



D A M N E D D  
A M N E D D A M N  
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A M N E            D D A  
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D A M N E D D A M N  
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« Les lois inutiles affaiblissent les nécessaires »—Baron de Montesquieu, *Mes Pensées*

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

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

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

### Our situation<sup>1</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> This formulation of the colonial-racial reality is informed by Sylvia Wynter’s reappraisal of W. E. B. Dubois’s Color Line, which i cite below in the introduction, and Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “transparency thesis,” which demonstrates that race is a global form of humanism sustained by a spatial ontoepistemology that is a violent act of sovereign power and a colonial mode of thinking conditioned by the articulation of the others to the western liberal human subject as nonhuman. See Silva, Denise Ferreira da. *Toward a Global Idea of Race*. University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

<sup>4</sup> By asserting that the nonhuman is not alive, i adopt and ontologize the thesis of “social death” as summarized by Jana Králová: “loss of social identity, loss of social connectedness and losses associated with the disintegration of the body” (246). In recent years, an ontologized thesis of social death has gained traction in Afro-pessimism. See, for example, Sexton, Jared. “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism.” *InTensions*, no. 5, Fall/Winter 2011, <http://www.yorku.ca/intent/issue5/articles/jaredsextton.php>.

inorganic inert matter. An ontology that is not nonrelationally relational, a vitalism, is antimaterialist because it treats as given and absolutizes the correlation between human and nonhuman, hypostatizing life and/or organic matter, vital properties relative to the human, and projecting it/them onto us, the dead inorganic inert matter. This is the objective reality of colonial-racial violence.<sup>5</sup> As Reza Negarestani argues, vitalist humanism, relational ontology *par excellence*, cannot decolonize thought:

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

Negarestani's functionalism gets us closer to Moten's mathopoetics<sup>6</sup> of the "blur," the "not-in-between that surrounds the surfaces that surround it" (BB 259). Blurring, we self-consciously negate the strong identitarianism of historicism (e.g., area studies), and its complicity with the colonial-racial reality.<sup>7</sup> We amplify the distortion, the noise, of the *implied*

<sup>5</sup> Vitalism epitomizes what Quentin Meillassoux calls "subjectalism," or any philosophy "in which certain subjective traits, or just one, are raised to the rank of an absolute that colours being with its particular psyche, and which in consequence installs a difference of degree (or as some say, intensity) between the inorganic, the organic, and the thinking being, individual and then collective" ("IRR" 122). Subjectalists absolutize the correlation of thought and being.

<sup>6</sup> Mathopoetics designates "the transits and obstructions between mathematics and poetics, and how both help us to think from the other side." Mathopoetics was the subject of a discussion between Moten and Fernando Zalamea at the Tramway in Glasgow on 23 November 2019. See Arika. "Discussion on Mathopoetics: Fred Moten & Fernando Zalamea." *Arika*, <http://arika.org.uk/programming/episode-10-means-without-end/programme/discussion-mathopoetics>. Accessed 18 April 2020.

<sup>7</sup> I follow the early Louis Althusser and understand history to be a "totalité mouvante, dont on pourrait comprendre l'unité, saisir le sens des mouvements internes, mais sans jamais l'expliquer, c'est-à-dire sans jamais rapporter des mouvements d'interaction à un élément déterminant" (M 48) / "moving totality, whose unity can be understood and the meaning of whose inner movements can be grasped, but which can never be explained, i.e. its interactional movements can never be related to a determinant element" (PH 51).

encomium, the *laudatio*. We adopt a method of writing deliriously—modeled after Eleanor Kaufman’s delirious writings of Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Klossowski in *The Delirium of Praise* (2001)—that “signals the ecstatic breakdown of identity that occurs when it is no longer discernible what thought belongs to whom and whose voice is being heard at any given moment” (7). We understand noise in terms isomorphic with Kaufman’s understanding of chatter as a form that, at first, “stands slightly apart from its content” (*DP* 21). Chatter, and noise, then fuse together form and content, maintaining a minimum degree of separation between them. This minimum degree gets us closer to Denise Ferreira da Silva’s “difference without separability,” a nonrelational relational ontology.<sup>8</sup> Our introduction’s method—consenting, doing, blurring, delirious, different, inseparable—is the formal communication of our body’s argument that the energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster contributes to the decolonization of “petroculture.” Ours is a no-space, no-time, *le néant* (the nothingness). Perhaps we make space, perhaps we make time, perhaps we make something. Our *expérience*, our *experiment*, yields to the intoxicating energies generated by distortion, by noise.<sup>9</sup> As suggested by Kaufman, strong historicism “might not even notice” (*DP* 6) such energies because of their uselessness, their mere implication, their impersonally personal defiance of the capitalist economy of use and exchange, of the nation-state. Their generosity. We write deliriously, blur, *glean*, we bring the noise outside in.<sup>10</sup> To unite aesthetics and philosophy, to contribute to the decolonization

<sup>8</sup> See “On Difference Without Separability” (2016), a text by Denise Ferreira da Silva for the catalogue of the 32a São Paulo Art Biennial, “Incerteza viva” (Living Uncertainty).

<sup>9</sup> In French, *expérience* can mean “experience” or “experiment.”

<sup>10</sup> See Stoekl, Allan. “Gift, Design and Gleaning.” *Design Philosophy Papers*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2009, pp. 7-17.

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

On the one hand, with “the damned,” we take Paul Verlaine’s phrase “poètes maudits”—literally, “(ac)cursed poets,” “blasted poets,” “beastly poets,” “confounded poets,” “damned poets”<sup>11</sup>—of *Les Poètes maudits* (1888).<sup>12</sup> With the “poètes maudits,” Verlaine elaborates Charles Baudelaire’s writing of the structural-ontology of the Poet, the speculative thought of pleasure and pain, of *jouissance*.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, we reclaim Fanon’s “les damnés” of *Les damnés de la terre* (1961). As argued by Miguel Mellino, Constance Farrington’s original (and sociological) English translation of the book’s title as *The Wretched of the Earth* occults Fanon’s “apocalyptic, messianic, and redemptive” meanings of “les damnés,” “the damned.”<sup>14</sup> To update Mellino’s argument, we insist that “the wretched” occults the ontological charge, the beautifully *alien* energy, gifted to us by the damned. Against the gravest temptations of alarmism and conservationism, we occupy the apocalyptic present not in dread of omnicide, but with the thought of absolute *jouissance*.<sup>15</sup> We assert that energy

<sup>11</sup> These meanings of “maudit” are obtained from Robert & Collins.

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

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

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

<sup>15</sup> In a future revision, I’ll elaborate my understanding of omnicide, “the annihilation of an entire species, esp. the human race,” *vis-à-vis* Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh’s *Omnicide: Mania, Fatality, and the Future-in-Delirium* (2019). Mohaghegh explains, “there is no turning away from the imperative to study this riddle [of omnicide] in all its mystifying complexity—to walk the tightrope across which a lone state of delirium might form a hidden route to world-erasure. Movement of the lost cause” (8).



aesthetics—in its excess, its radical wastefulness—allows us to reconceptualize oil as a waste product of a dying sun whose energy is generously infinite.<sup>16</sup> After all, what are fossil fuels but fossilized sunshine? And, if oil is reconceptualized as a waste product of a dying sun, suddenly, it becomes easy to imagine socialities—expenditures of energy—detached, utterly, from “petroculture” and its complicity with the capitalist economy of use and exchange. We think those aesthetic and philosophical projects, sensitized to the Anthropocene and the colonial-racial reality, struggling—blurred, in delirious ecstasy—to generate critical alternatives to correlationist capitalism, new structures of thinking and being. We think science fiction (SF), the graphic novel (BD), poetry, asemic writing, weird fiction—the fantastic; we think speculative materialism, left-accelerationism, Afro-pessimism, queer negativity, other-thought, xenofeminism, neorationalism—the damned. We think noise. We think the goddamned flowers of evil.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> It is true, after all, that the sun will die 4.5 billion years from now.

<sup>17</sup> I quote here an extract from Baudelaire’s “Bénédiction” from *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857), in which he singularizes the damned Poet : “Je sais que vous gardez une place au Poète / Dans les rangs bienheureux des saintes Légions, / Et que vous l’invitez à l’éternelle fête / Des Trônes, des Vertus, des Dominations. / Je sais que la douleur est la noblesse unique / Où ne mordront jamais la terre et les enfers, / Et qu’il faut pour tresser ma couronne mystique / Imposer tous les temps et tous les univers. / Mais les bijoux perdus de l’antique Palmyre, / Les métaux inconnus, les perles de la mer, / Par votre main montés, ne pourraient pas suffire / À ce beau diadème éblouissant et clair ; / Car il ne sera fait que du pure lumière, / Puisée au foyer saint des rayons primitifs, / Et dont les yeux mortels, dans leur splendeur entière, / Ne sont que des miroirs obscurcis et plaintifs !” (10) / “I know that the Poet’s place is set / In the blessed ranks of the holy Legions, / That you invite him to the eternal fête / Of Thrones, Virtues, and Dominations. / I know that pain is sole nobility / Proof against earth’s and underworld’s worst, / And that to weave my crown of mystery / I must tithe all time and every universe. / But the lost jewels of ancient Palmyra, / The unknown metals, the pearls of the sea, / Though mounted by your hand, could not aspire / To this diadem shining resplendently; / For it will be made of the purest light, / From the sacred hearth of primitive splendors, / Of which mortal eyes, in their radiant sight, / Are no more than obscure and plaintive mirrors!” (11).

## Our ontology

What are “apocalyptic literatures about the disaster”? First, literatures are understood here to be the texts themselves. Throughout this study, we thus refer to apocalyptic literary *texts* or *works* about the disaster as apocalyptic *literatures* about the disaster. And a literary work is a character in a language. As Nelson Goodman explains, “Both identity of language and syntactic identity within the language are necessary conditions for identity of a literary work” (LA 209). No two literary works are the same; no two characters in a language are the same; and, no two languages are the same. Second, disaster—whose occulted meaning is “an unfavourable aspect or condition of a star or planet; an ill-omened star”—is derived from the Middle French *désastre*, which is derived from the Italian *disastro*, which is derived from the conjunction between the Latin *dis*—“apart,” “asunder,” “away,” or “utterly,” carrying with it a constitutively negative, reversing, releasing, and intensive charge—and the Greek *ástron*—“star.” Today, disaster generally means “a sudden accident or catastrophe, or a series of such events; misfortune, calamity,” as in a disastrous party, or, more specifically, “a sudden accident or natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life,” such as a hurricane or an earthquake.<sup>18</sup> In light of global warming, however, commonsense definitions of disaster are

<sup>18</sup> The etymologies of “disaster” and “apocalypse” outlined in this paragraph are obtained from a combination of Merriam-Webster and the Oxford English Dictionary (OED). Furthermore, all commonsense word meanings which appear in quotes in this study are obtained from a combination of Merriam-Webster and the OED.

unintelligible.<sup>19</sup> So, let us move backward, then, slowly, from what Jalal Toufic calls “the surpassing disaster” to the apocalypse:

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

The surpassing disaster, or the “apocalypse,” in its rush to naïve moralism thus occults<sup>20</sup> the Greek *apokalyptein*, a *revelatory uncovering*, for martyrs, unbound by time. “Apocalypse” is derived from the Middle English *Apocalipse*, “revelation” (the New Testament book), which is borrowed from Anglo-French, which is borrowed from the Late Latin *apokalypsis*, “revelation, the Book of Revelation.” As a parallel consequence, an occultation, whereby martyr *qua* witness and ~~the apocalypse~~ the apocalypse *qua* revelation *qua* uncovering is lost, utterly, to martyr *qua* “person who suffers greatly or is killed because of their political or religious beliefs.”<sup>21</sup> It follows from this that the surpassing disaster, the apocalypse, adversely affects the nature of language—understood *vis-à-vis* Robert Brandom to be an inferential practice.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> i agree with Timothy Morton that calling anthropogenic climate change “climate change” occults the seriousness of global warming. Throughout this study, i, like Morton, refer to anthropogenic climate change as global warming. See Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Throughout this study, i follow Toufic and use “occult” as a transitive astronomical verb that means “of a celestial object: to conceal (an apparently smaller object) from view by passing or being in front of.”

<sup>21</sup> It is the Derridean use of the apocalypse that is under erasure [*sous rature*] here because of its retrospectivist quietism: “The end approaches, now there is no more time to tell the truth about the apocalypse. But what are you doing, all of you will still insist, to what ends do you want to come when you come to tell us, here now, let’s go, come, the apocalypse, it’s finished, I tell you this, that’s what’s happening” (“AT” 35). i instead grasp the apocalypse that has already come to pass with *jouissance*. i can’t request the original French from Interlibrary Loan because campus has been closed due to COVID-19.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Brandom, Robert B. *Reason in Philosophy: Animating Ideas*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009.

Let us premise the excavation of the disaster on Toufic's surpassing disaster. The surpassing disaster, or "disaster," in its rush toward a closed universal, occults *the disaster*, or the absolute negativity—apart, asunder, away, utterly—of a planet, Earth. It should be qualified that an open universal would be egalitarianism and justice. At stake in the disaster is a non-Copernican account of Earth: it is not that a stationary Earth and revolving sun is the reality behind the appearance of a rotating Earth and a stationary sun. The disaster, with the nonrelative definite article, is not merely an unfavorable aspect of a planet or star; it is the Earth's detachment from its correlation with the sun. The stars our destination. Cosmic distortion.

We use the word "correlation" to make explicit the importance of Quentin Meillassoux's identification of the thesis of correlationism to this study:

Correlationism rests on an argument as simple as it is powerful, and which can be formulated in the following way: No X without givenness of X, and no theory about X without a positing of X. If you speak about something, you speak about something that is given to you, and posited by you. Consequently, the sentence: 'X is', means: 'X is the correlate of thinking' in a Cartesian sense. That is: X is the correlate of an affection, or a perception, or a conception, or of any subjective act. To be is to be a correlate, a term of a correlation...That is why it is impossible to conceive an absolute X, i.e., an X which would be essentially separate from a subject. We can't know what the reality of the object in itself is because we can't distinguish between properties which are supposed to belong to the object and properties belonging to the subjective access to the object. ("SR" 409)<sup>23</sup>

Correlationism is the antiabsolutist thesis that we can only know what is true for us; we cannot know the noumenon, or the "thing-in-itself." For the correlationist, it is thus impossible to separate being from thinking and thinking from being; the two are correlated. Meillassoux, however, argues it is possible to think being as an absolute, as an in-itself, or noumenon, apart

<sup>23</sup> There is no original French because this essay is an edited transcription of a presentation Meillassoux delivered at "Speculative Realism: A One-Day Workshop," which took place on 27 April 2007 at Goldsmiths, University of London. I cite where it was transcribed: Quentin Meillassoux. "Speculative Realism." *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development*, vol. 3, 2012, pp. 408-435.

from mind. We argue throughout this study that such a *speculative thought* gifts us an energy source in excess of “petroculture.” Meillassoux’s rationalist argument amounts to an attack on what Wilfrid Sellars calls the “myth of the given.”<sup>24</sup> This attack has had an immense impact on the ongoing unification of Kantian epistemology (analytic philosophy) and Hegelian phenomenology (continental philosophy), the latter of which has been devastated as a consequence of Alexandre Kojève’s anthropologization of the master-slave dialectic. Issuing from the continental tradition, Negarestani’s *Intelligence and Spirit* (2018) is the exemplar of this unifying project. Issuing from the analytic tradition, Brandom’s *A Spirit of Trust* (2019) is the exemplar. Tom Evers’s *Speculative Formalism* (2017), Jaeggi’s *Critique of Forms of Life* (2018) and Anna Kornbluh’s *The Order of Forms* (2019) offer third ways. More significant to the present study is the great extent to which Kojève’s reading informs the thesis of correlationism. As a consequence of correlationism’s influence on the capitalist university, we find that we are unable, utterly, to objectively prove the existence of the Anthropocene or the colonial-racial reality, proofs we need. No one is going to redeem us from the disastrous climatic events “we” have set in motion. No matter how different difference is from itself, no matter how protracted its deferral, difference must not be singularized by what Judith Butler calls the “insufficiency of identitarian ontologies” (68). We agree with Meillassoux: the principle of noncontradiction (PNC) should be sustained. By granting existence and nonexistence at the same time to an entity, the quintessential correlationist move, adherence to contradiction makes necessary that entity, in turn contradicting the potential for things,

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<sup>24</sup> Even ‘the given’ is not given. See Sellars, Wilfrid. *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*. Harvard University Press, 1997. By “rationalist argument,” i mean the logical consistency of Meillassoux’s argument is atemporal.

anything, to change. Without the PNC, that is, there can be no difference within which things may become; without the PNC, there can be no difference within which “petroculture” may become. As Meillassoux insists, we must instead accede to the “*pure heterogenous that breaks with all differences of degree or intensity* in favour of differences *in* nature—the only authentic differences, those which do not underhandedly lead back to an identity (an identity of nature) in an alterity (of degree) [. . .we need] *a polydualism*” (“IRR” 132).<sup>25</sup> At stake in Meillassoux’s speculative materialism, and his teacher Alain Badiou’s formalist philosophy, is the liquidation of the analytic-continental philosophy correlation and an opening to a horizon Meillassoux calls the « Grand Dehors » (*AlF* 21) / “great outdoors” (*AF* 7).<sup>26</sup> There, we might discover new models of alterity, perhaps, even, new models of communism. As Negarestani asserts: “And once this poison starts to take effect, we will tear apart Western philosophy and build philosophy anew; we will turn into that thinking and scheming Other of which Western thought had every right to be afraid” (*IS* 408).

We define the disaster in noncorrelationist terms as the Earth’s detachment from the sun. Throughout this study, we grapple with the challenge to representation that such a vantage point demands by exhuming the energy in the speculative thoughts inaccessible to

<sup>25</sup> Meillassoux explains that a polydualism entails “*dualisms* everywhere: pure differences in nature, with no continuity whatsoever between that which they make differ, between the many regimes of the real—matter, life, mind, society, etc.—whose possible coordination does not at all allow us to think their rapprochement, unless in a crude mode of blind fact [. . .] fractures that render impossible any reductionism from one regime of beings to another (life reduced to matter, mind to life, etc.) and permit the entities of our world to escape all attempts to reduce them to one unique nature (whether we call it nature or not, denials are of little consequence)” (“IRR” 132).

<sup>26</sup> Meillassoux’s philosophy is *speculative* because it attains an “absolute outside of itself” (“IRR” 119); it is *materialist* because it “accedes to an absolute that is at once external to thought and *in itself devoid of all subjectivity*” (“IRR” 120).<sup>26</sup> It follows that Meillassoux’s philosophy is also *realist* because it accedes to an absolute reality.

ordinary sense gifted to us by apocalyptic literatures about the disaster. What this occult retrieval amounts to is a recasting of being *qua* Earth-in-itself and thought *qua* sun-in-itself. The disaster is the emergence of absolute negativity in thought. To return to Goodman and Toufic, if literatures are texts and the apocalypse a revelatory uncovering, for the martyr *qua* witness, then apocalyptic literatures about the disaster are *damned* texts which reveal and allow us, martyrs, to witness the emergence of absolute negativity in thought. The energy aesthetics in apocalyptic literatures about the disaster allows us to think being *qua* absolute negativity. Absolute negativity reclaims the occulted meaning of *the disaster*: it refers to a star or planet that is apart, asunder, away, utterly. It is a reclamation of the nonrelationally relational, of alienation. Our ontology is the absolute negativity of the disaster. We have located a vicious circle.

### Our epistemology, our politics

Aesthetics is understood in this study to be an epistemology of worldmaking. Worldmaking, for Goodman, is the capacity of art to employ symbols in the making of worlds.<sup>27</sup> It is a capacious definition of aesthetics and, for this reason, we adopt it. It may be thus said that aesthetics is a functionalist epistemology: a literary work, a work of art, is what it does, which is make worlds. For Goodman, artworks accept a plurality of incommensurately correct interpretations. Nonetheless, artworks cannot be identified with interpretations of them.

<sup>27</sup> See Goodman, Nelson. *Ways of Worldmaking*. Hackett Publishing Company, 1978.

Goodman's aesthetics is pluralist and relativist. And relativism poses a great threat to us. As Badiou says, "il y a un seul monde" (there is only one world).<sup>28</sup> If the absolute negativity of the disaster is our ontology and aesthetics our functionalist epistemology, the politics of this study is evental. For Badiou, an *événement* (event) is an unprecedented occurrence that introduces a massive potential for change.<sup>29</sup> An event necessitates fidelity by those magnetized by its force. Such fidelity is a process of *subjectivation* (subjectivization); it subjectivizes the subject faithful to the event, not the other way around. The event is Outside. For Badiou, events may occur in mathematics, politics, the arts, and love. Some of his examples are Georg Cantor's set theory,<sup>30</sup> the Paris Commune,<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry, and love *qua* the encounter of the world from the perspective of difference. Badiou's theory of the event is so generous that one might even think of a falling leaf as an event. For this study, the event is the Anthropocene.<sup>32</sup> As Frédéric Neyrat explains, the Anthropocene is characterized as a concern for the formation

<sup>28</sup> I refer here to the title of Chapter Four—Le huitième point [« Il y a un seul monde »]—of Badiou's *De quoi Sarkozy est-il le nom ?*. Nouvelles Éditions Lignes, 2007 / *The Meaning of Sarkozy*. Translated by David Fernbach, Verso, 2010.

<sup>29</sup> See Badiou, Alain. *L'Être et l'événement*. Éditions du Seuil, 1988 / *Being and Event*. Translated by Oliver Feltham, Bloomsbury, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Livingston explains: "Georg Cantor was the creator of set theory and the modern theory of the mathematical infinite. His discovery of a rigorous, mathematical way to treat actually existing infinite sets revolutionised the foundations of mathematics as well as philosophical thinking about infinity, with implications that continue to be actively explored today" (37).

<sup>31</sup> Kristin Ross explains the (evental) drama of the Paris Commune: "For what could be more dramatic than the seizing of the government by Parisian workers on March 18, 1871? And what could be more dramatic than the massacre, two months later, of some twenty-five thousand, mostly working-class, Parisians at the hands of the Versaillais in a week-long battle in the streets of Paris? More people died in the final week of May 1871 than in any of the battles of the Franco-Prussian War, or than in any of the previous 'massacres' (for example, the Terror) in French history" (4).

<sup>32</sup> Paul Crutzen explains that eighteenth-century analyses of trapped air inside polar ice caps indicate that the burning of fossil fuels has increased carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere, a mathematically identifiable (and, hence, self-referential, noncorrelationist) increase that has dramatically altered the climate, culminating in the sixth mass extinction, the end of the Holocene, and the dawn of a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene.



of the terrestrial environment.<sup>33</sup> The history of the colonial-racial reality is characterized as a concern for the formation of *anthropos* (Man). Following W. E. B. Dubois's concept of the Color Line,<sup>34</sup> Sylvia Wynter asserts:

[A] principle of nonhomogeneity, that of Dubois's Color Line in its white/nonwhite, Men/Natives form (i.e., as drawn between the lighter and the darker races), will now be discursively and institutionally deployed as a "space of Otherness" on which to project an imagined and extrahumanly (because ostensibly bio-evolutionarily) determined nonhomogeneity of genetic substance between the category of those selected-by-Evolution and the category of those dysselected-by-Evolution. The Color (cum Colonial) Line would, therefore, be made to reoccupy the places earlier occupied by the Heaven/Earth, supralunar/sublunar, and by the rational humans/irrational animals premises of nonhomogeneity in order to enable the selected/dysselected, and thus deserving/undeserving status organizing principle that it encoded to function for the nation-state as well as the imperial orders of the Western bourgeoisie. (322)

Thus, following Eileen Crist, Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, Donna Haraway, Jason W. Moore, Claire Colebrook, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth A. Povinelli, Stacy Alaimo, Joshua Clover and Juliana Spahr, and Kathryn Yusoff,<sup>35</sup> the ostensibly unifying (rational and selected) *anthropos* of the Anthropocene risks occulting the colonial-racial reality and the environmental devastation caused by its imperialist drive to mine, from within the capitalist economy of use

<sup>33</sup> See Neyrat, Frédéric. *La part inconstructible de la terre*. Éditions du Seuil, 2016 / *The Unconstructable Earth: An Ecology of Separation*. Translated by Drew S. Burk, Fordham University Press, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> See Dubois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. Penguin, 2002.

<sup>35</sup> See, respectively, Crist, Eileen. "On the Poverty of Nomenclature." *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 3, 2013, pp. 129-147; Malm, Andreas and Alf Hornborg. "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative." *The Anthropocene Review*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2014, pp. 62-69; Haraway, Donna. "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene." *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2015, pp. 159-165; Moore, Jason W. "Introduction: Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism." *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, edited by Jason W. Moore, PM Press, 2015, pp. 1-11; Colebrook, Claire. "We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counterfactual." *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 1-20; Braidotti, Rosi. "Four Theses on Posthuman Feminism." *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 21-48; Povinelli, Elizabeth A. "The Three Figures of Geontology." *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 49-64; Alaimo, Stacy. "Your Shell on Acid: Material Immersion, Anthropocene Dissolves." *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 89-120; Clover, Joshua and Juliana Spahr. "Gender Abolition and the Ecotone War." *Anthropocene Feminism*, edited by Richard Grusin, University of Minnesota Press, 2017, pp. 147-168; and, Yusoff, Kathryn. *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*. University of Minnesota Press, 2018.

and exchange, what Malm calls “fossil capital”: “a triangular relation between capital, labour, and a certain segment of extra-human nature, in which the exploitation of labour by capital is impelled by [the metamorphosis of fossil fuels into CO<sub>2</sub>]” (“OFC” 52). For Karl Marx, use value refers to a materially constituted object’s capacity to satisfy needs and wants. Exchange value refers to a materially constituted object’s capacity to satisfy the needs and wants of others, its social use value.<sup>36</sup> And the colonial-racial reality structures the (“irrational” and dysselected) nonwhite non-European nonstraight nonmale as an object of exchange value, a nonhuman commodity. Capitalism and colonial-racial violence are circularly related. This circle coincides with an isomorphism shared between the Anthropocene and the colonial-racial reality. The condition of this isomorphism, following Jon Solomon, is the logic of species difference: human/nonhuman.<sup>37</sup> We henceforth refer to the Anthropocene as the *Alienocene*. Neyrat explains: “Aliens, foreigners, exiles: the figures of the Alienocene are cosmological as well as political, they go beyond the framework of the Anthropocene and the quasi-incestuous relationship that *anthropos* maintains with the Earth.”<sup>38</sup> We have been aided, we have been energized, we have been multiplied. We reclaim the disaster. Mind is equal. Long live the damned.

<sup>36</sup> I refer here to Chapter One of Part I of Marx’s *Das Kapital. Erster Band. Buch 1: Der Produktionsprozess des Kapitals* (1867) / *Capital Volume 1*.

<sup>37</sup> I refer here to Solomon, Jon. “Logistical Species and Translational Process: A Critique of the Colonial-Imperial Modernity.” *Intermedialités*, no. 27, Spring 2016, doi: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1039809ar>.

<sup>38</sup> See Neyrat, Frédéric. “WHAT IS ALIENOCENE?” *Alienocene: Journal of the First Outernational*, <https://alienocene.com/what-is-alienocene/>. Accessed 3 April 2018.

### Formal conditions—energy

What is energy? In beginning to answer this question, let us return to our situation. The overemphasis on fiction about oil in literary studies in the energy humanities repeats the colonial-racial reality's ecologically devastating use of oil. Some notable examples are Stephanie LeMenager's *Living Oil* (2013), Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden's *Oil Culture* (2014), and Christopher F. Jones's *Routes of Power* (2014).<sup>39</sup> This overemphasis is a variant of what Jones identifies as "petromyopia," an anthropocentric attitude that views oil as an easy, limitless resource.<sup>40</sup> Petromyopia is speciesist insofar as it presumes that the inherent capacity for rationality supposedly unique to humans is a sufficient reason to exploit nonhuman nature. Thus, petromyopia is isomorphic with the colonial-racial violence that structures the nonwhite, non-European, "irrational," and ultimately nonhuman nonstraight nonmale as the easy, limitless energy resource of its opposite, the white European rational straight human Man (*anthropos*). This violent commodification of energy precludes the development of alternative expenditures of energy outside the capitalist economy of use and exchange. Unsurprisingly, there is no concentrated study of the energy aesthetics in the energy humanities. Aesthetics

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

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

is *apolitical*. Aesthetics is *useless*. Aesthetics be *damned*. Let us refine our thesis: this study seeks to correct this gap in scholarship by considering how the aesthetics of apocalyptic literatures about the disaster may gift us energy resistant to easy use. We first define energy. Let us make four affirmations: 1) energy is a material multiple; 2) energy is radically contingent; 3) energy is on the side of the object; and, 4) energy reclaims nature's separation from society.

f t h e a n t h r o p e A L I E N O c e n e <sup>41</sup> t h e d a m n e d Ø d

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<sup>41</sup> See William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming" (1920):  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43290/the-second-coming>.

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