
IV. FICTIONAL REALITY: PRO AND CONTRA THE SACRED REALM

18. Ashen Worlds: The Poetics of Apocalypse in Climate Fiction

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Abstract: This text explores the transformation of apocalyptic imagination from Pauline eschatology to contemporary climate fiction. Beginning with the Christian “already/not yet” tension that shaped Western historical consciousness, it argues that modernity secularized but did not abandon eschatological urgency. After the collapse of revolutionary and utopian horizons in the late twentieth century, transcendence gives way to catastrophe and survivalism. The paper reads climate fiction as a poetics of negative apocalypse, where salvation is replaced by endurance amid ecological and political breakdown. Taking as examples *The Drowned World*, *The Road*, *Energan 22*, and *The Disaster Tourist*, it shows how literary forms register humanity’s finitude in the Anthropocene, staging apocalypse as geological regression, sudden annihilation, toxic suffocation, or commodified spectacle.

Keywords: apocalypse; climate fiction (cli-fi); eschatology; Anthropocene; dystopia; survivalism; poetics of catastrophe

We are all Paulines, we dream of the end. Since Paul, the experience of history in the West has become eschatological.¹ And in a very special way. Christians were the witnesses-to-be of the end. Thinking the apocalypse has always involved a poetics of imminence. The end of times was a question of utmost urgency. History was thought to be rushing toward a decisive and imminent conclusion. Christ’s death and resurrection had already marked the end of this age (ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος) and thus inaugurated

¹ Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, trans. David Ratmoko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 58-65

the coming one (ὁ μέλλων αἰών), but they had not yet completed it. So, believers lived in an already/not yet tension. This undecidedness between what is already there and what is to come was defining for the apocalyptic imaginary. It is a paradoxical, in-between condition of urgent expectation. All the omens and signs are revealed as if the end already unfolds here and now in a ghostly fashion. What is to come is experienced in advance. The new age has arrived; it just awaits fulfillment. Formally we have crossed the line, the rest is a matter of time. That is to say the decisive moment (καιρός) already lies in the past although chronologically speaking we are still waiting for its effects to be accomplished. We are imminently expecting what is already with us. “*The ends of the ages have come upon us*” (1 Cor 10:11).² It is a mode of anticipation that is not contemplating the future, but is living within the event. The end has already come upon us. It is to be expected within this same generation: “*We who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord...*” (1 Thess 4:15).³ The eschatological imaginary was molded in a high-speed velocity form.

In such terms Modernity, which we are used to think as dramatically increasing the pace of time, can be thought of as a slowing down. The Modern Age presented history as immanence. The progressist imaginary was propelled by a constant movement, a perpetual stepping into the future. Utopias became the engines of this frantic race through history and as such they possessed transcendental purpose.⁴ They were always already there, shaping the imagination and experience of history, and yet they were never to arrive as a matter of fact. Factual life does not consist in experiencing utopias, but it is structurally dependent on them. This tension and postponement are precisely how historicity becomes possible. But there is one huge difference between modern utopian finitude of history and Paulinian eschatology. Progress needs time, annihilation and rupture are instantaneous. Transcendence is sudden-

² 1 Cor 10:11, *New American Standard Bible* (1995): “Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

³ 1 Thess 4:15, *New American Standard Bible* (1995): “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.”

⁴ Cf. Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, Paul Knight (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1986).

ness, while secularity is time-consuming. The former is an interfering break, the latter —a continuity. Yet only in the register of the apocalypse and up to a certain moment. It seems that moment has passed somewhere in the middle of the twentieth century. We are all Paulines again. In expectation of an imminent catastrophe. The end has already come upon us.

But Modernity was also captivated by the end. According to Walter Benjamin and Jacob Taubes⁵ modern thought never outgrew theology in terms of eschatological thinking. It only secularized its meaning. The urgency was still there, made possible by the insistence that the end of the current world order is imminent and transformative. The eschaton, far from being a distant end or a religious speculation, is present as a horizon that gives historical action its meaning. It is precisely the gap between what is already there and what is to come, the strange in-betweenness that is only to be experienced as a coincidence, an overlapping of present and future, event and contingency, that opens up the messianic now-time (*Jetztzeit*) —a charged present capable of rupture.⁶ This is the necessity of the revolutionary moment which will abruptly and possibly violently overthrow the current order. It is the ultimate utopia of a hidden transcendence - the transfiguration of all social, political and cultural realities. An immanent movement of a grandiose turn. But what happens to the so-called “now-time” after the death of revolution? The revolution (even as a metaphor) was rendered impossible by the social imaginary sometime after the end of the 1960s.⁷ While the counter-cultures of that famous decade went as far as to imagine the transformation of life and consciousness themselves, we are caught now in the paradox of urgency and futility. Being in the condition of emergency and need for change and at the same time being aware of its unattainability. The situation we are facing in terms of environment, according

⁵ Cf. Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 253–264; Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology* (Stanford, 2009), 1–10; Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul* (Stanford, 2004).

⁶ Walter Benjamin, “On the Concept of History”, *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 395.

⁷ Cf. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

to Yuval Noah Harari⁸, resembles the movie *Speed* where a bus is driving with 50 mph—if it slows down, it will explode, yet if it keeps the pace, it will crash anyway.

Of course, Modernity did imagine an apocalypse in slow motion, as a gradual entropy, not explosion.⁹ But then again, the atomic bomb, the nuclear meltdown, the rapid spread of a virus, the occurrence of a cosmic event, the accelerated global warming and mass pollution, the use of chemical or biological weapons are all set to trigger irreversible effects in an instant. Suddenness returned. Once more we are facing transcendence. Despair is creeping, closing in on us, as we realize the point of no return has been passed—the end is now upon us. Genuine apocalyptic imaginaries come back to us.

And they always belonged to the realm of poetics. The founding text that flooded the Western imagination with apocalyptic energies was The Book of Revelation, the Apocalypse of John. It is a book of symbolic allegory and sublime terror. The book employs a poetic narrative to reveal a vision, a prophecy. As if in a dream, saturated with horrifying imagery, the last of days are revealed. “*Write in a book what you see*” (Revelation 1:11).¹⁰ The striking epiphany is a literary gift. The excessive vision was always meant to become a book. It belongs by purpose to the field of literature. What is more - it engenders a literary device, if not a whole literary genre. Thinking of the end means engaging in the poetics of apocalypse. So, the understanding of sudden finitude is defined by literary meanings. The apocalyptic imaginary is driven by poetic forms. The history of the end is a history of literature.

Now, as we have seen, after the end of messianism and revolutionism no space is left for salvation. No new heaven and no new earth are possible, there will be no transfiguration. This dying planet is our only home. This is how messianism turns into survivalism. And indeed, since the 60’s it is all about survival strategies. *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (1969) by R. Buckminster Fuller¹¹ presents a rather discour-

⁸ A discussion with Yuval Noah Harari and Kohei Saito at Frankfurt Book Fair, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, October 16, 2024.

⁹ Andrew McMurtry, “The Slow Apocalypse: A Gradualistic Theory of the World’s Demise,” *Postmodern Culture* 9, no. 1 (1999), 1–22.

¹⁰ Revelation 1:11, *New American Standard Bible* (1995).

¹¹ R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969).

aging situation: we find ourselves aboard on planet Earth as if on a spaceship, with limited resources, and with no operation manual or any guide to tell us what to do. We are left on our own to find out how to survive. No escape is possible since we are alone in the void, surrounded by dangerous externalities. While commenting on the book, Peter Sloterdijk traces its logic to the true conception of the human condition as life-and-death autodidacticism:¹² learn how to survive on your own or perish.

Since the mid-twentieth century a swift shift in mood appears in literary imagination. The event of rupture is neither a revolution anymore, nor a coming of a new age, but a catastrophe. Surviving is the only option available. Utopias are now deserted in the aftermath of the dialectics of enlightenment. What had once started as a bright project of science and technology, a burst of progress, improving everything, making humanity better, turned out to produce a series of catastrophes: two world wars, the Holocaust, the atomic bomb, the totalitarian regimes and the rationalization of death, the technologies of mass destruction, the annihilation of whole species and a nature in peril, bringing us ever closer to an environmental disaster. On the territory of fiction, the colonization of space and the ultra-modern techno future of humanity, navigating its own destiny, gives way to dystopias, gloomy visions of political oppression, total control, omnipresent surveillance and supervision, absolute subjection through emerging new technologies. *1984* (1949) by George Orwell presents a world in a state of constant war, all-permeating propaganda, a Ministry of Truth and a Thought Police. *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley glimpses into a futuristic World State with biologically engineered citizens thanks to an advanced reproductive technology, a dystopian society dominated by perfidious manipulation and conditioning. In *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) Sinclair Lewis imagines the nightmarish vision of fascism in the United States, today sadly a political reality. The true progenitor of all modern dystopian literature in Europe though, and *de facto* the first work of this kind is undoubtedly Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921) where in a unified state ("The One State") citizens are devoid of names and are instead signified by numbers like technological units. People live in glass houses so that everything becomes an object of surveillance, privacy is impossible.

¹² Peter Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the Twentieth Century?*, trans. Christopher Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 25.

Sexual relations are scheduled and bureaucratically managed. Poetry, music, and acts of imagination are viewed as pathologies.

Political and social disillusionment opened the sluice gates through which dystopian climate fiction poured into Western imagination. A fragile, freakish humanity, obsessed by profit and control is doomed to environmental failure. The poetics of apocalypse now takes the shape of a melancholic poetry of catastrophe.

A new sensibility was born out of the harsh realities of the 19th and 20th centuries, yet it also belonged to a much deeper, geological process: the gradual loss of ignorance and naïveté and the growing awareness of humanity's finitude. What started with the understanding of the limits of the subject with Kant (man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity), followed with Nietzsche (the death of God and the rebuttal of all metaphysical comfort) and led to Heidegger's existential analytics of Dasein (being-toward-death) had also broader implications. In 1912, the German chemist Wilhelm Ostwald offered one of the earliest explicit formulations of the finitude of terrestrial resources in *Der energetische Imperativ* ("The Energetic Imperative"). There, he advanced a critique of both industry and the state, insisting that no infinite superstructure can be erected upon a finite base and that humanity must accordingly adopt an alternative ethos in its relationship to nature.¹³ In 1920 at the end of his famous essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber claimed that the current economic system holds the human being spellbound within an "iron cage" and "with irresistible force determines the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism... Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt."¹⁴ The realities of the socio-economic and political order, and the corresponding repertoires of human behavior were inevitably linked together with the sickness of the Earth. Werner Sombart recalls that in conversation with him, Weber sometimes remarked that capitalism would not come to an end until "the last ton of iron and the

¹³ Wilhelm Ostwald, *Der energetische Imperativ* (Leipzig: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1912).

¹⁴ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 123.

last ton of coal had been smelted.”¹⁵ The fate of humanity as a society with all its political monstrosities, the tyranny of an economy based on insatiable, endless loops of consumption and a ruthless production, sucking out all resources, drying up sea and land, literally dismantling the ecosystem, the total rationalization of a suicidal form of life and the impunity of its logic makes it difficult not to recognize that the fate of the planet is now inseparable from politics, from the ugliness of the brave new world. Political dystopia always already presupposes a critique of ecological reason. As early as 1895 in *The Time Machine* H.G. Wells imagined the extinction of the whole of the human species in the distant future. But in the context of the brutal developments of the 20th century, it becomes more a sober projection rather than fiction. Although human extinction was scientifically normalized and rendered unavoidable since Georges Cuvier and Charles Darwin in the 19th century, it still remained just an abstract consideration. The new situation of an imminently impending disaster and environmental catastrophe accompanied by the consciousness of futility and impossibility to change turned us into gloomy Paulines of pessimism, awaiting the end in eager panic. Instead of the gospel we receive bad news. The end is upon us. This updated condition of humanity resulted in depression, indifference, blissful negligence and denial or green radicalism, but it also fueled the literary imaginary which produced a whole web of virtual scenarios. Climate fiction was born. The history of the end is truly a history of literature. So, let’s explore a few literary approaches to how the world ends, whether with a bang or a whimper.

Some seven years before *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* appeared, the novel *The Drowned World* (1962) by J. G. Ballard was published. It is considered one of the founding novels of the climate fiction sub-genre, sometimes simply called *cli-fi*.¹⁶ Roughly seventy years before the events of the novel, a series of violent and prolonged solar storms expand the Van Allen radiation belts, severely degrading Earth’s ionosphere. Intensified solar radiation bombards the planet, driving up surface temperatures and sea levels and transforming much of the globe

¹⁵ Werner Sombart, *Der moderne Kapitalismus*. Dritter Band: Das Wirtschaftsleben im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1927), 1010.

¹⁶ Jim Clarke, “Reading Climate Change in J.G. Ballard,” in: *Critical Survey* 25 (2), 7–21.

into a tropical climate. As vast regions of Earth become uninhabitable for humans, the remaining population migrates toward the North and South Poles, which the new planetary climate has rendered suitable for human life. While dismantling anthropocentric narratives, J. G. Ballard provides a deconstruction of human subjectivity which now pursues new modes of existence, driven by unconscious urges. A sweet and fearsome sliding back into the primordial. The apocalyptic scene is already set in Ballard's first novel *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962) where a fierce hurricane sweeps humankind from the surface of the planet:

Manhattan's under hundred-foot waves, most of the big skyscrapers and office blocks are down. Empire State Building toppled like a falling chimney stack. Same story everywhere else. Casualty lists in the millions. Paris, Berlin, Rome—nothing but rubble.¹⁷

No explanation is given for the disaster, although as one of the novel's protagonists remarks:

maybe it's the deliberate act of an outraged Providence, determined to sweep man and his pestilence from the surface of this once green earth.¹⁸

By contrast *The Drowned World* presents us with a natural, organic disaster. One might call it an ethically benign apocalypse. It is a catastrophe for which humanity bears no responsibility. Yet, what follows is a degradation of the humankind. In the opening scene the main character is observing the apocalypse from a lavishly furnished suite at the Ritz on the beach. Like the hotel itself the "ivory-handled squash rackets" and "hand-printed dressing gowns" (p. 10)¹⁹ seem eerily anachronistic. Their absurdity is amplified by the presence of a giant *Anopheles* mosquito, now the size "of a dragon-fly" (p. 10); by the "ancient impassive faces" of the iguanas and basilisks (p. 18) that line the window-ledges; by "the countless thermal storms" that "rip through the horse-tails lining the creek" (p. 8) and stir what is now little more "than a garbage-filled swamp" (p. 13); by the "half-submerged white faced buildings of the 20th century" (p. 10) that mark all that is left of a city. "Had it once been

¹⁷ J.G. Ballard, *Wind from Nowhere* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 119.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 55.

¹⁹ J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012),

Berlin, or Paris, or London?” (p. 9).²⁰ London has become a tropical lagoon infested with shady wildlife and gigantic insects. This new environment seems strangely seductive. The planet is reverting to a prehistoric state: Triassic lagoons, giant reptiles, oppressive heat. And humans begin to mentally regress alongside it. According to Adrian Tait a kind of relapse follows as:

a dwindling band of survivors slowly realize that flood-waters, storms, and rising temperatures are the least of it. Plagued by strange dreams, they begin to experience the withdrawal characteristic “of all animal forms about to undergo a major metamorphosis” (p. 14).

As if anticipating the most controversial claims of those who, today, maintain that human behaviour is still strongly shaped by our evolutionary past, Ballard’s characters are about to be reclaimed by long-buried, atavistic forces²¹

It is a world where humanity is slowly declining, fading away into something else, something alien. And there is a certain sad seductiveness in the fall and primordial reduction of the human species. At the end of the book, the main character Dr. Kerans travels south, like “a second Adam searching for the forgotten paradises of the reborn sun”.²²

In *The Burning World* (1964) Ballard already draws a different picture. The novel depicts a global, human-caused drought in which industrial waste forms a thin film on the oceans, impeding evaporation and disrupting the water cycle, thus engendering a post-apocalyptic economy of scarcity. The thin film coating the water surface is reminiscent of the toxic foam we see nowadays covering the Yamuna River in Delhi, comprising a mix of untreated sewage, detergents, and industrial waste.

The Road (2006) by Cormac McCarthy is a work of true apocalyptic dark poetry. The catastrophe is brought about by some sudden event that is not explained in the novel. The cause is never named: no environmental disaster, nuclear event, or technological failure is ever specified. Nevertheless, the world is literally covered in ash, devoid of ani-

²⁰ Adrian Tait, “Nature Reclaims Her Own: J. G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World*,” in: *Australian Humanities. Review* 57 (2014): 26.

²¹ Ibidem, 28.

²² J.G. Ballard, *The Drowned World* (London: Fourth Estate, 2012), 192.

mals and vegetation, climatically ruined (it is cold, the sun is blotted out)—a sterile, dead Earth. It is a condition, stripped of history and explanation. A naked, broken reality, where nature is already dead, society is gone, and humans resemble feeble, but bestial ghosts. *The Road* is enframed by the poetics of night, ashes and ontological darkness:

Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more gray each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world.²³

...

The cold and the silence. The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and carried forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air. Sustained by a breath, trembling and brief. If only my heart were stone.²⁴

It is a world of pain and existential void. Just like in *The Wind from Nowhere* by Ballard, the devastation comes from nowhere. But here nothingness, nowhere-ness becomes the genuine horizon of being in the world. All meaning is gone, humanity cracks. The whole novel is a postapocalyptic black song telling of the end of humanity. It is a world without a world. All worldliness is corrupted. The event has shattered nature, but also the humanity of humans. Being in such a world hurts. *If only my heart were stone*. At the same time at its core the story is profoundly human, fragile, touching. It is a book of loss and triumph. A father and his son traverse dead lands, ashen cities, ruined, deserted shores, covered with industrial waste. Only to glimpse “the ocean vast and cold and shifting heavily like a slowly heaving vat of slag and then the gray squall line of ash”.²⁵ There seems to be no hope. Society has collapsed into scavenging, slavery, and cannibalism. Nevertheless, it is not a book about saving the world, neither about surviving in a hostile, ontologically rotten reality. It is all about what it truly means to stay alive. What does staying alive mean in a world beyond society, beyond any hope? Is there something that still matters, when nothing matters anymore? It is, after all, a novel about goodness, about love in the face

²³ Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2006), 12.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 16.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 143.

of nothingness. That is a story of the sublime absurdity of care and love. Even when all reason is gone, civilization failed, technology faltered, madness and violence become the law, and there is nothing left but endless night, the father urges his child:

You have to carry the fire.
 I dont know how to.
 Yes you do.
 Is it real? The fire?
 Yes it is.
 Where is it? I dont know where it is.
 Yes you do. It's inside you. It was always there. I can see it.²⁶

It is truly the poetics of salvation, not mere survivalism. And it is not about saving the world in environmental, political or any social sense, but about saving humanity even when everything turns against it. *The Road* is not only a book about ashen worlds and annihilation, but mostly about spiritual triumph.

Energan 22 (1981) by Haim Oliver is a Bulgarian novel set in a near-future dystopia where cities are suffocating under toxic smog and even oxygen is rationed and sold. The protagonist, a disgraced journalist living in the polluted Amerigo City, stumbles upon a mysterious offer: a substance called Energan-22, an incredibly cheap and powerful fuel that could solve the world's energy crisis. Life in the city is wholly exposed in the poetics of breathlessness, choking, claustrophobia, pollution and existential terror:

They were hanging me.
 I was suffocating, moaning, dying...
 I tried to open my eyes, but my eyelids weighed on me like leaden lids; my lungs were bursting with strain; my heart was pounding to the point of tearing apart. And I knew it was a dream—the same nightmarish dream that unfailingly accompanied my morning awakening ever since we reduced the supply of oxygen in the bedroom.

In vain I thrashed beneath the executioner's dead grip; in vain I opened my mouth to gulp the last mouthfuls of air—and I already

²⁶ Ibidem, 183.

knew that soon I would wake up and return to the bleak day, with a dizzy head, pain at the nape of my neck, and bitterness in my mouth...²⁷

A sick humanity, thrown into a bleak world devoid of breathing. *The last mouthfuls of air*. Living on the edge of oxygen. It seems to be the most logical, the most imminent and realistic of all disasters. The poisoned air makes the head dizzy, the neck hurts, the mouth tastes bitter. Haim Oliver presents a crippled, dying humanity, lost in dust and smog, doomed to suffer. A dystopia of the last gulps of air. And just like at the Delhi airport, there are oxygen booths, where people pay to inhale purified air. It becomes a commodity, a paid service for those who have money. Breathlessness is for the poor. In Delhi this sounds eerily close to reality. But then again, all dystopian literature, all climate fiction is a critique of the present. And is bound to be politically charged.

The Disaster Tourist (2020) by Yun Ko-eun is a darkly comic, satirical eco-novel that skewers late capitalism, corporate culture, and media driven fascination with catastrophe. At its center is Yona Ko, a thirty-something female programming coordinator at Jungle, a Seoul-based travel company that specializes in disaster tourism—curated excursions to places ravaged by hurricanes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, war, and other calamities. Here the disaster itself, the catastrophe becomes a commodity. The society of the spectacle, just as described by Guy Debord, is all-inclusive. The tragedy, the pain, the apocalypse is sold on smaller or larger scale, it is branded, advertised, planned and manufactured. There is a whole economy of disaster, an unsatiable consumerism of violence and catastrophes. There is nothing more exciting, spectacular and profitable than cataclysms and calamities. Although we do not see a global apocalypse or environmental demise, we are at the end of ends here. The apocalypse does not belong to the realm of poetry anymore, it is unhinged from imagination, from history. It is not an event but a spectacle. What was once the very condition of historicity is being cut up into pieces and sold like meat. There is nothing to wait for, nothing to expect. We are Paulines without revelation, without event, with no transcendence but a brutally colonized, exploited immanence. Here we are, feverish for new sensations, ready to buy, to consume, never to be bored. There is no suddenness, we fade out slowly. No sal-

²⁷ Haim Oliver, *Energan* 22 (Sofia: Otechestvo, 1981), 3 (English translation is mine).

vation will come, just death bit by bit. Are we gone yet?

These four novels represent different modes of thinking the end. *The Drowned World* points to a natural disaster, a seductive slipping back to primordial forms of life. This is an inevitable, geological, if not even cosmological process, presupposing some way of extinction. *The Road* is a sudden apocalypse, a catastrophe that erased humanity from humans and threw the world into an endless night. A true dark vision of a posthuman, postapocalyptic ontological desert. *Energan 22* brings us closer to actual contemporaneity: energy crisis, polluted cities, toxic smog—a poetics of suffocation and breathlessness, a slow but certain death caused by industry and greed. *The Disaster Tourist* is an ironical approach towards a political critique of a society turning disasters into spectacle and commodity fetishism. Eventually capitalism integrates the catastrophe into an endless series of consumption and marketing.

No matter what happens though we find ourselves in a Pauline situation—the end is upon us. We think of the end as if it has somehow begun. We are there, in the in-betweenness of the last days. The Anthropocene has started an irreversible march. This awareness of being involved in an imminent end, having stepped in an already/not yet situation, triggered a truly apocalyptic stance. Nevertheless, the horizon of this breaking moment in history is not an eschatological opening, a transcendence and salvation, but a catastrophe. We are experiencing a negative apocalypse with no future or transformative meaning. The survivalist mentality is deferring, escapist, it dwells in uncertainty. As Fredric Jameson famously put it, it is easier for us to imagine the end of the world than imagine a different social order, an alternative society.²⁸ Our inability to imagine a genuine future coincides with an explosion of apocalyptic scenarios. Probably a good first step would be thinking from the basics, not from the complexities of the end. Maybe the way we think and act on the very conditions and forms of life we are constantly reproducing would open a different possibility of understanding our finitude. Since apocalypticism was always about poetry and politics, being the junction point of imagination and social reason.

²⁸ Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), xii: “It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism; perhaps that is due to some weakness in our imagination.”