

Contemporary Collapse: New Narratives of the End. An Introduction¹

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The apocalyptic genre in Western art is rooted in a long tradition, largely influenced by religious perspectives on the end of the world, with works that highlight the struggle to imagine a world without humans, so that they often depict a never-ending end or a post-apocalyptic world (Gervais). With the increasing acknowledgement of the current ecological crisis, the pervasive awareness of its anthropogenic origin and the human inability to react appropriately to stop or reverse its process, the apocalypse and its representations take a new turn, one that questions the human's relevance on the planet. Contemporary narratives of the end thus need to deal with the perspective of a posthuman world, which has already attracted the attention of scholars for the past decades (Braidotti). Such works offer speculative frames through which to defamiliarize and reorganize the human standpoint on the end, address her/his relationship towards the environment and point out connected realities such as species extinction. Through this reconsidering of the human at the end, contemporary narratives tackle a number of important issues such as the relationship with the Other, whether as individuals, families, communities or species. In this issue of *Ecozon@*, these considerations are examined through aesthetic and narrative choices that embody various possible endings, thereby presenting survivalist struggles, renewal hopes, singular or collective voices, stories in/of ruins, interspecies care, soft and hard versions of the apocalypse, and so forth.

This special issue takes seriously the idea that “global climate change is [...] catastrophic for the human imaginary” (Colebrook 10) and focuses on contemporary narratives that nevertheless seek to imagine the end of the world. It includes articles that explore how these narratives question the significance of the human in a collapsing world, how this resonates with current issues in ecocriticism and the

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environmental humanities and allows for an articulation of environmental scholarship with the contributions of collapse and apocalypse studies. The contributions to this special issue investigate a posthuman aesthetics in contemporary literature, which builds on, but mostly shifts Western and anthropocentric conceptions of collapse, and diverges from the apocalyptic tradition. In that sense, this special topic considers the *posthumus* along with the posthuman, to think about what happens after death, where the posthumus renegotiates the assemblage of chains of life between animals, plants and humans (Derrida 285). The issue also includes essays that engage with ethical concerns of apocalyptic narratives, as well as with their epistemological implications, where the presence or absence of human and nonhuman traces determines a specific knowledge and way of knowing in a collapsing world.

The special section of *Ecozon@* 14.2 includes seven articles that engage with literary and artistic works dealing with the end of the world. These articles examine contemporary collapse narratives from different cultural areas to reflect on the aesthetic and ethical concerns of representing a secular apocalypse that accounts for its anthropogenic cause. Representations are particularly apt at articulating the relationship between humans and their environment, providing that we pay a renewed attention to how they also challenge the usual foregrounding of human stories. The posthuman perspective adopted by the authors of this issue highlight the changing state of nature in contemporary narratives and the potential for these narratives to depict the epistemological shift triggered by collapse and propose a new ecopolitics of the end.

In “Collapse and Reversed Extinction: Beyond Inherited Epistemologies of Species Loss in Louise Erdrich’s *Future Home of the Living God*,” Ida Olsen shows how Louise Erdrich’s post-apocalyptic novel *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) questions the epistemological framework through which we currently examine species extinction. Featuring a strange extinction process in which evolution seems to run backwards as much as in any direction, Erdrich’s novel moves away from the 19th century colonial scientific legacy while highlighting its deleterious impact on Indigenous communities. It offers a counter-narrative to the Western teleological discourse of progress and shapes a cyclical time that moves away from the usual apocalyptic timeline and the genre that celebrates it. Olsen convincingly argues that this Indigenous Futurist novel engages with uncertainty about the nature of the world to propose an alternative to the Western colonial system of knowledge as well as to the end of the world that it shapes.

In “Pachakuti, An Indigenous Perspective on Collapse and Extinction,” Jasmin Belmar Shagulian relativizes the meta-narrative of collapse by analyzing the way in which the concept of *pachakuti* in Andean cosmology brings us back to a circular ontology that indigenous literature explores. In *pachakuti*, the perception of collapse is not linear; on the contrary, it is linked to the cycle of life, where things are damaged and regenerated. This reminds us that the anguish of collapse is first and foremost the problem of industrial societies that have lost touch with the world. That is why it is

so important to rediscover the dissemination of that ontology in Indigenous narratives such as *Todo está dicho (Everything Has Been Said)* by Fredy Chakangana, *La Tórtola (pájaro melancólico) (The Turtledove, Melancholic Bird)* by Lorenzo Ayllapán, and *Vivir-Morir (To Live-To Die)* by Vito Apūshana. In these works, *pachakuti* reveals an incandescent cosmos where forces hold human beings between catastrophic chaos and the construction of fragile communities. By choosing a mythocritical perspective based on the analysis of mythemes, Jasmin Belmar Shagulian describes the archetypes and procession of images that manifest this *pachakuti* in the ceaseless cycle of rebirth. This contribution is all the more original in that it invites us to revisit structuralist methodologies to show the anticipations of these cosmogonies, which had even perceived the scandal of colonization as the sign of this major destruction to be overcome.

Collapse thinking calls for creativity and fictional inventiveness. In “The Future is Collapsing: Feminist Narratives of Unmaking in Laura Pugno and Veronica Raimo,” Alice Parrinello takes us to Italian science fiction, with writers such as Laura Pugno and Veronica Raimo taking up the genre. In these authors’ works, collapse is not the perception of a global extinction, but a practice of deconstruction, revisiting past certainties and the social and sexual divisions established between people. Based on the study of Laura Pugno’s *Sirene* and Veronica Raimo’s *Miden*, ecofeminist fiction revives what Donna Haraway calls “oddkins,” that is unexpected combinations between living beings (2–4). These two dystopian short stories reveal a sense of physicality as characters attempt to rearrange themselves. In one case, the figure of the mermaid is chosen to herald these coming hybridizations and recompositions of the human species, which involve questioning the patriarchal imaginary. In Alice Parrinello’s interpretation of these two dystopian novels, not only is the patriarchal imaginary destroyed, but so are the related categories that defined the human being (maternity, male-female relations, etc.). Binary distinctions collapse, allowing us to see humanity in terms of assembly and solidarity of beings.

In “Contemporary Graphic Narratives of the End: Sketching an Ecolitics of Disorientation and Solidarity through *Sf Bande Dessinée*,” Armelle Blin-Rolland examines conceptions of the end in four science fiction *bandes dessinées*: Jérémy Perrodeau’s *Crépuscule*, Enki Bilal’s trilogy *Coup de sang*, Ludovic Debeurme’s trilogy *Epiphania*, and Jeanne Burgart Goutal and Aurore Chapon’s *ReSisters*. She argues that the sf genre and comics medium adequately combine to propose a rebuilding of the collapsed world and an ecolitics of disorientation and solidarity in the Anthropocene. Her article builds on ecocriticism and queer and feminist studies to discuss counter-narratives of the future that foreground nonhuman agencies and unsettle Western narratives about the environment. Her analysis shows how these narratives disrupt the Modern teleological spacetime and unearth its ideologies, such as the human-nature separation. Blin-Rolland focuses on the narratives’ practices of care and resistance that, combined with disorientation, offer an ecolitical perspective to dissolve the human/more-than-human boundaries and involve the reader into outlining an ecofeminist uprising.

In “Norwegian Futurisms: Posthumanism and the Norwegian Nordic Model in Tor Åge Bringsværd’s *Du og Jeg, Alfred and Alfred 2.0*,” Karl Kristian Swane Bambini shows how ecodystopian narratives in Norway challenge the stereotype of a peaceful society with a generous welfare state. In fact, many productions in science fiction revolve around the predation of the Norwegian model which is based upon the securing of fossil energy. The novels of Tor Åge Bringsværd illustrate the revitalization of the genre of science fiction in Norway, where for a long time it was considered as a minor genre. Indeed, this revitalization goes together with a growing interest in societal issues and, in particular, in the place of new technologies in human existence. Ecodystopian novels immerse us into posthumanist quarrels and put into tension the image of a society concerned about the environment with the publication of the Brundtland report in 1987 on sustainable development.

In “Seeing the World Through Glass: Time and Extinction in Fiona Tan’s *Depot* (2015),” Deborah Schrijvers focuses on the mass extinction of species that is currently taking place, thereby threatening biodiversity, including that of marine creatures. She argues that this extreme process requires a different, nonlinear time frame for humans to tune into it and that cinematic techniques can provide such an opportunity to apprehend other temporalities. Her article examines Fiona Tan’s video installation *Depot* (2015) to identify and discuss the techniques used by the artist to give duration to specimens that she has filmed in the natural history museums of Leiden and Berlin. Stilled images, close-ups, and voice over allow to question Western scientific and imperial discourses embodied in natural history and its linear timeline of progress. Schrijvers shows that by reframing this history, *Depot* decolonizes extinction and provides a new narrative of the ocean that steers away from the previous frontier narrative, reflecting on the human place in a world of extinctions.

In “Facing Depletion. Artworks for an Epistemological Shift in the Collapse Era,” Damien Beyrouthy examines epistemological shifts initiated in four artworks that question technofixes as the answer to our collapsing world. His analysis of David Claerbout’s *The Pure Necessity* (2016), Emilio Vavarella’s *Animal Cinema* (2017) and *Amazon’s Cabinet of Curiosity* (2019), and his own installation *She Was Called Petra* (2020) builds on the acknowledgement that, although they are presented as the solution to the exploitation that they necessitate, technofixes accelerate the extraction of resources, whether these be human, nonhuman or geologic. Beyrouthy argues that the works resist fracturing and so highlight the agencies either involved or subdued in the process, thereby pointing to alternative relationships with nonhumans, and creating a horizon for collaborating with them without falling into the illusion of their direct, untranslated presence.

The articles in this special issue exemplify how new narratives of the end can move away from the apocalyptic model to propose alternatives to a nostalgic perspective of a past Western human glory and/or a will to restore this collapsed world. In the narratives examined by the authors of this issue, the anthropocentric point of view on the contemporary collapse is replaced with a posthuman one, which highlights the need for a collaboration with nonhumans, based on a new epistemology

and an ethics of care. Rather than giving in to the shriveling of imagination brought about by collapse, these narratives creatively respond to the causes of collapse, pointing to the human responsibility in destroying the planet and the crucial need for establishing a different relationship to our environment (Serres). These narratives' reframing of the past, present and future invite us to question and overcome the various boundaries (race, gender, species, etc.) that have a deleterious impact on the planet and lead to its collapse.

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