoguattarian?) reading of Delany’s memoir *The Motion of Light in Water* (1988) in Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York University Press, 2009. Muñoz ~~ironically~~ opposes queer futurity to Edelman’s queer negativity because “In the same way all queers are not the stealth-universal-white-gay-man invoked in queer antirelational formulations, all children are not the privileged white babies to whom contemporary society caters” (94). Muñoz’s straightforward identitarianism encumbers his capability to think queerness without recourse to consciousness, let alone time. It’s as if he were reading a different text (*No Future*); or, rather, it’s as if he didn’t even read *No Future*. I understand his unintelligible utopianism to be a trivial appeal to capitalist “power” all too common to identitarianism. Edelman’s queer theory of sinthomosexuality isn’t a projection of any identity; if anything, it’s a projection of an ethics of refusal of reproductive futurism.

When I come, sometimes, balling somebody I'm not too interested in (or having particularly uninteresting sex with somebody I am), I get some picture (or words) that stays a few seconds until it hazes to something hard to recall as a dream: This time, it was an image of myself, holding hands with someone (Lanya? Risa? Denny?) and running among leafless trees laced with moonlight while the person behind me kept repeating: "...Grendal, Grendal, Grendal..." [. . .] "Grendalgrendalgrendalgrendalgren..." still ran through my head. Suddenly, I realized I hadn't been listening carefully enough; I'd stuck the brake in the wrong place. The actual word I'd heard at orgasm and that, for the last few minutes had been repeating in my head was: "...Dhalgren..." (678-679)

Thus, Kid, because he does not worry about the *jouissance* of the other, is closer to what Silvia Lippi calls a "masturbatory jouissance."¹²⁹ But, as indicated above, "Dhalgren," and the monstrous Grendal, turn out to be ironic red herrings, like the smoke that obscures its source in fire. Near the end of the novel, for instance, Kid even thinks his name might be "Michael [. . .] Henry...something. I don't remember the last one now" (779). It makes sense, then, that he who cannot remember his name is actually given early in the novel the name "Kid" by one of his queer friends and lovers Tak Loufer. Even the search for the proper name, which is the consistency in *Dhalgren*, is trivialized via irony. In this way, *Dhalgren* both critiques reproductive futurism and forces us into the queer realm of an eternal present, pure conceptual transgression. *C'est la jouissance de nous-mêmes* (This is the *jouissance* of ourselves). It follows from all this that Delany's "identification" of Kid as a Native American and white queer polyamorous dyslexic ambidextrous amnesiac and possibly schizophrenic poet is ironic. That is, Delany wants readers to project their colonialist presumptions onto the text so that the text itself can

¹²⁹ I cite here Lippi, Silvia. "About the feminine simulation." Translated by Kristina Valentinova, *Recherches en Psychanalyse*, vol. 10, 2010, pp. 78-87.

mirror them back onto readers. It's therefore up to readers to do the labor of unlearning their own colonialist presumptions. Such is Delany's own irony, sadism.

An anathematic object without a subject

We return to *Dhalgren's* "beginning" infinitive phrase—"to wound the autumnal city"—and authorize ourselves to read further: "So howled out for the world to give him a name. / The in-dark answered with wind" (1). The second sentence is more difficult. What is the "in-dark" and what is "wind"? The early Louis Althusser's radicalization of Montesquieu's climatic determinism is generative here because, as William Gibson says, "Once established in memory, [*Dhalgren*] comes to have the feel of a climate, a season. It turns there, on the mind's horizon, exerting its own peculiar gravity, a tidal force urging the reader's re-entry" (xi). Agreeing with Gibson and backing up just a bit, how might we read *Dhalgren* climatically? As Thomas H. Ford explains:

[The word climate] stems from the Latin *clima*, which in turn developed from the Greek verb κλίνειν, which meant to lean, slope or deviate—such words as 'decline', 'inclination' and 'clinic' all come from the same Greek root. Climate named the differing inclinations at which the sun's rays strike different points on the Earth's surface: climate was, in effect, a solar and geometrical expression of latitude. And this meaning persisted as the term's primary scientific frame of reference well into the nineteenth century, when it was finally replaced by our current sense of climate as a global thermodynamic atmospheric system [. . .] These etymological and philological continuities, which run far into the modern period, relate our word 'climate' to the Lucretian term 'clinamen', which derives from this same Greek root-verb κλίνειν. (164)

In Book II of *De rerum natura*, Lucretius writes of the clinamen, the infinitesimal swerve, the source of all freedom and natural phenomena:

Another basic principle you need to have a sound
Understanding of: when bodies fall through empty space
Straight down, under their own weight, at a random time and
place,
They swerve a little. Just enough of a swerve for you to call

It a change of course. Unless inclined to swerve, all things
would fall
Right through the deep abyss like drops of rain. There would be
no
Collisions, and no atom would meet atom with a blow,
And Nature thus could not have fashioned anything, full stop. (42)

Later, in Book V, he writes:

Nor is there one neat explanation for how the sun is borne
From summer to the turning point of wintry Capricorn,
And rounding the bend, how he comes back, making for the
post
Of Cancer's summer solstice—or how the moon is seen to coast,
In the space of only a month, the very distance that the sun,
Driving along his track, takes an entire year to run.
Again, there are many possible explanations, not just one. (Lucretius 167)

These two passages lead Ford to argue that the clinamen is “linguistically correlated here to climatic difference, to the swerves of the seasons and the changing inclinations of the Sun’s appearance in the sky” (165). Ford subsequently draws attention to the early Althusser’s reappraisal of Montesquieu’s political science—in particular, his climatic determinism—which makes explicit the connection between climate and clinamen. Ford in his final analysis suggests Althusser’s reappraisal of Montesquieu’s climatic determinism “may actually involve a paradoxical rethinking of determinism as clinomatic indeterminacy [. . .] because, for Althusser, Montesquieu’s theory of climate gave expression to the central problem of modern political history, which is that of the intelligibility of contingency, of the meaningfulness of the randomness of what happens” (165).

So, then, let us follow Althusser and return to Montesquieu’s climatic determinism via Lucretius in order to apprehend it as clinomatic indeterminacy, which

will, in turn, allow us to read *Dhalgren* climatically, which is to say *clinomatically*. We will consider below how climatic reading relates to energy aesthetics. Montesquieu's climatic determinism may be summarized in his own words: « S'il est vrai que le caractère de l'esprit et les passions du cœur soient extrêmement différents dans les divers climats, les lois doivent être relatives et à la différence de ces passions, et à la différence de ces caractères » (*EL* 25) / "If it be true that the temper of the mind and the passions of the heart are extremely different in different climates, the laws ought to be in relation both to the variety of those passions and to the variety of those tempers" (*SL* 221). Montesquieu basically correlates climate with « le caractère de l'esprit et les passions du cœur » / "the temper of the mind and the passions of the heart," leading him to make numerous unintelligible Orientalist claims.¹³⁰ However, Althusser, because of climate's etymological and philological "adequation without correspondence" (Brassier, *NU* 238) to the Greek infinitive verb κλίνω (to lean, slope, deviate), radicalizes Montesquieu's climatic determinism via Lucretius as clinomatic indeterminacy. To explain, in *Montesquieu: La Politique et l'Histoire* (1959), the early Althusser demonstrates that Montesquieu's rationalist political science rejects the presupposed stability of natural laws and the social contract. He argues that Montesquieu takes as his object « l'histoire entière de tous les hommes qui ont vécu » (Althusser, *M* 7) / "the entire history of all the men who have ever lived" (Althusser, *PH* 17) and elaborates « l'instinct de sociabilité » (Althusser, *M* 20) / "the instinct of sociability" (Althusser, *PH* 29), which privileges law

¹³⁰ For example, Montesquieu claims: « La loi de Mahomet, qui défend de boire du vin, est donc une loi du climat d'Arabie : aussi avant Mahomet, l'eau était-elle la boisson commune des Arabes » (*EL* 33) / "The law of Mohammed, which prohibits the drinking of wine, is, therefore, fitted to the climate of Arabia: and, indeed, before Mohammed's time, water was the common drink of the Arabs" (*SL* 228).

qua contingent relation. Althusser explains that Montesquieu's political science « dégage les lois réelles de la conduite des hommes des lois apparentes qu'ils se donnent, que pour critiquer ces lois apparentes et les modifier, faisant ainsi retour à l'histoire des résultats acquis dans la connaissance de l'histoire » (M 31) / “disengages the real laws of the conduct of men from the apparent laws they provide themselves in order to criticize those apparent laws and modify them, thus returning to history the results obtained in the knowledge of history” (PH 38). Althusser via Montesquieu then locates the isomorphism shared between the science-object of science correlation and the existing state-project of its reform correlation. He argues that science and the existing state only act *indirectly* on the object of science and the project of state reform, respectively. Althusser proceeds to speculatively track this isomorphism—this nonrelative law of relation that, in its indirectness, yields to contingency—into the climate-existing state correlation, in effect radicalizing Montesquieu's climatic determinism:

Il est vrai que le climat et le terrain, etc., déterminent des lois. Mais ils peuvent être combattus par elles, et tout l'art du législateur éclairé consiste à jouer de cette nécessité pour la jouer. Si ce recours est possible, c'est que cette détermination *n'est pas directe, mais indirecte*, et qu'elle se recueille et se concentre tout entière dans les mœurs et l'esprit d'une nation, entrant par le *principe*, qui est l'abstraction et l'expression politiques des mœurs, dans la totalité de l'État. Or comme au sein de cette totalité, une certaine action de la nature sur le principe est possible, et donc une certaine action des lois sur les mœurs, et par conséquent sur leurs composantes et leurs causes, *il n'est pas étonnant que le climat puisse céder aux lois*. (M 56)

It is true that the climate and the soil, etc., determine certain laws. But they can be counteracted by them, and all the art of the enlightened legislator consists of playing on this necessity in order to beat it. If this recourse is possible it is because this determination *is not direct but indirect*, and that it is completely gathered together and concentrated in the manners and spirit of a nation, entering via the *principle*, which is the political abstraction and expression of the manners and morals, into the totality of the State. But since within this totality there is a

certain possible action of the nature on the principle, and hence of the laws on the manners and morals and consequently on their components and causes, *it is not surprising that climate may give way to laws.* (PH 58)

Thus, as a consequence of Althusser's dialectical method, Montesquieu's climatic determinism, in emphasizing the climate's indirect action on laws, carries with it the means for its own overcoming, the contingency that would reform the existing state. After all, did not Montesquieu himself make the normative claim that « les lois doivent être relatives et à la différence de ces passions, et à la différence de ces caractères » / “the laws ought to be in relation both to the variety of those passions and to the variety of those tempers”? It follows that, like the word “climate,” the structural-ontological core of Montesquieu's climatic determinism is the *clinamen* and, with that, the infinitive verb κλίνειν, to lean, slope, deviate. Montesquieu's climatic determinism advances from an anethical commitment to the form of contingency, to the *principle*, that is, of indirectly overcoming not only the existing state, but the State. Such is his « *instinct de sociabilité* » / “*instinct of sociability*.” The formalist Althusser radicalizes Montesquieu as an atheistic, antimoralist, antiimperialist, and, if we may, *queer* communist. This radicalization makes sense because, to repeat, for Lucretius, the *clinamen*, the infinitesimal swerve, is the source of all freedom and natural phenomena.

For the late Althusser, the *clinamen* returns and explicitly refers to *le néant* (the nothingness) of the infinitesimal swerve without origin, an absolute self-referentiality from which every world originates. In *Le courant souterrain du matérialisme de la rencontre* (1982), he writes:

Le clinamen, c'est une *déviaton* infinitésimale, « aussi petite que possible », qui a lieu « on ne sait où ni quand, ni comment », et qui fait qu'un atome « dévie » de

sa chute à pic dans le vide, et, rompant de manière quasi nulle le parallélisme sur un point, provoque *une rencontre* avec l'atome voisin et de rencontre en rencontre un carambolage, et la naissance d'un monde, c'est-à-dire de l'agrégat d'atomes que provoque en chaîne la première déviation et la première rencontre [. . .] Pour que la déviation donne lieu à une rencontre, dont naisse un monde, il faut qu'elle dure, que ce ne soit pas une « brève rencontre », mais une rencontre durable, qui devient alors la base de toute réalité, de toute nécessité, de tout Sens et de toute raison. Mais la rencontre peut aussi ne pas durer, et alors il n'est pas de monde. Qui plus est, on voit que la rencontre ne crée rien de la réalité du monde, qui n'est qu'atomes agglomérés, mais *qu'elle donne leur réalité aux atomes eux-mêmes* qui sans la déviation et la rencontre ne seraient rien que des éléments *abstraites*, sans consistance ni existence. Au point qu'on peut soutenir que *l'existence même des atomes ne leur vient que de la déviation et de la rencontre* avant laquelle ils ne menaient qu'une existence fantomatique [. . .] Le monde peut être dit *le fait accompli*, dans lequel, une fois le fait accompli, s'instaure le règne de la Raison, du Sens, de la Nécessité et de la Fin. Mais *cet accomplissement du fait* n'est que pur effet de contingence, puisqu'il est suspendu à la rencontre aléatoire des atomes due à la déviation du *clinamen*. Avant l'accomplissement du fait, avant le monde, il n'y a que *le non-accomplissement du fait*, le non-monde qui n'est que l'existence *irréelle* des atomes. (Althusser, CS 541-542)

The clinamen is an infinitesimal *swerve*, 'as small as possible'; 'no one knows where, or when, or how' it occurs, or what causes an atom to 'swerve' from its vertical fall in the void, and breaking the parallelism in an almost negligible way at one point, induce *an encounter* with the atom next to it, and, from encounter to encounter, a pile-up and the birth of a world—that is to say, of the agglomeration of atoms induced, in a chain reaction, by the initial swerve and encounter [. . .] In order for swerve to give rise to an encounter from which a world is born, that encounter must last; it must be, not a 'brief encounter', but a lasting encounter, which then becomes the basic for all reality, all necessity, all Meaning and all reason. But the encounter can also not last; then there is no world. What is more, it is clear that the encounter creates nothing of the reality of the world, which is nothing but agglomerated atoms, but *that it confers their reality upon the atoms themselves*, which, without swerve and encounter, would be nothing but *abstract* elements, lacking all consistency and existence. So much so that we can say that the *atoms' very existence is due to nothing but the swerve and the encounter* prior to which they led only a phantom existence [. . .] The world may be called *the accomplished fact* in which, once the fact has been accomplished, is established the reign of Reason, Meaning, Necessity, and End. But *the accomplishment of the fact* is just a pure effect of contingency, since it depends on the aleatory encounter of the atoms due to the swerve of the clinamen. Before the accomplishment of the fact, before the world, there is only *the non-accomplishment of the fact*, the non-world that is merely the *unreal* existence of the atoms. (Althusser, UC 169-170)

We therefore argue that Althusser's philosophy of the encounter (between atoms, that fundament of all matters), which accepts a plurality of possible worlds, sustains from his earlier radicalization of Montesquieu's climatic determinism the nonrelative law of contingent relation that the subject (atom) only acts *indirectly* on the object (atom). In other words, Althusser's nonrelational relational ontology may be understood to be an abstraction from his formalist reappraisal—his radicalization, that is to say—of Montesquieu's climatic determinism into what he calls *matérialisme aléatoire* (aleatory materialism), the highest level [*crescendo*], the Archimedean point of his axiology:

D'où la *forme d'ordre* et la *forme d'êtres* provoquées à naître de ce carambolage, déterminées qu'elles sont par la *structure* de la rencontre ; d'où, une fois la rencontre effectuée (mais pas avant), le primat de la structure sur ses éléments ; d'où enfin ce qu'il faut bien appeler une *affinité* et complétude des éléments en jeu dans la rencontre, leur « accrochabilité », pour que cette rencontre « prenne », c'est-à-dire « prenne *forme*, donne *enfin naissance à des Formes, et nouvelles* [. . .] D'où le primat du « rien » sur toute « forme », et *du matérialisme aléatoire sur tout formalisme*. En d'autres termes n'importe quoi ne peut pas produire n'importe quoi, mais des éléments voués à leur rencontre et, par leur affinité, à leur « prise » les uns après les autres. (CS 564-565).

Whence *the form of order* and the *form of beings* whose birth is induced by this pile-up, determined as they are by the *structure* of the encounter; whence, once the encounter has been effected (but not before), the primacy of the structure over its elements; whence, finally, what one must call an *affinity* and a complementarity of the elements that come into play in the encounter, their 'readiness to collide—interlock' [*accrochabilité*], in order that this encounter 'take hold', that is to say, 'take *form*', *at last giving birth to Forms, and new Forms* [. . .] Hence the primary of 'nothing' over all 'form', and *of aleatory materialism over all formalism*. In other words, not just anything can produce anything, but only elements destined to encounter each other and, by virtue of their affinity, to 'take hold' one upon the other. (UC 191-192)

Having induced our own pile-up [*carambolage*], we embrace the swerve, return to *Dhalgren*, and call an affinity and a complementarity [*complétude*] between it and Althusser's aleatory materialism, the latter of which ascends to the absolute reality of

asubjective atoms and void. Let us, then, finally read *Dhalgren* climatically, which, again, is to say clinomatically. Climatic reading relates to energy aesthetics inasmuch as the former's aleatory materialism encompasses an energy that is materially multiple, radically contingent, on the side of the object (atom), and a reclamation of nature's separation from society. Climatic reading obtains its energy from the sun. Such is our own destiny, beyond even sadism.¹³¹ For now, let us reproduce here the first three lines of the novel:

to wound the autumnal city

So howled out for the world to give him a name.

The in-dark answered with wind. (1)

The “beginning” infinitive phrase is the caesura, O, a splitting, the *sun qua* generously infinite energy source. A brief return to Deleuze, for whom the caesura splits the subject and generates the formalist subject of pure conceptuality is instructive here. For Deleuze, following Friedrich Hölderlin, the caesura, which constitutes the third synthesis of time, an eternal present, may be understood « dans l’image d’une action, d’un événement unique et formidable, adéquat au temps tout entier » (*DeR* 120) / “in the image of a unique and tremendous event, an act which is adequate to time as a whole” (*DaR* 89).¹³²

¹³¹ The adjective « voué à » can mean “destined to” or “doomed to.” I have selected to sustain G. M. Goshgarian’s translation of it as “destined to.” In a future (major) revision, I’ll examine Althusser’s aleatory materialism in the introduction and track the climatic reading derived from it throughout the chapters.

¹³² Hölderlin, on the caesura, writes: “In the utmost form of suffering [. . .] there exists nothing but the conditions of time and space. Inside it, man forgets himself because he exists entirely for the moment, the god [forgets himself] because he is nothing but time; and either one is unfaithful, time, because it is reversed categorically at such a moment, no longer fitting beginning and end; man, because at this moment of categorical reversal he has to follow and thus can no longer resemble the beginning in what follows” (108).

As Daniela Voss explains, in Deleuze's philosophy of the event, the temporal order is predestined:

[T]he past is the time before the caesura; the pure present is the becoming equal to the act and the experience of internal difference [. . .] finally, the future is the time after the caesura. The future marks the time when the excessive act turns back against the subject, destroying its identity and dispersing it in a discrete multiplicity of little selves, of egos with many names or, what amounts to the same thing, a universal ego with no name at all. (236)

In *Dhalgren*, the past is the time before the caesura, the acausal disaster, the "beginning" infinitive phrase—"to wound the autumnal city"—which is the possibility condition of Bellona. Bellona's events happen in an eternal present, when Kid is the Red and queer structural-ontological position destined to become equal to the acausal disaster that makes the difference, the eco-racial disaster that weaponizes energy aesthetics in order to contribute to the destruction of the antiblack world. Kid occupies the postapocalyptic present not in dread of annihilation, but with *jouissance*. Such is his sadism, sovereignty, irony, his destiny beyond alarmism and conservatism. The first sentence of *Dhalgren*—"So howled out for the world to give him a name"—is an open parenthesis, (, an unresolved breaking-off that refers to an impossible search for the proper name, the third synthesis of time, an eternal present, a (crescent) *moon*. The second sentence—"The in-dark answered with wind"—is another open parenthesis, (, another unresolved breaking-off, another (crescent) *moon*. Unlike the first sentence, the second sentence refers to the future, when the becoming-equal to the acausal disaster that makes the difference returns, dissolving Kid's identity and "dispersing it in a discrete multiplicity of little selves, of egos with many names or, what amounts to the same thing, a universal ego with no name at all" (Voss 236). Above Kid *qua* Red and queer structural-

ontological position, Kid *qua* universal ego with no name is the formalist subject of pure conceptuality. The “in-dark” is *le néant* of the infinitesimal swerve without origin, an absolute self-referentiality from which every world—including *Dhalgren*, Bellona, and the world—originates. The “wind” is the return of the becoming-equal to the acausal disaster that makes the difference, which leads to contingent encounters between atoms, constituting base matters (Bataille). No *undifferentiated universal rain* (Lucretius), the *differentializing universal wind* produces swerves, encounters, and events, upending the presupposed stability of natural laws (and the social contract), producing new unresolved breakings-off, new forms, *new energy*. The form effectuated by *Dhalgren*’s becoming-equal to the acausal disaster that makes the difference could therefore be depicted as an empty lyric center (a caesura), followed by an open parenthesis (a breaking-off), followed by another open parenthesis (another breaking-off).¹³³ This form, an anathematic object without a subject, refers to the explosively dilated sun and two moons that haunt *Dhalgren*, Bellona, the world, worlds. And here is the sovereign energy *Dhalgren* gifts us, a speculative thought inaccessible to ordinary sense, energy in excess of petromyopic “petroculture.”—

O((

¹³³ I model this form after Thomas Dilworth’s reading of David Jones’s *The Anathemata* (1952) as a symmetrical multiple chiasmus: “(((((((O)))))))))” (177). Jones’s nonnarrative epic-length poem is the inspiration for the title of *Dhalgren*’s final chapter, the typographically experimental “The Anathēmata: a plague journal.”

4. Returning the disaster: *Le Transperceneige*

« A la fin, ma poitrine oppressée, ne pouvant chasser avec assez de vitesse l'air qui donne la vie, les lèvres de ma bouche s'entr'ouvrirent, et je poussai un cri...un cri si déchirant...que je l'entendis ! Les entraves de mon oreille se délièrent d'une manière brusque, le tympan craqua sous le choc de cette masse d'air sonore repoussée loin de moi avec énergie, et il se passa un phénomène nouveau dans l'organe condamné par la nature. Je venais d'entendre un son ! Un cinquième sens se révélait en moi ! »—Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*

“At last, my heaving bosom unable to expel the life-giving air speedily enough, my lips opened and I cried out...a cry so heart-rending that I myself heard it! The obstacle in my ears snapped abruptly, the eardrum cracked beneath the shock of that mass of noisy air expelled from within me so violently, and a new phenomenon took place within that organ condemned by nature. I had heard a sound! A fifth sense was born in me!”—Comte de Lautréamont, *Les Chants de Maldoror*

“It takes me as long to read a comic-book page as it does to read a page of Kant.”—Donald Ault, “On Carl Barks”

“And then I thought that, one day, maybe, there'd be a human society in a world which is beautiful, a society which wasn't just disgust.”—Kathy Acker, *Empire of the Senseless*

Our reading listening

The above panel¹³⁴ introduces Jacques Lob (writer), Jean-Marc Rochette (artist), and Benjamin Legrand's (writer) science-fiction *bande dessinée* (drawn strip), or graphic novel, *Le Transperceneige* (1984-2000), an apocalyptic literature about the disaster that makes a future world withdrawn from the world as the consequence of a faintly-understood disaster—a « soleil froid et pâlichon...éphémère » (26.2) / “cold, pale sun...insubstantial” (*SPI* 22.2) or a bomb or some other anthropogenic accident—that has left the world frozen and lethal to human life. It is divided into three parts: 1)

¹³⁴ I'm unable to scan panels from *Le Transperceneige* / *Snowpiercer* because I can't access my department's copier, as campus has been closed due to COVID-19. I don't want to include in this document photos taken on my phone because I'm confident they would interfere with the aesthetic consistency to which I aspire. I hope you understand.

L'Echappée / The Escape (Lob and Rochette 1984); 2) *L'Arpenteur / The Explorers* (Legrand and Rochette 1999); and, 3) *La Traversée / The Crossing* (Legrand and Rochette 2000). Through fragmented white shapes and recessed black shadows, we learn those who remain are onboard the eternally returning Transperceneige (Snowpiercer), which was initially designed to be a luxury super-train for the ruling class to weather out the disaster. However, following the « ruée sauvage » (21.1) / “wild rush” (*SPI* 17.1), during which survivors of the subjugated classes clambered aboard the train before its departure, proletarian nonhumans have lived, decrepit and forlorn, in the tail; bourgeoisie humans have lived in nihilist decadence in the front, closer to the perpetual motion engine Sainte Loco, which is worshipped by a religious cult: « Parcourant la blanche immensité d'un hiver éternel et glacé d'un bout à l'autre de la planète roule un train qui jamais ne s'arrête » (7.1) / “Across the white immensity of an eternal winter, from one end of the frozen planet to the other, there travels a train that never stops” (*SPI* 3.1). Food is supplied by « une énorme masse de barbaque qui mijote dans un liquide spéciale qui la nourrit, en quelque sort » (44.2) / “an enormous slab of vat-grown meat, suspended in a nourishing fluid” (*SPI* 40.2). But, proletariats live unaware of the resources, such as coffee, fresh vegetables, wine, and space, enjoyed by the bourgeoisie, « comme si c'était encore les beaux jours et que rien n'était arrivé » (71.5) / “as if it were still summer and nothing had happened” (*SPI* 67.5). We emphasize in this chapter that the form of the graphic novel is isomorphic with the eternally returning Transperceneige. We move through the bourgeoisie-proletariat, culture-nature, and image-sound correlations and arrive at the speculative thought, the energizing gift, of the eternal return.

Correlation 1: bourgeoisie-proletariat

The bourgeoisie-proletariat dialectic central to the graphic novel shares an isomorphism with G. W. F. Hegel's master-slave dialectic. But, according to Karl Marx's update of the dialectic, emphasis ought to be given to the social, material conditions that prompt religious belief, or faith, in something outside real, material suffering. Jack Reynolds explains:

[The proletariat and the bourgeoisie are] contradictory aspects of a single totality in which the forces of production expand through factories and socialized labour, but at the same time this conflicts with essential dependence on property relations. Famously, the material abundance that is made possible by the former is frustrated by the latter, the anarchic inequality of the market, and the tension which obtains between them means that this economic and class divide must be overcome. ("MSD" 14)

We may thus refer to Marx's bourgeoisie-proletariat dialectic as a correlation because the bourgeoisie may not be thought without recourse to the proletariat, and the proletariat may not be thought without recourse to the bourgeoisie: it is their correlation that necessitates its overcoming. The emergent question is that of *Angst*, the proletariat's self-alienation and withdrawal from the bourgeoisie. Reynolds's explication of the correlation ignores the conceptual role the negative might play in its overcoming. Reynolds may therefore be apprehended as an example of what Reza Negarestani calls a "kitsch Marxist," one who ironically occults the negativity of the dialectic, its call to self-alienation, by automatically appealing to the "pathos of negativity" ("LI" 441). With the words "abundance," "frustrated," "anarchic," "tension," and, finally, "overcome," that is, Reynolds tries to position us in and move us from the pathos of negativity to the achievement of utopianism, without constructing any norms: the "[p]ractical negativity

[of every kitsch Marxist agenda] refuses to be a resignation, but it also refuses to contribute to the system and develop a systematic attitude toward the affirmative stance ‘implicit’ in the construction of the system” (Negarestani, “LI” 442). However, the formidable pessimism of *Le Transperceneige* forces us to confront the insolvency of such automatism, which reflects theoretical bias. Indeed, every attempt to achieve utopia—the egalitarian and just material conditions for those *damned* lives on the train—fails. But, not content with some noble resignation, its formalist self-reflexivity also forces us to cultivate a “project of construction and revision” (Negarestani, “LI” 460), an inhuman freedom. Its vicious circularity is an invitation to grasp, understand, and systematize, through theorizing and/or modeling, the subjective force, the magnetism toward egalitarianism and universal justice, that is the necessary condition for the force’s exertion on the State.

L’Echappée / The Escape introduces us to Proloff, a refugee from the tail who is arrested in the book’s opening pages by armed military personnel—who refer to him as a « fumier d’queutard » (7.3) / “tail-fucker” (*SPI* 3.3)—for leaving the tail and attempting to integrate into the « voitures dorées » (56.1) / “golden cars” (*SPI* 52.1). Proloff is quarantined because of the military’s fears of contagion. He then meets Adeline Belleau, a social activist from the middle sections whose group’s goal is « l’intégration progressive des passagers des wagons de queue » (14.4) / “to progressively integrate the occupants of the tail with the rest of the train” (*SPI* 10.4). Proloff and Adeline are subsequently escorted to the front of the train to meet Colonel Krimson, witnessing along the way the corruption that has taken root in the State, the military, and the cult of Sainte

Loco. When they meet Krimson, he shares with them that Sainte Loco is slowly dying, resulting in the slowing down of the Transperceneige. The State's solution is to abandon the tail cars because of the weight they transfer to the rest of the train. Krimson asks Proloff and Adeline if they might, with the aid of Adeline's activist group, help integrate those in the tail cars into the remaining cars. However, Proloff soon discovers through the train's cynical archivist and historian that Krimson intends to detach the tail cars while Proloff, Adeline, and her activist group are in them, freeing the bourgeoisie from the burden of the proletariat. Consequently, Proloff decides to rush the engine room, engaging in numerous shootouts with the military along the way. We, at the same time, learn a disease has spread throughout the cars, possibly, as a result of Proloff's sudden introduction into the front. Appropriate to his thanatological characterization, Proloff shoots the frontmost car's windows, unleashing the violent climatological forces of the world outside the train into it, freezing Adeline to death and leaving him unconscious.

Proloff wakes in the engine room to the self-alienated Alec Forrestier, « le seul maître à bord » (110.5) / “the master of the train” (*SPI* 106.5), the master of “Olga,” his name for the perpetual motion engine powering the train. Forrestier informs Proloff that « [Olga] est un peu comme les humains, vois-tu...même si elle se suffit à elle-même, comme eux, elle a besoin d'autre chose pour s'épanouir : une présence...quelques paroles...elle a besoin de...de se sentir **habitée** ! ... » (112.2) / “[Olga] is a little like humans, you see...even though she's self-sufficient—just like them—she needs something else to thrive: a presence...a few words...she needs to...to feel **inhabited**...” (*SPI* 108.2). Forrestier dies, forcing Proloff to become the reluctant master of the train,

which we are led to believe will continue along its circular path into dark eternity. On the final page of *L'Echappée / The Escape*, Proloff, locked inside the engine room, places his back against the wall and slides, dejectedly, onto the floor, suddenly asking « Quoi ? ... Qui-est là ? C'est toi, Adeline ? ...J'aurai juré qu'on avait frappé à la porte » (114.3) / “What...? Who’s...who’s **there**? Is that you, Adeline...? I—I could’ve sworn there was a knock on the door...” (*SPI* 110). We will return to this hallucination, this thought of a knock from beyond, in the below section about the image-sound correlation. For now, let us note that the below panel concludes *L'Echappée / The Escape* with the same lines with which it begins: « Parcourant la blanche immensité d'un hiver éternel et glacé d'un bout à l'autre de la planète roule un train qui jamais ne s'arrête... » (114.5) / “Across the white immensity of an eternal winter, from one end of the frozen planet to the other, there travels a train that never stops...” (*SPI* 110.5). Here, however, we find an ellipsis, and not a period.

In the introductory panel above (Figure 1), we find a period following « s'arrête » / “stops.” The introductory panel is a *frozen image*. An interpretation of it as a moving train would have to be informed by familiarity with both “train” as symbolic of a “number of railway carriages, vans, or trucks coupled together, with or without a locomotive” and Rochette’s denial of a one-point perspective that would give us a vanishing point with which we might logically suppose an end to the Transperceneige. Meaning, we are given a period both in the text box following « un train qui jamais ne s'arrête » / “a train that never stops” and at the level of the image itself; the concept of motion is supplied from outside the image. In the concluding panel below (Figure 2), the

image is also frozen, but Rochette here denies altogether a linear perspective and the illusion of depth. We are also given an ellipsis in the text box whose function is not to suspend meaning but, rather, to refine it. That is, if the introductory panel above is understood to be analogous to the period, the full stop that ends a sentence, the concluding panel below would be analogous to the ellipsis, not as the suspension of meaning, but, literally, as three full stops that end a sentence. Lob and Rochette thus draw our attention to the metalinguistic level, the sequentiality of the drawn strip, the *bande dessinée*. Without a subsequent panel, we are stranded with the brutality of the return, the full stop, the frozen image, the recognition that the Transperceneige—a neologism of the verb « transpercer » (to pierce) and « neige » (snow)—is mere deferral. So, although the sequentiality of the *bande dessinée* and our understanding of the symbol “train” may lead us to infer that the above and below images present a moving train, piercing the snow, realizing their ellipses, they are both periods, full stops, nothing but frozen images. Lob and Rochette’s pessimistic point seems to be there will be no revolution, on the train or off it. We will track the formalism that allows this pessimism.

L’Arpenteur / The Explorers commences with the above panel (Figure 3), which, like the introductory panel of *L’Echappée / The Escape*, denies a one-point perspective that would give us a vanishing point with which we might logically suppose an end to the train. Unlike the latter, however, the former plays with shadow and closure, disrupting the circularity implied by the latter’s distant curvature. Additionally, there is no text box; the words float in negative space, the night. Put differently, the Transperceneige 2, or the Crève-Glace (Icebreaker), a much larger and more technologically advanced train, is

brutal in its seemingly infinite linearity. *Contra* the period or the ellipsis, we might think of this image as analogous to the em dash, and its ambivalence. The populations on the Transperceneige 2 appropriately live in constant fear of a collision with the Transperceneige, with whom they have lost contact. It is at first unclear whether *L'Arpenteur / The Explorers* takes place after or before *L'Echappée / The Escape*. We learn the external temperature is improving, agricultural and meat production are excellent, fertility control is improving, and « l'engouement pour le grand jeu bat son plein » (128.5) / “the gambling craze is at its peak” (*SP2* 16.5), all of which is kept secret from the train's passengers, who are pacified with literal TV talking head Overmars, the cult of Sainte Loco, antidepressants, and state-sponsored lotteries, whose winners receive VR tours to different worlds, such as « Le fils de Spartacus » (159.8) / “The Son of Spartacus” (*SP2* 47.8), which carries apocalyptic, messianic, and redemptive charges. Although the divide between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is less defined in *L'Arpenteur / The Explorers* than it is in *L'Echappée / The Escape*, the wealthy elite class can nonetheless afford to take VR tours without competing against the « ploucs du milieu » (126.4) / “riff-raff from the middle” (*SP2* 14.4), as one character remarks in the audience at a virtual chariot race. Furthermore, the State, the military, and the cult of Sainte Loco on the Transperceneige 2 are unified under the title of « Conseil » (Council). We also discover a countercult in the form of the Cosmosiens, whose suicidal leader Métronome believes the train to be a spaceship on which only the « élus atteindront la planète promise » (146.7) / “chosen ones will reach the promised planet” (*SP2* 34.7).

L'Arpenteur / The Explorers follows Puig Vallès, an explorer we first meet in the book's opening pages as a child witnessing « les arpenteurs » (the explorers) being sent on a secret mission out into the cold to help test the Transperceneige 2's braking system in the event of an imminent collision with the Transperceneige. A suicidal passenger, however, sets off a grenade, killing Puig's parents and all but one of the explorers, inaugurating a « dinguerie » (125.7) / “madness” (*SP2* 13.7). The book then jumps seventeen years, with Puig now an explorer whose tasks include helping test the train's braking system and venturing into the cold to salvage art objects from the ruins of museums to help VR designers create new environments. Unlike Proloff, whose characterization is to a great extent obtained through his interactions with others, we learn much about Puig through text boxes explicating his thoughts on his trips into the frozen deserts:

Si mes parents n'étaient pas morts le jour du premier freinage...je ne serais dans doute jamais devenu arpenteur...fouille-merde gelée...fouille-gravats du passé...et je n'aurais accédé à la culture...risquer sa vie pour, je ne sais pas moi, de la bouffe ou des médicaments, passe encore...mais pour rapporter des souvenirs que les nordistes entassent je ne sais où...mais je ne sais pas ce qu'elle a, moi, et si vous voulez admirer ces merdes congelées vous n'avez qu'à sortir...enfin, je fais boulot, c'est tout... (135.1-2, 136.1-2, 136.5, 137.1)

If my parents hadn't died the day we first braked...I would probably never have become an explorer...a raker of frozen-muck...scouring the rubbish of the past...and I would never have had any access to the **culture** of the now-frozen world...to risk your life for—I don't know, food or medicine—that's **fine**...but to be sent out for **souvenirs** just so the frontiers can hoard them in their luxury carriages...so what if I **did**? You want to admire these frozen turds, you're all **welcome** to come out and join me...so I'm just doing my job, that's all... (*SP2* 23.1-2, 24.1-2, 24.5, 25.1)

Let us slow down and place the English against the French, giving attention along the way to the images inside the panels. What follows is not an exhaustive reading. « Si [. . .]

freinage » / “If [. . .] braked” may be read in a text box in the bottom right of a horizontal panel (Figure 4) in which we are given an aerial perspective of three explorers who walk up a flight of frozen steps, toward the bottom center of the panel, into a looming shadow that encompasses the bottom third of the panel, including the text box. « Je ne serais [. . .] culture » / “I would probably [. . .] world” may be read in a text box in the top left of the subsequent, slightly taller horizontal panel (Figure 5) in which we are given an eye-level perspective of the three explorers who walk up and toward an abstraction, a building encased in snow. These two panels, taken together—the first an aerial, the second an eye-level—together form a focal point not in the building itself, but in the gutter, the horizontal white space, between the panels. Although the gutter is conventionally used by artists to implicate us in the generation of movement in time and space, here, because the diagonals in both panels work together to draw attention to the gutter itself, it may be said that, although the text boxes might explicate Puig’s thoughts, Legrand and Rochette emphasize the self-reflexivity of the *bande dessinée* itself.¹³⁵ Pushing further, we argue what we find in the communication between these two panels is the concept of the ellipsis, reflected isomorphically in the numerous ellipses found in the text boxes. But, like our comparative analysis of the introductory and concluding panels of *L’Echappée / The Escape* above, the ellipsis refers not to the suspension of meaning, the free play, but to the markings on the page, the three periods, the full stops, pure sequentiality without synthesis. While the comic *per-forms*, « culture » / “**culture**,” in translated boldface, is

¹³⁵ For a technical guide to comics, see McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. HarperPerennial, 1994.

exposed as the reduction of difference, of becoming, to a frozen commodity. Conceptual « souvenirs », which may mean also mean “memories” in French, give way to material “**souvenirs**,” “things that are kept as a reminder of a person, place, or event.” Virginie Selavy’s translation and boldfacing only amplifies *Le Transperceneige*’s critique of the capitalist economy of use and exchange, whereby the commodification and consumption of concepts in VR precludes the development of concepts.

Puig is blamed and arrested for the deaths of his fellow explorers during a botched braking test. He then meets Val Kennel, a VR designer whose father is General Kennel, a member of the Council. Val wants to collaborate with Puig to develop a new VR trip to the outside world, which, ultimately, disturbs passengers. But, Puig is suddenly ordered by the Council to embark on a perilous reconnaissance aircraft mission to help the train’s radarists map possible approaching obstacles. Once his mission is complete, the train reverses its direction and unleashes turret-fire on Puig’s aircraft. Stranded in the outside, Puig is afforded a glimpse of the sun, whose rays momentarily engulf his aircraft. Val hacks his display screen, broadcasting on TV his witnessing of the sun and his threats to crash into the train, killing its passengers: « J’ai vu le soleil, une fois dans ma vie, c’est assez » (171.5) / “I’ve already seen the sun—that’s enough for me” (SP2 59.5).

Energized by the sun, Puig becomes a hero to the people, forcing the Council to allow him to re-board the train and make him a member. Authorized to move freely throughout the train, he travels to see Sainte Loco in the frontmost car, where he meets the master of the Transperceneige 2, the sole surviving explorer of the first braking test. The master repeats Forrestier’s language, saying the engines need to be « habitées » (179.5) /

“**inhabited**” (SP2 67.5). He also reveals the first braking “test” was not a test; rather, the Transperceneige 2 collided with the Transperceneige, the latter of which was brought into the former’s hull. We learn Proloff is still alive, inhabiting “Olga” and occasionally visiting Adeline’s frozen corpse. The below panel (Figure 6) concludes *L’Arpenteur / The Explorers*, with new lines floating in negative space, the night: « Tourne Transperceneige / Tourne sans t’arrêter / Tourne comme un manège / Sur notre terre glacée » (182.1) / “So round and round *Snowpiercer* / Goes — round and round forever. / Round and round the frozen earth... / Round and round... / Forever” (SP2 70.1). A literal translation, from French to English, could be: “Turn Transperceneige / Turn without stopping / Turn like a carousel / On our frozen earth.” Selavy’s translation, which emphasizes a third-person point of view that distances us from the train, would thus seem to occult the possibility of an imperative mood. In the French, that is, the train could become, through the imperative mood, something like a model train on which we impose motion. But, by moving from the French to the English and back again, we may alternatively understand the original repetition of « tourne » to be the third-person singular conjugation of the verb « tourner », which means “to turn.” Taken together, a comparative analysis of the French and the English turns us away from the panel itself, drawing our attention to the negative space, to the top right of the panel. Here, we see white smudges on black, a visual trail, perhaps, of the sun or snow. Or, it could just be ink.

Correlation 2: culture-nature

La Traversée / The Crossing begins with the above panel (Figure 7). Puig is now a Council member, the Cosmosiens escalate conflict in anticipation of messianic

vengeance, and Val is lost in hexagrams from the *I Ching* to find inspiration for the perfect VR trip: « Par le retour l'on deviant exempt de faute, c'est l'innocence » (204.4) / “By returning, we become exempt from guilt, reaching a state of **innocence**” (*SP2* 94.4). We learn the radarists have detected a faint audio signal of music, suggesting the possibility of other survivors on Earth. During another braking test, the Cosmosiens set off a bomb in the tail, damaging the braking system. Puig and several other explorers set out to investigate the damage, which is revealed to be irreparable. Inside the train, the cult of Sainte Loco leader Révérend Dicksen and a military general (not Kennel), both members of the Council, conspire to kill Puig by sending out to follow him and the explorers a group of brainwashed, murderous children. Dicksen and the general order the radarists to disconnect the tail cars to prevent the bomb damage from spreading, cleaving the train in two. Puig survives the attack and arrests Dicksen and the general, becoming a messianic figure to the remaining passengers, who are now alarmed about colliding with the Transperceneige. Puig and Val convince them to leave the tracks, use the train's snow chains to traverse the frozen landscape, and follow the musical signal to its source: « Pour essayer d'atteindre l'autre bout de la terre, le Transperceneige se change en serpent de mer il rampe lentement sur l'océan gelé guidé par les accords de musiques oubliées » (217.4) / “Like a sea snake, Snowpiercer moves slowly across the frozen terrain, towards the far-off shore guided only by the strains of forgotten music” (*SP2* 107.4).

Métronome then frees Dicksen and the general in exchange for safe passage to Earth, as he still believes they are on a spaceship. Dicksen has Métronome killed, and convinces the passengers the train must return to « la Sainte Voie » (225.3) / “its sacred

tracks” (SP2 115.3). Selavy’s translation obscures the parallel drawn between Sainte Loco and Sainte Voie—Saint Loco, Saint “Crazy,” and Saint Way, the “Holy Way.” Following numerous shootouts, Puig and Kennel kill Dicksen and the general and consequently quell the religious uprising. We learn Proloff has died, but his consciousness has been dispersed into the train’s AI system—« Après les mutineries viendront d’autres problèmes, la terre promise lointaine ne s’approche pas vite... » (238.3) / “After the mutiny, there’ll be more problems to come... the **promised land** still lies a long way off...” (SP2 128.3)—through which he, now a ghost in the machine, sings nursery rhymes to Val. The Transperceneige draws close to the musical signal’s origin. To reach it, however, Puig must pilot a reconnaissance aircraft across vast stretches of ice, encountering at one point a battleship frozen in dead space, a « monstre » (244.4) / “monster” (SP2 134.4) whose automatic defense system fires on him. The musical signal now stronger—a radarist believes it to be Gabriel Fauré’s *Requiem* (1887-1890)—it is determined that the source is the battleship. Back on the train, a new orator has taken over Dicksen’s place, motivating passengers with the colonialist hope of discovering a « nouveau continent » (248.5) / “new continent” (SP2 138.5). To make space for the wounded toward the rear, explorers reluctantly discard art objects, such as a Renaissance painting of a woman.

In the panel below (Figure 8), our attention is drawn to the culture-nature binary. In the foreground, we see art objects, including what might be an African sculpture, littering the wasteland; in the background, we see the Transperceneige continuing along its path into dark eternity. The souvenirs and the train jut out, abstractly, of the landscape.

Remember that, in *L'Echappée / The Escape*, we learned that the new Ice Age might be a consequence of a dying sun, a bomb, or some other anthropogenic accident. If it were the consequence of either of the latter two possibilities, we could read this panel as imaging a human-nonhuman hybrid landscape, invoking caution against the reality of a devastated—if conceptually presupposed and then discursively suppressed and/or deferred—nature. Such a constructivist approach, as Kate Soper explains, is “nature-skeptical,” because it is “wary of the social and sexual policing functions of the appeal to naturality, and [. . . seeks] to expose its misleadingly anthropocentric and anthropomorphic conceptual projections” (18). Soper contrasts the constructivist and realist approaches to nature, the latter of which is “nature-endorsing” because it apprehends nature as a “domain of intrinsic value, truth or authenticity” (17). If the new Ice Age were the consequence of a dying sun, we could adopt a realist position and argue the panel reclaims the separation between human and nonhuman, invoking caution against the reality of a devastated—conceptually foregrounded—nature. Both constructivist and realist approaches to nature presuppose the human/nonhuman divide and both would affirm, through relativism, more ethical futures. The constructivist would hold out for the possibility that human-nonhuman coevolution might one day occur, outside the text, through relationality; the realist would hold out for the same possibility through nonrelationality. We are unsatisfied with both approaches. Soper theorizes a third approach to nature that is both realist and humanist:

It is realist [. . .] in the sense that it recognizes the contrast between the independent ‘nature’ that is presupposed as the permanent ground of all human activity and environmental change (the ‘realist’ concept of nature), and the ‘nature’ through which we refer to the historically changing and culturally

transformed environment (the ‘lay’ or ‘surface’ concept of nature, the nature of immediate human experience and aesthetic response). It is *humanist*, on the other hand, in the sense that it is opposed to that form of naturalism which wants to emphasize how similarly (rather than differentially) placed we are to other animals in respect of our ‘essential’ needs and ecological dependencies. (19)

We find in Soper’s realist-humanist approach to nature—specifically, in its yieldingness to the domain specificity of nature, cultural constructivism, and ontological difference—the seeds of an egalitarian and just ecological politics, and it seems mostly appropriate to the apprehension of *Le Transperceneige*’s engagement with the culture-nature binary. By denying us a reason for the new Ice Age, Lob, Rochette, and Legrand indeed gift us the combined thought of human-nonhuman hybridity *and* the separation between human and nonhuman. We nevertheless argue a realist-humanist approach to nature would fail to adequately account for the graphic novel’s formalism, its self-referentiality, which calls for a thought unbound from anthropocentric conceptions of time which would, like kitsch Marxism, make appeals to the pathos of negativity to achieve a future utopia, without elaborating norms conducive to egalitarianism and universal justice. In light of the exigency raised by Anthropocenic energy exhaustion, merely making appeals to the pathos of negativity encumbers our capability to transition to alternative energy sources.

We argue a realist-posthumanist approach to nature is equipped to confront such formalism, such self-referentiality, thereby propelling us toward the energetics of speculative thought. We thus adopt David Roden’s “Speculative Posthumanism (SP),” which does not insinuate limits to technological artificialization and whose motive metaphysical proposition is “*there could be posthumans*” (PL 5). For Roden, SP is “anthropologically unbounded”:

[SP] holds that the space of possible agents is not bound (*a priori*) by conditions of human agency [. . .] Since we lack future-proof knowledge of possible agents based on the transcendental conditions for *human* agency, I refer to such a posthumanism as ‘anthropologically unbounded’. Unbounded posthumanism allows that the results of techno-political interventions could be weird in ways that we are not currently able to imagine. (“PPF”)

From the perspective of SP, there is no transcendental structure, no condition of possibility for agency. A no-space, an open universal, SP, that is, eschews constraints on agency: there is nothing mind cannot do. This posthuman freedom, Roden explains, consists in the “capacity to map and generate the unbounded through ceaseless experimentation with the noumenal sources of agency” (“PPF”). Roden gifts us an example of such experimentation in the “alien time” of improvisation: a “time window limited by the memory and attention of the improviser, responding to her own playing, to the other players” (“PPF”).¹³⁶ Such improvisation communicates with an impersonal real, an alien time. The *per-form-er*, the agent who is not necessarily human, “must tolerate and practice a systemic violence against itself and its world; against stable values or identities; performing its intrasubjective equivalent of the deracinative (extra-subjective) noise of modernity’s technological and planetary networks” (Roden “PPF”). Today, to improvise, to become energized, is to be free. We will see how the *bande dessinée* stages an encounter with the alien time of noise.

Our approach to nature is realist because it recognizes nature’s independence from mind; we find no contradiction in also recognizing the cultural constructedness of

¹³⁶ For example, in Éliane Radigue’s ongoing ensemble project *Occam Ocean* (2011—), performers respond, with images of fluid water in mind, to their own playing (the “occam” configuration), to another player (the “river” configuration), or to the ensemble itself (the “delta” configuration).

experienced nature. Our approach is posthumanist because it is opposed to humanism, and to those posthumanisms and antihumanisms that “bind,” as Roden might say, agency to a transcendental structure. Such humanism, bounded posthumanisms, and antihumanisms cannot grasp their complicity with the colonial-racial reality because they conceptually presuppose, hypostatize, and then discursively suppress and/or defer some vital term under the guise of ethics. More precisely, they project the life of *anthropos* onto the dead inorganic inert matter of *the damned*. As Quentin Meillassoux explains:

[The] *refusal of anthropocentrism* in fact led only to a most startling *anthropomorphism* that consisted, following the most classic illusion, of seeing in every reality (even inorganic reality) subjective traits whose origin is in truth all human; for it goes no further than, by means of a human imagination, to vary the experienceable traits of our always human existence by degree and in this way place the result of this doubly anthropomorphic operation in all things, and all that according to a scale ranging from most to least [. . .] If there was ever a way of placing oneself at the summit of all things, it was surely to place oneself in all things in a most diluted state. (“IRR” 126)

Humanism, bounded posthumanisms, and antihumanisms thus absolutize the correlation, a transcendental structure, between human and nonhuman, occulting the reality that nonwhite non-European nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodities are not alive, and have no agency. Alexander G. Weheliye explains such posthumanisms’ and antihumanisms’ complicity with the colonial-racial reality:

[M]any invocations of posthumanism, whether in antihumanist post-structuralist theorizing or in current considerations of technology and animality, reinscribe the humanist subject (Man) as the personification of the human by insisting that this is the category to be overcome, rarely considering cultural and political formulations outside the world of Man that might offer alternative versions of humanity. Moreover, posthumanism and animal studies isomorphically yoke humanity to the limited possessive individualism of Man, because these discourses also presume that we have now entered a stage in human development where all subjects have been granted access to western humanity and that this is, indeed, what we all want to overcome. (9-10)

Humanism and bounded posthumanisms and antihumanisms, in their rush toward a closed universal, do not allow emergent aesthetics to disrupt “western humanity.” They draw vicious circles in the sand, yielding to without really wielding the contingency of all things material.

To understand how our posthumanism differs, let us return to *Le Transperceneige*. When reviewing the abovementioned panel (Figure 8), we are left, stranded, in inertia, with vision, with thought. We are not convinced this panel represents anything. Returning to ourselves, we therefore insist on its abstraction, ink on paper, nothing but symbols. In this way, Lob, Rochette, and Legrand force us to think the notion of art—to experience art, that is, from the outside. To read the graphic novel is to communicate, to follow Roden, with an alien time, a noise that disrupts “familiar relationships and forms of succession” (“PPF”). The images in the panels indeed flicker throughout the graphic novel. Through their sequentiality, whose presupposed linear continuity is disrupted through their repetition, we grasp the graphic novel as dovetailing sets of transforming relationships between panels, without interiors. To too hastily redeem the text—to reduce it to a constructivism or a realism—would be to deny the functions of its images, which assemble situations and make conditions possible. At the level of content, it would be to ignore the graphic novel’s rigorous pessimism, its stagings of failed revolution, its overcoming of the bourgeoisie-proletariat correlation. It would also be to ignore its repetitions: a *Transperceneige* literally within a *Transperceneige*; thanatological guides and their being wrongfully arrested; doubled military generals; religious cults that worship perpetual-motion engines and the enigmatic masters who

inhabit them; explosions and shootouts that create social disorder; failed and successful braking tests and abandonments of the tail cars; salvage trips into the cold; aircraft missions to and sounds from beyond, and so on. Such repetition, doubling, circular, nesting, generously invites a plurality of possible readings. Considering its engagement with VR and the *I Ching*, one might even decipher in the graphic novel an attempt at modeling an environmental simulation. Our reading, however, is that its chilly formalism demands the theorization of an unbound posthumanism that would hold out for the possibility of the following notion: to think is to be both a part of distinct from nature. We suggest such a realist-posthumanist approach to nature is a nonrelational relational ontology that is adequate to thinking the multi-dimensional immensity of Anthropocenic energy exhaustion and the colonial-racial reality. Although the graphic novel, at the level of content, is thoroughgoingly pessimistic, its form opens us up to the sovereign energy of speculative thought, an energy, that is, in excess of petromyopic “petroculture.”

Correlation 3: image-sound

As Puig nears the source of the signal, in word balloons, we may “hear” the music: “Oh...when the train left the station, a red light on behind...oh when the train left the station” (248.4), lyrics from a cover of African-American blues singer, songwriter, and musician Robert Johnson’s “Love in Vain (Blues)” (1939) by English rock band The Rolling Stones, a song about unrequited love, about being left at a train station, forlornly looking after the recently departed train’s red light. We infer it is the Stones’ cover because someone on the train says, « C’est un groupe de la deuxième moitié du XXe siècle » (248.4) / “It’s a band from the second half of the 20th century” (*SP2* 138.4). We

then hear, “Oh when the saints, oh when the saints, oh when the stains go marchin’ in” (249.4), lyrics from the early-twentieth-century black spiritual “When the Saints Go Marching In,” an apocalyptic song inspired by the Book of Revelation, famously covered by African-American jazz trumpeter, composer, and vocalist Louis Armstrong in 1938. Not included by Legrand and Rochette are its lyrics about a new world, a sun that both refuses and begins to shine, revelation and revolution, the rich working and crying, the air being pure and clean, an abundance of food, and the desire “to be in that number” of saints ascending to the heavens.¹³⁷ The content of the graphic novel is isomorphic with the sun that refuses to shine as a consequence of a faintly-understood disaster; the form of the graphic novel is isomorphic with the sun that begins to shine, the sun *qua* generously infinite energy source. Finally, we hear, « Mais il reviendra le temps des cerises » (250.1) / “But the time of cherries will come back” (*SP2* 140.1), lyrics from Jean-Baptiste Clément and Antoine Renard’s “Le Temps des cerises” (1866), a song associated with the Paris Commune, and its exertion of the force of the proletariat, the people, the crowd, *the damned*, on the State. To borrow Alain Badiou’s language, like Puig’s commitment to being an explorer following the death of his parents, each song presents an event: a) love *qua* the encounter of the world from the perspective of difference; b) a last judgment in the wake of the transatlantic slave trade; and, c) the Paris Commune.¹³⁸ It is then abruptly revealed that there is no one alive on the battleship; an automated system broadcasts

¹³⁷ These lyrics are derived from a combination of collaboratively edited lyrics aggregators—such as Lyrics.com, LyricsFreak.com, and AZLyrics.com—and some of my own listening.

¹³⁸ I follow here Badiou’s philosophy of the event, which I explained in the introduction—namely, in “Our epistemology, our politics.”

songs of failed revolutions. Puig informs the train, « On a fait tout ça pour une chansonnette » (250.2) / “We did all this...for a **song**” (SP2 140.2). But, it is our contention that failed revolution—unrequited love, continued black suffering, continued class exploitation—presents us with an affective test, an instrument, of selection that leads us to catalyze the advent of a world of egalitarianism and universal justice.¹³⁹

Before developing this contention any further, we will examine *Le Transperceneige*'s rendering of sound through the form of the *bande dessinée*, the comic book, because such rendering drives us further toward speculation, *specio* (*specere*), to look at, perhaps, *to see into*.¹⁴⁰ To see into the *bande dessinée*, the drawn strip, is to encounter a shattered audio-vision of separate-but-interlocking panels of images—a noise with which we might improvise—to be free. We use the word “audio-vision” to make explicit the importance of Michel Chion to this chapter. This proposition might seem at first contradictory for two reasons. First, as Scott McCloud explains, the comic book is taken to be a “mono-sensory medium” (89) because it appears to only ask for our sight in the collaboration of worldmaking. It is thus conventional to understand other sensual phenomena as being merely represented in the comic book—e.g., word balloons represent sound. Indeed, understanding the comic book is often taken exclusively to be a

¹³⁹ With the phrase “black suffering,” I refer back to Calvin L. Warren, with whom I read Ballard's *The Drowned World*.

¹⁴⁰ Donald Phillip Verene explains reflection *contra* Hegelian speculation: “In the general form of the proposition typical of reflective thinking, the subject moves from the predicate and is thought simply to turn back to the subject. No dialectical change has occurred. In the speculative proposition, in the movement from the subject into the predicate, something has to be ‘seen into’ about the nature of the subject such that as it returns, keeping the predicate in relation to itself, it is no longer the same as the original subject” (10-11).

subjective act of interpretation. McCloud, for example, exclaims, “These things [in comics] are all subjective!” (91). Second, although Chion’s writings about sound deal to a great extent with film-sound perception, his theories about noise, “transsensoriality,” and “synchresis” are particularly striking to us because they are revisions of noise *qua* “undesirable sound,” synaesthesia, and associationism, respectively; that is, each strives toward the objectivity of thought, which *Le Transperceneige* does, as well.

Let us now reappraise our understanding of noise.¹⁴¹ As we argued in our chapter on *The Drowned World*, we understand noise as close to Jacques Attali’s politically charged definition of it: an ongoing dialectical process whereby dominant codes and networks are attacked from inside or outside, resulting in constitutive changes within such codes and networks. Our understanding of noise is also informed by Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver’s information theory definition of it: an undesirable element in a communicative signal. The latter informs the former—i.e., Shannon and Weaver’s emphasis on undesirability informs Attali’s politicized mobilization of that which is undesirable according to dominant codes and networks. What is implied in both definitions is the unintelligibility of noise, its irrationality. We are in the colonial-racial paradigm of the noble savage. To refine our understanding and attain a vantage point from which we might commence the work of forging another paradigm, let us turn to

¹⁴¹ In a revision of this chapter, I’ll again reappraise my understanding of noise *vis-à-vis* Inigo Wilkins’s forthcoming *Irreversible Noise* (2021).

Chion's definition of noise: "That which is neither speech nor music identified as such"

(S 59).¹⁴² Chion continues:

[I]n both cases, the succession of sounds is perceived as beholden to a certain overarching structure, to an organization that retains the "value" of each sound, whereas that which does not make an immanent logic emerge is heard as a succession of noises [. . .] all musical systems [. . .] necessarily entail what borders them and is apparently foreign to them. In other words, each entails the assimilation of punctual effects that elude the system in question [. . .] with the aim of representing the real, noise as such. (S 62-63)

Like the sequentiality of panels in the comic book, speech and music are bound to an organizational structure, or system, consisting in sounds. Those sounds that do not contribute to the emergence of an "immanent logic" are considered noises. We can already detect Chion's problematization of the musical sound/noise distinction. But, not content with critique, he suggests that "musical systems [. . .] necessarily entail what borders them and is *apparently* foreign to them" (our emphasis). Crucially, for Chion, noise should not in the first instance be perceived as "foreign" to musical sound; at the same time, noise escapes immanent structure, whose aim is the representation of the real. We have located the pressure point in Chion's understanding of noise. Instead of evading it, he generously increases pressure: "the musical brings noise into the foreground as an event, as a moment of the real, while noise for its part, like a beauty spot, magnifies the musical" (Chion, S 63). Noise, for Chion, is a temporal notion; noises are "punctual

¹⁴² I did locate the original French, Chion, Michel. *Le son. Traité d'acoulogie*. Armand Colin, 2010, but I can't cite it because it's in my office on campus, which has been closed due to COVID-19. I instead cite Chion, Michel. *Sound: An Acoulogical Treatise*. Translated by James A. Steintrager, Duke University Press, 2016.

effects,” instants in time that “elude” structure.¹⁴³ Thus, noise is a nonrelational relational ontology because it maintains a minimum degree of separation between itself and musical sound, but admits to their inseparability. We have removed ourselves from the colonial-racial paradigm of the noble savage, which would treat as physical (*contra* conceptual) a division between musical sound *qua* white European human, rational straight human Man (*anthropos*) and noise *qua* nonwhite non-European nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodity, the “irrational Other,” the “undesirable.”

Let us now examine Chion’s theories of “transsensoriality” and “synchresis” in the context of noise before we return to *Le Transperceneige*. His point with transsensoriality is to differentiate it from the Baudelairean model of « correspondances », in which the senses are treated as given and, then, through the use of aesthetic forms, the artist refers to intersensoriality—« chaque sens existerait chez soi, mais ils auraient des points de rencontre entre eux, des points de jonction » (Chion, *LAV* 116) / “each sense exists in itself, but encounters others at points of contact” (Chion, *AV* 137)—with the aim of producing synaesthetic experience.¹⁴⁴ Chion’s differentiation between

¹⁴³ Iannis Xenakis’s *Pithoprakta* (1955-1956), which was first performed by Hermann Scherchen in Munich in 1957, is an exemplar stringed orchestra piece that dissolves the musical sound/noise distinction by foregrounding such a self-referential understanding of noise through the use of Jakob Bernoulli’s law of large numbers and Gaussian curves. Xenakis apprehends an isomorphism shared between pitch and temperature. Xenakis writes: “To sum up we have a sonic compound in which: 1. The durations do not vary; 2. The mass of pitches is freely modulated; 3. The density of sounds at each moment is constant; 4. The dynamic is *ff* without variation; 5. The timbre is constant; 6. The speeds determine a ‘temperature’ which is subject to local fluctuations. Their distribution is Gaussian” (15). Listen to Lukas Foss’s performance of it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AE1M2iwjTSM>.

¹⁴⁴ Here are two lines from Charles Baudelaire’s “Correspondances” that refer to intersensoriality in order to produce a synaesthetic experience: « Il est des parfums frais comme des chairs d’enfants, / Doux comme les hautbois, verts comme les prairies, » (16) / “Some perfumes are as fresh as babe’s skin, / Suave as oboes, green as the prairie” (17).

transsensoriality and intersensoriality reflects a movement away from the production of perceptual experience (intersensoriality) and toward the objective thought of forms (transsensoriality). Transsensoriality, like noise, is a nonrelational relational ontology that maintains a minimum degree of separation between the senses—without treating any sense as given. There is thus no “reader” whose perceptual experience we might abstract, which would occult the heterogeneity of perceptual experience. Transsensoriality allows the senses’ inseparability and their capability of achieving an objectively graspable synthesis, or what Chion identifies as “synchresis”: « la soudure irrésistible et spontanée qui se produit entre un phénomène sonore et un phénomène visuel ponctuel lorsque ceux-ci tombent en même temps » (55) / “the spontaneous and irresistible weld produced between a particular auditory phenomenon and visual phenomenon when they occur at the same time” (63). His example is the prologue of Ingmar Bergman’s *Persona* (1966) because the sounds heard in it gift “added value” to the image: « la valeur expressive et informative dont un son enrichit une image donnée, jusqu’à donner à croire [. . .] que cette information ou cette expression se dégage « naturellement » de ce qu’on voit, et est déjà contenue dans l’image seule » (*LAV* 8) / “the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression [. . .] that this information or expression ‘naturally’ comes from what is seen, and is already contained in the image itself” (*AV* 5).¹⁴⁵ As noted by Nicola Phillips, synchresis is both

¹⁴⁵ Chion elaborates: « C’est la synchrèse qui fait que, dans le prologue de *Persona*, nous ne doutons pas un instant que les sons entendus sur les mains clouées soient les sons du marteau qui les cloue » (*LAV* 55) / “Synchresis is responsible for our conviction that the sounds heard over the shots of the hands in the prologue of *Persona* are indeed the sounds of the hammer pounding nails into them” (*AV* 63).

associationist and synergetic.¹⁴⁶ Associationism, because it describes synchronicity between senses, is close to intersensoriality. Synergy, because it refers to the information or expression emerging from an association, is closer to transsensoriality. Synergy is in the realm of auditory pareidolia, third sounds, such as Diane Deutsch's scale illusion.¹⁴⁷

In *Le Transperceneige*, sound is extradiscursive to the images inside the panels. There is no presupposed correlation between image and sound. That is, in "hearing" "Love in Vain (Blues)," "When the Saints Go Marching In," and "Le Temps des cerises," it becomes evident we are hallucinating evental (Badiou) memories, "traumas" we do not necessarily experience—viz., the traumas of unrequited love, continued black suffering, and continued class exploitation. Chion explains: "Every passing sound is marked with hallucination, because it leaves no traces, and every sound can resound for all eternity in the present perfect of listening" (S 30). We find here a rejoinder to Sigmund Freud's understanding of hallucination as a phenomenon that brings into the conscious traces of repressed traumatic memories.¹⁴⁸ As explicated by Roland Fischer, hallucination is not perception; rather, it is a "gradual turning inward toward a mental dimension at the expense of the physical" (897). Hallucination reflects a hyperaroused and ergotropic

¹⁴⁶ See Phillips, Nicola. "Book Review: Michel Chion *Audio-Vision – Sound on Screen*." *FilmSound.org*, <http://filmsound.org/philips.htm>. Accessed 23 November 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Deutsch explains: "[The pattern that produces the Scale Illusion] consists of a major scale with successive tones alternating from ear to ear. The scale is played simultaneously in both ascending and descending form; however when a tone from the ascending scale is in the right ear a tone from the descending scale is in the left ear, and vice versa." See/listen to "Scale Illusion": <http://deutsch.ucsd.edu/psychology/pages.php?i=203>.

¹⁴⁸ See Freud, Sigmund. "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis; An Open Letter to Romain Rolland on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. II, translated and edited by James Strachey, Hogarth Press, 1964, p. 244.

state; it is a massive expenditure of energy without expectation of return. No fixed place on a map, it is memory without a body, thought, pure conceptuality. Remember that Proloff, in the conclusion of *L'Echappée / The Escape*, hallucinates, in the engine room of the *Transperceneige*, a knock from beyond. Like Proloff, we do not “hear” sound in *Le Transperceneige*, we listen to it, in the present perfect. Because the act of listening is completed as soon as sound is “heard,” we suggest that what occurs when reading the *bande dessinée* is an improvisation with noise. We do not occupy the instant in time; we think it. In *Le Transperceneige*'s final panel (Figure 9), we think a desolate landscape of snow, a small mountain, and the night; there is no train. In the top right of the panel, we find, as with the concluding panel of *L'Arpenteur / The Explorers*, white smudges on black. We are returned to the question: Do these smudges refer to the sun that has gone dim as the consequence of a faintly-understood disaster, or to the snow? Legrand and Rochette's pessimistic response is neither. They refer to themselves, to the literal markings on the page: « La paix... / Neuf à la troisième place signifie : / Pas de plaine qui ne soit suivie d'une côte, / Pas d'aller qui ne soit suivi de retour. / Sans blâme est celui qui demeure constant dans le danger. / Ne te désole pas d'une telle vérité. / Jouis du bonheur que tu possèdes encore » (250.3) / “Peace. / There is no plain that is not followed by a slope, / No outbound trip that is not followed by a return. / Blameless is the one who remains *constant* in the face of danger. / Don't be saddened by this truth. / Enjoy the happiness you still have” (SP2 140.3). The smudges activate a speculative thought: they refer to the sun *qua* generously infinite sovereign energy source.

Selavy does not translate the line « Neuf à la troisième place signifie » / “Nine in the third place signifies,” which derives from the *I Ching*, over whose hexagrams Val obsesses to find inspiration for the perfect VR trip. On the final page of *Le Transperceneige*, we see the *T'ai* (Peace) hexagram, black lines on white (Figure 10). Let us turn to the *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese divination text, in which we discover that “nine in the third place” signifies “No plain not followed by a slope. / No going not followed by a return. / He who remains persevering in danger / Is without blame. / Do not complain about this truth; / Enjoy the good fortune you still possess” (50). If what follows the line « Neuf à la troisième place signifie » / “Nine in the third place signifies” is almost a duplication of the significance of “nine in the third place,” why does Selavy not translate the line? Let us return to the *I Ching*. In the English, Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes translate the explanation of *T'ai*, with nine in the third place, as follows:

Everything on earth is subject to change. Prosperity is followed by decline: this is the eternal law on earth. Evil can indeed be held in check but not permanently abolished. It always returns. This conviction might induce melancholy, but it should not; it ought only to keep us from falling into illusion when good fortune comes to us. If we continue mindful of the danger, we remain persevering and make no mistakes. As long as a man's inner nature remains stronger and richer than anything offered by external fortune, as long as he remains inwardly superior to fate, fortune will not desert him. (50-51)

This passage presents a theory of perpetual motion, of energy close to its informal meaning as a “fundamental entity of nature that is transferred between parts of a system in the production of physical change within the system and usually regarded as the capacity for doing work.” But, what of “evil”? Here, Georges Bataille is generative because, as he explains, evil “bursts out from the headless summit of morality, a volcanic eruption of energies without limit: the access to an ‘acephalic universe’” (Botting and

Wilson 7). Evil, for Bataille, is not a concept wielded exclusively by the naïve moralist; evil is an ontologization of energy—whose necessary condition is base materialism—which is communicated through sovereign acts. In the *I Ching*, evil can “be held in check but not permanently abolished. It always returns [. . . this conviction] ought only to keep us from falling into illusion when good fortune comes to us.” Similarly, Bataille suggests, in a TV interview with Pierre Dumayet, that the realization of the eternal return of evil, of all things material, may result in the cultivation of « raisons » / “reasons” to confront such danger.¹⁴⁹ Such is Bataille’s sobriety, his insistence on the motivational force of reason: his recognition and acceptance of limits, even rationalist strictures, as potentially generative structures. It would thus be easy to read the conclusion of *Le Transperceneige* as the capitalist correlationist, the poststructuralist, might, as the twisting of the negative into the affirmative. But, we think such an antimetaphysical approach—whereby the notion of the return would be apprehended through some contradiction as a critique of truth—would occult the graphic novel’s self-referentiality, its ambition to speculative thought inaccessible to ordinary sense, its nonrelational relationality, thereby foreclosing its generous invitation to think the absolute of the markings on the page, the *bande dessinée*. And here is the sovereign energy *le Transperceneige* of *Le Transperceneige* gifts us—

¹⁴⁹ See Bataille’s TV interview with Dumayet: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XCnGuK8CVc&t>.

Nine in the third place

Capitalism is insuperable. Theodor W. Adorno nevertheless declares we must make art despite its inevitable commodification, driving us further toward negativity. He calls this “commitment”:

[Commitment is] not simply out to correct unpleasant situations, although the committed all too easily sympathize with the idea of solving problems by means of ‘appropriate measures.’ Commitment aims at the transformation of the preconditions of situations, not at merely making recommendations; to this extent it inclines toward the aesthetic category of essence. The polemical self-consciousness of art presupposes its spiritualization; the more sensitized art becomes toward that sensual immediacy with which it was formerly equated, the more critical its posture becomes toward raw reality, which [. . .] reproduces itself socially in ever expanded form. (246)

The formalism of Lob, Rochette, and Legrand’s *Le Transperceneige* reflects its commitment. It alienates us by forcing us to think the markings on the page. In its self-reflexivity, its pessimism, the graphic novel implores us to reflect on our reflections—to hallucinate, think, to improvise with the alien time outside the page. From such a vantage point, “merely making recommendations” may be abandoned in favor of the “transformation of the preconditions of situations.” And such is the sovereign energy it gifts us. Its final line—« La paix... / Neuf à la troisième place signifie : / Pas de plaine qui ne soit suivie d’une côte, / Pas d’aller qui ne soit suivi de retour. / Sans blâme est celui qui demeure constant dans le danger. / Ne te désole pas d’une telle vérité. / Jouis du bonheur que tu possèdes encore » / “Peace. / There is no plain that is not followed by a slope, / No outbound trip that is not followed by a return. / Blameless is the one who remains *constant* in the face of danger. / Don’t be saddened by this truth. / Enjoy the

happiness you still have”—is not a respite from work, a deceleration; it is an appeal to think the notion of the eternal return, an acceleration.

We therefore read its conclusion in the context of Meillassoux’s speculative materialism, specifically, of what he calls the « brutalité indépassable de l’éternel retour » (“IOM” 60) / “unsurpassable brutality of the eternal return” (“IWB” 446). For Meillassoux, the challenge of the return, gifted to us by Friedrich Nietzsche, is « tout, y compris toi, revient éternellement sous la même forme » (“IOM” 60) / “all things, yourself included return eternally to the same” (“IWB” 466).¹⁵⁰ By emphasizing the ontology of the return, Meillassoux rationally, without contradiction, delineates its function as an « instrument de sélection qui renforce le corps des actifs et détruit celui des réactifs » (“IOM” 61) / “instrument of selection which reinforces the body of those who are active and destroys the body of those who are reactive” (“IWB” 467). Conditional for Meillassoux’s ethical reading is the essential grief that comes with what he calls « le dilemme spectral » / “the spectral dilemma”: is it possible to live and not die with « des vivants aux morts terribles » (“IOM” 46) / “those who have died horrendous deaths” (“IWB” 452)? He determines that neither the atheistic response nor the theistic response

¹⁵⁰ Nietzsche writes: “*The greatest weight*.—What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust! / Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.’ If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, ‘Do you desire this once more and innumerable times more?’ would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?” (273-274).

can resolve the spectral dilemma because both the atheist and the theist would succumb to the pathos of negativity when confronting it. Articulating instead a speculative position of « irreligion » (“IOM” 39) / “irreligion” (“IWB” 444), Meillassoux argues the thought of the absolute, of the possible advent of a contingent God that does not yet exist—which would correspondingly resurrect « des vivants aux morts terribles » / “those who have died horrendous deaths”—might galvanize neither religious belief, or faith, nor nihilism, but militant hope in a future world of egalitarianism and universal justice in the form of a « sujet vectoriel » / “vectorial subject,” or « aimanté par le vecteur de l’émancipation à venir » (“IOM” 57) / “one magnetically attracted by the vector of the emancipation to come” (“IWB” 463). A vectorial subject would be generated in response to the experience of the « brutalité indépassable de l’éternel retour » / “unsurpassable brutality of the eternal return,” of an immortality activated by the thought of the absolute, of the possible advent of a contingent God that does not yet exist.

Because such a God does not exist in this world but may, perhaps, exist in a future world concomitantly redeemed of essential grief by its arrival, Meillassoux distinguishes the experience of the return as an immanence « n’est pas de ce monde [. . . qui] consiste à assumer une existence dans laquelle la mort n’est en rien une interruption définitive de notre existence, mais une étape de notre devenir annulé par notre renaissance ultérieure » (“IOM” 62) / “not of this world [. . .that] consists in an existence in which death is not at all a definite interruption of our existence but a stage of our becoming which is canceled out by our ulterior birth” (“IWB” 468). Adhering to the necessity of contingency, to experience the « répétition impitoyable » / “unforgiving repetition” (“IWB” 468) of the

return, Meillassoux explains, is to experience « l’immortalité considérée comme perpétuation sans fin de la vie présente (ou d’une de ses parties) [. . .] parce que la seule acceptation véritable de l’ici-bàs [*sic*] consiste à supporter son prolongement à l’infini » (“IWB” 62) / “immortality conceived as the endless perpetuation of existing life (or some aspect of existing life) [. . .] because the only genuine meaning of the immanent [*l’ici-bàs (sic)*] consists in upholding its continuation to infinity” (“IWB” 469). The experience of the return, of immortality, is, then, to experience life *in extremis*, life as waking death; accordingly, the subject « doit faire alors le deuil du Tout-Autre de la vie » (Meillassoux, “IOM” 62) / “has to mourn the All-Other of life” (Meillassoux, “IWB” 468). *Contra* Bataille, who might find the beautiful auto-destruction of the subject *qua* an instant of base materialism as a consequence of the experience of the return, Meillassoux insists on its ugly metaphysical truth in order to subjectively cut through it to the divine.

To speculate, to think the absolute eternal return of evil, of all things, is to think a materialist nonrelational relational ontology removed, utterly, from the colonial-racial reality, which, to reiterate, would treat as given and absolutize the correlation between human and nonhuman, hypostatizing life and/or organic matter, vital properties relative to the human, and projecting it/them onto us, the dead inorganic inert matter, *the damned*. With the advent of a contingent God that does not yet exist, Sainte Loco, the sufficient material conditions for life would be met in the form of immortality—an immanence freed, at last, from the grasp of metaphysics. Following Marx, Meillassoux describes this as « une vie communiste, c’est-à-dire une vie enfin dépourvue de politique » (“IOM” 67) / “a communist life, that is to say, life finally without politics” (“IWB” 473). Those who

survive the brutal experience of the return, of the Transperceneige, an instrument of selection, would transform themselves into vectorial subjects, to catalyze the advent of a world of egalitarianism and universal justice, to live and not die with « des vivants aux morts terribles » / “those who have died horrendous deaths,” such as the *damned* of the tail cars. As Meillassoux writes in another context, such self-transformation would be, *contra* « un devenir réactif » / “a reactive becoming,” « un devenir actif » / “an active becoming”: « son accroissement de puissance ne provient pas d’une décision autonome d’un sujet constituant, mais d’une expérience toujours subie, d’une épreuve affective en laquelle se donne une extériorité radicale, une extériorité jamais ressentie auparavant comme telle » (“SoC” 90) / “its increase of force does not come from an autonomous decision of a constitutive subject, but from an experience that is always undergone, an affective test in which a radical exteriority gives itself, an exteriority never before felt as such” (“SC” 101). Or, as Negarestani asserts: “To concretely demonstrate the death of God, we must become gods. But gods as objects of philosophy vastly differ from gods as objects of religion [. . .] Proceeding from that which is good—the death of all gods—the ultimate form of intelligence works toward the good life by removing all conditions of exploitation, in doing so emancipating itself and all others” (*IS* 506-507). And the reason for the active subject’s self-transformation into a vectorial subject, into a god, comes from outside—the thought of the return, its *interestingness* to mind. The *I Ching*: “If we continue mindful of the danger, we remain persevering and make no mistakes.” To return to Bataille, we now have our reason to confront such danger, evil, to harness energy, perpetual motion, to philosophize, to make art. Nine in the third place.

5. Remembering the disaster: *L'Apocalypse arabe* / *The Arab Apocalypse*

« Cependant du tréfonds un appareil volant sans cesse s'élève / sur les cercles de l'être endormi / C'est l'heure où le pauvre et le déchu / comme le riche et l'important / recueille une moisson-surprise dans des champs inconnus / où chacun, de retour chez soi, vit avec ses parasites / mais balai à son tour balayé / reviennent les dehors / se rapprochent les dehors on perçoit / on perçoit / on perçoit qu'on perçoit / afflux / Afflux sur soi / afflux contre afflux / Et prédateur comprend / *Soleil a qui sait réunir* »—Henri Michaux, *Vigies sur cibles*

“From the depths however an incessantly flying apparatus arises / over the circles of the sleeping being / It is the hour where the poor and the fallen / like the rich and the important / gather a surprise harvest in unknown fields / where each, upon returning home, lives with its parasites / but a broom swept in turn / brings the outside in / the outside coming closer / one perceives / one perceives that one perceives / surge / Surge of oneself / surge against surge / And predator understands / *Sun that is able to reunite*”—Henri Michaux, *Watchtowers on Targets*

“Line is a symbol and another form of words—letters, which are also symbols as well. It is limitlessly able to create form, as a ‘sensual-realist and imaginary’ extension at the same time. Thus the lines harmoniously form what look like mirrors, which reflect the unseen aspects of the visible world. Thus the world appears, through the harmonious arrangement of the lines and the words, to be a system of signs. Man himself is a symbol and a sign. Everything is a symbol and a sign. Things and beings are all lines—symbols on this page—which we call the world or reality or existence.”—Adonis, *Sufism & Surrealism*

“The beautiful and imperishable comes into existence due to the suffering of individual perishable creatures who themselves are not beautiful, and must be reshaped to form a template from which the beautiful is printed (forged, extracted, converted). This is the terrible law of the universe. This is the basic law; it is a fact. Also, it is a fact that the suffering of the individual animal is so great that it arouses an ultimate and absolute abhorrence and pity in us when we are confronted by it. This is the essence of tragedy: the collision of two absolutes. Absolute suffering leads to—is the means to—absolute beauty. Neither absolute should be subordinated to the other. But this is not how it is: the suffering is subordinated to the value of the art produced. Thus the essence of horror underlies our realization of the bedrock nature of the universe.”—Philip K. Dick, *The Exegesis*

Our reading seeing

With the line « Un soleil jaune Un soleil vert un soleil jaune
Un soleil rouge un soleil bleu » (*LAA* 1) / “A yellow sun A green sun

a yellow sun A red sun a blue sun” (*TAA* 1), Etel Adnan begins her book of poems written in French *L’Apocalypse arabe* (1980) and her English rewrite of it *The Arab Apocalypse* (1989), apocalyptic literatures about the disaster that make worlds withdrawn from the world. In beginning to explain these books, let us observe the repetition of « un soleil » / “a sun” in the first line of their cosmological first page (Figure 1).¹⁵¹ With each repetition, each new sun, we find a difference in color—from yellow to green, back to yellow, from red to blue. With each new color, Adnan would appear to use the indefinite article « Un » / “A,” in the upper case; when returning to a yellow sun and turning to a blue sun, however, she uses the indefinite article « un » / “a,” in the lower case. Distended white spaces separate the suns, but green and red are adjacent to yellow, blue is adjacent to red; a blue sun juts out further, beyond the body of text. Without *le soleil* (the sun), and its definite article, we are left, stranded with a multiple sun that is gifted a different color and an indefinite article with each repetition. Elsewhere, we learn that « Moi j’ai pris le soleil par la queue et l’ai jeté à la rivière. Explosion. BOUM... » (Adnan, *LAA* 14) / “I took the sun by the tail and threw it in the river. Explosion. BOOM...” (Adnan, *TAA* 20). The multiple sun repeats—chameleon, indefinite, exploding, dreadful, alienating—throughout the books’ 59 (118) poems [*souffles*].¹⁵² The

¹⁵¹ As with the previous chapter, I’m unable to scan pages from *L’Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse* because I can’t access my department’s copier, as campus has been closed due to COVID-19. I don’t want to include in this document photos taken on my phone because I’m confident they would interfere with the aesthetic consistency to which I aspire. I hope you understand.

¹⁵² With *souffles*, which more precisely means “breaths,” I refer to both the seductive indistinctiveness of Adnan’s poems and the journal *Souffles*, a lightning rod for avant-garde art and politics founded in response to the question of Palestine in the Maghreb from the late 1960s through the early 1970s. Khatibi, whose *pensée-autre* (other-thought) I explore below in “*Correlation 2: west-east*,” was an early contributor to and shaper of *Souffles*. See Harrison, Olivia C. and Teresa Villa-Ignacio, editors. *Souffles-Anfas: A Critical Anthology from the Moroccan Journal of Culture and Politics*. Stanford University Press, 2016.

second line on the first page eliminates colors and articles; we instead find to what Jalal Toufic refers as “graphic signs” (00), which modulate our reading. In the French, « soleil » is replaced by a circle eradiated by six lines; in the English, “yellow” is replaced by a circle eradiated by seven lines. The spacings between words differ; the graphic sign between « soleil » / “sun” and « un » / “a” differs; the sign between « un » / “a” and « bleu » / “blue” differs; the sign between « un » / “a” and « rouge » / “red” differs; the sign between « un » / “a” and « bleu » / “blue,” again, differs. Each difference is a generous invocation of thought. We are impelled to ask, Why is each sun is different? In delaying an answer, Adnan refers to the contingency of thought. Below, we will link this contingency to the Batailleian idea of the sun *qua* infinite energy source.

We discover more nouns, most with indefinite articles: *un bateau* (a boat), *un matin* (a morning), *une fleur* (a flower), *une barque* (a small craft), *une table de jeu* (a card table), *une roue* (a wheel), *un coureur* (a runner), *une lune* (a moon), *un nuage* (a cloud), *un univers* (a universe), *une flèche* (an arrow), *le ciel* (the sky), *Un oeil* (An eye), *les tubulures de la mer* (the tubes of the sea), and *Un hopi* (a Hopi). In addition to colors, we discover more adjectives describing these nouns: *tranquille* (quiet), *solaire* (solar), *lunaire* (lunar), *étoilé* (starry), *nébulaire* (nebular), *Qorraiche* (Qorraich), *floral* (floral), *ronde* (round), *jaloux* (jealous), *amoureux* (enamoured and amorous), *épouvanté* (terrified), *horizontal* (horizontal), *romanesque* (romantic), *frêle* (frail), *timide* (timid), *belliqueux* (bellicose), *vaniteux* (vain), *malheureux* (sorrowful), *pharaonique* (Pharaonic), *égyptien* (Egyptian), *universel* (universal), *tubulaire* (tubular), *pernicieux* (pernicious), *indien rouge* (Red Indian), and *arabe brun* (Black Arab). Prepositions are rare. Verbs are

rarer. First, the phrase « un soleil jaune Qorraiche coureur couru courant » (Adnan, *LAA* 1) / “a yellow sun Qorraich runner ran running” (Adnan, *TAA* 1) might refer to the Quraysh, Muhammad’s tribe. Above the French, we see an arrow pointing out, beyond the body of text, paralleling the Qorraich runner, which might be a reference to Muhammad. Second, the phrase « Un oeil a peur du soleil le soleil est un oeil » (Adnan, *LAA* 1) / “An eye dreads the sun the sun is an eye” (Adnan, *TAA* 1) contains a mirrored rhyming of *oeil* and *soleil*, an exchange between subject and object, sun and eye. What follows the eye’s dread of the sun, the sun’s dread of the eye, is alienation: a sun, « hanté » / “haunted,” a « hopi un soleil indien rouge un soleil arabe brun un soleil jaune et bleu » (Adnan, *LAA* 1) / “Hopi a Red Indian sun an Arab Black Sun a sun yellow and blue” (Adnan, *TAA* 1). We detect additional spaces between the words in this line; between « Un » / “A” and « hopi » / “Hopi,” we see a circle dissected into quadrants by crisscrossing lines. Pure signification; also, without contradiction, the massacre of the Hopi, perhaps, at Awat’ovi.¹⁵³

Correlation 1: meaning-nonmeaning

Adnan’s drawings of graphic signs on the page are instances of postalphabetic asemic writing, which problematizes the meaning-nonmeaning correlation. Peter Schwenger explains:

In the case of the *asemic*, it is meaning itself, or rather the sign’s capacity to convey meaning, that is eliminated. So asemic writing is writing that does not attempt to communicate any message other than its own nature as writing [. . .] The signs before our eyes don’t belong to any familiar system. At the same time,

¹⁵³ See Brooks, James F. *Mesa of Sorrows: A History of the Awat’ovi Massacre*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2016.

they put themselves forward in the form of a sign system, recognizable as marks disposed on a page according to certain conventions. (1-2)

Asemic writing's untranslatability thus disrupts semantics and forces us to think the noesis of meaning-making itself. Noesis is the "act or process of thinking [. . .] the functioning of intellect, or the exercise of reason."¹⁵⁴ *L'Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse* are not content with positioning us in an asemic subjectivity; they rationally stage geometric progressions of concepts, *Geistes*. As Toufic explains, such progressions—"Arabic tradition's vertiginous extension"—advance from a "withdrawal of Arabic tradition" (00). Toufic describes *L'Apocalypse arabe* as "one of the Twentieth Century's major Arabic books of poetry" (00). How can a book written in French and then rewritten in English be an Arabic book of poetry?¹⁵⁵ French and English represent the unfolding of thought in left-to-right script; Arabic represents the unfolding of thought in right-to-left script. And an analogical reading of Adnan's graphic signs—"as if" they "look like" Arabic script—would be Orientalist fantasy. No, Adnan's decision to not write in Arabic results not in a reversal—from left-to-right to right-to-left script—but in a surface coincident with the painting: "the synthesis is present at first sight, and then the viewer traces analytically the various parts of the painting" (Schwenger 6).¹⁵⁶ By sustaining left-to-right script, Adnan implores us to slow down, draw near, and think the

¹⁵⁴ This definition of "noesis" (from the Greek *noesis* thought, from *noein*, to think) is obtained from Oxford Reference.

¹⁵⁵ For Toufic, Adnan's *L'Apocalypse arabe* is an Arabic book of poetry because "it was withdrawn, occulted by the surpassing disasters that have affected the Arab world" (00).

¹⁵⁶ Adnan is a painter. See Adnan, Etel. "Artwork." *Etel Adnan*, <http://www.eteladnan.com/art/>. Accessed 5 December 2019. Adnan is also a philosopher.

thought before writing—before the line. As she exclaims, in uppercase, more than two hundred times throughout both books: « STOP » / “STOP.” And, as Schwenger explains, asemic writing results in a “kind of cognitive dissonance: writing is evoked at the same time that we are estranged from it” (7). Adnan: « ô Temps incousu » (*LAA* 8) / “O unsewn Time!” (*TAA* 14). Reading is thus dislocated in time by *seeing*, or what Vilém Flusser refers to as “imaginal thought,” which can “transform a concept into its ‘object’, and can therefore become a metathought of conceptual thinking” (30). By occupying the structural position of imaginal thought, Flusser declares, “Art would no longer work at things (‘oeuvres’), but would propose models” (34). By drifting [*dérive*] through an atopic space, an atopic time, *le néant* (the nothingness) of lines, curls, twists, scratches, and spirals—by seeing into *L’Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse*—we are invited to *may-to-be* [peut-être], to think the absolute of the colonial-racial reality in language.¹⁵⁷ We will now move through the west-east and man-woman correlations to build the theoretical apparatus we need to be capable of translating Adnan’s untranslatable hand and the sovereign energy it gifts us. We agree with Toufic that Adnan’s books are Arabic books of poetry, but we offer a minor revision: they are paintings that initiate a journey, perhaps, a *katabasis* [κατάβασις], to salvage Arabic poetry. Adnan writes: « Ils ont jeté la langue arabe aux poubelles les crapauds l’utilisent » (*LAA* 69) / “They threw the Arabic language to the garbage toads took it up” (*TAA* 75). According to Adnan’s energy aesthetics, the Arabic language—“imaginary gardens with

¹⁵⁷ With *dérive*, I refer to the Situationist practice of “walking or moving through the urban space in a manner contrary to its design yet consistent with one’s own desire” (Buchanan). See Buchanan, Ian. “*dérive*.” *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2010, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199532919.001.0001>.

real toads in them” (Marianne Moore)—is the rejected object, the waste, that is integrated into a process of hijacking [*détournement*], in turn becoming a gift, “garbage,” with which we undergo a decolonization, self-transformation.¹⁵⁸ Receiving the gift hurts because, in returning, we learn of its violent erasure, colonialism. Allan Stoekl might call the Arabic language a “gleaned object”: “the gift comes back, conditions, overturns the human while maintaining its difference from the animal” (“GDG” 16).¹⁵⁹ To glean Stoekl’s posthumanist notion of the gleaned object, we argue that, through *L’Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse*, Arabic *qua* gift comes back, conditions, overturns French and English while maintaining their difference from Arabic.

Correlation 2: west-east

Haunting Adnan’s books are the massacres of refugees at Tall al-Za‘tar and Quarantina during the Lebanese civil war. The strong historicist, Orientalist, would automatically reduce Adnan’s asemic writing to the traumatic memory of them, which would reflect theoretical bias. But, Adnan herself is no Orientalist because she problematizes the west-east correlation by extending Arabic tradition to include, as Toufic writes, “many a bodhisattva as well as many a schizophrenic/psychotic who is not an Arab by descent and/or birthplace but who exclaims in his or her dying before dying: ‘Every name in history is I’ (Nietzsche)” (00). Or, as Michel Cassir writes, « Beyrouth,

¹⁵⁸ With *détournement*, I refer to the Situationist practice of “transforming artworks by creatively disfiguring them” (Buchanan). See Buchanan, Ian. “*détournement*.” *A Dictionary of Critical Theory*. Oxford University Press, 2010, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acref/9780199532919.001.0001>.

¹⁵⁹ Stoekl explains *vis-à-vis* Agnès Varda’s documentary film *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000): “Gleaning is not stealing, but taking as one would receive a gift: with the intention of giving back” (“GDG” 13). He elaborates: “Gleaning is after all breaking apart, trying out, recombining, *using against* within the larger context of social *detournement*” (Stoekl, “GDG” 17).

Homs, Palmyre, Mexico, les noirs, les arabes, les indiens sont pris dans le vertige d'un soleil androgyne ; ce soleil qu'Etel Adnan nomme indien et zoroastrien » (00) / “Beirut, Homs, Palmyra, Mexico, the Blacks, the Arabs, the Indians are caught in the vertigo of an androgynous sun; this sun that Etel Adnan names Indian and Zoroastrian” (our translation). The identitarian might therefore read Adnan’s extension of Arabic tradition as an attempt to find a sort of cosmopolitan solidarity between Palestinians, Lebanese, and Native Americans, but we contend such a generous reading, while to an extent accurate, would occult the plurality of her aesthetics. An extension of Arabic tradition should not, however, be apprehended as the elimination of difference, but, rather, as a recognition of radical contingency before death. Adnan writes: « Un cadavre étendu dans le soleil [. . .] Nous sommes tous de futurs cadavres » (*LAA* 15; 58) / “A corpse lying in the sun [. . .] We are all future corpses” (*TAA* 21; 64). We the nonwhite non-European nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodities, we the *damned*, are not alive. Adnan’s extension of Arabic tradition is an attempt to find a different sort of solidarity between those who are individuated against the structural-ontology of *anthropos*: an acknowledgement that anything can change. We agree with Cassir’s claim that Adnan traces « le sillon d’une nouvelle culture, d’un nouvel humanisme » (00) / “the furrow of a new culture, a new humanism.” But, much like the posthumanism we delineated *vis-à-vis* David Roden and Jacques Lob, Jean-Marc Rochette, and Benjamin Legrand’s *Le Transperceneige*, Adnan’s revelatory posthumanism, an open universal, is to be unearthed beyond the present perfect—under cover of to what she refers as « la NUIT » (*LAA* 72) / “the NIGHT” (*TAA* 78). To understand how *L’Apocalypse arabe* and *The*

Arab Apocalypse problematize the west-east correlation, we now turn to Abdelkebir Khatibi's *pensée-autre* (other-thought) because it is also a recognition of contingency before death. We will see how this recognition authorizes us to think the absolute of the colonial-racial reality in language, thereby gifting us a sovereign energy source in excess of petromyopic "petroculture." The insuperable horizon toward which we move is Adnan's nonrelational relational model of what Khatibi calls *l'orientalisme désorienté* (disoriented Orientalism), an "act of bringing Orientalism back to its native soil without any attempt to tell of its cardinality (that has always oriented it)" (74).¹⁶⁰

Because the European would remain invisible in its prior determination of the non-European, Khatibi is skeptical of the possibility of achieving the late Frantz Fanon's postcolonial call for a purely non-European thought in *Les damnés de la terre* (1961).

Other-thought mounts a decolonial reorientation:

It is a working on the self, a constant work to transform one's suffering, humiliation, and depression in the relationship with the other and others. Focusing on such questions marks a grief, and I would say, a grief without hope or despair, without finality in itself, but altogether a global necessity that life imposes on us only to abandon us to the same question, the first and the last: that there is no choice. (Khatibi 1)

Other-thought is close to Quentin Meillassoux's test of the eternal return because its consequent decolonization, self-transformation, stems from the necessity impelled from outside to resolve a "grief without hope or despair." How do we live with the objective reality of colonial-racial violence, or what Khatibi calls "life," the "insolvable violence"

¹⁶⁰ I did locate the original French, Khatibi, Abdelkebir. *Maghreb pluriel*. Denoël, 1983, but I can't cite it because it's in my office on campus, which has been closed due to COVID-19. I instead cite Khatibi, Abdelkebir. *Plural Maghreb*. Translated by P. Burcu Yalim, Bloomsbury, 2019.

(2)? In moving beyond pessimism, life for him is also the “insurgency against its own alienation” (2). How is such insurgency connected to energy aesthetics? No simple will to revolt, yes, on the side of the materially multiple object, other-thought, which lodges difference *qua* the West inside being, is oriented toward that risk, that contingency, which is self-alienation from nature: the “nonreturn to the inertia of the foundations of our being” (Khatibi 2). The relinquishment of the identitarian’s reification of origins and the extension of the constitutive plurality of Arabic tradition is only possible through the “insurgency of an other-thought, which is in dialogue with planetary transformations” (Khatibi 3). In light of the reality of the Anthropocene and the risk of soon reaching a point of no return from disastrous global warming, we argue the nonrelational relationality of other-thought is capable of activating the subjective commitment we need to transform the world without recourse to the colonial-racial reality.¹⁶¹ Khatibi refers to this nonrelational relationality—an alterity *ex nihilo*, independent of contemporary political discourses, no cosmopolitan humanism—as the “dissymmetrical eccentricity of a gaze and of a face-to-face—in life, and in death, without the help of any god” (3). He calls this decolonization of thought, of oneself, “Third World”: the “tremendous energy of surviving in transformation, this plural thought of survival whose duty is to live in its extraordinary freedom, a freedom without any final solution” (Khatibi 6). Here, generative is Georges Bataille, for whom, remember, inner experience [*expérience intérieure*] hurls the master-slave dialectic to its limits of possibility, to the destruction of

¹⁶¹ I refer here to the 2018 special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), from which the idea of a 12-year point of no return from disastrous global warming has been posited. See: https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2018/07/SR15_SPM_version_stand_alone_LR.pdf.

the master, the authority of *anthropos* (white European rational straight human Man). The decolonization of thought is a tremendous expenditure of sovereign energy. And, to return to Khatibi, the economy of other-thought is a “gift bestowed by the suffering that seizes its terrible freedom” (6). Other-thought is gifted to us by the brutal, eternal question—“that there is no choice”—without the thought of exchange.

For Khatibi, *double critique* (double critique) is the task of other-thought: “[t]he overturning of mastership, subversion itself, depends on this decisive act of turning infinitely against one’s own foundations, one’s origins, those origins undermined by the whole history of theology, charisma, and patriarchy” (26). This formulation, unlike Hegelian mutual recognition, turns in on itself. No solipsism, however, Khatibi’s emphasis on the “*bilingual situation*” (33) allows us to differentiate double critique from quietistic deconstruction and the resigned critique of the kitsch Marxist, the latter of which we explained in our chapter on *Le Transperceneige*:

[C]urrent Arab knowledge is a conflicting interference between two epistemes, one of which (the Western) covers the other; it restructures the other from within, detaching it from its historical continuity [. . .] Yes, but Arab knowledge maintains a certain autonomy, thanks to its native tongue. Hence its possibility for thinking and for thinking the other by translating it, by grafting it to this possibility, opening this possibility toward the unknown—the nonknowledge to think again and again between two or more languages. This entry into globality through this transformation of the Arab language is probably the future of this knowledge, its ascension to planetary speech [. . .we] must not forget that the Arabs, at the time of their initial confrontation with the Greeks, had to translate in order to establish an autonomous philosophical and scientific language! (34)

Thus, double critique is an obligation to cut through the west-east correlation in order to overcome it. A throw of the dice will never abolish contingency (Stéphane Mallarmé).

The self *qua* translator, hurled by an other-thought, is propelled to decolonize oneself, to

think again and again neither institutional nor critical thoughts, but what Khatibi calls “thoughts of the impossible” that want to “destroy themselves in their power of speech, by turning against all institutions, including that of thought itself, be it the thought of difference and of identity, or critical, constitutive and deconstitutive, affirmative and negative” (36-37). Not even nothing is sacred. As Julietta Singh writes of reading against mastery, “We must with increasing urgency revise the very idea of (and the languages we use to describe) our work as intellectuals—with what resonances, and toward what possibilities” (9). Double critique, in other words, is a “*question of language*” (Khatibi 37). No longer alienated, alienated *a priori* by language, the self-decolonizing self, the translator, sees into, perhaps, listens in to, the untranslatable.¹⁶² Double critique is at once *un sursaut quantique* (a quantum leap) and *un repli* (a withdrawal), a vertigo that Khatibi calls “insurgency [. . .] an exigency of life and of survival” (28).¹⁶³ Dying before dying,

¹⁶² By claiming that the translator is “[n]o longer alienated, alienated *a priori* by language,” I am claiming structuralism as my defining methodology. Objects can objectively know themselves as being distinct from *anthropos*.

¹⁶³ With *un sursaut quantique*, I refer to Bernard Stiegler: « Pourtant, tout le monde le sait bien aujourd’hui, l’abandon du cours des choses en l’état est *suicidaire* : que cette époque soit décadente signifie qu’elle est *révolue*, et ne pas l’acter, c’est renoncer à la vie. Cependant, cette décadence signifie *aussi* que l’époque est *épuisée* : qu’elle stagne, qu’elle ne peut pas engendrer sa propre transformation. Autrement dit, cela signifie qu’il faut que s’y produise un *sursaut*—disons, pour demeurer dans le langage de Simondon, un *sursaut quantique*. Ce sursaut ne peut être qu’une *opposition* à la décomposition. » (MD 134) / “The whole world today knows very well, however, that abandoning things to their course is, within our current situation, *suicidal*: the fact that this epoch is *decadent* means that it has run its course [*révolue*], and to not act is to renounce life. This decadence, however, *also* means that the epoch is exhausted—that it stagnates, that it is unable to engender its own transformation. In other words, this means that it requires a *jumpstart* [*sursaut*—let’s say, to remain with the language of Simondon, a *quantum leap* [*un sursaut quantique*]. This leap could only be an opposition to decomposition” (DIS 95). I temper Stiegler’s vitalism *vis-à-vis* Paul de Man’s ironic fall, or *dédoublément* (self-duplication): “The dialectic of the self-destruction and self-invention which for him [Friedrich Schlegel], as for Baudelaire, characterizes the ironic mind in an endless process that leads to no synthesis” (220). Staging a dialectic of *un sursaut quantique* and *un repli* gets us closer to Khatibi’s insurgent double critique of other-thought. It also telegraphs Rosi Braidotti’s idea of virtual suicide, which I explore below in “NIGHT.”

the self-decolonizing self, the translator, recognizes that every material thing, including thought, must be allowed to change, to be contingent. The untranslatability of Adnan's *L'Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse* forces thought "so much so that to think between several languages [French, English, Arabic] is a *mad thought*" (Khatibi 138). Adnan's hand is inspired by the Arabic alphabet in order to dispose the asemic, and her graphic signs are neither purely Arabic, French, nor English. Textually multilingual, Adnan's books enable madness and reason. Khatibi asserts: "It may be madness, it may be reason, but a mad thought works to shake metaphysics, insofar as the latter opposes reason to unreason, thought to unthought" (138). Such a mad thought is close to Audra Simpson's "ethnographic refusal."¹⁶⁴ Let us not presuppose Adnan's hand to be irrational.

Correlation 3: man-woman

According to Miriam Cooke's strong historicism, in the seven years between the beginning of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 and the Israeli invasion in 1982, Lebanon witnessed an unprecedented surge in the output of women writers to whom she refers as the "Beirut Decentrists." For Cooke, the "Beirut Decentrists," among which she counts Adnan, critique the independent patriarch polity responsible for the war and assert a distinctly female identity in language.¹⁶⁵ We don't think such capitalist

¹⁶⁴ See Simpson, Audra. "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice,' and Colonial Citizenship." *Junctures*, no. 9, December 2007, pp. 67-80. I was introduced to the practice of ethnographic refusal by Kim TallBear's *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (2013).

¹⁶⁵ See Cooke, Miriam. *War's Other Voices: Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War*. Cambridge University Press, 1987. Adnan was born in Beirut. After living in Paris and Berkeley, she returned to Beirut and, from 1972 to 1976, worked for two of the city's daily newspapers (*Al Safa* and *L'Orient le Jour*). Adnan's partner is a woman. Taken together, the strong historicist might even want to include Adnan in

representationalism—a generous “right to difference” (Khatibi 2)—is capable of grasping Adnan’s aesthetics, which amounts to a rational universalism founded on radical contingency. At the same time, we don’t claim that it’s not insignificant that Adnan is a woman, so we’ll sustain a minimum degree of historicism. We therefore turn to Laboria Cuboniks’s *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (2018) and Helen Hester’s *Xenofeminism* (2018).

First, xenofeminism (XF) aspires to a postmelancholic “future in which the realization of gender justice and feminist emancipation contribute to a universalist politics assembled from the needs of every human, cutting across race, ability, economic standing, and geographical position” (Laboria Cuboniks 13). Adnan’s poems cut across fragmentary references to Egypt, the Hopi, the Bedu, Mexico, the Inca, Syria, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Amazonia, Palestine, Argentina, Jews, Lebanon, Nubians, Jerusalem, Yemen, Borneo, Turkey, Algeria, Iran, Armenia, Saudi Arabia, Cuba, the Yahi, Iraq, Sumer, Morocco, Canaan, Islam, the Sioux, Jupiter, Guatemala, Angola, Uruguay, Persia, Oman, the Yakama, Venus, and Mars—to name only a few. This broken kaleidoscope demonstrates the universalist politics to which Adnan aspires. Second, XF is antinaturalist: “XF is an anti-naturalist endeavour in the sense that it frames nature and the natural as a space for contestation” (Hester 19). Like the realist-posthumanist approach to nature we excavated in nonrelational relation to Kate Soper, Roden, and *Le Transperceneige*, XF’s antinaturalism precipitates and, moreover, demands (more) alienation, “the labor of freedom’s construction” (Laboria Cuboniks 14). The self-

what Sofian Merabet identifies as “queer Beirut.” See Merabet, Sofian. *Queer Beirut*. University of Texas Press, 2014.

decolonizing self, no longer alienated, alienated *a priori* by language, likewise demands more alienation from in at once refusing a politics of recognition and energizing the mad thought of textual multilingualism. What follows from this are endless attacks on the myth of the given (Wilfrid Sellars), and the generation of systematic thinking and structural augmentation in linguistic imagination. No aristocratic victimology, then, XF is a rationalism unafraid of normativity; XF aspires to self-mastery. And, like *The Drowned World*, XF's rationalist aspiration to self-mastery is *hyperstitional*:

[T]he task of engineering platforms for social emancipation and organization cannot ignore the cultural and semiotic mutations these platforms afford. What requires re-engineering are the memetic parasites arousing and coordinating behaviours in ways occluded by their hosts' self-image; failing this, memes like 'anonymity', 'ethics', 'social justice' and 'privilege-checking' host social dynamisms at odds with the often-commendable intentions with which they're taken up. The task of collective self-mastery requires a hyperstitional manipulation of desire's puppet-strings, and deployment of semiotic operators over a terrain of highly networked cultural systems. The will will always be corrupted by the memes in which it traffics, but nothing prevents us from instrumentalizing this fact, and calibrating it in view of the ends it desires. (Latoria Cuboniks 49)

Adnan's xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing alienates us from the world and ourselves; our attempts to appropriate it *vis-à-vis* an understanding of the vocabularies and grammars of French and/or English are met with an intense drag—not only through graphic signs, but also through the speed at which we read, which is altered by profuse enjambment—that pressurizes, confuses, forces us to think about how we make meaning.¹⁶⁶ What follows through our struggle to systematize Adnan's aesthetics is the

¹⁶⁶ I don't attribute a necessarily insidious intent to acts of appropriation because that would be unintelligible according to my Marxism (inasmuch as I reject the ideas of private property and the State). For Rahel Jaeggi, appropriation, rather, is a "way of establishing relations to oneself and to the world, a way of dealing with oneself and the world and having oneself and the world at one's command" (A 36).

recognition that meaning-making and understanding are social practices with which we engage at the level of language.¹⁶⁷ Nature is autonomous; rationalism and sociality are not mutually exclusive. We are therefore driven to structural amendment: How do we collectively manage alienation in light of the Anthropocene without affirming colonial-racial divisions? How do we transform such an understanding of language into truth? Our response: we need more alienation so we can sift through the detritus of the old worlds in order to make new ones.¹⁶⁸ As Laboria Cuboniks exclaims: “If nature is unjust, change nature!” (93).

Third, XF is gender abolitionist, which is “shorthand for the ambition to construct a society where traits currently assembled under the rubric of gender, no longer furnish a grid for the asymmetric operation of power” (Laboria Cuboniks 35). Hester elaborates: “The recognition of *innumerable* genders is therefore only a first step in the refusal to accept *any* gender as a basis for stable signification” (31). It should go without saying that gender abolitionism does not mean the elimination of difference; rather, as argued by Madhavi Menon, gender abolitionism interrupts the “chain of causality that all these categories imply in their formulation” (41). In Poem XX, Adnan’s symbol of « androgyne défait soleil androgyne androgyne clair » (Adnan, *LAA* 33) / “defeated androgyne androgynous sun clear androgyne” (Adnan, *TAA* 39) refers to the books’

Alienation, it follows, is a capitalist disruption in this relation, or what Jaeggi refers to as an “*impairment of acts of appropriation*” (*A* 36).

¹⁶⁷ I refer here to Robert Brandom’s Wittgensteinian “game of giving and asking for reasons,” to which I return in the conclusion. See Part I of *Making It Explicit*.

¹⁶⁸ I allude here to structuralism.

gender abolitionism, which does not fall into the trap of trans-exclusionary tautology. That is, Adnan's rationalism is neither purely 'feminine' nor purely 'masculine'; her androgynous aesthetics suspends the "rubric of gender." At the same time, her universalist politics necessarily includes the "needs of every human" (Laboria Cuboniks 13), which includes any gender. We detect no violent contradiction in this condensation. Fourth, XF is an intersectional universalism "built from the bottom up [. . .that] must guard against the facile tendency of conflation with bloated, unmarked particulars—namely Eurocentric universalism—whereby the male is mistaken for the sexless, the white for raceless, the cis for the real, and so on" (Laboria Cuboniks 57). XF is positioned against the colonial-racial reality. Similarly, in both form and content, there is no trace in Adnan's books of Eurocentric universalism. Rather, the universal they posit is the sun, which 1) cannot be empirically known, 2) is not a fact (which would mean it could not be contingent), and 3) does not refer to chance (which would mean it is a predetermined outcome of probability). The sun of *L'Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse* is a symbol that refers to nothing other than contingency; its sun is a generously infinite energy source.

Finally, no naïve techno-utopianism, XF is "sensitive to the insidious return of old power structures"; no austere Luddism, however, it is "savvy enough to know how to exploit the potential [of technologies]" (Laboria Cuboniks 75). Hester explains: "Technologies, then, need to be conceptualized as social phenomena, and therefore as available for transformation through collective struggle" (11). If we understand language to be a social technology, Adnan's xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing corrupts

technology to construct a “new language for sexual politics—a language that seizes its own methods as materials to be reworked, and incrementally bootstraps itself into existence” (Laboria Cuboniks 91). Adnan, following an indentation in the English, but not in the French, writes: « Grand cybernétique du Malheur machine cassée » (*LAA* 6) / “Cybernetics of Doom broken machine” (*TAA* 12). Khatibi might call this “planetary speech” (34). If we understand Adnan’s sun to be a reference to contingency, it follows that it and everything else, including gender, could change for no reason whatsoever. Adnan’s sun is isomorphic with Meillassoux’s thesis that the contingency of the laws of nature is absolutely necessary. It is in this way that Adnan’s books problematize the man-woman correlation. Furthermore, because Adnan links contingency to the sun, we return to Bataille, for whom, remember, the sun offers limitless energy: « La source et l’essence de notre richesse sont données dans le rayonnement du soleil, qui dispense l’énergie—la richesse—sans contrepartie » (*PM* 66) / “The origin and essence of our wealth are given in the radiation of the sun, which dispenses energy—wealth—without any return” (*AS* 28). Adnan’s first point with her planetary speech is that the apocalypse should not be mourned with the pathos of negativity, which would, to return to Toufic’s idea of the surpassing disaster, bury the apocalypse, a revelatory uncovering, and result in a resigned melancholy. Laboria Cuboniks asserts:

[M]elancholy—so endemic to the left—teaches us that emancipation is an extinct species to be wept over and that blips of negation are the best we can hope for. At its worst, such an attitude generates nothing but political lassitude, and at its best, installs an atmosphere of pervasive despair which too often degenerates into factionalism and petty moralizing. The malady of melancholia only compounds political inertia, and—under the guise of being realistic—relinquishes all hope of recalibrating the world otherwise. It is against such maladies that XF inculcates. (41)

For Adnan, melancholy is determined by the occultation of the apocalypse, whereby concomitantly martyr *qua* witness is occulted by martyr *qua* “person who suffers greatly or is killed because of their political or religious beliefs” (Toufic 00). Adnan’s second point with her planetary speech is that what is ultimately occulted by “the Arab apocalypse” is *revelatory uncovering*, the primary meaning of apocalypse: “From time to time, there occurs what suspends time, revelation—at least for certain people, martyrs” (Toufic 00). Adnan writes: « l’Histoire est morte. le soleil est le Rien. l’air brûle depuis toujours » (*LAA* 67) / “History is dead. the sun is Nothingness. the air is burning for ever” (*TAA* 73). Radiation. Revelatory uncovering. Because “the sun is Nothingness,” because it both proves the contingency of all material things and generously gifts us infinite energy, because the sun —> everything could change without reason, we may say that Adnan’s XF, unflinching in the eye of the apocalypse, defends alienation so we may sift through the detritus of the old worlds to make new ones. Adnan writes: « ô camarade céleste efface le noir du deuil et plante des rosiers / ô camarade céleste chante un requiem de gloire pour ceux dont la voix est murée dans les tombes » (*LAA* 60) / “O celestial comrade erase the blackness of mourning and plant rose bushes / O celestial comrade sing a requiem of glory for those whose voice is sealed in tombs” (*TAA* 66). Adnan’s apostrophe takes utterly seriously the alien [*xeno-feminism, O celestial comrade*]. Let us on the left slow down and look forward to nocturnal rapport. On the last pages of *L’Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse* (Figure 2), we learn of a future conflagration, the extinguishment of the sun and all terrestrial life with it. But, refusing to give in to melancholy and abandon “hope of

recalibrating the world otherwise” (Laboria Cuboniks 41), Adnan writes, « alors la matière-esprit deviendra la NUIT / dans la nuit dans la nuit nous trouverons le savoir l’amour et la paix » (*LAA* 72) / “Matter-Spirit will become the NIGHT / in the night in the night we shall find knowledge love and peace” (*TAA* 78). We are interested in the disarticulating, decolonizing feedback effect of telegraphing the night on the self, martyr, witness.

But, what is the night? With *Night* (2016), Adnan gifts us an answer. Before we introduce and study her symbol of the night, we return to the strong historicist, Orientalist, who would automatically reduce Adnan’s xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing to the traumatic memory of the massacres of refugees at Tall al-Za‘tar and Quarantina during the Lebanese civil war. We also return to the identitarian, who might generously read Adnan’s extension of Arabic tradition as an attempt to find a sort of cosmopolitan solidarity between Palestinians, Lebanese, and Native Americans. We maintain our argument that both the strong historicist and the identitarian would occult the plurality of Adnan’s aesthetics. But, we now refine our argument to do justice to Adnan’s revelatory posthumanism. We take from the strong historicist the notion of memory and we take from the identitarian the notion of solidarity because we think memory and solidarity are integral to the formulation of an egalitarian and universally just politics adequate to the colonial-racial reality and the Anthropocene. But, we maintain the plurality of Adnan’s aesthetics, which contradicts the strong historicist’s automatic reduction of Adnan’s xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing to trauma and the identitarian’s cosmopolitan humanism. We now introduce and study Adnan’s symbol

of the night, which amounts to a posthumanist theory of memory. We will then describe the *drama* of Adnan's energy aesthetics *vis-à-vis* Réda Bensmaïa's rereading of Gilles Deleuze through Immanuel Kant before arriving at her nonrelational relational model of disoriented Orientalism. With this, in the caesura, the structure of this chapter comes into view. From top to bottom, we have theorized Adnan's energy aesthetics by moving through the meaning-nonmeaning, west-east, and man-woman correlations, to be capable of explaining *L'Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse*; from top to bottom, that is, we move toward a nonrelational relational model of disoriented Orientalism that is capable of describing the usefulness of Adnan's energy aesthetics to an egalitarian and universally just politics adequate to the colonial-racial reality and the Anthropocene. A radical alienation, a radical contingency, a broken kaleidoscope. Adnan writes: « le soleil se brûle la raison de cellule en cellule dans une apothéose / les radiations cosmiques se promènent dans un univers noir » (*LAA* 22) / “the sun burns out its insanity from cell to cell to reach an apotheosis / cosmic radiations travel in a black universe” (*TAA* 28). We move below, into the black universe of the night, to overcome alienation. But, waiting for us on the other side is the combined horror of what Reza Negarestani calls the “Inhuman Demon,” the “xenolithic artifact,” and Stijn Vanheule's reading of Jacques Lacan's formalist account of psychosis.

NIGHT

Adnan asserts:

Memory is right here, in the head, but it can exit, abandon that head, leave it behind, disappear [. . .] It's not a tool for being able to think, it's thinking, before thinking [. . .] We can admit that memory resurrects the dead, but these remain within their world, not ours' [. . .] But this memory is the glue that keeps the

universe as one: although immaterial, it makes being possible, it is being. If an idea didn't remember to think, it wouldn't be [. . .] We can also say that the universe is itself the glue that keeps it going, therefore it is memory in action and in essence, in becoming and in being. Because it remembers itself, it exists. Because it exists, it remembers [. . .] To see something is to remember it; otherwise there's no seeing [. . .] Memory is intelligent. It's a knowledge seated neither in the senses, nor in the spirit, but in collective memory. It is communal, though deeply personal. Involved with the self, though autonomous. At war with death [. . .] It helps us rampage through the old self, hang on the certitude that it has to be [. . .] There must be non-human memories from where our own surges, take us to the next thing [. . .] Memory trespasses our limits [. . .] Reason and memory move together [. . .] And night and memory mediate each other. We move in them disoriented, for they often refuse to secure our vision. (*N* 14-17)¹⁶⁹

Of course, the cognitive process of memory takes place “in the head.” But, if we take seriously Adnan's contention that memory can “exit, abandon that head, leave it behind, disappear,” memory would be autonomous (atemporal) thinking—“thinking, before thinking [. . .] it] makes being possible, it is being.” Adnan is careful, however, to not transcendentalize memory in writing it is “not a tool for being able to think.” Although memory is thinking that precedes thinking, it does not determine thinking; memory is not a thought. In keeping with a universalist politics, memory, for Adnan, is also cosmic. On the one hand, memory is the “glue that keeps the universe as one.” On the other, the universe is itself memory “in action and in essence, in becoming and in being.” And the universe is the memory of the dead who, though resurrected by our thinking them, “remain within their world, not ours'.” How do we live with the objective reality of colonial-racial violence? Note Adnan's use of a single closing quotation mark, which impels us to turn back the pages and search for an opening quotation mark. Because we're not given one, we are returned to the brutal, eternal question: “that there is no

¹⁶⁹ Adnan wrote *Night* in English.

choice” (Khatibi 1). Adnan orients herself according to an other-thought and performs a decolonizing “rampage through the old self”—a double critique—in order to know memory as the thinking that *decapitates* the body, unfurling us, *acéphalique* (headless), into the cold, sunless universe of the night, an infinity of material worlds.¹⁷⁰ Memory, radically contingent, “trespasses our limits.” And, in trespassing our limits, memory leads us beyond to experience the immortality of the ethical life. Rosi Braidotti explains:

Pursuing a sort of seduction into immortality, the ethical life is life as virtual suicide. Life as virtual suicide is life as constant creation. Life lived so as to break the cycles of inert repetitions that usher in banality. Lest we delude ourselves with narcissistic pretences, we need to cultivate endurance, immortality within time, that is to say death in life. (135)

Adnan’s cosmicism means that, although memory may be “immaterial” “in the head,” once it exits, “death in life” gets us closer to what Eleanor Kaufman calls a “disembodied materiality that is a pure energy of thought” (*DP* 10). The material universe is independent of thought, but not of memory, thinking, or a knowing collective and personal, social and cosmic, contingent and material.¹⁷¹ For Adnan, memory and, by coextension, the universe are intelligent, they are *sapient*: “Reason and memory move together.” No humanism, such an understanding of memory is posthumanist: “There must be non-human memories from where our own surges, take us to the next thing.” So, how

¹⁷⁰ With *acéphalique*, I refer here to both Bataille’s journal *Acéphale* (1936-1939) and Bataille’s secret society *Acéphale*, whose aim was to create a secular cult, a satanic mass of self-destruction. See Elder, Bruce. “Acéphale.” *Routledge Encyclopedia of Modernism*, Routledge, 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781135000356-REM356-1>.

¹⁷¹ Adnan’s cosmicism is close to H. P. Lovecraft’s, whose aesthetics also foregrounds the horror of an aimless, inconceivable, and ultimately indifferent cosmos. See, for an exemplar, “Nyarlathotep” (1920): “And through this revolting graveyard of the universe the muffled, maddening beating of drums, and thin, monotonous whine of blasphemous flutes from inconceivable, unlighted chambers beyond Time; the detestable pounding and piping whereunto dance slowly, awkwardly, and absurdly the gigantic, tenebrous ultimate gods, the blind, voiceless, mindless gargoyles whose soul is Nyarlathotep” (Lovecraft, “N” 123).

do we live with the objective reality of colonial-racial violence? We are again returned to the question: that there is no choice. Every sentence must have a predicate, virtual suicide. Adnan, on the last pages of *L'Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse*, suggests we look to the coming night, which we now see mediates and is mediated by memory, the universe. This interstellar recursion, in refusing to “secure our vision,” *disorients* us. We the dead matters, aliens, endure the “war with death.” Adnan’s symbolization of the night is mediated by the drama of an energy aesthetics, which, to review, is a functionalist epistemology of employing symbols to make postsustainable worlds that revel in the sovereign expenditure of an energy that is the consequence of the aftereffects of a “corporeal generosity” (Stoekl, “GDG” 14). Sovereign acts are insubordinate to the capitalist economy of use and exchange; and, energy is 1) a material multiple; 2) radically contingent; 3) on the side of the object; and, 4) a reclamation of nature’s separation from society.

What is drama? To answer, we turn to Kant’s aesthetic judgment by way of Bensaïa’s rereading of Deleuze. *Contra* reason and the understanding, it is through « *face à l’objet* (d’art) [. . .] qu’une « forme » se dégage de l’ensemble (pour le sujet) » (“LSA” 215) / “facing the object (of art) [. . .] that a form emerges from the whole (for the subject)” (“SA” 27). Bensaïa continues:

[E]n parlant de « formes », et en particulier de ce qui est « beau » dans les choses, Kant n’a en tête ni la rigide régularité des formes géométriques, ni la symétrie fonctionnelle des formes organiques [. . .] pour Kant, la « forme belle », ce qui fait qu’une forme est belle ou que la beauté est avant tout forme, c’est moins, encore une fois, telle ou telle structure saillante que je reconnais dans l’objet ou que j’en « extrais » [. . .] mais *le jeu dynamique instable entre des figures sans résolution conceptuelle*. Prendre en considération l’idée de forme et l’associer à un jeu entre des figures que l’on ne peut arrêter, c’est en faire l’enjeu d’une

instabilité perpétuelle. Et c'est à cette *intersection* que se fait la *rencontre* entre l'esthétique kantienne et l'esthétique deleuzienne autour de la « forme belle » comme différenciation interne, ou, si l'on préfère, comme différence qui s'auto-différencie et affirme (impose) sa différence sans négation [. . .] La singularité du beau [. . .] proviendrait donc d'une *cohérence interne à laquelle on ne peut associer un concept transcendant*. (“LSA” 215-216)

[I]n speaking of ‘forms’, and in particular of what is ‘beautiful’ in things, Kant has in mind neither the stiff regularity of geometric shapes nor the functional symmetry of organic forms [. . .] for Kant, ‘beautiful form’—which means that a form is beautiful or that beauty is prior to all form—is not some prominent structure or other that I recognize in the object or that I ‘extract’ from it [. . .] but rather the *dynamic unstable play between figures without conceptual resolution*. To consider the idea of form and to associate it with an unstoppable play between figures is to treat it as what is at stake in a *perpetual instability*. And it is at this *intersection* where the *encounter* takes place between Kantian and Deleuzian aesthetics concerning ‘beautiful form’ as internal differentiation or, if you prefer, as difference that self-differentiates and affirms (imposes) its difference without negation [. . .] The singularity of the beautiful [. . .] would result from an *internal coherence with which we cannot associate any transcendental concept*. (“SA” 27-29)

For Kant, the autonomous free play of the aesthetic sphere is apprehended through disinterest. Jacques Derrida writes: « Sans doute le centre d'une structure, en orientant et en organisant la cohérence du système, permet-il le jeu des éléments à l'intérieur de la forme totale » (“La structure” 409) / “By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system, the center of a structure permits the play of its elements inside the total form” (“Structure” 352). Yes, but let us slow down and read Bensmaïa's reading of Deleuze's appropriation of the Kantian schema, or what Deleuze names “vice-diction”: « dégager [. . .] les éléments d'une théorie de l'« Idée » visant principalement à arracher l'Idée à l'« Intelligible » platonicien et à l'inscrire dans une dialectique de « vice-diction » permettant de la penser comme multiplicité intensive » (Bensmaïa, “LSA” 217) / “bringing out the elements of a theory of the ‘Idea’, aiming primarily to wrest it away

from the Platonic ‘Intelligible’ and to inscribe it within a dialectic of ‘vice-diction’ that would enable us to think of it as intensive multiplicity” (Bensmaïa, “SA” 29). Deleuze asserts:

Le problème de la pensée n’est pas lié à l’essence, mais à l’évaluation de ce qui a de l’importance et de ce qui n’en a pas, à la répartition du singulier et du régulier, du remarquable et de l’ordinaire, qui se fait tout entière dans l’inessentiel ou dans la description d’une multiplicité, par rapport aux événements idéaux qui constituent les conditions d’un « problème ». Avoir une Idée ne signifie pas autre chose [. . .] Il appartient à la vice-diction d’engendrer les cas, à partir des auxiliaires et des adjonctions. (*DeR* 245).

The problem of thought is tied not to essences but to the evaluation of what is important and what is not, to the distribution of singular and regular, distinctive and ordinary points, which takes place entirely within the inessential or within the description of a multiplicity, in relation to the ideal events which constitute the conditions of a ‘problem’. To have an Idea means no more than this [. . .] It is a vice-diction which engenders cases, on the basis of auxiliaries and adjunctions. (*DaR* 189-190)

Bensmaïa explains that the dialectic of vice-diction forces « certaines des axes (axiomes, aussi bien) de Kant, de les *dramatiser* pour « lever » certaines des *virtualités*, certaines *possibles* ou certaines des *Idées* que Kant n’aurait pas su ou pu « actualiser » ou mettre au jour » (“LSA” 218) / “certain of Kant’s axes (and axioms), of *dramatizing* them, in order to ‘lift up’ some of the virtualities, some of the possibilities, or some of the Ideas that Kant would not have been able to ‘actualize’ or bring to light” (“SA” 30).¹⁷² Thus, for Deleuze, knowing is an ethical question: How do we evaluate “what is important and what is not”? We locate in Deleuze’s procedure of vice-diction the beginnings of a disalienating dialectic that at once transgresses conceptual limits and foregrounds the

¹⁷² With the phrase « lever » / “lift up,” Bensmaïa refers to Deleuze’s Hegelianism [*Aufheben*], which is another story for another time. It can wait.

affirmative force of the interrogative.¹⁷³ For Adnan, drama, like memory, transgresses conceptual limits. It is the maddeningly straight line. It makes sense, then, that Adnan establishes an analogy between memory and theatre, an analogy which expresses a desire to disrupt the drama of the straight line:

Memory and theatre work in similar ways [. . .] Theatre started with the Greek oracle. In Delphi. When the Pythia was uttering her sound, her cry, she was passing a message from one world to an other, so that it be stored in human memory, and the people were watching, and the event was becoming a representation [. . .] Thus a remembered event is a return to a mystery. When that happened for the first time, in pre-ancestral times, the creature that witnessed it as a return to the past was shattered. (N 16-17)

From the navel of the Earth [*omphalos*], the Pythia, martyr, inhaled ethylene gas from fissures connected to subterranean petrochemical deposits.¹⁷⁴ Quite interestingly, in *L'Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse*, Adnan makes numerous references to petroleum, and petrochemicals are distillates of petroleum; for instance, « le pétrole sert aux veillées du soir et à l'apothéose de la nuit » (*LAA* 67) / “petroleum is used in the evening and for the night’s apotheosis” (*TAA* 73). The oracle’s subsequent cry communicated a message she witnessed, a nonhuman memory. The event, an encounter with the Earth, becomes an object of art, a representation, that could be faced. Facing the representation, listening to it as a message from beyond the self, returns us to a “mystery,” a negative *shattering* of the self. We are in the intagliated nonlinearity of other-thought; we move toward its double critique. But, why does Adnan use the form of

¹⁷³ It is a way, perhaps, of thinking what Slavoj Žižek calls the “pure processuality of the subject which emerges as ‘its own result’” (38). The subject, for Žižek, who follows Lacan, is a multiplicity decentered from within and without, by the Real.

¹⁷⁴ See Harpur, James. *The Atlas of Sacred Places: Meeting Points of Heaven and Earth*. Henry Holt and Company, 1994.

the analogy? “Memory and theatre work in *similar ways*” (our emphasis). As David Lloyd explains, analogy is the “principal ideological moment of the aesthetic domain [. . .] In the very process of formalization that its analogical structure produces, aesthetics displaces the historical conditions of its emergence on to a universal claim to deduce the ‘super-sensible substrate’ that is the identity of the human” (21-22). For Lloyd, the nonrelationality of what he names “the aesthetic regime of representation consigns the racialized subject to the space of an exception on which the structure of any possible politics rests” (43). But, learning from *The Drowned World’s* eco-racial disaster that weaponizes energy aesthetics in order to contribute to the destruction of the antiracist world, we contend the aesthetic regime of representation may be hijacked. Indeed, as we saw *vis-à-vis* Bensmaïa’s reading, in Kantian aesthetics, as in Deleuzian aesthetics, beautiful form is the “*dynamic unstable play between figures without conceptual resolution*” (28). So, although the nonrelationality of the aesthetic may appear to be a form of racialized violence, a closer reading reveals its « multiplicité intensive » (Bensmaïa 217) / “intensive multiplicity” (Bensmaïa 29), its disarticulating, decolonizing feedback effect on the subject, its beautiful, volatile, relational contingency. So, while Lloyd’s theorization of the “Subject without properties” refers to the subject’s becoming the “global ubiquity of the white European” (77) through aesthetic judgment, we insist that beauty can be “ugly,” or, alternatively, that what is ugly is beautiful (Charles Baudelaire). Put differently, we contend that Adnan’s energy aesthetics—its telegraphing the night, which mediates and is mediated by memory, the universe—not only gifts us a

reorganized understanding of the world, but also affirms the ethical importance of transforming the world, to make art, making worlds. As Jeffrey Sacks explains:

In Kant the aesthetic is not disassociated from the worldly, or the world, but gives place to it. The aesthetic points to a reorganization of an understanding of world and that being, 'man', said now only to think and no longer know self, world, or God. This reorganization shares in the divided, dividing legacies of colonialism, which are remarked in Said, pointing to a passivity in writing that compels sustained attention. 'In many ways my study of Orientalism has been an attempt to inventory the traces upon me, the Oriental subject, of the culture whose domination has been so powerful a factor in the life of all Orientals', Said wrote. In this passage, 'I' is given place to, 'I' may be said to be who or what I am, only in relation to my being an 'Oriental subject'—a subject 'constituted' (26) in relation to the event of cultural 'domination' Said studied. (18-19)

The aesthetic is thus *useful*. Like science, just beyond negation, it is a functionalist epistemology of employing symbols to make worlds (Nelson Goodman). And this epistemology "shares in the divided, dividing legacies of colonialism, which are remarked in Said, pointing to a passivity in writing that compels sustained attention." No simple consignment of the racialized subject to "the space of an exception on which the structure of any possible politics rests" (Lloyd 43), the aesthetic, rather, demands radical passivity, or, if we may, generosity, a leap (*sursaut*) into other-thought, into double critique, into memory, the universe. Adnan's passivity is in her refusal to write in only Arabic, French, or English; her xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing compels our sustained attention. And, for Adnan, "Reason and memory move together" (N 17). We are in the structural position of imaginal thought (Flusser), a risk, an energizing contingency. Again, let us not presuppose Adnan's hand to be irrational; let us not suppose her writing to be "ugly."

We may now begin to describe the usefulness of Adnan's nonrelational relational model of what Khatibi calls *l'orientalisme désorienté* (disoriented Orientalism) to an egalitarian and universally just politics adequate to the colonial-racial reality and the Anthropocene. Khatibi explains:

Orientalism should be accorded its fullest desire for nobility, its nobility of view toward the sunrise [. . .] It requires vis-à-vis the other, knowledge of the laws of hospitality, a certain protocol wrapped in vigilance. Beyond all mutual resentment, it tells of the nuptial entry into the thought and memory of the other. Such a call puts one in a position to receive and go toward the other, to adjust language to the splendor of the Same. But perhaps we have forgotten the honor that we are owed. And perhaps our instinct of domination has drawn us away from such an encounter. The Orientalist, noble in a sense, is the one who watches over the dawn of thought. (73-74)

And Khatibi adds to this that:

The Orientalist is a translator, inasmuch as he enables passing from one linguistic shore to another. His dream is to be bilingual. How to go toward the language of the other and receive him in his own language? [. . .] But the essence of poetry is to be untranslatable. How to approach and listen to this untranslatable? [. . .] A language that transports another must be transformed during this journey while remaining itself—a rather strange and formidable transformation when the two languages belong to different linguistic sources and to two different metaphysical movements [. . .] The East and the West are not reduced to a geographical distribution or to some cultural difference. But they call, in their spacing, every cardinal question of Being, according to an auroral and nuptial protocol—a protocol that does not refer to some illuminative philosophy that would come to transfigure, through solar imagery, the unthought-of-birth of all East and all West. This birth dictates the song of the awakening. And as such, it is always an extraordinary event. It is never given as a supernatural gift from heaven. As gift, distraught memory, this birth celebrates the unthought. Distraught memory, insofar as the gift, brings an intoxicated moment between the companions. But for such a gift to give itself in the proximity of the other, it too must be realized according to a thought of difference. (89-93)

Thus, the radical nobility of disoriented Orientalism is not resigned to critique. In *L'Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse*, the Arabic language *qua* gift comes back, conditions, overturns the French and English languages while maintaining their

difference from the Arabic language. Textually multilingual, passive, Adnan's asemic writing is utterly detached from the Orientalist paradigm of the noble savage. Adnan's Arabic, French, and English "call, in their spacing, every cardinal question of Being, according to an auroral and nuptial protocol." *Contra* the "solar imagery" of "some illuminative philosophy," the "auroral and nuptial protocol" refers to the Adnanian night *qua* memory that transgresses conceptual limits, thereby opening onto the pure potentiality of world-transformation, worldmaking. Auroras are the consequence of disturbances in the atmosphere caused by the solar wind. According to NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center, the "source of the solar wind is the Sun's hot corona. The temperature of the corona is so high that the Sun's gravity cannot hold on to it."¹⁷⁵ The solar wind is in excess to the sun's gravity, travels and disturbs the Earth's atmosphere; the solar wind is sovereign. Global-warming deniers therefore argue that the solar wind is responsible for global warming, not anthropogenic action.¹⁷⁶ For Adnan, however, « le soleil toujours va contre le vent le soleil tourne dans les cyclones » (*LAA* 40) / "the sun always moves against the wind the sun revolves in cyclones" (*TAA* 46). The wind here refers to both the solar wind and what Khatibi calls "distracted memory." For Adnan, "the wind" brings in the memory of Arabic, a colonized language. In other words, as a celebration of "unthought," Adnan's xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing is a sonic

¹⁷⁵ See NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center. "The Solar Wind." *NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center*, <https://solarscience.msfc.nasa.gov/SolarWind.shtml>. Accessed 9 December 2019.

¹⁷⁶ See, for instance, the Joerg Knipprath citation in EarthTalk. "The Role of Sunspots and Solar Winds in Climate Change." *Scientific American*, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/sun-spots-and-climate-change/>. Accessed 9 December 2019. Knipprath explains: "[V]ariations in solar energy output have far more effect on Earth's climate than soccer moms driving SUVs."

birth, bringing in an “intoxicated moment between the companions [Arabic, French, and English].” If the Arabic language is a gift with which we undergo a decolonization, self-transformation, “it too must be realized according to a thought of difference”—an intoxicating disruption of the presupposition of colonial-racial divisions. And here is the sovereign energy in excess of petromyopic “petroculture” Adnan’s untranslatable hand gifts us—to unite aesthetics and philosophy, to decolonize thought, to think the speculative thought inaccessible to ordinary sense of the colonial-racial reality in language. That is, Adnan’s xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing moves from the petroleum that « sert aux veillées du soir et à l’apothéose de la nuit » (*LAA* 67) / “is used in the evening and for the night’s apotheosis” (*TAA* 73) to the night’s apotheosis itself, the Nothingness.

We return to Adnan, whose energy aesthetics stages thoughts of difference. Her Arabic, French, English, and graphic signs are cries from the center of the Earth. We listen to these solar cyclones—the sun against the wind. But, if *L’Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse* are paintings that initiate a journey to salvage Arabic poetry, what is *L’Apocalypse arabe* (The Arab Apocalypse) itself? It is an example of what Negarestani calls an “Inhuman Demon,” or a “xenolithic artifact”:

These relics or artifacts are generally depicted in the shape of objects made of inorganic materials (stone, metal, bones, souls, ashes, etc.). Autonomous, sentient and independent of human will, their existence is characterized by their forsaken status, their immemorial slumber and their provocatively exquisite forms. Their autonomy alone marks their outsideness to the human and to its ecology, the planetary biosphere; this is why they are frequently associated with alien life forms and defined by the prefix xeno- (outside) [. . .] Inorganic demons are parasitic by nature [. . .they] embed their inorganic sentience within the host [. . .inducing] xeno-excitations in their wielders or human hosts. (*C* 223-224)

We argue the Arab Apocalypse is an inhuman demon/xenolithic artifact made of bones, whose parasitic cracking noise we hear as the sun explodes.¹⁷⁷ Let us return to Poem XX (Figure 3): « un soleil fou d'Apocalypse éclate J'entends des craquements d'os » (LAA 33) / “an Apocalyptic sun explodes I hear the cracking of bones” (TAA 39). In *L'Apocalypse arabe*, we see on the page from which these lines are cited a shaded sphere with a line curling away from it; in *The Arab Apocalypse*, we see a distorted black circle with a faint scratch above it, floating in white space. Adnan's xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing disrupts semantics and forces us to think the noesis of meaning-making itself; *vis-à-vis* these graphic signs, we may say there is always a dialectical way outside our sedimented habitats and perspectives. Like Arab knowledge, which “maintains a certain autonomy, thanks to its native tongue” (Khatibi 34), like nature, like memory *qua* autonomous (atemporal) thinking (Adnan), like the autonomous free play of the aesthetic sphere (Kant through Bensmaïa's rereading of Deleuze), the Arab Apocalypse, or the *colonization that forsakes Arabic*, is autonomous, sentient, outside to “the human and to its ecology, the planetary biosphere” (Negarestani, *C* 223). In forcing us to think noesis, Adnan's xenofeminist multilingual asemic writing allows us to think the absolute of the colonial-racial reality in language by inducing in us “xeno-excitations”: « les atomes du soleil se sont incarnés dans ma chair STOP STOP / DOUM ! DOUM ! DOUM ! les rues sont jonchées de cadavres aux bouches ouvertes

¹⁷⁷ My linking of the parasite and noise is energized by Michel Serres, for whom noise is the archetypal parasite: « L'écart est de la chose même et peut-être la produit-il. Peut-être l'origine radicale des choses est-elle cela même que le rationalisme classique jetait aux enfers. Au commencement est le bruit » (*LP* 23) / “The difference is part of the thing itself, and perhaps it even produces the thing. Maybe the radical origin of things is really that difference, even though classical rationalism damned it to hell. In the beginning was the noise” (*TP* 13).

vers le printemps » (*LAA* 29) / “the sun’s atoms are incarnating in my flesh STOP STOP / DOUM ! DOUM ! DOUM ! the streets are covered with corpses whose mouths open to the spring” (*TAA* 35). These xeno-excitations have horrifying psychosomatic side effects. Negarestani explains:

These obscure allergic reactions to inorganic demons are either programmed by the demon-artifact as it embeds itself within the human host (reprogramming the logic of organism), or are produced by the human host in its overreaction to the xenotating existence of the inorganic demon, its unfolding inhumanity and its qualitative state (that is, its inorganicity). Another reason for these cataclysms in the host is the incoming data from the Outside which is inherently overwhelming for the anthropomorphic capacity, and therefore triggers a recoiling mechanism in the host from within, in the form of a flood from without. (*C* 224)

The primary psychosomatic side effect of the xeno-excitations induced in us by the Arab Apocalypse is a practical psychosis, a “thought of difference” (Khatibi 93).¹⁷⁸ We accordingly read the Arab Apocalypse in the context of the Vanheule’s reading of Lacan’s formalist account of psychosis, before arriving at the Sufism of *L’Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse*, which we unearth *vis-à-vis* Adonis. According to Vanheule, Lacan argues that “language makes up the experience of subjectivity and that psychosis is marked by the absence of a crucial signifier” (1-2), which Lacan calls the *nom du père* (Name-of-the-Father). For Lacan, metaphor and metonymy are necessary to subjectivize the subject and establish thematic continuity in sentences, respectively. Following Roman Jakobson, metonymy, for Lacan, is a “mode of speech in which signifiers are combined without the interruption of ambiguous or unexpected meaning [. .

¹⁷⁸ In emphasizing the practicality of psychosis, I am energized by Negarestani’s 2019-2020 seminar at The New Centre for Research & Practice “The Man Who Knew Nothing: Between Neurodiversity & Practical Schizophrenia.”

.metonymic speech] does not attribute a clear position to the subject” (Vanheule 52; 54). And, following Jakobson, metaphor, for Lacan, is a “process at the level of synchrony, in which one signifier is replaced by another based on similarity [. . . metaphors] name the enunciating subject and create an enunciated subject [. . . and this] naming creates a mode of personal identity and inscribes the subject in a network of social relations” (Vanheule 56). In psychosis, however, the process of metaphORIZATION fails, resulting in a *foreclosure* of the metaphor of the Name-of-the-Father that destabilizes metonymic thematization in the signifying chain of language. Vanheule explains that, as a consequence of foreclosure, there are black holes installed in identity, whereby “making accurate interpretations of other people’s intentions and drawing conclusions about how to manage the desire of the other is most complicated and distressing” (69). Ultimately, as Vanheule explains, “signifiers pointing to questions concerning the subject’s existence cannot be experienced as coming from within. Therefore, Lacan qualified the subject in psychosis as a martyr of the unconscious, a passive witness of strange messages coming from without” (79). The psychotic generated by the Arab Apocalypse is a “pythic” martyr who witnesses the colonization that forsakes the Arabic language, which Adnan treats as metaphor, the Name-of-the-Father. To recapitulate and extend our argument, Adnan’s xenofeminist multilingual aseptic writing, which authorizes us to think the absolute of the colonial-racial reality in language, summons the Arab Apocalypse, an inhuman demon, xenolithic artifact, a failed metonymy (of the colonization that forsakes the Arabic language), which induces in us xeno-excitations, whose primary psychosomatic side effect is a practical psychosis, a “thought of difference” (Khatibi 93), whose consequence

is the production of a language that erupts as a “flood from without” (*shath*), thereby disrupting the presupposition of colonial-racial divisions. We maintain that *L’Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse* are paintings that initiate a journey to salvage Arabic poetry, but we offer a minor revision: they are also examples of rational universalist Sufi writing. Adonis asserts:

In Sufi writing, the I and the non-I melt into one, in a dialectical movement, which transforms man himself into a movement that seeks out the hidden part of existence and merges with its secrets. This writing appears more distant than the literariness of speech. It appears to be a word that snatches at what lies behind nature, as if it is a secret atmosphere in what is behind the words. It appears to be waiting for something that is unexpected, to be wishing for something that will not be fulfilled, for when it realizes what it is yearning for, this only increases the sense of longing and urgent solicitation. When we immerse ourselves in such writing, we ask whether the language is audible or touching, whether it is really revelatory or profound. Everything in it appears to be a symbol, a dream or a sign. Night is not night so much as an allusion to another light, and death is not death so much as another life [. . .] This is very apparent in the outpourings of *shath*, which flood out from the unknown world inside man [. . .] *Shath* sheds light on this great world, which is filled with what is sudden and dazzling, with what is infinite. It is an explosive force, which destroys the familiar patterns of thought and expression and writing. (119)

Let us return a final time to Adnan’s *L’Apocalypse arabe* and *The Arab Apocalypse*.

Toward the end of these books, she makes explicit references to language. For example,

Poem XXIV: « soleil connaissant les hommes le soleil est un verbe porté par nos doigts /

soleil : troupeaux de poètes manifestant le pouvoir déchu des mots / DE GRANDS

ANNEAUX PHOSPHORESCENTS ENCHAINENT LA PAROLE A L’ARBRE DU

MAL / un soleil jaune un soleil bleu un soleil noir le circuit du verbe a brûlé

STOP » (Adnan, *LAA* 37) / “sun knower of men the sun is a verb carried by our fingers /

sun: herds of poets manifesting the dethroned power of words / BIG

PHOSPHORESCENT RINGS CHAIN LANGUAGE TO THE TREE OF EVIL / a

yellow sun a blue sun a black sun the language-circuit has burned STOP” (Adnan, *TAA* 43). In the French, we detect additional spaces among « le », « circuit », « du », « verbe », and « a ». In the English, we see a graphic sign that looks like a tree just to the right of “EVIL,” beyond the body of text, floating in white space. Taking seriously the books’ adoption of *shath*, the “flood from without” (Negarestani, *C* 224), we suggest the dialectic between the I and the non-I fuses the Arabic language to the French and English languages, while maintaining a minimum degree of separation among them. We maintain a minimum degree of historicism. The dialectic’s ambition to the universalism of the symbol—“Everything in it [Sufi writing] appears to be a symbol, a dream or a sign”—*vis-à-vis* the becomingMovement that “seeks out the hidden part of existence and merges with its secrets” (Adonis 119) is magnetized by the egalitarian idea of *the infinite*. But, unlike G. W. F. Hegel’s dialectic, the Sufi dialectic is not total. In cracking, it engenders a “secret atmosphere in what is behind the words” (Adonis 119), suggesting through the gesturality of sound and touch impalpable memories, vocabularies, and grammars yet to be uncovered. Such a cracking [*craquement*] refers to the concept of transformation-in-itself: energy. Adnan generously treats as given an absolute contingency of thought, its energy, at which is arrived by remembering the disaster, the dreadful colonization that forsakes the Arabic language. More alienation, more concepts, profusely advance from the Sufi dialectic, whose writing “appears to be waiting for something that is unexpected, to be wishing for something that will not be fulfilled, for when it realizes what it is yearning for, this only increases the sense of longing and urgent solicitation” (Adonis 119). The dialectic, distant from the world, burns out its own language-circuit (Adnan)

vis-à-vis shath and decolonizes the French-English-Arabic *triangulation*. A « soleil noir » (Adnan, *LAA* 37) / “black sun” (Adnan, *TAA* 43) lodged in the core of identity—a nonrelational relational ontology on the side of the object. Such is the objective truth of freedom experienced as psychosis. The Arab Apocalypse, an inhuman demon/xenolithic artifact made of bones, its *drama* in cracking, generously gives us the gift of transformation, of sovereign energy. We use this gift to uphold the night *qua* memory that transgresses conceptual limits, to find a solidarity between those who are individuated against the structural-ontology of *anthropos*. Anything can change. Adnan’s poems are beautiful.

6. Decapitating the disaster

“...their knowledge will have been completely extinguished, even more so than the extinction of the fire [sun] of Heraclitus mentioned by Plato.”—Alfarabi, *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*

« Ô Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps ! levons l’ancre ! / Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort !
Appareillons ! / Si le ciel et la mer sont noirs comme de l’encre, / Nos cœurs que tu
connais sont remplis de rayons ! // Verse-nous ton poison pour qu’il nous réconforte ! /
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau, / Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou
Ciel, qu’importe ? / Au fond de l’Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau* ! »—Charles
Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*

“O Death, old captain, it is time to lift anchor! / This country is a bore, o Death! Let’s
take our chance! / If the sky and the sea are like ink, only blacker, / Our hearts that you
know well are full of radiance! // Serve us your poison that makes being less bitter! / We
would, while this fire burns our brains through and through, / Plunge into the abyss, Hell
or Heaven, what matter? / To the depths of the Unknown in search of the *new*!”—Charles
Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*

“The tense extremes of horror are lessening, and I feel queerly drawn toward the
unknown sea-deeps instead of fearing them. I hear and do strange things in sleep, and
awake with a kind of exaltation instead of terror. I do not believe I need to wait for the
full change as most have waited [. . .] Stupendous and unheard-of splendours await me
below, and I shall seek them soon. *Iä-R’lyeh! Cthulhu fhtagn! Iä! Iä!* [. . .] We shall swim
out to that brooding reef in the sea and dive down through black abysses to Cyclopean
and many-columned Y’ha-nthlei, and in that lair of the Deep Ones we shall dwell amidst
wonder and glory forever.”—H. P. Lovecraft, *The Shadow over Innsmouth*

Our conclusion—what is a hypothesis?

Deriving the inhumanism of energy aesthetics in language

Let us linger with the question of language. Our conclusion’s guiding question is,
“What is a hypothesis?” Our aim in this section is to derive the inhumanism of energy
aesthetics in language. A difference without separability, responding to this question and
fulfilling this aim will require massive supplementation. Let us begin with a *hypothesis*:
apocalyptic literatures about the disaster are capable of deploying formal languages
comprised of meaningless signs in order to energize [*dynamiser*] truths that are

inaccessible to ordinary sense. So, what is a meaningless sign? To answer this question, we first return to Quentin Meillassoux's rationalist rejection of the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) and defense of the necessity of contingency. The PSR, which Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz first made explicit in *La Monadologie* (1714), asserts that everything has a reason for being, and so nothing is irrational.¹⁷⁹ Metaphysics constitutively relies on the PSR.¹⁸⁰ As we demonstrated in our introduction, Meillassoux inverts this dictum: nothing has a reason for being, and so everything is irrational. Meillassoux's speculative materialism is a response to David Hume's problem of induction, which is epitomized in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), and Karl Popper's response to it. For Hume, in a billiard game, experience and logic cannot rationally guarantee the necessity of the physical laws of collision between balls.¹⁸¹ As Nelson Goodman summarizes, "Predictions, of course, pertain to what has not yet been observed. And they

¹⁷⁹ Leibniz writes: « Mais la *raison suffisante* se doit trouver aussi dans les *vérités contingents ou de fait*, c'est-à-dire, dans la suite des choses répandues par l'univers des créatures ; où la résolution en raisons particulières pourrait aller à un détail sans bornes, à cause de la variété immense des choses de la Nature et de la division des corps à l'infini. Il y a une infinité de figures et de mouvements présents et passés qui entrent dans la cause efficiente de mon écriture présente ; et il y a une infinité de petites inclinations et dispositions de mon âme, présentes et passées ; qui entrent dans la cause finale » (*LM* 16) / "But a *sufficient reason* must also be found in *contingent truths*, or *truths of fact*, that is, in the series of things spread throughout the universe of created things, where resolution into particular reasons could go on into endless detail because of the immense variety of things in nature and the division of bodies to infinity. There is an infinity of shapes and motions, both present and past, which enter into the efficient cause of my present writing, and there is an infinity of minute inclinations and dispositions of my soul, which enter into its final cause" (*LMTG* 91-92).

¹⁸⁰ Meillassoux writes: "Every philosophy whose absolute is presented in the form of modally privileged beings or modes of being, insofar as they are given as necessary, is a metaphysics" ("IRR" 119-120).

¹⁸¹ Hume writes: "When I see, for instance, a Billiard-ball moving in a straight line towards another; even suppose motion in the second ball should by accident be suggested to me, as the result of their contact or impulse; may I not conceive, that a hundred different events might as well follow from that cause? May not both these balls remain at absolute rest? May not the first ball return in a straight line, or leap from the second in any line or direction? All these suppositions are consistent and conceivable. Why then should we give the preference to one, which is no more consistent or conceivable than the rest? All our reasonings *a priori* will never be able to show us any foundation for this preference" (18-19).

cannot be logically inferred from what has been observed; for what *has* happened imposes no logical restrictions on what *will* happen” (FFF 59). In *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1934), Popper responds to the problem of induction by defending the inherent falsifiability of scientific hypotheses, which could be replaced by new theories to explain surprising physical behaviors.¹⁸² Meillassoux, in *Métaphysique et fiction des mondes hors-science* (2013), demonstrates that Popper, in privileging epistemology (i.e., experiments and theories), evokes a “science-fiction imaginary” to deal with an “extro-science fiction problem” of ontology (i.e., the stability of physical laws). For Meillassoux, that is, Hume is more interested in a future when the application of scientific theories to the world would be impossible. Meillassoux then responds to Immanuel Kant’s response to the problem of induction, the transcendental deduction. Meillassoux demonstrates that, in attempting to prove the deduction and application of the category of causality to experience, Kant wants to affirm (for us) the necessity of physical laws and therefore distinguish between perception and dream. According to Kant, that is, we cannot imagine the hypothetical billiard game because, if physical laws were contingent—as Meillassoux argues at length in *Après la finitude* (2006)—it follows that consciousness would be impossible. Meillassoux refers to Kant’s hallucinatory

¹⁸² Popper writes: “The root of [Hume’s problem] is the apparent contradiction between what may be called ‘the fundamental thesis of empiricism’—the thesis that experience alone can decide upon the truth or falsity of scientific statements—and Hume’s realization of the inadmissibility of inductive arguments. This contradiction arises only if it is assumed that all empirical scientific statements must be ‘conclusively decidable’, i.e. that their verification and their falsification must both in principle be possible. If we renounce this requirement and admit as empirical also statements which are decidable in one sense only—unilaterally decidable and, more especially, falsifiable—and which may be tested by systematic attempts to falsify them, the contradiction disappears: the method of falsification presupposes no inductive inference, but only the tautological transformations of deductive logic whose validity is not in dispute” (20).

cinnabar example in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), where objects perpetually decompose, and decodes a lawless chaos whereby « puisque la contingence des lois, supposée par Hume, impliquerait, si elle était vraie, l’abolition de la représentation et du monde, le fait même *qu’il y ait* représentation d’un monde vaut réfutation de l’hypothèse humienne » (FHS 41) / “since the contingency of laws, as Hume envisioned it, would imply the abolition of representation and of the world, the very fact *that there had been* representation of a world would refute the Humean hypothesis” (XSF 30).¹⁸³ Thus, for Meillassoux, Kant’s adoption of an “extro-science fiction imaginary” goes too far when responding to the problem of induction, amounting to a pure chaos where narration would be impossible, where « toute entité implorerait aussitôt que créée, et rien n’aurait le temps de se différencier de rien » (FSH 41) / “every entity would implode as soon as it was created; and nothing would have the time to differentiate itself from nothing” (XSF 30). In challenging Kantian « fiction (des mondes) hors-science » (FHS) (FHS 7) / “extro-science fiction” (XSF) (XSF 3), Meillassoux theorizes FHS/XSF worlds that, on the one hand, are more regular than Kant’s and, on the other, are not dependent on some universal law. To wit, FHS/XSF worlds follow two requirements: 1) no real or fantastic logic can explain them and 2) the question of science nonetheless continues to pose a problem for them. As we argued in our introduction, apocalyptic literatures about the

¹⁸³ Kant writes: “If cinnabar were sometimes red and sometimes black, sometimes light and sometimes heavy, if a person could be changed now into this, now into another animal shape, if on the longest day the fields were sometimes covered with fruit, sometimes with ice and snow, then my empirical imagination would never be in a position, when representing the colour red, to think of heavy cinnabar. Nor could an empirical synthesis of reproduction take place, if a certain name were given sometimes to this, sometimes to that object, or if the same object were sometimes called by one, and sometimes by another name, without any rule to which appearances by themselves are subject” (130).

disaster are likewise incommensurate with homogenous systems, such as real or fantastic logic and science, in addition to capitalism, ontology, and the colonial-racial reality. But, we are more interested here in determining the extent to which Meillassoux's speculative materialism solves Goodman's "new riddle of induction" from *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, the "grue paradox." Staging this problematic amounts to a reconceptualization of language and contributes to the decolonization of the analytic-continental philosophy correlation. More specifically, it demonstrates that any presupposed and real differences between analytic and continental philosophy ought to be subsumed into *philosophy*. As Reza Negarestani asserts: "The ambitions of philosophy are far too vast and comprehensive for them to be pigeonholed into cozy compartments" (*IS* 5). It also helps us resist the panic attack of the surpassing disaster, or "disaster," which, remember, occults *the disaster*, or the absolute negativity—apart, asunder, away, utterly—of a planet, Earth. We will make explicit our swerve's significance to apocalyptic literatures about the disaster below: allow us to dwell on this for a few moments.

Goodman claims that, although Hume's problem has been ostensibly solved, "we face new problems [of induction] that are not as yet very widely understood" (*FFF* 59). He therefore returns to the problem of induction and above all contends it raises the question of inductive validity:

[I]nductive inference [. . .] is justified by conformity to general rules, and a general rule by conformity to accepted inductive inferences. Predictions are justified if they conform to valid canons of induction; and the canons are valid if they accurately codify accepted inductive practice [. . .] The validity of a prediction consisted for [Hume] in its arising from habit, and thus in its exemplifying some past regularity. His answer was incomplete and perhaps not entirely correct; but it was not beside the point. The problem of induction is not a

problem of demonstration but a problem of defining the difference between valid and invalid predictions. (*FFF* 64-65)

Goodman then examines the paradigmatic statement that generalizes evidence, the hypothesis, and concludes that only a “statement that is *lawlike*—regardless of its truth or falsity or its scientific importance—is capable of receiving confirmation from an instance of it; accidental statements are not” (*FFF* 73). No relativistic practice of including “a few odd and unwanted cases” (Goodman, *FFF* 73), this conclusion leads him to posit a radically new riddle of induction that helps us distinguish between lawlike and accidental predictions. Again, we will make explicit our swerve’s significance to apocalyptic literatures about the disaster below. For now, let us say that Goodman’s new riddle of induction also forces the problem of defining confirmation to displace the problem of justifying induction. Goodman posits and explains:

Suppose that all emeralds examined before a certain time t are green. At time t , then, our observations support the hypothesis that all emeralds are green [. . .] Our evidence statements assert that emerald a is green, and that emerald b is green, and so on; and each confirms the general hypothesis that all emeralds are green [. . .] Now let me introduce another predicate less familiar than “green”. It is the predicate “grue” and it applies to all things examined before t just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are blue. Then at time t we have, for each evidence statement asserting that a given emerald is green, a parallel evidence statement asserting that the emerald is grue. And the statements that emerald a is grue, that emerald b is grue, and so on, will each confirm the general hypothesis that all emeralds are grue. Thus according to our definition, the prediction that all emeralds subsequently examined will be green and the prediction that all will be grue are alike confirmed by evidence statements describing the same observations. But if an emerald subsequently examined is grue, it is blue and hence not green. Thus although we are well aware which of the two incompatible predictions is genuinely confirmed, they are equally well confirmed according to our present definition. Moreover, it is clear that if we simply choose an appropriate predicate, then on the basis of these same observations we shall have equal confirmation, by our definition, for any prediction whatever about other emeralds—or indeed about anything else [. . .] only the predictions subsumed under lawlike hypotheses are genuinely confirmed;

but we have no criterion as yet for determining lawlikeness. And now we see that without some such criterion, our definition not merely includes a few unwanted cases, but is so completely ineffectual that it virtually excludes nothing. We are left once again with the intolerable result that anything confirms anything. (*FFF* 73-75)

It might be thus objected that the external information that all emeralds are grue surreptitiously confirms the hypothesis that all emeralds are green. Goodman concedes that we ought to accept that external information *indirectly* impacts the hypothesis in question through other alike hypotheses that are confirmed by such information, or evidence.¹⁸⁴ Lawlikeness, then, would be “amenability to confirmation by direct positive instances when found” (Goodman, *FFF* 76); and, lawlike hypotheses would refer to the *general*, to projectible predicate *signs*—e.g., green, blue. Accidentalness would be spatial or temporal restriction; and, accidental hypotheses would refer to the *particular*, to nonprojectible predicate *signs*—e.g., grue. But, Goodman demonstrates that these definitions do not account for the problem of defining confirmation. He recapitulates:

One might say roughly that the first question was “Why does a positive instance of a hypothesis give any grounds for predicting further instances?”; that the newer question was “What is a positive instance of a hypothesis?”; and that the crucial remaining question is “What hypotheses are confirmed by their positive instances?” The vast amount of effort expended on the problem of induction in modern times has thus altered our afflictions but hardly relieved them. The original difficulty about induction arose from the recognition that anything may follow upon anything. Then, in attempting to define confirmation in terms of the converse of the consequence relation, we found ourselves with the distressingly similar difficulty that our definition would make any statement confirm any other. And now, after modifying our definition drastically, we still get the old

¹⁸⁴ This concession to indirectness parallels the early Althusser’s Montesquieuvian argument that science and the existing state only act indirectly on the object of science and the project of state reform, respectively, thereby yielding to contingency, an argument I studied in the chapter on *Dhalgren*. Bringing the late Althusser’s aleatory materialism and Meillassoux’s speculative materialism in dialogue with Goodman’s new riddle of induction and would be quite interesting. But, I cannot expand on these parallels here because they merit an article-length discussion.

devastating result that any statement will confirm any statement. (Goodman, *FFF* 81)

The essential problem that therefore (re)emerges is that of distinguishing between valid (i.e., confirmable) and invalid (i.e., nonconfirmable) inductive inferences (i.e., hypotheses); between, that is, projectible predicate signs (e.g., green, blue) and nonprojectible predicate signs (e.g., grue). An objection emerges. Goodman asks “why we need worry about such unfamiliar predicates as ‘grue’ or about accidental hypotheses in general, since we are unlikely to use them in predictions” (*FFF* 80). After all, we are not likely to encounter a meaningless sign like “grue” in daily life. But, what about in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster? We agree with Goodman: “if we seek a theory at all, we cannot excuse gross anomalies resulting from a proposed theory by pleading that we can avoid them in practice” (*FFF* 80). Indeed, the *damned* cases like grue are “clinically pure cases that, though seldom encountered in practice, nevertheless display to best advantage the symptoms of a widespread and destructive malady” (Goodman, *FFF* 80). For us, the damned of the Anthropocene, the widespread and destructive malady is the colonial-racial reality. In other words, the law of this study is the colonial-racial reality according to which the white European straight male human subject (*anthropos*) is taken to be *the* (rational) *subject* and its subaltern Others are taken to be its nonhuman (“irrational”) objects. And the accident of this study is an energy that is materially multiple, radically contingent, on the side of the object, and a reclamation of nature’s separation from society. As we argued in our chapter on *L’Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse*, this accident might help us find a solidarity between those of us nonhumans who are individuated against the structural-ontology of *anthropos*. All laws, natural and

otherwise, can change. We are close to Catherine Malabou's "destructive plasticity" [*plasticité destructive*].¹⁸⁵

We turn, finally, to Meillassoux's "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Sign Devoid of Meaning" (2012) in order to at once determine the extent to which it solves Goodman's new riddle of induction and answer our conclusion's guiding question, "What is a hypothesis?" Meillassoux contends we are capable of thinking signs devoid of meaning (*dm*), like grue; furthermore, he argues that the absoluteness of *dm* is the possibility condition of any natural science insofar as its absoluteness produces "hypothetical (revisable) descriptions of the present world, capable, in turn, of being true in an absolute sense—that is to say, independently of our existence" ("IRR" 156).¹⁸⁶ Meillassoux distinguishes between "primoabsolutive properties," which are necessary properties of every being, and "deuteroabsolutive

¹⁸⁵ See Malabou, Catherine. *Ontologie de l'accident*. Éditions Léo Scheer, 2009 / *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*. Translated by Carolyn Shead, Polity, 2012. Malabou writes: "We must all of us recognize that we might, one day, become someone else, an absolute other, someone who will never be reconciled with themselves again, someone who will be this form of us without redemption or atonement, without last wishes, this damned form, outside of time. These modes of being without genealogy have nothing to do with the wholly other found in the mystical ethics of the twentieth century. The Wholly Other I'm talking about remains always and forever a stranger to the Other" (2-3). I can't request the original French from Interlibrary Loan because campus has been closed due to COVID-19. In a future revision, I'll examine Malabou's "destructive plasticity" *vis-à-vis* Thomas Lynch's *Apocalyptic Political Theology: Hegel, Taubes and Malabou* (2019), Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness* (1903), and Peter Goodrich's *Schreber's Law: Jurisprudence and Judgment in Transition* (2018).

¹⁸⁶ There is no original French because this essay, which was translated by Robin Mackay and Moritz Gansen, was distributed to participants in a workshop that took place at Freie Universität in Berlin on 21 April 2012. I therefore cite where it was reproduced: Meillassoux, Quentin. "Iteration, Reiteration, Repetition: A Speculative Analysis of the Sign Devoid of Meaning." *Genealogies of Speculation: Materialism and Subjectivity Since Structuralism*, edited by Armen Avanessian and Suhail Malik. Translated by Robin Mackay and Moritz Gansen, Bloomsbury, 2016, pp. 117-197.

properties,” which are not absolutely necessary but which could be “facts which, as to their existence, are *radically independent of thought*” (“IRR” 156). He then explains:

A figural derivation is eternal: it is valid for any possible reality, and in this sense it is primoabsolutive. What I am going to derive is thus not the fact that *our* world, the actual world, is describable in mathematical terms—but that *every possible world* can be mathematized and can conserve in itself these mathematical characteristics, whether or not there is any thinking to formulate them. I will thus legitimate the deuterioabsolutive practice of the experimental sciences, which strive to propose a determinate series of mathematized descriptions of the real. The actual world reproduced by the sciences is thinkable, against the correlationist thesis, in terms of a world independent of our intention. In this way, the theories put forward by science—whatever they may be—could always *qua* hypotheses, be thought as *true in themselves* and not only ‘for us’. And if this set of theories is superseded, it will be in favour of another new set of theories and/or experimental facts, which in their turn, as every time, could be posited as absolutely true, of a deuterioabsolutive truth. (Meillassoux, “IRR” 157)

In this passage, Meillassoux 1) *indirectly solves* Goodman’s riddle, which led us back to the epistemological question of inductive validity (i.e., of distinguishing between valid, or confirmable, and nonvalid, or nonconfirmable, inductive inferences, or hypotheses); 2) *sidesteps* Kantian chaos; and, 3) *ontologizes* Popper’s epistemological response to Hume’s problem (i.e., hypotheses are revisable). For Meillassoux, that is, the primoabsolutive practice of figural derivation—viz., its capacity to prove that the deuterioabsolutive practice of the experimental sciences produces inductive inferences, or revisable hypotheses, which are not absolutely necessary but which could be radically independent of thought—intervenes in the epistemological question of induction, giving place to the absolute necessity of the contingency of the laws of nature, thereby solving Hume’s problem on appropriately ontological terrain. From the *Grand Dehors* (great outdoors) in, Meillassoux forces the problem of thought’s capability of the absolute to displace the question of inductive validity. It might be thus objected that the ontological

problem (i.e., the stability of physical laws) surreptitiously displaces the epistemological problem (i.e., inductive validity). But, we take seriously Goodman's assertion that external statements indirectly impact internal statements through other alike statements that are confirmed by external statements, or evidence. In our analysis, Meillassoux implores us to yield to contingency—to the accidental statement recast as spatiotemporal latitude. *The lawlike is the accidental, and the accidental is the lawlike*. It doesn't matter whether a hypothesis is valid/confirmable or nonvalid/nonconfirmable because all hypotheses could be "*true in themselves* and not only 'for us'." And, if a hypothesis is superseded, it will simply be in favor of another hypothesis that "could be posited as absolutely true, of a deuterioabsolutive truth." We are left with the tolerable result that anything *could* confirm anything.

Meillassoux is now freed to ask, "can we found the capacity of mathematics to grant us access to the Kingdom of the dead, and then to return so as to recount to the living the discoveries of such a journey?" ("IRR" 157). His response is that the deuterioabsolutive formal language of mathematics is a realm of *dm*, meaningless signs, perhaps, ~~non~~projectible predicates, like *grue*. Though we do not follow Meillassoux into mathematics *per se*, we do follow him into the realm of *dm*, meaningless signs, by taking up what seems to us the most interesting parts of his derivation:

[A]lphabetical natural languages do indeed make rule-governed use of letters and syllables that are, in themselves, devoid of signification—but they do so at the morphological level of the constitution of words, and not at the syntactical level of the constitution of sentences. At the syntactical level, a natural language can certainly also use words devoid of meaning—for example, Mallarmé's 'ptyx', if we agree that this word means nothing—but there is no rule that *imposes* this type of word upon natural languages. Their propensity is, on the contrary, to avoid them, so as to fulfil their ordinary function of communication. Consequently,

what is proper to a natural language is to grant, at the level of syntax, a contingent (and generally marginal) role to the sign *dm*. (“IRR” 161-162)¹⁸⁷

Thus, Meillassoux distinguishes between “formal meaning,” proper to which is the “rule-governed use of syntactical units that are devoid of signification,” and “ordinary meaning,” proper to which is the “*absence* of a rule-governed use of syntactical units devoid of meaning” (“IRR” 162). For him, formal languages alone are “*capable of producing deuterobabsolute truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense*” (Meillassoux, “IRR” 162). Recall our hypothesis: apocalyptic literatures about the disaster are capable of deploying formal languages comprised of meaningless signs in order to energize truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense. The truth of *The Drowned World* is the speculative thought of a future world without the structural-ontology of *anthropos*; the truth of *Dhalgren* is the speculative thought that is a graphic formalization of the first three lines of the novel, of *Dhalgren*; the truth of *Le Transperceneige* is the speculative thought of the eternal return; the truth of *L’Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse* is the speculative thought of the absolute of the colonial-racial reality in language. And, although there is clearly no rule that imposes its “type” on natural languages in general,

¹⁸⁷ Mallarmé’s “Sonnet en yx” (1887): « Ses purs ongles très haut dédiant leur onyx, / L’Angoisse ce minuit, soutient, lampadophore / Maint rêve vespéral brûlé par le Phénix / Que ne recueille pas de cinéraire amphore / Sur les crédences, au salon vide : nul ptyx, / Aboli bibelot d’inanité sonore, / (Car le Maître est allé puiser des pleurs au Styx / Avec ce seul objet dont le Néant s’honore). / Mais proche la croisée au nord vacante, un or / Agonise selon peut-être le décor / Des licornes ruant du feu contre une nixe, / Elle, défunte nue en le miroir, encor / Que, dans l’oubli fermé par le cadre, se fixe / De scintillations sitôt le septuor. » (68; 70) / “With her pure nails offering their onyx high, / lampbearer Agony tonight sustains / many a vesperal fantasy burned by / the Phoenix, which no funerary urn contains / on the empty room’s credences: no ptyx, / abolished bauble, sonorous inanity / (Master has gone to draw tears from the Styx / with that one thing, the Void’s sole source of vanity). / Yet near the vacant northward casement dies / a gold possibly from the decorations / of unicorns lashing a nymph with flame; / dead, naked in the looking-glass she lies / though the oblivion bounded by that frame / now spans a fixed septet of scintillations” (69; 71).

consider Meillassoux's reference to Stéphane Mallarmé's "ptyx" as an example of a natural language using meaningless words at a syntactical level. Ptyx, that is to say, has no meaning in any natural language but is nevertheless constituted by the rime of the poem itself.¹⁸⁸ We are interested in Meillassoux's subtle slide to the semantical level, to the assertion that a natural language only uses meaningless signs when we agree they are meaningless.

By adopting Robert Brandom's rationalist inferentialism, we argue that we seek and speak of the truth of meaninglessness because "we are makers and takers of *reasons*" (RP 176). This argument will allow us to at once refine our conclusion to the problem of induction (i.e., anything could confirm anything) and verify our hypothesis that apocalyptic literatures about the disaster are capable of deploying formal languages comprised of meaningless signs in order to energize truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense. To elaborate this argument, we turn to Brandom's chapter "Why Truth Is Not Important in Philosophy" in *Reason in Philosophy* (2009), in which he asserts (i.e., puts forward as true) we ought to think about our propositions (i.e., true or false statements) and concepts (i.e., norms of evaluating truth) in terms of inference rather than truth, seemingly contradicting Meillassoux's principal assertion that we ought to (re)discover thought's capability of "eternal truths" ("IRR" 117). Following Gottlob Frege, for whom "good inferences never take premises that are true into conclusions that are not true" (RP 166), Brandom then asserts we should obtain not only knowledge of,

¹⁸⁸ See Grubbs, Henry A. "Mallarmé's 'Ptyx' Sonnet: An Analytical and Critical Study." *PMLA*, vol. 65, no. 2, March 1950, pp. 75-89.

but an understanding of good inference—of the roles, that is, propositions and concepts play in *reasoning*.¹⁸⁹ Throughout this study, our close readings constitute our reasoning; that is, the validity of our assertions hinges entirely on our close readings, our proofs. We therefore invite charges of sophistry; indeed, such charges energize us to revise our writing because we don't own it.¹⁹⁰ Again following Frege, Brandom understands that “anything that can play the role both of premise and conclusion in an inference will be the right sort of thing to be evaluated as to its *truth*” (*RP* 168). Thus, from an inferentialist approach to semantics, it is more precise to say that Brandom puts forward as an “appropriate *premise* from which to make *inferences*” (*RP* 168) that we ought to think about our propositions and concepts in terms of inference rather than truth. For us, what is most important is what we can infer from our close readings, which constitute our reasoning. What is most important for us is how we might transform the world using the worlds we study: *The Drowned World*, *Dhalgren*, *Le Transperceneige*, and *L'Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse*. Brandom concludes that truth is “what is both preserved by good inferences and what one is putting something forward *as* when one asserts it” (*RP* 168). So, while truth remains, its importance in philosophy is superseded by inference.

¹⁸⁹ Or, from “knowing that” (knowledge) to “knowing how” (understanding): “The talk of ‘knowledge’ here is very different from that involved in knowledge of truth conditions. For it is a kind of knowing *how* rather than knowing *that*: knowing how to *do* something, namely distinguish in practice between good inference and bad inference in which the sentence appears as a premise or conclusion, rather than knowing *that* the truth conditions are such-and-such. Understanding shows up on this account as a practical ability, a kind of skill: sorting possible inferences into good ones and bad ones, endorsing or being disposed to make some of them, and rejecting or being disposed not to make some others” (Brandom, *RP* 169).

¹⁹⁰ I am energized by the precedent Meillassoux has generously set. Precedents matter. As Graham Harman explains: “What makes Meillassoux so audacious is precisely his willingness to let everything hang from the threads of his proofs, and thus to invite charges of sophistry from anyone who happens to be unconvinced” (37). See Harman, Graham. *Quentin Meillassoux: Philosophy in the Making*. Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

But, it might be objected that inferentialism overestimates our rationality, to which

Brandom responds:

We are rational creatures in the sense that our claims and aims are always liable to *assessment* as to our reasons for them [. . .inferentialism] says that we are beings that live and move and have our being in the space of *reasons*. We are, at base, creatures who give and ask for reasons—who are sensitive to that “force of the better reason,” persuasive rather than coercive, which so mystified and fascinated the ancient Greek philosophers [. . .] Wittgenstein famously said that language does not have a ‘downtown’: a core set of practices on which the rest depends, and around which they are arrayed, like suburbs. But inferentialism says that practices of giving and asking for *reasons* are the ‘downtown’ of language [. . .and if] inferentialism is the right way to think about contentfulness, then the game of giving and asking for reasons *is* privileged among the games we play with words. (*RP* 174-176)

We agree with Brandom: we are rational creatures who give and ask for reasons. We are left with the satisfactory result to the problem of induction that anything could confirm anything iff our hypotheses are understood *as assertions* that put forward the appropriate premises from which to make inferences. Indeed, as Brandom argues: “It is not possible to make sense of the notion of inference apart from that of assertion, since assertions are the termini of inferential moves” (*RP* 168). It might be thus objected that the assertion surreptitiously displaces the hypothesis. But, we still agree with Goodman’s assertion that external statements indirectly impact internal statements through other alike statements that are confirmed by external statements, or evidence. And we maintain from Meillassoux that hypotheses (i.e., assertions) could be “*true in themselves* and not only ‘for us’” (“IRR” 157). Inferentialism, in the final analysis, allows us to yield to *both* intersubjective norms of evaluating truth *and* the objective truth of things-in-themselves. This study’s guiding intersubjective norms of evaluating truth are egalitarianism and universal justice; we have located the objective truth of things-in-themselves in the form

of the speculative thoughts derived from closely reading *The Drowned World*, *Dhalgren*, *Le Transperceneige*, and *L'Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse*. To return to Meillassoux's assertion that a natural language only uses meaningless signs (e.g., ptyx, *Dhalgren*, etc.) when we agree they are meaningless, we can now say we agree signs are meaningless (∴ signs-in-themselves) in the social game of giving and asking for reasons, in the game, perhaps, of citation—the noise, that is, of the *implied* encomium, the *laudatio*.

The assertion that we are rational creatures who give and ask for reasons entails the question of the human. We therefore turn to Negarestani's "The Labor of the Inhuman" (2014), in which he adopts an inferentialist perspective and, without relapsing into the colonial-racial paradigm of absolute mastery, defends the human's capability of rationality. He explains:

Inhumanism is the extended practical elaboration of humanism; it is born of a diligent commitment to the project of enlightenment humanism. A universal wave that erases the self-portrait of man drawn in sand. Inhumanism is a vector of revision. It relentlessly revises what it means to be human by removing its supposedly self-evident characteristics while preserving certain invariances. At the same time, inhumanism registers itself as a demand for construction: it demands that we define what it means to be human by treating the human as a constructible hypothesis, a space of navigation and intervention. (Negarestani, "LI" 427)¹⁹¹

Thus, the labor of the inhuman consists in elaborating what it means to be human without recourse to finitude, determinism, or theology. We hereby expand on our posthumanism by crystallizing our inhumanism *vis-à-vis* Negarestani's inhumanist rationalism and the

¹⁹¹ In a future revision, I'll examine enlightenment humanism *vis-à-vis* Ray Brassier's "Prometheanism and its Critics" (2014) and Margaret C. Jacob's *The Secular Enlightenment* (2019).

late Frantz Fanon below because David Roden's Speculative Posthumanism (SP), in its generous unboundedness, its nonlinear dynamics, its no-space, does not necessarily allow for the decolonization and generation of thought that accompanies rationalist stricture.¹⁹² Being human, in Negarestani's inhumanist elaboration, means being capable of adopting an intervening attitude that "seeks to elaborate the content of a commitment [e.g., being human], and then update that commitment according to the ramifications of collateral commitments that are made explicit in the course of that elaboration" ("LI" 429). Being human means understanding what could be inferred by making assertions, which, again, could both confirm anything and be true-in-themselves. Negarestani contends that the necessary possibility condition of the human is the capability of sapience, to practice "inference and to approach non-canonical truth by entering the deontic game of giving and asking for reasons" ("LI" 432). First, he qualifies that, in this game, we "(1) deploy a vocabulary, (2) use a vocabulary to specify a set of abilities or practices, (3) elaborate one set of abilities or practices in terms of another set of abilities-or-practices, and (4) use one vocabulary to characterize the other" (Negarestani, "LI" 433). And it is in this social game that we find the "functional kernel of genuine collectivity, a collaborative project of practical freedom referred to as 'we' whose boundaries are not only negotiable but also constructible and synthetic" (Negarestani, "LI" 434). Second, Negarestani argues that the

¹⁹² Here, I am informed by and agree with Negarestani's critique of Roden's SP: "Firstly, even if we follow Roden in ruling out the rational (i.e., linguistic-inferential) conditions necessary for the realization of human agency, it is still far from obvious how neatly a feature of nonlinear dynamic systems, i.e., divergence from initial conditions, can be extended to all conditions of realization. Not all complex systems and conditions necessary for emergent behaviours can be framed in the context of nonlinear dynamics and stability analysis. Nonlinear dynamics is not a necessary criterion for complexity, nor is divergence from initial conditions" (*IS* 97-98).

mark of sapience is commitment, to vacillate perpetually “between doing something in order to count as saying it, and saying something specific in order to express and characterize that doing” (“LI” 434). The mark of sapience is the capability of combining assertion *qua* belief and assertion *qua* making, of understanding, that is, good inference in language *qua* public space. Negarestani ascertains humanity-*qua*-commitment’s rendering of reason as an ongoing process oriented toward its own actualization, “not as a rigid or immutable thing but as an evolving space that reconstitutes itself through revisable rules which simultaneously preserve ignorance and mitigate it” (“LI” 437). Reason is an empty absolute truth: “even though its genesis is historical, its activation implies the deactivation of historical anticipations of what humanity can be or become” (Negarestani, “LI” 450). Inhumanism designates this corrosive force of reason, which returns from the future of collaborative social revision to pull the human of the past toward it, a deracination of the present. Negarestani claims, “one may well ask whether it is worthwhile or useful to call what is left behind ‘human’ at all” (“LI” 446). We push further: like the eco-racial disaster that weaponizes energy aesthetics to contribute to the destruction of the antiblack world, “the human” is a meaningless sign whose inhumanist elaboration *vis-à-vis* autonomous reason impels us to commit to the making of a future world of egalitarianism and universal justice that would attend to the ways that racialization and colonial violence condition and are perpetuated by the capitalist system that has caused ecological collapse. In Negarestani’s final analysis, indeed, adaptation to an autonomous conception of reason, yielding to collaborative revision in language, “coincides with the revisionary and constructive project of freedom” (“LI” 466). In

“Inhumanism, Reason, Blackness, Feminism” (2017), Nina Power elaborates and updates this coincidence:

Inhumanism as a starting point is the simultaneous recognition of the lack of humanism (and humanity) as imposition, and of inhumanism as absolute, collective, shared human capacity for reason. Inhumanism may tell us things we do not like to hear, but it does so *collectively*. Via obstacle, negation and the overcoming of ideology, it creates an empty image of collective thought that is nevertheless crystalline in its brilliance. The insights into inhumanism afforded by those practically excluded from the life of the mind and from politics are today the best positioned to reinvent reason, universalism and the positive inhumanism at the heart of inhumanism itself.¹⁹³

We agree: we nonliving nonwhite non-European nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodities, we inorganic inert matter practically excluded from the life of the mind [*nous*] and from politics, have insights into inhumanism in light of the Anthropocene and the colonial-racial reality.

The twinning questions that manifest here are a) *how* are apocalyptic literatures about the disaster capable of deploying formal languages comprised of meaningless signs in order to energize truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense and b) *why* do apocalyptic literatures about the disaster deploy formal languages comprised of meaningless signs in order to energize truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense? Let us first tackle the “how,” which returns us to the question of energy aesthetics, a functionalist epistemology of employing symbols to make postsustainable worlds that revel in the sovereign expenditure of an energy that is 1) a material multiple; 2) radically contingent; 3) on the side of the object; and, 4) a reclamation of nature’s separation from

¹⁹³ I cite here Power, Nina. “Inhumanism, Reason, Blackness, Feminism.” *Glass Bead*, Site 1: Logic Gate, the Politics of the Artifactual Mind, 2017, <https://www.glass-bead.org/article/inhumanism-reason-blackness-feminism/?lang=enview>.

society. Having both defined a meaningless sign and provided a satisfactory result to the problem of induction—again, that anything could confirm anything iff our hypotheses are understood as assertions that put forward the appropriate premises from which to make inferences—we are now freed to *assert* that apocalyptic literatures about the disaster are capable of deploying formal languages comprised of meaningless signs in order to energize truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense inasmuch as these truths are postsustainable worlds that revel in the sovereign expenditure of energy. In the context of this study, the withdrawn worlds made by *The Drowned World*, *Dhalgren*, *Le Transperceneige*, and *L'Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse* and, more precisely, the sovereign energy found within them—1) the *fata-morganic* Drowned World of *The Drowned World*; 2) the anathematic object without a subject (O()) of *Dhalgren*; 3) the eternal return of *Le Transperceneige*; and, 4) the aseptic French-English-Arabic triangulation in the language of *L'Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse*—are meaningless signs that together energize a truth inaccessible to ordinary sense: energy-circulation-in-itself. We are thus returned to Georges Bataille, for whom energy circulation is an absolute truth and the material basis of life:

La méconnaissance par l'homme des données matérielles de sa vie le fait encore errer gravement. L'humanité exploite des ressources matérielles données, mais si elle en limite l'emploi, comme elle fait, à la résolution [. . .] des difficultés immédiates rencontrées par elle, elle assigne aux forces qu'elle met en œuvre une fin que celles-ci ne peuvent avoir. Au-delà de nos fins immédiates, son œuvre, en effet, poursuit l'accomplissement inutile et infini de l'univers. (*PM* 59)

Man's disregard for the material basis of his life still causes him to err in a serious way. Humanity exploits given material resources, but by restricting them as it does to a resolution of the immediate difficulties it encounters [. . .] it assigns to the forces it employs an end which they cannot have. Beyond our immediate ends,

man's activity in fact pursues the useless and infinite fulfilment of the universe.
(AS 21)

These forces, whose terrestrial movement *anthropos* (white European rational straight human Man) exploits, constitute the *universal* movement of energy circulation. The elaboration of a postsustainable economy (Allan Stoekl), a solar economy, would entail first acknowledging a lawlike accident, an accidental law: the system of *anthropos* has received more energy (i.e., wealth) than necessary for sustaining its life. And, as Bataille writes, « si le système ne peut plus croître, ou si l'excédent ne peut en entier être absorbé dans sa croissance, *il faut nécessairement le perdre sans profit, le dépenser*, volontiers ou non, glorieusement ou sinon de façon catastrophique » (PM 60) / “if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically” (AS 21). The Anthropocene is the consequence of *anthropos*'s *catastrophic* expenditure of excess energy mined from nonliving nonwhite non-European nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodities (i.e., inorganic inert matter) for immediate needs and ends (i.e., necessity, productivity). As should go without saying, *anthropos* has long since reached its limits for growth. Bataille instead defends *glorious* expenditures of energy, without return. Glory has everything to do with truth, nothing to do with morality; the glorious expenditure (i.e., the useless consumption of energy), the waste [*dilapidation*], is mere surrender to the inexorable circulation of inhuman energy, whose infinite resources are generously gifted to us on Earth by the sun, from which we are absolutely withdrawn. Inferring from our chapter on *Dhargren*, the sovereign subject identifies with this circulation. We the damned, the accursed share [*la part maudite*],

claim our sovereignty. In our nonliving existence as inorganic inert matter, we embrace the inhuman power [*puissance*] of energy, of reason, and allow ourselves to be pulled toward that « extrémité rigoureuse de la conscience » (Bataille, *PM* 73) / “rigorous extreme of consciousness” (Bataille, *AS* 34). We found there, in death, swerve, noise [*bruit*], the « vérité profonde du mouvement dont la vie est l’exposition » (Bataille, *PM* 73) / “profound truth of that movement of which life is the manifestation” (Bataille, *AS* 35). In a *volte-face*, the damned become alive. The living dead matters, sovereign subjects, we identify with the « mouvement fondamental qui tend à la richesse à sa fonction, au don, au gaspillage sans contrepartie » (Bataille, *PM* 76) / “basic movement that tends to restore wealth to its function, to gift-giving, to squandering without reciprocation” (Bataille, *AS* 38). Such is the objective truth of freedom subjectively experienced as *Angst*. But, *Angst* is a meaningless sign for those who overflow with life, and for « l’ensemble de la vie qui est un débordement par essence » (Bataille, *PM* 77) / “life as a whole, which is an overflowing by its very nature” (Bataille, *AS* 39). For us, even death is a meaningless sign. With *jouissance*, we adopt what Bataille calls the « point du vue général » (*PM* 77) / “general point of view” (*AS* 39), where resources are in excess. We rational earthlings just have to find them; there is always an alternative.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ In a future revision, I’ll consider Bataille as a Romantic anti-Newtonian because he transforms thought into the sun. Donald Ault’s discussion of solidification in *Visionary Physics: Blake’s Response to Newton* (1974) will be instructive in this context. I’ll also critique Slavoj Žižek’s reading of Bataille as a pre-Newtonian in *The Indivisible Remainder: On Schelling and Related Matters* (2007). Noah Heringman’s *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (2010) will be a generative interlocutor. I don’t think we’ve ever left Romanticism. I’ll thus return to François-René de Chateaubriand’s *René* (1802), which might be among the first apocalyptic literatures about the disaster.

Let us now tackle the question of why apocalyptic literatures about the disaster deploy formal languages comprised of meaningless signs in order to energize truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense. The “why” gives rise to the question of translation in light of the Anthropocene and the structural-ontological inequalities of the colonial-racial reality. *This is our political “choice.”* We therefore turn to Jon Solomon’s “Logistical Species and Translational Process” (2016), where he brings Naoki Sakai’s biopolitical theory of translation into a dialogue with Gilbert Simondon’s philosophy of individuation from which he obtains a theory of translation that does not reaffirm colonial-racial divisions.¹⁹⁵ First, following Sakai, Solomon asserts that, *contra* the real practice of translation, the “*representational regime of translation [. . .] is mobilized by the modern nation-state to configure itself in relation to an international cartography of axes.*”¹⁹⁶ Area studies privileges this regime.¹⁹⁷ Second, following Simondon’s (nonhylomorphic) assertion that thought and being operate according to “themes of non-deterministic causality and of non-substantial identity” (Bardin 8), respectively, Solomon establishes an operation, or relational process, between the epistemology and ontology of

¹⁹⁵ See Sakai, Naoki. *Translation and Subjectivity: On “Japan” and Cultural Nationalism*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997. Also, see Simondon, Gilbert. *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information*. Million, 2005.

¹⁹⁶ I cite, in this section, Solomon, Jon. “Logistical Species and Translational Process: A Critique of the Colonial-Imperial Modernity.” *Intermedialités*, no. 27, Spring 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039809ar>.

¹⁹⁷ Solomon elaborates: “Historically speaking, the ‘fields’ that composed area studies consisted of an interdisciplinary arrangement in which both normative human sciences and regional and local knowledge were mobilized to produce knowledge on areas. The salient feature of knowledge production in the area studies format was not only to reproduce political legitimacy for (neo)colonial discursivity and provide policy for colonial-type governmentality, but first and foremost to fashion subjectivity in relation to a process of bordering. Area studies, in other words, surreptitiously assumes, in an inverted form, the task that one would normally assign to studies of national aesthetics and tradition.”

translation.¹⁹⁸ Following Giorgio Agamben's reading of Linnaeus in *L'aperto* (2002), Solomon asserts that the representational regime of translation orders "human populations internally through the logic of species difference."¹⁹⁹ The logic of species difference (i.e., human/nonhuman) is the possibility condition of the colonial-racial reality, whereby the white liberal human subject is *the* (rational) *subject* and its subaltern Others are *its* (nonhuman and "irrational") *objects*. For example, the targeted "area" of area studies is cast as an impossibly limitless energy resource, a nonhuman and "irrational" object to be mined, thereby extending and deepening the capitalist system of accumulation that has caused ecological collapse. The disciplines of area studies in this way adopt the structural-ontological position of *anthropos*. Following Simondon's "science of discontinuous processes that preserve discontinuity without turning it into the commensurable," Solomon instead theorizes translation as a mode of thinking and being constituted in nonrepresentational analogical operations, relational processes, which are irreducible to structures of communication, but could nonetheless modify these structures. There is no given (nonhuman and "irrational") object of translation, no "area,"

¹⁹⁸ I cite Andrea Bardin's succinct formulation in *Epistemology and Political Philosophy in Gilbert Simondon: Individuation, Technics, Social Systems* (2015) because Simondon's *L'individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d'information* (2005) has yet to be translated (into English). Simondon writes: « La méthode analogique suppose que l'on peut connaître *en définissant des structures par les opérations qui les dynamisent*, au lieu de connaître *en définissant les opérations par les structures entre lesquelles elles s'exercent*. La condition logique d'exercice de l'analogie suppose une condition ontologique du rapport entre la structure et l'opération. Car le transfert de l'*opération logique* par laquelle on pense un être, d'un être à un être *analogue*, ne peut être valable que si l'*opération logique* était modulée par l'ensemble systématique des *opérations essentielles* qui constituent l'être » (532).

¹⁹⁹ Agamben writes: "man has no specific identity other than the *ability* to recognize himself. Yet, to define the human not through any *nota characteristic*, but rather through his self-knowledge, means that man is the being which recognizes itself as such, that *man is the animal that must recognize itself as human to be human*" (26).

and, thus, no hope for dialectical synthesis. Rather, translation is *transductive* insofar as it is an “act that puts into relation two operations, while an operation is the conversion of one structure into another.” Such an understanding of transduction allows us to at once update our result to the problem of induction and arrive at a revised understanding of the hypothesis, the paradigmatic statement that generalizes evidence: anything could confirm anything iff our hypotheses are understood as assertions that put forward the appropriate premises from which to make inferences *that could modify anything*. Not everything is speculative, *quod erat demonstrandum*, ■. Solomon concludes that “[s]eparation is what sustains the possibility of the analogical jump [*saut*]” integral to translation.²⁰⁰ Similarly, for us sovereign subjects, the living dead matters, our hypotheses are separate from the collaborative social generation of inferences, which are made in the public space of language, perhaps, even, of citation. In sum, Solomon’s transductive theory of translation helps us understand the functional operativity of the game of giving and asking for reasons, of jumping, that is, among discontinuous operations, or relational processes, and modifying structures of communication (e.g., “we”). Translating is energizing.

Let us reiterate, elaborate, and update our principal assertions. First, the absolutely withdrawn meaningless signs of the apocalyptic literatures about the disaster we have studied—viz., the sovereign energy they gift us—energize the truth of energy-circulation-in-itself. Second, these meaningless signs energize “we” recast *vis-à-vis*

²⁰⁰ Following Sakai, Solomon thinks of operations in terms of the address, the “instantiation of a relation (between addressor and addressee) that occurs prior to, and without any guarantee of, the informational exchange that characterizes [structures of] communication.”

Negarestani’s inhumanist rationalism as a “collaborative project of practical freedom [. . .] whose boundaries are not only negotiable but also constructible and synthetic” (“LI” 434). Both procedures yield to and navigate a separation between *operation* (i.e., the gifting of sovereign energy) and *structure* (i.e., energy-circulation-in-itself and “we”).²⁰¹ And each procedure is close to what Jacques Lezra calls an *absolutization of what is not-one*: “Nothing mediates between the two, nothing translates one into the other: they insist without alternating” (200). In both answering our guiding question (i.e., “What is a hypothesis?”) and satisfactorily deriving the inhumanism of energy aesthetics in language, we have coextensively located a nonrelationally relational practice of translation that disrupts capitalist-nationalist translational practices that would have us treat as given correlations like inner-outer, white-black, north-south (*The Drowned World*), sadism-masochism, white-Indian, straight-queer (*Dhalgren*), bourgeoisie-proletariat, culture-nature, image-sound (*Le Transperceneige*), meaning-nonmeaning, west-east, and man-woman (*L’Apocalypse arabe / The Arab Apocalypse*)—whose possibility condition is the species-difference correlation: human-nonhuman. Apocalyptic literatures about the disaster force us to move through correlationism to arrive at speculative thoughts of absolutes that allow us to breathe [*souffler*] the air of eternity, of a radical outside immanent to the inside.²⁰² Such *souffles* all share the *character*

²⁰¹ Indeed, as Muriel Combes demonstrates, for Simondon, operations determine structures. See Combes, Muriel. *Simondon: Individu et collectivité*. PHILOSOPHIES (Presses Universitaires de France), 1999 / Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of the Transindividual. Translated by Thomas LaMarre, The MIT Press, 2013.

²⁰² In a revision of this study, I’ll reappraise my understanding of eternity *vis-à-vis* Robert Esposito’s *A Philosophy for Europe: From the Outside* (2018).

daemonicus of apparition.²⁰³ Apocalyptic literatures about the disaster deploy formal languages comprised of meaningless signs in order to energize truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense because they summon « une forme future, elle appelle une nouvelle terre et un peuple qui n'existe pas encore » (D&G, *QP* 104) / “a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist” (D&G, *WP* 108). Cosmic distortion.²⁰⁴

Disinterring le fantastique damné: Qui se souvient de la mer

Let us now mobilize our understanding of the hypothesis and the inhumanism of energy aesthetics in language to disinter the “dark precursor” to our study: *le fantastique damné* literary genre. But, as Tzvetan Todorov acknowledges in the first pages of his study *Introduction à la littérature fantastique* (1970), the notion of literary genres immediately gives rise to the question of entitlement: « a-t-on le droit de discuter un genre sans avoir étudié (ou au moins lu) toutes les œuvres qui le constituent ? » (*ILF* 7-8) / “are we entitled to discuss a genre without having studied (or at least read) all the works which constitute it?” (*TF* 3). He responds by claiming to adopt a deductive scientific method, asserting « la quantité des observations n'est pas pertinente, mais uniquement la cohérence logique de la théorie » (Todorov, *ILF* 8) / “it is not the quantity of observations, but the logical coherence of a theory that finally matters” (Todorov, *TF* 4).

²⁰³ I am energized here by Goodrich, Peter. “The Judge’s Two Bodies: The Case of Daniel Paul Schreber.” *Law Critique*, vol. 26, 2015, pp. 117-133.

²⁰⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, on the refrain, write: « Produire une ritournelle déterritorialisée, comme but final de la musique, la lâcher dans le Cosmos, c’est plus important que de faire un nouveau système. Ouvrir l’agencement sur une force cosmique » (D&G, *MP* 432) / “Produce a deterritorializing refrain as the final end of music, release it in the Cosmos—that is more important than building a new system. Opening the assemblage onto a cosmic force” (D&G, *ATP* 407).

Todorov then claims to deduce the literary genre of *le fantastique* from a theory of literary themes:

D'abord, il faut que le texte oblige le lecteur à considérer le monde des personnages comme un monde de personnes vivantes et à hésiter entre une explication naturelle et une explication surnaturelle des événements évoqués. Ensuite, cette hésitation peut être ressentie également par un personnage ; ainsi le rôle de lecteur est pour ainsi dire confié à un personnage et dans le même temps l'hésitation se trouve représentée, elle devient un des thèmes de l'œuvre ; dans le cas d'une lecture naïve, le lecteur réel s'identifie avec le personnage. (*ILF* 37-38).

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work—in the case of naïve reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. (*TF* 33)

First, the emphasis Todorov gives to the themes of hesitancy and identification might seem to confine his theory to the reader-text correlation and, by isomorphism, the self-other correlation. (Indeed, he devotes two chapters to more specific themes of the self and the other.) Second, it might be still objected that Todorov's method of deducing *le fantastique* (from a theory about themes of the self and the other) is entitled and therefore *monotonic*: the addition of literary texts he does not consider cannot invalidate the existence of *le fantastique*. But, a careful reading shows that, against his own claims to deduction and like Solomon's theory of translation, Todorov's method is transductive insofar as every literary text he considers « n'est pas seulement le produit d'une combinatoire préexistante (combinatoire constituée par les propriétés littéraires virtuelles) ; il est aussi une transformation de cette combinatoire » (*ILF* 11) / “is not only the product of a pre-existing combinatorial system (constituted by all that is literature *in*

posse); it is also a transformation of that system” (*TF* 7). That is, Todorov’s deduction of *le fantastique* proceeds by an operation, or relational process, which at once yields to and navigates the separation between *literary text* and *literary structure*. Furthermore, his method is ~~unentitled~~ radically *nonmonotonic*: the addition of anything he does not consider could modify, if not invalidate, the existence of *le fantastique*, notwithstanding its logical coherence.²⁰⁵ *Contra* Solomon’s nonrelational relationism, however, Todorov’s relational nonrelationism obliges him to singularize—without recourse to any universal law—something absolutely necessary not about any individual text or any individual genre, but about literature itself. In other words, *he makes a hypothesis about the nature of literature*. Before we examine this hypothesis, we note that Todorov’s nonmonotonic *structuralism* is compatible with our solution to the problem of induction: anything could confirm anything iff our hypotheses are understood as assertions that put forward the appropriate premises from which to make inferences that could modify anything. We will return to this compatibility below.

²⁰⁵ Todorov’s explains his method: « elle n’exige pas l’observation de toutes les instances d’un phénomène pour le décrire ; elle procède bien plutôt par déduction. On relève, en fait, un nombre relativement limité d’occurrences, on en tire une hypothèse générale, et on la vérifie sur d’autres œuvres, en la corrigeant (ou la rejetant). Quel que soit le nombre des phénomènes étudiés (ici, des œuvres), nous serons toujours aussi peu autorisés à en déduire des lois universelles » (*ILF* 8) / “it does not require us to observe every instance of a phenomenon in order to describe it; scientific method proceeds rather by deduction. We actually deal with a relatively limited number of cases, from them we deduce a general hypothesis, and we verify this hypothesis by other cases, correcting (or rejecting) it as need be. Whatever the number of phenomena (of literary works, in this case) studied, we are never justified in extrapolating universal laws from them” (*TF* 4). Although he claims to adopt a deductive scientific method, his concession to defeasibility stands in curious contrast to the conventional understanding of deduction as a “discourse in which, certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their being so. I mean by the last phrase that it follows because of them, and by this, that no further term is required from without in order to make the consequence necessary” (Aristotle 40).

In the final pages of his book, Todorov derives from Franz Kafka a new genre, a « fantastique généralisé : le monde entier du livre et le lecteur lui-même y sont inclus » (*ILF* 182) / “*generalized fantastic* which swallows up the entire world of the book and the reader along with it” (*TF* 174).²⁰⁶ Instead of describing events that force “the reader” to hesitate between natural and supernatural explanations for them, *le fantastique généralisé* describes events that *synthesize the supernatural and literature*.²⁰⁷ The ubiquity of the fantastic in *le fantastique généralisé* impels Todorov to venture an escape from the self-other correlation and speculate, to think the paradox of literature *tout court*:

Les mots ne sont pas des étiquettes collées à des choses qui existent en tant que telles indépendamment d’eux. Quand on écrit, on ne fait que cela ; l’importance de ce geste est telle, qu’il ne laisse place à aucune autre expérience. En même temps, si j’écris, j’écris de quelque chose, même si ce quelque chose est l’écriture. Pour que l’écriture soit possible, elle doit partir de la mort de ce dont elle parle ; mais cette mort la rend elle-même impossible, car il n’y a plus quoi écrire. La littérature ne peut devenir possible que pour autant qu’elle se rend impossible. Ou bien ce qu’on dit est là présent, mais alors il n’y a pas place pour la littérature ; ou bien on fait place à la littérature, mais alors il n’y a plus rien à dire [. . .] L’opération consistant à concilier le possible et l’impossible peut fournir sa définition au mot « impossible » lui-même. Et pourtant la littérature *est* ; c’est là son plus grand paradoxe. (*ILF* 183-184)

Words are not labels pasted to things that exist as such independently of them. When we write, we do merely that—the importance of the gesture is such that it leaves room for no other experience. At the same time, if I write, I write about something, even if this something is writing. For writing to be possible, it must be born out of the death of what it speaks about: but this death makes writing itself impossible, for there is no longer anything to write. Literature can become possible only insofar as it makes itself impossible. Either what we say is actually here, in which case there is no room for literature; or else there is room for

²⁰⁶ See Kafka, Franz. *The Metamorphosis*. Translated by Susan Bernofsky, W. W. Norton & Company, 2014.

²⁰⁷ Todorov’s structuralism prevents him from introducing here the term “supernatural literature,” which might seem to be the logical synthesis between the supernatural and literature. As a performative moment, *le fantastique généralisé* is pure excess; there can’t be a supernatural literature because that would mean it would be impossible to think it.

literature, in which case there is no longer anything to say [. . .] The operation which consists of reconciling the possible with the impossible illustrates the word “impossible” itself. And yet literature *exists*; that is its greatest paradox. (TF 175)

In this passage, Todorov advances to an anticorrelationist position. Observe that, in the final line, Richard Howard translates « *est* » as “*exists*.” But « *est* » is a conjugation of the infinitive verb *être*, which means “to be.” So, the real meaning of « *est* » is not “*exists*,” but “*is*”: the real meaning of « la littérature *est* » is “literature *is*.” Howard’s existentialist translation of this line occults the absolute, the *ontology* of literature to which Todorov’s speculative thought accedes. We therefore borrow Meillassoux’s formalization of correlationism to retranslate this passage. When you write about something, you write about something that is given to you, and posited by you. Consequently, the sentence: “literature *is*,” means “literature is the correlate of thinking.” We can’t know what the reality of the object-in-itself about which we write is because “we can’t distinguish between properties which are supposed to belong to the object and properties belonging to the subjective access to the object” (Meillassoux, “SR” 409).²⁰⁸ Hence Todorov’s assertion that « [o]u bien ce qu’on dit est là présent, mais alors il n’y a pas place pour la littérature ; ou bien on fait place à la littérature, mais alors il n’y a plus rien à dire » / “[e]ither what we say is actually here, in which case there is no room for literature; or else there is room for literature, in which case there is no longer anything to say.” Now, contemplate the following assertions: 1) « Les mots ne sont pas des étiquettes collées à

²⁰⁸ The word choice and grammatical structure of these three sentences self-consciously emulate Meillassoux’s formalization of correlationism, which I cite in the introduction (DA 10-11). See Meillassoux, Quentin. “Speculative Realism.” *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development*, vol. 3, 2012, pp. 408-435. In a revision of this study, I’ll reappraise my understanding of the object *vis-à-vis* Seo-Young Chu’s *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sheep?: A Science-Fictional Theory of Representation* (2011).

des choses qui existent en tant que telles indépendamment d'eux » / “Words are not labels pasted to things that exist as such independently of them”; 2) « L'opération consistant à concilier le possible et l'impossible peut fournir sa définition au mot « impossible » lui-même » / “The operation which consists of reconciling the possible with the impossible illustrates the word ‘impossible’ itself.” Note that, in the first assertion, Todorov writes « existent », whose real meaning is indeed “exist,” and, in the second, it is not literature that he operationalizes to reconcile the possible with the impossible, but the word « « impossible » lui-même » / “‘impossible’ itself.” If words are not simply labels pasted to things that exist as such independently of them and if literature *is*, then what are words and what is literature? Although it might seem that Todorov absolutizes in this passage the possible-impossible correlation as *being* constitutive of literature, a careful reading reveals that words, like “impossible” *lui-même* (itself), and literature *are*.

We thus return to Meillassoux's figural derivation of *dm*, which continues to be generative, and assert that words are meaningless signs. Words, that is to say, are differential, unlimited, and indefinite *reiterations* that allow us to speculatively grasp the contingency of things and thereby found a potential infinite. Meillassoux brings together the question of formal languages and the problem of an “*ontology of the empty sign*” (“IRR” 163), the latter of which breaks with the sign-meaning correlation (c.f., Ferdinand de Saussure's signifier-signified correlation and C. S. Peirce's symbol-(index)-icon correlation). He argues that “*meaning is contingent in the constitution of the sign* [. . .and] *there exists in the very sign itself a stratum of immateriality that not only has nothing to*

do with meaning but that precedes it, conditions it, and can exist independently of it”

(Meillassoux, “IRR” 164-165). For Meillassoux, this immateriality consists in a noncorrelated dualism (type/token):

A sign—for example, a written sign—is never just a mark on paper that you have before your eyes; for when you see a mark *as* a sign, this mark ceases to be only mark, that is to say a singular material thing, and becomes *a token of a type-sign*. When I write the letter ‘a’ three times onto the board, I write three tokens of a type that itself is unique: the letter ‘a’ in general, as instantiated in the tokens proposed, without, however, being reducible to them. In other words, when you see a mark as a sign, you see *the limitless reproducible token of an intangible type-sign*. If I take the ‘a’ as a mark, I am only dealing with an individual trace of ink; if I take it as a token, I see in it the essentially unlimited number of its possible reproductions under the aegis of a type that is, itself, always identical to itself [. . .] It is thus an essentially immaterial possibility of reproduction that constitutes the duality of type and token. *There is indeed in the ‘signifier’—independently of the ‘signified’—an immaterial internal articulation (type/token) that allows it to differentiate itself from the sole material support of the sign, without for all that appealing to the immateriality of meaning.* (“IRR” 165)

In other words, Meillassoux both divides the empty sign into its material and immaterial parts and differentiates it from an individual thing. He subsequently designates this type of empty sign as a “kenotype,” and asks, “How can we grasp a kenotype, or: How can we grasp, within a mark itself, the duality type/token of an empty sign?” (Meillassoux, “IRR” 166). Meillassoux’s tripartite response is that a kenotype “possesses an immaterial force of identical reproduction. But since it is arbitrary, no concept can capture its essence—it is in principle infinitely variable with regard to its form, and this form has no necessity in itself. And since I can posit distinct forms of empty signs, its iterable identity is no longer that of the general concept of ‘sign’” (“IRR” 170). He concedes that empirical recognition is at most necessary but not sufficient to grasp a kenotype, and argues that grasping marks as tokens “*annuls all difference owing to repetition [. . .]*and]

allows one to grasp an unlimited iteration” (Meillassoux, “IRR” 173). Meillassoux proceeds to delineate a quadripartite typology of semiotics: 1) a “recurrence” is every reproduction of a same mark; 2) a “repetition” is a spatial (visual) or temporal (aural) “*differential and finite recurrence*” (“IRR” 175); 3) an “iteration” is a nonspatialized (nonvisual) and atemporal (nonaural) “*recurrence that is nondifferential and hence unlimited, because it produces a pure identity of marks* [. . . which is paradoxically] indexed to a determinate material thing” (“IRR” 176); and, 4) a “reiteration” is differential, unlimited, and indefinite because “its unlimitedness engenders a term each time differing from its preceding term [. . . it is] the foundation of ‘potential infinity’” (“IRR” 177). He thereby completes the figural derivation of *dm*: “whereas normally we grasp things through their properties, and secondarily through their contingency, we are constrained to grasp these same things through their speculative contingency (their arbitrariness) once they are seen as signs (any sensible reality whatsoever being able to serve as a mark)” (Meillassoux, “IRR” 182). Meillassoux thus moves from the empirical recognition of contingent things to the speculative grasping of the contingency of things:

Whereas the sign provided with meaning is forgotten in favour of its meaning and its reference, the sign *dm*, giving itself ultimately for itself, as pure sign, makes me accede to its pure gratuitousness, to its pure absence of necessity, to the fact that anything whatsoever could fulfil its task just as well as it does. So that it is indeed the nonfoundation of all beings, and not of the sign alone, which discreetly reveals itself in its asignificance. Through the intuition of the sign *dm*, I leave the physical world, where everything seems to have a cause, in order to penetrate the pure semiotic world—where nothing has a reason to be, where nothing has meaning—and where everything, in consequence, breathes the air of eternity. (“IRR” 182)

Meaningless signs, in their pure gratuitousness, *energize*. To return to *le fantastique généralisé vis-à-vis* Meillassoux’s derivation of *dm*, we assert that it is not only the word

“impossible” *lui-même* that illustrates the « opération consistant à concilier le possible et l’impossible » (Todorov, *ILF* 184) / “operation which consists of reconciling the possible with the impossible” (Todorov, *TF* 175), but the word-in-itself *qua* meaningless sign. Finally, we return to Goodman, for whom aesthetics is an epistemology of worldmaking, and assert that literature is an aesthetic epistemology of employing meaningless signs (∴ words-in-themselves) to make worlds. *Words, worlds, and literature are.*

But, for Todorov, the speculative thought of the ontology of literature proceeds from his derivation of *le fantastique généralisé* literary genre, which describes events that synthesize the supernatural and literature. The mark of *le fantastique généralisé* is the internalization of the outside, the supernatural, “some force beyond scientific understanding or the laws of nature.” As Todorov writes, « le fantastique devient la règle, non l’exception » (*ILF* 182) / “the fantastic becomes the rule, not the exception” (*TF* 173). *Le fantastique généralisé* is isomorphic with Mark Fisher’s theorization of the weird as that “*which does not belong*” (*WE* 10). The weird, Fisher explains, is a “signal that the concepts and frameworks which we have previously employed are now obsolete” (*WE* 13); it is an affect that concatenates a fascination-horror affection that shares an isomorphism with *jouissance*.²⁰⁹ To accede to the speculative thought energized by *le fantastique généralisé*, one must forget everything ordinary and embrace the *damné*, a

²⁰⁹ I understand affect and affection *vis-à-vis* Brian Massumi’s Spinozist-Deleuzoguattarian definitions of them: “*L’affect* [Affect] (Spinoza’s *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body’s capacity to act. *L’affection* [Affection] (Spinoza’s *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include ‘mental’ or ideal bodies)” (xv). Affect is not emotion.

French adjective—whose meanings include “cursed” and “confounded”—that contracts the weird’s transgression of conceptual limits that renders previous epistemologies obsolete.²¹⁰ We find in this dialogue between *le fantastique généralisé* and the weird the kernel of a literary genre that would be compatible with our solution to the problem of induction. An *extro-science fiction* irreducible to logic and whose existence is threatened by science. Also, an *abomination* that would operate by way of hypotheses that put forward the appropriate premises from which to make inferences that could modify anything. This genre would generously embrace *defeasibility*; indeed, its existence would be defeasible. At the same time, this genre could be “true in an absolute sense—that is to say, independently of our existence” (Meillassoux, “IRR” 156). Let us venture a distortion, a hypothesis: *le fantastique damné* literary genre is a *decapitation* of apocalyptic literatures about the disaster that allows us grasp the inhumanism of energy aesthetics in language—understood to be an epistemology of deploying formal languages comprised of meaningless signs (i.e, words-in-themselves) in order to energize truths that are inaccessible to ordinary sense inasmuch as these truths are postsustainable worlds that revel in the sovereign expenditure of an energy that, as affirmed in our introduction, is 1)

²¹⁰ I prefer the French *damné*, whose meanings here are obtained from Robert & Collins, because the commonsense definitions of “weird” as “out of the ordinary course, strange, unusual; hence, odd, fantastic” and “partaking of or suggestive of the supernatural; of a mysterious or unearthly character; unaccountably or uncomfortably strange; uncanny” don’t encapsulate the unique compound of cursedness and confoundedness expressed by *damné*, which seems to me more appropriate to the weird’s conceptual transgression. I’m intrigued by the statistical notion of confounding variables, which causally affect dependent and independent variables without recourse to correlationism (and associationism). Additionally, refer to H. P. Lovecraft, the progenitor of weird literature: “To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all [. . .] but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown—the shadow-haunted *Outside*—we must remember to leave our humanity and terrestrialism at the threshold” (*SL2* 150).

a material multiple; 2) radically contingent; 3) on the side of the object; and, 4) a reclamation of nature's separation from society. Inhuman, meaningless signs, words-in-themselves, energize *us*.

We have located an example of *le fantastique damné* in Mohammed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer* (*Who Remembers the Sea*), a novel ostensibly about the Algerian revolution. Yet, we encounter in the text an unnamed city—or, rather, cities within cities, and, indeed, cities beneath cities—besieged by fantastic forces and surrounded by a receding sea—a damned world that, like *Dhalgren's* Bellona, exists in its own spacetime. We find in this world minotaurs carrying flamethrowers; resuscitated mummies lying in ambush; an underground mole whose thunderous footsteps leave behind trails of blood; winged “iriace” (a meaningless sign) that devour olives and spit out their pits, which rain down on the city like cinders; winged “spyrovirs” (another meaningless sign) whose deafening shrieks blind and desiccate the city's inhabitants; slithering walls that imprison and spit them out elsewhere (walls that « d'enveloppement de l'intérieur comme de l'extérieur » (*QSM* 18) / “envelope the inside as well as the outside” (*WRS* 9)); vomit of stones; holey skulls full of weeds; impossible songs and aromas; explosions without sources; hazy meteors and electric wind; a disintegrating star (the sun?), and so on. We encounter a world, then, where the fantastic is ubiquitous, a weird world that does not belong. In his postface, Dib thus asks, « pourquoi [. . .] le drame algérien m'a poussé à prendre pareil ton et à mettre ces grandes années de malheur dans un cadre terrible et légendaire, je ne sais pas trop aujourd'hui que répondre » (*QSM* 189) / “why [. . .] has the Algerian drama led me to adopt such a tone and to present those great years of misfortune

within this terrible and legendary framework?—I can hardly know today what to answer” (*WRS* 121). As Louis Tremaine notes, nowhere in the text do the words “Algeria” and “revolution” even appear.²¹¹ In his translator’s introduction, he explains, “One can establish references external to the text [. . .] only if one is prepared to do so arbitrarily—the text will neither confirm nor deny them [. . .and] *why* an Algerian victory comes about [. . .would] remain a mystery” (Tremaine, “TI” x-xi). Let us, therefore, leave the strong identitarianism of historicism to those who have no other recourse. We emphasize instead that our nameless (like Kid in *Dhalgren*), meandering guide through the text is a theorist, and, as Tremaine explains, “his theories about the events going on around him only serve to drive the revolution out of his consciousness and ‘underground’” (“TI” vii). To that end, the theorist is persistently confronted with the contingency of all things and nowhere does he obtain a causal explanation for the world’s collapse:

Les gens promènent des caboches forées de trous, empanachées de touffes d’herbes folles ; géologie de l’insomnie, plissements, failles, catastrophes, je dois en avoir une semblable. Je sens les couloirs et les passages souterrains qui me parcourent l’intérieur du crâne. De temps en temps, des décharges nerveuses y circulent. La moindre d’entre elles ébranle le système, bien conçu, il faut le reconnaître, quoique dû au hasard, et se transforme en explosion après une fraction de seconde. (*QSM* 24-25)

People are walking around with their skulls full of holes, feathered with tufts of weeds; geology of insomnia, buckles, cracks, catastrophes; my own must look the same. I feel the corridors and underground passages that crisscross the inside of my head. From time to time, nervous discharges pass through me. The least of these rocks the whole system—well conceived, one must admit, through the product of chance—and turns into an explosion in a fraction of a second. (*WRS* 12)

²¹¹ I refer here to Tremaine, Louis. “Psychic Deformity in Mohammed Dib’s *Qui se souvient de la mer*.” *Language and Style*, special issue of *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 19, no. 3, Autumn 1988, pp. 283-300. Tremaine translated Dib’s novel (into English).

However, like *The Drowned World's* Kerans, the theorist—obsessed with and haunted by the rejuvenating sea that recedes, the cruelly sarcastic behavior of the iriace, and dreams of his childhood—never stops searching for an explanation, even after he is led into the underground city of the revolution by a barefoot youth. This search is an enraging and humiliating burden he carries as stone, as « matière inerte qui n’attend de vous qu’une seconde d’inattention pour s’approprier votre forme » (*QSM* 26) / “inert stuff that needs only a second’s attention to move in and take over your shape” (*WRS* 13). But, because he « avais vu comment la machination avait été montée, mise au point » (*QSM* 28) / “had seen how the whole scheme had been brought off” (*WRS* 15), he is also the only one in the city to realize the iriace had given its inhabitants an ultimatum: « une demande de reddition sans condition de notre ville » (*QSM* 144) / “a demand for the unconditional surrender of the city” (*WRS* 91). So, in what does this scheme [*machination*] consist?

In a dreamlike sequence early in the text, we learn of the theorist’s childhood, which he devoted to exploring the labyrinthine passages and mysterious recesses of his family’s castle:

C’était [sur la terrasse] surtout que je respirais le plus librement. La vue des champs ensoleillés qui s’étendaient à l’infini provoquait en moi une sauvage exaltation. Le ciel touchait à des lointains si profonds qu’il était agité d’un perpétuel frémissement [. . .] Ensuite, il me fallait redescendre. Les salles m’ouvraient leur domaine nocturne. Si au moins, elles menaient à des grottes sous-marines : non, je m’enfonçais à travers d’anciens couloirs comme dans un souterrain. Le silence y dormait, débordant de toutes parts. J’eus, la première fois que je le remarquai, la sensation que notre habitation était immergée sous des nappes de pétrole étales, noires, insondables [. . .] *Berce mon corps, dissous mon ombre* [. . .] le bitume géologique dans lequel nous confinons notre existence m’apparaît aujourd’hui encore comme l’horreur suprême. On ne voyait pas se faire sa destruction, on n’en décelait que les effets. (*QSM* 35-37)

It was [on the balcony] in particular that I breathed most freely. The view of the sun-drenched fields stretching to infinity aroused wild exaltation in me. The sky touched distances so deep that it lay perpetually aquiver [. . .] Then it was time to go back down. The rooms opened their nocturnal realm to me. If only they had led to deep-sea grottos: no, I plunged down ancient corridors as if through an underground passage. There silence slept, overflowing everywhere. I had, the first time I noticed this silence, the sensation that our house was submerged beneath pools of still, black, bottomless oil [. . .] *Cradle my body, dissolve my shadow* [. . .] the geological bitumen in which we confined our existence still seems today the supreme horror. One could not see one's destruction preparing itself, one could only make out the effects. (*WRS* 19-20)

In this passage, the theorist contrasts the liberating « sauvage exaltation » / “wild exaltation” affection aroused in him at seeing the « champs ensoleillés qui s'étendaient à l'infini » / “sun-drenched fields stretching to infinity” with the « horreur suprême » / “supreme horror” affect he encountered and still encounters in the sleeping silence, the violent *sensation* that his house « était immergée sous des nappes de pétrole étales, noires, insondables » / “was submerged beneath pools of still black, bottomless oil.” It should be qualified that we understand sensation *vis-à-vis* Gilles Deleuze to be a direct action on the nervous system.²¹² Meaning, there is no represented (or even representable)

²¹² Deleuze, on sensation in cinema, writes: « Le tout, c'est totalité organique qui se pose en opposant et surmontant ses propres parties, et qui se construit comme la grande Spirale en suivant les lois de la dialectique. Le tout, c'est le concept. Ce pourquoi le cinéma est dit « cinéma intellectuel », et le montage, « montage-pensée ». Le montage est dans la pensée « le processus intellectuel » lui-même, ou ce qui, sous le choc, pense le choc. Déjà l'image, visuelle ou sonore, a des harmoniques qui accompagnent la dominante sensible, et entrent pour leur compte dans des rapports supra-sensoriels (par exemple la saturation de chaleur dans la procession de « *La ligne générale* » [de Sergei Eisenstein]) : c'est cela, l'onde de choc ou la vibration nerveuse, telle qu'on ne peut plus dire « je vois, j'entends », mais JE SENS, « sensation totalement physiologique » (*IT* 206) / “The whole is the organic totality which presents itself by opposing and overcoming its own parts, and which is constructed like the great Spiral in accordance with the laws of dialectic. The whole is the concept. This is why cinema is dubbed ‘intellectual cinema’, and montage ‘thought-montage’. Montage is in thought ‘the intellectual process’ itself, or that which, under the shock, thinks the shock. Whether it is visual or of sound, the image already has harmonics which accompany the perceived dominant image, and enter in their own ways into suprasensory relations (for example, the saturation of heat in the procession in [Sergei Eisenstein’s] *The General Line*): this is the shock wave or the nervous vibration, which means that we can no longer say ‘I see, I hear’, but I FEEL, ‘totally physiological sensation’” (*C2* 158).

object that causes sensation; rather, sensation *is*. It is, in other words, a self-referential *Figure* that directly acts on the nervous system. In this way, and as with Francis Bacon's screaming Pope, the horror affect encountered by the theorist is multiplied, supreme [*suprême*], because it is inferred from the sensation itself, not from any represented object.²¹³ Hence the sentence: « On ne voyait pas se faire sa destruction, on n'en décelait que les effets » / “One could not see one's destruction preparing itself, one could only make out the effects.” So, the *Figure* in this passage is composed of « nappes de pétrole étales, noires, insondables » / “pools of still, black, bottomless oil,” a « bitume géologique » / “geological bitumen.” These meaningless signs, words-in-themselves, contrast with the represented object that generates a liberating « sauvage exaltation » / “wild exaltation” affection in the theorist, the « champs ensoleillés » / “sun-drenched fields.” (We will return to the *Figure* of infinity below.) *Contra* the sun, which we still understand *vis-à-vis* Bataille to be the « principe [. . .du] développement exubérant [de la vie] » (*PM* 66) / “source of life's exuberant development” (*AS* 28-29), the *Figure* of oil here is closer to Negarestani's theorization of it as the “Black Corpse of the Sun” (*C* 26), which allows us to at last reconceptualize oil as a waste product of a dying sun whose energy is generously infinite. As Alexander R. Galloway explains, oil is a “transmutation of the light of the sun [. . .] the geological product of sunlight having transitioned via

²¹³ Deleuze, on Bacon's screaming Pope, writes: « Quand il peint le pape qui crie, il n'y a rien qui fasse horreur, et le rideau devant le pape n'est pas seulement une manière de l'isoler, de le soustraire aux regards, c'est beaucoup plus la manière dont il ne voit rien lui-même, et crie *devant l'invisible* : neutralisée, l'horreur est multipliée parce qu'elle est conclue du cri, et non l'inverse » (*FB: LS* 42) / “When he paints the screaming Pope, there is nothing that might cause horror, and the curtain in front of the Pope is not only a way of isolating him, of shielding him from view; it is rather the way in which the Pope himself sees nothing, and screams *before the invisible*. Thus neutralized, the horror is multiplied because it is inferred from the scream, and not the reverse” (*FB: TLS* 34).

photosynthesis into vegetable matter, that matter itself having been decomposed” (162).

Oil, in Negarestani’s speculative elaboration of it, becomes:

[A] lubricant, something that eases narration and the whole dynamism toward the desert. The cartography of oil as an omnipresent entity narrates the dynamics of planetary events. Oil is the undercurrent of all narrations, not only the political but also that of the ethics of life on earth [. . .] To grasp oil as a lube is to grasp earth as a body of different narrations being moved forward by oil. In a nutshell, oil is a lube for the divergent lines of terrestrial narration [. . .] Narrative organizer, definitely (heart of gloopy darkness) [. . .oil exemplifies] trapping the energy of the sun accumulated in organisms by means of lithologic sedimentation, stratification, anaerobic decay and bacteria in highly stratified sedimentary basins. In this sense, petroleum is a terrestrial replacement of the onanistic self-indulgence of the Sun. (C 19)

Thus, as deciphered by McKenzie Wark, oil is prehuman solar capital unearthed and exploited by *anthropos* (white European rational straight human Man), resulting in not only its own destruction, but the destruction of nonhuman nature, of Earth itself.²¹⁴

Contra a solar economy that would find in the sun an *extraterrestrial* energy source generously infinite, an oily economy, a *petromyopia*, presumes that the inherent capacity for rationality supposedly unique to humans is a sufficient reason to exploit *terrestrial* nonhuman nature. To reiterate, this speciesism is isomorphic with the colonial-racial violence that structures the nonwhite, non-European, “irrational,” and ultimately nonhuman nonstraight nonmale as the easy, limitless energy resource of its opposite. This violent commodification of energy precludes the development of alternative expenditures of energy outside the capitalist economy of use and exchange. But, as asserted above, we living nonwhite non-European nonhuman nonstraight nonmale commodities are rational

²¹⁴ I refer here to Wark, McKenzie. “An Inhuman Fiction of Forces.” *Leper Creativity: Cyclonopedia Symposium*, edited by Ed Keller, Nicola Masciandaro & Eugene Thacker, punctum books, 2012, pp. 39-43.

creatures who give and ask for reasons. *We are sapient beings*. And we assert that the theorist of *Qui se souvient de la mer* recognizes that beneath what Dib calls « le drame algérien (*QSM* 189) / “the Algerian drama” (*WRS* 121) lies the projection of colonial-racial violence onto nonhuman oil, whose nocturnal viscosity, like the unnamed city’s slithering walls, imprisons and displaces all narrations. Or, as Negarestani writes, “Books, foods, religions, numbers, specks of dust—are all linguistically, geologically, politically and mathematically combined into petroleum [. . .] everything is suspiciously oily” (*C* 42). Such is the scheme [*machination*] of the iriace seen “underground.” Indeed, the Évian Accords of 1962, which granted independence to Algeria, also created the Franco-Algerian Saharan Organisme. According to Patricia Berko Wild, the Organisme was created to “exploit the oil and mineral resources of the Algerian Sahara with equal financial support from France and Algeria” (21). Such is the supreme horror [*horreur suprême*] of life on Earth. (We will return to the Figure of the desert, toward which oil stretches, below.)

But, what of the « champs ensoleillés qui s’étendaient à l’infini » (*QSM* 35) / “sun-drenched fields stretching to infinity” (*WRS* 19)? As suggested above, the phrases « nappes de pétrole étales, noires, insondables » / “pools of still, black, bottomless oil” and « bitume géologique » (*QSM* 36) / “geological bitumen” (*WRS* 20) are meaningless signs, words-in-themselves, which energized a sensation, a self-referential Figure, a nonrepresented object that directly acted on the theorist’s nervous system at a silent, sleeping moment during his childhood, giving rise to a horror affect that has orbited him since. In contrast, we understand the « champs ensoleillés » / “sun-drenched fields” to be

meaningful signs, words-for-us, because they represent an object. It follows from this that they energize no sensation in the theorist—or in us. Rather, they bypass sensation altogether and arouse in us a liberating « sauvage exaltation » (*QSM* 35) / “wild exaltation” (*WRS* 19) affection. We assert that this bypassing operation is magnetized for us by the unrepresentable Figure of infinity, which we understand *vis-à-vis* Alain Badiou to be the ontological condition of the multiple, which we claimed as our first affirmation of energy in our introduction.²¹⁵ And the infinite horizon toward which the « champs ensoleillés » / “sun-drenched fields” stretch is a universal philosophy that would address humans and nonhumans as rational creatures, as sapient beings who give and ask for reasons. This philosophy would fulfill the late Fanon’s insurgent call for an ontological revolution in the conclusion to *Les damnés de la terre*, a “Black anti-colonialism” (Thomas 293).²¹⁶ There, he contends « [I]a grande nuit dans laquelle nous fûmes plongés, il nous faut la secouer et en sortir. Le jour nouveau qui déjà se lève doit nous trouver fermes, avisés et résolus » (Fanon, *DT* 301) / “[w]e must shake off the great mantle of night which has enveloped us, and reach for the light. The new day which is dawning must find us determined, enlightened and resolute” (Fanon, *WE* 235). Fanon’s target was Europe; ours is *anthropos*. For Fanon, leaving Europe meant creating « un homme neuf »

²¹⁵ Energy is our multiple; every material thing, that is, must be allowed to change, to be infinitely divisible.

²¹⁶ I refer here to Greg Thomas’s “Afro-Blue Notes: The Death of Afro-pessimism (2.0)?.” *Theory & Event*, vol. 21, no. 1, January 2018, pp. 282-317. Thomas explains: “The pessimist rejection of anti-colonialism goes particularly awry with Fanon. The institution of academia came to Fanon late with great selectivity. It isolates him from the whole tradition of Black anti-colonialism (or anti-colonialist Blackness) so that he becomes a cipher, a sort of color-blinding Rorschach test even. In fact, Fanon is isolated from himself [. . .] The Fanon examined in academia got reduced to a very few pages of *Black Skin, White Masks*, which was written when Fanon still thought he could be ‘French’ and faithful to French colonial empire while opposing physiognomic but not cultural or ‘civilizational’ racism” (295).

(DT 305) / “a new man” (WE 239). For us, leaving *anthropos* means creating a new *human*. We must therefore depart from *anthropos* and cultivate our own *nonanthropic* models, projects, and collaborations. We agree with Fanon: « Reprenons la question de la réalité cérébrale, de la masse cérébrale de toute l’humanité dont il faut multiplier les connexions, diversifier les réseaux et réhumaniser les messages » (DT 303) / “Let us reexamine the question of cerebral reality, the brain mass of humanity in its entirety whose affinities must be increased, whose connections must be diversified and whose communications must be humanized again” (WE 237-238). To this end, we strive toward a new model of alterity, toward what Fanon calls « un niveau incomparablement supérieur » (DT 303) / “an infinitely higher plane” (WE 237). *We must be discoverers [découvreurs]*. And *we must go underground in order to reach the infinite*.

As the theorist of *Qui se souvient de la mer* asserts following an unprecedented eclipse, « Les origines du soleil se dessinent en diagrammes fugaces sur notre terre qu’elles viendront un jour étreindre. Il ne restera plus alors qu’à gagner les hauteurs ou à découvrir les profondeurs. A nous, la vérité, nous qui ne vivons que dans cette attente ! » (QSM 118) / “The sun’s origins are outlined in fugitive diagrams on our earth which they will come to one day seize in their grip. There’ll be nothing left to do but to get ourselves to the heights or discover the depths. Ours the truth, we who live in wait only for that moment” (WRS 73). Toward the end of the text, he finally chooses:

Je regarde les gens marcher, travailler, se tendre la main, et ne comprends pas pourquoi nous sommes là encore alors qu’il existe quelque part sous terre une ville sûre. Le savoir certes ne suffit pas, il faut pouvoir y entrer. Que chacun, en ce cas, y consacre ses énergies, au lieu de les gaspiller à cette vaine existence. Ne serait-ce que pour échapper au réseau de complicités établi par nos propres murs,

qui s'acharnent à persécuter, à mettre la population entre parenthèses sous l'œil même des nouvelles constructions. (*QSM* 176-178)

I look at people walking, working, shaking hands, and can't understand why we're still here when there exists somewhere under the ground a safe city. Just knowing about it of course is not enough, you have to be able to get in. Let each of us, in that case, devote his energies to that end, instead of wasting time on this vain existence. Even if for no other reason than to escape the network of complicity set up by our own walls, which delight in persecution, in trapping the population between parentheses before the very eyes of new constructions. (*WRS* 114)

Thus, after witnessing the absence of the sun's energetic generosity during the day, the theorist reappraises his terrestrial existence and makes the choice, like Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man in *Invisible Man* (1952), to devote his energies to go underground in order « échapper au réseau de complicités établi par nos propres murs, qui s'acharnent à persécuter, à mettre la population entre parenthèses sous l'œil même des nouvelles constructions » / “to escape the network of complicity set up by our own walls, which delight in persecution, in trapping the population between parentheses before the very eyes of new constructions.”²¹⁷ In other words, because he has been able to make out the iriace's scheme [*machination*] to unearth and exploit oil *qua* prehuman solar capital once their ultimatum to unconditionally surrender the city has been met, he has become *ecologically sensitive*, thereby authorizing him to make a choice *tout court*. As R. Scott Bakker explains: “The nature of choice involves the systematic neglect of systems that must be manipulated nevertheless. Cues and correlations are compulsory. The nature of choice [. . .] obliterates our intellectual and phenomenological intuitions regarding

²¹⁷ See Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. Vintage Books, 1995.

choice. *There's just no such thing.*"²¹⁸ The nameless theorist embraces the fact that his ecologically sensitive "choice" to go underground toward the prehuman obliterates his own intellectual and phenomenological intuitions regarding choice. To return to our left-accelerationist reading of *The Drowned World* and to borrow and update David Benatar's antinatalist argument for human extinction, the theorist understands, that is, that the earlier extinction of the structural-ontology of *anthropos* "guarantees against the significant harm of future lives" (164), human and nonhuman. *Without horror, he speculates a world without anthropos*, and adopts what Eugene Thacker calls a "Planetary view":

[T]he Planet moves beyond the subjective World, but it also recedes behind the objective Earth. The Planet is a planet, it is one planet among other planets, moving the scale of things out from the terrestrial into the cosmological framework. Whether the Planet is yet another subjective, idealist construct or whether it can have objectivity and be accounted for as such, is an irresolvable dilemma. What is important in the concept of the Planet is that it remains a negative concept, simply that which remains "after" the human. (7)

However, the Planetary view adopted by the theorist energizes him to think that which precedes *anthropos*: nonhuman oil. No irresolvable dilemma, the Planet of this view is *objective* insofar as it is occupied by the structural-ontology of *the damned*—the nonwhite, the non-European, the nonhuman, the nonstraight, the nonmale, the commodity, *the object*—underground. The subaltern. As Stefano Harney and Fred Moten write: "Down here underground, where the kingdom of God is overthrown and out of hand and hand to hand, there's a general griot going on. His (and that of any of his

²¹⁸ I cite here Bakker, R. Scott. "If Free-Will were a Heuristic..." *Three Pound Brain*, <https://rsbakker.wordpress.com/2019/12/19/if-free-will-were-a-heuristic/>. Accessed 8 January 2020.

representatives, the ones who must be representing us but can't) strategy is exhausted and surrounded by our plans."²¹⁹ The theorist rids himself of the burden, the stone of *anthropos* and places a wager on the possibility of discovering something more alive underground.

As mentioned above, he is ultimately led underground by a barefoot youth. At the beginning of the novel's final chapter, he shares with us his plan and what he has discovered:

Il me faut étudier de près les structures de la ville du sous-sol, sans quoi je ne pourrais pas m'adapter, comme il serait souhaitable, aux nouvelles conditions de vie où me voici placé. Que les fondements mêmes de ce second état de l'existence y soient inscrits, j'en suis tout à fait persuadé à présent. A première vue, ces structures ne sont que la réplique de celles de la ville d'en-haut, leur image renversée en quelque sorte et cachée dans les stratifications inférieures. Mais où commence à s'imposer la différence, c'est dans la découverte du fait que la ville du sous-sol ne connaît pas de limites, que ses derniers retranchements ne sauraient être atteints par l'un quelconque de ses habitants ou par un moyen d'investigation, si puissant soit-il ; et son domaine s'étendrait encore plus loin. Pour tout dire, selon moi, elle plonge ses racines non pas dans le sol, au sens restreint du terme, mais d'une façon générale, dans le monde, avec lequel, par une infinité de conduits, d'antennes, elle entre en communication comme jamais ne l'a fait la ville de l'air. Cette disposition lui a permis, de créer de nombreux plexus vitaux et surtout—surtout !—une réserve de ceux-ci, à l'abri de toute attaque, même par surprise, de toute infiltration, même par ruse. Chose qu'on aurait pu imaginer mais nullement réaliser à la surface. Ils constituent, ces systèmes de réserve, la plus remarquable défense qui se puisse concevoir : ils offrent des zones de refuge inexpugnables autant qu'ils forment des accumulateurs—qui, en cas de besoin, se convertissent d'eux-mêmes en sources !—d'énergie. Sans conteste, on doit les considérer comme la partie vive de cette ville. (*QSM* 185-186)

I must study closely the structures of the underground city, otherwise I won't be able to adapt, as I would wish to do, to the new conditions of life in which I now find myself. That the very foundations of this second state of existence lie inscribed in those structures, I am now completely convinced. At first glance, they are merely a reproduction of those of the city above, their image somewhat

²¹⁹ I cite here Harney, Stefano and Fred Moten. "Base Faith." *e-flux*, no. 86, November 2017, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/86/162888/base-faith/>.

reversed and hidden in the lower strata. But where the difference begins to make itself felt is in the discovery that the underground city knows no limits, that its outermost boundaries cannot be reached by any of its inhabitants or by any means of investigation, however powerful. And its domain extends even further. In fact, I believe it sinks its roots not just into the ground, in the narrow sense of the term, but more generally speaking, into the world, with which, by an infinite number of channels, of antennae, it enters into communication as the open-air city never did. This arrangement has allowed it to create numerous vital centers and especially—especially!—a reserve of these, safe from any attack, even by surprise, and from any infiltration, even by trickery. Something one could imagine but never achieve on the surface. They constitute, these reserve systems, the most remarkable defense conceivable: they offer impregnable zones of refuge as well as forming reservoirs—which, in case of need, convert on their own into generators—of energy! Indisputably, one must consider them the real heart of the city. (*WRS* 119)

In this passage, the theorist apprehends the infinity of the underground city. But, because infinity « ne sauraient être atteints par l'un quelconque de ses habitants ou par un moyen d'investigation, si puissant soit-il » / “cannot be reached by any of its inhabitants or by any means of investigation, however powerful”—that is, by any given epistemology—he mobilizes the ontology of oil to characterize it: « elle plonge ses racines non pas dans le sol, au sens restreint du terme, mais d'une façon générale, dans le monde, avec lequel, par une infinité de conduits, d'antennes, elle entre en communication comme jamais ne l'a fait la ville de l'air » / “it sinks its roots not just into the ground, in the narrow sense of the term, but more generally speaking, into the world, with which, by an infinite number of channels, of antennae, it enters into communication as the open-air city never did.”

The theorist's ecological sensitivity allows him to be opened (by) oil. *He thinks oil itself.* He therefore escapes the supreme horror affect that has orbited him since his childhood. In this way, his strategy for grasping the alterity of oil is close to what Negarestani, following Deleuze and Félix Guattari, calls a “schizostrategy”: a strategy for “being opened (by), not being open (to) [. . .] Schizostrategies always emerge out of anomalous

(in the sense of the positioning and arrangement between two or multiple entities, not their unconventionality) participations with the Outside” (C 242). (The Outside is nature, from which society, again, is absolutely withdrawn.) As Rick Dolphijn argues, Negarestani’s schizostrategy calls for “an ecology of *clopenness* (a term from topology combining closed and open), which does not start from language, conscience or even man (and his Other), but from a need to become a target, from a need to be opened up (by)” (211). An ecology of clopenness, which is to say a nonrelational relational ontology, allows for the creation of « nombreux plexus vitaux et surtout—surtout !—une réserve de ceux-ci, à l’abri de toute attaque, même par surprise, de toute infiltration, même par ruse » / “numerous vital centers and especially—especially!—a reserve of these, safe from any attack, even by surprise, and from any infiltration, even by trickery.” Moreover, these reserve systems « offrent des zones de refuge inexpugnables autant qu’ils forment des accumulateurs—qui, en cas de besoin, se convertissent d’eux-mêmes en sources !—d’énergie » / “offer impregnable zones of refuge as well as forming reservoirs—which, in case of need, convert on their own into generators—of energy!” An ecology of clopenness, that is, acknowledges the energy of speculative thinking. First, recall that oil “eases narration and the whole dynamism toward the desert” (Negarestani, C 19). For Deleuze and Guattari, the desert is a *nomad space*, where the *nomad* attests to « une solitude absolue, c’est une solitude extrêmement peuplée, comme le désert lui-même, une solitude qui noue déjà son fil avec un peuple à venir, qui invoque et attend ce peuple, n’existe que par lui, même s’il manque encore » (MP 467) / “an absolute solitude, it is an extremely populous solitude, like the desert itself, a solitude already intertwined with a

people to come, one that invokes and awaits that people, existing only through it, though it is not yet here” (*ATP* 439). Following Negarestani, Deleuze, and Guattari, we assert that the absolutely solitary theorist of *Qui se souvient de la mer* discovers underground a generously infinite energy source in the ~~petromyopia~~ speculative thought of oil, the absolute of the sea, a nomad space, desert of water. In being alone in remembering the rejuvenating (Dead?) sea that has receded from the aboveground city underground, *he thinks flowing water itself*. More precisely, he apprehends the infinity of the underground city *through* the ontology of oil, which leads him to disinter the ontology of the sea. *Il se souvient de la mer* (he remembers the sea). His discovery of reservoirs that autonomously generate energy is close to the early Louis Althusser’s Figure of the irrigating spring. *Contra* the Humean billiard game, which is spatiotemporally immediate, Althusser apprehends the irrigating spring as spatiotemporally infinite, which allows him to assert that « l’eau qui coule n’est jamais rompue d’avec elle-même. C’est, de la source à la terre la plus lointaine, la même eau ininterrompue » (*M* 74)²²⁰ / “flowing water never breaks with itself. It is the same uninterrupted stream, from the spring to the most distant lands” (*PH* 68). Like the theorist of *Qui se souvient de la mer*, that is, he thinks flowing water itself.²²¹ And, for both nomads, this infinite spatiotemporality, this speculative thought,

²²⁰ Althusser, Louis. *Montesquieu. La politique et l’Histoire*. Quadrige / PUF, 1992.

²²¹ I find here the seed of Althusser’s later writings on aleatory materialism, which I examined in the chapter on *Dhargren*. I also find here a way of positioning my own response to the problem of induction in a genealogy of French philosophy, from Montesquieu (on climate and monarchy) to Meillassoux (on radical contingency). With Goodman’s “grue paradox” and Brandom’s rationalist inferentialism, the possibilities stretch to infinity. I bracket for another time Althusser’s Montesquieuvian argument that « c’est le désert même que le despotisme établit à ses frontières, brûlant les terres, même les siennes, pour s’isoler du monde, se protéger des contagions et des invasions dont rien d’autre ne peut le garder » (*M* 87) / “it is the desert itself that despotism establishes at its frontiers; burning lands, even its own, to isolate itself from the world, to protect itself from the contagions and invasions from which nothing else can save it”

means infinitely generous energy—a *nisus*, freedom, beyond “petroculture.” It follows from all this that they consent not to be single beings (Moten); *they become thought*.

Let us now return, at a ~~higher~~ lower level, to our hypothesis and *speculate* the title of Dib’s novel: *Qui se souvient de la mer* (*Who Remembers the Sea*). With these meaningless signs—words-in-themselves, letters-in-themselves, lines-in-themselves, symbols-in-themselves, movements-in-themselves—Dib performs a triple displacement.²²² First, he replaces the question (*Qui se souvient de la mer ?*) with the statement (*Qui se souvient de la mer*). Second, he substitutes the question (*Qui se souvient de la mer ?*) for the question (*Qui est qui ? / Who is who?*). Although the nameless theorist (Kerans? Kid?) certainly remembers the sea, we assert that the relative pronoun *qui* refers to that which precedes not only the text but also anthropic society: nonhuman nature, solar deserts of oil and water (and ice). *The universal underground*. After all, *qui* can refer to a noun mentioned previously in order to differentiate it from others. We thereby (re)translate the title of Dib’s novel into English as *Nature Remembers the Sea*. Remember Adnan: “Reason and memory move together” (*N 17*). Finally, then, Dib displaces an epistemological question about identification with an ontological statement about nature. Ecologically sensitive, we are opened (by) the forces

(*PH 79*). I cite here the French from Althusser, Louis. *Montesquieu. La politique et l’Histoire*. Quadrige / PUF, 1992.

²²² I am energized here by Montag Warren’s reappraisal of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s question *vis-à-vis* Althusser’s occulted Platonism: “Plato was right to see philosophy as the site of a war that can have no end insofar as one must constantly confront the unforeseeable consequences of one’s own work.” I cite here Warren, Montag. “Can the Subaltern Speak and Other Transcendental Questions.” *Multitudes: Revue Politique, Artistique, Philosophique*, no. 26, Autumn 2006, <https://www.multitudes.net/Can-the-Subaltern-Speak-and-Other/>.

of nature. We are now freed to assert that *Qui se souvient de la mer / Nature Remembers the Sea* is a hypothesis compatible with our solution to the problem of induction. In other words, it is an assertion that puts forward the appropriate premises from which to make inferences that could modify anything. It follows from this that anything could confirm anything. *Anything could revolve*. Such is the infinite spatiotemporality—the generously infinite sovereign energy—gifted to us by speculatively thinking absolutes in language. *Nomad space. Nomad time*. The literary texts we have studied—*The Drowned World*, *Dhalgren*, *Le Transperceneige*, *L’Arabe apocalypse / The Arab Apocalypse*, and *Qui se souvient de la mer*—are all examples of *le fantastique damné*. In them, the fantastic is ubiquitous. They render obsolete given epistemologies. They don’t belong. They’re cursed and they’re confounded. They displace the anthropic project of area studies; they *weird* area studies.²²³ With *jouissance*, we embrace the extinction of *anthropos*. We could’ve resurfaced: “The earth is local movement in the desegregation of the universal” (Harney and Moten). « A nous, la vérité, nous qui ne vivons que dans cette attente ! » (Dib, *QSM* 118) / “Ours the truth, we who live in wait only for that moment” (Dib, *WRS*

²²³ I am energized here by Timothy S. Murphy’s “weirding” of world literature *vis-à-vis* Lovecraft’s cosmicism: “If the critique of the nation-form calls into question the fundamental unit common to nationalism, imperialism, and internationalism and thus the fundamental units of national literature that comprise the conventional notion of world literature by questioning its metaphysical subject-form, the people, then Lovecraft’s critique of anthropocentrism calls into question the overall world map that those units are supposed to comprise by positing a radically alien subject preceding, producing, still underlying and hence threatening that (inter)national subject-form with dissolution [. . .] Instead of the nation-form preceding, prefiguring, and producing first the interimperialist world and then the international world, the alien world precedes, disfigures, decenters, and undermines the world of nations and imperialisms. By projecting an ancient, radically different world beneath our world, Lovecraft unexpectedly destabilizes the political world of national/imperialist identity and the conceptual systems of rational consistency and scientific intelligibility” (171-172). The same thing could be said of Dib’s subterrestrial world.

73). A future model, for a new earth and a people that don't yet exist. We decapitate the disaster. *Acéphalique*, we shall have a procession of the damned.²²⁴ New structuralism.

—*Inverness, Gainesville, Chicago,*
Riverside, Ghent, Paris,
Dublin, Tampere, Lublin,
Copenhagen, Saint-Erme-Outre-et-Ramecourt,
Los Angeles

September 1989/May 2020

²²⁴ I allude here not only to Bataille (with *acéphalique*), but also to Charles Fort: “A procession of the damned. / By the damned, I mean the excluded. / We shall have a procession of data that Science has excluded. / Battalions of the accursed, captained by pallid data that I have exhumed, will march. You’ll read them—or they’ll march. Some of them livid and some of them fiery and some of them rotten. / Some of them are corpses, skeletons, mummies, twitching, tottering, animated by companions that have been damned alive. There are giants that will walk by, though sound asleep. There are things that are theorems and things that are rags: they’ll go by like Euclid arm in arm with the spirit of anarchy. Here and there will flit little harlots. Many are clowns. But many are of the highest respectability. Some are assassins. There are pale stench and gaunt superstitions and mere shadows and lively malices: whims and amiabilities. The naïve and the pedantic and the bizarre and the grotesque and the sincere and the insincere, the profound and the puerile. / A stab and a laugh and the patiently folded hands of hopeless propriety” (3).

to SCREAM [*CRIER*]

from the navel of the Earth [*omphalos*]

S
D
A
E
M
Ø
N

laugh at the sun
fuck the apocalypse

Coda: Cydonia

« La destruction prématurée ? toute l'épouvante humaine vient d'elle ! Après l'homme le Horla »—Guy de Maupassant, *Le Horla*

“Premature destruction? All the horrors of humanity stem from that alone. After mankind, the Horla.”—Guy de Maupassant, “The Horla”

« Le drapeau n'est plus buvable ! La légende est odieuse ! / Nous sommes les Nouveaux Morts »— Mohammed Khaïr Eddine, *Soleil arachnide*

“The flag can no longer be drunk! The legend is repulsive! / We are the Newly Dead!”— Mohammed Khaïr Eddine, *Scorpionic Sun*

“A screaming comes across the sky.”—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

« Je le sais, je ne suis qu'une contrefaçon. Mais une goutte bleue est entrée en moi. Je la transforme en encre de gamin noir déchirant les murs. Cette histoire que vous lisez sur mes murs, ses mots ne partiront que quand les immeubles poussées de la mouillure des cyclones auront disparu »—Ananda Devi, *Ève de ses décombres*

“I know this, that I'm only a simulacrum. But a drop of blue ink has gotten into me. I transform it into a black child's ink, lacerating the walls, its words will only disappear when the buildings born out of the cyclones' waters have disappeared.”—Ananda Devi, *Eve out of her Ruins*

“The world begins anew, starting now.”—Monica Byrne, *The Girl in the Road*

European Space Agency (ESA), Sept. 21, 2006:

“After multiple attempts to image the Cydonia region from April 2004 until July 2006 were frustrated by altitude and atmospheric dust and haze, the High Resolution Stereo Camera (HRSC) on board Mars Express finally obtained, on 22 July, a series of images that show the famous ‘face’ on Mars in unprecedented detail.

The data were gathered during orbit 3253 over the Cydonia region, with a ground resolution of approximately 13.7 metres per pixel. Cydonia lies at approximately 40.75° North and 350.54° East.

‘These images of the Cydonia region on Mars are truly spectacular,’ said Dr Agustín Chicarro, ESA Mars Express Project Scientist. ‘They not only provide a completely fresh and detailed view of an area famous to fans of space myths worldwide, but also provide an impressive close-up over an area of great interest for planetary geologists, and show once more the high capability of the Mars Express camera.’

Cydonia is located in the Arabia Terra region on Mars and belongs to the transition zone between the southern highlands and the northern plains of Mars. This transition is characterized by wide, debris-filled valleys and isolated mounds of various shapes and sizes.

One of these visible remnant massifs became famous as the 'Face on Mars' in an image taken on 25 July 1976 by the American Viking 1 Orbiter.

A few days later, on 31 July 1976, a NASA press release said the formation 'resembles a human head.' However, NASA scientists had already correctly interpreted the image as an optical illusion caused by the illumination angle of the Sun, the formation's surface morphology and the resulting shadows, giving the impression of eyes, nose and mouth.

Nonetheless, the 'Face on Mars' was the subject of widespread speculation on the possible origins and purpose of artificial structures on the Red Planet, with the face being the most talked-about formation.

The array of nearby structures has been interpreted by some space enthusiasts as artificial landscapes, such as potential pyramids and even a disintegrated city. The idea that the planet might have once been home to intelligent beings has since inspired the imagination of many Mars fans, and has been expressed in numerous, more-or-less serious, newspaper articles as well as in science-fiction literature and on many Web pages.

Despite all this, the formal scientific interpretation has never changed: the face remains a figment of human imagination in a heavily eroded surface.

It took until April 1998, and confirmation with additional data from the Mars Orbiter Camera on NASA's Mars Global Surveyor, before popular speculation waned. More data from the same orbiter in 2001 further confirmed this conclusion.

While the formations aren't of alien origin, they are nevertheless of significant interest to planetary geologists.

In areas adjacent to Cydonia, gently sloping areas surrounding hills or reliefs, so-called 'debris aprons,' are frequently found. They form at the foot of such remnant mounds and probably consist of a mixture of rocky debris and ice. In Cydonia itself, such aprons are often missing in smaller massifs. The formation of debris aprons is considered to be controlled by talus formation, a sloping mass of rock debris at the base of a cliff, and landslides.

At the Mars 'face,' such characteristic landslides and an early form of debris apron formation can be seen.

Former larger debris aprons might have been covered by later lava flows in the surrounding area; the western wall of the face moved downslope as a coherent mass. The location of the detachment zone is reflected by a large scarp extending from North to South. The results of large mass wasting, or downslope movement of rock, are also visible at the foot of the pyramid-like formations.

Between April 2004 and July 2006, the HRSC gathered data from the Cydonia region numerous times.

However, high flight altitude, resulting in poor data resolution on the ground (orbits 0262, 2533, 2872), as well as dust and haze in the Martian atmosphere, leading to heavily reduced data quality (orbits 1216, 2872) prevented the acquisition of high-quality Cydonia images.

On 22 July, the HRSC finally met success during orbit 3253, and a wide area in Cydonia was imaged at the best possible resolution and in 3D. In fact, in addition to the well-known 'face' and 'pyramids,' a naturally skull-shaped structure also appears in some of the Mars Express images."²²⁵

²²⁵ I cite here in its entirety European Space Agency. "Cydonia – the face on Mars." *European Space Agency*, http://www.esa.int/Science_Exploration/Space_Science/Mars_Express/Cydonia_-_the_face_on_Mars. Accessed 12 April 2020.

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