Hauntings from the Future

Ghosts, Travellers and Extraterrestrials

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CONTENT

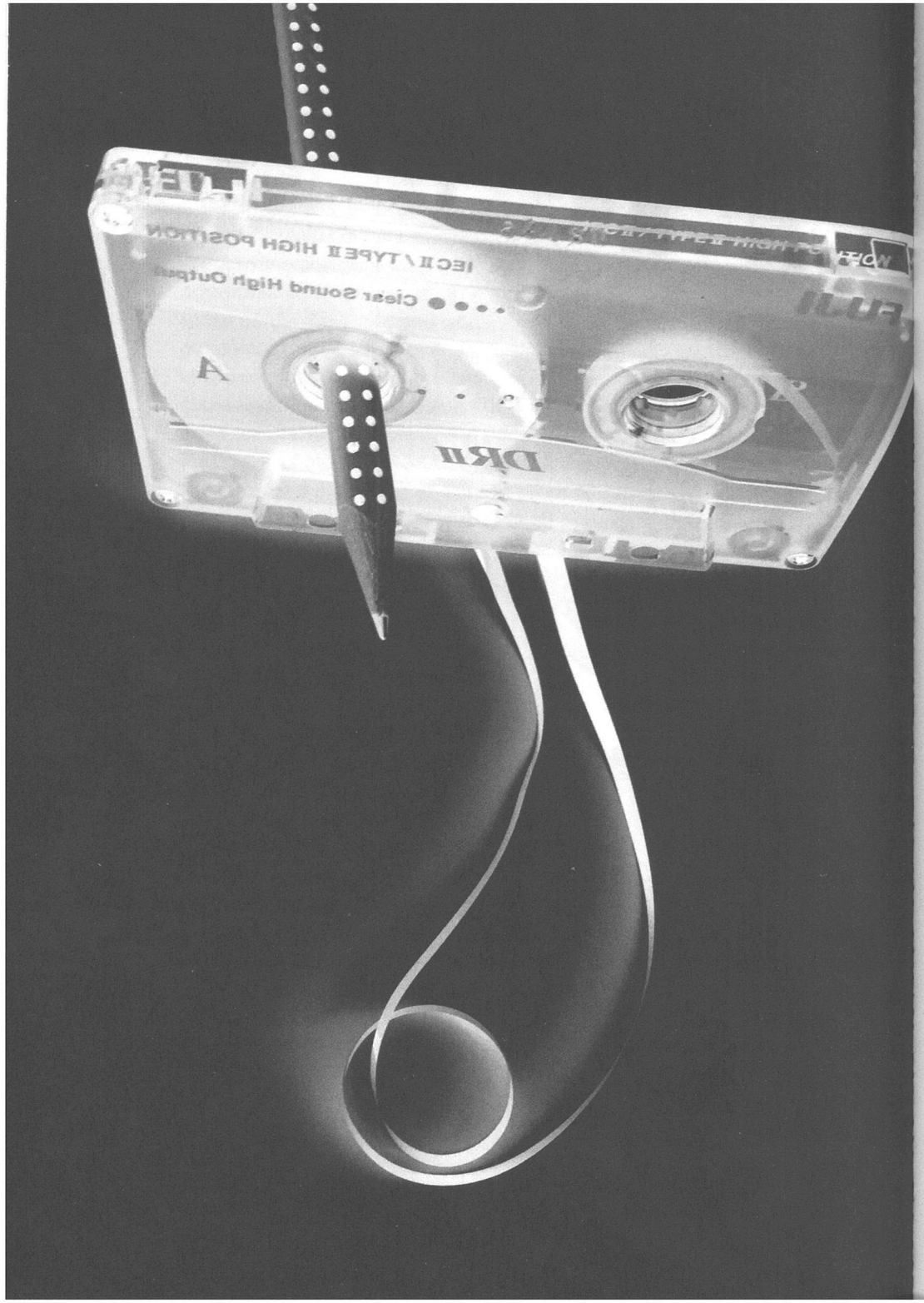
BOOKLET

TRACKLISTS

MIXTAPE Side A

MIXTAPE Side B

HIDDEN TRACK



Hauntings from the Future: Ghosts, Time Travellers, Extraterrestrials

Esther Peeren

> **Ghosts … are weeds that whisper tales of the many pasts and yet-to-comes that surround us.[01]**

The usefulness of the figure of the ghost as "a figure of return" and "present absence" that offers "a critique of the 'un-mixed"[02] for conceptualising how forgotten, overlooked, repressed or denied histories of violence and oppression linger, only partially materialised, in the present, and how such histories, once their remaining traces have been acknowledged, should be addressed has been established in a myriad of contexts.[03] The same goes for the ghost's ability to shed light on unseen, disavowed or obfuscated aspects of the present, from the workings of global capitalism[04] to what I have elsewhere called, following Achille Mbembe's work on necropolitics, "living ghosts" – people like undocumented migrants "who, already in their lifetime, resemble dispossessed ghosts in that they are ignored and considered expendable, or, sometimes at the same time, become objects of intense fear and violent attempts at extermination."[05] What has only recently begun to draw attention, and what I will focus on here, is what the ghost, in its peculiar temporality and materiality, and its potential haunting force has to say about our relation to the future, particularly when, as the editors of *Futures and Fictions* insist, in the

01 Elaine Gan, Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson and Nils Bubandt, "Introduction: Haunted Landscapes of the Anthropocene," in: *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, eds. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan and Nils Bubandt, Minneapolis 2017, pp. G1–G14, here p. G6.

02 Esther Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor: Living Ghosts and the Agency of Invisibility*, Basingstoke 2014, p. 10.

03 See, for example: Renée L. Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, Hanover/New Hampshire 2000; Judith Richardson, *Possessions: The History and Uses of Haunting in the Hudson Valley*, Cambridge/Massachussets 2003; Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Minneapolis 2008; María del Pilar Blanco and Esther Peeren, *The Spectralities Reader: Ghosts and Haunting in Contemporary Cultural Theory*, New York 2013.

04 See, for example: Arjun Appadurai, "Spectral Housing and Urban Cleansing: Notes on Millennial Mumbai," in: *Public Culture* 12 (2000), no. 3, pp. 627–651; Miriam Meissner, *Narrating the Global Financial Crisis: Urban Imaginaries and the Politics of Myth*, New York 2017.

05 Peeren, *The Spectral Metaphor* (see nt. 2), p. 14. See Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," in: *Public Culture* 15 (2003), no. 1, pp. 11–40.

face of "the spectre of all kinds of futures likely being curtailed" it is becoming more and more urgent to think of the future beyond the linear and the singular/unitary.[06]

According to the introduction to *Ghosts of the Anthropocene*, one part of the anthology *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, we, humans of the Anthropocene, live in a time in which we are constantly encouraged by the precepts of capitalism "to keep moving forward, to get the newer model, to have more babies, to get bigger",[07] despite an increasing awareness that this moving forward, if it continues at the same rate as today and yesterday, will result in rendering our planet unliveable for humanity and possibly for all known lifeforms. Mary Louise Pratt poignantly summarises the paradox of moving into a future that may well not include humans when she asks: "How will we slouch toward our deep future, toward an almost certain demise whose script we are writing but cannot imagine?"[08] This question at once indicates our responsibility for this future of likely expiration (it is "our" future, "written" or shaped by human activities), our inability to picture it (we cannot imagine demise on a scale that includes all of us), and our resulting hesitancy, incompetence and unwillingness to act upon it. While the capitalist-colonialist-modernist narrative of the future, under the banner of "Progress,"[09] allows us, or at least the privileged among us, to move unfalteringly into the future, confident that it will keep stretching out in front of us, the "deep future" of a possible no future, of our probable end, inclines us, in Pratt's words, to "slouch" toward it, ungainly, uncertain, unprepared.

Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet proposes a turn to ghosts and monsters, which, according to the editors, "cannot be segregated" as an alternative to either continuing to embrace the (fantasy of the) future of Progress or approaching the "almost certain demise" of our own making without facing it (through denial or defeatism).[10] Ghosts, as remnants of the past in the present, are seen to undo the "refusal of the past, and even the present" promoted by capitalism, which fixes our attention on "the immediate promises of power and profits."[11] At the same time, "ghosts remind us that we live in an impossible present – a time of rupture, a world haunted with the threat of extinction."[12] Here, what haunts is not the past but a possible, probable (no) future that, just like ghosts from the past (if they manage to capture our attention), moves "what's been in your blind spot ... into view" and imposes a "something-to-be-done" in the present.[13] Crucially, however, since "indeterminacy" is "a quality of ghosts",[14] no haunting can offer absolute certainty about what should be done to address the pasts and futures that trouble the present.

Dealing with ghosts or hauntings then is about dealing with uncertainty, with not-knowing, and hence about what Donna Haraway (who contributes to *Monsters of the Anthropocene*, the second part of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*) calls "staying with the trouble."[15] In her eponymous book, Haraway posits this attitude as an alternative to "futurisms" that respond to "the horrors of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene" with either "a comic faith in technofixes" or "a position that the game is over."[16] For her,

> **staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing point between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal creatures entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.[17]**

Her notion of "learning to be truly present" has nothing to do with a present conceived as isolated from the past and the future; rather, being "truly present" means being aware of and acting upon one's entanglements in the present with other "places, times, matters and meanings," or with what Karen Barad, in her contribution to *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, calls "spacetimemattering" and defines as "not a set of static points, coordinates of a void, but a dynamism of différancing."[18]

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06 Henriette Gunkel, Ayesha Hameed, and Simon O'Sullivan, "Futures and Fictions: A Conversation between Henriette Gunkel, Ayesha Hameed, and Simon O'Sullivan," in: *Futures & Fictions*, eds. Henriette Gunkel, Ayesha Hameed, and Simon O'Sullivan, London 2017, pp. 1–20, here p. 11.

07 Gan et al., "Introduction" (see nt. 1), p. G2, emphasis in text.

08 Mary Louise Pratt, "Coda: Concept and Chronotope," in: *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ed. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, Minneapolis 2017, pp. G169–G174, here p. G173.

09 Gan et al., "Introduction" (see nt. 1), p. G8.

10 Ibid., p. G3.

12 Ibid., p. G6.

13 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters* (see nt. 3), p. xvi. Whereas Gordon sees the ability to haunt – to impose a "something-to-be-done" through their disruptive presence – as an inalienable attribute of the ghost, I would contend that not all ghosts are able to haunt with the same force, and that there are also ghosts that cannot haunt at all. After all, haunting requires an apparition to be insistent and captivating. If a ghost is present without seizing anyone's interest and attention, there is no haunting – a situation forcefully explored in films like *Beetlejuice*, directed by Tim Burton, Warner Bros 1988; and *A Ghost Story*, directed by David Lowery, A24 2017.

14 Gan et al., "Introduction" (see nt. 1), p. G2.

15 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Durham/London 2016.

16 Ibid., p. 3.

17 Ibid., p. 1.

18 Karen Barad, "No Small Matter: Mushroom Clouds, Ecologies of Nothingness, and Strange Topologies of Spacetimemattering," in: *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, eds. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, Minneapolis 2017, pp. G103–G120, here p. G110, emphasis in text.

Barad's reference to différance brings me to Jacques Derrida. He, most notably in *Specters of Marx*, explores ghosts or spectres as embodiments of différance. As such, they disturb any sense of a stable, singular origin; hence his replacement of ontology with 'hauntology'. They also challenge notions of the discrete and homogeneous, being "the *more than one/no more one* [*le* plus d'un]."[19] And, by putting time out of joint, they refute any clear separation between past, present and future. While Derrida's thoughts on ghosts and haunting are, rather surprisingly, not referenced in the Ghosts part of *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, they arguably haunt its pages. A turn to his thoughts can elucidate what is gained by conceptualising the relation between past, present and future as a haunting one, especially "in troubled, illegible times"[20] that portend a probable end of (human) times. Three of Derrida's ideas are particularly productive in this respect, as I will show in what follows. First, his elaboration of the spectre as both 'revenant' (that which returns from the past) and 'arrivant' (that which arrives from the future). Second, the indeterminacy with which he invests the spectre by associating it with a messianic future-to-come that has to be awaited without a horizon of expectation and without knowing exactly what it is that will arrive. And third, the notions of "living 'with' ghosts" and "learning to live, finally."[21] Living 'with' ghosts envisions being haunted not as a finite condition, to be ended through exorcism or assimilation of the ghost, but as an ongoing one of continued troubling. Learning to live, finally, in turn, proposes a living towards finality (death) that does not separate that finality from living, but rather places it 'within' life.

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It seems more challenging to produce an effective haunting (in the sense of a temporal disjunction that is attended to and as a result can impose a something-to-be-done) from the future than from the past, perhaps because a haunting from the past has perceptible detrimental effects in the present, whereas with a haunting from the future such effects can only be announced as yet-to-come. This difficulty is demonstrated by the case of the spectre of climate change, which is bearing upon us with increasing urgency and insistence, but which does not seem capable of prompting a generalised sense that something must be done *now* to address it, before it fully materialises and it becomes too late. The spectre of climate change is an arrivant, much like that of the spectre of communism haunting Europe evoked by Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*. As Derrida notes in *Specters of Marx*:

> **that of which it was the specter, communism ("das Gespenst des Kommunismus"), was itself not there, by definition. It was dreaded as communism to come. It had already been announced, with this name, some time ago, but it was not yet "there". It is only a specter, seemed to say these allies of old Europe so as to reassure themselves; let's hope that in the future it does not become an actual, effectively present, manifest, non-secret reality.[22]**

Like climate change, communism as a 'geo-political' movement raised the disturbing question of "whether there would still be any future and any history at all for Europe" (and the rest of the world it dominated through colonialism).[23] In the face of this question, with which they did not want to engage seriously, the allies of old Europe clung to the "sureness of this certainty" that a spectre is *not* real.[24] Similarly, the spectre of climate change is conjured away through climate change denial as well as through a milder form of disavowal that defers the real calamity – the actual, effectively present, manifest reality of climate change – to a future considered still safely separate from the present. Both are forms of exorcism that allow climate change, in its fully-fledged reality as no future for the earth, to continue to be conceived as "improbable."[25] For a haunting from the future to be taken seriously and impress upon us the need to act in the now, we have to be willing to face the questions it poses to us and to let go of the idea that "between a spirit and a 'Wirklichkeit', the dividing line was assured" or "'ought to have been' assured."[26] We (and this "we" is a notion that should also be problematised) have to recognise the arrivant as a haunting presence 'in' the present, as something we cannot ignore but have to live 'with' here and now, even if it has not yet fully arrived.

For Derrida, the futural dimension of the ghost as arrivant refers most concretely to the fact that a ghost always announces its next appearance; without implied re-appearances in the future, there would be no haunting. The ghost, therefore, arrives as much from the

19 Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International*, New York/London 1994, p. xx, emphasis in text.

20 Gan et al., "Introduction" (see nt. 1), p. G10.

21 Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, Basingstoke 2007.

22 Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (see nt. 19), p. 38.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*, Chicago 2016, p. 12.

future as it returns from the past, drawing attention not just to what was, but also to what is to come. With regard to the past, the ghost – signifying an inheritance we cannot refuse, but which simultaneously is always multiple, heterogeneous and formed around a secret that cannot be deciphered – imposes a responsibility to select and then take responsibility for that selection. At the same time, Derrida emphasises that the ghost "signals toward the future" or perhaps more accurately, 'from' the future:

> **Given that a revenant is always called upon to come and to come back, the thinking of the specter, contrary to what good sense leads us to believe, signals toward the future. It is a thinking of the past, a legacy that can come only from that which has not yet arrived – from the "arrivant" itself.[27]**

Here, the ghost as revenant/arrivant is what thinks the past from the future, with this past also including the present (which, for the arrivant, is part of the past). The legacy in question then is that of the past and present as seen from the future, making the arrivant akin to a time traveller confronting us in the present with what we will have left behind – the legacy is 'ours.' As with ghostly inheritances from the past, this haunting legacy will not be singular/unified or completely intelligible. What the arrivant presents (in the sense of making it part of the present) is a future-to-come that takes the form not of a certainty but of a question: "it questions with regard to what will come in the future-to-come."[28]

When the arrivant impresses this questioning upon the now, it should not be deferred but rather recognised as creating a sense of urgency and possibility through its specific temporality. Derrida's spectre resolutely undermines linear notions of time: past, present and future are not sequential but intertwined, happening concurrently. Such interlacing is also central to Haraway's Chthulucene, which she calls "an ongoing past, present, and future,"[29] and to Barad's quantum field theory–derived notion of time as "diffracted, imploded/exploded in on itself: each moment made up of a superimposition, a combination of all moments (differently weighted and combined in their specific material entanglements)."[30] Barad's reference to these moments as "differently weighted" and involved in "specific material entanglements" stresses that this diffracted (or, as Derrida would say, disjointed) time is saturated with power relations. Not all past, present and future moments and their entanglements carry equal weight. Barad's case study, the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, is, for example, particularly weighty, not least as Barad points out because of its material and metaphorical (through the mushroom cloud) invocation of "a fascination with and anxiety over the alchemical notion of transmutation."[31] The diffracted, disjointed time of the spectre, then, is not undifferentiated.

When a haunting from the future is perceived as involving not something distant in time, but something already 'there', acting in the present, however indeterminately (in that it is also still to-come), it becomes possible to see the present as the site to address this something. Thus, Haraway's "staying with the trouble" is not about "stopping something from happening that looms in the future,"[32] but about realising that other futures can be made in the present, which also contains the resources of the past. Barad similarly argues that, within the structure of haunting,

> **injustices need not await some future remedy, because "now" is always already thick with possibilities disruptive of mere presence. Each moment is thickly threaded through with all other moments, each a holographic condensation of specific diffraction patterns created by a plethora of virtual wanderings, alternative histories of what is/might yet be/have been.[33]**

By mobilising these alternative histories/presents/futures in their complex intertwinements, new ways of living on a damaged planet in a state of impending demise may be devised. These new ways of living, however, should replicate the logic of haunting in eschewing certainty and clarity for speculation and ambiguity.

Derrida goes as far as to advocate, in relation to the spectral future-to-come, an attitude of absolute hospitality, which entails a "messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited 'as such,' or recognized in advance."[34] The messianic here is without Messiah in that it does not entail any knowledge as to who or what will come, or as to what this coming will mean. Instead, it focuses on the activity of 'awaiting,' which, crucially, is not a passive resignation to the future as already determined but an active anticipation that prepares the ground for the arrival of whatever is to-come. For Derri-

27 Derrida, *Specters of Marx* (see nt. 19), p. 196, nt. 39.

28 Ibid., p. xix.

29 Donna Haraway, "Symbiogenesis, Sympoiesis, and Art Science Activisms for Staying with the Trouble," in: *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet*, ed. Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, and Nils Bubandt, Minneapolis 2017, pp. M25–M50, here p. M33.

31 Ibid., p. G114.

32 Haraway, *Staying* (see nt. 15), p.1.

33 Barad, "No Small Matter" (see nt. 18), p. G113.

da, the ghost or spectre is intimately associated with uncertainty, with what he calls "a radical experience of the perhaps."[35] Thus, living *with* the ghost, which for Derrida is the only ethical response to the radical alterity it presents us with, means living 'with' uncertainty. This entails accepting certain risks (the ghost/guest may seek to do harm) and goes against the need to know, the need to be certain and the need to get rid of all ambiguity ("One has to know. *One has to know it. One has to have knowledge* [Il faut le savoir]"),[36] which is the impulse that drives the haunted to attempt to exorcise the ghost, to lay the past or the future to rest so that it no longer disrupts the present.

The need to know not only leads to exorcisms but can also pre-empt hauntings altogether. Whereas an exorcism presumes an acknowledgment of the presence of the ghost and some kind of engagement with its disruptive power (after all, if this power were not acknowledged, it would not be thought necessary to exorcise the ghost), potentially disruptive pasts and futures are often not recognised at all, preventing them from acquiring a haunting force in the present. Thus, many have chosen to ignore, dismiss or explain away the traces of impending environmental disaster in the present rather than allowing themselves to be disturbed by them in a way that would require a something-to-be-done. One strategy of dismissal adopted by climate sceptics is to argue that until science can offer absolute certainty and consensus about what is/will be happening to the planet and who or what caused it, no action can or need be taken. Here, the lack of certainty about the future-to-come becomes a pretext for inaction: the demand is for the ghost to become fully present, which would make it no longer a ghost, or, in other words, for the future to be encountered as it will definitely be rather than as it might be, which makes it no longer the future (as a spectral-to-come).

Notably, from Derrida's perspective, opposing this dismissal of a haunting from the future with an insistence that there 'can' be absolute certainty about climate change and its consequences would entail a similar refusal of the ghost as ghost and the future as future. The future, Derrida insists, can only appear to us as a ghost, in all its ambiguity and unknowability: "One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge."[37] Thus, a haunting from the future can never come to us as a full picture of what will be (just like we can never be given full knowledge of what was). It is only by accepting this that we allow a haunting from the future to take place, which we can then learn to live with in a way that faces up to the probable future in the spirit of the perhaps.

Derrida's arrivant then has to be seen – and welcomed – as an inevitably unreliable time traveller. The presumption is that time travellers possess absolute, indisputable knowledge about the future, which they are able to certify by predicting events to-come in the present to which they have returned. Unlike ghosts, who put time out of joint, time travellers are believed (and believe themselves) to be capable of mending timelines to prevent disasters, restoring the future to what, according to the time traveller or whoever sent them, it was meant to look like. However, because it is impossible to truly know the past and its relation to the present – "one always inherits from a secret"[38] – the time traveller can, in fact, never be sure if they have identified the right event(s) to stop from happening in order to restore the desired future. Moreover, by travelling back in time and intervening in the past, the time traveller risks changing this past in unplanned ways, which, in turn, will affect the future. This means that the time traveller may not actually know the future and becomes, like Derrida's spectre as arrivant, capable only of figuring an uncertain future-to-come.[39]

In her article "Haunting from the Future: Psychic Life in the Wake of Nuclear Necropolitics", Gabriele Schwab, on the basis of Derrida's "No Apocalypse, Not Now" and Mbembe's work, elaborates on how we are haunted by scenarios of nuclear apocalypse that we can never be certain will actually occur. Schwab writes:

> **imagining nuclear war seems to become a precondition for (collective) actions that may be able to avert it. Yet the imagination of a remainderless destruction depends upon the performative and persuasive power of texts, discourse, and figurations.**[40]

Here, imagining replaces knowing (for sure, for certain) as a requirement for establishing a something-to-be-done in the face of a haunting from the future.

According to Schwab, however, the particular forms taken by the texts, discourse and figurations that make a future of nuclear war present in the now may also work to neutralise the arrivant. Thus, the future of nuclear war as a remainderless destruction (which, as such, would be unable to produce a post-apocalyptic time traveller,

35 Ibid, p. 35.

36 Ibid, p. 9, emphasis in text.

38 Ibid, p. 16.

39 For examples of time travellers caught in this paradox, see: *La Jetée*, directed by Chris Marker, Argos Films 1962; *Twelve Monkeys*, directed by Terry Gilliam, Universal Pictures 1995; and *Terminator Genisys*, directed by Alan Taylor, Paramount Pictures 2015.

40 Gabriele Schwab, "Haunting from the Future: Psychic Life in the Wake of Nuclear Necropolitics," in: *The Undecidable Unconscious: A Journal of Deconstruction and Psychoanalysis* 1 (2014), no. 1, pp. 85–101, here p. 89.

at least not one from Earth) is, as it were, *de-imagined* by the commodification of sites of isolated nuclear disasters such as Chernobyl and Fukushima; further, the association of these sites with idyllic notions of freedom and the recovery of natural ecosystems works to disavow both the vast destruction that occurred and the even vaster destruction that might take place in the future.[41] According to Schwab, "apocalyptic texts and films, and the apocalyptic imaginary more generally, inevitably entail a form of symbolic domestication of the ultimate threat of nuclear destruction," since they avoid figuring the future without human life (or any earthly life) that global nuclear war could result in.[42] The same goes for what she calls the "nuclear sublime," to which many survivors are drawn and which transforms radiation into "a godlike omnipresence" in order to allow its danger to be denied and its survivability asserted.[43] Referential depictions or even performative prefigurations of the possible aftermath of nuclear war, especially when these routinely elide the possibility of a remainderless destruction, neutralise and domesticate apocalyptic futures by making them knowable and, unrealistically, survivable. What is needed instead, and what Schwab finds in the work of authors like Samuel Beckett, is a figuration of an apocalyptic future as feared in the present, an inconclusive evocation of an arrivant that is actually able to haunt – to disturb, to unsettle, to prompt a something-to-be-done to ward off the apocalypse that may be not at some point in the future but now.

Effective hauntings from the future in the present are not only needed to change our relationship to "our deep future" of "almost certain demise,"[44] but also to reconfigure our relationship to the present and the past, especially for those "groups of people [for whom] the future was/is already foreclosed,"[45] those caught in what Mbembe calls "*death-worlds*, forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life that confer upon them the status of living dead (ghosts)."[46] Whereas Mbembe concentrates on detailing how such death-worlds, which offer no future to those inhabiting them, came to be historically and how they are proliferating in the necropolitical present, the question of how to make possible a future (and, consequently, a different present) for the living dead, specifically those from Africa and its diasporas, is taken on by Afrofuturism.

41 See, for example, the Japanese film *Ieji*, directed by Nao Kubota, Bitters End, Pony Canyon 2014, set during the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster.

42 Schwab, "Haunting" (see nt. 39), p. 95.

43 Ibid, p. 97.

44 Pratt, "Coda" (see nt. 8), p. G173.

45 Gunkel et al., "Futures and Fictions" (see nt. 6), p. 8.

46 Achille Mbembe, "Life, Sovereignty, and Terror in the Fiction of Amos Tutuola, in: *Research in African Literatures* 34 (2003), no. 4, pp. 1–26, here p. 1, emphasis in text.

According to the editors of *Futures and Fictions*, Afrofuturism "points to an engagement with the future that ceases to devalue the present and the past."[47] By presenting "a science-fiction story, a story about the future, which very often involves technologies yet to come alongside technologies that are already here,"[48] it does not endorse accelerationism's fetishising of speed and the machine,[49] but instead establishes a haunting from the future capable of providing redress in the present for the exploitative past and present. This presenting of another future also challenges the narrative of "no future" that has been ascribed through colonialism and other violent forms of necropolitics to Africans and Africa.

Kodwo Eshun, in "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," imagines a team of African archaeologists from the future, from an age of total recall in which forgetting has become impossible (a fantasy that highlights the virtual "no recall" of African histories in Eshun's past and present), excavating a museum from the twenty-first century and noticing "how much Afrodiasporic subjectivity in the twentieth century constituted itself through the cultural project of recovery."[50] This recovery project, conducted through the forging of counter-memories to the colonial archive, was eventually displaced by the work of Afrofuturists, who chose to focus not only on the past, but also on the "not-," both with respect to how this not-yet is exploited by those in power to dispossess Africans and how it might be mobilised strategically as a form of emancipatory agency.[51]

What Afrofuturism exposes first of all, according to Eshun, is the predictive aspect of the power of neocolonial capitalism, which works by controlling not only the memory of the past (the archive), but also the way the future is configured and who has a place in it. As Eshun writes,

> **the powerful employ futurists and draw power from the futures they endorse, thereby condemning the disempowered to live in the past. The present moment is stretching, slipping for some into yesterday, reaching for others into tomorrow.[52]**

47 Gunkel et al., "Futures and Fictions" (see nt. 6), p. 2.

48 Julian Henriques and Harold Offeh, "Afrofuturism, Fiction and Technology: A Conversation between Julian Henriques and Harold Offeh," in: Gunkel et al., "Futures and Fictions" (see nt. 6), p. 97–121, here p. 99.

49 Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities: Accelerationism and Capitalism*, London 2014.

50 Kodwo Eshun, "Further Considerations of Afrofuturism," in: CR: *The New Centennial Review* 3 (2003), no. 2, pp. 287–302, here p. 287.

51 Ibid., p. 289.

52 Ibid.

From the perspective of the disempowered, what haunts them from the future is the fact that they are not seen as having a future (or even a present), whereas for those who are seen to belong in the futures of Progress endorsed by neocolonial capitalism, there is no haunting from the future, only a certainty that their comfortable place in it is guaranteed.

Echoing Schwab's denunciation of figurations of nuclear war that envision it as survivable and thus repress the possibility of remainderless destruction, Eshun condemns science fiction for evoking in an inconclusive manner not possible futures-to-come in which anyone could have a place (or from which everyone could be eradicated), but acting, in a deterministic way, as a "research and development department within a futures industry that dreams of the prediction and control of tomorrow."[53] Any sense that the future is spectral and can therefore only be anticipated and awaited inconclusively, under the sign of the perhaps, is disavowed, preventing the future from emerging as a haunting structure in the present. What science fiction does instead, Eshun argues, is "preprogram the present," investing it with a sense of order, stability and certainty.[54]

Africa's present and future are preprogrammed – and thus robbed of possibility – not just by science fiction but also by global scenarios of capitalism which centre on "making futures safe for the market" and configure the continent as irredeemably dystopian, destined for certain environmental, political, economic and cultural disasters.[55] At the same time, there is a "focus on 'Africa rising' and an 'African twenty-first century'" that incorporates Africa into the teleological capitalist logic of progress and exploitability.[56] What Afrofuturist thinkers and artists seek to do is to counter this positioning of Africa as having a determined future, whether as excluded from or part of the narrative of Progress, by exploring "the possibilities for intervention within the dimension of the predictive, the projected, the proleptic, the envisioned, the virtual, the anticipatory and the future conditional."[57] Such interventions, I want to suggest, are aimed at creating a haunting from the future that would open up Africa's – and, by extension, the rest of the world's and the planet's – future to the indeterminacy of the to-come, multiplying its possible shapes.

53 Ibid., p. 291.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 See, for example, this report by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/World Bank: Kathleen Beegle, Luc Christiaensen, Andrew Dabalan and Isis Gaddis, *Poverty in a Rising Africa*, Washington 2016.

57 Ibid. p. 293.

An explicit connection between Afrofuturism, haunting in the Derridean mode as I have been discussing it, and Haraway's and Barad's emphases on intertwined pasts, presents and futures, emerges in Eshun's description of Afrofuturism's focus on establishing a different temporal logic:

> **[B]y creating temporal complications and anachronistic episodes that disturb the linear time of progress, these futurisms adjust the temporal logics that condemned black subjects to prehistory. Chronopolitically speaking, these revisionist historicities may be understood as a series of powerful competing futures that infiltrate the present at different rates.[58]**

Here, as in Derrida, Haraway and Barad, past, present and future are no longer seen as singular, separate realms that causally determine each other, but as multiplicities, as pasts, presents and futures brought together on the same plane, albeit "at different rates" or, in Barad's terms, "differently weighted." On this plane, they can inflect each other and open up new ways of being African, past, present 'and' future. Like Derrida's ghost and the invariably unreliable time traveller from the future, the extraterrestrial invoked in many Afrofuturist imaginations – including John Akomfrah's film *The Last Angel of History*,[59] discussed in *Futures and Fictions*[60] – replaces a linear narrative (taking Africans from past enslavement to expendability in the neocolonial capitalist present and future) with a speculative, strategic vision. Thus, *The Last Angel of History*, by presenting a Data Thief capable of "processing data and reading images at post-human speeds"[61] and by giving the future a nostalgic gloss while the past is presented in futuristic cool blue, creates "a way to think about the future in a way that is code-switched with history, that creates a kind of remembering that is shot through with the future."[62] In this way, both the past and the future are opened up to the perhaps and become haunted/haunting realms capable of prompting action in the present.

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58 Ibid., p. 297.

59 *The Last Angel of History*, directed by John Akomfrah, Icarus Films 1996.

60 Ayesha Hameed, Kodwo Eshun, and Louis Moreno, "Sonic Utopias: *The Last Angel of History*: A Conversation between Ayesha Hameed, Kodwo Eshun and Louis Moreno," in: Gunkel et al., "Futures and Fictions" (see nt. 6), pp. 249–267.

61 Ibid, p. 260.

62 Ibid. p. 264.

As Gayatri Spivak points out in a discussion of the Native American Ghost Dance as aiming to "make the past a future"[63] that forms part of her critical response to Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, the counter-futures conjured through strategic acts of imagination – or, as the editors of *Futures & Fictions* call it, "fictioning"[64] – which are always also political acts, appear in the mode not of the future present (the future as it will be) but of the future anterior (the future as it might or could be, what Eshun calls the "future conditional") and rely on a "surrender to undecidability."[65] Such a surrender is not without risk, as the fate of the ghost dancers in nineteenth-century America (and the dismissal of the ghost dances as delusional) shows. However, if we do not allow ourselves to be truly haunted from the future in disturbing ways that open us up to harm and potentially even death, we can never learn to live finally in Derrida's sense of "learning to die, learning to take into account, so as to accept, absolute mortality (that is, without salvation, resurrection, or redemption – neither for oneself nor for the other)."[66] Only this kind of living finally (living towards the end that is certain but can never be known with certainty), which is a haunted living but also a mode of being finally truly alive (finally living), is a fitting way to live on a damaged planet, in that it would enable us to "navigate the dangers of the present and the threats of futures that will be continental, oceanic and archipelagic in their scale and their scope."[67] In the end, we – a spectral, shifting, open entanglement capable of accommodating non-human lifeforms and things, as well as the possibility that humans may one day no longer be part of the world – can only face the future in a way that could make it otherwise if we allow ourselves to be haunted by a to-come that we can never be entirely sure of.

63 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Ghostwriting," in: *Diacritics* 25 (1995), no. 2, pp. 65–84, here p. 70.

64 Gunkel et al., "Futures and Fictions" (see nt. 6), p. 13.

65 Spivak, "Ghostwriting" (see nt. 61), p. 71.

66 Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, Hoboken 2007, p. 24.

67 Hameed et al., "Sonic Utopias" (see nt. 58), p. 265.