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When Horses Won't Eat: Apocalypse and the Anthropocene

Franklin Ginn

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Abstract

In this article I suggest that fantasies of apocalypse are both a product and a producer of the Anthropocene. While images and narratives of contemporary environmental apocalypse have usually been understood as politically regressive and post-political distractions, I demonstrate that a more hopeful reading is possible. Apocalypse tells us that the Human as currently configured in the Anthropocene – an ideal universal subject who is energized through fossil fuels and who has been elevated to a position of ecological mastery – cannot continue indefinitely. This article therefore considers what apocalyptic imaginaries reveal about the limits to being human and the future of human life after the Anthropocene. It does so by analyzing a critically-acclaimed film, *The Turin Horse* (2011). In this film an old farm horse refuses to eat, drink, or leave its stall, while a daughter and her father struggle on through an unspecified disaster, gnawing on raw potatoes as their world slowly unravels. *The Turin Horse* discloses the earth forces that have made Anthropocene humans along three lines: the geological, the biological, and the temporal. The film also hints at three challenges to be overcome to make humans differently: the need to surpass carbon humanity; the need for nonhuman allies; and the need to affirm agency against the inevitability of deep time. I suggest that contemporary apocalyptic visions are a core aspect of how geographers should understand socio-ecological transformation, since they challenge those who view them to feel the condition of the Anthropocene, and pose the question of how to respond well to unruly earth forces.

Keywords

Posthumanism, Dystopia, Ecocriticism, Béla Tarr, *The Turin Horse*

Anthropocene apocalypse

Thinking of the Earth today and not, at the same time, thinking of its devastation is increasingly difficult. Popular apocalyptic stories multiply on screen: resource extraction and imperialism (*Avatar*); the vanity and depression of the rich (*Melancholia*); alien migration and hybridization (*District 9*, *Falling Skies*); zoonotic pandemics (*Contagion*); climate disaster (*The Day After Tomorrow*; *The Colony*); the end of friendship between human and animal (*The Life of Pi*, *After Earth*), as well as in text (*The MaddAddam Trilogy*, *The Windup Girl*, *The Possibility of an Island*), and in landscapes (witness the popular and critical interest in ruins). The flavor and political tone varies too, from conservative family drama, to regressive ecology, to exuberant tales of technonatures to come. Such visions are an imaginative force oriented toward the future, riven by pervasive anxiety about the prospects for life.

Of course visions of civilization's end are nothing new, and indeed every culture seems to obsess over its own ruination (Hall 2009). We must therefore historicize. 'Our' current time is the Anthropocene, that new geological epoch in which humans have become a planetary force, according to analysis of the lithographic, geochemical, biological, and atmospheric records of human activities (Zalasiewicz et al. 2011). For some, the Anthropocene signals a final enclosure of politics and culture within ecology: a new geo-politics in which Earth is the sovereign authority; humans, inmates of a planet-sized camp in a permanent state of emergency. For others, it is an occasion to double down on techno-hubris and call forth more fevered bouts of rationality and management (Oxford Martin Commission 2013). Optimistic commentators hope that naming this new epoch may accelerate action on the pressing challenges of our time – that the Anthropocene is an “unprecedented opportunity” (Ellis et al. 2013, 7978), a wake-up call for “planetary stewardship” (Steffen et al. 2011), or just good to think with (Ellsworth and Kruse 2013). Critics remind us that the unitary human of the Anthropocene hides political difference and risks elevating a particular kind of consumer to a motor of History (Malm and Hornborg, 2014). For the purposes of this article, however, the very act of asking the question, “Is this the Anthropocene?” demonstrates that we have moved into an era of anxiety about the prospects for planetary life. Indeed, the Anthropocene might be defined as an emotional condition as well as a physical event (Robbins and Moore 2013). It is worth remembering that the Anthropocene arrives not with a socio-ecological transition (an event), but rather with our capacity to *measure* and to read signs of that event through scientific or artistic means (Szerszynski 2012). Only once we can measure, read, and therefore sense, how the Earth has become sensitive do we enter the Anthropocene. Thus if the Anthropocene is partly formed through ‘affective atmospheres’ (Anderson 2012) and ways of representing that constrain and

enable political imaginaries, we should consider these as important components of socio-ecological transition.

In this article I suggest that fantasies of apocalypse are both a product and a producer of our current epoch – the Anthropocene – and that they also take us beyond this epoch by confronting what might be to come. I contend that ‘Anthropocene apocalypse’ reveals how we have always been more-than-human in ways at once both geological and biological, ways through which earth forces have been folded within us. Against the dominant grain in social science and drawing upon recent work in ecocriticism, I offer a hopeful reading of apocalypse. If contemporary apocalypse emerges as a nightmare of the Anthropocene’s socio-ecological risks, it also produces something over and above anxiety – something escapes, and such excesses might be mined for their transformative kind of feeling, not just criticized for their politically regressive negativity. The article therefore focuses on apocalyptic cinema, examining how film offers us a way of measuring our sensitivity to the Earth (rather than measuring the Earth’s sensitivity to human activities). The article analyzes on one avant-garde, critically-acclaimed film: *The Turin Horse* (2011), directed by Béla Tarr. Tarr’s film represents a particular kind of apocalyptic vision: uncompromising, difficult, culminating in cosmic emptiness that is implied but not presented. It is far from a Hollywood blockbuster. The film nonetheless distills into an intense form many anxieties of Anthropocene apocalypse, making it a suitable vehicle through which to explore the cultural politics of how we are sensitized to the Earth.

Post-political apocalypse, ecocriticism and film

Can a film make someone think or act differently? Can apocalyptic cinema change the world? We can characterize two prevailing perspectives on apocalyptic cinema that respond to these questions in very different ways. The first, an eco-Marxist perspective dominant in geography, suggests that “quite simply apocalypticism is politically disabling” (Katz 1995, 277). The second, more prevalent in social theory and ecocriticism, to summarize crudely, seeks to locate cinema’s potential to “reframe perception” for progressive ends (Rust et al. 2013, 11). This article thus seeks to connect geographical debates about socio-ecological futures to those taking place in the inter-disciplinary field of the environmental humanities.

In a series of articles, Swyngedouw (2010; 2013) has laid bare what he sees as the politically regressive logic of apocalypse. In Swyngedouw’s analysis modern ecology is a thoroughly depoliticized enterprise in which politics has been replaced by policy and governance. His paradigmatic example is climate change, in which carbon dioxide has been fetishized to stand in as ‘the problem,’ masking the underlying cause: the unequal socio-

economic and geopolitical networks behind each unit of carbon dioxide. Negotiations turn on parts-per-million, thresholds are set at atmospheric concentration levels, and 'sustainable' policies, such as carbon pricing, are the only game in town. Even radical environmentalists translate their goals into scientific measurements by fixating on carbon dioxide levels. Capitalism, in particular its neoliberal variegation, remains uncontested. As Swyngedouw puts it, implicit in crisis and apocalypse is a universal threat: we are all potential victims, ultimately in it together. Swyngedouw argues that "the imaginary of crisis and potential collapse produces an ecology of fear, danger and uncertainty while reassuring the 'people' ... that the techno-scientific and socio-economic elites have the necessary tool-kit to readjust the machine such that things can basically stay as they are" (2010, 11). The end of everything is an ongoing crisis that we are assured can be managed within the current system; apocalyptic imaginaries become a key way to sustain this post-political consensus. The politically regressive nature of apocalypse is therefore its tendency to entrench further forces that precipitate catastrophe in the first place.

Since the late 1990s the burgeoning field of ecocriticism has been analyzing the potential of environmental film and literature, including apocalyptic visions, for consciousness-raising that might inculcate a sense of planetary care (Rust et al. 2013). The prescriptive moral tone of some progressive ecocritical readings and the assumed link between consuming a pro-environmental vision and a more enlightened planetary citizenry are, of course, naïve to say the least (Buell 2003; Hulme 2008). For even 'progressive' environmental films, including apocalyptic films intended to shock us out of complacency, do not easily escape the post-political critique outlined above. A film like *Avatar*, for example, while showcasing the evils of an imperialist, militarized capitalism, symptomatically falls back on troubling notions of a sovereign Nature, complete with a native people, the Na'vi. Other films, such as *Melancholia*, explicitly embrace passivity in the face of disaster as the only possible alternative to Hollywood bombast (wherein techno-scientific knowhow saves the day) (Latour 2013a). Yet other ecocritics suggest that films, while always suffused in the prevailing post-political ideology of the day (eco-doom as consumerist spectacle), do not robotically follow such ideologies, but also contain ideological contradictions and excesses (Ingram 2004). Such critics are also aware that, historically, apocalypse has generated highly varied political positions, from the regressive to the revolutionary (Skrimshire 2014). For Hageman, the power of ecofilms comes not from "explicit ecological programming," but "their contradictions," and "the fissures through which we may glimpse and further imagine an ecology without capital – an ecology to come" (2013, 66). Hageman thus re-reads film against the grain of hegemonic ideology, and suggests that we approach ecofilm not by asking what a film does (does it change people's actions?), but rather what *can* a film do? In other words, instead of assessing measurable changes in people's actions

we can speculate how ecofilm might offer novel ways to think about the future and in so doing relativize the present.

To understand how film works, we can draw on ecocritic Ivakhiv's ecological approach. Ivakhiv (2013) suggests that films have internal ecologies, and that this makes cinema different from other cultural forms. The main difference being, according to Ivakhiv, film's motility and openness: each film's internal ecology is poised to be read in a different way, to mutate, and by drawing viewers into a relationship become more than merely internal to the film, but to overflow the film and make connections to the world beyond. Film draws viewers into its world along three vectors: the spectacular, which is the immediacy of affect and response in the experience of seeing a film; the narrative, or the recognition of connection through scenes that makes up the film world; and the exo-referential, which is the recognition of meaningful reference to things outside the film. Through each of these three vectors – the spectacular, the narrative and the exo-referential – films can be “affectively generative” and can change the viewer (Ivakhiv 2013, 300). The force of these vectors is neither pre-ordained nor contained in the film alone, but emerges from the ecological relationship between viewer, world, and film. Such capacities make cinema more than programmed texts readable in only one way.

Drawing on Hageman and Ivakhiv to read the spectacular, narrative, and exo-referential ecologies of *The Turin Horse*, I contend that the apocalyptic differs from other ecofilms, which might aim to shock the viewer, or to prompt an emotional reaction to suffering, or to mourn, to bear witness, or to inspire. While apocalyptic film can do those things, its more important function is to prompt a yearning for something different, a transformation: the beginning of a new world, not the end of an old one, as well as prompt the question of how to respond to an uncertain future. Apocalyptic cinema is not, of course, pre-programmed to do this; rather, a desire for the new emerges out of the ecological relationship between film, viewer, and world. The ‘new’ here, I will demonstrate, involves confronting the disempowering deep time horizons implicit in the Anthropocene as well as the geological and biological commitments of the anthropos of the Anthropocene.

The speculative style of this article is of course not intended to supplant more grounded analyses of socio-ecological politics and transition. We know from such work that apocalypse is already here, it is just not very evenly distributed (to paraphrase novelist William Gibson). Moreover, the capacity to be affected by film is governed by a distribution of the sensible that follows lines of privilege (Rancière 2004). Indeed, cinematic representations of Anthropocene apocalypse might be characterized as entertainment for a privileged elite. But as Castree (2014) argues, representations produced and consumed by the powerful have force and should not escape our critical attention. If, as I have suggested earlier, the Anthropocene is defined as much

by anxiety as by transitions in earth systems, then it is crucial to interrogate how any cultural elite produces and consumes knowledge and imaginaries of the future as well as the physical science base.

The Turin Horse: Cosmic un-making and hope in time

Hungarian director Béla Tarr's work spans 30 years. Tarr's early films, beginning with *The Prefab People* (1982), grapple with the problems of communist Hungary, while his later works chart the hollowness of the good life under capitalism; his most famous film, the seven-hour *Satantango* (1994), follows the break-up of a collective farm after the end of communism. Tarr's films also get darker and darker in tone, culminating with the final scenes of his last film, *The Turin Horse* (2011, 146 minutes), in which the sun and all light are extinguished. Tarr describes starting his career with the desire to show how messed up the world is, but that gradually he "began to understand that the problems were not only social; they are deeper ... They were cosmic," which led to his style becoming ever-simpler and by the end "very pure" (2012).

The Turin Horse describes six days on a bleak, wind-swept, and dusty farmstead. After the opening scene, a mesmeric close-up of a horse-and-cart journey home, the horse ('played' by a horse called Ricsi) is shut away in her stable. Each day the peasant farmer, Ohlsdorfer, (played by János Derzsi) and his unnamed daughter (Erika Bók) repeat their routine: they get dressed, stare out the same windows, eat the same meal (one boiled potato). The young woman has to dress her father each morning because his right hand is paralyzed; he seems barely capable even of tending to their horse. The film shows a pared down life without joy, although the audience is clearly expected to fear that worse may be to come in this anti-genesis narrative arc. On day two, despite being whipped, the horse refuses to move. We see their daily routines once again, but from slightly different angles and perspectives. On day three a drunken neighbor warns them of the encroaching final darkness in a long, rambling monologue. On the fourth day the horse refuses to eat or drink. The well runs dry. On the fifth day, the farmer and daughter decide to flee with their horse. They load their possessions on their cart, and slowly the three disappear over the horizon. The camera stays fixed on a lone tree until forty seconds later we see the trio return, even more desperate and exhausted than before. The horse is shut away again, and does not reappear (Figure 1). On the sixth day, the storm has ended, but a great darkness has descended; their lamp gutters and dies (Figure 2). The film's closing shots are of the man worrying at a raw potato with one hand, the woman staring into her bowl; although we don't see the final breath, the end is inevitable.

On one level Tarr's film is a Nietzschean vision in which the farmer and daughter fail to break out of their lives and drown in repetition as the cosmos slowly slides back to its dark origins. All Tarr's films are caught in a tension between the endless repetition of material events (the wind, the potato, a shot of pálinka) and the potential each being has for breaking out of that repetition, of exhibiting a will to power that can break with this history, bend other life to its own enhancement. The characters in *The Turin Horse* are caught between, on the one hand, as Rancière puts it in his commentary on Tarr's films, "the law of wind and misery", and on the other, "the weak but indestructible capacity to affirm 'honor and dignity' against this law" (2013, 46). For Tarr's characters, affirming 'honor and dignity' would mean not surrendering to environmental or apocalyptic forces, but striving for paths out of eternal repetition and confronting cosmic dissolution. *The Turin Horse* discloses potential for honor and dignity through three themes: the geological, the biological, and the temporal.

The elements play a strong role in *The Turin Horse*: incessant wind, the well running dry, and the life-sustaining fire. The film's soundscape is dominated by howling wind, which at times makes human speech impossible, while the encroaching darkness creates creeping dread and heightens the importance of the family's firewood and paraffin supplies. Wind, water and fire are not a backdrop against which the 'action' unfolds, but are active participants. This elemental emphasis creates, as Ivakhiv would have it, a spectacle that captures physical hardship rooted in earth forces, as well as perhaps the (off-screen) politics of land tenure. But as well as a spectacle, the narrative prominence of the pair worrying about fuel mirrors conditions outside the film world (Ivakhiv's exo-referential element). As Mitchell (2011) has shown, fossil fuels were central to the emergence of modern liberal-democratic states: first as the entrenched material networks of coal extraction bred class politics, then as oil made possible the just-in-time energy distribution networks that fuel the global economy. From Mitchell it is a small step to acknowledge that the Anthropocene is a project done not by humans alone, but done *with* geological forces: laid down deposits of fossilized solar energy. Others have taken this to its next logical step, which is that as well as liberal democratic capitalism, geology has made possible modern carbon humans (Clark 2011). To summarize, fossil fuels are folded into the human: materially (think of pervasive endocrine disruption); through our embedding in socio-technical systems that ultimately depend on fossilized energy (the notion that to be human is always already to be a tool-user); psychologically (our desires, hopes, and fears shaped by the geopolitics of oil). All this means that inasmuch as we might have become a geological force in the Anthropocene, "we" are also an "historically locatable capitalization on geo-power" (Grosz 2012, 975). In *The Turin Horse* it is the lamp that shows how wedded the man and woman are to the "geologic life" of the Anthropocene (Yusoff 2013). The woman gathers firewood and

tends the fire each day – there is no electricity, only a supply of paraffin for their lamp. In the last days, the fire and lamp burn low, and – eventually – die. The pair is unable to relight the lamp, even though the woman assures her father that she has filled it. But faced with this mystery, rather than seek an explanation or another fuel source the pair grope their way to bed in the dark. “What is all this?” the woman asks, as the sun vanishes; “I don't know, let's go to bed,” the man replies. The sixth day's separation of life from the sun (as the great darkness descends to block the ultimate source of fossil fuels) refers to the inevitability of the end of carbon humans not just in this film, but in our own world. The characters' inability to respond to this crisis evokes the way in which imaginations of the Anthropocene have been colonized by fossil fuels.

Possibilities of a new kind of human linger at the edges of Tarr's film if only the pair can break out of the ‘law of rain and misery’ and find other ways to harness earth energies. Hope, such as it is, lies with another character however. In the film's opening scene the man sits on his cart, buffeted by the wind. But he is unmoving – instead it is the horse that fights the wind, the horse that struggles to overcome the weather. The farm's residents are a knot of companion species bound together on a journey into darkness. As well as being makers of and made by Earth's geology, the horse signals how humans are made through the biological. Biophilosophers now make much of our originary relationality, the idea that the human is a strategic essentialism distilled from multi-species practices. We are, Bennett (2010, 113) puts it, “nested sets of microbiomes.” Relationality goes all the way in (to the 80% of our DNA shared with daffodils), and all the way back (our genome replete with remainders of canine viruses transmitted in the saliva of doggy companions back in deep time (Haraway 2008)). Just as the ‘short’ Anthropocene was done with geological earth forces (fossil fuels), so too the ‘long’ Anthropocene (which takes the domestication of grain as its starting point) was never a human project (these two are the main competing versions of the Anthropocene, although they are not incompatible). The first garden plant was a blow-in weed, an opportunist landing on garbage at the edge of a camp, tended by a speculative human: a partnership of convenience, not the effect of human genius (Doolittle 2004). Since then, palm oil, wheat, cows, and the weedy foot-soldiers of empire have changed earth systems along with their human kin (DeLanda 1997). Which is to say that as well as suffering in it, non-humans have been fundamental to creating the Anthropocene.

The film takes its title from an apocryphal tale which has Nietzsche throwing his arms around a horse being cruelly whipped in a Turin square, before collapsing on a sofa and declaring himself ‘dumb’. The hook for the film is curiosity: what happened to the horse in this tale? The answer to this question arrives during a remarkable one-and-a-half minute shot in

which we first zoom in to focus on the horse's face, and then zoom out as the stable door is shut forever. This shot begins as a dense moment of spectacle (in Ivakhiv's terms), creating an intense connection between viewer and animal. But the shot's length ensures that we realize that this is a real, fleshy horse, as well as a cipher for human/nonhuman entanglement. Tarr is famed for using non-actors in his films, and this horse is no exception. Tarr searched for a horse that didn't want to work, and found Ricsi in a "very ugly, shitty, miserable animal market" near the Romanian border (2011a). The cinematographer, Fred Kelemen (2012), noted that "She had this deep sadness in her eyes." As the horse stares at us through the camera, her eyes pull us in, asking for response. The horse, then, embodies both the characters' and the viewers' debts and obligations to nonhuman kin.

Although the horse suffers a hard life, it is far from being merely a dumb beast of burden that can only accede to human demands. For the horse betrays the man and daughter: she seems to sense the coming end better than the two humans. Crucially, it is when the horse *refuses to eat* that any possibility of escape for the humans is extinguished. For the horse cannot then drag their cart, and the daughter must try instead (either because the man is impaired or because of a gendered division of labor). She fails. The final terror here is not any historical calamity; the final terror is that that the father and daughter are deserted by their nonhuman ally. The humans are left bereft, realizing too late that Tarr's injunction to go beyond mere survival to enhance the self, expand one's capacities, affirm dignity and break out of the "law of rain and misery" requires, well, a horse – a significant earthly other (Rancière 2013, 46). The human characters in *The Turin Horse* are caught between, on one hand, the endless repetition of the same, and on the other hand the possibility of escape, of a line of flight that leads to another life, but that without the horse's help cannot be followed. This apocalyptic vision demonstrates the need for the contemporary human subject to become more actively aware of its debts to nonhumans and to enter into progressive alliances with nonhumans as partners, not mere victims to be saved.

If the anxieties of Anthropocene apocalypse in this film take shape through the geological and biological dimensions of life, these are in turn overshadowed by the film's peculiar temporality. Time is crucial to Tarr's film. The director is famed for long shots, and indeed there are only thirty cuts in the whole film. This warps the viewer's perception of time, demanding patience and a slower form of engagement that retrains perception and flirts with boredom (MacDonald 2004). As in other apocalyptic worlds, life in *The Turin Horse* is slow. This is a double juxtaposition: first to the snappy, energetic style of Hollywood disaster movies (a contemporary Hollywood film has a cut on average every four to six seconds), and second to the accelerated, globally networked world of the Anthropocene. In *The Turin Horse* there are

two main temporalities at work. The first is the repetitive time of the everyday, which wears the characters down. The second is cosmic time, as the anti-genesis narrative arc moves slowly to day seven and the end of everything. The film thus juxtaposes the embodied, lived experience of apocalypse against prophetic eschatology. Much as the Anthropocene names a disaster that has already occurred (Morton 2013), the cosmic temporality in *The Turin Horse* encompasses a slow unravelling after some undisclosed, past calamity. On one hand, this could be read as a post-political shrug, a deep cynicism about any creatures' capacities to influence events and forces operating on vast scales (as the narrative of the film shows the wind, darkness, and end of fire overwhelming the characters, who remain unable to break of their repeated daily routines). But this would be a circumscribed reading. The film does not encourage us to welcome the void. Rather, we want the characters, amid their geologic and biologic commitments, to act differently than they do in the film: to act, that is, despite the inevitability of the end by breaking out of their repetitive loops. In other words, if the creatures in *The Turin Horse* seem bent to their fate and the world's unravelling, their placidity makes us desire them to act otherwise. We want them to wake up, to assert their honor and dignity in the face of the wind and darkness. They do not, which challenges the audience to think about how they themselves might achieve a less fatalistic relation between the temporality of the everyday and the time of geologic inevitability. The film's ecology, in other words, overflows the film world into our own, and mirrors the predicament of the Anthropocene: both ask what is the right response to deep time and intractable earth forces (Clark 2014).

Conclusion

Tarr is convinced the world can be changed for the better, but confesses that he is “just a poor filmmaker,” who wants to “show you something, some pictures, just some human eyes, something that is close to you ... Just listen to your heart and trust your eyes. That's enough” (2012). Tarr's film shows us characters downtrodden by forces vast and alien on the one hand (the wind and dark), intimate and fleshy on the other (unraveling bodies and animal agencies). The absence of the sun brings about the end of carbon modernity, their stockpile of oil useless and unburnable, and bereft of ideas the characters stumble to bed. An animal offers a line of escape from the encroaching gloom: an old horse that could, if it were able or wanted to, help the man and daughter escape. The horse shows the need for a desire that overflows the self and seeks connections, ways to feel more deeply our debts and obligations to non-human others. *The Turin Horse* is not a hopeful film. It shows the destruction of a version of ‘the human’ that has been elevated into a planetary agent as the anthropos of the Anthropocene. The film enjoins us

to imagine the characters doing things differently, breaking out of the law of rain and misery, seeking alternatives to their repeated daily routines.

In this article I have been suggesting that apocalyptic cinema, with its portrayals of collapse and of what might come after, is a kind of ‘earth dreaming’ that constructs the Anthropocene (along with scientific measurement, carbon emissions, and so on). Such earth dreaming does not work the same way as other knowledge. It is more open, its test of verification is not the “transport of indisputable necessities,” but its capacity to create “beings of fiction” that are carried along and transformed by their dreaming (Latour 2013b, 112). We encounter cinema as an open ecology, a provocation to feel something different, and as a relativization of current political power; cinema does not instruct us with its knowledge claims, nor need it reinforce apathy, helplessness, and post-political impasse. I have stressed that, following the ecological model of Ivakhiv (2013), cinema works along spectacular, narrative, and exo-referential vectors which reconfigure the relation between audience, film, and world. We are not spectators of apocalyptic films, we are participants; their ecology an invitation to feel the condition of the Anthropocene and what might lie beyond. If the earth-dreamers watching apocalyptic cinema are parochial, they are no less parochial than the legislators of sound science, the technocrats of earth systems governance, or the salespeople of shiny futures, and their version of the Anthropocene requires scrutiny in good faith, not just dismissal as vicarious indulgence or post-political passivity.

Anthropocene apocalypse does not therefore demand action or politics in the traditional sense. Instead, apocalypse undercuts the familiar modern narrative of progress. It shows that our projected future will be rudely interrupted by more-than-human forces; that, really, our collective myth of progress, of a humanity reaching ever-upwards towards great feats of rational management, will collapse as surely as global fish stocks. Thus the political charge of apocalypse is that it destroys the future – specifically, the future as a field in which the present Human will endure unchanged. For some this is liberating: “Moderns always had a future ... but never a chance, until recently that is, to turn to what I could call their *prospect*: the shape of things to come” (Latour 2010, 486). Or as Colebrook puts it, “any truly futural future is apocalyptic, which is to say that it is destructive of the present, and certainly cannot be contained by any thought of saving, surviving, enduring, or maintaining life as cosmos or oikos” (2012, 205). The dark geographies of apocalyptic life demand possibilities for other ways of being human, for ‘a people to come’ after carbon humans. Anthropocene apocalypse may not be exactly hopeful, but it demands a kind of depressing redemption: realizing that the question is not how to continue present ways of life, but the deeper challenge of crafting new ways to respond with honor and dignity to unruly earth forces.

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