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Counter-apocalyptic beginnings: cosmoecology for the End of The World

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ABSTRACT

Departing from Aimé Césaire's striking proposition that The End of the World is the only thing in this world that is worth *beginning*, this article sets out to explore some of its implications as a counter-apocalyptic gesture that renders apocalypse an immanent event: the end of some world in this world. Probing the speculative force of Césaire's counter-apocalyptic proposition, the article suggests that it can trouble one of the more insidious powers of Anthropocene stories: the way in which, by conflating the end of Euro-American extractive ways of living with the end of everything as such, such stories reduce the plural interplay of immanent values which sustain divergent modes of living and dying well to sheer matters of "survival," thereby determining what is *vital* to life, and how lives worth living and deaths worth living for are to be defined. Weaving together philosophical experimentation with a story of other modes of living and dying inside and despite ecological turmoil, the article takes up the notion of "cosmoecology" as a way of experimenting with plural value-ecologies of living and dying on a heterogenous Earth.

KEYWORDS

Césaire; apocalypse; living; survival; cosmoecology

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Césaire; apocalipse; vida; cosmoecologia

PALABRAS CLAVE

Césaire; apocalipsis; vida; cosmoecología

Inícios contra-apocalípticos: cosmoecologia para o Fim Do Mundo

RESUMO

Partindo da surpreendente proposta de Aimé Césaire de que O Fim do Mundo é a única coisa que vale a pena começar neste mundo, o artigo pretende explorar algumas das suas implicações como um gesto contra-apocalíptico que transforma o apocalipse num evento imanente: o fim de algum mundo neste mundo. Ao examinar a força especulativa da proposta contra-apocalíptica de Césaire, o artigo sugere que as suas implicações nos permitem problematizar um dos poderes mais insidiosos das narrativas antropocénicas: a forma como, ao conflitar o fim das formas de vida extractivas euro-americanas com o fim da própria vida, tais narrativas reduzem a multiplicidade de valores que sustentam modos de vida e de morrer bem diferentes a uma questão de pura "sobrevivência," determinando assim o que é vital para a vida, e como se deve definir uma vida que vale a pena viver e

uma morte pela qual se merece viver. Intersectando a experimentação filosófica com uma história de outras formas de viver e morrer no meio e apesar da turbulência ecológica, o artigo retoma a noção de “cosmoecologia” como uma forma de experimentar ecologias de valor plural e modos divergentes de viver e morrer numa Terra heterogénea.

Comienzos contra-apocalípticos: cosmoecología para el Fin Del Mundo

RESUMEN

Partiendo de la sorprendente propuesta de Aimé Césaire de que El Fin del Mundo es lo único que merece la pena comenzar en este mundo, el artículo se propone explorar algunas de sus implicaciones en tanto gesto contra-apocalíptico que convierte el apocalipsis en un acontecimiento inmanente: el fin de algún mundo en este mundo. Al examinar la fuerza especulativa de la propuesta contra-apocalíptica de Césaire, el artículo sugiere que sus implicaciones permiten problematizar uno de los poderes más insidiosos de los relatos del Antropoceno: el modo en que, al combinar el fin de las formas de vida extractivas euroamericanas con el fin de la vida misma, dichos relatos reducen la multiplicidad de valores que sustentan modos divergentes de vivir y morir bien a una cuestión de pura “supervivencia,” determinando así lo que es vital para la vida, y cómo una vida que merezca ser vivida y una muerte por la cual merezca la pena vivir han de ser definidas. Entrelazando la experimentación filosófica con una historia de otros modos de vivir y morir en medio y a pesar de turbulencias ecológicas, el artículo retoma la noción de “cosmoecología” como una forma de experimentar con ecologías de valores plurales y modos divergentes de vivir y morir en una Tierra heterogénea.

1. Introduction: counter-apocalypse now

I must begin.

Begin what?

The only thing in the world that's worth beginning:

The End of the World, no less.

Penned in 1956 by Afro-Caribbean thinker and poet Aimé Césaire, in the very middle of his *Return to My Native Land* (2013, 39), these verses reverberate today with echoes that induce a sense of profound disconcertment. Yet this is not caused by a failure of understanding or a perplexity provoked by the opacity of the poetic voice. It is not only precipitated by the interstitial character these words acquire in the body of the poem itself, the lyrical transition the verses effect at the heart of a poem that, through an apocalyptic metamorphosis, connects the abjection of the world of slavery and colonialism to the affirmative poetics from which its final pages draw their iridescent vitality (Dabrinski 2016). If the experience today is one of disconcertment and not only of perplexity, it is because it renders such metamorphosis contemporary. Amid runaway climate change, expanding deforestation, recurring bleaching events, earth-wide ecological devastation, and the ongoing prospects

of a mass extinction that might perhaps implicate the end of “Humanity” itself, Césaire’s verses precipitate a visceral disturbance of one’s existential composure, an intense reevaluation of values. The End of the World – an imperative? The End of the World – a beginning? The End of the World – *the only thing in this world worth beginning?*

The disconcertment, in other words, owes to the fact that Césaire’s proposition reaches a present already largely sustained in the shadow of what, after Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), one might call a modern apocalyptic *refrain*: sung under our breath, neither inaccessible nor entirely accountable; a pattern which steals into the tone of things, infusing stories of past, present and probable futures with speeds, rhythms and terms of order around which a certain territory is assembled. As the foundations of the modern world-system begin to crumble, there is little doubt that this territorial assemblage, which provokes fascination and repulsion in equal measure, has today been marked by the name “Anthropocene.” “The Earth,” environmental scientist Johan Rockström and colleagues (2009) tell us,

has entered a new epoch, the Anthropocene, where humans constitute the dominant driver of change to the Earth System ... The exponential growth of human activities is raising concern that further pressure on the Earth System could destabilize critical biophysical systems and trigger abrupt or irreversible environmental changes that would be deleterious or even catastrophic for human well-being. This is a profound dilemma because the predominant paradigm of social and economic development remains largely oblivious to the risk of human-induced environmental disasters at continental to planetary scales.

As a result, the world “in which civilization developed, the world with climate patterns that we know and stable shorelines, is in imminent peril [...] The startling conclusion,” eminent climate scientist James Hansen warns in the opening of his *Storms of My Grand Children: The Truth about the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our Last Chance to Save Humanity* (2009, ix) “is that continued exploitation of all fossil fuels on Earth threatens not only the other millions of species on the planet but also the survival of humanity itself – and the timetable is shorter than we thought.”

There are, of course, countless problems with Anthropocene stories, from their geodeification of a universal *Anthropos*, to the modern scientific naturalism they espouse, through to the calculated evasion of tangled histories of capitalism, colonialism, and extractivism within which they are nevertheless inscribed (Haraway 2016; Blok and Jensen 2019). The critiques of the notion of “Anthropocene” are vitally important, and I for one do not count myself amongst the term’s advocates. Yet those quoted above are only some of the refrain’s myriad expressions, variations on a diffuse and dispersed tune. Indeed, the function of a refrain is more territorial than representational. More than questions of signification, refrains raise “a question of consistency: the ‘holding together’ of heterogeneous elements” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 324). Hence Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987, 309) suggestion, after composer Olivier Messiaen, that “music is not the privilege of human beings: the universe, the cosmos is made of refrains.” For unlike proverbs, refrains (*ritournelles*) are sustained by operations of co-ordination, which are cosmological and ecological in the most expansive sense: they regroup and reorganize terrestrial and cosmic forces establishing co-ordinates according to specific rhythms and manners which they simultaneously assemble. As such, a refrain “always carries the earth with it” (1987, 312). If refrains engender what Deleuze and Guattari

call a “territorialization,” it is because in their reorganization of forces refrains express and give shape, at one and the same time, to habits and habitats, to values and valuations, to stories and worlds, to *ethos* and *oikos*, such that “the ethos is both abode and manner, homeland and style” (1987, 312).

To suggest that the present is increasingly held in the shadow of an apocalyptic, Anthropocenic refrain is, therefore, to pay attention to the storied and rhythmic patterning of the present for which “Anthropocene” is but an unfortunate nickname, one marked by the iterative invocation of an event (at once the end and the beginning of a geohistorical epoch) which itself heralds an *imminent*, catastrophic End, against which all our efforts (intellectual, imaginative, political, ecological) must now be directed, efforts on which human survival on this Earth is said to depend. That is, the pattern of co-ordination and valuation which, in positing the End of the World as an impending event, reorganizes earthly and cosmic forces in such a way as to regroup multiple and divergent modes of living and forms of being into transcendental categories – including, at its very center, that of “Humanity” and of the “Earth-System.”

If Césaire’s words are disconcerting, it is because they upend the rhythm of this territorial refrain. But they do so not by embracing a new millenarianism – today perhaps best expressed by the ecomodernists of the “good Anthropocene” – which in its prophetic messianism cannot but eagerly await the coming of the End of the World for the emergence of a new (technocratic) Kingdom on a geoengineered Earth. Nor do they achieve this by adopting an anti-apocalypticism that denounces any talk of the end as mere fear-mongering, thereby bringing apocalypse itself to an end, disqualifying it as the latest eschatological iteration of a Christian or Zoroastrian myth that has now acquired a geological and environmental bent. Addressed to his native Martinique in the wake of the apocalypses of slavery and colonialism, I read Césaire’s proposition, that the end of the world is the only thing *in* the world that’s worth beginning, as affirming something akin to what feminist eco-theologian Catherine Keller calls a *counter-apocalypse*: one that “recognizes itself as a kind of apocalypse; but then it will try to interrupt the habit” (1996, 19). Indeed, Césaire’s words interrupt the rhythm of imminence with one of *immanence*: affirming that we are always *in* apocalypse, already *amidst* endings, participants in one and many apocalyptic refrains and their multiple cosmological and ecological effects. As such, they remind us that the End of the World is always the end of *some* world *in* this world – situated finitude, not absolute finality. Whereas the Anthropocenic refrain exhorts us to avert the ultimate planetary end, Césaire’s counter-apocalypse resituates endings as immanent events *in* the world, reminding us that the end of this world, the Euro-American extractive mode of living through which “civilization developed,” is not the end of everything as such. In so doing, it precipitates a revaluation of the either/or values to which apocalyptic refrains give way, making it perceptible that the choice is not one between salvation or damnation, life or death, but one *between* divergent modes of living and dying, of composing worlds, of inhabiting the Earth (see also Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2015).

This revaluation matters. First, because it enables us to attend to the non-innocent character of the Anthropocenic refrain: the manner in which, by appealing to the fate of a universal Anthropos and a transcendental Earth, its organization of terrestrial and cosmic forces can become the source of its own forms of ecological and cosmological devastation – authorizing interventions and operations that determine in general what

is vital to life, and therefore bring divergent modes of living, other values and valuations, other ways of composing the Earth, to an end of their own. Indeed, with the help of an ethnographic story of the introduction of a ban on fishing in the name of “food security” and the survival of humans and stocks of Nile Perch facing imminent extinction in Uganda’s Victoria Lake (Johnson 2017), in what follows I argue that, far from a primary condition for the cultivation of any life worth living, the imperative of survival that pulsates through the Anthropocenic refrain is inescapably tethered to the world whose end this refrain seeks to avert and from which its transcendental notions of Humanity and Earth emanate. In Victoria Lake, the imperative of “survival” itself becomes the source of an erosion of other modes of living and of inhabiting the Earth, thereby prolonging the long imperial apocalypse of ecological homogenization (Crosby 1986).

But Césaire’s counter-apocalyptic revaluation matters in another sense as well. Affirming apocalypticism without catastrophism, finitude without finality, he not only proposes that we’re always amidst endings, that apocalypses are immanent to the world, but also that the End of the World is the only thing in this world that is worth *beginning*. Connecting apocalypse not with the optimistic messianism of a new and better world to come, but with one and multiple *beginnings* – which is to say with an *opening*, with an unknown and an indetermination – I read Césaire’s counter-apocalypse as one that “savours its intensity, its drive for justice, its courage in the face of impossible odds and losses” (Keller 1996, 20). For what it discloses amidst apocalyptic closure is the possibility of attending to and of amplifying immanent deterritorializations, engendering one and many ends to *this* Anthropocenic present through ongoing and unfinished experiments in animating other situated and divergent refrains, ones that might enable rearrangements of cosmological and ecological forces, modes living and forms of habitation, beyond sheer survival. Taking inspiration from Vinciane Despret and Michel Meuret’s (2016, 26) call for cosmoecological experiments that connect *oïkos* and *kosmos*, habits and habitats, modes of living and of composing the earth otherwise, “each bearing the consequences of the others’ ways of living and dying,” I here take up the notion of “cosmoecology” as a call for beginning amidst all endings, as a speculative proposition for the permanent pluralization and nourishing of divergent forms of living and dying amidst ecological turmoil.

2. A matter of survival? Extinction, modes of living, and the rhythm of imminence

“Fossil fuel production escalated, greenhouse gas emissions increased, and climate disruption accelerated. In 2001, the IPCC had predicted that atmospheric CO₂ would double by 2050. In fact, that benchmark was met by 2042. Scientists had expected a mean global warming of 2 to 3 degrees Celsius; the actual figure was 3.9 degrees. Though originally merely a benchmark for discussion with no particular physical meaning, the doubling of CO₂ emissions turned out to be quite significant: once the corresponding temperature rise reached 4 degrees, rapid changes began to ensue. By 2040,” write science historians Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway (2014, 24–25) in their aptly titled *The Collapse of Western Civilization*, told from the speculative vantage point of the would-be survivors of a postapocalyptic future,

heat waves and droughts were the norm. Control measures – such as water and food rationing and Malthusian ‘one-child’ policies – were widely implemented. In wealthy countries, the most hurricane- and tornado-prone regions were gradually but steadily depopulated, putting increased social pressure on areas less subject to those hazards. In poor nations, conditions were predictably worse: rural portions of Africa and Asia began experiencing significant depopulation from out-migration, malnutrition induced disease and infertility, and starvation. Still, sea level had risen only 9 to 15 centimeters around the globe, and coastal populations were mainly intact. Then, in the Northern Hemisphere summer of 2041, unprecedented heat waves scorched the planet, destroying food crops around the globe. Panic ensued, with food riots in virtually every major city. Mass migration of undernourished and dehydrated individuals, coupled with explosive increases in insect populations, led to widespread outbreaks of typhus, cholera, dengue fever, yellow fever, and viral and retroviral agents never before seen. Surging insect populations also destroyed huge swaths of forests in Canada, Indonesia, and Brazil. As social order began to break down in the 2050s, governments were overthrown, particularly in Africa, but also in many parts of Asia and Europe, further decreasing social capacity to deal with increasingly desperate populations.

Theirs is of course but a cautionary tale, depicting a possible near future. Yet, as is often the case with science fiction, this speculative tale renders the present lucidly perceptible. It throws us with terrifying clarity back in the thick of the Anthropocenic refrain, in the grip of the rhythmic imminence of a coming apocalypse in an unknown but increasingly probable future. *Tick-tock*. In their story, the immediate factors precipitating the collapse are diverse, but the ultimate cause is one repeatedly invoked today: a failure, in spite of a wealth of knowledge and information, to practically and culturally come to terms with *another* end, that of a geological epoch – the Holocene – where Humanity and the Earth still went on living out their own separate stories.

Indeed, as those who give voice to the Anthropocenic refrain today proclaim, the Anthropocene constitutes “the very recent *rupture* in Earth history arising from the impact of human activity on the Earth System as a whole” (Hamilton 2017, 10). Like its own apocalypse, it not only heralds a coming catastrophe but itself constitutes “the totalizing event par excellence,” superseding the many-storied universe of divergent ecologies and modes of living through what is nothing short of a cosmological *clearing operation*. One that hails the emergence of a transcendental Humanity and a total Earth System “which is not merely a collection of many local worlds but a dynamic, evolving total entity above and beyond the local, and increasingly deciding the fate of all locals” (2017, 77). To approach these scientific and speculative stories as expressions of an Anthropocenic refrain, therefore, is to pay attention to the consequences engendered in the interplay between the New Climatic Regime, as Bruno Latour (2017) would call it, and a certain *climactic* regime that suspends the present between a new beginning (the new epoch) and its own imminent End (planetary catastrophe). For if Anthropocene narratives appeal to the inauguration of this singular cosmological story of a world composed of a transcendental Anthropos and a total Earth System whose reciprocally enhanced powers have them locked into a dance and battle to the bitter End, it is their rhythm of imminence, mesmerizing and paralyzing all at once, which gives such stories their overwhelming power to reassemble forces, such that the present is configured and increasingly governed in the hold of an imperative whereby the possibility of *surviving* the catastrophe to come requires of every mode of living that it consent to the clearing operation, that it face up to the cosmological apocalypse the rise of the Anthropocene epoch

itself constitutes. “Only when we accept both will we be able to properly grasp the new situation humans confront” (Hamilton 2017, 46).

Indeed, refrains are not merely speculative conceptualizations. Insofar as the rhythm of imminence renders this new cosmological story an imperative matter of survival, the Anthropocenic refrain becomes the keynote to an entire array of interventions and operations devised both to stave off the end as it actualizes its cosmological clearing. Nowhere are such operations more visible than in those situations in which modern states or transnational development and conservation programmes brush against other modes of inhabiting the earth, ways of living and dying otherwise whose modes of habitation do not neatly conform to the demands that the rhythm of imminence makes manifest. One such case is the banning of fishing and the paramilitary operations of its enforcement that Smart-Fish, a multinational governmental and nongovernmental collaboration funded by the European Union and implemented by the Indian Ocean Commission with the support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, has imposed on Uganda’s Lake Victoria (Johnson 2017). The introduction of the ban was a direct response to the dwindling stocks of Nile Perch, a species of commercially significant fish that came to inhabit its waters and now is considered to be at imminent risk of extinction brought about by ecological and economic transformations. But, according to ethnographer Jennifer Lee Johnson (2017, 8), it also followed a widespread and longstanding apocalyptic narrative of the impending death of the lake itself, one that frames the ban and its enforcement as an attempt to save Lake Victoria whilst in so doing ensuring both food security and more-than-human survival on unstable ecological terrain.

From afar, the operations of Smart-Fish are nothing but the mere application of sound environmental policy in a time of global climate change. But if this situation enables us to sense the operations and modes of intervention to which the Anthropocenic refrain gives way, it is because, as Johnson relates (2017, 5), the fish of Lake Victoria are integral participants in another rhythmic assemblage composed of local fishworkers, bodies of water, food, an “ethical” spirit-being known as *Siryá Maluma*, and “sauce.” That is, they are vital to a situated, collective cosmological composition thanks to which it “is still possible to live well with a body of water that continues to feature within popular press accounts as ‘dying’ or ‘already dead.’” Indeed, in this other assemblage of being, in this other mode of living, “food is not everything that could be eaten. Cultivated crops only become food (*emmere*) when they are served with sauce (*enva*). When cultivated crops are served without sauce, they are instead *maluma*,” which denotes “biting, gnawing, hunger, or pain” (2017, 10). The spirit of the place, *Siryá Maluma* – the meaning of which in Luganda translates into the ethical proposition “I do not eat pain,” and, “I do not eat without sauce” – is at once powerful and vital to the coordination of terrestrial and cosmic forces on the shores and islands that constitute the ecological milieu of the lake. Central to the ontological divergence that *sauce (enva)* introduces in what constitutes a nourishing meal, the presence of *Siryá Maluma* is indissociable from what “living well” amongst these fishing communities comes to comprise. Consider, Johnson (2017, 12) writes,

one everyday way the *Siryá Maluma* exists. Two fishermen return to shore in the early hours of the morning after a long night of fishing for Nile perch [...]. Their catches were not

particularly good. When their wives come to greet them, each man hesitates to hand over the two medium sized fish that they each usually reserve from the rest of their commercial catch to give to their wives for sauce. One man hoped to sell his two fish before his wife came to the shore and spend the extra cash trying to win more in an ongoing card game outside a local bar. The other had hoped to give at least one of his fish to an attractive young woman who recently moved to this fishing camp to set up a *hoteli*, or local foods restaurant. His gift of a fish might endear him to this new, attractive woman. Instead, both of their wives insisted, Sirya Maluma, *I do not eat food without sauce*, and went home each with two fish to prepare for sauce. That day, like most other days, these two pairs of people and those they eat with all ate a complete meal.

Indeed, on the islands where Sirya Maluma and these fishworkers live,

the only sauces strictly considered *enva* are those made with fish. Fish served in warm, wet sauce are mediatory substances that transform cultivated crops into edible foods. Together food and sauce make the kinds of complete, satisfying meals that contribute materially and metaphorically to good lives made working with fish. (2017, 10)

It cannot be denied that a certain “extinction equivocation” is at stake here (Tironi and Vega, [this issue](#)), a political dispute over what exists and what is subject to imminent extinction, what needs to be sustained, and how. For the environmental and developmental concern with food security is fuelled by the fact that, when researchers visit the shores and islands of the lake, “and ask whether residents have difficulties sourcing food, fishworkers honestly report that yes, food is a problem” and as a result, “researchers too often leave fishing sites thinking that everything that could be eaten is scarce there, particularly fish.” (Johnson 2017, 10–11). What’s more, it is not Nile Perch which local fishworkers prefer, but *nkolongo*, a seasonally abundant, indigenous fish which is regularly “being studied out of existence” by the methods deployed by vessels that conduct trawl surveys to estimate fish abundance (2017, 15) Thus, while the ban on fishing and its associated policing by paramilitary enforces is introduced as part of an attempt to “save’ Lake Victoria from its always imminent future of death and collapse” (2017, 8) in order to create “secure fisheries and secure futures,” such interventions entail more than the introduction of environmental restriction to the activities of local fishworkers or an impediment to their livelihoods. They are also and at the same time operations which sap that which is vital to life, outlawing their divergent mode of collective existence, and violently eroding the world and mode of eating and living well that the fishing collectives in these islands cultivate.

It is not that Smart-Fish and other such animating agencies of the Anthropocenic refrain are unaware of the possibility of such equivocations, however. It is that, from the perspective of the imminent rhythm that the Anthropocenic refrain animates, such pluralistic problematizations offer little more than well-meaning distractions from the impending threat, mere impediments to facing up to the urgent task ahead. “Appealing to one’s particular culture or religion – in short, tradition – is no argument,” Clive Hamilton (2017, 38) writes, “because belonging to a certain cultural or religious group does not exempt one from what is happening on Anthropocene Earth. There are no more enclaves.” Here again the rhythm of imminence sanctions, reinforces, and gives moral and political urgency to the clearing operations that transcendentals perform. From its perspective, having access to adequate food at all times is a matter of survival – the minimum requirement for a secure future on “Anthropocene Earth.” However difficult it

may be to accept, coming to terms with such requirements is paramount if humans are to face up to the existential “dread” that constitutes the mood music of this new epoch – a sense of dread provoked by “the vast transformation that is taking place in the Earth System and what it means for their lives and life on the planet” (Hamilton 2020, 117). Because we are now said to have entered a “non-analogue” state marked by the imminence of the End, “an ontology appropriate to the Anthropocene cannot be found by repurposing pre-modern ontologies, or revitalizing those that survive in the crevices of naturalism’s vast transformations, and then blending them in some yet-to-be-negotiated combination” (2020, 111).

Once again, such words give explicit voice to what the apocalyptic refrain quietly makes resonate. That while the Earth may be undergoing profound metamorphoses, modern colonial gestures can survive even the most dramatic transformations. For it is in the name of the future security of “Humanity on Anthropocene Earth” that fishing communities in Lake Victoria are forced to persist – if at all – in an endangered existence, in breach of national fisheries laws, under threat of violent assaults by armed paramilitary teams tasked with enforcing those laws while simultaneously taking their money and their *sauce*. It is in the name of survival that they’re forced “to eat pain” unto the end. Indeed, the dread conveyed in Johnson’s story communicates not with the sublime horrors that a transcendental Earth can inflict, but with the fact that the very knowledges and stories that announce Lake Victoria’s imminent collapse “submerge histories and contemporary realities of already existing forms of fish production, consumption, and trade that actually sustain, and even develop, fishing communities in Uganda” (Johnson 2017, 20). Whereas the Anthropocenic refrain dreads the horizon of the ultimate End, the concrete dread running through the more-than-human inhabitants of Lake Victoria becomes felt in the imperative of survival itself – the surrendering of that which is vital to a singular mode of living and dying in the name of postponing a transcendent End. As such, the story Johnson tells at the rough edges of the Anthropocenic refrain makes present some of the ways its single cosmological story of imminent catastrophe can give birth to forms of devastation of its own, ones that are as much cosmological as ecological, systematically bringing the very beings and practices that have made it possible for these heterogenous collectives to nourish their lives, to eat and live *well*, to their end.

Which is to say that the rhythm that animates the staving off of the imminent End of the World converges with an immanent extinction of its own: that of the divergent multiplicity of modes of being and ways of living which the new story of a transcendental “Humanity” and “Earth System” are now said to replace, with which are all now exhorted to come to terms. Renewing the colonial trope of despotism as the price to be paid for enlightenment, those who give voice to the Anthropocenic refrain dare to hope that the “impositions of planetary boundaries by the Earth System in the Anthropocene, harsh as it will be, might be seen by its survivors as the path to true liberation, the cost of learning to live in solidarity with the Earth.” (Hamilton 2017, 161) But who or what is it that “survives,” in the end? As the story of Sirya Maluma dramatizes and the etymology of the word itself intimates, what *sur-vives* is whatever *remains* once a world, a mode of living well and of inhabiting the Earth, has been cleared out, depleted of its own concrete, immanent values, rendered unable to nourish what is vital to its own singular form of life. The pure art of survival, to borrow Césaire’s (2013, 20) words, is that which leaves “life flat on its face, miscarried dreams and nowhere to put them, the river of life listless in its

hopeless bed, not rising or falling, unsure of its flow, lamentably empty, the heavy impartial shadow of boredom creeping over the quality of things, unbroken by the brightness of a single bird.”

Indeed, this is what Césaire’s counter-apocalyptic words, and stories such as Johnson’s, make insist at the rough edges of the Anthropocenic refrain: that while the latter articulates a concern for the fate of human and other-than-human life on Earth and rightly asserts that no one is exempt from the ripples that ecological turmoil precipitates, nobody – save, perhaps, for this abstract “Anthropos” – has ever lived on a total, transcendental Earth. Contrary to what someone like Hamilton would suggest, there is *nothing* but enclaves – it is their immanent, heterogenous togetherness that composes the Earth (Maniglier 2020). And while many environmental activists rebelling against imminent extinction today are undoubtedly concerned for the consequences that earth-wide ecological devastation poses to other more-than-human collectives in and out of Europe, to propose that the End of the World is the only thing in this world that’s worth beginning is to make felt that what animates the rhythm of imminence of Anthropocenic refrain is the dread that *a certain* world and mode of life, the imperial world “in which civilisation developed” (Hansen 2009), may be at risk of coming to its end: that it is *that* end, the end of *that* life, which must be averted at all costs. A world and mode of living that has not only played an outsized role in the ecological mess we’re in, but that, as Jairus Grove (2019, 237) rightly remarks, is just

as threatened by peak oil or any other shortages of minerals or capital that are necessary for the predictable routines that many Americans and Europeans have grown accustomed to, undoubtedly at the expense of the rest of the planet’s population of human and nonhuman Earthlings.

This is why it matters what kinds of endings we take apocalypses to precipitate. For when apocalypse is affirmed as the end of *some* world rather than the end of everything as such, matters of survival are indissociable from the particular territory that the Anthropocenic refrain assembles, one that institutes a transcendental perspective of valuation which determines, in general and for everyone, what is *vital to life* – how lives worth living and deaths worth living for are to be defined. And it renders us alive, in relay and return, to the fact that survival inside the territorial refrain of “Anthropocene Earth” may *already* give way to an apocalyptic existence: to a life flat on its face, composed precariously inside and despite the end, unfolding in the rubble of another world’s attempts at its own persistence; but also to a death “without sense or piety, this death where there is no majesty, the gaping pettiness of this death, the death which limps from pettiness to pettiness; little greeds heaped on top of the conquistador; little flunkeys heaped on top of the great savage” (Césaire 2013, 27). Thus, to understand apocalypse as an immanent event in the world, as the end of *some* world in this world, is to affirm that the question over whether one lives or dies can never be abstracted from the question of *how* one lives *and* dies; that the question of the End of the World can never be abstracted from the question of the worlds yet to be composed, from the divergent manners of inhabiting the Earth.

3. Cosmoecology for the end of the world

That, indeed, is the interminable task Césaire calls for when he states that the End of the World is the only thing *in this world* that’s worth beginning. This connection, between

apocalypse and the task of *beginning*, is important. For unlike prophetic millenarianism, it signals that there is no second coming, that it is not apocalypse itself that carries with it the blueprint of its own redemptive fate. By contrast, to suggest that the end of the world must be begun is to affirm that the otherwise *must be made*, and to proffer an invitation, inside and in spite of the apocalypse of survival and homogenization, for an ongoing and unfinished experimentation with divergent modes of inhabiting the Earth. But how to begin, amidst all endings? Recalling with Césaire that beginnings derive not from origins but from *openings*, that the otherwise must be made, “cosmoecology” seems to me to be one generative name under which such experimentation could speculatively begin. A name for resisting the cosmological clearing operation, looking for openings that interrupt imminence with immanence, experimenting pluralistically, at the End of the World, on unstable ecological terrain. I take inspiration from Vinciane Despret and Michel Meuret’s (2016, 25–26) use of the term, in their proposal to attend to how “ecology and cosmology are knotted in a common story, forming a cosmoecology of multiple beings, gods, animals, humans, living, and dead, each bearing the consequences of the others’ ways of living and dying.”

To say that ecology and cosmology are knotted in a common story is not however to claim, yet the again, that they compose *a single story*. It is not therefore an attempt to redeem ongoing forms of ecological devastation by appealing to the nature-loving cosmology of an ecophilosophy which would remind us that everything is interconnected, that every loss is another birth, that every death is but a transformation of Life towards a new Kingdom on Earth. Needless to say, neither is it an attempt at “repurposing pre-modern ontologies” or at arguing that “traditional practices and ways of seeing the world have the answers to techno-industrial destructiveness,” as Hamilton (2020, 111) scornfully puts it. There are real losses ultimately unatoned for, and the mere act of embracing other cosmologies would not by itself solve any of our problems, just as no individual invention of a universal “fifth ontology” of a newly invigorated and unified Anthropos in the face of earthly defiance will manage to “*calm the Earth*” (2020, 118). Cosmoecology is experimental or it is nothing. It is an attempt, at the End of the World, to escape the hold of the Anthropocenic refrain by “learning to hold possibilities open, learning attentiveness to the infinite ways of being affected and of affecting, where no one may know ahead of time the affects one is capable of or the kinds of forces and entities that will constitute landscapes and worlds with us” (Despret and Meuret 2016, 35).

Which is why the “cosmo-” in cosmoecology is first and foremost a vector of indetermination of those rhythmic territories in whose hold much of the present currently dwells. Reclaiming immanent ecologies of living and dying from the operations of clearing that transcendental valuations perform and by which divergent modes of living are so frequently damned, to begin amidst all endings is to precipitate one and many indeterminations, to disclose an otherwise which persists amidst apocalyptic closure yet does not determine the shape of what might lie in the fugitive “afters” that an end to this world makes insist. Hence the experience of disconcertment induced by Césaire’s counter-apocalyptic words: if the End of the World is the only thing in *this* world that’s worth *beginning*, it is precisely because to begin is to displace both origins and destinations, finalities and foundations. It is to disclose an immanent opening from the interstices of a situation marked by imminent apocalyptic closure – luring us into a permanent experimentation with other refrains, with other assemblages of earthly and cosmic forces that might,

just perhaps, both affirm and intensify modes of living and dying otherwise, other habits and habitats, other values and valuations, other *oikos* and *kosmos* (Savransky 2020). It is precisely in this sense, therefore, that by attending to the ways in which others inhabit their world, to what becomes vital to each mode of living, to the divergent value-ecologies that other modes of habitation immanently uphold, the task of a “cosmoecology” is that which, after Nietzsche, one could call a *pluralistic revaluation of values* against all transcendental devaluations. A permanent, situated labor that eschews abstract determinations in order to give way to divergent ways of immanently appraising what living and dying well at the end of a world might mean, ways of living out and through times of endings without surrendering the question of a life worth living and a death worth living for to the dread induced by the imminence of The End.

It goes without saying that no established political procedure and no promise of a world to come can avoid the fact that we can never anticipate what those other refrains may engender in turn. Indeed, one of the dangers of the Anthropocenic rhythm of imminence is that its catastrophism paradoxically occludes the profusion of thoroughly *tragic* political options with which the present is infused. Options where the difference between success and failure, virtue and vice, salvation and damnation, is not one of opposition but of precarious appositions that irredeemably bind well-meaning projects as much to chance and contingency as to their own potentially disastrous consequences. As such, to begin, to begin again at the End of the World, is to experiment in the dark, without guarantees, groping for possibles we envisage but cannot quite understand, accepting that since we can never determine in general what is vital to life, “we may never know, safely and reliably, either ahead of time or a posteriori, which beings will bear the consequences, or will enjoy the consequences, of the concrete attention we give to them” (Despret and Meuret 2016, 26). It is a work to be done, from the deep end of beginnings, in the course of a precarious process and struggle whose radical contingencies no all-encompassing planetary vision, no other “-cene,” can effectively gainsay.

As Césaire’s words make present, endings – death, loss, even apocalypse – themselves belong to the world. They too are ingredients in the making of this turbulent Earth. Which is why the question they pose is not an ethical question – are they good or evil? – which always presupposes a transcendental perspective of evaluation from which the values of “good” and “evil” derive. Enjoying none of the innocence that morality affords, the question calls for a pragmatics of habitation on a precarious earth: not a choice between living or dying, but one between divergent modes of living *and* dying. Indeed, the end of the world which Césaire’s counter-apocalyptic words call for is that of the world-without-others that modern colonialism apocalyptically inaugurated and that the very attempt to stave off the End is in danger of prolonging today. And if the end of that world is the only thing in this world that is worth beginning, the task, perhaps, is to give to the presence of other worlds, of other modes of living and dying, the power to destabilize our cosmological orders and to question our ethical commitments, to give to them the power to teach us not that apocalypse is a myth but that another end of the world may be possible in spite of all. One that may engender new values and valuations inside and in spite of us, one that may induce in us an ongoing and unfinished revaluation of what a life worth living and a death worth living for might mean on this troubling earth (Savransky 2021).

“One launches forth, hazards an improvisation. But to improvise is to join the World, or meld with” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 311). Indeed, to call for counter-apocalyptic *beginnings* is to risk affirming divergent, collective modes of living and dying otherwise that might – with both gains and losses, with beginnings and endings, with lives and deaths, including our own – continue nourishing the precarious multifariousness of partial and precarious connections and disconnections, folds and snags, joys and tragedies, thanks to which the Earth is rendered habitable still, worth living and dying on in spite of all. It is to live and die dangerously indeed, precisely because what a life worth living and a death worth living for mean cannot be defined in general, precisely because the values divergent modes of living and dying immanently uphold won’t be the same values, won’t compose one common world. Precisely because, in the end, in the beginning, their consequences will be felt in a future that is no longer ours. Perhaps it is such an opening to a radical unknown and indetermination that Césaire’s counter-apocalypse calls upon us to begin. Perhaps it is this untameable danger immanent to the living and the dying on an Earth which is not One, that it enables us to trust. Perhaps it is this End of the World as a multiplicity of counter-apocalyptic beginnings that it fugitively entrusts us to affirm: *Heia!*

Heia for the royal Kailcedrate!
 Heia for those who have never invented anything
 those who never explored anything
 those who never tamed anything

those who give themselves up to the essence of all things
 ignorant of surfaces but struck by the movement of all things
 free of the desire to tame but familiar with the play of the world

truly the eldest sons of the world
 open to all breaths of the world
 fraternal territory of all breaths
 undrained beds of the waters of the world
 flesh of the flesh of the world pumping with the very movement
 of the world
 (Césaire 2013, 58–59)

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