Delenda Est: World and Belief in Apocalyptic Thought

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Abstract

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In the recent rise of dystopic fiction, millenarianism, fundamentalism, and ecological disaster, *Delenda Est* interrogates the current proliferation of apocalyptic texts not as individual phenomena but as shared configurations for thinking about worlds, particularly in the crisis of belief invoked in the end of the world. I posit that apocalyptic thinking is best understood not through a particular history, period, genre, or place, but as a recurrent set of philosophical problems engendered in the attempt to imagine the "end" of a world, problems that bring worlds and our beliefs about them into view. This dissertation, in conversation with literary scholars of the post-secular age and contemporary philosophers that bridge the continental-analytic divide, works toward a theory of apocalyptic thinking as a consequence of (and a means of furthering) rupture in the belief systems that are integral to everyday narrative construction and world-constitution. *Delenda Est* comprises a comparative study of scriptures, literature, art, and popular culture about the end of the world that traces the shifts in world-committing beliefs across period and place, from famous apocalyptophilic works such as the Book of Revelation, Hieronymus Bosch's *Last Judgment*, and William Blake's *Jerusalem* to those of the American Shakers,

Russian modernists, and contemporary evangelical pop culture. Apocalyptic texts, this dissertation suggests, provide a unique but critical site for comprehending totalizing beliefs and how such beliefs commitments can break, transition, or are fortified in the end of a world.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation exists thanks to the support of my partner, Jason, and family, particularly my brother John. Without his influence, I'd probably still think [insert joke John came up with].

Similarly, it never would have come into being without Brian's herculean efforts and the boundless support of Monika and Leroy, who each put countless hours into this project. Each reader approached my project with the intellectual flexibility and patience necessary for such a strange project to emerge. If there is anything I take particular pride in regarding this dissertation, it is simply who has (actually) read it.

That said, if there is anything amiss within, dear reader, you know whom to blame.

For P.

ὅτι μοι θεῖόν τι καὶ δαιμόνιον γίγνεται φωνή

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INTRODUCTION

Regarding the End of the Word, the Subject of Belief, and the Drunken Search for a Lost Watch

This dissertation begins under the premise that thinking apocalyptically—whether watching the most recent world-disaster movie, reading the Book of Revelation in a bible study, or engaging in a political discussion around the possibility of nuclear annihilation—does *something.* Defining that "something," or what a type of thinking does beyond its most obvious material consequences, is, of course, the challenge. But despite this amorphous dilemma, it is easy at the time of this writing to see why such a question might be necessary. The end of the world is pervasive. From dystopic fiction to millenarianism or nuclear holocaust to ecological disaster, talk of "the end" permeates both scholarly and common discourse. How, then, do we trace the dimension of such an idea—a common narrative, rhetoric, or imaginative exercise—particularly one with such a plurality of expressions? What actually constitutes the apocalyptic? In its current pervasiveness and breadth of forms, where does the apocalyptic begin and end? Simply, where do we start?

We know of apocalypse, historically, as a vehicle of belief. From Norse mythology's Ragnarök to Christianity's evangelizing spread of the term itself through the Book of Revelation, apocalypse is not only inextricably linked to the destruction of worlds but the narrative function of bringing myths, religious texts, cyclical time frames or non-empirical worlds together and tying them into an end. Such a totalizing function is thus also a "revelation", as the apocalyptic function is an "uncovering" (the literal translation of *ἀποκάλυψις*) of truth. In the midst of the current apocalyptic forms of political terror and environmental disaster, some scholars find this long history and complex tangling of beliefs and worldviews a weakness for comprehending the

current obsession and problem of apocalypse, or that such a history is no longer relevant after the postmodernist rejection of metanarratives and their endings.[1] However, as I will argue throughout this project, this is apocalypse's strength as a concept as well as the source of its relevance, well into the so-called secular age. This vital connection to belief makes apocalypse an important subject of study, crucial not only to comprehending the popular obsession with both secular and religious apocalypse but also to understanding what it means to "end" a world and, in the process, what it means to think worlds and worldviews in the first place.

Despite the unavoidable proliferation of belief in everyday interactions, we have a general tendency to avoid discussing belief, particularly in academia. Gayatri Spivak, who is joined by a set of scholars in the framing and critiquing this "post-secular" age, perhaps best excoriates the status of secularism in the academy and its failures in the twenty-first century in "Terror: A Speech After 9-11".[2] Spivak calls out "those sanitized secularists . . . hysterical at the mention of religion," who "are quite out of touch with the world's peoples and have buried their heads in the sand" (102). Indeed, though Spivak is writing about terrorism in 2004, her characterization is perhaps even more weighty in 2018. Not only have secularized assumptions distanced scholars from rigorously accounting for significant populaces and commonplace forms of thought, but it has led many of us to ignore the crucial truth that belief is not just a vehicle of thought for the religious but permeates our scholarly work, too. For these reasons, we cannot "sanitize" apocalypse, nor should we; thus, this work means to explain how the apocalypse is a valuable arena for insight into what we believe about the world. Thus, this project hopes to not only respond to Spivak's criticism but also take-up her call, borrowed from the words of Martin Luther King Jr., to participate in "a 'setting to work' to meet the world in which we live" (105).

But what is the world, anyway?

And what happens to this "work" when we destroy it?

I emphasize these questions particularly for their distinctness. In the midst of the current obsession with apocalyptic media and its ensuing scholarship, many scholars have asked the purpose of imagining the coming apocalypse resulting in many diverse and respectable answers. Most are motivated by a particular intersection of crisis, whether it be in response to the turn of the millennium, the growing awareness of environmental crisis, or what it means to live and think through death-throes of late capitalism.[3] Despite this shared apocalyptic anxiety and the imperative nature of this work, it is around this question of worlds where we depart. The question is not which apocalypse, nor how apocalyptic texts process current cultural crises or anxieties, but what happens when we imagine against or without a world. To put it within a common metaphor for describing the apocalypse, these studies and others explore the ways in which the apocalyptic "rearranges the furniture of the world," or how the apocalypse or anxiety surrounding it allows subjects to reprioritize their values and comprehension of how the world is organized. This is a good analytic maneuver, particularly regarding post-apocalyptic fiction, in that it recognizes within apocalyptic thinking the key dimension of rearranging the world. However, I will argue that apocalypse does something more extreme: rather than a bit of feng-shui, apocalyptic thinking, as a device that quite literally destroys worlds, is instead more akin to burning down one's home and asking "where—and how—shall I live next?" The space of apocalyptic worldlessness is far more radical imaginative position than simple reorganization; at its heart, it is a question of what the world is, not just the order of what is within it.

For this reason, I approach the apocalyptic not as a distinct form of literature or even genre, but rather as a form of thinking, a way of conceptualizing and processing the end of the world. I do this for many reasons, which I hope to expand on throughout the dissertation, but I

will condense here. Primarily, while I maintain a distinction between the imaginative or fictive and that of reality (material or otherwise), I see the two as inextricable. It appears to me the most successful apocalyptic fictions are those that generate a reaction beyond the text, compel the reader to a new vision of the world. This is most obvious in the case of eschatological religions and their practices; to evaluate evangelical eschatological voting records without Revelation or the lifestyle of Shakers without their statements of belief seems to make the mistake of *actually* splitting the child, so to speak, rather than revealing a true distinction. Such integrative capacity pertains to secular apocalypses, too. If one takes the apocalypticism of *An Inconvenient Truth* to heart, it results in apocalyptic thought in action. Treating the apocalypse as a type of thinking also avoids reductive limitations through various genre restrictions. To restrict oneself to film, sacred texts, or literature not only risks isolating itself from a much larger phenomenon but ignores the pervasiveness of the thinking that infects many of the little genres we so often (myself very much included) ignore: pamphlets, posters, jokes, or ads, just to name a few. To artificially truncate the concept to a singular historical moment or lineage, likewise misses the certain and significant commonality as well as the potential explanatory power in characterizing that narrative structures of certain forms of thought. The plurality of apocalypse is expressive—and thus warrants attention.

With this approach toward the glut of apocalyptic forms, this dissertation will look past these cases as individual phenomena and into the common, catalyzing ground of apocalyptic thought. What unites these cases is not so much their ideological content but their shared configurations for thinking about the world, specifically the crisis of belief invoked in thinking through the end of the world. Thus, to elucidate this contemporary moment, this dissertation proposes that apocalyptic thinking is best understood not through a particular history, period,

genre, or place, but as a recurrent set of philosophical problems engendered in the attempt to imagine the "end" of a world, problems that bring worlds and our beliefs about them into view. *Delenda Est* works toward a theory of apocalyptic thinking as a consequence of (and a means of furthering) rupture in the belief systems that are integral to everyday narrative construction and world-constitution. Apocalyptic texts provide a unique but critical site for comprehending totalizing beliefs and how such beliefs change, transition, or are reified in the end of a world.

In what follows, I will delineate my approach to thinking about worlds and beliefs in the imaginative rupture of apocalyptic thought. My first chapter will outline the problems of worlds sparked in thinking through the end of the world and my approach's theoretical scaffolds to thinking worlds and beliefs in the apocalypse. I will argue, through the philosophy of Markus Gabriel, that we can best understand what happens to worlds in apocalyptic thinking when we think them through world-committing beliefs, taken-for-truths about the nature of the totalities we envision ourselves to inhabit. With such a framework, we can see how apocalyptic thinking generates a philosophical problem which instigates a crisis of belief, one with productive potential and the capacity to change such beliefs.

In the remaining chapters, I will track how I see apocalyptic thinking instigating and instrumentalizing this crisis and the patterns of change I see recurrent to this kind of thinking. Chapter two will examine how apocalyptic thinking can catalyze a moment of world-apostasy, a divorce from one's beliefs about the nature of the world, and how such thinking plays out to haunting effect in T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land". Chapter three and four will refocus on the question of how these world-committing beliefs change in apocalyptic thought. Chapter three will examine what I categorize as apocalypses of necessity, which utilize the "unveiling" of apocalypse to justify their worldviews, through the Book of Revelation, the evangelical thriller

Left Behind, and Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. Chapter four will respond to the problems raised in chapter three by looking at apocalypses that do the opposite, that is reimagine certain world-beliefs as contingent and thus reorient the subject's worldview, namely through the works of William Blake, post-Kantian German Idealism, recent genre fiction, and contemporary scholarship. Finally, this dissertation will end with an examination of how apocalyptic thought can be used to build commitments to new worldviews and how that carries over beyond imaginative fictions of manifestos into the material world for both the American Shakers and early 20th century Russian avant-gardes.

This dissertation is thus imaginative work, tracing the peculiar curvature of a form thinking as it appears in its numerous contexts. Guy Davenport argues that the difference between "Parthenon and the World Trade Center, between a French wine glass and a German beer mug" is the imagination, but he also describes the imagination as "like the drunk man who lost his watch, and must get drunk again to find it. It is as intimate as speech and custom, and to trace its ways we need to reeducate our eyes" (*Geography* 3-5). This dissertation does not pretend its efforts are any nobler nor more sensical than such a search but hopes that this exercise is perhaps fruitful. So please, "reeducate your eyes" (that is, fill your glass) and read on.

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[1] For an example of this scholarly dilemma of apocalypse and belief, see Evan Calder Williams' troubled but ultimate decision to use the term "apocalypse" despite the "historical, and particularly religious, baggage" of the term. For an example of the apocalyptic question in postmodernism, see Teresa Heffernan's *Post-Apocalyptic Culture*.

[2] One the key frameworks of this discussion is Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, which traces the rise of the secular in Western thinking and its proliferation of options from which to register

belief. Other important, critical voices include Talal Asad in *Formations of the Secular*, Saba Mahmood in *Politics of Piety*, and John Lardas Modern in *Secularism in Antebellum America*.

[3] For those who study millenarianism, see for example Daniel Wojcik's *The End of the World As We Know It* or Martha F. Lee's collection *Millennial Visions*. For ecocritical perspectives focus on the apocalyptic, see Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects*, Kate Rigby "Dancing with Disaster", or Val Plumwood's *Environmental Culture*. Definitive works on apocalyptic nature of late capitalism include Fredric Jameson's seminal *Postmodernism* and Slavoj Žižek's *Living in the End Times*, while more apocalyptically-centered works include Evan Calder Williams's *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*.

CHAPTER ONE

I Want to Believe: Apocalypse and the Ontology of World-Committing Beliefs

How do we imagine the end of a world? Yes, considering recent millennial anxieties, many images of disaster—from the toppling of famous building and wholesale destruction of suburbia—no doubt come to mind. They show a world we know in disarray. But do those worlds, in fact, end? Let me frame this question through what is perhaps the most famous painter of the apocalyptic imaginarium, the Early Netherlandish painter popularly known as Hieronymus Bosch. Take a look at this fragment of a *Last Judgment* (Fig. 1).[4]

Though it shares a family resemblance with the rest of Bosch's oeuvre, this fragment is nevertheless distinct in important respects from much of Bosch's work, which is known for its eccentrically detailed and expansive backgrounds that are filled to the brim with various smaller scenes occurring all at once. Compare it to Figure 4 (page 30), the middle panel from Bosch's famous *Last Judgment* triptych; you'll notice a stark difference in the intricacy of the setting itself. Typical of Bosch as we know him, the claustrophobia-inducing collection of scenic vignettes in the famous *Judgement* create a more fully-realized sense of place, in this case the chaos in the face of Christ's ordering return. The fragmentary *Last Judgment*, however, while still made up of such vignettes, has an almost completely undeveloped background; there are some shapes among the blackness that in places suggest some kind of terrain, particularly where light erupts around it and a few figures are emerging from barely distinguishable holes that seem to be graves. The overall effect, though, is a stark blackness against which the brightly colored grotesqueries exist. This *Last Judgment* fragment seems to be occurring in a void—a space without much definition or context, neither a world in chaotic finale nor the distinct landscapes

Figure 1 Bosch, Fragment of Last Judgment

of damnation. It is a radically worldless space against which these creatures stand out, that is, exist.

This fragment illustrates a peculiar problem that is difficult to think: how do we imagine the end of a world? The images I painted earlier of millennial anxiety, in media res of destruction, fail to reach the final culmination of apocalypse: worldlessness. In contrast, the Bosch fragment, uncertain of where it takes place, indefinite regarding what these figures exist against —is it hell or is it Earth, and if either, what is the nature of those places—captures the difficulty of thinking without a world. No longer a knowable space that reads directly as a popularly imagined Christian afterlife destination, we viewers gaze on with a degree of indeterminacy. While the fragment is still a framed view of a particular context at which we can guess thanks to the actions of the people and demonic figures, we are nevertheless left contemplating a world unknown, in the midst of becoming. What will happen or happened to the Earth we humans know? Is this it, or did it vanish into nothing? Did it become a new world, either a heaven or hell? Are these just different "worlds"? Crucially, in the face of this blackness, is there ever *no* world? So, to ask again more precisely, how do we think, imagine, or even comprehend *without* a world, without a background, a context, an all-encompassing idea of what simply *is*? What *really* happens when we attempt to imagine the end of a world?

This difficulty in imagining the world's end seems to produce not only fruitful questions regarding what worlds are, in their end, but also the productive capacity of apocalypse. Apocalypses do not simply end worlds, they radically change them. In this chapter, I will lay out my approach to thinking about worlds, what role beliefs play in worlds, and how those worlds change in the course of apocalyptic thinking. I will argue that the onset of apocalyptic thinking—an attempt to think through the failure or end of the world—offers a surprising but crucial

opportunity to rethink the world and what we take to be true of it. The worldlessness of apocalypse has the capacity to rupture the belief systems that are integral to everyday world-constitution and thus a critical site for comprehending totalizing beliefs and how such beliefs change, transition, or are reified in the end of a world.

To track how apocalypse can do all this, I will begin by interrogating "worlds" and what we might mean or envision in our usage of them. World is a troubling flexible concept, and I will argue that it is this same flexibility that makes imagining the end of the world both possible and so exciting. To account for this troubled play, I will introduce my own approach to thinking worlds, influenced by the work of Markus Gabriel. I argue we need to think worlds through beliefs (what Gabriel terms mythologies), particularly as world-constitutive thoughts and assumptions, to get at the heart of apocalyptic change. From there, I will define apocalyptic thinking and the modes of change I see at work within it that I use to track how world-committing beliefs change at the end of a world. Apocalyptic thinking, I hold, comprises a set of tools for questioning, renegotiating, and revising our deeply set beliefs about the world.

What is the World, Anyway?

If we are to begin answering these questions, we will have to deal with the problem of knowing what a world *is*. This is a problem only in the sense that we have too many answers. As used colloquially, "world" is hard to pin down in its various meanings of encompassing-bigness (even in its surprising smallness, "it's a small world, after all"): are we referring to planet Earth only? The universe that includes everything? An individual's subjective experience? For this reason, I want to begin by examining these common meanings of "world" and how each productively influences certain forms of theory and criticism, often to the exclusion of one or

more differing usages or definitions of "world."[5] What follows by no means comprises a total list of world-use, but those most relevant to the apocalyptic. In tracing these common uses, I hope to note how this proliferation and flexibility of interpretations can aid our conception of the end of the world. If "worlds" toggle between a set of increasingly harder to imagine totalities, they can both help explain how we imagine the end of the world, as well as why it is an effective model for rearranging our world commitments. With these popular and theoretical guides in hand, I mean to work through how apocalypses can challenge our very conception of what the world is while relying on the flexibility of those same "worlds" to make apocalyptic thinking possible.

Let us begin with the smallest and most definite world: our home planet. "World" often focuses solely on Earth, from a tiny speck in the vastness of space to the expansive planet of human life and culture. In this kind of usage, we think of humans and their relation to each other and the universe. We have "world-travelers" and "world leaders," both of which are most likely commuters on the "world-wide web"; all of these examples, "world"-wise, are ways of thinking through human concerns on the planet earth. We also think of this kind of world as separate or against the universe; not only are the previous colloquialisms restricted to planet earth and not the universe, but we are often reminded of this opposition by shows like *Cosmos* (either Carl Sagan's or Neil deGrasse Tyson's will do), which then expands our universe-related imagination, giving perspective by providing sharp limits to our "whole wide world" as the small, material realm of humans—all too simply, a rock in space on which we live. In a similar vein of definition, when we refer to Mars as a "world," we tie the definition down to its planetary circumference (we thus have both "world-wars" and "wars of worlds") and the concerns of its inhabitants within. World in this way is a material space for its particular inhabitants and its

usages speak to the relationship between that rock, those inhabitants to one another, and/or those inhabitants versus the rest of the universe.

But this kind of "world" is the most restrictive definition that is in many ways directly oppositional to its other widely popular use: "world" as a construction of a kind of inner-life or personal concept of reality, the basis of subjectivity. We talk of imaginative children as "in their own world," radical ideas as "world-shattering," and fictional works as doing the work of "world-building." This use of the word carries with it an awareness of some kind of subjective construction of reality and usually suggests a break from actual worlds or some form of reality (the child is unrealistically imaginative, the world "shattered" was a fragile and incompetent conception, the fiction is of course fiction). These worlds are thus agent-centric, as the thinker imposes limits and order on the overwhelming expanse of experience. Because of the precarity of such impositions, these worlds are often fragile and mutable, open to growth and change. "World" in this way also suggests a proliferation of worlds, even if they are "false"; worlds can be real or not, but there are more than one.

This brings us to the third colloquial use of world: the simple emphasis on an all-encompassing bigness or whole, a totality of totalities. We often say things like "all the world," "whole wide world," or even "worldview," in an attempt to grasp everything in experience in a phrase. We also set up projections of the will of the all-encompassing cosmos, which can "be our oyster" or a "weight" we are forced to carry. In this way, "world" is synonymous with everything, all time, the ultimate. Unlike the previous two definitions, there is more flexibility between the material planet and one's subjective experience of it; less about *how* everything is experienced, this use tries to iterate the definite grandiosity of *it all*.

Which world, then, is the apocalyptic concerned with? The best answer, I think, is all three, with varying degrees of emphasis depending on which particular kind of "world" is under scrutiny. "World," it seems, has in common discourse a linguistic and conceptual flexibility that keeps a range of viable meanings on hand. This is most likely because no single colloquial use functions on its own. For example, the first two popular definitions appear complementary when prodded. The subjective inner-world of a child needs a material world if for no other reason than to be compared *against*, while the planet-focused material world still relies on a conceptually negotiated framework, as many thinkers have shown us (and as I will soon survey in more detail). Perhaps this colloquial confusion suggests that we are often unsure of exactly what we mean when we refer to a "world," short of its contextual application. I tend to doubt the purchasers of "World's Best Dad" mugs take the time to think through all the fathers they have met or even try to imagine how many of the seven billion people on this planet are fathers, let alone if there are concepts of fatherhood beyond this planet. Frankly, I imagine they don't think anything in particular (for various reasons; we are discussing children), particularly because the expanse of "everything" frees the thinker from trying to bring that entire totality into view, perhaps because she (we, all of us) simply can't. This incapacity, I believe, is in part why we need all three "worlds" in apocalypse. Imagining totality and its ends is much harder than one would expect, despite our apocalyptic climate.

This difficulty in imagining everything is what makes apocalypse so interesting, for it engages a simple question: can we think the end, the outside, of "everything"? Let us briskly walk through a common thought experiment. Suppose I ask you to imagine the world. Is it planet Earth, hanging in space? Can you think the world without outer-space? What is in the background? Think of the universe. Is it, too, lingering in space? A darkness a void of

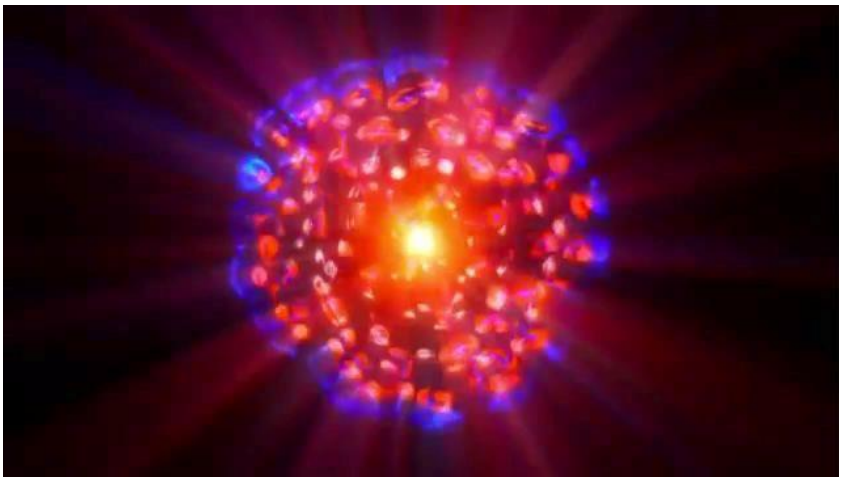

Figure 2 "Is There and End to the Universe", Through the Wormhole

Figure 3 Bosch, Exterior to the Garden of Earthly Delights

nothingness? This is a constant problem in, for instance, *Through the Wormhole* (see Fig. 2), a television show devoted to interviewing and explaining current, mind-bending scientific research to a popular audience. Against blackness or an empty background (occassionally the backgrounds are confusingly but prettily decorated with the stuff of the universe, such as stars or sparkley cosmic dust), the show creates models of these ways of thinking the universe.

To imagine the universe, the show puts it in space or against a background, thereby defining the limits of everything against the not-everything. It seems that every time we attempt to imagine a totality we imagine it over and against a background of something else. This philsopical problem is not new; Russell's paradox, for example, explicates this difficulty within set theory amd establishes that the set of all sets (that which contains all) cannot contain itself.[6] Regardless of these various theoretical explications and applications, this paradox continues to be as a stumbling block, in popular discourse and television, particularly in our everyday attempts to grasp a world. It's a difficult business, which is why this flexibility seems to be so handy.

Before I explain how apocalypse utilizes all three kinds of "worlds," however, I want to turn to the existing scholarly and theoretical conversations about worlds to see how they work through this mutable concept and what we can learn about worlds in the process. Though these theories are far more sophisticated than the "world-concepts" I have introduced here, this colloquial mapping can be useful for thinking through existing theories of world and what each brings to the table, despite lending themselves even less neatly to such categorization. The world-theories I'm about to all-too-quickly cover do not solely think worlds through one of these "worlds" I've introduce, but they do, however, tend to emphasize a particular world-form. By working through this scholarship, I intend to explore what varying purposes certain concepts of

world serve and why, in studying the end of the world, we need a theory world that accounts for all three "worlds."

The most clear-cut examples within current scholarly conversations are those that favor thinking of the world in this planet-focused way, which includes those invested in cosmopolitan thinking and globalization. The former is interested in how we think about the world in relation to one another, the latter emphasizes the how "world" defines our relationship to that material environment we occupy.[7] A particularly useful example of this is Gaytri Spivak's fight to overwrite "globe" with "planet" in *Death of a Discipline,* which tries to replace the capitalist-sliced-up map of a "globe" with the fragile and undivided environment "on loan" of a "planet" (53). Another might be Jean-Luc Nancy's *Creation of the World*, which positions the phenomenological experience of the world into a fight between globalization's uninhabitable world and an authentic world-forming that struggles for justice. Both concern the nature of people and the relationship to one another and their environment, meaning the material context in which people live, and the particular problem that arises when that same environment. The earth as world, limited in its expanses and resources, is in danger by the exploitation of that human-environment (and nonhuman) relationship, as are our human-to-human relationships. These emphasize the importance of rock-in-space worlds, which, despite their arguments regarding how we should conceptualize or experience the "world," are more invested in the questions of how we think within the defined circumference of Earth. Such scholarship gives us a way to discuss these interconnected relationships as well as their limitations.

Meanwhile, the inner life kind of "world" reflects various conversations within philosophy and literary theory. We have constructivist conversations about worlds, which operate on the fundamental assumption things or worlds do not exist in themselves but through

models of worlds in discourse, and irrealist ones, which suggest worlds are split up into relatively true versions. The latter, foundationally explicated in Nelson Goodman's *Ways of Worldmaking,* positions worlds as true versions or systems of coherent ideas we painstakingly assemble. Worlds in these ways become our various attempts at creating cohesive systems for our experiences, a self-constructed sense of order projected onto our experiences, and, for Goodman at least, actual to the thinker. These worlds are agent-centric, as they limit and order the infinitely vast possibility of the ungraspable whole. They are also often taken to be mutable works in progress, worlds that can be shattered by new concepts of the world. These worlds also account for the negotiation of conflicting worldviews we encounter and how we try and fail to think that all-encompassing totality.

In a slightly different realm, possible worlds theory utilizes the concept of manifold worlds (often reorganized by tantalizing contingencies, say Nixon becoming a postman rather than president) to think through the modal claims of worlds. Saul Kripke's reintroduction of Leibniz's old concept in the development of a logic model of possible world semantics has sparked a whole new field of study, which employs possible worlds for a variety of goals. Literary scholars in turn are working through these philosophical implications of possible worlds for literary studies (Lubomír Doležel, Ruth Ronen), the reciprocal relation between possible and actual worlds (Doreen Maitre), or the role of language in possible worlds (Thomas L. Martin). An important philosophical offshoot of the possible worlds conversation includes the work of David Lewis, who argues such worlds are all actual, meaning every possible world is real (an idea not unheard of in quantum mechanics). These "worlds" are also plural and are usually in some way or another are tied up in thinking a world, often as experiment. Like those above,

possible worlds help us to negotiate conflicting accounts of the world, particularly in terms of the would-haves and could-have-beens of our world's possibilities.

Another key set of concepts for discussing worlds is Martin Heidegger's concept of worlding and world-pictures. Heidegger's emphasis on the role of experience in worlds also seems to accentuate the sense of worlds as inner-organizing forces simultaneously at work in defining totalizing world forms. Heidegger's expressionistic description of "worlding" in "The Origin of the Work of Art" is a process of generative grounding of experiences and things in webs of meaningful relations, an always-ongoing attempt to make the world or realities of our experiences familiar.[8] Artworks, as objects that reflect or even produce this worlding, can open up the world of other cultures. Conversely, his discussion of technology and its restrictive role of framing a "world picture" stresses how worlds can problematically limit or even reduce a world. Heidegger's use of worlds seems to stress the experiential, ordering nature of certain world-concepts that also grapple with one's attempts to grasp totality.

Then there is the "totality of totality" which is also the "world" on which many philosophers primarily focus. Ludwig Wittgenstein's concise definition of world as "everything that is the case" has a practical applicability that makes it an often-cited source (25). Other thinkers struggle with the impossibility of such a totalizing structure; Kant, for one, sees such an entity as impossible and therefore exists only as a "regulative" ideal—a concept like those of the previous world-definition—that, though useful in determining experience, never quite reaches that totalizing whole it seems to be. These world theories struggle with the difficulties of defining and comprehending an all-encompassing totality and the paradoxes and explanations such problems open up.

Each of these theories offer a way of talking about the capacity of worlds while simultaneously dealing with the difficulty of conceptualizing vast totalities. Each purposefully emphasizes particular versions of the world so as to bring certain capacities under scrutiny. Yet despite the proliferation and successes of these theories, their various purposes do not necessarily fit the apocalyptic agenda. This is in part due to the problem that some of these worlds do not function well as concepts in apocalypse. Take Wittgenstein's comprehensive definition that the world is "everything that is the case." Despite its simplicity, this definition cannot encompass the apocalyptic act of ending a world; for a world to end, it must cease being a "world" in Wittgenstein's definition. To imagine the end of everything, we must either imagine it is *not* everything, or that everything, itself, does not exist. Such incompatibility appears in the application of certain world concepts within apocalyptic thinking. Planetary apocalypse apathetically becomes one more great extinction—that of the human, its concerns, and its environment—where the uncaring universe goes on without us. This may be the point of the when-planets-collide SF film *Melancholia*, but it certainly is not the goal of many nuclear apocalypse narratives or human-centric apocalypses like that of Alan Moore's landmark graphic novel *Watchmen*, which hopes to curb our destructive intentions. The state of human affairs is very much alive and well in what most of us would describe as apocalyptic. Meanwhile, inner-worlds seem hardly fit for apocalypse, given they are shattered and destroyed constantly (or at least mine are), unnoticed by the average passerby. Such ends are rather just beginnings and a sign of our disposition to conceptual resilience. To get at what these apocalypses do with worldlessness, we need all three types of world and what they can do, whether it is the struggle with an all-encompassing totality, the negotiation of competing worldviews, or the human and

planetary concerns of sharing a rock in space. All of these, I believe, play a role in apocalyptic thought, in what it does and how it functions.

In this way, the apocalyptic is a crucial site of reflection, for it seems to raise serious questions regarding our definition of worlds and how we think them. Not only does the apocalypse pressure many of our working concepts of world to fail in the pursuit of an end, but it plays on that somewhat obscured but important conceptual flexibility at work within our ideas of worlds. We need planets and their definite ends to frame Earthly (and nonhuman and human) concerns, whose marked ends also function as a finite form for imagining the end of "everything" (even if not *the* everything) and invoking the sense of a split from a totalizing ideal. We also need the "world-shattering" power of inner-worlds to register the fragile, mutable, and negotiable character of certain apocalyptic experiences, which displace those totalizing imaginings and abolish certain worlds as ordering concepts. Thus, for a theory of apocalyptic thinking that is not made impractical by overly cautious and neat definitions, we need our worlds to be elastic and open as, too, must be our imaginable ends for them.

For this reason, this project will turn to the work of Markus Gabriel, whose work on worlds both accounts for this flexible use of worlds and explains why apocalypse is such a handy tool for thinking about worlds. Gabriel contends that the totality of all totalities (our third colloquial definition of world) does not exist. Not a denier of material reality (there is a universe and it is very much real), Gabriel argues in line with Kant that the totalities of totalities, the container for all things and thoughts—the idea of which we use daily to regulate or ground our world—cannot exist. Attempts to grasp such a thing, though necessary, conceptually fail. We never actually grasp the World's Best Dad because "we never come to an end; in this way we never achieve the last field of sense in which everything appears—the world. Rather, the world is

always deferred" (82). Unsurprisingly, this concept of world can function in the face of apocalypse, for not only can it meaningfully account for the end of the world but it also embraces the seemingly contradictory linguistic flexibility necessary for attempting to imagine a world, for "all structures . . . are part of the world which is why the world is chaotic and contradictory" ("Mythological Being" 84). For Gabriel, worlds are failed concepts, but they are crucial to our ontological grounding—which makes their ends so dramatic.

If worlds do not exist, how is it we talk about worlds? The short answer is a kind of toggling; we can easily switch between a picture of a planet and a "radically empty" thought about everything without keenly registering the difference (*Why the World* 80). The long answer, however, is that when we talk about worlds we are actually talking about something else—worldviews, or beliefs. Here, again, the work of Bosch can help us to think through this problem. Bosch's exterior for *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (Fig. 3) sets up a picture of the world, mid-creation and in the midst of nothing. We can tell it is mid-creation for the globe depicts a world of only vegetation and the reference to Psalm 33:9 at the top "Ipse dixit, et facta sunt: ipse mandāvit, et creāta sunt" (For as he spoke and it was done, he commanded and it stood fast). Like the graphic from the show *Though the Wormhole*, this depiction is interesting in its determination of the space in which the world is created against. The illuminated globe stands starkly against the dreary darkness, creating tension between what has come into existence and what hasn't. What keeps this depiction from falling into an endless stream of infinite regress or from drawing questions on the failure of totality? A god, who is that same totality, of course. Anchored, tiny, in the corner sits a creator who makes nothing into something, organizing these totalities into a coherent view. By including God, Bosch is framing the very framing device within the picture (world as totality of totality), the structuring belief that turns this from a

nihilistic painting of world-against-nothing into a narrative of Christian belief. Bosch crafts this image of the world out of Christian worldview where it is sensible to imagine the creation of the planetary world where God is not only exterior to the world (and thus sits alone, planning the world), but explains the existence of that exterior. Beliefs can enframe totality because they are the frameworks in which worlds appear. We are reminded that, when it comes to thinking about and through worlds, it is a matter of *view*, which is belief.

This is the second reason I turn to the work of Markus Gabriel: it not only theorizes a conception of world that can have meaningful ends but also recognizes the role of world-structuring *belief* in our notion of worlds. For Gabriel, "the world does not exist": there is no domain of all domains, some all-encompassing rule of existence, only an "infinite proliferation of fields of sense" and the meanings generated within them ("The Meaning of 'Existence'" 83). But, as Gabriel goes on to argue, while there is no unrestricted totality or world, against this non-world or nothing we "concept-mongering creatures" create meaning ("Mythological Being" 60) and "nothing becomes something in our constant activity of naming the void" (17).

So, what happens to a world when we try to imagine its end? We witness the failure of a world, not simply as a material thing, but the failure of a world-constituting belief that which constantly grounds us in our everyday realities. Our worlds are complex forms of totality, intertwined with our concept of planet, our ideas of the way things are, and our sense of everything (even if that everything does not exist). To get to the root of apocalyptic thinking, which registers the world under these variances, we need a way for thinking worlds that makes sense of this crisis of world, that is, of beliefs. In the next section, I will work through Gabriel's concept of worlds and worldviews, which he refers to in his earlier works as *mythology*, but I

will call world-committing beliefs. This account of worlds, I think, can track what is most crucial about the end of the world.

World-Committing Beliefs

The concept of belief—that is, a foundational assumption taken for truth—is a powerful addition to our conversation of worlds. Not only do beliefs' framing function, as illustrated above, make the problem of thinking totality possible, beliefs also engage worlds in terms of all three world-forms I introduced in the previous section. As mutable subjective premises, they account for the fragile quality and potential agency of inner-worlds. Like the planetary world form that gives us a whole in a knowable finite form, beliefs, as finite assumptions that provide frameworks of determinacy, which also make our totalizing ideas comprehensible (and why those totalizing thoughts so often reflect home or human concerns). The totality of totality might not exist, but our assumption that it exists and that we somehow grasp it, does. In this section, I will outline approach to belief, particularly as world-centering framework, through the work of Markus Gabriel and his engagement with a Schellingian concept of mythology. By delineating the role of these mythologies play in establishing world-committing beliefs and how those beliefs direct and shape our experience, I mean to illustrate the precarious but grounding force of world committing beliefs and how they can explain worldlessness, and therefore apocalyptic thinking, in a productive way.

Gabriel's philosophy of mythology and world constitution is an important tool for thinking through the problems of apocalyptic worlds. Not only does Gabriel's larger body of philosophy revolve around the idea of wordlessness, but it embraces the role worldviews, collections of beliefs that frame experience, play in our conceptualization of worlds. This,

however, is not an echo of the purely constructivist notion of worlds I described above. Gabriel, as a scholar of the Post-Kantian philosophy, which argues against a mind/world division, maintains an ontology of representations (perhaps best understood in his claim that "everything exists except one thing: the world" (*Why the World* 1)), the recognition that the mind is not "worldless" and that thoughts, too, exist and foster their own realities. While I will dive more into this later in this section as well as in chapter four, what is important is that this allow us to focus on creating descriptive account of ideas and their reality-entwined implications, not as actual worlds beyond thought or possible worlds without actuality, but through an emphasis on how representations and beliefs give experiences direction and structure a concept of world, which, in the particular interest of this project, continually fail to secure a complete reality. Rather than reduce apocalyptic thinking to an inconsequential unreality, Gabriel allows us to emphasize an ontology that is made manifest in thought and as thought, recognizing the reality of beliefs plays a fundamental role, generally unnoticed, in the structuring of our sense of a world.

Gabriel in "The Mythological Being of Reflection: An Essay on Hegel, Schelling and the Contingency of Necessity" argues for the presence of *constitutive mythologies*, ever-evolving processes of meaning-making that, through their acts of interpretation, define the conditions of the world as we understand it. This is a rethinking of our current conceptions of mythology, which are constructed from our own science-based ideology which equate myth with stories of the fantastical that stand in for other truths or set communal beliefs. As such, we treat myth as synonymous with "false." Instead, constitutive mythologies replace an allegorical interpretation of myth with a tautegorical one, which "enacts the very *unity of sense of being*, of content and form" ("Mythological Being" 62). Less about story-based myths (like Zeus) and more about how certain beliefs (taken-for-truths) cut up and influence our experience of reality, this conception of

mythology shifts the emphasis from symbolic interpretation to the ways in which mythology precedes and informs our systems of logic, allowing us to give perceptions direction and make sense of the world. As tautegorical, mythology becomes more than a singular and outdated understanding of the world, but instead a continuous process of meaning-making and interpretation which determine and re-determine the very conditions of the world as we understand it. Never coming from a blank slate but always already performing in the work of framing and determining a context for our sense experience, mythology reckons with "the brute fact of our thrownness into a meshwork of beliefs, into a belief system that is only accessible from within" ("Mythological Being" 66). Constitutive mythologies articulate how we are always already given to a continuous, spider-like work of building an inhabitable web of assumptions and beliefs which both structure and respond to what we experience.

Mythology is instead, then, the act of translating and unifying the proliferation of sense into comprehensible realities, limiting discourse into knowable worlds (that is, worldviews). As the work of laying out foundational beliefs that precede ideology and shape our comprehension of particular contexts, "mythology denominates the brute existence of a logical space which cannot be accounted for in logical terms" ("Mythological Being" 20).[9] This is the "groundless ground" on which myths or beliefs—the access conditions and limits for understanding the world—take place ("Mythological Being" 71). The products of that constitution are what Gabriel calls *regulative mythologies*, the tangible existence of myths or beliefs as we know them, access-limiting conditions of our world or truths built on base conditions taken to be true (e.g. Zeus as maker of lightning or my everyday acceptance of gravity—even if I don't wholly understand gravitational waves).[10] In this way, the mythological act of conceiving our world and the tangible regulative beliefs we take for truths constitute the world as we understand it. This, for Gabriel,

reveals a radical ontology: “being thus turns into the fragmentary history of mythological images and narratives” (“Mythological Being” 26).

Thus, despite these seemingly stable regulative frameworks, the fragmentary world-conceptions that mythologies continuously generate are unstable, as these conceptions constantly reassess themselves and think meaningful positions that make the understanding our experiences possible. Rather, mythology produces fluctuating positions of subjectivity, mutable beliefs about the order and nature of things and entities, the world included. Subjectivity “is, thus, a radical instance of ontological genesis: it consists in its positing itself, in generating a field of sense, and in this a sense a world to be inhabited. The process has no external foothold in the transcendent realm but rests solely on and in itself” (Gabriel, “Mythological Being” 42). Not to be confused with some form of absurd ontic creation where the subject thinks objects into being, subjectivity, as an experience of finitude that limits possibilities, asserts a position and creates the framework in which further determinations take place: “We do not create the *objects* of experience but rather horizons of *objectivity*” (“Mythological Being” 78). A subjectivity determines its own malleable positioning within in a field of sense generated by this meshwork of beliefs, taking certain positions for truths or real accounts of the world, which makes other positions or determinations possible. From these base conditions taken to be true, a subjectivity is constantly in the act of determining its world and its place within it and, therefore, its own stability. The ontological stakes of such a process are high, since “discourse needs to stabilize its preconditions incessantly in order to defend itself against the ongoing threat of indeterminacy” (“Mythological Being” 18). The subject is not only continuously constituting itself and the world but is also creating its own stability within the world by making that world knowable.

In the struggle for stability within this kind of ungrounded assertion of reality, it is vital to emphasize that in this space, mythology is beyond intention: "we have no grasp of that which constitutes our world even though it is we who perform said constitution" ("Mythological Being" 31). As the "groundless ground" that precedes logic and ideology—the very organization of beliefs (or truth-apt thought)—Gabriel's mythology exists outside of reflection, since any attempt to completely comprehend mythology's presence only creates another myth that will "sooner or later hold us captive" ("Mythological Being" 19). Any attempt to comprehend or systematize a notion of reality (the theory of constitutive mythologies not exempt, thus Gabriel's claim to a "mythology of mythologies," a mythology among others that reflects on its own nature though never fully grasps it) requires a step outside of reflection that cannot be accessed except through the same act of reflection. Instead, this belief-taking genesis exists in a "blind spot of reflection" ("Mythological Being" 32), a kind of desirable ignorance that allows us to avoid the confrontation of a nothingness or baselessness and the potential of pure indeterminacy. This subjective formation is elusive as it is both "in the frame/form/horizon of his world *and* part of the enframed content (of the reality he observes), and the problem is that he cannot see/locate himself within his own frame (Žižek 108). As put by Catherine Malabou, "subjectivity does not reside in its own being, it 'haunts' itself" (*The Future of Hegel* 35). In calling attention to mythological process, we are forced to call into question the reality we, through ignorance, have presumed to have known but have always instead been distanced from. We recognize that precarious grounds of subjectivity do not secure a whole truth or the real that we chose to forget, and this confrontation with nihilism, or potential worldlessness, can disrupt our own embrace of the meaningful realities we have taken for truths.

Constitutive mythologies, as blind spots, are difficult to grasp and define, and therefore become integrated as the truths on which we delimit our worlds. Instead, we catch the regulative beliefs they leave behind, as "rules that govern our epistemic commerce" ("Mythological Being" 72). These regulative beliefs, however, give this blindspot its highly consequential edge: too often we reify these beliefs—perhaps best recognized as ideology—and deny the "paradoxes and antinomies which lie at the basis of determinacy and accredits itself the capacity to investigate the conditions of possibility of determinacy (of meaning, truth, etc)" ("Mythological Being" 77).[11] Thus "reification mistakes its own activity for setting up its world (in the sense of a framework in which determinate things can appear) for the activity of something external to it," which both exiles the role of the subjective in ordering sense experience and the potential agency at root in these contingent orderings ("Mythological Being" 77). When we reify our own belief-taking process, not only do we participate in a kind of cognitive-duping which posits ideology as representative of the real and unlimited in its conditions, but we also exclude the all other possibilities of meaning and ultimately deny the "contingencies of choice" ("Mythological Being" 78). Dominant ideologies, too infrequently perceived to be mutable representations, place other systems of meaning (as well as its own, as in chapter two) into crisis by defining such systems falsely as "unreal."

In this way, Gabriel's mythologies remind us how we think ourselves in worlds, as well the pitfalls of such thinking finds itself in, time and time again. The determinacy that shapes our sense of reality and worldview takes place in a meshwork of given beliefs, context-specific spaces of reflection generated within collections of "inherited background" (Wittgenstein, *On Certainty* §94).[12] For us to think truth-apt thoughts, they must appear in a conceptual framework—a framework we tend to ignore. However, we ignore the shifting nature of these

frameworks and that they are built on commitments, on beliefs taken for truths. For Gabriel, these blind spots of belief, though unavoidable, are prone to failure: "all worldviews are equally misguided insofar as they ground our beliefs in a commitment to an overall world that already settles all the big questions behind our backs" (*Why the World* 13). Rather, in spite of the shifting nature of these frameworks themselves, we reify these frames as products of the external world, and mistake ideological commitments for the world "as it is." And it is for this reason this concept of belief-constituted worlds are so crucial; it is an "ideology-critical tool" to excavate those beliefs ("Mythological Being" 78). For this reason, if we are going to meet the world in which we live, I believe we can start here. These frameworks of belief, the generative "worlds to be inhabited" ("Mythological Being" 67), are the "worlds" we ought to pay attention to in the world-ending imagination of apocalyptic thinking, for it is these world-frameworks that are called into question through crisis.

In the following chapters, for the sake of clarity, both to separate this project from Gabriel's and to break with the old conceptions of myth that distance them from contemporary thinking, I will call these regulative myths—those products of this world-constitutive process—what they, descriptively, are: *world-committing beliefs*. As parts of conceptually-given frameworks that make our determinations possible, world-committing beliefs are just that: beliefs, or taken-for-truths that both order and commit us to certain conceptions of the world. As *world*-committing, these beliefs are tenets of a person's commitment to some form of all-encompassing totality. Unlike everyday beliefs that exist in relation to particular contexts (e.g. for me, the belief that I've made a mistake writing a dissertation on apocalypse rather than cats), world-committing beliefs are taken-for-truths that constitute and shape our worlds, the very fabric of what we take to be real and true of the world we live in, which includes how we think

of the human societies we form (e.g. my general faith in science as an accurate institution for knowing the material reality of the universe as well as cats). The former example of belief carves out an interpretation of things and facts in the world, whereas the latter example is constitutive of the world itself and allows me to make these determinations about what and how things exist. As world-*ordering*, world-committing beliefs delineate the realms of possibilities for how we interpret the facts and things we experience. As world-*committing*, these beliefs are acts of faith in that they take assumptions or uncertainties as grounds for determining truths. But as with Gabriel's constitutive mythologies, these are neither stable nor set, but continuously capable of shifting as they generate ideas of the world we inhabit. World-committing beliefs are thus a flexibly helpful way for thinking worlds and how worlds in the crisis of belief that is apocalypse makes worldlessness unexpectedly productive.

As the foundational building blocks that can maneuvered or replaced, world-committing beliefs give us an account of the conceptual commerce at work at the end of the world. When we imagine the end of the world, we do not so much envision the end of that all-encompassing totality (or planet or inner-world), but the end of potential world-concept or picture, a different configuration of those building blocks of belief. By having a world in view and ending it, either through destruction or expansion beyond its supposedly unsurpassable limits, we are bringing those world-constituting factors under scrutiny. This is the power of apocalyptic thinking.

Apocalyptic Thinking

With this conception of worlds as situated in beliefs that "settle the big questions behind our backs," apocalyptic thinking, as it appears in either literature or other forms of cultural production, becomes a kind of revealing instance that brings these world-committing beliefs into

view and seizes on their mutable character. We expect destruction from apocalypse, toppling cities and failed futurities; however, we rarely think of it for its creative and formative possibilities. But, to borrow from Catherine Malabou's work on trauma, "destruction has its own sculpting tools" (*Ontology of the Accident* 4). In this section, I will lay out my theory for apocalyptic thinking, both in terms of what it is and what it can do. By centering the world through crisis, apocalyptic thinking can forefront and enframe world-committing beliefs and suspend our prior commitments to the world. Within this state of suspension and scrutiny, world-committing beliefs can be reevaluated, replaced, or rearranged. I see these changes occurring in two ways: a change in the status of commitment to these beliefs and a change in the modal quality—the limitations and possibilities—of particular world-committing beliefs. Apocalyptic thinking, I will argue, is thus a vital space of revision for our most foundational assumptions about the world, reality at large, and our relationships to one another. There is both radical potential and hostile entrenchment in these revisions, which this dissertation hopes to preview in its various forms.

So, finally: what does it mean to think apocalyptically? As I proposed earlier, there are many different ways of defining what is apocalyptic and I tend to favor a weaker, more encompassing definition as simply thought which ends a world. I believe this flexibility is crucial in part because "world" is so vitally interchangeable in its own forms, all of which we see within texts and ideas we would call apocalyptic. This flexibility is also why I refer to it as a form of "thinking" rather than a culture or a kind of literature. Though this is a literary dissertation, restriction to material texts would ignore such exemplary apocalypses as the cultural performances built into the day-to-day living of the Shakers, who carried the apocalyptic with them throughout their chores. Apocalyptic thinking works best, it seems, when its compelling

accounts exceed the text and blend into everyday accounts of the world. (Apocalypses such as those presented in the documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* and its fictional complement *The Day After Tomorrow* would be failures to their mission if they did not linger and affect the viewer's account of the world). Culture, too, suggests a broader community or history, whereas I am equally interested in the apocalyptic imaginaries of individuals, which perhaps go unshared. By calling it "thinking," I am trying to get at both a kind of pervasiveness and processual quality I see at work in imagining the end of the world that is simply not limited to a particular form, genre, or communal history. Apocalyptic thinking is, as I see it, best understood as a recurrent set of philosophical problems engendered in the attempt to imagine the "end" of a world.

Apocalyptic thinking brings what we consider to be the world into view. When we watch a giant meteor create a tidal wave that will wipe out human kind in the movie *Deep Impact*, we are less interested in the deeper motivations or crushed dreams of the hero Leo Biederman (who is trying to save his girlfriend) than the coming scenes of terror and destruction (otherwise we would have chosen to see a romance instead). Even in character-centered apocalypses, such as the thriller *Take Shelter*, which focuses on a man's toggling between regarding his apocalyptic visions as either a symptom of schizophrenia or true prophecy, we see a character push back against the world as we question who truly has a grasp on reality. At stake is a question of the world: what is it and who truly understands it? As one of Ayn Rand's prime movers succinctly puts it, "contradictions" (which for Rand are all neatly resolved in the nature of the world) "do not exist. Whenever you think you are facing a contradiction, check your premises" (*Atlas Shrugged* 199). While I disagree with much of this conception of world (see chapter 3), this call to "check your premises" is one of those sculpting tools of the apocalyptic. In the face of instability and contradiction, we are instructed to look to our view of the world. No longer the

background that simply shapes what we thought to be true, we discover worlds become predominant in crisis, whether material or conceptual, as our previous assumptions are called into questions. Unlike the specific contexts of disaster films (such as *Dante's Peak*) or the belief-shattering revelations of, say, the Bildungsroman (such as the personally shattering revelation of Pip's true benefactor's in *Great Expectations*), apocalyptic thinking and its fictions are concerned with *everything*, the world-bearing beliefs we thought we could trust and rely on. Akin to the discomforting unease of an optical illusion, apocalyptic thinking undermines our sense of reality, of our trust in our ability to grasp the world.

Because such a grasp of the world at stake, I choose to define the apocalyptic loosely, as what might be best described as a "failure" of a world. Not merely wholesale destruction, nor even as simple as the debate between a bang and a whimper, worlds fail when they cease to be all-encompassing, when the outside limits of the world, i.e. its ends, are reached. This can be a world exploded, say in the film *Melancholia,* in which a large rogue planet smashes into the Earth and completely destroys it; a human world slowly depopulated by plague as in Mary Shelley's novel *The Last Man*; or a world conclusively enclosed and collapsed in the final page of a manuscript as in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Such failures can be limiting or freeing; they can catalyze, for instance, a startling wake-up call to climate change (*An Inconvenient Truth*), a deflating acceptance of the heat-death of the universe (Ray Brassier's *Nihil Unbound*), or a pessimistic reflection on the near-collapsing weight of history (Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"). The "world" fails either to encompass or secure a reality (hence why "world-shattering", too, must be a part of our worldly work).

What does it mean for a world to fail? Let me again turn to the work of Bosch to explain, this time via the center panel of Bosch's famous *Last Judgment* (Fig 4). This panel nicely capture

Figure 4 Bosch, center panel of the Garden of Earthly Delights triptych

the world as rupturing totality. Though currently in the disarray and frighteningly mutant in the haze of destruction and transformation, the bottom half of the painting clearly signals the world as we know it populated by people and houses but in a certain degree of disorder. Though we may enjoy the aesthetics of the destruction of the world is in this painting, the reason for its destruction is clear: the world of god is infringing on the human world. Jesus' perfect, ordered sphere has penetrated the human world and revealed the whole to be incomplete and imperfect. The viewer is intensely reminded that the world is just a dysfunctional, minor part of god's greater totality, as the monstrous world in the midst of horrific punishment is ruptured by the ordering world of Christ. The human world, incomplete and unable to secure an all-encompassing totality, fails.

When worlds fail—whether by coming to an end, exploding, or imploding under the revelation of its incompleteness, incoherence, or contradictions—the world-committing beliefs that give our day to day experiences direction, come under scrutiny. We undergo a suspension of belief and thus its crisis. That stabilizing work of ordering experiences under the premise of a whole we presume to grasp stalls. If we cannot trust our world, what can we take to be true? What are the true foundations of our determinations? Apocalypse, in its flirtations with worldlessness, is a confrontation with nihilism, that beneath what we took to be true, there is "groundless ground." In the process, our grounding beliefs, truths, or narratives are uprooted and those questions we had "settled behind our backs" are no longer settled and under intense scrutiny.

For me, this confrontation of the nihilism of belief, the "groundless ground" on which we constitute meaning and the break from these dominant beliefs, is the essence of apocalyptic thinking. Apocalyptic thinking is haunted by its own indeterminacy and engenders its own

subjective displacement, troubling its own positioning within the world. It is a falling-out with the realities of one's own ideological or regulative conditions, the world-committing beliefs taken for truths. The constant process of organizing beliefs, while still constituting the world, is registered as untrustworthy or meaningless. Frederic Jameson argues in *Archaeologies of the Future* that "the properly Utopian program or realization will involve the commitment to closure (and thereby to totality)" (4). If so, then perhaps apocalyptic thinking is the obverse side to utopian thinking (and potentially also its instigator, as I explore in chapter five): a divorce with belief in the wake of the frightening disclosure of the ungraspable, whether it be in the face of contradiction and incoherence, the discovery of an "outside" to one's totality, or the threat of destruction to one's totality. For Malabou's traumatized subjects, it is a "deserting of subjectivity, the distancing of the individual who becomes a stranger to herself" (Malabou *Ontology* 6), but for the apocalyptic subject, the world itself becomes the stranger—terrible, surprising, malleable.

Thus, within this suspended and worldless state, apocalyptic thinking allows for revisions of the apocalyptic subject's world-committing beliefs. No longer anchored in a forgotten but functional world-concept, apocalyptic thinking becomes an opportunity to register more fully, redefine, or even potentially shift grounding beliefs about the world. Convictions dulled and commitments in question, world-committing beliefs can be defined or exploded in the imaginative space of the apocalypse, as the world we knew is put into revelatory crisis. How do such beliefs change? I see two modes for registering these changes in apocalyptic thought: the first, a change in the nature of the *commitment* towards one world-committing beliefs, and, the second, the *modal shift* of specific world-committing beliefs.

The first occurs in those suspensions of belief that occur in a failure of a world. Beliefs are challenged and chilled or fanned and incited in a negotiated state of world-uncertainty. Apocalyptic thinkers might divorce themselves in a de-commitment to deeply held beliefs or take up and devote themselves to new world-committing beliefs, or both. Commitments are a matter of faith, that is, of resoluteness toward certain conceptions of the world. As commitments, world-committing beliefs can be loosened, solidified, adapted, or even dismissed. Some commitments are shared amongst most people and relatively steadfast, such as the general consensus that the Earth is a circular globe in located in the universe. Others are weak or malleable, such as a child's belief in the possible existence of magic in the world. It is also important to note that some belief commitments bear more importance than others regarding how a subject views the world; if one's commitment to a belief in an all-powerful god is shaken, many other world-centering beliefs may fall with it, whereas most children give up on magic (and Hogwarts) eventually, hopefully with relative ease and little change to the rest of their world. I will explore these mutable commitments to a certain totality in both the next and the final chapter of this project. The first will explore the suspension and de-commitment of such beliefs, whereas the fifth chapter will look at how apocalyptic thinking can be utilized to inspire commitments to new beliefs. I have chosen to split these chapters, as the bookends for what follows, since these states of commitment in some ways seem to mark the beginning and end of apocalyptic thinking. In between and in the space of that suspension, the middle chapters discuss the modal shifts that can occur to specific beliefs within these changes of commitment, which is the second mode.

In the next chapter, to illustrate the belief-destabilizing power of apocalyptic thinking, I turn to a favorite text of modernists and apocalyptophiles alike, T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land."

By reading the poem's crisis not as the absence of myth (worlds) but its proliferation, I argue the poem's fragmentation is the result of radically de-positioned subjectivity. Myths, as remnants of other world-committing beliefs acquired through colonization, crowd the modern empirical worldview and destabilize its claims on reality. Though the poem establishes a colonial lineage in its repetition of references to Phoenicia, Carthage, Rome, England, and India, it struggles to cohesively and coherently tie together these myths into a singular, encompassing worldview and is instead haunted by these meaning-making constructions of the past. I argue this decentered worldview is the hallmark of apocalyptic thinking and also what makes it such an important reflective tool. In the midst of apocalyptic uncertainty, world-committing beliefs are forced to the forefront of examination and become an object of revision.

Recognizing that these apocalyptic suspensions often come to a close after new belief rearrangements, my dissertation concludes by focusing on how the rhetoric of apocalypse can also be used to commit to new world-beliefs and new worldviews. Just as apocalypse can destabilize a subject's worldview, this chapter examines how radical movements indulge in apocalyptic rhetoric to rethink and remake the world anew, particularly as seen in the similarity between the American Shakers and early 20th century Russian literary and artistic avant-gardes. Employing apocalyptic rhetoric in their manifestos to both augment what I see as the "theatricality" Martin Puchner deems necessary for the genre and to shape new pictures of the world, these collectives embrace an inventive, apocalypse-inspired functionalism that works its way into their performances, architecture, and even furniture. The apocalypse, I argue, not only uniquely shapes beliefs about the world, but also elucidates how worldviews are made manifest in the world: in writing, in the creation of new forms of living, and in communities themselves.

The second mode, the shift of modality of specific world-committing beliefs, targets key beliefs and, through the exploration of apocalyptic imagery, rewrites the nature of those beliefs. These changes are a form of doxastic modality, belief claims about the world, not the world itself (or every possible world, for that matter). They are the belief-content under negotiation in the suspension of belief. As *modal* claims on the world, these are claims on the limits and possibilities of a world-concept, the necessity (what *must* be the case) and contingency (it could be otherwise) of such world-committing beliefs. Claims of necessity delimit a world, requiring certain truths to hold true universally. They pin down a world to particular certainties. Claims of contingency recognize the world could be something that it is currently not, that there is the possibility for difference from what is currently the case. The difference between the two, between must and could, in world committing beliefs is a question of what the world can and cannot be. For example, this difference can be captured in the distinction between believing aliens *must* exist (in the sense that it is only logical, given the size of the universe or perhaps one's abduction experience) and aliens *might* exist; though a small division here, it changes the expectations toward what could, should, or must appear within a world. Most simply, these modal shifts in apocalyptic thinking can powerfully revise what is and is not possible within a set of world-committing beliefs and thus renegotiate deeply held truths.

Chapters three and four thus interrupt our conversations about commitments to investigate the modal shifts of specific beliefs made in apocalyptic thinking, particularly apocalypses that emphasize changes, respectively, in necessity and contingency. Whereas the previous mode deals with the status of a belief, these chapters are interested in the change of the content of said beliefs. Within the collapse and reformation of commitment to certain beliefs about the world, apocalyptic thinking affords the manipulation and manifestation of key world-

committing beliefs so as to reorient or re-orchestrate a particular concept of world. Though both modal shifts likely occur in some shape or form in most apocalypses, these world-pictures differ greatly depending on which modal shift is emphasized. Apocalypses of necessity tend to focus on making a foundational belief about the world visible and recognizable, whereas apocalypses of contingency are interested in displacing common beliefs in favor of an uncertain or incomplete worldview. These types of apocalypse, I will show, create differing conceptions of the world, which, in practice, makes all the difference.

Chapter three explores apocalypses of necessity, which posit certain world-committing beliefs as necessary truths in order to represent and reify certain pictures of the world. Examining how each uses the vehicle of apocalypse to collapse different types of necessity to illustrate their worldviews, this chapter track this trend through Book of Revelation, the American evangelical best seller *Left Behind*, and Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. I trace how these modal shifts are crafted to justify their beliefs by eliminating "error," that is, divergent conceptions of worlds. These apocalypses not only share a worldview of unseen or "persecuted" individuals upholding the social order but also a worldview invested with the anxiety of accounting for this difference of perception, that is, how everyone else can be so wrong about the world itself. This anxiety, I believe, is a key basis for the ideological marriage of the Christian Right and Randian economics in the last fifty years, and thus offers an invaluable glimpse into the trouble inherent to reifying world-committing beliefs.

The fourth chapter moves on to examine how apocalypses of contingency emphasize shifts world-committing beliefs that open up worldviews to new possibilities, instead of attempting to fix certain beliefs as "true" and thereby imaginatively destroying those who disagree. Working through how William Blake's problem with the fixed forms of revelation

conflicts with his attempts to include a Book of Revelation-style apocalypse in his early works, I argue Blake rethinks what revelation is and means in order to create *Jerusalem*. Blake, I show, shifts to an apocalyptic process of worldbuilding that does not reify singular beliefs about world and "truth" but instead celebrates the radical displacement of belief in apocalypse. I then draw on Blake's approach to apocalypse to explicate how German Idealists situate the annihilation of knowledge at the center of an incomplete but freeing worldview, which I will argue is the world-conceptualizing move at the center of apocalypses of contingency (one, I believe, better suited to the unstable positions of world-committing beliefs). Using this concept of apocalypse as a springboard for investigating other similar apocalypses, this chapter closes with an examination of how we scholars employ apocalypse to a comparable end: the chance to displace rigid worldviews and encounter worlds differently. I argue that this iteration of apocalypse, less interested in revealing determinate worlds and more invested in imagining the world otherwise, presents an opportunity to revise beliefs about the world and embrace the freedom of apocalypse.

These are, as I see them, some of the most critical problems and powers of apocalyptic thinking. Despite the many claims that it is a defeatist model for encountering the many justifiably terrifying world-ending problems we face, I find in apocalypse a productive capacity for intervening in the part of our world-experiences that are not given. Worldlessness, even in its staggering confrontation with the nihilism at the base of our everyday world-commitments, brings those "questions settled behind our backs" to the front (Gabriel, *Why the World* 13), offering the opportunity to change. World-committing beliefs, as a means for discussing those worlds, give us a way of tracking those transformations and rendering explicit what they can tell us about what and how we think the world. As this dissertation proceeds, I ask not only how

apocalypse changes belief but what kind of consequential patterns arise from this kind of thinking.

What happens when we attempt to imagine the end of the world? We are offered an opportunity to change our beliefs about it, which is a radical act of ontological genesis. World-committing beliefs are not unreal thoughts—they are the beliefs that undergird what we take to be real. Though these all-encompassing totalities may not exist, the plurality of their expressions and our various theories for discussing them underscores the significant yet obscured role they play in our lives. If apocalyptic thinking can temporarily suspend this world-committing process and turn crisis into a productive occasion for re-assessing our deeply held beliefs, then revelation resides not in uncovering a world but exploding one.

But first we must understand this suspension of commitments. Onwards and endwards.

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[4] This mostly ignored fragment deserves more scholarly attention than I plan to give it. I am grateful to the members of the Bosch Research and Conservation project and Laurinda Dixon for including in their research. I should emphasize here there is ongoing debate whether this fragment is Bosch's work, produced in the Bosch family workshop, follower, or some other. See Matthijs Ilsink and Jos Koldeweij for more on this question.

[5] In a most unwordly move, I will admittedly be pulling mainly from the anglophone tradition of "world" throughout this section. Though highly influenced by the ancient Greek concept of *kosmos* (κόσμος) as well as too many German philosophers, most of the following colloquialisms come from the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

[6] While this project is less interested in set theory (for reasons more clearly developed later in this chapter), see Griffin and Links' collection *One Hundred Years of Russell's Paradox* or M Oksanen or Nino B. Cocchiarella for why the paradox can be potentially resolved.

[7] For an excellent representation of the conversations of the cosmopolitan questions of world, see Pheng Cheah's examination of the role of "world" in world literature.

[8] Worlding" has inspired such scholars' works within the discipline as Eric Hayot's historicization of the world-concept (also influenced by Jean-Luc Nancy) and Katie Stewart's exploration into worlds and worldings of affect.

[9] Gabriel ties ideology to this function of mythology as one of its potential regulative products and clearly draws on a Frankfurt school definition of the term. For the purposes of this dissertation project, my emphasis falls on reified forms of thought, of which ideology is often an example. Gabriel's (and my own) take on reification is discussed later in this section and in chapter three.

[10] For the purposes of this chapter, I will refer to regulative mythologies simply as "myths," whereas I will employ "mythology" to refer to Gabriel's constitutive acts of meaning-making and subjectivity formation.

[11] To create a functional distinction with Lukács' commodity-centric definition of reification, I have included Gabriel's more definitive statements on reification in the next few sentences. Though Gabriel no doubt draws on Lukács passive and thinglike characterization, Gabriel structure's his term to differentiate reification from objectification, where the former as presentation excludes the elusive and finite character of discourse and the latter presents an picture of the world that recognizes the multifarious possibilities within ("Mythological Being" 76)

[12] Gabriel makes this connection with Wittgenstein's idea of "inherited background" in "The Mythological Being of Reflection" (68)

CHAPTER TWO

A Crisis of Belief at the End of the World

The fear
that all *this*
will end.

The fear
that it won't.
--Rae Armantrout "Prayers"

In the previous chapter, I proposed a way for thinking world and belief and promised creative potential for revising beliefs in apocalyptic thinking. But to understand how end of the world can trigger such foundational changes to belief systems, we must first grasp how the apocalyptic thinking ruptures these systems and how such ruptures can temporarily suspend those commitments central to world-committing beliefs. Thus, in this chapter, I will lay out what I see as the crisis of belief invoked by the end of the world. Though the chapters that follow will track the changes such a suspension may instigate, the initial casting off of belief brought about by worldlessness is, for me, the most vital and necessary aspect of apocalyptic thinking. Without a sense of worldlessness, even if only experienced briefly or subtly, apocalyptic thinking cannot spur new world convictions, let alone rearrange the content of those beliefs. Worlds change when we break through our current commitments to certain worldviews; apocalyptic thinking lends us the resources and imaginary space—whether via certain narratives, imagery, rhetoric, etc—to do so.

Allow me to introduce this variety of breakthrough via a brief example from Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*, where the stark change of convictions is paired with the apocalyptic imagery of a kind of worldlessness. The film follows a disenchanted patriarch, who is celebrating his birthday with his family at his isolated house by the sea when World War III erupts and who

is inspired to make a promise to god to give up his quiet life (particularly his house and much beloved son) to prevent the crisis. *The Sacrifice* is careful to establish the patriarch, Alexander, and his commitments prior to the apocalypse. He is an ex-actor turned critic and lecturer on aesthetics whose relationship with God is "nonexistent." Alexander is discontented with modern life and loves his rural home, which separates him from human obligations, such as family conflicts and the pressure of "the relentless march of technology" (Tarkovsky 222). Tired of the "emptiness of human speech" (222), Alexander carves out time to be with his son Little Man, who is temporarily mute due to a throat operation. But as quake-inducing jets fly over the home and foreshadow the coming nuclear holocaust, the world of the film is put into disorder. The women of the house run back and forth in an unnerved roving, and glasses loudly smash on the floor in the otherwise still house. This disquieting looming of the coming worldlessness is presaged by film cuts to black and white scenes of disarray and destruction in cityscapes far from the rural house. In the disjunction of the world as we knew it, the patriarch changes from a disgruntled passive spectator of an unsalvageable world to a devoted actor, who not only makes a promise to god to undo this apocalypse but commits to the promise by copulating with a witch.[13] This commitment sticks, for when Alexander awakes in his home to a world normalized and with war averted, he immediately burns his house down and willingly leaves his family for the solitary life of the asylum. *The Sacrifice* nicely establishes why "world-shattering" is center of the apocalyptic potential to change worlds; the encounter with the destruction and loss that destabilizes everything a subject takes to be true and opens the possibility for the world to be different.

But how exactly does this worldlessness instigate a reconsideration of these firm commitments? Why does a character like Alexander, so certain of the state of the world and its

meaningless decline, change? In this chapter, I will argue that apocalyptic thinking, as a position of worldlessness, is a belief destabilizing exercise. End-of-the-world thinking breaks faith with the expectations of what the world is and its ability to secure a sense of totalizing reality by suggesting its current concept of the world is a failure, an unreal or incomplete ideal. When crisis or disaster brings the world into view, the resulting uncertainty raises questions for the thinker that further a sense of the world's elusiveness and unencompassable character. Such questions about the status and nature of the world provoke a comparative model for thinking the world; not only do we contemplate what the world could or should be in contrast to what we have previously taken to be true, but we invite the world-belief configurations of others to jostle with our own. A world-belief unsecured by commitment is a potential truth under negotiation, and these different world-beliefs can crowd the supposedly singular truth of the worldview that these beliefs scaffold. In this crisis of belief instigated by the proliferation of potential, varied, and contradictory world-committing beliefs, apocalyptic thinking exhumes the "as if" character of such beliefs, the mistaken blindspot of taking these beliefs for truths. Between the pressure of differing world-centering beliefs and the recognition of their taken-for-granted character, apocalyptic thinking can suspend the commitments to a subject's world-committing beliefs, as a subject is de-positioned from its worldview, and thus spark an ontological crisis: the world, no longer meaningfully ordered, does not functionally delimit the "horizons of objectivity." I argue this world-apostasy is the radical potential of apocalyptic thinking and its attempt to bring worldlessness into view.

In what follows, I will return again to the work of Markus Gabriel to discuss the suspension of belief involved in the worldlessness of apocalyptic thinking and how this distancing breeds particular conflict for the modern, empirical worldview. Having established an

approach to this world-forsaking function of apocalyptic thinking, I will turn to a favorite text of apocalyptophiles, T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", and demonstrate that "The Waste Land" is best read as an expression of this crisis of belief, the disruption of sincere commitments to world-committing beliefs and their ability to position the subject within the world. The apocalypse that "The Waste Land" represents is not an expression of an absence of myth but the failure of modernist myths of history and colonialism to fully encompass a world and produce a coherent sense of reality and thus a rejection of meaningful world-constitution.[14] By understanding the rupture-inducing power at work in apocalyptic thinking's ability to seize on the precarity of world-committing beliefs, we will be able to trace how the collection of dead myths engender a destabilized relation to empiricist beliefs. This proves to be an ontological crisis which haunts subjectivity and, as I will argue, reflects back a position of worldlessness, a stance of what I will call metametaphysical nihilism.

Divorcing the World

How exactly can apocalyptic thinking generate an ontological crisis? In this section, I will outline my approach to determining the de-commitment to a worldview sparked by apocalyptic thinking. I see this worldview-divorce as a process instigated by imaging the world in peril, which brings the world into view and leads to its interrogation. Under scrutiny, the world proves to be ever elusive, which only generates other possibilities, other possible configurations for thinking the world. This comparative model for thinking the world reveals the taken-for-granted character of our worldviews and the world-committing beliefs that constitute them, a performative "as if" that obscures the doxastic quality of our worldviews. The world,

whose very constitution and reality is now called into question, is entangled in a crisis of belief, which generates a suspension of commitments and ontological crisis.

The first step of apocalyptic thinking is the most recognizable: it puts the world in peril. To raise alarm regarding the state of the world both brings the world into view and raises questions about the world and its current status. In *The Sacrifice*, this is the disorganizing force of jets flying overhead and the announcement of the coming, devastating war. The apocalyptic threat, as I suggested in the previous chapter, makes an object of the world, the otherwise taken for granted background context, which brings the those "questions settled behind our backs" to the forefront. Whether a comet hurtling toward Earth, a god descending from a cloud, or everyone waking up one day knowing the world will end "like the closing of a book" on February 30th (Bradbury), displacing our expectations of the world by plunging it into state of crisis enframes the totality we have largely ignored for the concerns of our more particular contexts.[15] Though the state of individuals, governments, science, gods, etc may be the vehicle of crisis, what's at stake is the world and the truth of its precarity. Crisis opens the world to questions: why it is in this critical state? How did it come to be? What does it mean? What do I do differently? These answers are not given; even in the case of the Book of Revelation, the totalizing apocalypse that reveals all, the reason behind the apocalypse is not given except in the undepictable god, who is given but radically indiscernible. We may see what happens, but the mechanism of the world's crisis only raises further questions, critically: how did we get to this point? What did we miss or misunderstand about the world we occupy? What can be done? Such questions can be raised clearly, as in an apocalyptic disaster movie that gives short answers ("it's a meteor and NASA is clearly under-funded!") and moves to focus on survival (and the hierarchal structures that block individuals paths to safety), or as a slow, unanswered ache, as in

"The Waste Land". Regardless of the exact questions or methods of asking, these questions become imaginative subversion, for what lies at the bottom is the ultimate question: what is the world, really? The world has become elusive.

Within the recognition of this elusiveness is the failure of the world, both as committable concept and as all-encompassing totality. Not only does this difficultly to pin the world down undercut the supposed stable, knowable character of the world, but to attempt to bring this all-encompassing totality into view only exposes its impossibility. The world, in the face of its uncertain character as well as lack of cohesion or contradictions, is no longer either a secured thing to be understood, or a complete, totalizing whole, let alone the possibilities we presumed non-existent encroaching on our supposed whole. Our totality of totalities becomes incomplete. The world becomes a stranger. We might compare this to Darko Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement, but I think perhaps Malabou's more personal and traumatic description of the "deserting of subjectivity" is more helpful here, as "these types of beings impose a new form on the old form, without mediation or transition or glue or accountability, today versus yesterday, in a state of emergency, without foundation, barebacked, sockless" (*Ontology* 6).[16] Apocalypse does not unveil the truth in its whole, but is a revelation of misunderstanding, that which was unaccounted for in the encompassing world. The crisis of the world thus becomes a crisis of belief.

In this failure to secure totality and the questions raised by this crisis, apocalyptic thought opens up a comparative model of worlds; the threat of apocalypse makes space for other world-concepts, other configurations of world-committing beliefs. When we attempt to grasp the whole, it eludes us. When we attempt to think of it through a state of crisis, we crowd it with other models of world: the could bes, the should bes, the might already bes. The uncertainty

generated in our world assessment does not better bring the world into view but shatters it into a multitude of the possible, or which of those models are, ought to, or could be the case. For Alexander in *The Sacrifice*, belief in god becomes the only functional option to 'right' the world. Some apocalypses are driven by a single world-to-world conflict; *The Day After Tomorrow* features a representation of the world we know (the everyday human) overcome by the one we ought to have recognized (centered on the drastic necessity of addressing climate change). "The Waste Land" is a particularly interesting model, insofar as its attempt to create a colonial history that encompasses myths from across the planet is likewise crowded but with a plethora of myths, or world-committing beliefs. The uncertainty of world, aggravated by the taken-for-truth nature at the root of world-committing beliefs, creates a friction between worlds as competing possible world-beliefs rub against one another. Such friction is key to the success of the apocalyptic; the great potential of the comparative model of worlds is that it frees us from the illusion of *one*.

By pulling the world into view and stripping it of its singular character, the world ceases to be a background object "out-there," given, but reveals itself to have an "as if" quality, a performative quality tied up in our representations. In the frictional contestation of other worlds, Kant's important discovery becomes clear, mainly "that intentionality as such has an *as if* character: in order for it to have anything *in view*, which is even potentially distinct from *having* it in view, we need to refer to it at least as if it was independent of that act of reference" (Gabriel *Transcendental* xvi). This "as if," this make-believe or even theatrical quality, is usually the framing device the world, as totalizing context, plays; however, when we bring the world into view and under debate, it too discloses an "as if" quality, one that is haunted by a certain contingency (at least, if we listen to Schelling): "That which is something determinate is, according to Schelling's theory of predication, that which could always be other" (Gabriel

Transcendental 67). The world, prior to this determination, was secured from the multiplicity of representations through this "as if," that is, through a commitment.

This crowding of beliefs and "as if" character of worlds is a particularly troubling problem for the 20th century empiricist mindset, as it troubles the claims of realism and claims at objective truth.[17] For "The Waste Land", as a poem reaching out against its own dominant belief systems, such a break from the scientistic ideology of realism particularly jarring, as it is a world-view that "paradoxically engenders its own impossibility" since it "defines thought on the basis of an inductive construction of reality" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 29). As a supposedly "objective" ideology, it clashes with its ability to uncover its own groundlessness, the state of meaning construction particularly in the ambiguity of the world itself: "Science defines a domain of knowability, of stable objects that resist the human experience of elusiveness" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 88). The scientific endeavor, normalized in popular thought, to excise the human perspective in pursuit of the world out-there "as is" and without our input—though crucial to the practice of the sciences—hides the very commitments to disenchantment that position that worldview. Such an endeavor become drastically more problematic in its self-obstruction outside the domain of science (such as politics, which is perhaps articulated with the most ringing alarm in Adorno and Horkheimer' s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*); it is this meta-theoretical alienation that belies its own constitution through certain belief-commitments.

The positivist mindset, as a reified system of thought that struggles to grant validity to its own belief commitments—those taken-for-truths about the world and things within it that help make determinations possible—too easily rejects the human-finitude-bound process of its own constitution of meaning. Because of this self-denial, the stakes of departure from these commitments reach a level of violence: "For the scientific temper, any deviation of thought from

the business of manipulating the actual, any stepping outside of the jurisdiction of existence, is no less insane and self-destructive than it would be for the magician to step outside the magic circle drawn for his incantation" (Adorno and Horkheimer 19). The world, under such a worldview's constraints, is drawn up between that which is empirically recognizable and the impossible, indefinable other. To encounter this non-empirical entity generates fear: "Enlightenment is mythical fear radicalized. The pure immanence of positivism, its ultimate product, is nothing other than a form of universal taboo. Nothing is allowed to remain outside, since the mere idea of the 'Outside' is the real source of fear" (Adorno and Horkheimer 11).

But to end a world is to reach its limits and look "outside" it. Apocalyptic thinking unabashedly addresses its world-constitution, attempting to uncover the outside of our world delimiting-beliefs, and, in the process, inciting an ontological crisis of belief. These world failures, whether they be in the face of contradiction and incoherence, the discovery of an "outside" to one's totality, or the threat of destruction to one's totality, suspends one's own meaning-making process, situating it as another belief among other beliefs. The position taken through world-committing beliefs that define reality become unstable in these failing commitments. Take for example, what is in some ways the opposite: Frederic Jameson argues in *Archaeologies of the Future* that "the properly Utopian program or realization will involve the commitment to closure (and thereby to totality)" (4). While the utopian impulse may be the happy embrace of an absolute, the belief-constructed ideal of a totality, apocalyptic thinking convinces the subject that the world as it understands it is in fact real or perhaps correct, and is instead meaningless: a "fragmentary history of mythological images and narratives" (Gabriel, "The Mythological Being" 26) turns into "a heap of broken images" (Eliot 22). In apocalyptic thinking, the world-committing beliefs that stabilized a subjectivity are displaced—that is, the

commitments to one's world-committing beliefs are suspended—as is a subjectivity's ability to construct meaning and comprehend the ontological conditions of its world. That which was once considered outside the possibility of reality, beyond comprehensible meaning, is radically integrated into the realms of possibility, inspiring not only an ideological crisis (my concept of the world is insufficient and can cannot protect me), but also an ontological crisis (what is the world anyway?). The impossible becomes not simply renormalized, but very much real, engendering a "haunting" awareness of failed sense of and in the world.

This is the radical worldlessness of apocalyptic thinking: in divorcing the world, a subject steps back from its commitments to certain configurations of totality, or a singular worldview, and attempts to orient its perspective from a position of worldlessness, or metametaphysical nihilism. Though I focus on empirical, scientistic thinking for the purposes of this chapter's case study ("The Waste Land") and the implications for the contemporary reader, this crisis of the outside is not restricted to this world-configuration; rather, the ontological crisis arises whenever the world is renounced and put up for negotiation anew. Worldlessness both affords the opportunity to engage in those commitments settled behind our backs and the position to reconceive what the world *is* in the first place. Though the view from nowhere is still a view, this form of meta-metaphysical nihilism (that there is no higher-order meaning outside what we construct) need not result in apathy, but can find a sense of agency to commit to different, hopefully better, beliefs. The ontological crisis of worldlessness, then, though frightening, is an important meaning-critical tool for participating in the ordering of the world.

One World to Hold Them All and Other Impossible Realisms

"The Waste Land" is a particularly useful illustration of the apocalyptic crisis of belief. The poem not only lingers, in media res, on the suspended state of an uncertain world, but crowds its emptiness with other models of world, or the world-committing beliefs of past cultures, hauntingly disorganized. Under the framework of an ontologically-positioning subjectivity, which posits world committing beliefs to give our experiences meaning and direction, it is thus possible to understand the apocalyptic thinking in "The Waste Land" as more than a yearning for lost meanings and fanciful thinking. It is the more general consequence of a kind of mythological failure, a critical break from the positioning of subjectivity and therefore ontological certainty. World-committing beliefs, under Gabriel's model, reveal the ontological stakes so deeply embedded within the constitution of meaning and individual myths themselves. "The Waste Land", as a poem fostered in enlightenment world-committing beliefs, only destabilizes subjective formation by encountering other regulative myths, relics of past meaningful conditions that haunt as reminders of the arbitrariness of meaning itself. While the poem collects dead myths for in its search for a meaningful world, it further engenders its own crisis, in which the world-constituting belief in realism is rejected as meaningless as just one myth, or worldview, among others.

"The Waste Land" ostensibly attempts to engage in its own world-constitution by positioning itself within a colonial lineage. As one of the culturally resilient regulative myths presented in the poem, and perhaps one of the most insidious in its latent imagery and ideological claims, the construction of history on the basis of a colonial plot attempts to locate Britain as heir to a line of great empires. "The Waste Land" develops a colonial line extending as far back as the Phoenicians and reaching to modern Britain and its occupation of India, creating an almost fraternity-hazing ritual of empire. Each empire of the past is an occupant of the future

empire: the Phoenicians colonized Carthage, which was later occupied by Rome. Rome's empire then occupied Britannia, who in its modern phase had claimed India as its greatest prize. The fact that Eliot creates within "The Waste Land" a colonial line that unites England with past empires is not new.[18] Moreover, the fact that Eliot creates this line at a time of national crisis is even less distinctive. There is a rich literary tradition of colonizing the past that we can see, for example, in Virgil's *Aeneid*, written just after the end of the Republic in which Rome fictitiously unites with the mythology of Troy past and legitimizes its claim through the mythology of the classical Greek literary tradition. Even in the modern case of "The Waste Land", the construction is unabashedly mythic: Eliot requires the surrogacy of myth to provide the narrative structure of history to the claim of empire he constructs. This colonial legitimizing must, ironically, pass through myth to achieve its meaning, myth that not only is unrecognized by the empirical worldview of British colonialism but is also, in the contexts of other myths, reveals itself to be inherently "meaningless" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 64). Examining the representation of each of these empires within the poem, we can trace a mythological construction of history, an attempt to meaningfully situate England within a colonial plot, and outline its descent into ontological crisis engendered by such a self-reflective act.

The representation of the Phoenicians within the poem, and perhaps the most strange inclusion in the colonial lineage since it replaces the more common lineage from Troy, is most obviously embodied in Phlebas, the dead sailor. He is first introduced without a name via a tarot card the speaker receives from Madame Sosostris, the card of the "drowned Phoenician Sailor" (47). Not only is Eliot drawing Phoenician civilization in closer comparison to England's by the speaker receiving it as the speaker's card and binding the two together in a shared fate ("Here, said she, / Is your card" 46-7), but the line that follows ties the drowned sailor into

Shakespearean tradition: "(Those are pearls that were his eyes! Look!)" (48). It also raises an ontological question. Is the drowned sailor dead? This line from *The Tempest* is a part of Ariel's song to Ferdinand telling him of his father's death, wherein death itself is questioned:

> Full fathom five thy father lies;
>
> Of his bones are coral made;
>
> Those are pearls that were his eyes:
>
> Nothing of him that doth fade
>
> But doth suffer a sea-change
>
> Into something rich and strange (1.2.560-565)

Ferdinand's father's supposed death is not a violent rupture with the living world but a transition as his body is absorbed into the deep-sea life. Perceiving death as a shift in regimes—a "sea-change"—rather than a definite history with a beginning and end also echoes colonial ideologies; the body, not gone, passes from the rule of land to that of the sea. This ontological question of passing between worlds is raised again in Part IV of the poem that is dedicated to Phlebas. Though "a fortnight dead" (312), he "forgets" life and its "profit and loss" and even "passes the stages of his youth" as a floating corpse on the sea (313-317). Phlebas is dead, but, strangely, not without some kind of subjectivity, a way of positioning himself in the world. If we accept Phlebas as a representative of the ancient Phoenicians, this being the oldest in Eliot's line of empires, it is fitting that Eliot issues a warning not to forget one's own eventual decay: "Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you" (321). But like the colonies in the poem, it is a death that is not wholly death. Phlebas haunts long beyond his death with a way of conceiving the world that cannot be killed. Ontologically uncertain, the dead Phoenician's body changes while his worldview, though now forgotten, simply lingers, and haunts the poem.

Both Carthage, a Phoenician colony, and Rome, its eventual conqueror, are presented in terms of the Punic Wars and in the figure of Augustine, who was born in a Roman colony in North Africa and then went to a Roman-rebuilt Carthage to study. The first occurrence involves the Punic Wars and appears in the conversation of the "dead" men crossing the bridge: "You were with me in the ships at Mylae" (70). Mylae was the first of three wars between Rome and Carthage are raised to legendary status in Roman history and culture. Eliot's conversation appears to be one that would be expected of soldiers after the Great War, drawing the present into parallels with great ancient wars. But rather than raising World War I to a definitive, epic level, Mylae in the poem becomes a part of the mundane as masses cross the London Bridge, presumably on their way to work. This takes myth out of an allegorical arrangement (fables exaggerated representing more realistic truths) and suggests we read it tautegorically (where myth gives meaning direction), as the past myths considered so fantastical merge with the everyday and blur the distinction between the two, which perhaps implies the incorporation of great ancient wars into regulative myths is a way of overcoming despair and destruction. Myth in this instance of war-overlap, regardless, is integrated as a kind of modern history

But more than merging the quotidian present with storied myths of the past, this exchange also struggles to return to the difficulty of positing definitive ends to either war or colonization. Mylae is only the first of the three bitter Punic Wars and in this equivalent mythic pairing with the Great War arises the hint of another war, for "that corpse you planted last year in your garden" is trying to "sprout" and a "dog" (of war?) might "dig it up again" (71-75). Though seemingly more and more akin to the trials of a zombie film (the dead have a problem staying dead throughout the poem), repeated armed conflict appears just as difficult to put to rest. Thus, it is no surprise when the third Punic War also resurfaces later in the poem in the lines "to

Carthage then I came / Burning burning burning burning" (307-8). This seems in part reference to the third Punic War, where Rome razed an unthreatening Carthage under the now famed dictum, "delenda est Carthago".[19] But despite its burning and total destruction (it was alleged that the Romans sowed the earth with salt so that nothing would grow there), Carthage was rebuilt under Roman rule. Like the Phoenician sailor, this raises more ontological confusion within the concept of a colonial lineage. Though supposedly dead, the colony proves to be oddly resilient, and seems to exist rather through change and appropriation than a rigidly periodized and circular history of empire that only conceives of beginnings and ends.

But the lines "To Carthage then I came / Burning burning burning burning" also compound the worldview-bearing reference of an already belief-centric history (307-8), for each line also references a famous religious icon. The former, St. Augustine's *Confessions*, alludes to the saint's move to Carthage (he was born a Roman citizen in the colony of Thagaste) and thus introduction to sex and the consequential threat of hellfire, and the latter is Buddha's Fire Sermon in which freedom is achieved by divesting oneself from burning passions of the senses. These layered allusions tie an ancient colonial lineage into contemporarily-practiced religious mythologies, interrupting the realist claims on the past with impossible connections and reminding us modern beliefs still carry remnants of the ancient worldviews of the long dead. But perhaps more crucially, the mythic compounding of the Fire Sermon links the early Christian asceticism with Indian Buddhist theology, which both establishes India within this colonial line theologically and prods the troubling world-blurring at play in these disorganized compilations of world-committing beliefs. These competing worldviews not only rub against one another, but, in their shared space of allusion, excavate the "as if" quality of world: in their likeness, we recognize both worldviews could perhaps be otherwise.

Such potential for the world (and its committing beliefs) to be otherwise is only solidified in the poem's finale. The Fire Sermon allusion also introduces the final colony central to the poem's mythically constructed history, India, whose representation has the final say in the poem, which suggests its place in the future line. Like the representations of the colonies/empires before it, India is defined by its mythic systems both in the fire sermon mentioned above and in the Upanishad-based finale. The myth surrounding "Da" lays bare the constitutive myth-making process, as each kind of being is given the same word, "Da," and is expected to produce a meaningful narrative from it (in the poem: "Datta: what have we given . . . Dyadhavam . . . Damyata" 401-18). Unsurprisingly, each is led to a different assertion, stressing the contingent nature of representation at the basis of determinacy and the different worldviews under which those beings operate: the gods understand it as a need for control, men to give, and demons to be more compassionate. This meta-myth ends the poem, possibly noting the inescapable nature of belief. Transparent in its taken-for-truth character, India's mythic representation here is mythologically-reflexive and potentially otherwise. Though using a colonial-historical emplotment, Eliot altogether has instead manufactured consortium of non-English myths with England's own decentered, as it ends up being only one among many.

In this way, Eliot's constructed myth of the colonial past (and possible future) cannot succeed in creating a totality-securing and succession-fulfilling national identity like the *Aeneid* and other past greats of such a literary tradition. This failure is stirred by the compounding of the mythology itself, the crowded compiling of other world-beliefs. Instead of validating the world-committing beliefs of the present in the midst of the current crisis, "The Waste Land" awakens an awareness of that its own era's model of the world has been and therefore could be otherwise, an awareness that undercuts a modern subjectivity's committed placement within the world-

stabilizing beliefs. Openly mythic and ontologically unstable, the images of this colonial lineage incite an awareness of non-empirical nature of history and the contingent representations of worlds embedded in empires. Instead of the near-scientific turn of historical writing, this history recognizes that any attempts to provide narrative frameworks of beginnings and ends are disrupted in the concept of colony, the end that is not an end but a sea-change.[20] Nor does the poem's history deny its mythological, or belief-centric, roots; in fact, it defies modern history's presumptive objectivity by collapsing history with these other mythologies. Eliot's colonial past is inseparable from its ancient myths; he cannot present the Phoenicians without Shakespeare, Rome and Carthage without Buddha and Augustine, India without the Upanishads. "The Waste Land" even ends on a myth that self-consciously exposes the interpretative work of the myth-making process, as each of the beings of the "Da" myth must interpret their own realities. Eliot's colonial mythology is self-reflexive, ontologically confused, and ultimately draws attention to the display of the poem's own contingent, belief-committing apparatus.

This critical self-awareness is the turning point in the poem's collection of myths; a world already situated in potential perversion ("breeding . . . out of the dead") and in the lingering context of the Great War, the repeated imagery and allusions to a colonial lineage only reflect the failure of a world-committing belief long contained in the European traditions of empire. Such a failure not only unseats the working commitments of world and empire and the reductions they contain but also the way these attempts at totalizing, non-empirical histories have been told: to tell the myths of history through myths—compounded and disorganized, nonetheless—posits the possibility that these representations of the world could be otherwise, thus inviting a comparative model of the world. With these world-committing beliefs destabilized and the myths of other worlds loosened, the crisis proves not to be one of a world in peril but one of belief. The modern

nihilism of the poem, I argue, is the direct result of the worldlessness of apocalyptic thought. It becomes a question of not what to believe about the totality of totalities, but how a subject believes. This engenders meta-metaphysical nihilism.

Worldlessness, or World-Apostasy

As "The Waste Land" circles around the remnants of these world-committing beliefs concerning history and empire, we can better recognize the more general problems of stabilizing world-committing belief that spark the state of suspension and sense of worldlessness in this exercise of apocalyptic thought. The seeming grasping at totality that come in this myth-collecting are not only doomed to fail to reach totality but also further its own commitments' displacement. The scientistic worldview, in crisis and distanced from world-committing beliefs that undergird its sense of reality, exists as ontological crisis in the poem (what is the world, anyway?). The epistemic problem of knowing the world becomes, through the world's role in delimiting and giving direction to sense perception, an ontological problem. This, as I have argued through Gabriel, results in subjective instability. That "The Waste Land" turns to falsified, dead myths for wisdom only furthers the troubling of the positivist subjectivity, as it looks "outside" the horizon of its own worldview. More than manifestations raised to contest modern myth, the poem's specters are products of the modern thinker's own disillusioned and displaced subjectivity, as Georges Bataille notes, "today because a myth is dead or dying, we see through it more easily than if it were alive: it is the need that perfects the transparency" (Bataille 48). The failure of positivist myths to secure a certain reality leads to a desire for a different meaning-making system, perhaps for one that can account for its own crisis. That which provided a solution in past traditions is also that which brings about the destabilization of a

subjectivity: colonialism. In its own acts of appropriation, colonialism creates layers of myth, reminders of divergent subjectivities of cultures past. Rather than joining "The Waste Land" under some banner of empire and its spoils, the dead myths of the past crowd and destabilize the subjective positioning of modern world-committing beliefs.

The troubling of the positivist worldview is sourced in its own colonial beliefs which are subverted by their complementary acts of appropriation, both materially and through knowledge acquisition. Paul Douglass argues that "The Waste Land" is not unlike a modern museum full of cultural artifacts:

> *The Waste Land*'s cultural biases are a matter of form as well as content, for the archaeological method being mimicked—of reading the fragments—constitutes an approach to history and culture that is emphatically not value-free. Archaeologists and collectors imported fragments from other cultures to set up museums and drawing rooms; the poem also exhibits objects like that, like the Elgin Marbles, were torn from context, bringing antiquity. . . into dialogue with the war generation's despair. (8)

The problem of colonial appropriation of myth emerges, as these different world-committing beliefs via their relics come into contest with one another and trouble the blindspot at the basis of world-committing beliefs. The dominant empiricist worldview, in an attempt to overcome and assert its own subject position as true, demystifies other myths by treating them as museum artifacts, objects made digestible by and knowable through scientific inquiry. But even demystified and categorized by empiricist thinking, these myths still reflect meaning-producing positions in the world, and the colonial subjectivity still encounters the limitations of its own reflection (the "outside") in these dead myths. That the colonial mindset rejects them as false, primitive, and objects of study only makes their supposed meaninglessness more glaring. This

destabilizing appropriation becomes apparent as Douglass goes on to compare the poem to the case of England's fight for King Tut and also the supposed curse, which is a strong example of colonial appropriation of cultural artifacts in that it not only displays colonial "hubris" but also its troubled subjectivity (Douglass 20). The curse was an English manufacturing of ancient occult mythology, for "curse texts are a rarity in Egyptology" and that there is no known curse on Tut's artifacts (Douglass 21). A signal of the awareness of irreverence and enforcement of colonial prioritization (valuing a supposed objective history over cultural belief systems, and thereby enforcing the dominant myth structure of Europe), this mythological conflict is also waged within the colonial conscious, manifesting in an occult presence, one taken to be meaningful yet not quite real.

Akin to the kind of museum Douglass describes, "The Waste Land" exposes layers compiled through a European history of colonialism. The epigraph, quoted from Petronius, is more than a flex of academic muscle. It, too, is an embedded image of colonization whose very presence informs this display of classical clout. Though culturally respected by the Romans for its education, Greece was well under Roman rule before Petronius tried his hand at writing. The Latin narration interrupted by Greek quotations only signifies Roman power at this time as the epigraph linguistically registers a Roman acquisition of Greek. This all proves to be a form of meta-acquisition as Eliot, too, is able to import the quotations for his own purpose, freed of all original context, to be an ornament in an English poem. Other images are layered with this form of appropriation, perhaps for no other reason than it is the history of the Mediterranean. This history cannot be eradicated, though, even in holy spaces: "Where the walls / Of Magnus Martyr hold / Inexplicable splendor of Ionian white and gold" (263-5). This English adoption of ancient Greek architecture self-describes as a style that arose from the same disputed territory of

Anatolia from which the Smyrna merchant hails.[21] "The Waste Land", in this way, grounds the ubiquitous merging of the colonizer's subjectivity and meaning-making with the colonial others' through appropriation, both materially and mythically. Within its narrative of history, legitimacy, and superiority lay latent specters of colonization which remain a constant reminder of the presence of other world-committing beliefs of empires past, and within them the "groundless ground" on which all meaning is structured.

In this haunted contestation of meaning, inextricably tied up in beliefs from the 'outside,' modern world-committing beliefs are contextualized as one world-model among others and thus a taken-for-truth. This is a shock, as the cultural myth post-enlightenment is the "absence of myth" according to Georges Bataille. The absence of myth is the belief that myth is obsolete, a belief that, like a misdirected Cronos who eats his ancestors rather than his children, swallows myth in the modern world. But this rejection of myth, the recognition that society no longer needs myth to mediate between human existence and nature "through which the cohesion and necessity of society is affirmed," is a myth in and of itself (Richardson 13). For Bataille, "'night is also a sun,' and the absence of myth is also a myth: the coldest, the purest, the only *true* myth" (48). Myth, as an articulation of world-bearing beliefs, is not a scientifically disproven attempt to mediate nature but the representational meaning-making process. Myth, understood only through its regulative manifestations, then does not disappear but is manifested in new discreet world-committing beliefs, new ignored structures of articulating representations of the world. Instead of the ancient myths characterized by strong narrative structures, modern culture replaced them with direct descriptions of the world. But this too, as system of making sense of the world, is a myth, and a myth that believes it has overcome myth. For some like Bataille, such a universe is intolerable: "The fact that a universe without myth is the ruin of the universe – reduced to the

nothingness of things – in the process of depriving us equates deprivation with the revelation of the universe" (Bataille 48). The modern absence of myth is a belief of absence, of a singular and material realism, which is a history Eliot cannot create.

This absence of myth is explicitly played out within the poem in the speaker's lamentation of the Thames and its missing nymphs. Using a biblical Psalm of exile in Babylon for expression, the speaker bewails the dirty reality of London, repeating that "the nymphs are departed" (175-9).[22] The gritty realism of the polluted Thames provides a harsh contrast to the mythic nymphs and sets the two at odds. Though it is difficult to determine if the absence of the nymphs is the cause of the pollution or if the unsentimental realism of such pollution is the cause for absence, the scene seems to manifest Bataille's struggle of mythology, classically-realized, against the belief of objective realism as mutually exclusive. Yet the nymphs are also manifestations of the spectrality of myth, as they exist within the poem as a non-presence, not physically-existing but haunting the consciousness of the speaker. Such juxtaposition appears again in Eliot's dual allusion to the biblical story about the road to Emmaus and Ernest Shackleton's supernatural Artic exploration where spectral presences haunt disciples and explorers alike in the questioning, "who is the third who walks always beside you? / When I count, there are only you and I together / But when I look ahead up the white road / There is always another walking beside you" (359-362). The duality of the allusion seems at odds; the explorer, whose role is classically the demystifier of the unknown, encounters, through biblical-style haunting, the "outside" that cannot fit into objective scientific realism (such an outsider to the binary world of realism that it, like Tiresias, defies gender: "I do not know whether a man or a woman", 364). These non-entities of myth still haunt the world it has been excluded from. It is the specter of realism, the outside that haunts the mythological construction of realism.

Eliot's attempt to resurrect dead myths, then, goes beyond a complaint against realistic, materialistic, or scientific narratives that have replaced ancient myth. By evoking the myths of the past, Eliot's specters problematize the world committing beliefs of the present. Within the dead myths of the past lies the belief-dependent reality of the present. Though it is easy to write off unrealistic myths as false beliefs of the uneducated times past or categorize them as cultural artifacts, they inherently expose the meaning-making systems that we too rely on. In a system of belief whose very content declares its nonexistence, the presence of old myths contests this claim of absence by presenting the possibility of multiplicity within such systems. Rather, "the uncanny stranger begins to pervade the sphere of the subject, threatening its identity from within" (Gabriel 2009, 31-32). Or, as Jacques Derrida puts it in a different context, "hegemony still organizes the repression and thus the confirmation of a haunting. Haunting belongs to the structure of every hegemony" (37). Empiricist belief's claim to the construction of objective totalities creates the haunting presence of myths past. That which ought to be dead under such limiting claims lingers through its suppression, claims which only recall the presence that is not there. And the lingering is by nature seditious:

> If there is something like spectrality, there are reasons to doubt this reassuring order of presents and, especially, the border between the present, the actual or present reality of the present, and everything that can be opposed to it: absence, non-presence, non-effectivity, inactuality, virtuality, or even the simulacrum in general, and so forth. (Derrida 39)

The apparition of myth in the age of its supposed absence not only makes such absence suspect but also makes the very structure of the present suspect. A subjectivity, in reflecting on its own

positioning, not only engenders its own displacement, but also its own ontological crisis as its "horizon of objectivity" is called into question (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 78).

Tiresias is, of course, the most obvious and best (dis)embodiment of this absence. In his/her self-announcement, s/he first declares that s/he is "throbbing between two lives" (218). While oftentimes read solely as a further elucidation of Tiresias' hermaphroditic experiences in the following line "old man with female wrinkled breasts" (219), it also produces an ontological confusion as Tiresias exists between two forms of being. Though perhaps not immediately the expected ontological confusion of a specter (between life and death), the vacuity of life that is being straddled with the claim is further emphasized in Tiresias's declaration of also having "walked amongst the lowest of the dead" (246). Only at the end of his/her appearance does Tiresias remind us of his/her spectral manifestation, as we are reminded that s/he too is dead. Tiresias also holds the traditional capacities of the specter: s/he can watch, understand, and comment, but s/he has not the power to act in any way. The Cumean Sybil, too, from the epigraph of the poem, has the same spectrality. The Sybil, whose body might best be understood as mummified, also exists in some ontologically confused state. Though her body is dead and threatens to fall apart (and thus she is often represented as confined to a jar), she is somehow still alive and at least mentally present. In a state of ontological liminality, she is finished with her restricted corporality and, when asked, desires only one thing: "ἀποθανειν θέλω" (I want to die) (3). Just as the nature of colonization explodes historical narrative, the (non)existence of these specters destroys the linearity of homogenous, modern beliefs and pressures the limits of their supposedly all-encompassing totalities.

Both these specters haunt the poem through the elevated understanding of the modern world they are injected into; their position as prophets still remains even outside their own

mythic context. Both are looked to, despite the recognition of their falsity and these myths' inability to have effect on the world, as beings positioned to meaningfully understand the present. The Sybil is presented as a timeless source of wisdom, as her story is repeated by Eliot, who repeats Petronious, who credits a character named Trimalchio, who sources the original petition to some Greek youths. The valuation of such wisdom spreads over a millennium and past national borders. Her importance is also amplified by her separation from the poem, as epigraph. Tiresias, situated in the center of the poem (line 218 of 432), is designated by Eliot's notes as "the most important personage of the poem, uniting all the rest" (North 23). Though the notes have been written off by Eliot himself in *On Poetry and Poets* (1957), Tiresias's binary-encompassing knowledge, which includes life, death, both sexes, and apparently both past and present, is not called into questioned by the poem itself. Both ontologically inexplicable and simultaneously meaning-filled, these specters fuel further friction against the hegemonic beliefs into which they cannot be meaningfully integrated.

The potency of these mythological specters resides, then, in their manifestation of the already haunted subjectivities of the modern colonizer. As mythology "mistakes its own activity of setting up its world . . . for the activity of something external to it to the effect that the world appears as the given *par excellence*" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 77), a sort of cognitive-duping that hides the very meaning-making process and assumes direct connection with the world out-there, the truly terrifying specter that haunts *"*The Waste Land*"* is the forgotten meaninglessness of one's own subjectivity, for "it 'haunts' itself" (Malabou, *The Future of Hegel* 35). The English people represented in the poem not only encounter the haunting specters of their colonial appropriation but their own meaning-making processes. They haunt themselves:

"What is that noise?"

The wind under the door.

"What is that noise now? What is the wind doing?"

Nothing again nothing.

"Do

"You know nothing? Do you see nothing? Do you remember

"Nothing?" (117-126).

Just as our sense of reality is constituted by beliefs that commit to a world, so too are these hauntings a subjectivity's projection of the world hidden under the pretense of being external. The speaking-voice seeks out a haunting that is not there, is "nothing," and in experiencing nothing, turns inward to question the subjective experience of knowing/seeing/remembering. Thus follows a crisis of subjectivity within the speaking-voice, who cannot connect with the thinker: "'My nerves are bad to-night. Yes, bad. Stay with me. / 'Speak to me. Why do you never speak. Speak. / 'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What? / 'I never know what you are thinking. Think.'" (111-114). Not only is the speaking-voice unable to connect with the thinker and reach some kind of core of the thinker's subjectivity ("What thinking?"), but the speaking-voice cannot escape its own empty, de-positioned subjectivity, a banal and mindless babble, and projects it onto the thinker: "Is there nothing in your head?'" (126). The speaking-voice goes on a hunt in the external world for an explanation of the nothingness of its own positioning, and in the process maintains in its own being a subjectivity of nothingness it is determined not to fill with anything. Meaningful world-constitution, here, is vacated.

The thinker, who answers in thought but not aloud, responds to this crisis for the thinker is also haunted by it. Replying, "I think we are in rats' alley / Where the dead men lost their

bones" (115-6), the thinker positions itself in the world of the specter. The thinker's second silent response returns to the mythologized past of the Phoenician sailor, dead but not dead, remembering "Those are pearls that were his eyes" (125). But in pondering this ontologically confused image, the thinker is not divorced from it but instead absorbed, as the speaking-voice must ask, "'Are you alive, or not?" (126). The thinker's encounters with obsolete world-committing beliefs produce its own haunted state, one that is not only shared by its speaking companion, but by English society as a whole:

> Unreal City,
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
> A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
> I had not thought death had undone so many.
> Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,
> And each man fixed his eyes before his feet. (Eliot 60-65)

In this scene of commuting, the populace is not only reduced to a kind of brute meaningless through its monotony, as the shuffling masses sigh and keep their eyes downward, but also become ontologically entangled by the inference that they are already "undone" by death. These hauntings are the manifestation of the modern state of subjective reflection; without firm commitments to a world-stabilizing belief they body forth their own ontological crises.

This self-haunting is a suspension of belief, the subject's impotency to take a position and constitute its world. Pressured by a time of collapse and the very expanse of the appropriation of other mythologies to reflect on the myth process, the unstable empirical worldview encounters the fearsome root at the base of belief, for "in its brute meaningless, it is the foundation of meaning, even of the meaning of meaninglessness" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 64). As this

struggle with the meaningless of reflection manifests itself through haunting, it raises its own eschatological claim:

> This logic of haunting would not be merely larger and more powerful than an ontology or thinking of Being (of the 'to be,' assuming that it is a matter of Being in the 'to be or not to be,' but nothing is less certain). It would harbor within itself, but like circumscribed places or particular effects, eschatology and teleology themselves. It would *comprehend* them, but incomprehensibly. (Derrida 10)

The tangled ontology of haunting contains in its non-death a sense of its own final end which, like most world-committing beliefs, is not fully aware of itself. Encountering the haunting nothingness at the core of subjectivity, the failure of beliefs to meaningfully position a subject in the world and fill the gap in place of rejected modern world-commitments leaves its thinkers impotent. This apostasy is the worldlessness of apocalyptic thinking, the waste land deprived of meaningful conditions.

"The Waste Land" is thus a "heap of broken images" (23), a self-reflective but "broken" belief system. As such, the poem is littered with nihilistic apocalyptic images, perhaps best described as "comprehended . . . incomprehensibly" (Derrida 10). Ontological crisis, impotency, and subjective failure come together in the poem, as in the Hyacinth stanza, resulting in an untranslated apocalyptic image:

> I could not
>
> Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
>
> Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
>
> Looking into the heart of light, the silence
>
> *Oed' und leer das Meer* (Desolate and empty is the sea). (38-42)

Like Tiresias and the haunted speaker who ponders the rat's alley, the Hyacinth speaker is ontologically uncertain, "knows nothing" and, impotent, seems to experience "desolation." The attempt to find meaning, "looking in the heart of light," results in a knowledge of nothing. Acts of meaning-making continue in the poem, but their iteration, without world, is a kind of nihilism: "I can connect / Nothing with nothing" (301-302). Unsettled in the world and from a position from which to compellingly make meaning, and thus in a state of suspension, the speakers encounter nothing. But rather than embrace this worldless view, the speaker instead experiences it as a failure. Apocalyptic thinking in "The Waste Land" experiences nothingness as a collapse:

> Ringed by the flat horizon only
>
> …Falling towers
>
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
>
> Vienna London
>
> Unreal (373-376)

Even the colonial histories of empire collapse within the poem, under the weight of their ontological impotency. The world, unknowable and unreal, an indefinite expanse of nothingness ("ringed by flat horizons"), falls apart in "The Waste Land".

Though "The Waste Land", as a seeming picture of the worldless suspension of belief at the heart of apocalyptic thinking, does not bring forth a commitment to new or different worldviews, the poem does raise the suggestion that it, too, looks toward a future of new belief. The speaker at the end of the poem gathers the doxastic remains, "these fragments I have shored against my ruins" (430), and points to the usual trajectory of apocalyptic narratives: the commitment to a new worldview. Not simply an act of destruction that creates a suspension of commitments, this apocalyptic narrative awaits a new, more meaningful world. For the poem,

that seems to reside in the beliefs of India. The speaker returns to and concludes the poem by invoking the Upanishads, where each being makes his own interpretation of "Da," and the Sanskrit word for peace: "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata / Shantih shantih shantih" (433). Though perhaps still a residue of colonial mythology in this end, it still seems to contain a stillness, unhaunted, that the rest of the poem does not reflect. The world-committing process continues, then, seeking out new conditions to embrace as truths. This shift to new meaning, though, is no different from the beginning of the poem, as myths, like lilacs, "[breed] …out of the dead" (1). From nihilistic suspension, the speaker looks towards new myths, new meanings, something "to hold us captive" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 19).

"The Waste Land" is thus, for me, an encapsulation of the exciting, destructive potential of the worldlessness of apocalyptic thinking and how such thinking works. Worldlessness can break the reified commitments, the "inherited backgrounds" (Wittgenstein §94), the common-sense assumptions of dominant worldviews, often by seizing on the impossibilities or contradictions inherent to such beliefs. "The Waste Land" is a particularly compelling example of this as it not only rips up the foundations of a positivist worldview but stares with dedication into the nihilistic heart (or "heart of light") of such a process. But the poem also recognizes this nihilism is not the end of all meaning, just its current iteration, which perhaps makes it apart of the most pertinent modernist project: not the embrace of simple nihilism—for these beliefs and systems of meaning do in fact exist, in spite of their precarity or outright false accounts—but that of a kind of metametaphysical nihilism, which recognizes meaning in the human effort to constitute meaning for the world. Beliefs play a vital role in thinking the world, which perhaps best put by another famous modernist: "I like the word 'belief.' I think in general that when people say 'I know,' they don't know, they believe . . . To live is to believe" (Duchamp 137).

Apocalyptic thinking, I hold, via the radical rupture of worldlessness, provides an opportunity to engage with those foundational beliefs that commit us to a particular world(view). When crisis imperils our sense of world, we are compelled to attempt to bring the world into view and the work that maintains our commitments to certain beliefs behind our backs. Under scrutiny, these beliefs neither perfectly cohere nor compress the world they promised; in the case of "The Waste Land", the shattered imagery of a history of a colonial Europe and an empiricist world ideal seems to suggest the disbanding of a one-time centering worldview.[23] Such an opening makes room for a comparative model for thinking the world, where the world can be encountered and understood differently due to its "as if" character. Though this friction between worlds only furthers its own sense of crisis where world-ordering beliefs are renounced, the worldlessness of apocalyptic thinking creates a temporary view from nowhere that can be used to critical rethinking our relationship to the world and our constitutive beliefs about it. Thus, Gabriel's concept of mythology creates not only a new way to conceptualize modernism's encounters with mythologies but more crucially an "ideological-critical" tool for dissecting the worlds we envision ourselves as inhabiting.

Having understood how apocalyptic thinking can destabilize a set of world-committing beliefs by challenging our commitment to those world configurations, we can in the following chapters recognize how certain beliefs, now negotiable, are reimagined and supplanted for particular purposes in apocalyptic art and literature. By first establishing how the end of the world can tear up the foundations of what we took to be true, we can, as "The Waste Land" seems to finally imply, rearrange those beliefs and look toward a potential new world of meaning. Our world-committing beliefs are both fragile and flexible, like the strands of a spider's comparatively resilient web; a large force may knock some or all of strands away but

their strands, considered one of the strongest known materials, often keeps some in play in some shape or other, some perhaps to be rebuilt in a new web. We now know how apocalyptic thought can come in and sweep away our beliefs about the world. What remains is to track how beliefs are rearranged, replaced, and/or taken up at the end of the world.

But before we return to what the question of relaying and rebuilding commitments, however, we will pause to examine some of the specific ways in which these beliefs change in apocalyptic thought: how, exactly, in this apocalyptic interruption, do we structure and restructure our concepts of world and what is at stake in the process? If we continue with the metaphor of the spider and its web, the following two chapters are an examination of the patterns of particular web-formations and the species of spiders who create such webs, the recurrent patterns of particular modifications of apocalyptic thinking. Chapters three and four track how specific belief changes restructure their worlds, particularly under modal specifications, and how such changes alter the subject's relationship to the that elusive totality.

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[13] Lest this example mislead you to the conclusion this atheist-to-theist conversion as an apocalyptic norm, I should note this relationship is just as likely to go the other way in the end of world or leave god out of it altogether. Tarkovsky's depiction here is also not so wholesomely theistic as some believers might hope.

[14] As made clear in the introduction and as this chapter will develop further, this is an argument for apocalypse based neither solely in Biblical tradition of the revelation that unveils, nor end-of-the-world definition of contemporary pop culture. For an interesting look at Biblical apocalypse in "The Waste Land" as a spiritual absence of revelation, see Cornelia Cook's "The Hidden Apocalypse: T. S. Eliot's Early Work".

[15] Now is a good time to note that "crisis" in this project is perhaps best understood as both its more obvious contemporary use as emergency or state of instability and its ancient Greek sense of judgment or turning point. A crisis need not feel, as in the Bradbury case, as an emergency; it may simply be a world-turning point, felt simply as such.

[16] Suvin's defines SF as the "literature of cognitive estrangement," thus as sees estrangement as vital to the nature of the genre and built into SF expectations. For this reason, cognitive estrangement, I think, lacks the shock apocalyptic thinking so readily embraces and uses to certain effect. Consider that SF, especially dystopias, generally are less concerned with the potentially traumatic apocalyptic event than the "novum," or the new world alterations.

[17] In this chapter, I treat this scientistic mindset broadly, in part to keep the chapter focused on the larger goals of tracking apocalyptic thought. However, I would be remiss not to note the clear influence Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, particularly in my thinking of the problem of myth and modernism in "The Waste Land". While I will in this chapter refer to such a worldview as "scientistic" or "empirical," I particularly like Horkheimer and Adorno's description of this mindset, in the 1969 preface, as a "lapse from enlightenment into positivism, into the myth of that which is the case" (xii).

[18] See e.g. the opening of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late 14th century) as an example of this tradition of the translatio imperii or the prologue of the Prose Edda (early 13th century)

[19] Scholars familiar with classical studies will recognize this is one of the dicta attributed to Cato the Elder. For the less classically inclined, it is worth noting Cato, a veteran of the previous Punic war, is said to have repeated this maxim at the end of every speech, regardless of its relation to the speech's content. This claim that "Carthage must be destroyed" has come to

tokenize rhetoric that capitalizes on a lingering, often irrational threat to necessitate a confrontation.

[20] In terms of the shift to a more scientific or evidence-based concept of history, I pull from Paul Veyne's telling of the change in citation in historical writing in *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths?*,which emphasizes the shift in the modes of history creation, particularly in 16th century France.

[21] To even understand the national claims of this dispute around Smyrna, one needs an extended history stretching back to ancient times. See David Roessel's "Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna Merchant," and Post-War Politics in "The Waste Land" for a poem-centric explanation of current political crises occurring Anatolia between newly minted Turkish nationals and Greek colonial claims in the area.

[22] Babylon (Iraq) at the time was also part of the British empire due the Anglo-Iraq Treaty that established Iraq as a Kingdom under British Administration (1921-1932). This is perhaps yet another example of the colonial layers within the poem.

[23] For this reason, I prefer my Eliot as apostate or not at all. That Eliot later decried the heterodoxy which seems so central to "The Waste Land", during Hitler's rise to power nonetheless, I think only suggests Eliot, too, recognized the destabilizing power of colonial accumulation of meaning, but took it as a threat, rather than opportunity: "the population should be homogenous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either likely to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate" (*After Strange Gods* 20). This is why apocalyptic crisis, is a potential rather than a threat. But I prefer a world with Korean barbeque tacos in it, whereas later Eliot does not.

CHAPTER THREE

An Inconceivable Truth, Or Why the World *Must* End

In the last chapter, I argued that apocalyptic thinking could split a subject from a totalizing worldview, breaching a near-sacred sense of reality. World-apostasy is only one mode of the apocalyptic, however, for it can also do the opposite and help a subject commit to a new worldview. To understand how these new commitments are forged, we must first understand what happens to individual beliefs at the end of the world. Before I explore how such commitments are created (chapter five), I want to put the question of commitment on hold to focus on this question: in what ways do these beliefs change? Once the world has been upended and made radically uncertain, how exactly do those beliefs central to our ideas of reality shift? In what way does the world (understood as the accumulation or configuration of world-committing beliefs) change? In the next two chapters, I will argue a key aspect of this shift lies in the realm of possibility within these questionable worlds. When we break faith with a totalizing structure of belief, we have the opportunity to renegotiate the validity, importance, and degree of certainty of a variety of our world-committing beliefs and in doing so, reevaluate the conditions we take to be true of our world, particularly in terms of what is and is not possible. Philosophically speaking, these are modals shift of certain world-committing beliefs, changes to their claims of necessity (it could not be otherwise) and contingency (it could be otherwise). Simply speaking, it is a negotiating of possibility, of what must or could happen. In this chapter, we'll start with the must: necessity.

While many conversations regarding necessity are concerned with its role in possible worlds, we are discussing its role in belief, that is, doxastic modality: the possibility-limiting

truth claims posited in certain beliefs. So rather than concentrate on what is true of the world (or worlds) outright, the end of the world presents the opportunity to reconfigure what beliefs become principal to our idea of the world and our expectations of what can—and *must*—happen within it. By shifting the question from necessary truths to those of world-committing beliefs, the conversation changes in two important ways: we recognize that there is flexibility to these beliefs (they need not be true for two individuals, let alone in every possible world) and that these are, in the friction of perceived difference, much contested. The average person, who is not a paid analytic-philosopher, does not produce a logically charted and contradiction-free concept of the world (and they are most likely better for it); rather, as I argue in the previous chapters, this world-committing is more akin to the work of a spider whose web, constructed in a relatively busy pathway, is routinely battered and rebuilt. The modality of our beliefs change—and most likely more frequently than we think. It isn't the world (which according to Gabriel doesn't exist) but we "concept-mongering" creatures' thought of totality that shifts. Which leads us to the second important capacity of for dealing in doxastic modality: that it is shaped, changed, sold, and debated by others. When people discuss "truth," this is often what they mean: the supposedly undeniable nature of the world (everything), or world-committing beliefs regarding necessity. These are beliefs about the way the world *must* be, a "truth," however, despite its claims of undeniability, often up for grabs.

Thus, apocalypses that emphasize changes to the necessary conditions of the world, or what I will call apocalypses of necessity (A(N)), focus on re-writing certain world-committing beliefs to justify and strengthen the claims of those beliefs by giving them a shape. A(N)s, I will argue, are an attempt to enter that debate and settle it once and for all. Using fiction to give their debatable truths shape and a recognizable form, A(N)s utilize the end of the world to present a

complete picture of the world, one which validates their world-committing beliefs. These apocalypses can lead their thinkers and readers to pin down, or reify (see previous chapter), beliefs central to their concept of the world—beliefs taken, perhaps too incautiously, as necessary truths.

Allow me a brief but obvious example: *The Day After Tomorrow*, the 2004 global warming disaster film inspired by 1970s eco-sci-fi and pop-apocalyptic interpretations of climate science reports, asserts with necessary certainty the existence of climate change and its troubling consequences.[24] Devoted to scaring you into recognizing the horrors of global warming, the film zooms in on this single truth about the world (that global warming will have devastating effects on the ocean's currents and therefore the planet's climate) and exaggeratedly traces how such a truth changes everything else we think is possible in the world (to the point that we watch as much of human existence—the world we knew—is near annihilated). Though the film claims effects on the entire planet's climate and instigates a major migration to the global south, most of the scenes follow the dramatic destruction of US metropolises: Los Angeles is destroyed one media crew at a time by multiple giant tornadoes and New York is overtaken by a winter storm that not only brings city-sized tidal waves but also a cold snap that freezes all who venture out into it. The New York survivors rewrite their priorities by burning books to survive and stand in awe as ships from the harbor tear through the city, upturning their expectations of the world.

By using *The Day After Tomorrow* as an example of doxastic modality I am not denying the existence of global warming or writing off science as simply belief; rather, I mean to pinpoint how this is an inherently doxastic move: using the apocalyptic imagination to center a belief about the world, *The Day After Tomorrow* helps us visualize the world differently in the face of this single, fundamental necessary truth. It takes an otherwise difficult truth to recognize in our

day-to-day lives and realizes it before our eyes. It is a move, as I will argue in this chapter, that certain apocalypses emphasize and employ to revise and recentralize what is most true and necessary about what we should believe about the world.

There are two important points of this process to note moving forward: that apocalyptic thinking both isolates and elevates particular "truths" about the world and that these "truths" are claims of necessity. *The Day After Tomorrow* does this seamlessly, and of course unscientifically, through visualization. We watch as a massive climate-change-induced storm replaces the world we know with an inhospitable and uninhabitable one. Symbols taken as monuments to human achievement, such as the Statue of Liberty, are easily overcome by the superstorm and major metropolises are frozen over as if they were in Artic, to an assumedly uncountable number of casualties. Within an hour, we can watch global warming wreak havoc in ways that make our lives small and meaningless, without decades of waiting.[25]

The second important point is that, unlike other apocalypses that open up the possibilities of what the world can be, A(N)s emphasize a re-centering around a single, necessary truth, a closing-off of the world's possibilities. Most akin to a literal apocalypse (ἀποκάλυψις, "unveiling"), all the world's chips are on the table, the cards are flipped, and the incontestable nature of the world is revealed. In the case of *The Day After Tomorrow*, that necessary truth revealed is how much our planet, and therefore our species, relies on a well-stewarded climate and environment. What was once debated (even if foolishly) is now proved true and the viewer is asked if she bet on the correct truth.

In this way, these apocalypses that necessitate certain world-committing beliefs become fictional proving grounds for these same beliefs. One is not convinced by the next-to-non-existent science of *The Day After Tomorrow*, for one need only watch as the "truth" plays out

before their eyes as fictional testament to the world-altering reality of these beliefs. These necessary truths are revealed—but even more importantly realized—by their own depictions.

But there's the rub: the fictional representation of these world-committing beliefs often conflicts with the supposedly real, "necessary" conclusion of these beliefs. Not only are they generated in belief and not found in the world itself, but if one's goal is to make clear a belief of necessity—that the world could not be otherwise—one reaches a conflict exacerbated by the use of fiction which could be "otherwise": if this is an undeniable truth, how is it possible that other people continually see it differently?[26] The answer is hydra-like: those in conflict must be wrong, miss the point, be encased in illusion, or, as I will simply call it in this chapter, in error. (I use the hydra imagery here because, like the Errour of Edmund Spenser's imagining, error even in defeat still pervades and reproduces).[27] A(N)s enter into a fight for the truth of the world. To do so, however, they engage in the use of representation—the fiction, the false, even error itself—to illustrate and make real and recognizable the content of their commitments to the world. Manifesting these beliefs through fiction, or "vision" in the case of the Book of Revelation, A(N)s make their belief-commitments more visceral and thing-like (a literal reification) but in treating them as a presentation of truth, mistake their own role in establishing these world-commitments. Thus, those who write and ascribe to these truths often have difficulty sorting-out where these hard "truths" end and the fiction of representation begin; Ayn Rand, whose apocalyptic novel *Atlas Shrugged* I will address at the end of this chapter, is known particularly for this problem, often citing the speeches of her own characters in support of her philosophy. This conflicted entanglement of error, as I hope to show by the end of the chapter, arises in the nature of the world-committing beliefs themselves and the inability of the kind of worldview they produce to account for the plurality of worldviews into their "true" worlds.

In this chapter, I will argue that A(N)s, in their attempts to manifest or reveal the truth of the world-committing beliefs of their creators, utilize the world-uncertainty of apocalyptic thinking to center the world on the claims of necessity vital to their worldviews. To emphasize these keys beliefs, A(N)s collapse differing forms of necessity, such as blending moral truths into physical laws, to make their otherwise debatable truths undeniably true. Employing Kit Fine's definition of different kinds of necessity to single out their distinct applications, I will first track this collapse in the Book of Revelation and how it is used to animate and justify the then radical beliefs of first century Christians.[28] I will argue this collapse makes Revelation's otherwise inconceivable world-committing beliefs real and present but splits the world in two, into a world of God (the true) and that of misled "inhabitants of the earth" (the false).

But while this mode of apocalyptic thinking works as form of resistance for an early Christian, it becomes a curious problem in its less marginalized 20th century applications. To illustrate the pressure such thinking puts on maintaining a singular and all-encompassing worldview, I will turn to the example of *Left Behind*, a late 20th century novelization of the Book of Revelation. *Left Behind* also splits the world in two, but its inability to account for the difference of perspective (those who fall into the category of false) only produces more anxiety; for the more A(N)s reveal the truth, the less capable they are of explaining error, or those positions outside their own beliefs of totality. A(N)s need but cannot provide a complete description of the world to defend their truth because it is doxastic—which means it is a matter of subject positions which could be otherwise. The anxiety generated in this haunting awareness, present in *Left Behind*, results in the final pattern common to A(N)s: the destruction of the world of error. The final section of this chapter will track the encounter and ultimate destruction of erroneous worldviews in Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* and how she conceptualizes this process in

her journals. Unable to either understand or account for how people come to see the world differently, A(N)s obliterate these other worlds of error to justify and secure the totality of their own worldviews.

Collapsing Necessities for and in Revelation

The first step in tracking the methods and consequential problems in this kind of apocalypse is to elucidate how these texts manifest and reify their central truths (their world-committing beliefs of necessity). To do so, I will examine the ur-text of Western apocalypticism, the Book of Revelation. This is a particularly helpful example for a multitude of reasons, from its clear manifestation of its totalizing truth (God) to the context of its production, which is notably quite unlike the other A(N) examples in this chapter. In this section, I will argue that the Book of Revelation, coming from a time and place of unique culture pressure, utilizes the apocalyptic mode in an act of imaginative resistance against empire. I will not argue this occurs simply through allegorical code, though that certainly exists as we know from the work of many scholars.[29] Instead, I will focus on how the representation of God's fight for the world allows John of Patmos (Revelation's author) to collapse all the varieties of necessity—which I will define through the work of Kit Fine—to center the Christian God as the supreme embodiment of necessity for the universe. This act makes the non-empirical manifest, reified through fictional form, and justifies the early Christian's normative or moral beliefs that have been aggravated by the pressure of colonization. This revelation ultimately leads to a splitting of the world, between that of the right and that of the wrong.

While I mean to expand on the role of necessity in this text, I think it crucial to begin with this key difference from the following examples in this chapter, which is also its source of

anxiety: being a Christian in the Roman Empire between the mid to late first century C.E. This ur-text, though crafted in light of and within a long-standing form fostered in cultural anxiety, is both the product and production of its own unique moment of potential erasure and resistance.[30] Though scholars have some difficulty pinning a date on Revelation with a degree of exactness, it is generally agreed that, though these early Christians during did not suffer systematic persecution during the composition of Revelation, the early church felt itself under threat.[31] Rome had destroyed the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E. and many of important church leaders had been killed by Roman authorities or mobs by the time of its writing. Besides the threat to their own existence, the pressure of doxastic relevance also weighed on the Christian mind. Elaine Pagels notes how the provinces of Asia, which largely backed Marc Antony following Julius Caesar's assassination and was thus eager to please Octavian, began monumental construction of imperial temples and Roman statues in submissive acquiescence to a new Roman empire (Pagels 13). These monuments likely not only insulted these early Christians' monotheistic sensibilities but often depicted the conquered nations in degrading submission, a grating reminder of the colonized's lack of power. With a future like this for one's existence and beliefs, the Book of Revelation becomes an act of imaginative resistance in a world set on eliminating its very beliefs and a way of realizing their own hidden truths—their God's central role in the function of the universe—in spite of the Roman world that fails to recognize their God. Revelation is the manifestation of those truths, those necessities. How? The answer, I believe, lies in the role of representation (for Revelation, that is "vision") and its collapse of different kinds of necessity.

To track this distinction, we will need to take a quick detour through analytic philosophy, particularly Kit Fine's work on necessity. Fine's "Varieties of Necessity" argues that there are "three major forms of necessity—the metaphysical, the natural, and the normative—and that

none of them is reducible to the others or to any other form of necessity" (253). These distinctions, nicely argued by Fine, establish the different ways of making demands on the world that are not reducible to a different kind (so natural necessity, e.g., is not simply a type of metaphysical necessity). Though not a doxastic model, these kinds make key distinctions for how we think through claims of necessity, especially as they appear in fiction.

The first kind, *metaphysical necessity*, is the long-time central definition of necessity in philosophical discourse, the "sense of necessity that obtains in virtue of the identity of things (broadly conceived). Thus, in this sense it is necessary not only that everything red is red or that nothing is both red and green, but also that I am a person or that 2 is a number" (254). Metaphysical necessity is concerned with claims concerning the properties of things, their indispensable qualities and the logical necessities that follow from them.[32] This is the form of necessity most often engaged in possible worlds theory, as philosophers try to pin down things as they are in any given case.

The second kind is *natural necessity*, which "pertains to natural phenomena" (256), such as when "one billiard-ball hits another. We are then inclined to think that it is no mere accident that the second billiard-ball moves. Given certain antecedent conditions and given the movement of the first ball, the second ball *must* move. And the 'must' here is the *must* of natural necessity" (256). In some ways the most intuitive of Fine's kinds, natural necessity is composed of those physical laws we encounter everyday, such as the nature of gravity either in a pencil dropping or planetary revolution, where the "fabric of the universe is envisaged to exclude a certain sort of behavior," such as a pencil falling up or the halt of planetary revolution (258).

Finally, there is *normative necessity,* moral judgements that are held up as unconditional (so applicable in every possible case, such as "every war is necessarily wrong"). As moral

claims, these non-empirical judgments are not indicative of the way the world is, but what it ought to be, the moral claims that hold us we such sway that we consider ourselves "subject to moral law" (267). These are the most slippery; despite their non-empirical quality, we have a tendency to treat them as generative of physical and metaphysical consequences and thus becomes Hume's strong "ought" masquerading as an "is".[33]

But where Fine has kinds and Hume a guillotine, the A(N) has a needle, thread, and the magic of representation. While all three kinds of necessity come into play in the Book of Revelation, they all collapse into a single, encompassing necessity, which is centered in the narrative from the very beginning. The Book of Revelation begins with the "must" of this necessity: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what soon must take place" (*NSRV* 1.1). As traditional with ancient literary conventions, John begins by stating the contents of the composition: parsed by clause, it is firstly a revelation, secondly sent by God, and thirdly what "must soon take place" ("ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι"). (John then finishes this sentence by explaining how it was revealed and to whom). As we recognize from Fine, this "must" (δεῖ, commonly translated as "it is necessary," "it behooves one," or "must") is a form of necessity, though initially ambiguous in nature. This exact "must" of things to come ("ἃ δεῖ γενέσθαι") returns again, after John has finished addressing each Anatolian church, when John is invited to witness the divine throne-room, his initial encounter with God: "I heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.' At once I was in the spirit, and there in heave stood a throne, with one seated on the throne!" (4.1-2). The repetition of the exact phrase again solidifies the purpose of revelation: to define and share the necessary course of history and the world as spoken by God himself (or the approximation of metaphors that denote God as such). This also ties the role of necessity and

world-determining to the throne room, which Revelation continuously returns to before any form of divine intervention to show the divine sovereignty in determining events in the world.

Thus, Revelation is focused on imparting this vision of the divine order, the hidden determining mechanism of the world itself. We can see this built into the description of the throne room, where even mundane things are invested with sacred significance that confirms the idea of a divine plan. Divine order is on display in the repetition of sacred numbers; the throne room contains, in addition to the central throne, "twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones are twenty-four elders" (4.4), the four "living" creatures (the source for Blake's Zoas) (4.6), and "seven flaming torches which are the seven spirits of God" (4.5). Each of these number of course contains sacred significance: twenty-four, as a doubling of twelve, suggests a combination of the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles; four creatures fulfills Ezekiel's prophecy of God in a chariot led by four winged creatures; while seven, connected to Genesis as the number of days it took God to make the world and used fifty-seven times in Revelation alone, symbolizes divine pattern "evident in both the universe and history" (Notes in NSRV 2089). These numerical orderings are the physical manifestation of divine purpose, the embodiment of godly truths significantly tied to the creation of the world and God's will within it, here no longer obscured by millennium of history, empires, and even various other world-ordering concepts. While it may seem impossible to comprehend the purpose even when laid bare—it is the will of God and thus tautologically embedded divine order—the throne room is itself clearly designed on the basis of sacred meaning. Unlike in the human world, nothing is without clear purpose or symbolic significance. While the rest of Revelation shows the reader how this divine necessity—the governing rules of the world—is built both into God's domain as well as the human domain, there is no occlusion of this order in the throne room; it is divine revelation, the nature of the

world-order (metaphysical necessity, the very identity or ordering principle of the world) laid bare.

More than an awe-inspiring signal towards sacred significance, this kind of purposeful, symbolic design plays an important role in making a non-representable god (metaphysical necessity) present. The use of numerology in Revelation ties the ordered embodiment of God's will with the manifestations of the divine selves. God is only referred to as the "one seated on the throne" and is signaled through thunder and other divine symbols (4.3). Never embodied in image or symbol, "the one who sits on the throne" is only visible through his actions, such as speaking through thunder. The radical absence, even in revelation, manifests God's identity (creator of the totality) through the necessary course of actions for the world itself. The purposeful construction of world events is God's very embodiment. Even Jesus, God's embodied son, is manifested in Revelation through this coding of purpose (symbolically and numerologically). Jesus appears as a lamb (the intentional sacrifice) marked by the divine, "seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out to all the earth" (5.6). Though the "one on the throne" is never revealed or physically present in Revelation outside his actions, his presence is manifested in the shape of determining order, including the other creatures and kings that do his will. Executors of the things that must be, such as the four creatures (4.6), the four horsemen (allegorical agents of God's will in history) (6.1-8), or the event-inducing seven seals (5.1) all speak to the manifestation of God's identity in the world, i.e his own will in the construction of it.

Thus, visions of this throne room, as the embodiment of divine necessity, typically precede all the major events of Revelation, tying the happenings of the world (the necessary course of history) to this identity of God (his will). The most obvious example of this is of course

the Lamb (Jesus) opening up the seven seals, each of which in control of a chain of events that initiates a reign of terror on the earth and its inhabitants. This action, occurring in the throne room, not only places the history of the human world in the hands of the Lamb who enacts each event as it opens each seal, but reduces the final days of the world and its possibilities to a pre-written scroll—or perhaps simply an algorithm. This moves the metaphysical necessity of God's will, manifested in the design of the throne room, into the world of humans and the natural world itself. While this is evident in the first four seals that unleash the four horsemen of the apocalypse who bring about world events like famine and war, the conflation of metaphysical and natural necessity is clearest in the opening of the sixth seal which ignites "a great earthquake; the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars in the sky fell to earth as the fig tree drops its winter fruit when shaken by a gale" (6.12). Resonating a sublimely apocalyptic tone, the natural world comes undone by its very unnaturalness, for we sense an unknown new set of rules at play for determining the world. The natural necessities we rely on (e.g. that stars do not behave like figs, even if one does not recognize gravity or the Big Bang) spin wildly into the control of new rules: the sun no longer shines, the moon produces a different light, and stars behave under the same gravitational rules as figs. (Even if we construe these as mis-descriptions of scientifically plausible events—perhaps an eclipse, blood moon, and meteor shower—we normally do not consider physical laws to answer to a scroll). While it's unsurprising that the belief in an all-mighty god results in such a god controlling the world, this is a revelation that literally lays bare how a central world-committing belief of necessity can subsume other kinds, here natural necessity under metaphysical necessity. Revelation can unveil the truth of the world because—and only

because—it has found a way to manifest a non-empirical metaphysical necessity and causally connect it to nature and history (natural necessity).

But this is not the only way in which Revelation collapses necessity into a single, world-defining truth; rather, as a testament to faith and reassurance for the wavering, the Book is set on the ultimate collapse of metaphysical necessity with normative necessity, that is, uniting those disputed world-committing beliefs of moral necessity (which god controls the universe and *ought* to be worshipped) with the underwritten truth about the nature of the world itself (the metaphysically necessary). Simply, if you are a Christian under Roman rule towards the end of the first century, you have a problem: the world is *not* what it *ought* to be. Though God operates as a form of metaphysical necessity that pervades everything in the book, this is not true (or at least recognizably so) of the world John lives in. The early Christian God, center of these believers' very understanding of the world, is no more empirically recognizable than any other god (in fact, even less so, considering their resistance to iconography in an age of pantheons and imperial cults whose massive construction is particularly pervasive). The Book of Revelation, in illustrating the things that must be, is finding a way to present the non-representable God; it is an attempt to realize a moral necessity in a world that radically disagrees. Thus, Revelation focuses intensely on the judgement of those who fail to recognize this fundamental *moral* truth of the world, that the Christian God is in control of the universe. But this leads us back to Hume's guillotine, where "should" and "is" are separate; what people should believe about God and the world (for an early Christian) is not in fact what they do believe. It is a simple but crisis-inducing problem: the Christian needs to manifest these beliefs via the reification of fiction to make them visible, but to do so is to trap them in the thing-like realm of the empirical. This is treacherous, for the empirically determined normative necessity is "still subject to a serious epistemological

problem. For what is this mechanism for fixing reference, that both allows for genuine disagreement on matters of morality and yet respects the non-empirical character of moral belief, meant to be? How can the reference of terms hook up to the real world, yet our justification for believing a substantive body of ethical truths not require any access (or any substantive access) to that world?" (Fine 277). Simply, in this case, if God is the central necessitating fact of the world, why is there any dispute? Why is John surrounded by the gaudy idols of emperors and other gods? John needs to manifest God, the "ideal cognizer who is capable of grasping a complete description of world" which "is merely a device to factor out irrelevant empirical considerations" (Fine 274). To "fix" their moral beliefs, John needs the all-necessity-bearing, all-encompassing God who not only can justify their submission with the promise of the future, but sort and exile the false-believing colonizers.

In this way, early Christians need a "complete description of the world" to fend off the forces of their political reality, which aggressively turned against this belief. The world must be laid bare *for* others, because there are others who do not, cannot, or will not see the truth of such a world. To borrow from Northrop Frye's argument on the intersection of the Bible's ideal world (which the apocalypse reveals) and the believer's context:

> "there is the problem that the nations outside of Israel –Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Phoenicia—are as a rule more wealthy, prosperous, and successful than Israel. They possess the power and domination the Israelites themselves longed to possess, and would certainly have regarded as a signal mark of divine favor had they had possessed it. The only recourse is to show this heathen success in a context of demonic parody, as a short-lived triumph that has all the remarks of the real thing except permanence" (140).

Frye's argument hits firstly on the larger stroke that Revelation is devoted to visualizing a world that simply is *not* the case but rather one to come and secondly a key pressure (here political and violent) of differing world-committing beliefs that claim to be necessary truths. If early Christians have the right belief in the right god and godly values—a totalizing God who is beginning and end, living and dead—why is the world so openly hostile to them? For the stout monistic-world thinker, the answer is not a failure of one's world-committing beliefs, but of others': someone (else) is wrong. By presenting God as pervasive world-controller who has written all of the world's future into a scroll, Revelation can justify these beliefs from the perspective of an ideal cognizer who knows the truth of all the facts.

This need for recognition and justification for otherwise non-manifestable belief can explain the proliferation of the rhetoric of true and false belief throughout Revelation. Yes, as revelation, truths are meant to be finally recognized, but the Book of Revelation obsesses over the false (that the Antichrist steals the show is not news to even the lax reader). We can see this in the imagery of tests and trials that is central to the text, for Revelations details "the trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth" (3.10). This testing applies to believer and non-believer alike. John, before outlining the vision of Revelation, delivers messages to each of the Anatolian churches that first introduces this trial-imagery as well as suggests the faithfulness of believers as a primary concern. Reminding the audience they are first going to be "tested" to find those who are "false" (2.2), this interrogation rhetoric is repeated in a variety of ways to most of the churches addressed.

These messages also intimate that these trials' import is not about right and wrong but recognition; John tells Philadelphia, "I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and are not, but are lying—I will make them come and bow down before your feet and

they will learn that I have loved you" (3.9). They "will learn," indeed—but not before the Antichrist is given free-rein to spread the illusion of the false. Much of Revelation details the fantastic shenanigans of the Beast, his deceptive works, and the tricks and force used to lull the foolish into false belief. Perhaps this false belief is best understood as code, via the number six, which the repetition of which is striking in its opposition to the numerology of God. If the previous sacred numbers (four, seven, and twenty-four), all carry the revelation of godly order, six is the number of the false, that which does not. But though it reflects a wrong commitment to the world-order of the Beast, it too proliferates in the text, giving voice to a different order; it is a *part* of the world. Thus, the world-order of the Beast must be brought under judgment, recognized for what it is, and subjugated ("bow down before your feet"). The sussing out of wrong thought, wrong belief is central to Revelation and the God who forces it, declaring "I am the one who searches minds and hearts" (2.25).

But uncovering the false—and even subjugating it—does not rid the world of this epistemic problem; instead Revelation must secure its god-world's totality against the false. Revelation makes multiple efforts to establish a complete godly totality, both through the collapsing of necessity and in the descriptions of God. Jesus claims in himself a binary breaking all-encompassing identity, "I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys to Death and Hades" (1.17-1.18). Beginning and end, enclosed, and that which crosses both living and dead, Revelation posits its divine as not only truth but everything. For this reason, godly totality is under threat of the false beliefs, which do not clearly cohere to the divine order, nor recognize its truth. This can be sensed when the two themes—that of God's true totality and eventual subjugation of the false—appear in close proximity: "and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail. So it is to be. Amen. 'I am the

Alpha and Omega,' says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come" (1.7-8). The wailing of the wrong and the triumph of God's world go hand in hand; for either his totality must encompass the false or destroy it. To root out and reveal the false is to find what isn't within God's totality, and thus what risks making it not an all-encompassing totality.

Thus, in Revelation's attempt to render its God visible and justify its normative claims on the world, the texts conflates different types of necessity and, by revealing its moral truths as necessary, splits totality in two—a world of believers and a world of the wrong. This requires a sleight of hand regarding world-committing beliefs; necessary beliefs (and even facts) are swept up into a single, necessary truth within the narrative of godly totality, one that destroys and replaces totalities of difference to secure its beliefs. We see both how this apocalyptic tactic effectively makes determinate the occluded, non-presentable world-committing beliefs (John's God) but also its consequential difficulties; if your goal is to present these essential truths as obvious through a representational method—the fictional, even as vision—your success relies on diluting your truth with fiction and displacing this truth into a world at best not yet realized. Beneath the shock and awe of apocalyptic imagery and literary device, compelling in its dramatization, is a simple question: is the vision truth? And if so, how is that vision-truth different from empirical reality? For the believer in this kind of totality, the answer seems to be yes and that the difference is the occlusion of false belief. For Christians in John's time, this is an important move of imaginative resistance in the face of a different, hostile world. However, when we begin to discern this dynamic in more current iterations—especially in its fundamentalist adaptation in *Left Behind*—things get curiouser and curiouser: where does this anxiety of difference go, when one is no longer the subjugated to powerful cultural institutions bent on their total destruction?

"More than a Theory" But Less than Nothing

"Most people are blind and deaf to the truth until they find it; then *it makes all the sense in the* world*"* Left Behind (332)

In this chapter, I have argued that A(N) tries to manifest and necessitate certain world-committing beliefs to overcome the pressure of dissenting views and justify those beliefs. Perhaps there is no better example of this than Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*, a novel published in 1995 that soared to popularity and the top of New York Times Best Seller List by the turn of the millennium. A fictionalization of the Book of Revelation that reads like a Tom Clancy novel, *Left Behind* is an unabashed attempt at evangelization through imagining the final days—or years, based on the series' twenty-five book expansion—before Jesus' second-coming. But unlike its religious source material, *Left Behind* was not created to give voice to endangered beliefs in an antagonistic empire, but was likely a for-profit endeavor attempting to respond to an at-worst unkind public in a nation with the largest Christian population on the planet.[34] What justification does such a text require? What anxiety requires it?

I ask these questions because *Left Behind* does contain an anxiety but one different from Revelation, one I think aggravated by the epistemic problems inherent to A(N)s. *Left Behind*, like Revelation, focuses on the task of sorting the good and bad as a way to present and justify its own world-committing beliefs regarding the world's singular source of necessity and truth (it's God). But whereas Revelation depicts an approximation of God (and can as "vision"), *Left Behind* encounters the apocalypse through the perspective of some of the "inhabitants of the earth," those who did not properly accept Christ before the beginning of the end times. *Left Behind* thus gets entangled in the problem of error: how can you manifest the totalizing truth of it

all when it is a matter of perspective, or who *can* recognize truth? In this section, I will argue *Left Behind* is a revealing example of the worldly anxiety buried within A(N)s and the problem of justifying non-empirical belief. Though the novel manifests its godly necessity through the same apocalyptic process as Revelation, *Left Behind* becomes particularly embroiled in error due to its genre and perspective-based differences. Whereas John's text is a vision—an allegorical exchange with God and his manifest necessity itself (and thus error is reserved for those who misunderstand)—*Left Behind*'s realism is stuck in the limited perspectives of those eventual converts and thus the human concerns of defending non-empirically based beliefs: what is the truth and who has the authority to know it? Who truly is a "real" Christian? Where, what, or who is God, this total manifestation of truth? Though the novel writes God as somehow both what is logical and what is beyond logic—problematic already, for this "beyond" is just the collapsing of necessity in this fictional world—it cannot secure the grounds of its own belief and stumbles into its own trap of error; how do you know, with a still absent God, for sure? Rather than resolving the anxiety produced in these contested beliefs and converting those in error, *Left Behind* depicts the precarious, fictional perch from which it dictates truth, which lingers in the novel's obsessive rhetoric of true and false.

Let's begin by first examining how *Left Behind* centers the world, that is, calls attention to the world and our commitments to it, through crisis. The apocalypse of *Left Behind* focuses on the withdrawal of the righteous Christians (the Rapture) who are saved from the apocalyptic disaster detailed in the Book of Revelation that ensues (also referred to as the Tribulation). This disappearance is both instantly and intensifyingly disastrous. Perhaps the cataclysmic nature of this suddenness is best understood and displayed in the 2014 film adaption starring Nicholas Cage, which, in defiance of the novel's evangelical mission, becomes a two-hour effort to land a

plane in world without the support of properly staffed airplanes or airports. This is the initial cataclysm of the novel, and it turns the world upside-down in ways we normally expect of apocalyptic disaster. Without the proper human-power to keep various social institutions properly running, much of the beginning of the LaHaye and Jenkins' apocalypse opens on the terrors and "unending tragedies" of unmanned vehicles, EMT shortages, and many desperate, failed attempts to contact loved ones through downed forms of communication (29). As a result of the disappearance of these righteous individuals, the world also becomes "an ugly place overnight" (207), where looting goes up "200%" within a week "as if inner city has moved into the suburbs" (260, 265). While we should of course note the clear racist and xenophobic nature of this signal to the likely suburban reader, it reveals a shift from the supposedly functional order of the world (where "inner-cities" are not suburbs) to one in which the world ceases to operate according to its supposed "normal" order. The novel not only signals this crisis arises out of the absence of people in general, but the absence of what the novel considers to be *good* people who kept the world intact.

This centers the debate regarding the true nature of the world, even as it makes it more uncertain. As with the decentered subject of "The Waste Land," this uncertainty results in a crisis of belief amongst the remaining characters as they try to understand what to believe in the face of a "world [that has] been skewed" (94). However, what begins in initial confusion—throughout the novel there are debates whether the crisis of people disappearing is due to aliens, new military technology, or some kind of strange scientific event—becomes the central problem of the novel because "whoever had the answers is gone" (106). Undoing previous commitments to what is possible, each of the three central characters is forced to recognize his or her incapacity for fully grasping totality. This is initially felt as an opening-up of possibility, as Rayford, the

first to acknowledge this forced shift of perspective, acknowledges "I wouldn't have dreamed any of this was possible a week ago, but my logic has been stretched to the breaking point" (160). Throughout the novel, the characters try obsessively and repetitiously to think through the world as radically different, discontinuously placed outside of time—for "nothing was as it was before or would ever be again" (343)—and cosmologically and fundamentally reorganized, for "the world was changing. Things would never be as they had been" (357). Buck, an Ivy-league journalist and the last of the three main characters to convert, perhaps visualizes this decentered world-estrangement best before his final commitment to the truth of Revelation: "It already seemed as if he were living in a science fiction thriller . . . what appeared to be a universe out of control" (395). The characters seem to experience the world as estrangement; the world no longer bends to the so-thought everyday rules they had to recognize but appears radically disordered—leaving the characters in a state of worldlessness.[35]

That is, until they realize in the course of the novel's events what the reader already knows: that this experience of world-apostasy and its possibility serves the evangelical purpose to guide the reader to a commitment to a newly god-centered world, a commitment of necessity. There is an illusion of possibility in the theories that immediately swirl in the face of the Rapture (355), but we are tied to the consciousness of our main guide through the apocalypse, Rayford, whose conversion is near simultaneous with the event. Rayford, whose self-acknowledged "religious fanatic" wife and younger child disappear with the other righteous (5), drives this "quest for truth" in the "hope that there was another chance for truth and knowledge" (104). Rayford is constructed as a trusted skeptic for the reader; not one for non-empirical thought, but a believer in "rules, systems, laws, patterns, things you could see and feel and hear and touch" (5), Rayford functions to guide the cynical and worldly reader through an authentic religious

transformation through Rayford's own struggles to unite the material facts (changes in natural necessity, as the world bends to God's plan) of the novel's world into a coherent totality. Unlike the complete perspective of totality from which John writes Revelation, Rayford is thinking through from the unknowing perspective of the "inhabitants of the earth" and the difficulty of seeing through one world to another. This challenge to grasp the world is further aggravated by the rise to power of the Antichrist, a magically deceptive and popular politician who not only preaches world peace and can speak "nine languages fluently" (232) but can make the masses "see lies as truth" (427). The apocalypse of *Left Behind* transitions from the material disaster of a world up-ended to the epistemological task of digging out the true world.

The search for determinant truths in *Left Behind* becomes an obsession with "logic," as the word itself is continually repeated throughout this "quest for truth." This logic seems, at first, divorced from proper Christian thinking, an obsession with facts that does not incorporate God (even if God is "the word" or λόγος). Often, the characters' overly analytic nature and dedication to the logical seems to explain why they failed to be good believers. However, this same logic begins to work for them, in the evangelical sense, in the wake of the apocalypse. Note this single exchange between Rayford and his daughter Chloe about the disappearance of their loved ones, which not only displays the novel's clear interest in "logic" but how it becomes a vehicle for their eventual conversions: "You're saying the only logical explanation is God, and he took his own and left the rest of us? . . . 'If what I'm saying is right, the logical two people [in the family] are gone and the logical two were left" (165). Despite the novel's standard for repetition, this is one of the most glaring incidents. The focus on the "only" logical possibility and the "right" starting point centers both the potential for error as well as the necessary conclusion. Chloe solidifies this potential to be otherwise in a later discussion, observing "it makes a lot of sense if

you buy into all that. I mean, you have to start with the right foundation. Then it all works neatly. But if you're still not sure about God . . . you're still wondering what happened and why (230-231). What is first registered in the novel as failing of non-believers finds its relative ground in the subject-position or "foundation" it springs from.

But as Raymond and the other characters slowly convert, the novel goes to great lengths to note how God is logic itself, making God the natural conclusion to which all roads lead. For Rayford, God is "the next logical step" (120), whereas Buck sees God as a unitary conclusion he desires, that thing that "tied it all together and made it make sense" (386). In this way, the logic that had previous led away from God serves to both lead to God and slowly rule out all other possibilities, until as Rayford discovers, characters can "see no other logical explanation" (169). So successful is this strategy that even our Ivy League journalist is forced to admit it is a matter of "intellectual honesty": "He had known beyond a doubt for the first time in his life that unexplainable things out there could not be dissected and evaluated scientifically from a detached Ivy League perspective . . . Everyone in the world, at least those intellectually honest with themselves, had to admit there was a God after that night. Amazing coincidences had occurred before, but that had defied all logic" (395). In this way, the three main characters are convinced by "logic" itself into being believers. Nothing solidifies this articulation of a grander "logic" beyond speculation than Rayford's introduction to his great persuasion of Buck and his daughter: "I have more than a theory" (383).

Rayford is, of course, right: he does have "more than a theory," one that "defies all logic"—he has a fictional world (the novel) constructed to make this world-concept coherent. Like the Book of Revelation, *Left Behind*'s apocalypse drastically rewrites the world by collapsing necessity to make its worldview both logical and determinate. The rapture becomes "a

fact" and the world fundamentally shifts (102). These radical world-changes, beyond the first apocalyptic event, are most obviously present in the schematic mapping of the Book of Revelation; the Antichrist is Romanian (to connect with Rome, a literal "descendent"), Russia maintains secret alliances with Ethiopia and Libya to fight Israel (14), and Israel, through a miracle invention that turns deserts into exceedingly productive farmland, becomes one of the richest countries in the world (most miraculously in spite of its relatively small size). The likelihood of these events is no longer a question, as the text has already written them. Those it hasn't written, it has predicted and estimated according to a dispensationalist interpretation of Revelation (309-314).[36] Their beliefs are secured by the fundamental changes to the world itself.

Thus, Rayford can easily convince us it makes sense to believe in God when there is no other scientific explanation for the disappearance of only "true" Christians. This is how, despite its promise of logical conversion and of a meeting between facts and beliefs, it truly steps beyond "logic": "It was time to move beyond being a critic, an analyst never satisfied with the evidence. The proof was before him: the empty chairs, the lonely bed, the hole in his heart. There was only one course of action" (214). Rayford's move "beyond" is in direct response to the proof provided by the material rearrangement of his world and necessitates "only one" course of action, and "no other option" (398). The manifestation of LaHaye and Jenkins' theocentric world forces a fundamental readjustment in Rayford's world-committing beliefs, one that hits him with the force of necessity. Though "To him, nothing was beyond belief" (15), this rearrangement of world-committing beliefs of necessary fact, certain interpretations become more logical than others as one truth becomes truer than all the rest. With such a clearly defined world and totality, one can find the "right" foundations, the "right" belief. Of course; for "when the supernatural

[comes] crashing through his academic pretense . . . you'd have to be blind not to see the light now, no matter how educated you thought you were" (237).

Thus, the apocalypse in *Left Behind*, like the Book of Revelation, manifests an otherwise hidden or contested world-committing belief; God becomes determinate and even the logically preferable choice. However, this raises the same question that Chloe asks a doubting Buck towards the end of the novel: "Tell me this, Buck, just with your cognitive-reasoning skills. If there is a God and if this is all true, wouldn't he want us to know?" (405). Wouldn't he, indeed? Chloe, seemingly voicing the authors' speculation on the logic of God, theorizes the apocalypse as one, last-ditch effort for God to make himself and the truth known, i.e. "God's final effort to get the attention of every person who has ignored or rejected him" (212). If God is the "Alpha and Omega" (Revelation 1.7-8) and the "way, truth, and light" (John 14.6)—the foundational truth of a single, unified totality—why does it take an apocalypse of world-shattering miracles to be revealed? LaHaye and Jenkins use an apocalypse to reveal God, but it is never enough to reveal God. Not only is it not a complete totality, it's not God; it's fiction. Even within the novel's world—where the world has been rewritten for the coming of Christ—the protagonists cannot make God more present: "I should think telling other people about our faith should be easier than ever now, but I've run into the same kind of resistance" (289). Despite the writers' attempts to make God (their all-encompassing truth and totality) determinate and present in its evangelical form, God is always mediated by representation, a fictional world of determinate, normative necessities. The apocalypse of *Left Behind* allows the writers to rearrange and re-stake necessity in a representational world, but it cannot make the world—god, totality, the cosmos, everything—truly determinate (even in the novel), nor can it truly explain the existence (and problem) of error.

Despite the world reordering in the face of God (the "right foundations") and its obvious logic, the search for the truth is simultaneously haunted by error, or simply others' difference of belief. The crisis is framed in the constant rhetoric of "right" and "wrong." Early in the novel, Rayford almost immediately frames his experience of the disappearance in these terms: "how could he know….The terrifying truth was that he knew all too well. Irene had been right. He . . . had been left behind" (19). Rayford's waffling between his own justified ignorance to certain wrongness ("how could he know . . . he knew all too well") occurs within a matter of two sentences, and with a certain immediacy he acknowledges that Irene was "right." Within this framing, the novel repeatedly returns to this problem of error. Not only are Christians judged as "real" or "true," but also via the repetition of the word "phony" (195, 370, 419). This repetition is the irritant of the novel's deeper problematic of finding the "truth." As various forms of necessity collapse into a single, necessary truth (that is, God's world), the difference amongst worldviews is explained simply as wrongness. Devotion to the belief in the world as a single, unified totality, forces a divide in the face of difference, as it "picks out its preferred domain [world] and defines it as the only really existing domain thereby drawing a sharp line between appearance (all other theories) and reality (the single true general theory)" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 16). In this way, all other exterior world-truths *must* register as false.

Thus, the attempt to justify certain world-committing beliefs, *Left Behind* as an A(N) squeezes out dissenting beliefs and knowledges out of its world. With no other "logical" choice, they are of course incoherent. This is particularly obvious in some of the anti-intellectual rhetoric that occasionally appears during the novel; some statements remind the reader certain knowledges are wasted ("for all Rayford's education and intelligence, he felt he had been a fool" (312)), while others make small digs at the elite education of Chloe and Buck which recurrently

leads them astray ("But Buck knew better than that, didn't he? He was Ivy League educated" (357)), others still accuse those left behind of "worshipping objectivity" (245). Such fun, games, and gentle mockery seem relatively harmless, but as I suggested earlier, error is a many-headed beast. With such stark commitments to a divided world of true and false, reality and appearance, how can one be sure one can count one's self as a part of the former? With God always beyond grasp, how can one be sure one is not "phony"? *Left Behind*'s rhetoric of right and wrong stresses this worry to the point that even a true Christian can't avoid.

In this way, the rhetoric of error and the threat of deception still plagues the believers, even after their conversions and into the fight against the Antichrist. This is in part due to the new lack of good authority, but also because even in apocalypse God is not recognizably present (though the Antichrist is) and the believers are still uncertain. Our heroes still have to interpret the Book of Revelation like an event calendar of the end, one in which they do not express full certainty in. Bruce, the left behind pastor, qualifies his nearly exact timeline (whether a "twenty-one month period" or "one thousand two hundred and sixty days") with such statements as "it looks to me" and "if I'm reading this right," the latter of which he repeats twice (309-313). Everything then hinges on having the right foundational perspective, the right interpretation, or "the mind of Christ" (197)—which I should note, is what Bruce admits to not having had and thus why he was left behind. Without the security of "mind of Christ" (the ideal cognizer), what guarantees they have the right belief? Faith, of course. The dispensationalist account may "makes a world of sense" in the novel (202) and the characters may constantly profess their certainty—Raymond asks before converting, "could he be more sure?" (206)—but it doesn't secure them or the novel itself from the same epistemological terror that lingers around these

points of the right belief, the right foundation. For who doesn't take their world-committing beliefs to be true? Aren't they, too, "sure"? How can one be sure one is also not in error?

Because error cannot be slayed, truth must be delayed, pushed off onto the definitive end the A(N) provides. Many A(N)s thus bear and irritate this anxiety, for every attempt to present their truth is forever doomed to be representation, one that can neither encompass everything nor *be* their truth in the world. What reveals their truth only undercuts it, reminding the reader that there are other truths, other beliefs that also *must* be overcome. To split the world into truth and error is a solution to this contestation of normative necessity but until fully realized, it is haunted by the potential to be wrong. Thus, *Left Behind* revolves around truth and error, and with every repetition it scratches the same, old itch, aggravating the already tender wound. There is no ideal cognizer, only the threat of the other, the false promise, the fake belief. It is no wonder there is so much anxiety in this worldview; for to encounter difference—what must be deemed the "false"—they end the world to justify their own belief.

Worlds of Error

> *What is offered as the identity of the subject must be accessed in the imagination when every impulse is to repudiate it. It is no use saying, with the reverse fundamentalists, true Hinduism is not like this; or to exclaim, with the secularists, I am a secularist, I do not vote with these people. The toughest task is to imagine myself a Hindu, when everything in me resists, to understand what in us can respond so bestially, rather than merely to show cause, or to impose rules that will break, in every polity but a police state, unless prepared for by a sustained and uncoercive rearrangement of desires with moves learned from the offending culture*—Gaytri Spivak, "Speech on Terror After 9/11"

Let's pause on this problem: in the fight to make certain world-committing beliefs determinate, i.e. pin them down to an image of the world that makes them clear, A(N)s further define, and are thus haunted by, error. Unable to reckon the difference of worlds and world committing beliefs under their single concept of totality, A(N)s split the world into domains of

right and wrong, true and false, reality and appearance. But without an "ideal cognizer"—who has a truly totalizing world picture—how can a believer know for sure which world they are a part? To further elucidate this problem, allow me to introduce another player in this argument who bears a strikingly similar plot and problem as its predecessor: Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*.

I do this for two reasons: first, to expand on our concepts of this kind of apocalypse beyond the obviously dogmatic and, second, to briefly touch on the telling political consequences of this similarity. It is easy it is to recognize the evangelical nature of apocalypse in a religious novel written by self-titled "Evangelicals" who mean to evangelize, particularly one attempting to illustrate the same world as the Book of Revelation. Too often scholars too easy to register "belief" as simply religious. However, this obscures the simple and prevalent nature of both world-committing beliefs and this kind of apocalypse, for there is as much evangelizing dogmatism—the attempt to make the world and its crises clear through the fictional text—in a seemingly innocuous text such as *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Day After Tomorrow* as in *Left Behind*. Not only can we recognize climate change as totalizing truth that *The Day After Tomorrow* struggles to make present on screen in the same way *Left Behind* struggles to make God clear and present, but the attempt to visualize climate change's radical revision of the world as we know it serves a similar purpose of re-writing the viewers beliefs about the world's impending environmental disaster.[37] The Book of Revelation simply is not the only tradition of this kind of apocalyptic, nor are Christians the only kind of believers who struggle with this philosophical problem of belief. Various peoples with different world-committing beliefs use apocalypse to legitimize belief for a multitude of worldviews, some more secular than others.

Moreover, *Atlas Shrugged* provides an opportunity to dabble in the material and political consequences of some A(N)s, since it is a strange fact of contemporary American politics that

this particular atheist has become the unofficial novelist laureate of the Christian right. While some good scholarship has been devoted to the political dimension of this ideological marriage, it is my hope—amidst the overarching argument regarding A(N)s—to elucidate how world-committing beliefs themselves play an important role in this convergence.[38] In advancing my argument about A(N)s, I hope also simultaneously to elucidate how the shared apocalyptic mode of *Left Behind* and *Atlas Shrugged* helps us better understand this surprising overlap through shared world-committing beliefs. With these motivations in mind, I will argue in this section that *Atlas Shrugged*, too, is an A(N) and as such, faces the same conceptual difficulties as *Left Behind*: to secure the truth of particular world-committing beliefs (for Rand the foundational role of capitalism in civilization's success). Rand, as with other writers of A(N)s, splits her world through a depiction of error so pervasive and radicalizing that it haunts its very producer. Through Rand, I will move this argument regarding the patterns of A(N)s further by elucidating the final step these apocalypses take to justify their normative claims of necessity, namely that, because of this problem with error that ultimately splits the totality in two, the totality of error must be destroyed.

Perhaps unexpectedly, Rand's apocalypse is similar to *Left Behind*'s. *Atlas Shrugged* like *Left Behind* also focuses on a withdrawal of righteous, correct-world-bearing individuals. The title itself declares it. Atlas represents for Rand the "prime movers," the purely rational creators who are the source of all industrial invention and civilization's functional cohesion, and he shrugs. In other words, these exceptional individuals give up their duties and go on strike. But where *Left Behind* focuses on the disaster *after* the withdrawal of the saved individuals, *Atlas Shrugged* details the events leading up to and causing its crisis, forcing a recognition of the importance of the prime movers in maintaining social order. Creating her own ideally dystopian

world where business is highly regulated and wealth is forcibly shared by the government, Rand shows us a wasteland world in which these prime movers are constantly hampered and ultimately motivated to "strike" by rampant collectivism (which is Rand's term for common-good-centric thinking that is based on her experiences of living in the Soviet Union as a youth).[39] In doing so, these prime movers intentionally destabilize trade and destroy the economy. Unlike the many apocalyptic texts we are familiar with that show us a post-apocalyptic landscape, *Atlas Shrugged* imagines "what happens to the world when its heart stops" (*Journals* 395), functionally placing Rand's righteous individuals as the unrecognized and underappreciated center of the world, the pivot around which it revolves.

As Rand's righteous slowly disappear from civilization, the apocalypse crescendos. Focusing mainly on the perspective of Dagny Taggart, the only capable executive of the country's largest railway company, the first half of the novel details the impossible work of sustaining large business ventures in a world where, through what Rand sees as collectivist incompetency, no one has enough initiative to produce anything nor enough responsibility to make decisions. Dagny waits months for late shipments of steel, fights with her brother Jim, a company president who is too cowardly to make divisive decisions necessary to save their struggling company, and watches as government regulations intervene to such an extent that the company is incapable of running safe trains. The pinnacle of this critical depletion of righteous capitalists is the preventable train accident in the middle of the novel, where, due to passing-off of responsibility and ineffective hand-wringing, Dagny's entire company allows the wrong train to pass through the wrong tunnel and in doing so kills all its passengers by exposing them to toxic fumes. To fight this kind of incompetency, Dagny and all her partners and competitors (the other prime movers) slowly and mysteriously disappear. Just as slowly, production halts and the

economy crashes. While there is much that could be said about the 1000-plus-page collapse and its purpose, Rand's philosophy is made clear in the apocalyptic imagery at the end of the book, as the striking primer movers look on a world that has been destroyed: "the darkness was hiding the ruins of a continent: the roofless homes, the rusting tractors, the lightless streets, the abandoned rail…and over the desolate earth [John Galt]" (hero and the primest of prime movers) "traced in space the sign of the dollar" (*Atlas Shrugged* 1168).

Thus, *Atlas Shrugged* is about the world for Rand; the apocalypse only serves to expose its true skeleton. Rand herself says as much, for in her notes on the novel, she asks herself what her main emphasis is—between "the prime movers, the parasites and the world"—and her reply is certain: "the answer is: *the world*. The story must be primarily a picture of the whole" (*Journals* 390). Rather than focus on the mindset and struggles of prime movers (her focus in *Anthem*), Rand seeks to use her apocalyptic strike to demonstrate the totality that necessitates these relationships, the order on which the world turns. Rand emphasizes this in her notes, in that "*the world* is featured in the story, and *the relation* of society to its prime movers" (*Journals* 397). Rand's notes both obsess over (i.e. repeatedly think through) this task of creating "a picture of the world with its motor cut off" (*Journals* 390) so that "the world learns its lesson" (395). Rand inherently understands that an apocalypse, as revelatory, can serve a didactic function, though it is in question to what extent she buys into this tactic herself. It is easy to see why Corey Robin thinks she can't tell the difference between her fictional world and the real one; for Rand they overlap. She makes statements in her journal such as "I will make the story profoundly *real*, spiritually real.[40] The plot device of the strike will then become only an exaggeration of that which actually happens, an emphasis for purposes of clarity and eloquence—not pure fantasy" (398) and "in a book of fiction the purpose is to create, for myself, the kind of world I want and

to live in it while I am creating it" (479). Rand's reflective thinking on her writing shows how she waffles between the world as it is and the world as it should be, specifically regarding the truths she finds inherent within it, even if everyone disagrees.

Thus, Rand employs a similar collapse of necessity to construct a world to reflect the truth of her moral necessity. Rand's notes illustrate this on a meta-level of writerly cognition, as we see how she reduces all morality to the recognition of her absolute: "There is no morality except an unbending, absolute recognition of the truth, in relation to everything . . . Nothing is moral but this cold, ruthless rational pursuit" (401). Rand asserts moral necessity in this "absolute recognition," regardless of whether such recognition is possible (outside the construction of her novel itself). What can all other forms of morality be except false, some illusion or delusion of the incapable? But when she expands on the importance of this rationality, we see that, for Rand, it is fused into the natural in its role in human nature: "The negation by a man of his primary human attribute (his essential attribute, the one and only attribute that makes him human) his independent rational judgment. This is all that's necessary; the rest—all the evils, corruptions, perversions—follow automatically . . . he is functioning against his own nature, he is acting against the laws of his own survival" (401). For Rand, this same moral rationality (in the sense of Fine's normative necessity) is also the sole human attribute, which to deny is to deny nature itself. Moral necessity and natural necessity are intertwined in Rand's conception of rationality and Rand continually articulates the singularity of this necessity.[41]

But, in the face of this single, world-committing belief turned necessary truth, Rand, too, must account for difference, or how others deny this human truth—despite its necessity—and inhabit the world differently. Rand pursues this obstacle as a problem of truth and error, "learning," and the belief in a wholly different (and faulty) universe: "the belief in a malevolent

universe and, from that the conviction that if he learns the truth about the universe he will discover the evils and disasters [surrounding] him" (*Journals* 402). Rand must construct a whole, separate world to account for the difference of opinion on this single moral necessity that should be obvious. But this leads to the same problems as with our other A(N)s, for, "[i]f totality exists, then it necessarily remains incomplete if we continue to exclude error from truth. Error, illusion, misunderstanding, negativity, finitude, etc. are necessary preconditions for an adequate, non-objectified understanding of the absolute as the opening up of a domain within which determinate (finite) objects can appear" (Gabriel and Zizek 5). Though Rand must fracture her singular world to do so, she constructs a new universe to account for error.

Thus, the apocalypse imagery of *Atlas Shrugged* becomes a space for Rand to explore this wrongness or difference—the "malevolent universe" of the parasite. Rand tries to think through this other world and how to best give shape to the "specific (concrete) form of the final catastrophe" of a world without her prime movers (*Journals* 399). Rand uses her novel to ask a question and answer it with an image of a dysfunctional world: "What happens when he [the parasite] rules us? The kind of vicious world you see, in which the best has been turned into a source of evil, in which competence is the source of failure, life energy is the source of destruction, and the capacity for joy is the source of the most terrible suffering" (403). It is a world of moral should, simply inverted. Though a justification for prime-mover-supremacy, Rand devotes countless pages in her notes and novel combined to discover the world of the parasite, where there is "no horror and violence—but slow disintegration. Slow rot" (*Journals* 395). Rand uses this "slow rot[ting]" apocalypse to explore the pull of her supposed natural law as well as its perversion. More than just the material destruction of order, Rand is interested in the irrational dilution of the spiritual, "the dreadful desolation of the world, not only in closed

factories and ruins, but also in spiritual emptiness, hopelessness, confusion, dullness, grayness, fear" (392). The apocalypse serves Rand as space for her to imaginatively encounter another world, even if she has already pre-determined its failure.

Rand does not shirk this duty, yet neither can she generously and fairly conceive of this difference because these others, to her, are the prime mover's opposite. We do not need Edward Said's *Orientalism* to recognize why this is disingenuous attempt of dualistic identities is primed for failure. Rand immediately positions the "parasite" as both the denier of this rationality (which is a necessary truth for Rand) and, thus, inhabiting a separate world in her notes: "Since the parasite's basic premise is escape from reason, since he has discarded his capacity for independent rational judgment (and dreads the necessity of such rationality), the most evident and all-embracing manifestation of a parasite's world will be the miserable scrambling to evade personal decisions and personal responsibility" (454). For Rand, the parasite, as a simple negation of truth, must have directly opposing values to the prime mover. There is no middle ground, no mitigating beliefs that map degrees of divergence. As necessary to the world itself, there are those who accept this human nature, and those who erroneously "discard" it. Rand seamlessly moves from this "escape" or denial to a separate world that must be inhabited because of it. Though Rand is describing behavior here (such as "evading personal responsibility"), it becomes associated with its own world.

Under such dualistic tendencies, the parasitic world must be both chaotic and empty, radically indeterminate in Rand's constructed universe of malevolent opposition, perhaps either because it is the antithesis of her world or simply because she cannot understand (determine) it otherwise. Where Rand is interested in a world committed to certain necessary truths, the parasite is of course the opposite: "Nobody will 'commit himself,' since no one is sure of

anything . . . (the theories about 'nothing is absolute,' 'nothing is certain,' 'nothing is real' are enormously popular.) It is not any particular statement they dread, but the mere fact of a definite statement, and of a man being able to make it—because this implies their own need to make [such statements]" (455). While there is a contradiction here (the parasite makes these statements while simultaneously too afraid to make statements and in need of making statements), what is striking is the lack of imagination. If afraid of definite statements, wouldn't "is" be at stake rather something vs "nothing"? As a parasite, these strike me as rather large, definite claims. Here, we understand the parasite world is incomprehensible, but only incomprehensibly. As with other A(N)s, to imagine the mis-recognition of this necessity, Rand requires the magic of fiction (or "transubstantiation," according to Robin (95)), relying heavily on metaphor and vague affect:

> "a world in the exact image of the parasite's soul—a gray shapeless fog. A world with a treacherous quicksand under one's feet—and no defined outlines, no solid shapes, no fixed entities . . . a world without focus, blurred, not to be reached, never quite in existence . . . it's an unbearable state, worse than blindness, because one would have to make constant efforts to see clearly, while knowing that's impossible" (457).

In this moment it's almost as if one can imagine Rand throwing her hands in the air in pure frustrations. It's unclear whether the world itself is indefinite in and of itself, or because we must imagine what a "soul" or "gray shapeless fog" translate to world-terms. We must agree with Rand, for "such a world must be first bewildering, then totally unbearable to an intelligent person" (455).

Rand is not alone in this; *Left Behind* and Revelation, too, must construct a separate world for the wrong and disillusioned. Even in Left Behind's process of apocalypse and this last-ditch effort to alert the inhabitants of the earth, the novel still distinguishes it as a separate "fallen world. God left control of it pretty much to Satan" (229). Rather, the tribulation following the rapture instead seems to result in a more deceptive world, a "new dangerous world" (230). The

characters are forced to recognize that the choice to be a righteous Christian and to exist complacently with societies built on erroneous beliefs is a difference of "worlds." Bruce, the pastor, explains it colloquially: "I thought I had the best of both worlds . . . You can't have it both ways. I discovered that truth in the severest way" (424). The two worlds are not only separate, but they are mutually exclusive. Revelation also clearly operates with a heavenly world for the sacred split from the world meant for the doomed "inhabitants of the earth." Those who worship elsewhere are committing themselves for a totality set for destruction. This returns us to the problem I see in each of our A(N) examples: this splitting of totality to preserve "truth" only undermines these texts' attempts to justify its singular, totalizing and necessary truth because it must *break* this same totality to do so. Creating another totality to account for the difference in worldviews comes into direct conflict with justifying the constructed empirical reality of belief. The all-encompassing world-committing beliefs to which the believers subscribe turn out to be partial, or not-so-encompassing. If the nature of its truth cannot account for error (i.e. difference), it must be excised. But to preserve the claim to totality of totalities A(N)s have their own response: deny its reality and destroy it.

As with her A(N)s constructing-compatriots, Rand first begins by treating the world of differing beliefs as an illusion, or unreal. It is the false covering of what is true, for Rand "that world (like the parasite) is a surface sham, an illusion, a mildew on the *real* world" (418). However, categorizing it as unreal, as we saw in the previous chapter, does not prevent this false view of the world from destabilizing taken-for-truth worldviews nor the same epistemological problem from rearing its head, namely, that if hers is the objectively true description of the world and its values and the parasite's is unreal, then how did it come to be? Rand gets tripped up in her own thoughts: "[The creators] must go on functioning in a hostile, vicious world unsuited to

them. Well, the world they see *is* vicious, but it's neither real nor essential nor necessary" (418) The world *is*, but it's unreal; it's not necessary, but if hers is, why isn't it the case? This world of denial likewise encroaches on the true world of the prime movers, confusing and clouding their true, rational judgement: "we have allowed him to create around us the kind of world **he** [the parasite] lives in, or imagines, or fears: the senseless, malevolent universe. We begin to doubt the power of the human mind, the reality or practicality of truth, the possibility of good and justice. We suspect that we might be living in an insane chaos, but that is a supposition with which we cannot exist or function" (403). Despite its untruth, error exists and even threatens the mental stability of Rand's ideal rational beings.

But just as error, unreal, remains a problem for her characters to overcome, so too does it haunt their author. Rand's obsessive emphasis on "right" thinking and creeping use of conditionals seems to circle around this problem. Her journals look more and more like a playbook for the characters of Left Behind: "So the process is: the right thinking creates the right desires, which create the proper activity" (475). But just as *Left Behind*'s claims to "rights" carries within it a reminder it could be otherwise, Rand nearly immediately follows these "rights" with an explanation of its error-ridden opposite, where each "right" is replaced with a "wrong" (475). Wrong thinking, which she also calls "spiritual error" (476), however, doesn't just apply to individuals but is a pattern reflected in the worldly-scale, so that "on the general scale of mankind as a whole, here is how the pattern is repeated: the right philosophy leads to the right ethics, which leads to the right politics, which lead to the right economics" (476). The same troubled positioning that secures an individual in the world secures the world itself. We can begin to sense here that Rand has "[mistook her] own activity for setting up the world . . . for something external to it" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 77).

Thus, the weight of the world rides on this thinking but finds itself insecure. Rand's positive reiteration of "is" slowly shifts into the conditional as she makes room for those who are wrong and calculates what they must do to get with the program. Rand advises, "Therefore, here is what men must be told: if, through improper thinking due to inadequate mental [capacity], you start down the wrong way—you need the creators, the best minds, to correct your errors and show you the right way" (476). (Note that these creators are the same almighty figures befuddled in the last paragraph). This is a big "if" (and one followed by two more sentences starting with the same "if"); if you are in error, how do you know? How do you know who needs to correct your errors? If wrong thinking sets off a causal pathway to destroying the entire world, at what point—and under what circumstances—is a wrong individual able to see the world for what it supposedly is and know their error? Under Rand's description of truth, how could an individual go awry in the first place? Not only is securing an empirical justification impossible, but it at some point comes back to the right world-belief not found in the world itself. This is, by (Gabriel's) definition, reification.

Error, for these reasons, not only must be eliminated from the world to bear the weight of these normative necessities but is also considered tortuous. Existing in error is a horrifying prospect, even for Rand's prime movers. Rand plumbs the depth of her protagonist's error, which is over-optimism in others, sometimes forgiving ("excusable and understandable") to threatening a potential fallout with the reality of the universe itself (424-5). However, error must ultimately be painful because it still unreal, and therefore "monstrous": "this is what happens when one departs from facts, i.e., to depart from justice (which is to depart from reality). [Regardless of] your motive, the result is still faking reality, evading facts—and the consequences will be those of any lie: corrupt, destructive, and monstrous (435-436). More than

a fiction, this is a torment, as is suggested by Rand's description of the parasite world and how it affects her geniuses indirectly, the "much greater torture which he imposes on himself by this wrong conception of the world" (404). Error, for Rand, is clearly horrifying—a monstrous, agonizing, world-destroying blunder—something one couldn't bear to be caught in, which is what makes the uncertainties and fear of error ("it seems to me," "may God forgive me (metaphor!) if this is mistaken conceit. As near as I can now see it, it isn't") in Rand's "Philosophical Notes on the Creative Process" all the more jarring against her obsessive break down of error (478-482).

Atlas Shrugged shows us what A(N) must do to truly justify its non-empirical world-committing beliefs, the lengths it must fictionally go to in attempt to secure its totality. However, it is in Rand's notes on the novel where we see how this splitting of worlds into right and wrong takes hold, as she obsessively attempts to think through and account for error. Throughout her journals on the novel, she repetitively returns to the question of error, of right thinking, of proper action, of the real world as though she we trying to scratch and unreachable itch. It is no wonder; she cannot solve this normative claim in the world itself for its generated by a commitment to a particular belief. With so much riding on being right, the problem of error only lingers, reminding us we too—may god forgive us!—may be mistaken, have the wrong foundation.

The Error that Haunts

Necessitating truth, unchecked, create reified worlds, worlds that cannot explain the source of its truth outside the reimagining the world itself. The necessary belief may be illustrated in fiction, but it cannot fully justify itself, because it is constituted by the commitments of certain beliefs not found in the world itself. No matter the content of that

necessary claim—whether god, the market, or climate change—its depiction through A(N) cannot secure its basis because it cannot only represent the world according to this necessity, rather than present it. World pictures do not commit world-beliefs; they can help, but the promise of revealed truth is only a fiction, never a proof. The presence of differing, and therefore erroneous, beliefs only exacerbates this anxiety. Error reminds us that there are positions outside our worldview and that we could think the world differently, that our certainty could be misplaced. This is haunting problem; even to destroy error and eradicate difference from your worldview cannot kill it, for noting its dire consequences only makes error more terrifying.

That error haunts should not surprise; it is a terrifying beast. No one understood this better, I think, than Edmund Spenser whose elaborate work *The Faerie Queene* begins its journey venturing into the Wandering Woods only to encounter Errour herself. Grotesquely allegorized (participating in the Christian tradition after Revelation) as half-woman, half-serpent, she wraps up the hero in her snake-like coils. As the knight struggles, the restriction increases. And though the knight eventually strangles the beast ("strangle her, else she sure strangle thee"), she only proliferates in a way, vomiting up books and papers and providing sustenance to her thousand suckling young who drink her inky blood (I.19.4). We cannot applaud the knight for though he escapes Errour here, he only wanders into another form of error, into the false Duessa's arms.

Is error avoidable? How can we guarantee a real, determinate worldview while still comprehensibly accounting for a difference of worldviews? As A(N)s constantly note and never admit, the answers to these questions do not reside in the truth of the beliefs themselves, but the configuration of the worlds they commit and how such beliefs position their relation to totality. In this chapter, I asked how beliefs shift in apocalyptic thinking in the necessitation of certain

beliefs, in centering their world around a certain absolute. However, in the next chapter, I will examine apocalypses that do the opposite by emphasizing the contingent nature of certain taken-for-truths. A(N)s display only one pattern of apocalyptic reconfiguration, one way of bringing to the front the demands and possibilities of certain beliefs. However, there are other possibilities and in them not only other worldviews, that is the content of specific beliefs, but different possibilities for a subject to position herself in relation to the world. These are different worlds, different configurations of totality.

I leave you now, reader, in the cave of Errour. If the thought of those conditionals, those differences, the threat of "the wrong concept of the world" begins to leave you breathless, do not struggle; perhaps you do not need to escape—for you will encounter it again anyway, under a different disguise or form—perhaps instead you just need a new concept of Errour.

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[24] Roland Emmerich, the writer and director of the film, cites as primary inspiration the *Coming of the Global Superstorm*, a non-fiction book which intersperses climate science with dramatizations of disaster (Revkin). For more on the problems and opportunities on this merger of fiction and climate science surrounding the film, see Ron Von Burg's "Decades Away or The Day After Tomorrow ?: Rhetoric, Film, and the Global Warming Debate" or Anthony Leiserowitz's "Before and After The Day After Tommorow: A U.S. Study of Climate Change Risk Perception".

[25] Though the film can be easily and critiqued for its misapplication of some actual science, the film seems to presciently respond to Timothy Morton's argument in *Hyperobjects*, namely that the scale of global warming is difficult to imagine in a humanly-recognizable time frame. Perhaps, besides ticket sales, this is why the film chooses fantasy over science-based realism.

[26] "Appearing, and not only being is manifold" (Gabriel 2011, xxvi)

[27] I wish to briefly excavate an underlying premise of this dissertation that is of interest to this chapter and made more evident here: namely, that the positivist tendency to dismiss the false as unreal, nonexistent, or somehow conquerable is not only untenable but potentially harmful. Most obviously, this is the basis of the previous chapter's argument, where positivist thinking undermines itself to the point of self-destruction. Error, the false, bad thinking, etc cannot be slayed. Perhaps this is why we scholars often play the role of carnival barker, catching such monsters in the wild and putting them on display. (This relies less on their extinction than a moment of recognition, which is, of course, always at risk of being tragic).

[28] For ease, in this chapter, I refer to the first century followers of Jesus as "Christians," despite the fact many perhaps would not likely have thought of themselves as such at this time. According to Elaine Pagels in *Revelations,* the writer of Revelation most likely thought of himself as a "Jew who acknowledges Jesus as Israel's Messiah" (61).

[29] For a general discussion of the political interpretations of Revelation, see Yarbo Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*. For more on the interpretations involving Nero, whom most scholars agree is referenced through gematria in the number 666, see Hans-Josef Klauk, "Do They Never Come Back? *Nero Redivivus* and the *Revelation of John*" or David Aune's *Revelation 6-16*

[30] Though I am here thinking of the Jewish apocalyptic forms that respond to conflicts of their own time appropriated by the Book of Revelation, for more on traditions and difficulties of defining this apocalyptic genre, see David Frankfurter's "The Legacies of Jewish Apocalypses in Early Christianity" and John J. Collins' "The Genre Apocalypse Hellenic Judaism"

[31] There is a long history of scholarly debate surrounding the dating of Revelation. Most scholarship posits the most likely dates as 68 C.E. and 90-96 C.E. For more on these debates, see

David Aune, *Revelation 1-5* and Adela Yarbro Collins, *Crisis and Catharsis*. Regarding Revelation's political turmoil, Pagels calls it "wartime literature" in *Revelations* (7).

[32] Much work within philosophy is devoted to defining metaphysical necessity and its various properties or its mistaken properties, e.g. Fine's own work on accidental properties in "Essence and Modality." However, since this essay is more interested in the distinctions of varieties of necessity than a meta-discourse on metaphysical necessity I will simply note some players in this conversation here: Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* and Boris Kment's "Counterfactuals and the Analysis of Necessity".

[33] I reference here what is called Hume's guillotine. Hume sharply distinguishes between prescriptive statements (what should be) and descriptive statements (what is), arguing there is no clear relation between the two.

[34] For more on population of Christians within the United States, see Hackett et al's "Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population". Also note the 2014 Pew Research Center report on "Global Religious Diversity", which also suggests the United States, with a 78% Christian population, comparatively encompasses only moderate amount of religious diversity. For more on how these evangelical beliefs are uniquely shaped by the culture they are a part of in Crawford Gibbon's comparative study between American and British dispensationalist novels, "Rapture Fictions and the Changing Evangelical Condition".

[35] As *Left Behind* self-describes this as science fiction-like, I once again would like to note Darko Suvin's notion of cognitive estrangement as an approximately helpful concept. Though the apocalypse is less "cognitive" (that is, factual) and belongs more to the realm of fantasy that Suvin excludes from his definition, the world-estranging element seems to play a similar world-divorcing role that I attribute to apocalyptic thinking. Again, however, I note the distinction in

apocalyptic thinking's interest not simply in the changes (novum) but the estrangement itself and its commitment-destabilizing power.

[36] Dispensationalist beliefs, as practiced in the United States, constitute a particular system for reading Biblical history popular among evangelical Christians that envisions history split into distinct periods, each guided by its own godly principles. What is key to note here, is that in its American fundamentalist contexts, dispensationalist thinking has embraced an eschatological perspective where many interpret our current dispensation as that which is nearing the rapture and tribulation, the events that trigger the apocalypse.

[37] I note again Morton's idea of climate change as hyperobject here to better facilitate a recognition that, like a Christian god, how difficult it is to realize a totalizing truth and its pressing need, particularly when under dispute.

[38] For a studies on this convergence, see Burack, Cynthia. "Just Deserts: Ayn Rand and Christian Right" and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. For more on Rand's slowly-settled battles with Christian conservatism see Jennifer Burns, "Godless Capitalism: Ayn Rand and the Conservative Movement."

[39] For more on Rand's history in the Soviet Union and likely influence on her work, see Burn's *Goddess of the Market.*

[40] See Corey Robin's *The Reactionary Mind* for more on Rand's use of John Galt's speech to justify her philosophy. I will simply add that Rand's description of Dagny in her journals, where she not only seems to write advice to Dagny (or "any execute") in the second person and explains how she must live alone in the world where she can only find "hope of a real world . . . in her work" (427), supports this argument.

[41] While I have stuck close to Rand's novel and her thinking around it, this collapse of various necessities is shouted from the rooftops in Rand-acolyte Leonard Peikoff's "Fact and Value" essay. Peikoff's argument that value is object requires a collapse of normative and natural necessity in the realm of fact.

CHAPTER FOUR

There Can be No Final Apocalypse

> *Philosophers like to think of themselves as having found the keys to the universe. But where there are many locks, it should be recognized that we may have need of many keys.* –Kit Fine, "Varieties of Necessity"
>
> *The imaginative fiction I admire presents alternatives to the status quo which not only question the ubiquity & necessity of extant institutions, but enlarge the field of social possibility and moral understanding. This may be done in as naively hopeful a tone as the first three Star Trek television series, or through such complex, sophisticated, and ambiguous construction of thought and technique as the novels of Phillip K. Dick or Carol Emshwiller; but the movement is recognizably the same -- the impulse to make change imaginable.*
>
> *We will not know our own injustice if we cannot imagine justice. We will not be free if we do not imagine freedom. We cannot demand that anyone try to attain justice and freedom who has not had a chance to imagine them as attainable.* –Ursula Le Guin, "A War Without End"

As we saw in the last chapter, error can be monstrous, though perhaps no more so than how we respond to it ("strangle her, else she sure strangle thee"). We can reveal, divide, and conquer it as much as we like, only to find no more secured grounding for our beliefs about the world. True totality, whether world or truth, is elusive. But without it, how are we ever to escape the terrifying reminder that we might indeed be "phony"? The problem of phoniness and error, arises in that very question of access to that totalizing truth. How do we cease ping-ponging in between devout reification of world-committing beliefs (claiming some access to that everything) and dismissing contradictory world-committing beliefs (illusory worlds constructed by faulty minds). Not only is the Truth not true enough to eliminate contradictory theories, but it leaves us asking who then has that access? How do, or can, they (ever) know? What if you, too, may be wrong?

This chapter will pick up on the conflicts raised in the previous chapter with apocalyptic thinkers who seem to recognize this problem buried in the "unveiling" at the end of the world. But rather than entangle themselves in a battle with error itself, these end-of-the-world auteurs go to the root, that is, rethink their relationship to the world in all its manifold appearing and contradictory beliefs. This reimagined relationship changes not only how we think about and account for error, but how we make sense of the world itself and our positions within it. It turns out the serpent-tailed, ink-bleeding specter of "phony" only horrifies those who think you can enjoy a world without diluting it with representations—and that's a problem of positions, or world-committing beliefs. There is not one way to register revelation or our access to the world, just as there is more than one modal possibility at stake in the apocalypse. This chapter will look at other forms of revelation and the primary modal shift of world-committing beliefs that gets them there: from necessity to contingency.

Whereas the devotees of the previous chapter relished the proof of the undeniable "must" crashing into their fictional worlds, those that this chapter explores are more invested in what could be. Like Le Guin's good science fiction, these world-ending texts ask what world-alternatives are possible. This goes against the common, mistaken assumption that apocalypses are vehicles of pure determinacy, where the veil is lifted and the whole truth simply *is*. But even apocalypse, as we saw in the last chapter, is clearly not capable of rendering a complete, totalizing revelation, which is forever pigeon-holed in the world of partial appearances. However, such partial appearances and incomplete worlds are not excluded from the realms of revelation. Our world concepts include both totalizing beliefs that are necessary, those hard "must"s, and also those that are contingent, beliefs with a mutable character that recognize things could be otherwise.

Take for example a specific application of contingency: I recently adopted a cat (Cooper) and occasionally think how it could have been otherwise. Would he have been adopted, later, by a better cat-mom? Still be at the shelter? Should I have named him Bob instead? Now take this example and apply such contingency instead to the world-determining level of a world-committing belief and you perhaps can imagine a world-history without human-cat relationships or an evolutionary or trajectory where big cats are the dominant species and chase non-sentient humans for play.[42] The way we think the possibilities of cats and their relation to the world changes; it opens up new dimensions of possibility.

At the level of world-defining belief, you can begin to easily recognize in this move of contingency the hallmarks of popular science fiction: AI that destabilizes the human sense of world dominance, alien sentience that questions human modes of knowing, or perhaps something as simple as how the interruption of human reproduction can reveal its own importance in maintaining order and happiness in the human world.[43] A foundational part of the world or how we understand it (human dominance or knowing, the guarantee of future human generations) is displaced from its position as a central tenet of our everyday experiences and comprehension of the world; the contents of these beliefs are not actually necessary to the way the world is and thus could be different, could change. For Le Guin's imaginative fiction, the focus is on the de-necessitating of institutions and the status quo, many of which bleed into our concept of worldly totality. For apocalypses that embrace this kind of contingent belief, it is a de-necessitating of certain world "truths," which restructure the world in its possibility.

Apocalypses that explore these kind of world-alternatives, which I will call apocalypses of contingency (A(C)), emphasize the modal shift of certain world-beliefs into the realm of contingency, into a state of it-could-be-otherwise. In the face of failing or threatened worlds,

these apocalypses do not anticipate a truth made complete but encounter the abyss beyond stable belief and the presumptions on which we built our ideas of the world. These beliefs uproot the beliefs we had taken to be necessary about the world or those assumptions rigidified by common experience into hard and fast truths. Rather than reveal the world, A(C)s use the modal exchange of apocalypse to center our uncertainty, error, and unstable grounds for understanding the world and thus change the way we shape our relationship to the world, that assumed all-encompassing whole. For A(C)s, the world does not appear as the misunderstood whole now available for all to see, but as an incomplete presence of which our bases of understanding are ever insufficient to grasp. These apocalypses do not proclaim recognizable truth; they scratch the surface of the unknown. A(C)s reposition our relationship to thinking the world and make room for different conceptions of the world within it, the most challenging of which recognize the role of our own world-conceptions in positing these worlds and utilize the apocalyptic mode to change them.[44]

In this chapter, I will argue A(C)s, less interested in revealing determinate worlds and more invested in imagining the world otherwise, becomes a vital opportunity for revising beliefs about the world as well as the thinker's relation to those beliefs that establish a worldview. A(C)s, through the use of creative and skeptical tools of reflection, use the destructive power of apocalypse to conceptualize and distance a subject from their world-committing beliefs, establishing a position of metatheorical engagement. To maintain this reflection, A(C)s instead reimagine revelation as process and integrate comparative models for thinking the world otherwise, which destabilize the taken-for-granted character of world-committing beliefs. In establishing an unending and inclusive model for thinking beliefs, A(C)s. render their worldview as ever incomplete, and therefore open to recognizing the contingent positioning of world-committing beliefs. With these de-necessitating tools to break through the structures of reified

thought, A(C)s take advantage of this and utilize contingent beliefs to reimagine the world differently. I hold that, at its heart, this is a freedom-centric process.

In what follows, I will trace the mutation of revelation in the world-revisionary thinking of A(C)s. I begin first with William Blake, whose work best illustrates and responds to the problems produced in the last chapter and whose conception of apocalypse redefines our common narratives of what defines apocalypse, especially in the Christian-religious sense. By focusing on Blake's position-centric and continuous approach to apocalypse, I will argue Blake posits a metatheoretical approach that finds freedom in revelation as process, rather than the climactic and totalizing unveiling of a world. I will then connect this approach to the post-Kantian German idealist tradition at the basis of Gabriel's philosophy and how its appropriation of skepticism for metaphysical reflection (or reflection on totalizing belief structures) replicates a form of apocalyptic thinking in the annihilation of knowledge. Recognizing the role of contingency in both in these modes of reflection and apocalyptic thinking, I will end the idealism section with a brief application of this thinking in a work of contemporary speculative fiction, Jeff Vandermeer's *Annihilation*. I will then close the chapter by expanding this analysis to my apocalyptic peers within contemporary theory and criticism. Though fiction is the most obvious space for end-of-the-world thinking, it would be remiss to ignore how scholars artfully utilize the contingent revisions of apocalyptic thought to the same catalytic effect: freedom to think the world differently.

Blake: From Error to Vision

If apocalypse, even in fiction, cannot reveal a complete, all-encompassing world, what can or does it reveal? What does revelation then look like? To address these questions, I will turn

to the work of William Blake, who is a particularly fit figure to begin this chapter in that his densely allegorical work both takes on themes of Christian revelation of the last chapter and challenges the singular vision of reified beliefs. His work's hard-to-categorize nature could be said to reflect key philosophical themes from his work and, more importantly, exemplifies a kind of multi-positional thinking inherent to A(C)s. His interest in apocalypse, which extends across decades and multiple works, doggedly interrogates the possibility and limitations of revelation itself. For this reason, Blake's concept of revelation, or what it means to access truth, responds to and ultimately changes in the face of the failure of finite revelation to something capable of recognizing the infinite (that unencompassable everything)—even if it cannot contain it.

Let me initially frame this problem through a particular struggle within Blake's later works. An interesting shift takes place in the depiction of apocalypse between William Blake's unfinished work *The Four Zoas* and his defining work *Jerusalem*; what started out as mostly Biblical apocalypse that invokes dramatic climax of great destruction, which even directly references the Book of Revelation writer John of Patmos, turns into an anti-climactic exhaustion of time.[45] While we can only speculate with more or less compelling arguments as to what caused Blake to leave *The Four Zoas* unfinished, it is clear that through the similarities and substantial changes in his depiction of apocalypse Blake encountered a problem within his conception of apocalypse and its narrative construction within a poetic work. I will argue in this section that the conflict of these apocalyptic types resides in the narrative difference of "visionary forms dramatic" (257), Blake's definite poetic forms, and his philosophical project of continuous, reflective system-building. But rather than delineate this conflict though the changes of *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*, I will instead explicate *Jerusalem*'s apocalypse by looking back to Blake's earlier work *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where Blake clearly introduces

the metaphysical-positionality and dramatic forms he builds on throughout his later works, and examine how this problem of narrative arises between apocalypse, the most definite and dramatic of forms, and the unending work of system-building.

The problem of narrative—and human finitude in relation to the world—emerges through the mouth of Elijah in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, who frames the problem of revelation within a fixed form. When Elijah is asked by the speaker why he ate dung, Elijah responds "the desire of raising men to the perception of the infinite" (39). Elijah, defined as a poet, has the conflicting purpose of fostering the infinite within a definitive and limited act of creation. Perceiving the infinite, for Blake, requires a creative, but ultimately defined, space of time; the boundless (whether all-encompassing world, god, or eternity) can only be perceived in terms of the bounded. Just as we reckon with the world via finite beliefs about it, understanding is reduced to a single, dramatic event, reflection and revelation. Yet, as Blake's later works emphasize, no single revelation can relay the infinite, for the continuously labor of system-making fosters the infinite through the process, not the event. Blake's insistence on "visionary forms dramatic," while affording the both dialogic confrontation and the finite and stable form of sublime reflection, must also force a conclusion through the form of apocalypse, revelation. However, Blake's later emphasis on the continuous process of system-making conflicts with such finite ends. The non-apocalypse of *Jerusalem* allows Blake to redefine apocalypse not as narrative event but reflective process that reexamines the metatheoretical systematic conditions of one's own thinking, changing revelation from a particular content to a reflective approach to thinking the world. This apocalypse, the eternally reflective work of system-building and world-constitution, is, for Blake, liberty.

Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* establishes Blake's burgeoning concepts of a kind of metametaphysics, the investigation into the positions that produce a metaphysics and enable their potential displacement.[46] In the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* these concepts exist in a dramatic form that he employs in *Jerusalem* yet are moderated by the explicit propositional structure of his earlier argumentative poems. The dramatic form is most obvious; the speaker exchanges wisdom with demons, angels, and prophets—clearly distinct beings with different desires and expectations for the world—about their foundational beliefs which generates scenes of opposition and even metamorphoses. What's key to note however, is that the choice to dramatize these scenes only emphasizes *who* says, determines, or takes-for-truth *what*. Proverbs are given not from a vague notion of truth out there (as they are often today are read aloud in Christian churches without context), but from a context—here, Hell. By using dramatic episodes made up of settings and characters, we note both who creates truth-claims and that, via a sense of finite duration to this exchange, they are liable to change. Blake's divine revelations are without throne room or ideal perspective ("he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole", 40), and thus begin by making distinct positions determinate.

The propositional arguments, then, are embedded into these position-driven episodes, and elucidate the creation of systematic thought. While no longer using the argument form of walking through propositions that he uses in "All Religions Are One" and "There is No Natural Religion," the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* retains aspects of those earlier argument poems in that it openly addresses the philosophical conversation with which it participates via the poem's dramatic presentation. The Proverbs of Hell, while not explicitly creating propositions that build on each other, function as basic premises for viewing the world that force the recognition of contraries. For instance, a proverb made popular for its more shocking image of infanticide,

"Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" (38), if accepted, offers a basis for thinking about moral action in the world: there is nothing worse (and perhaps more horrifying) than fantasize about doing something in place of the action itself. As a proverb, it is a premise without argument, simply a bit of day-to-day belief taken for truth. Within the context of this long list of other proverbs, these premises unite to illustrate a differing way of understanding the world—for they to varying degrees commit to a certain ideal of totality—but also one that, as representative of the thinking of Hell, forces the recognition of other operating conditions for comprehending the world. Though unusual, this ultimately proves to be an argument structure; Blake creates a long list of premises where the final result is not a logical conclusion, but a reflection on the creation of systematic positions—structures of taken-for-truths, world-committing beliefs, or even logics, i.e. systems of understanding the world behind these premises—developed under specific contexts.

Through this argumentative structure, Blake creates a concept of systems, or reified metaphysical positions, which is perhaps most thoroughly introduced within the middle of the poem directly following "enough" of the Proverbs of Hell:

> The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could percieve.
>
> And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country. placing it under its mental deity.
>
> Till a system was formed (38)

The Poets *animate*, uniting the objects of perceptions (sense) with subjective determinations of experience (properties and names). This is an act of organization, naming and placing each in its "mental deity," which eventually results in a "system." Not to be mistaken for pure constructivism, where subjective experience is projected onto the world (here for Blake it seems circular, where the referent uncertain "them" seems to flip the placing action from objects with gods to gods with natural, sensible properties), Blake situates the systematic act of organizing sensible perceptions into an *ordered* world as a creative act, as it is the work of poets, those who literally make things (from ποιέω). Systems, like worlds, are created not in the constitution of any kind of given object but instead in the determinacy of placing whatever the "enlarged" senses could perceive but as knowable realities in the act of organizing names and properties. If we can translate this into the language of world-committing beliefs, the process of determinacy that generates a position from which to view the world becomes systematic—a stable structure in itself. These systems, positionings within the world formed through taking certain determinations for truth, play a direct role in the construction of one's perception of their experience. However, Blake's systems are eventually appropriated and corrupted by a priesthood that claims, "God ordered these things" (38), thus displacing the organizing act onto the world outside of subjective experience. Like the reification of the previous chapter, these systems are "realized and abstracted" as divine principles found in the world itself and divorced from our own activities. For Blake, the initial creative act is truly one of all people, as "All deities reside in the human breast" (38). Thus, all that is, which is for Blake the only way in which one encounters the divine, is in part constructed within the systems of one's own worldview.

For Blake, the creative act of determining the world resides in the organization of senses, for such organization unites the Gods and Geniuses with the world. These systems are reasoned

out and categorized by predication, by the giving of names and "adorning them *with*" properties, by uniting deities and qualities with the sensible.[47] This is not an experience found in the world, but a subjective action of ordering what was not just ordered, carving up a space of perceptions so that rational experience can occur. Rather, as we see in the proverbs, these systems seem to be rooted in both an act of belief (premises taken for truths) and the systematic organization of points of view from these experience-directing bases. The last Proverb of Hell that immediately precedes the stanza about Poets and their systems, the proverb that tips the scale to "Enough! or Too Much!", claims that "Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ'd" (38). Belief precedes the understanding of truth, particularly if we take it to mean those same systems of predication; to ascertain "truth" one already operates post-predication, post-carving-up the world (and potentially by way of "corrupted" system). "Truth," at least according to Hell, does not spring from the definitive but the imaginative, which frames the conditions of its experience. In this way, belief as the preceding framework accounts for both the possibility of differently conflicting systems and truth's positional nature in relationship to those systems, so that "Everything possible to be believ'd is an image of truth" (37). It is an image, of course, but Blake suggests that does not make it completely false. Though these statements' presence as Proverbs of Hell may obscure their definitive nature as a complete statement (as a Proverb of Hell, is this only one half of a contrary?), Blake reinforces this point through the mouth of the prophet and poet Isaiah: "Then I asked: does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so / He replied, All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this firm perswasion removed mountains" (38-9). Both Hell and the prophets of the Bible agree on the capacity of belief, itself a "firm perswasion," to structure our relation to the world, as do the systems and actions that spring from such points. Firm perswasions, taken-for-truths, provide the conditions for

comprehending the world by providing a basis for system-making, and are directly connected to the imagination: "What is now proved was once, only imagin'd" (36). Proofs, truths, etc. start somewhere, and for Blake that somewhere is the imagination.

But just because belief and imagination create the conditions for truth does not justify all concepts of truth; Blake, rather, is interested in uncovering the nature of these "truths" and rigorously evaluating the premises of belief and their consequential conceptions of the world. Blake insists on outing bad and unreflective thinking: "I always find that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning" (42). What is at work in such insolent reason? The speaker takes the Angel into one of the "seven houses" of the Bible, which is filled with "monkeys, baboons. . . grinning and snatching at one another, but withheld by the shortness of their chains" (43), who proceed to devour one another and even self-cannibalize. Shortly after, the speaker reveals the "skeleton of a body. . . which was Aristotle's Analytics" (43). Though the Angel is set on the judgment on the speaker on the basis of these two works, the Angel overlooks via his own blindspot—that is the foundation of his own thinking—the animalistic brutality and stupidity at play in the Bible and the frighteningly incomplete structure that is the Analytics. Blake is eager to reveal the skeletons in the closet of such an unreflective and overly-confident system of thinking. The lack of reflection in this bad thinking is situated, for Blake, in the coopting of Poetic systems by Priests that divorce an individual from his own process of system-making (38). Their "institution of forms of worship" stolen from poetic tales hinders both the agency and processual nature of reflection, as the "vulgar" are enslaved in this attempt "to realize or abstract the mental dieties from their objects" (38). A system abstracted can only leave the thinker without the autonomy, stagnating in its own opinions and cut off from the liberty in recognizing that "All deities reside

in the human breast" (38). In this way, bad concepts or truths must be examined, tested, and extensively re-imagined to facilitate new thinking—all of which require a process, a duration for interlocuters to reevaluate their beliefs and change. In short, Blake wants to enable reflection, which is only possible through imagination.

In the later poems, this is the work of Los, who is the specter of the imagination in a mind divided and who "[keeps] the divine vision in time of trouble" (225). Imagination, as the creative act of predication at the source of all determinacy and system-building, is constantly at work against this reified abstraction: "I must create a system or be enslav'd by another Mans / I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create" (153). Imagination, the foundation for the "firm perswasion" that "removes mountains" (38-9), must not only engage in this system-making to prevent the stagnate abstraction of deities that comes with unreflective thinking, but must do this as an act of freedom. Freedom from faulty systems can achieved through reflection, and, for Blake, reflection comes in artistic creation: "prepar'd with art; / Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems" (154). Art, as finite form that can give image to and thus demonstrate positional thinking, is the indispensable form for reflection, and is essential to achieve this freedom.

This necessitates the dramatic form, as it can both engage in (and is responsible for) system-making while enabling reflection on its own conditions of possibility. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* demonstrates how the creative structure of dramatic form in particular fosters the capacity for reflection in dialogue, a metatheoretical standpoint for comprehending the nature of position-taking that is in play. Dialogue puts Blake's contraries (competing worlviews) in the same dramatic space and defines positions through conversation and, in its imagined space, through its change in the world itself. This may be best seen when the speaker is escorted by an

Angel to a view of his future punishment (41-2). When the Angel leaves the speaker to be devoured by white and black spiders, the landscape changes to a peaceful riverbank with a singing harpist whose "theme was, / The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind" (42). This change illustrates the clear difference in the speaker and Angel's position, which influences the world around them and gives shape to the metaphysical or systematic differences at stake within dialogue, as the speaker explains to the Angel: "all that you saw was due to your metaphysics" (42). The dialogue form allows for two world-shaping systems—whether "metaphysics," or some modern correlation such as ideology or discourse—to confront and recognize one another, as well as themselves, even if the Angel refuses to engage.

This moves the poem to a metatheoretical position that allows the speaker to reflect on the forces of these world committing beliefs. The conflictual rubbing of differing world-committing beliefs (an imposition) frees up the opportunity to change, "So the Angel said: thy phantasy has imposed upon me & thou oughtest to be ashamed. I answerd: we impose on one another. & it is but lost time to converse with you whose works are only Analytics" (42). The speaker recognizes the importance of this "imposition" and finds blame in such an unreflective partner. For Blake, "Opposition is True Friendship" (42); without the capacity to encounter the thoughts of others through dialogue ("The most sublime act is to set another before you" (36)), thought—which imposes these systems for understanding the world—stagnates into "reptiles of the mind." Dialogic reflection, by sparking friction around beliefs in one's blindspot, presents the opportunity for the reexamination of systems of belief and pushes the enactors outside their limited reflection, pushes to raise "other men to the perception of the infinite" (39). This is the apocalyptic impulse in Blake, as apocalypse embodies continual reflection and metametaphysical

revelation; from the most sublime act of the imposition in encountering others and their beliefs or systems, an individual can continue to grow into a more encompassing perception of the world.

With this undergirding ideal of metatheoretical reflection that pulls our world-shaping beliefs into perspective, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* takes a different approach to the "unveiling" of apocalypse, one that constructs its condition as a radical shift in perception that we will see in later poems. Apocalypse, not a device for ending discussion under a single world truth, instead instigates a new perception: "the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite. and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt" (39). This infinite is restricted by the limited and unreflective thinking that does not engage with others: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is: infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (39). In this way the apocalyptic event also proves to be more than the revelation of unlimited perception, but deliverance from such restricted thinking. This liberating act can only be achieved by printing with "corrosives" which "expunge" bad thinking (here noted as body/soul dualism) and melt "apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid" (39). This seemingly violent method of expunging comes by encountering contraries, as these corrosives are "salutary and medicinal" in Hell. But these corrosives, masquerading as violence, also serve a productive purpose, as they are a part in "printing in the infernal method" (39), and one of the ways in which Blake crafted his own plates. Apocalypse, in its violent melting away of old perspectives for the new, is also a creative act; a burning away of bad systems to get to the more "infinite" perception

However, the apocalypse of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is not the apocalyptic event itself, but the prediction of what is come: "The ancient tradition that the world will be

consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true. as I have heard from Hell" (39). This prophetic moment seems establish the narrative character of what is to come in *Jerusalem*: the apocalyptic depiction contains the character of a "cherub" (39), as well as the same 6,000 year time-scale we see in *Jerusalem* (230). *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* thus positions the apocalypse as a narrative event like that of the Book of Revelation; it a closing event of time that defines the narrative structure and will once and for all make things known. The *Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* in establishing both a basis for Blake's metatheoretical process of encountering differing systems of beliefs and the need for an apocalyptic event that forces new perspective through creative acts of narrative, begins to define the conflict between the two. If the infinite is about shifting perspectives and that only occurs through an illustrated process, how can revelation occur in a finite event? The role of the dramatic form becomes crucial not only in the recognition of systems and how they function but also in the revelation of breaking outside finite perceptions and corrupt systems of understanding the world. For *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, apocalypse, still removed, is imagined as the recognition of the infinite occurs in a single dramatic moment; corrosives free human perception to witness the infinite and the finite and corrupt is destroyed.

This, though, becomes problematic in later poems, as Blake's concept of system-making grows into a constant and eternal process. While dramatic form gives Blake's metametaphysics of systems a stable means to enable reflection, this same dramatic form forces a conflict with apocalyptic narrative in this system-making, as the continuous process takes precedence over any single revelatory truth. Whereas *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* gave a dramatic form to visualize beliefs and their systems, particularly those corrupted in reified abstraction, and compel reflection in in the hope of a future revelation, *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem* hit a snag in

depicting a complete and total revelation. *The Four Zoas* was never completed but *Jerusalem* seems to find a resolution, one outside the Biblical notion of revelation still remnant in *The Marriage of Heaven* and Hell and *The Four Zoas*. In what follows, I will trace the new form of apocalypse in Jerusalem and how it both builds on the dramatic forms of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* but rethinks revelation in the wake of this conflict. If the corruption of system-making comes from its stagnation in the attempt to "realize or abstract" and dramatic form can instigate a process of reflection to combat such corruption, *Jerusalem* must locate its revelation not in some final apocalyptic form (which only risks its own corruption) but in the eternal, liberating work of dramatizing and destroying systems.

As we see in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*, Blake's notion of systems grows to emphasize a continuous process in the later poems, as the work of imagination takes on the eternal work of system-making in the creative act of building Golgonooza. By *Jerusalem*, Los' work building "Golgonooza: terrible eternal labor" (155), becomes central to the poem, as Los is rarely portrayed without reference to this ongoing work. Both creative and self-reflective, Los considers his own thinking over and over again: "Thus Los altrd his Spectre & every Ratio of his Reason / He alterd time after time" (252). He must work continuously, lest a rigid system solidify in unreflective self-conception and prevent progress to a more infinite perception: "Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary" (201). Rigidity breeds bad thinking and gives reality to it: "Fixing their Systems, permanent: by mathematical power / Giving a body to Falsehood that it may be cast off for ever / With Demonstrative Science piercing Apollyon with his own bow" (155). Los' work then, is to from reflection of reified rigidity: "I care not whether a Man is Good or Evil; all that I care / Is whether he is a Wise Man or a Fool. Go! put off

Holiness / And put on Intellect" (252). Holiness, a central problem for *Jerusalem* in its self-righteousness destruction, sorts individuals rather than states or actions into the set dualist patterns of right and wrong, good and evil. This, as we learned from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, stagnates into "reptiles of the mind." Los creates forms to instigate reflection and disrupt reified systems.

This eternal work reveals the other major role of the dramatic form: the production of stable forms for reflection through art. Since Los's work is eternal and ongoing, it cannot achieve reflection without defined limits. Los works continuously to create stable forms, something permanent to provide a basis of reflection: "For Los in Six Thousand Years walks up & down continually / That not one Moment of Time be lost & every revolution / of Space he makes permanent" (230). What would be lost in eternity is persevered in the stable forms of Los' creation. The role of the stable artistic form in fostering reflection is best demonstrated in *The Four Zoas*. While the world constantly divides within this structure and the zoas keep changing and rethinking their own positions, there is a moment of reflection in relation to the artistic work:

> And first he drew a line on the walls of shinning heaven
> And Enitharmon tincturd it with beams of blushing love
> It remained permanent a lovely form inspired divinely human
> Dividing into just proportions Los unwearied labord
> The immortal lines upon the heavens till with sighs of love
> Sweet Enitharmon mild Entrancd breathd forth upon the wind
> The spectrous dead Weeping the Spectres viewed the immortal works
> Of Los Assimilating to those forms Embodied & Lovely (370-371)

Los' work not only provides something "permanent" that draws the gaze of the Spectres, but also imagines a more "just portportion[ed]" and "divinely human" image that the Spectres then assimilate to. Imagination not only reflects; it also provides more fitting images that change the Spectres' embodiment in the world. Through reflection, the conditions of a world-concept shift and as with their place within in, with newly imagined positionings. To phrase it as simply as in Chapter 2 of *Jerusalem*, the viewers "[become] what they beheld" (177). The ability to reflect on and imagine alternatives for viewing the world directly changes one's own role within the world.

But despite these important reflective changes, a single change is never enough; the process itself is the telos. In this way, the apocalypse as *the* definitive reflective act cannot hold with the continuous work of the imagination. If the imagination continuously organizes and reorganizes systems of understanding the world, and in the process destabilizes the idea of a universal, all-encompassing whole or truth in favor of constant reflection on our premises for accessing truth and perceiving the world, there can be no final apocalypse that reveals such a world or truth. Los' reflective work does not work to a final end of a single true reality, but is the constant reflective truth generated in the shift from one depiction to another, from representation to representation. Apocalypse, then, as depicted in the Bible and modes of the last chapter, no longer make sense for Blake; their impossible-to-represent apocalypse of complete world-revelation does not fit. Blake's apocalypse in *Jerusalem*, significantly altered from the more Biblically rooted and dramatic presentation in the *Four Zoas*, then must envision what apocalypse is outside of the Christian tradition, outside its role as a definitive narrative form. This results in a kind of anti-climactic apocalypse in *Jerusalem*; no longer a dramatic fiery end that reveals all things, yet one that still must bring a limited and stable work to a close.

In this way, *Jerusalem* must still employ dramatic gestures to come to a close. Blake relies on his strict time-scale of six thousand years bring an end to his work, simply declaring, "Time was finished!" (254). No particular defining action or climax is the catalyst for this apocalypse; time merely runs out within this particular stable work. Albion, then, awakes and enters dialogue with Jesus, in whom he recognizes his friend Los (255-6). As with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the dialogue is necessary for revelation. Only when in conversation with Jesus and the dramatic personae of Albion's Selfhood can *Jerusalem* play out the sublime reflection of other. In this way, Albion is able to confront the only other dramatic gesture of biblical apocalypse left in *Jerusalem*: the Covering Cherub. Straight out of the Book of Revelation, the Covering Cherub is adopted by Blake as "the majestic image of the Selfhood . . . its Brain incloses a reflexion Of Eden all perverted . . . Minute Particulars in slavery . . . Disorganizd" (248). An image of unreflective thinking and, as a result, disorganized senses and perverted world constitution (clearly the evil of evils for Blake), the Selfhood is only defeated in the reflection and concern for another: "Albion stood in terror: not for himself but for his Friend / Divine, and Self was lost in the contemplation of faith / and wonder at the Divine Mercy and at Los's sublime honour" (256). When the Selfhood, tries to divide and disrupt the dialogue, it forces Albion into the most sublime act of "[setting] another before [him]" (36), which in its contemplation dissipates the egoistic concept of self. In this way *Jerusalem*'s resolution still relies on the forms of dramatic structure to encounter apocalypse in terms of dialogue and stable form, but these forms are minimized (particularly when compared to the *Four Zoas*). Apocalypse for Blake no longer resides in the catalyst for perception and the dramatic form but rather in the shift of perception itself, a corrosive to the self-enclosed whole where the perception of the

infinite comes through reflection on the sublime encounter with another, a continuous shift from one system to another, from self to another.

Thus, Blake's apocalypse focuses not on the dramatic conclusion but a change in perspective. As the four zoas unite, perception increases fourfold: "Every Man stood Fourfold. each Four Face had. One to the West / One towards the East One to the South One to the North" (257). Revelation, embodied here, is radical re-vision. Violent restricting occurs on the level of perception, as the corrupt worlds constituted on limited perspective are eliminated: "The Druid Spectre was Annihilate loud thundring rejoicing terrific vanishing / Fourfold Annihilation & at the clangor of Arrows of the Intellect" (257). Rather than a final judgment, this new infinite perspective is a dramatic shift in the organs of perception and through this shift that provides reflection, comes the recognition that "everything possible to be believ'd is an image of truth" and that manifold appearing is both accounted for and given a sense of reality:

> According to the subject of discourse & every Word & Every Character
> Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the Translucence or
> Opakeness of Nervous fibres such was the variation of Time and Space
> which vary according as the Organs of Perception vary & they walked
> To & fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each & clearly seen
> And seeing (258)

The apocalyptic shift of perspective to another allows for perpetual reflection, one that is no doubt still inhabited in dialogic form.

This way, even this new apocalypse, the reflective and comparative questions regarding continuous system-making remains in play. This is not an eternity of free receiving of some single, totalizing Truth, but constant debate that comes with true friendship, which is

"opposition," and the reflection it prompts, as Los valorizes: "I never made friends but by spiritual gifts; / By severe contentions of friendship & the burning fire of thought" (251). Even eternity, after time's finishing, needs the stabilizing dialogic structure of dramatic forms:

> And they conversed in Visionary forms dramatic which
> Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
> In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect
> Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders divine
> Of Human Imagination. (254-5)

As infinite perception is only possible through continuous effort of reflection, apocalypse as true revelation (and concluding structure) is an eternal engagement in reflection with others—the inclusion, rather than exclusion, of other oppositional beliefs.[48]

Jerusalem ends not with apocalypse, but the product of its infinite perspective: "And I heard the name of their Emanations they are named Jerusalem" (259). Neither final judgment nor Truth, the apocalypse of *Jerusalem* brings freedom, for "Jerusalem is named Liberty" (171). In this reflective act one's own and others' system-making, one can return to the awareness that "All deities reside in the human breast," won in the constant process of systematically determining the world and metatheoretical reflection on those systems (38). Blake's apocalypse is not the realization of definite narrative as the Christian traditions would have it, but continuous freedom of taking control of one's own system, and therefore one's world-constituting beliefs.

Thus, Blake's apocalypse significantly alters the concept of apocalypse and its emphasis and dramatic climactic structure. Neither fitting as finite and definitive act or as moment of truth, Blake creates an apocalypse as a radical shift in the process of thinking and its supposed relationship to what we take to be true of the world we position ourselves within. Not only does

this reveal a form of reflection that positions belief and the creative act of organizing in the heart of world-determination and system-making thought but fosters an encompassing remedy for its own errors. Blake, in distinction from the apocalypses of necessity in the previous chapter which utilizes a model of apocalypse that can only attain a coherent totality by excluding contradictory models of the world, instead refocuses its revelation on the excavation and rigorous examination of our belief-commitments. Blake's apocalypse is also then a different approach to thinking about belief-configurations and how they position a subject in relation to the world. Rather than institute new, necessary beliefs, Blake's belief-system-reflexive destruction, whose very function is to uproot corrupted beliefs, is built into his worldview itself—changing the way it understands and accounts for the contradictions and incoherence of worldviews (the appearing of the world within itself).

Why does Blake's apocalypse change the world? To understand this shift in truth, revelation, and the "world," I will turn in the next section to Blake's contemporaries and the thinkers at the base of this dissertation's philosophical underpinnings: the Post-Kantian idealists, particularly Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Recognizing how these philosophers integrate the destructive power of skepticism into a metatheoretical examination of common assumptions about the world, I will argue we can better understand how A(C)s reroute our expectations of what the world is and how we can see ourselves in relation to it with a belief-reflexive framework.

The Annihilation of Knowledge

For Blake, true, useful revelation in apocalypse is not containable in a single moment, a single rigid truth. It is a continuous process. But what does processual revelation mean for the

world? How does it change our conception of the worlds we posit through belief? To answer these questions, I will turn to the work of Post-Kantian German idealists to outline what this kind of processual reflection can do to a worldview. Blake's model for apocalypse more fittingly echoes the world-constitution and which apocalyptic narratives clear a path toward, as I presented in chapter one. As my approach to world-commitments is generated in contemporary readings of early 19th century German philosophy, the connection between Blake's apocalypse and his contemporaries' idealist ideas of world-constitution is historically unsurprising. Within the Post-Kantian tradition that informs Gabriel's philosophy and this project, there is a strand of thinking that both explains and rhetorically mirrors the apocalyptic impulse buried within the excavation of everyday world-constitution. In this section, I will make a quick detour through Gabriel's reconstruction of Post-Kantian German idealists approach to world-constitution, focusing particularly how this change in the model of determinacy and world-building keeps at its core an apocalyptic model: the annihilation of knowledge. By implementing skeptical destruction in pursuit of knowledge of nonknowledge (not unlike Blake's metatheoretical positioning), Schelling and Hegel both employ apocalyptically-processed reflection to reroute our relationship to the world and thus secure a form of freedom, the kind we see exhibited in A(C)s. In repositioning the subject's relationship to the world differently, these thinkers escape the world-splitting problems of the last chapter and embrace the contingent basis for world-constitutive belief. This kind of thinking, I argue, is the basis for change for worlds in apocalypses of contingency, and hence their freedom.

Like Blake, Schelling and Hegel are worried about the stagnation of common sense thinking and utilize the rupture-inducing power of ancient skepticism to target the assumptions of what they call metaphysics, what Blake might call systems, but what I will simply emphasize

here as world-committing beliefs. The skeptical program, in a sentence, is to "explode the taken-for-granted character of our common explanations and experiences" by pitting dogmatic assertions against each other (true friendship?) in the attempt to recognize the groundlessness, and therefore relativity, of knowledge (Gabriel, *Transcendental* 6).The hope is, at the end of the argumentative tropes of the skeptical program, to compel the opponents to give way to what Sextus' metaphor describes as a "kicking away of the ladder one has just climbed": ataraxia, a "purging" of all metaphysical and theoretical positions. Already, we can begin to draw parallels between the groundlessness of ataraxia and the world-uncertainty encapsulated in apocalyptic thought; whether the figurative ground of an imagined future or the literal grounds of fictional worlds, the world moves beneath one's feet, challenging the security on which we took our standing. But rather than explode sense-certainty for the purpose of epistemological enlightenment, Schelling and Hegel apply these strategies to the structure of assumptions that undergird one's theoretical or systematic thoughts—those deep-set thoughts that constitute the nature of the relationship to the world-whole. Skeptical ataraxia can be turned on itself as leverage into reflective insight: "Therefore, natural consciousness must have an experience of 'rupture' to make its transition into philosophical knowledge, that is an experience of skeptical confusion" (Gabriel, *Transcendental* 22). This purging of worldly-expectations recognizes not only the positionality of world-committing beliefs, but the reflexive insight generated in groundlessness (worldlessness) itself. Thus the idealists utilize "the destructive energy of skepticism"—apocalyptic both in product and rhetoric—"in order to motivate a metatheoretical standpoint from which the theoretical conditions of metaphysics in general" can be scrutinized (Gabriel, *Transcendental* 6).

Rupture achieves this vantage-point by distancing the subject from its own world-committing beliefs or theories. By leveraging skeptical insight into a reflective position (not unlike a certain engraver-poet), Schelling and Hegel take this apocalyptically-won insight for world-reflective thought itself. For Hegel, "thought becomes the concrete thinking that annihilates the being of the world in all its manifold determinateness," the skeptical act of placing all content under suspicion that frees a subject from particular systematic thought, or world-committing premises, and generates reflection (*Phenomenology* 123). This is not a purifying move to imagine a world without error, but an attempt to recognize error in the world, rely on it and expect it, not only in others' beliefs but one's own. One must reify and defend a concept of totality before one can reach the "insight that metaphysical knowledge is only actual in self-destruction" (Gabriel, *Transcendental* 19). This attempt to kick out the ladder of one's world-constituting beliefs—registered here apocalyptically—is thus an anti-egoist gesture, a displacing act that splits a subject from its blindspot-prone beliefs, as we saw with apocalyptic thinking in chapter two. This effort to distance a subject from its world-assumptions should remind us of Blake's visionary forms, considering that Schelling, too, dubbed evil the manifestation of the selfhood (*Selbstheit*)—the egoistic arrogance that views human will distinct from nature.[49] Though their two conceptions differ in some key details regarding self-will, the end goal is the same: "Annihilate Selfhood" (Blake 22).

Like Los in Blake, Schelling and Hegel see this rupture necessary to excise corrupt, "abstracted" thinking and re-instill a sense of agency. This is the idealist "shift from the representation of metaphysical Truth to the truth of the shift from error to error" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being*"* 2). A subject is thrown into a "meshwork of belief" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 66), that allows a subject to become "itself relative to and against the

given and orients itself to the whole it anticipates" ("Mythological Being" 90). Though it is we who "[bring] a project to the whole" (90), or whom deities reside in, we mistake our processes of determination as exterior to ourselves. Despite the telling incompleteness of this process as process, we too easily give ourselves over to the "truth" of our world-committing beliefs, to those "pictures that hold us captive" (Wittgenstein qtd. in Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 19). We need the distancing rupture to shock us out of these reified, "abstracted" forms of thought or belief, which we mistake for some other force than our own activity.

To maintain this insight however, the annihilation of knowledge, metaphysics, or world-committing beliefs—those supposedly guaranteed positions for comprehending the world—must center a comparative model for thinking these systems. In this way, for revelation, a "long history of false is needed: eternal freedom is only realized at the end of a process" (*Transcendental* 20). Not only must one come to the end of the set of beliefs they themselves held, but this is aided by the comparative work of opposition, of finding difference plays into the success of reflection. Reflective thought, in pursuit of knowledge *in* annihilation, calls for a different model of world-concept construction whose content is not "totality tout court," but "the totality of metaphysical systems, the totality of the history of concepts of totality" (*Transcendental* 13). Reflection for Schelling is instead sustained through collecting a history of world concepts, a continuous decentering effort of encountering opposing world beliefs—the coulds, woulds, shoulds of other world-beliefs. In this way, the comparative model of worlds at work with apocalyptic thinking is also centered within Schelling's concept of the history of being, i.e. reflection. As with the haunting specters of other world-constituting beliefs at work in Eliot's waste land in chapter one, the historical collection of world-committing beliefs—always unfinished—sustains this ongoing reflection of worlds. We can also see clear Blakean echoes

here; Los, too, must forge and maintain a history in the work of Golgonooza and even in the anti-climactic apocalypse of 6000 years, the visionary debates continue (for a human "requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary" (200)). In the comparative work of creating a history of world-committing beliefs, "the historical concept of being here is thus a handy diagnostic tool for grasping history as revelation" (Gabriel, *Transcendental* 73); history goes on, however, making the total collection of totalizing ideas forever incomplete.

Thus, like Blake, rather than a singular moment of revelation that slides into an easy acceptance of common beliefs, the annihilation of knowledge, and therefore revelation, is an ongoing process. Thought's annihilation is best served not as another theoretical position (nor the relativity of and disengaged, quietist response to doxastic systems) but in the recognition that "true metaphysical knowledge has a processual content" (Gabriel, *Transcendental* 28). Just as there can be no final revelation for Blake, the metatheoretical insight gained in this destruction is not "momentary rupture but the contingency of ontology itself" (Gabriel, *Transcendental* 93). The world that is integrated with our representations and situates and directs determinacy could always be otherwise, as our history of worldviews shows us. Revelation cannot be an all-including picture (for what then would be the frame?); it is a practice. We require finite forms for reflection, but even more vital is the constant rub of the contingency from which our world-committing beliefs spring, the reminder that our world-configurations could be otherwise.

By building the rupture and reflection of apocalyptic thinking into the process for thinking the world itself, the annihilation of knowledge encourages a different relationship to the world-whole, one that expects incompleteness. For Gabriel, this comes back to the contingency contained in the blindspot revealed in metatheoretical thinking, which is sparked by the key

attributes of apocalyptic thinking: comparative world models and the apostasy that recognizes the "as if" character of the world, the contingent nature of its representation in belief. Metatheoretical thinking, on finding this contingency, fosters a world incomplete:

> The ontological fact of contingency—expressed in the fact that everything turns out to be contingent on some level of reflection or another—generates the incompleteness of everything that exists. Some things are straightforwardly contingent, but, more radically, some a priori truths turn out to be higher-order contingent. There can be no complete theory of anything, because every (rule bound) theory is constituted by a blindspot: it cannot both refer to the objects of its domains and the rules that constitute it, because the constituting rules can only ever be the object of a higher-order theory (Gabriel *Transcendental* xxx).

By moving into a process of metatheoretical reflection, and one that purposefully integrates other models of world, the subject finds contingency not simply in the content of beliefs but in positing a world in the first place. This perhaps rings of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* to us, where the metametaphysical positioning creates the possibility of change (contingency); angels become demons and vice versa in the recognition of their theoretical blindspots, particularly that which they excluded from their perfect world. Rather than split the world in two through error, the incomplete world does not liken itself to manifesting a necessary truth but the continual process, ever unfinished. That "no theory capable of ruling out other modes of presentation" should not terrify us, as it does for those in the previous chapter, for in it we find a new relationship to the world of our world-committing beliefs (Gabriel *Transcendental* xxxi). If the world is always incomplete, there is always space for something more, something different.

For this reason, the role of belief in thinking through the world is key to comprehending the competing notions of world at stake therein. The world is "always only the ideal of a world-whole" (*Transcendental* 100), an "the imaginary whole generated from within a particular field of sense" (*Transcendental* xxix). We generate beliefs about the whole out of particular contexts and from theoretical blindspots; we find difference and incompatibility amidst our various concepts not simply due to insufficient knowledge of the whole but the constantly self-constituted work of imagining the whole, the organization of accumulating beliefs about the contexts we are in. Our beliefs, particularly those that apply to that world-whole, are thus representations that compete and rub against one another in addition to other's beliefs:

> All structures (including higher-order intelligible structures such as theories and consciousness, etc.) are part of the world which is why the world is chaotic and contradictory: if the world is not only the object of theories but if it contains those theories (after all, theories are not transcendent) and if there are contradictory theories and a variety of perspectives on the world, then the world itself is a paradoxical unity which contradicts itself. The unity of the world is unstable and ever-changing, because it depends on the plurality of frameworks within which its unity can appear. Truth can only take place under the premises of dissent, difference, and misunderstanding. (Gabriel "The Mythological Being", 84)

As Fine suggests in the epigraph of this chapter, if the universe has many locks, we have need of many keys; the context-bound generation of world-committing beliefs thus, as idealized images of the whole, rely on diverse frameworks for appearing, for "appearing, and not only being, is manifold" (*Transcendental* xxvi). A belief about the world is one among many and could be

otherwise. For this reason, we find friendship in Blakean opposition, which allows for the opportunity to demonstrate these representations are representation and thus change them.

This incomplete-world-generating, never-ending process of accumulating the history of concrete metaphysical systems or world-committing beliefs serves the same purpose as *Jerusalem*'s: liberty. Schelling, according to Gabriel, "identifies the infinite with the 'self destruction' of human knowledge, the essential reflexive act of knowledge of nonknowledge. This reflexive metatheoretical insight into the antinomy of human knowledge *is* the infinite" (*Transcendental* 18). Like Blake's apocalypse of corrosives which burns away finite corrupt vision, the self-destruction in the annihilation of knowledge fosters new perspective for defining the infinite within the finite. This question of the infinite then becomes one of freedom: that which, though dependent on it, goes beyond the given. This isn't a totalizing freedom which minimizes the very real material institutions of power, but the contingency uncovered in how we position ourselves within the world is perhaps where resistance to power, ideology, or even what's "given" begins. If the "idea of being itself is an effect of out contingent position in the whole of beings" (Gabriel, *Transcendental* 65)—that logical structures depend on a constitutive, contingent context—then we place both determinacy and dissent near at hand, not alien, despite the "Leviathanesque" nature of certain ideologies. We shape our position and relationship to the whole. In doing so, we open the space to the "ontological future" (*Transcendental* 80)—one not trapped in the stagnated systematic thinking of the powers that may be. Despite the seemingly abstract philosophizing, Schelling, Hegel, and Gabriel all see in this process the tools to locate the rules, practices, and institutions of so-called common sense as the "negotiated, contingent" work of individuals and therefore work against such sense toward the possibility of a "truly committed" agency ("Mythological Being" 48). In this way, I think Le Guin, source of this

chapter's second epigraph, is a fit figure among these writers and thinkers, and right in finding freedom within that creative "impulse to make change imaginable." Just as Los finds himself in a battle against tyranny and the mechanical wheel of industrialization, securing contingency in this way is a fight against the common sense, or dominate worldviews of our time. Gabriel calls it an ideology-critical tool ("Mythological Being" 78); I think of it simply as the freedom of imagining otherwise.

It is also the freedom of apocalyptic thinking, which A(C)s heartily take up. When we recognize that "everything could always collapse" (Gabriel, "Mythological Being" 83), we brush up against the contingency of life and order itself. A(C)s recognize and utilize this freedom, rather than bury within an impossible task, truth, or whole. By displacing those "revered" ways of thinking the world (10), reflection on the manifold, contingent bases of determinacy "open[s] different worlds" (*Transcendental* xxv). This of course does not imply either ontic nonsense (that constructivist ordering alone can change the existential essence of material things), nor dismiss the hard-fought cases "forged" in the fires of thought. We are "concept-mongering creatures," and we are best served when this work is continually reassessed. A(C)s seize on this and the freedom of imagining the world otherwise. Thus, A(C)s often depict the world as incomplete wholes that need to be investigated and understood. They change the readers expectations of what ought to be found in and of the world. Rules, institutions, order itself (even physics gets the axe in some cases) are de-necessitated and imagined otherwise, moving the pivot on which we imagine the world to turn. It can be the role of men in the world (*Y: The Last Man*), the end of human reproduction (*Children of Men*), or our expectations of what religious belief can and cannot do for human freedom (*The Parable of the Sower*). Simply, these apocalypses embrace

the "original motivation" for practicing philosophy: "the strange feeling that things might be otherwise" (*Transcendental* 34).

What does that look like outside of Blake's apocalypse of continuous revelation? Take a recent example from Jeff Vandermeer's *The Southern Reach* trilogy, which frames the experience of the world as one of difference and possibility. Vandermeer's Area X is an apocalyptic landscape unknowable, as it is an area completely devoid of the human. Each novel in the series takes up the question of trying to solve the question of Area X—what it is, how it came to be, what is its purpose—but little progress is achieved throughout the eight-hundred-page plus series. The only two knowns (and here necessities) are that Area X somehow erases all traces of the human and that its borders are expanding. The latter revelation of the advancing border is the last bit of wisdom the psychologist offers the biologist: "The border is advancing. . . a little bit more every year" (*Annihilation* 129). Neither known is either fully understood or explained, but both represent the forced encounter with an unknown and therefore incomplete world: some unknowable space is slowly erasing—or rather encompassing and dehumanizing—the human world. In this way, Area X becomes radically other in all but its apocalyptic threat; it opens up all the possible otherwises of world constitution outside the human. Even the biologist, who perhaps best grasps Area X, can only characterize it by its otherness: "if it has intelligence, that intelligence is far different from our own. It creates out of our ecosystem a new world whose process and aims are utterly alien—one that works through supreme acts of mirroring, and by remaining hidden in so many other ways, all without surrendering the foundations of its otherness" (*Annihilation* 191). Area X is an apocalypse whose very existence defies human thinking and the limitations of human conceptions of totality and its necessity.

In encountering the unencompassable other, the *Southern Reach* trilogy chips away at trying to encompass Area X in some way through the failed human endeavors of trying to understand it. The first novel in the series, *Annihilation*, is narrated by a rational but ecosystem-sympathetic biologist who is sent to Area X with other scientists by a government agency, which has sent various, failed expeditions to produce useful knowledge of Area X. The biologist's narration meticulously tracks the trouble in grappling with the radically inscrutable and the simultaneously radically possible. Simply put: "Area X broke minds. . . a line of a song kept coming back to me: *All this useless knowledge*" (119). It does not take long for the biologist to recognize not only that her preparation was incomplete, but that she simply lacks the capability to fully encompass something so outside her comprehension. Her limitation of perspective is built into her language of size: "But there is a limit to thinking about even a small piece of something monumental. You see the shadow of the whole rearing up behind you and you become lost in your thoughts in part from the panic of realizing the size of that imagined leviathan" (93). The biologist cannot gauge the creature itself, encompass its whole, but its traces alone are enough to induce panic. The alien other of Area X is not thinkable to character or reader, but rather a drawn-out attempt to recognize an other totality, a different world, that pushes the limits of the imagination and what we've come to expect of the world.

Instead, the possibility of stable knowledge explodes in the apocalyptic revision of the world. Even in her final encounter with the creature the biologist cannot begin to grasp what she is seeing, which only reflects back to her own incomplete understanding: "But the longer I stared at it, the less comprehensible the creature became. The more it became something alien to me, and the more I had a sense that I knew nothing at all—about nature, about ecosystems . . . And if I kept looking, I knew that ultimately I would have to admit that I knew less than nothing about

myself as well, whether that was a lie or the truth" (175). The very appearance of this apocalyptic harbinger (who writes a Book of Revelations-esque screed on the wall in some kind of sprouting moss), destabilizes the narrator's beliefs about the world, even herself. The distinction of lie or truth ceases to matter in her in-take of the creature; it is the premises for which she understood the world that are revealed as radically contingent. In the end, the biologist's concept of world is upended, troubled in the binaries of un/real and non/existent, and constantly under the reevaluation: "these things are real and not real. They exist and do not exist. I remake them in my mind with every new thought, with every remembered detail, and each time they are slightly different. . . I was constantly reimaging the world even then, the lighthouse keeper colonizing my thoughts . . . I began to form a narrative for the lighthouse keeper (189-190). The biologist's experience of the radical other and its otherwise-world unseats her own and puts it under constant revision; yet even here she enacts a Blakean creative vision as she responds by building a finite understanding of it, by "forming a narrative."

After her encounter with the Crawler in this alien landscape, "What occurs after revelation and paralysis?" (179). This is the vital question and the stakes of apocalyptic literature, particularly the A(C), and post-Kantian idealist reflection, one to which Blake would answer: change (which the biologist quite literally does) and do it again. Though *Annihilation* is a particularly useful example where the space of the world is dramatized and contingency is forefronted by the literal changes incurred in contact with this world, more subtle and particularly focused science fiction or realist-style apocalypses do this by emphasizing the radical notion that our expectations, rules, or institutions are not in fact necessary. To annihilate the world we know—those tangles of belief that situate and direct our expectations—we

recognize the contingency at the bases of these views. Thus, this apocalyptic mode, at its heart, is freedom.

In this section, I have argued that A(C)s, which emphasize the contingency of certain beliefs, have the capacity to not only de-necessitate certain world-committing beliefs, but can reconfigure our relationship to the world itself and what we expect of these configurations of belief. The annihilation of knowledge, the apocalyptic impulse built into metatheoretical reflection, becomes within a Post-Kantian framework a form of insight itself. Through the apocalyptically-rife methods of comparative models of the world and processual reflection, the annihilation of knowledge sparks a rupture capable of rending the world-incomplete and open to change. When utilized to pursue the freedom rather than self-justification, apocalypses have the capacity both to liberate us from the common sense taken-for-truths we come to expect of the world and the very processes by which we relate to that unsecured, all-encompassing whole. In the next section, I will then explore small exercises of this freedom, within a genre very close to home: literary and philosophical scholarship. Though certainly more grounded in their speculations on the possibilities of the world, these examples project clear pictures of the world reimagined, and thus geared toward change, no matter how thought-based or incremental.

Visionary Forms Theoretic

Science fiction and fantasy apocalypses are an easy vehicle to imagine this radical contingency; fiction, in this way, is freeing. However, we should keep in mind that such freedom is not limited to fiction alone. If self or world annihilation is that which repositions thought, it should perhaps be most pervasive amongst those who consider themselves thinkers, i.e. theorists, critics, and scholars. As we saw in the last section, apocalyptic rhetoric serves as a device for

depicting the revelatory thinking, the visionary form metaphoric that to gives shape to the work of Schelling and Hegel so that it might be understood. Thus, theory and criticism, too, utilize apocalyptic thinking—perhaps even the most shamelessly—to "open up different worlds." In this concluding section, I will briefly look at how criticism employs apocalyptic thinking's contingent modes to create critical breaks and new world(view) possibilities within their own fields. While I could use some of the more obvious, theologically-minded predecessors such as Martin Heidegger, Jean Baudrillard, or Guy Debord, I find that two recent, scientific, and nonetheless obvious cases best serve these ends: Ray Brassier's *Nihil Unbound* and Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects*. Apocalyptic thinking is not solely reserved for the fantastically-minded, the religious, or the revolutionary, but can be employed as an aesthetic tool even for the detail-oriented and straight-laced work of academics. In including these scholarly texts for analysis, I not only hope to illustrate how apocalyptic thinking can instigate newly contingent world-beliefs and just how pervasive such rhetoric can be, but also perhaps, in analyzing like-minded speculative realists, these two are can act as stand-ins for the closest form of metatheoretical analysis this dissertation is willing to undergo.

Ray Brassier's *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* is quick to signal it's the-end-is-nigh narrative, embedding the apocalyptic in its alliterative title. As Brassier finds his starting point at the end of Quentin Meilliasoux's arche-fossil, that is, the heat-death of the universe, he utilizes litanies of good, scientific projection to explode a more human relation to the universe: "[Natural science] is also generating an ever-increasing number of 'descendent statements,' such as the Milky Way will collide with the Andromeda galaxy in 3 billion years; that the earth will be incinerated by the sun 4 billion years hence; that all the stars in the universe will stop shinning in 100 trillion years; and that eventually, one trillion, trillion, trillion years

from now all matter in the cosmos will disintegrate into unbound elementary particles" (49). The building repetition and increasing expansion of the universe within its scope (which, though perhaps not "incomplete," forces a recognition of incomplete of knowledge as pockets of unknown come with each expanded frame) each example is nothing less a dramatic zooming-out which clears the way for Brassier's non-human claim, which brings correllationism into question in the "annihilation of thought" (53). Imagining extinction and the end of the universe makes room for Brassier's "unbound" nihilism.

Though about the finite human necessity of extinction, Brassier's apocalyptic drama serves to open possibilities within the philosophical discourse that he feels has gone astray. It would seem the opposite, given such stringent parsing out of statements regarding necessity, such as "the annihilation of thought indexed by cosmological disintegration cannot be turned into a possibility coextensive with *Dasein*'s being-towards-death. Yet in *Being and Time*, it is death as the impossibility of possibility which provides the ultimate condition of possibility for presencing" (159). However, the "yet" is key here. Though the statement is positing necessity at the level of content (the non-possibility of disintegration), from a metatheoretical standpoint the "annihilation of thought" (for Brassier, the guaranteed death of humans and therefore subjectivity) inspires a different philosophical turn against the usual functioning of Dasein. This example is, I believe, a fair metonymy for the work at large. Throughout the work, Brassier summons the end-of-the-world to resituate the orientation and purpose of certain strains of philosophy, whether it be through dramatizing Lyotard's apocalyptic thinking (where the sun's extinction "blots out the terrestrial horizon of future possibility relative to which human existence, and hence human philosophical questioning have hitherto oriented themselves" (223)) or painting the picture of extinction of the universe (where "every star in the universe will have

burnt out, plunging the cosmos into a state of absolute darkness and leaving behind nothing but spent husks of collapsed matter" and eventually "the stellar corpses littering the empty universe will evaporate into a brief hailstorm of elementary particles. Atoms themselves will cease to exist" (228)). Brassier puts the apocalyptic narrative of extinction to work as a vehicle to rearrange the goals—and therefore possibilities—within the discipline of philosophic thought, because "extinction turns thinking inside out, objectifying it as a perishable thing in the world like any other" (229).

Of course, there's more than one way to destroy the world, and fellow speculative realist Timothy Morton utilizes the apocalyptic to rethink our relationship to climate change in *Hyperobjects*. Like Brassier, the content is also about the end of the world, for hyperobjects are "directly responsible for what I call the end of the world, rending both denialism and apocalyptic environmentalism obsolete" (2). Though Morton seeks to pull us out of an "apocalyptic" mindset toward environmentalism (which he sees as helplessly defeatist) and into a newly, truly committed program, it is his own end-of-the-world aesthetics that tells us to do so.[50] He compares his own project to that of *Wall-E* (23) and declares the "ultimate goal" of the book is "to set up a weird transit lounge outside of history" (4), as if each of these were not by definition apocalyptic. By positing, that is imagining, that "the end of the world has already occurred" (7), Morton can then move past the hand-wringing of the near future and institute a new telos by bringing its end into view. Like this project, Morton searches for a worldview that is worldless, which in turn transforms the very organization of reality: "What's left if we aren't in the world? Intimacy. We have lost the world but gained a soul—the entities that coexist with us obtrude on our awareness with greater and greater urgency. Three cheers for the so-called *end of the world*, then, since the moment is the beginning of history, the end of the human dream that reality is

significant for them alone" (108). In this end, Morton finds the possibility of a new beginning in reorienting the reader away from a purely human worldview.

The apocalypse as thought-device and destructively-charged rhetoric sparks both of these scholars' commitments to new paths forward, new views of the world, and new beginnings. In extracting the role of apocalyptic thought in these thinkers, I by no means intend to dispute the vital role of these works and their stakes therein but rather to recognize the critical value in this particular kind of thought device in our own scholarly usage. Though both works' content encompasses the apocalyptic, its flamboyant representation is employed to an attempt to change the supposed dominant narratives of the field. Brassier must imagine the end of the world to think thought differently, whereas Morton himself sees the value in simply shifting the type of his apocalypse, between what he calls apocalyptic environmentalism and the end of the world, as a key to executing real change. Both scholars see themselves as bursting through the "corrupted" systems of expectations in their fields; however, that these scholars, like Blake, indulge in Hell's corrosives should surprise no one. With such examples, it seems fair to apply such a lens to other apocalyptically minded critical works, this project notwithstanding. We scholars might perhaps be the best and worst offenders in the proliferation of the apocalyptic, either in its useful applications or shock-nullifying blandness. Maybe for this reason we ought to more credit for the aesthetic work of scholarship. It is a wonderfully creative business.

In this chapter, I've argued that A(C)s, those apocalypses that embrace the contingency embedded within particular worldviews and de-necessitate certain beliefs of the world, produce a pattern of apocalypse unlike what we usually expect of the deterministic revelation that exposes the false. Apocalypses of contingency instead re-write the possibility of the world and in doing so hone the ability to revise the thinkers very relationship to the world, not just the beliefs

themselves that constitute it. In embracing the incompleteness of the world in the process of comparative evaluation, A(C)s pursue freedom at the level of world-commitments and beliefs, a stance with the flexible capacity to challenge commonly misconceived necessities.

But what then? So far in this project, I have argued apocalyptic thinking can catalyze a divorce from world-committing beliefs that can result in patterns of world revisions, sorted here in terms of emphasizing the necessity or contingency of certain beliefs. In the next chapter, I will return to the question of commitment, particularly how apocalyptic thinking can compel commitments to the newly revised worlds and move beyond the language of belief and into the manifest realities of everyday believers.

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[42] You can thank Neil Gaiman for this comforting vision in "A Dream of a Thousand Cats" from *The Sandman*.

[43] You may note all of these examples are human-centric. Because our conceptions of the world are often so human-centric (and exist in the language play of "world"), these are the easiest to target. However, one could easily dredge up non-human-centric beliefs that are made contingent, such as in time-travel narratives. I also realized far too late into this project that I had not included *Children of Men*, whose exclusion would have constituted a grave mistake and thus include it as example here.

[44] Between this and the previous chapter's focus on beliefs of contingency and necessity in apocalypse, it is easy to assume apocalypses choose one or the other. However, I would like to stress here it is a matter of emphasis; both types of modal shifts occur in each of these recurrent types of apocalypse, and most likely even within apocalypses that do not fit into either pattern. What matters to these chapters is how these apocalypses utilize these recognizable changes to certain, similar effect.

[45] William Blake, *The Four Zoas*, included in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1965), p. 385. All subsequent references to Blake are to this edition and will be incorporated into the text in parentheses.

[46] In an important survey for the concept, *Metametaphysics*, David Manley defines metametaphysics as that "which is concerned with the foundations of metaphysics. It asks: do the questions of metaphysics really have answers? If so, are these answers substantive or just a matter of how we use words? And what is the best procedure for arriving at them—common sense? Cognitive analysis? Or assessing competing hypotheses with quasi-scientific criteria?" (1). While I by no means to draw Blake into the field-specific dimensions of this particular conversation this collection begins, I borrow the term in the sense that Blake seems to be doing something similar (and that which Manley does for the rest of his introduction), which is laying out what he sees as challenges to metaphysics and the forms of disputes metaphysics raise.

[47] My emphasis.

[48] Lest my rhetoric get away from me and be mistaken for naïve cosmopolitanism, I would like to note here the focus of the project remains on functional conceptions of the world, the totality of totalities—not an ideal utopian world, but the base condition of thinking the world, that is what it is, itself. A world that excludes the wrong, as we saw in previous chapter, cannot remain a totality and thus commits to a world of anxiety.

[49] While I have yet to uncover such scholarship (at least in English) to support this assumption that unites all three around the "Selfhood," Schelling, like Blake, was likely influenced by Emanuel Swedenborg's concept of "Selfhood." For more on Swedenborg's influence on Blake, see Harvey F. Bellin's *Blake and Swedenborg* or David V. Erdman's Erdman, David V. "Blake's

Early Swedenborgianism". For the connection between Swedenborg and Schelling, see Daniel Whistler's "Silvering, or the Role of Mysticism in German Idealism."

[50] Morton makes an important distinction for his work between apocalyptic (defeatist) narratives and end of the world narratives. My own language and argument throughout this dissertation does not pay heed to this distinction and will continue not to in this section, since it does not change my overall point regarding Morton's aesthetics. For more on this distinction within Morton's work, see the introduction and chapter entitled "The End of the World" in *Hyperobjects*.

CHAPTER FIVE

Apocalypse Made Manifesto

"Belief

Initiates and guides action—

Or it does nothing"

–Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents*

"We have it in our power to begin the world over again"

—Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*

Throughout this project, I have argued that apocalyptic thinking can disrupt and suspend one's commitment to certain beliefs, and in doing so, rearrange the modal claims of particular beliefs and establish different ways for relating to a world ideal. The previous two chapters addressed the two ways I see this occurring, in which apocalyptic thinking can reveal necessary truths to present and justify certain world-committing beliefs (as seen in the Book of Revelation model) or de-center a belief by rethinking it contingently, so as to destabilize reified ideas of what the world must be and making new, unrealized "truths" possible (as we see in Blake). We see how end-of-the-world thinking can radically shift worldviews, tearing up the floorboards of a subject's reality and re-lay a new foundation for thinking about the world. But so what? What then?

In this chapter, I hope to answer these questions by returning to the question of commitment in relation to world-committing beliefs, or how a subject solidifies certain ideas regarding the nature of the world as truth. If apocalyptic thinking, as an encounter with the

philosophical problem of thinking worlds, can put to the test one's commitment to certain world beliefs (as I explored in chapter two) and change those beliefs (as in chapters three and four), the work of apocalyptic thinking extends also to its own conclusion: to renew commitments to different beliefs in pursuit of those newly-configured worldviews. This may seem at odds with our typical narrative of the apocalypse's desolate purpose or lack of futurity, often associated with pure apathy.[51] However, I believe such a view is too reductive. The apocalyptic, neither inherently dystopian nor utopian, can be seen weaving its ways into visions of worlds that can only be called novel, for they define themselves against previous ideas of "the world." For if utopian thinking is "the commitment to closure (and thereby to totality)" as Frederic Jameson argues (4), it must first break with its current working world-concept. What better way to do it than the imaginative power of ending the world? This chapter will look at apocalyptic thought that restructures beliefs to commit new worlds and new ways of inhabiting them.

For this reason, I return again to Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*, whose protagonist's change of belief depicts both the destabilization of world-commitments and their re-establishment by film's end, to briefly illustrate my argument. The film is a meditation on the radical shift of commitment: a passive atheist becomes both an actor and believer in the face of the coming apocalypse. In Alexander's prayer where he offers a pact with a Christian god to save the world from coming doom, the protagonist begins with the Lord's prayer but switches into a plea for everything (including those who love God and those who don't) and against the "sick animal fear" of nothing (no people, no nature). In the space of worldlessness (the nothing Alexander fears) and the rearranged priorities of world commitments, apocalyptic thinking can commit a thinker to a new world whole—a better, or at least salvaged, world. The attempt to imagine everything through its destruction and the coercive ultimatums of "all" or "nothing," only

compels new commitments, which is why the film so fitting ends with Little Man asking, "In the beginning was the Word. Why is that, Papa?" *The Sacrifice* also stands as a testament to commitment inspired beyond the work itself. Not only does Tarkovsky suggest that the more his convictions about the desperate state of the world hardened that the more he became "committed" to this film as "the most important thing in [his] life" (Tarkovsky 218), but when film jammed in the final, expensive shot of the house burning, the dying director rebuilt the house and filmed it again (Tarkovsky 226). The power of apocalyptic thought resides not simply in its world-displacing capacity but also in the strength of its call to new commitments, to something *better*.

The same worldlessness that terrifies Alexander and destabilizes Eliot's mythic lineage is also what inspires new commitments and new world-configurations. If beliefs come into play in the radical disorder of displaced taken-for-truths and are reshaped, those new beliefs form a new worldview. In this chapter, I will argue the worldlessness of apocalyptic thinking can inspire new commitments by reminding the thinker it could be otherwise, exposing that theatrical "as if" nature of the world. But what separates the thinkers of this chapter and that of the second is willingness to employ the apocalyptic opportunity toward revolutionary goals of imagining, representing, and then inhabiting the world of these new commitments. Apocalyptic thinking can be a powerful tool for displacing current worldviews to envision and share new world ideals, ones its followers find worth working toward, worth realizing.

To track these apocalyptically realized worlds, this chapter will look at two case studies, one religious and one secular: the American Shakers and early 20th century Russian and Soviet avant-garde movements. The Shakers—more accurately, the United Society of Believers who were popularly dubbed "shakers" by a skeptical public—were a communist religious sect both

popular and infamous in the 18th and 19th centuries, known not only for their distinctive worship style ("shakers") and furniture but also their fervent eschatological beliefs. (It should be noted that, as I write, Shakerism is not a dead faith; two Believers still live on, despite the sect's population decline since the middle of the 19th century).[52] Due to the Shakers' strict eschatological beliefs that positioned them as inhabiting a post-apocalyptic world, I find a useful comparison in the early 20th century Russian avant-garde. These artists were likewise apocalyptically inspired; writing in the wake of the 1905 revolution, World War I, and the October revolution, they tried to imagine the end of an old regime and the beginning of a new, particularly in the call for a new everyday (*novy byt*) after the October Revolution. Both Shakers and these Russian artists utilized the apocalyptic to imagine new ways of being in the world, new communist societies. Both embraced lifestyles that reflected these post-apocalyptic worldviews, embracing utilitarian invention and exploring non-procreative futures.

In what follows, I will lay out the revolutionary potential of apocalyptic thinking found particularly in the manifestos and design of these two groups of post-apocalyptic thinkers. By tracing the way apocalypse can both reshape new ideas of world and forge new commitments to that world, I explore how an apocalypse can, despite defeatist arguments, inspire revitalized conceptions of the world while simultaneously working its way into the realization of that worldview. Beginning with a description of how the worldlessness of apocalyptic thought can be employed to form and represent new world-configurations, I will trace the use of apocalyptic rhetoric firstly through the genre of the manifesto to discover what it can tell us about creating compelling apocalyptic commitments. I will then turn to the examples of Russian avant-garde manifestos and use their similarity to explore Shaker "manifestos" and religious declarations as potential manifesto precursors. In doing so, I hope to elucidate how and why apocalyptic rhetoric

is married to the manifesto and more importantly is capable of realizing commitments to new worldviews.

Finally, following the results of such belief-transitions, I will look at the inventive manifestations of apocalyptic thinking into everyday life in both art and utilitarian lifestyles. Both Shakers and Russian post-revolution artists embraced the opportunity to rethink the basis of their community gathering (whether in the performance of sacred worship or national identity) and the organization of daily life, from their relationship to work, sex, or living space via their furniture and architecture. More than a theatrical act, I will show how apocalyptic thinking can in fact deliver on the manifestation of those worlds, particularly regarding the lifestyle revisions, organization, and artistic expression of both communities. Thus, I hope to show the proactive potential of eschatological thought and illustrate how something as subjective and transitory as a belief *about* the world wreaks its effects *within* it.

But before we examine this midwife role that the apocalypse plays for the utopian, however, it is important to note apocalyptic thinking's amorality. As a process of belief-transition it is neither inherently good nor bad, as far as I can tell. This, I hope, has been made clear in the previous two chapters, where the moral dimension of certain world-committing beliefs fundamentally reorients its worldview. As we saw in chapter three, the beliefs at stake may in fact be moral claims, but there is a more critical meta-judgment regarding what such beliefs both mean and do that is less encompassed by the apocalyptic thought itself then by what the world-ideals reveals. The content of those beliefs and, importantly, the worlds they commit one to are morally relevant. The apocalyptic serves as but a tool to make those worlds conceivable, and therefore possible. This final chapter interrogates that possibility. The consequences of these new concepts of world do not end simply in terms of belief and thought,

but fuel its own makings and doings, ones that refract the apocalyptic nature of their own conception. Just as contemporary evangelical Christians can vote on the basis of (and in pursuit of) eschatological desires or scholars use climate change's speculative futures to call readers to action, so too have various apocalypse-embracing groups utilized their end-of-worldviews to not only shift how they perceive the world but also how they interact with it in light of those beliefs—for better, or worse.

The End is Theatrical

As I have argued in chapter two, apocalyptic thinking puts the world in peril and generates a comparative model of world. This sense of other options and the mutable character of world-beliefs invites the displacement of those deeply-set beliefs, through what I have referred to as a kind of worldlessness which is prone to the negotiation of world-committing beliefs. But where we left "The Waste Land" grappling for new commitments, the cases featured in this chapter recognize the destabilizing opportunity of apocalyptic thinking, the "as if" nature buried in one's relationship to the world. In this section, I will return to these questions of commitment in the search of worldlessness, this time with a focus on how such freedom can be used to represent new depictions of world and to direct others toward these new world beliefs. Apocalyptic thinking, by splitting the world into two distinct possibilities, can compel commitments to a newly envisioned future.

Apocalyptic thinking, particularly in its rhetorical uses, has that same world-destabilizing power, which, if recognized, can be used to push against the commitments of currently-held worldviews. End-of-the-world rheotric, draws the world into peril and in doing so encourages a split from a subject's current working model of world. If the world can end, what else should it

have been? What could it become? This rhetoric encourages a spilt in our world imaginaries. To imagine utopia, or even just something else, one must first cut through the established necessity of what is, those claims that the world cannot be different, that a new world ideal is unrealistic because it is not yet "real." Using the end of the world to explode the necessary commitments of the old world, apocalyptic rhetoric smartly employed can generate that same world-decommitting power as we have seen in the previous chapters, that capacity to unsettle the world-bearing assumptions of old worlds—with the concise pressure to guide the reader to the next phase, which is to adopt a new world.

But just as apocalyptic thinking's capacity for splitting the world into different possible wholes, ideals, or outcomes destabilizes our singular worldview, so too does it brings in that comparative model for thinking the world, one which can foster a sense of agency for the thinker toward new world visions. This comparative model, as I argued in the second chapter, both frees the thinker from the illusion of a singular world and thus provides the imaginative space to think it differently. The woulds, coulds, shoulds of thinking the world depart from the world as is, from the mistake of thinking of the world as purely beyond human activities (which I argued in the previous chapter is a gesture toward agency). The comparative model of world suggests the world could be different, is not so well defined by the assumptions we held to be true, and thus provides the opportunity to rearrange world-committing beliefs. Apocalyptic thinking, in generating this worldly-friction, offers the agency to think the world as something else—to begin the world all over again under a different model.

To mold a new configuration of the world means taking advantage of that "as if" quality of having the world in view—both in terms of its potential contingency (things could be otherwise) and its theatrical character. Worlds, as I have argued via Kant and the idealists who

followed him, rely on an "as if" character to hold them in view, an act that distances and obscures the world from our own act of reference. But this same quality that disrupts and distances a world, obscuring its formation in a blindspot, can become the factor that establishes the performative possibility of a new world. The ability to not only emphasize a comparative model of worlds, and thus destabilizing certain commitments to the world, but also to remake a new image of the world, makes this "as if" an indispensable tool for those with revolutionary complaint regarding the way things are. If the world is not solely beyond our own organizing activities the important question becomes what it could be—an imagining what it could be means bringing it into view, giving it a representational format, the future's Golgonooza.

Thus, like Blake's Los who labors to provide forms of reflection, apocalypses that mean to inspire new commitments use the end of the world to make room for a new world-ideal, a new world picture via that theatrical "as if" that blends the fictional into taken-for-truths. The unrealistic utopia might be not yet real, but the world-revising capacity of apocalypse and its theatrical display makes it *realized*. By giving a picture, a configuration of different world beliefs, these theatrical displays generate new beliefs and, even if disregarded as untrue, exist and trouble other commitments to the world. Though presented in the fictive imagination of the texts they inhabit and not as the world itself, these theatrical representations constitute a challenge to visions of the world as it is and use that performance to compel commitments to its new ideals.

This apocalyptic theatricality, I believe, is most recognizable in the manifesto, which declares a future world it means to simultaneously produce. Whether the imagery borrowed from the Book of Revelation or the "inevitable" end-of-history rhetoric (Marx and Engels 169), the apocalyptic has proven to have a recurrent home in the genre of the manifesto. This, I believe, is

due to the shared methods and goals of both this genre and apocalyptic thought: both attempt to cut ties with the past, both seek new iterations of new worlds. Thus, manifestoes attempt to spread and reify beliefs that organize a community, oftentimes utilizing the world-shaping rhetoric of apocalypse to do so. But manifestos are more than just an opportunity or vision for change: they are also an attempt to make it so, and thus a useful illustration of how apocalyptic thinking attempts to re-shape the thinker's existence and experience of that world. Manifestos use the language and world-shifting idea of apocalypse to picture their novel world-concept. That alone, however, is not enough. If it is the function of manifestos is to announce and therefore induce change, then apocalyptic thinking can be understood as an apt tool for these efforts, fostering the imaginative space to forge new, dedicated commitments to these transitioned-to world-committing beliefs.

In tracking apocalyptic thought in manifestos, I turn to literary critic Martin Puchner's *Poetry of the Revolution* because it establishes the manifesto in a genre of its own and, in doing so, situates the manifesto within an apocalyptic lineage. Puchner cites two revolutionary and Revelation-based precursors to *The Communist Manifesto* (the first true manifesto according to Puchner), each arising from religious groups pulling from apocalyptic traditions. Though Puchner acknowledges the use of Revelation-style rhetoric allows these examples an alternative authority to substantiate claims against the power they seek to disrupt, he ultimately dismisses these examples as important precursors but whose use of such rhetoric "conceals" the revolutionary intent of such proto-manifestos (17). Rather than take the world or future into their hands, these pre-manifestos appropriate the language of the apocalypse to borrow its authority. This is a fitting distinction for analyzing a modern genre; it is, however, a less fitting framework for tracing a longer trajectory of revolutionary rhetoric and thought at large. In spite of this

difference in authority in the shift from Biblical revelation to a more secular manifesto, this apocalypoticism is a phase the manifesto does not outgrow, where the theatrically exuberant narratives of destruction for the sake of rebirth dominate.

Manifestos (especially for the modernist avant-garde) seem to foster eschatological thinking. Despite Puchner's reasonable rejection of the apocalyptic for the modern manifesto, his description of the genre establishes an agenda for it surprisingly similar to that of the apocalyptic thought. Most obviously, a manifesto shares the same intent to "change the world" (Puchner 3). Though perhaps not so literal to Puchner, in practice it appears even more apocalyptic, for the manifesto's program attempts "to create points of no return; to make history; to fashion the future" (2). It is an agenda of action. For Puchner, manifestos are theatrical attempts to engender the authority to become performative speech acts, recognized speech that can transform the concept of reality. Such a definition creates clear parallels with apocalyptic thinking's attempt to replace one world with another, an old reality for a new. Often, this is conceived of through time, as the avant-garde tradition of violently breaking with the past naturally unites with the apocalyptic narrative of destruction and rebirth. Artaud's concept of plague, Tzara's "Dada Manifesto," Aimé Césaire's "In Guise of a Literary Manifesto," and Breton, Rivera, and Trostsky's "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art" all carry within them explicit claims of the need for complete destruction of the past in order to secure a better reality, even though each is from a different movement and some from different continents. The tendency of these manifestos to stress the negation of the past more strongly than the new ideals they propose only emphasizes the idea of apocalyptic ruin and gives way to its rhetoric, a rhetoric of excess capable of bursting through the old-world standards and beliefs.

But this rhetorical overflow is not without purpose, for the eschatological threat can add importance, urgency, and necessary theatricality to a claim, which can inspire new commitments to a different worldview. If manifestos are, as Puchner argues, a theatrical act used to usurp authority to incite action (Puchner 25), the threat embedded within apocalyptic narratives is a key resource to such theatricality. Apocalyptic thinking can split the world into two potential world futures, by claiming that a current failure in the present that will lead to ultimate destruction if not somehow averted through a change, usually realized through the manifestos performative act. The theatrical "as if" scenario Puchner sees in the manifesto is also that of apocalyptic world-commitments (Puchner 30); the reader is led to believe that there are only two possible outcomes for the future and often that the world is already in the midst of decline, which brings two worlds via this theatricality into view. The apocalypse dramatizes, whether based on probable events or not, world-confrontations that are rooted in the threatening exaggeration of hyperbole and the language of extremes. Though the type of apocalypse may change (decay or technologically enhanced violence being two major recurring modernist threats), the same core threat remains: all or nothing, worldlessness or committed action. "X," whatever it may be, must be achieved or we will all die.

Breton, Trotsky and Rivera's "Manifesto for an Independent Revolutionary Art" provides a prime example of this theatrically apocalyptic threat. The manifesto opens with an apocalyptic crisis ominously close to fruition: "Without any exaggeration one can say that human civilization has never before been so exposed to so many dangers. . . . Today we see the whole of civilization being threatened in the integrity of its historical destiny by reactionary forces armed with the entire arsenal of modern technology" (Caws 472). The manifesto imaginatively posits the destruction of all civilization as the most likely of two futures. But by the end of the same drastic

paragraph, the reader is pointed to its supposed solution, the change that must happen to escape total destruction: "We are not only thinking of an impending war: already, while we are still at peace, art and science have been placed in an impossible situation" (472). The rest of the manifesto is a call to action, performative action, to change this same art. The augmentation of urgency within the apocalyptic narrative provides a drastic but convincing plea for transformation—a world splitting act of pretend.

Such apocalyptic theatrics are thus more crucial to the genre than it originally appears. Allow me to walk through Puchner's manifesto archetype, the *Communist Manifesto*, as an example of this power. Though it may seem that such an apocalyptic threat is missing from *The Communist Manifesto*, it uses the same, though less obvious (i.e. bloody) exchange of an old world for a new one. The *Manifesto* not only begins in laying out the historical basis in the first section meant to be overcome and replaced, but in the second sentence Marx and Engels single out the "old Europe" as representative of that separate world order (158). One need not dive deeply into to the influence of Charles Fourier on Marx to see how, even still in the *Manifesto*, the utopian impulse to split history into new and old worlds lingers in the text's rhetoric.[53] Rather than depict apocalyptic destruction and ruin, the *Manifesto* is about the necessary, utopian transition of worlds. Puchner's first true manifesto lacks an apocalyptic threat because Marx and Engels do not leave room for another possibility for the future. The proletarian revolution is undoubtedly coming according to *The Communist Manifesto*—a necessary *must*, not unlike some world-ending beliefs explored in chapter three—so the authors need not threaten what will happen to the world if it does not. Instead, the work has already begun: "they have a world to win" (186). Marx and Engels' new world is readymade. Unlike previous apocalypses I've covered in the project, the authors have concluded the necessary shift (though not seen as belief)

of the world at large. It need only be committed to, manifested by action and effort (according to the visionary form dramatized by the manifesto). The *Manifesto*'s world-committing beliefs have moved beyond transition of worldlessness—they need only bring that world into being through commitment itself.

Thus, even in its secular manifestations, apocalyptic thinking proves a useful tool in the hope of revolution and its ability to foster commitments to a new worldview. The *Manifesto* divides up the past and future into separate worlds and promises the latter a new realm of possibilities, in doing so guaranteeing a new world (though it still needs "winning") and a program for bringing it about. Marx and Engels reforming of commitments to this new worldview is easy because it is already happening. Of course, the very absence of a Plan B may perhaps point to the possibility that if Marx and Engels were to consider the possibility that the Communist revolution would not triumph within the manifesto itself, we might receive the same narrative of imminent decay and ultimate destruction of civilization due to the bourgeoisie. The manifestos that follow, however, do not restrict themselves to one possibility for the future. Instead, they fill out what might be implied in *The Communist Manifesto*: change OR death.

Apocalypses then, in establishing a vital space of worldlessness, have a "world to win"—one that can be shaped into a form worth committing to. Just as apocalyptic rhetoric can burst through our old ideas of world, inviting new configurations and the "as if" quality found in worldlessness, it can also utilize such destabilizing tools to make the world anew. Using the end of the world to imagine and represent the possibility of the world as something else, apocalyptic rhetoric or imagery can create a compelling image—and necessary path—to build the world the thinker wishes to inhabit. Thus manifestos, as a genre operating with a similar telos as that of apocalyptic thinking, use the theatrical power of apocalypse to break from old worldviews to

inspire commitments. In the next section, I will dive into how this commitment happens through my two case studies, through the manifestos of the early twentieth century Russian avant-gardes and the Shakers.

Gesturing Across the End of the World

Prior to this section, I argued apocalyptic thinking, particularly as it appears in the manifestos, can split with old world ideas and offer representations of new worldviews to commit to. But what does that look like and how do such commitments change the thinker's world? In this section, I will trace the apocalyptic forms in the manifestos of the Russian avant-garde and the Shakers to demonstrate how apocalyptic worldlessness makes room to form commitments to new world-beliefs, starting with the twentieth century avant-gardists. Both the Shakers as an apocalyptic religious sect and the early 20th century Russian avant-gardists as "people of the future" ("What Does Lef Fight For" 189 (fix)) utilize the imagery and rhetoric of ending a world in an effort to establish their new communities, revising their ways of living in their revised conception of the world. Let's begin with the most obvious case: the manifestos of the Russian avant-garde.

The Russian Futurists were keen on using the eschatological cycle to disrupt their relationship to artistic representation, language, and thus world-committing beliefs. Their manifestos prove to be some of the most eschatologically violent of the historical avant-gardes, as they are wedged between two revolutions. In the manifesto "Slap in the Face of Public Taste"—whose authorship is shared with David Burliuk, Alexander Kruchenykh, Victor Khlebnikov, and Vladimir Mayakovsky—the Futurists play out the usual apocalyptic narrative. They deny the efficacy of past art ("The past is too tight!"), propose its violent destruction

("Throw Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, etc., etc. overboard from the Ship of Modernity"), and create a list of demands and requirements for the future of art, including a similar destruction of language in favor of new words and a communal joining under the word "we" (Caws 230). In doing so, they sing the "New Coming Beauty of the Self-sufficient (self-centered) Word" (230). For even language itself is declared to have its own eschatological cycle, as Alexi Kruchenykh declares in "Declaration of the Word as Such": "WORDS DIE, THE WORLD IS ETERNALLY YOUNG" (Lawton 68). Narratives of destruction and rebirth were sewn into the Futurist's very concept of language as well as in their politics, which reemerge in the formation of their apocalyptic threats, meant to reorient the readers expectations of the world.

Mayakovsky in particular is also a master of this apocalyptic threat to position the world in a state of distress. "We, Too, Want Meat!" (1914) opens with a vivid comparison between soldiers fighting and poetry: "Here on the chipped wall is the five-fingered shrapnel imprint made of bits of human brain. How clever to attach to the stupid battlefield hundreds of severed human heads" (Caws 231). Mayakovsky, in this World War I manifesto, situates Russia within the devastating threat of modern warfare, the nation already having gained and lost East Prussia in the few months before this manifesto was written. By aligning war with the condition of poetry, the stakes of poetry desperately rise, until equivalent with blood and guts vividly splattered on the wall. This is made all the more dramatic and threatening by its connection to the current conflict. A later manifesto, "A Drop of Tar" (1915), uses the same technique again, opening instead with "Ladies and Gentlemen! / This is a year of deaths" (Caws 233). Though responding as much to the Cubo-Futurist break-up as the current political landscape, this manifesto goes on to further substantiate its claim in the then currently relevant decline brought about by the massacre of youth: "how can you understand youth? The young people to whom we

are dear will not soon return from the battlefield, . . . you, who are too rickety to carry a weapon, you, old bags crammed with wrinkles and gray hair, you are preoccupied with figuring out the smoothest possible way to pass onto the next world and not with the destiny of Russian art" (Caws 233). That the young are dying in the war as the social makeup becomes increasingly one of decaying old men (women do not seem to figure into the equation) only addresses the very real issue of regeneration after the war. Just as Russian Futurism refused to see its work divorced from contemporary politics, the apocalyptic threats of the Russian avant-garde carried clearly relevant end-times imagery, that positions the world in a state of precarity.

This rupture-inducing violence serves to imagine the implementation of a different, novel world. This distinction in vision is perhaps clearest in "The Trumpet of the Martians", where the Futurists see themselves as literally coming from a different world. They bring with them the threat of world-ending reckoning, for "Planet Earth begins to shake already at the heavy tread of our feet!" (239). This imaginary space war opens up the world-possibilities (a new worldview from Mars but also the destruction of Earthly ways) for Futurists, for "the war . . . forces one to break through the frontiers of what yesterday was unknown" ("A Drop of Tar" 234). For some artists, like the Rayonists, this world-splitting juncture was as inevitable as communist revolution was for Marx and Engels; though their art had "to do battle" with the old, success was only a "matter of time" for "the future is behind us" ("Rayonists and Futurists" 240-1). Other Futurists not associated with the Cubo-futurists also joined in the "mutiny against the earth" ("Why We Paint Ourselves"). As "creators," Ilya Zdenevich and Mikhail Larionov saw themselves as "having nothing to do with the earth" and opted instead "to herald the unknown, to rearrange life" (245). In this way, turning against the "world" in destructive resistance went hand-in-hand with the rhetoric of creating a new world—but it required a break, first, to become possible.

With this apocalyptic rhetorical move in mind, it is unsurprising that apocalyptic thinking ushered in a new-worlds narrative taken up by these avant-gardists, especially after the October Revolution. As graphically violent as the Futurist apocalypses proved, the promises of novel worlds were equally flamboyant, striking out in a vibrant call to commitment and action. Destruction was linked to the fertile future of the new, for from "across the ashes and cindered homes of the past, / before the gates of the vacant future. . . A blossoming of a new culture and a new civilization with their unprecedented-in-history of the masses" ("The Realistic Manifesto" 396-7). The manifesto recognized destruction provides compelling grounds to make a new worldview necessary. This meant a new narrative, a new logic (the old now exploded). Though perhaps less than grateful for the hole other avant-gardists blew open, many Constructivists recognized the need to create a new ideal totality, for "the distracted world . . . broken in shreds by their logical anarchy, cannot satisfy [those] who have already accomplished the Revolution or who are already constructing and building up anew" (397). Compelled by the need for a vision to build around and a committed public to do it, these manifestos seize the opportunity to create a program to match the new world they saw themselves moving into. Unlike the manifestos of artists on the other side of the continent and elsewhere, who also imagined an end of the world, the political shift of the revolution produced a push toward a post-apocalyptic imaginary—one, however, very unlike the zombified, regressive kind so popular with Americans of the 21st century. Though the rhetoric we've covered, as Puchner notes, is just that—a puffed-up chest of theatricality meant to make up for absent authority—that rhetoric still bleeds into the depiction of a new world at work post-revolution. In this way, apocalyptic thinking both attempted to cultivate a revolution, aiding the commitment to bring about a different world, and began to also shape what the possibilities for that new, post-history world could look like.

With this impetus, the apocalypse of manifestos changes from simple (ideological) destruction to the work of world-*building*. Oftentimes, the manifesto reminds the reader that the readers are living in a post-apocalyptic world and must act accordingly. In "Whom Does Lef Wrangle With" (1923), LEF, a journal of post-revolution artists and designers that emerged from the dissolved Cubo-Futurist movement, admits a change in strategy: "The Revolution has shifted the theater of our critical actions. / *We have to reconsider our tactics*" (Lawton 196). Similarly, the manifesto and its methods of eliciting change are also forced to adapt. Less in need of a direct apocalyptic threat, the revolution, even though past, haunts the manifesto as an incentive to act as the new people they are called to become. LEF's "Whom Does Lef Warn" reminds its readers of their new responsibilities post-revolution: "Now, the globe of the bourgeoisie belly is no more. / Sweeping away the old junk with the revolution, we have cleared the ground for the construction of art. / No more earthquakes. / . . . It's time to undertake *big projects*" (Lawton 199). Revolution, its own apocalypse in replacing an old with a new, was never absent from the avant-garde, which fought desperately to change the old-minded art into something proper for the new person under the Bolshevik revolution. The avant-garde acknowledged that the revolution they called for in earlier manifestos had been achieved, but that their political apocalypse alone was not enough. The construction of the new person to inhabit this new world was its own revolutionary act—the commitment to which they needed to give direction.

This realization changed the position of the avant-garde, which no longer demanded a political revolution but a more personal one, the work of everyday commitments. Mayakovsky took up this social complaint, calling for a "third revolution" that would be "bloodless but cruel—a revolution of the soul" (qtd. in Wachtel and Vinitsky 188). For him, neither art nor personal lifestyles had been had changed all that much in the new state. The Russian classics still

held sway, and LEF complained of such classics influence on the continuance of bourgeoisie habits: "*we will fight against the transferring of the working methods of the dead into today's art*. . . . [fight] *against those who with the evil intention of restoring the old ideology assign to the old academic junk an active role in today's world,* . . . We will fight those who replaced the poetry of private houses with the poetry of private house-committees" (Lawton 197). From old ideology to corrupt apartment managers, LEF did not distinguish between art and life. The artists of the avant-garde instead insisted on a clean break from the past that could only be truly manifested in the act of everyday living and consciousness, acts towards the construction of a new communist identity.

These manifestos demonstrate how the early twentieth century Russian avant-gardes employed apocalyptic rhetoric to move toward an image of a new world and the commitments that would make it so. But before we being to look at how the end of the world shaped these new ideas of community, I would like to compare the manifestos of our other proto-communist apocalyptophiles, the Shakers. While Russian artists had a state revolution to work with, they are not the only manifesto writers who used the apocalyptic to engage a new, personal revolution with new political implications for its participants.. The Shakers, too, as the political actors of their personal revolution, mended eschatological narratives into different worldviews than those of their eighteenth and nineteenth century peers. Though not often thought of as manifestos, the Shakers' statements of belief articulate their faith in forms so concise, candid, and world-ending that certain parts seem indistinguishable from modern manifestos. As an eschatology-centric religious sect, also communistic and invested in gender-parity (the Shakers believed their founder Mother Ann Lee was the second coming of Christ and thus attempted to establish a society where women had equal authority and power), the United Society of Believers used

manifestos to define and justify their place in and against the world with many of the same tactics we tracked above.

Puchner does not consider the Shakers in his study of manifestos, but *Dunlavy's Manifesto*, published in 1818, preceded *The Communist Manifesto* by thirty years. Though more of a theological treatise meant to legitimize the community than a modern manifesto, as it is too large to be cheaply circulated and too academic to be purely theatrical (which is not to say the two don't overlap), the work contains many of the same sentiments of the manifestos previously discussed. After the first chapter that argues the existence of god, Dunlavy's second chapter is devoted to describing the differences between current forms of Christianity and the tenets of the Shakers themselves, defining their sect through its difference from its Christian predecessors (not unlike Marx's move to define true Communism against others in his *Manifesto*). But the truly manifesto-like piece of *Dunlavy's* is the transition into the third, eschatological section of his book "Of the Resurrection and the Judgment" (Dunlavy 349), which is not without its theatrical moments: "Peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues; a divided and immense multitude over whom the great whore; THE MYSTERY BABYLON THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH presideth, with noise, tumults and divisions, like the roaring waves and commotions of the sea. But none of these things are in the church of Christ" (Dunlavy 348). Dunlavy's use of dramatic capital letters is reminiscent of "Declaration of the Word as Such" and other manifestos that freely draw attention to itself though this technique. No less dramatic are his choices for what to capitalize, Revelation's great whore, made visceral with the natural-disaster imagery. This piece of *Dunlavy's Manifesto* contains the apocalyptic threat and the sole possibility of, and therefore compelling, mitigation. Though hoping more for a conversion of individuals than a total national or political revolution (for the Shakers, living

within the sect was revolutionary enough), Dunlavy's work is not beyond the power of a good apocalyptic threat, which carries a world-splitting rhetoric meant to revise the world and the Shaker community in its light, for "Christ's people are not of this world" (325). Despite generic and contextual differences, the eschatology foments the same world-revising rhetoric bent on building a new world.

Dunlavy's eschatology, though speaking to a more theologically-minded audience, is modeled off an earlier Shaker statements of belief, though not self-titled as manifestos but even more recognizably appear as such. "A Candid Statement of Our Principles" begins by addressing the rumors surrounding the Shakers, setting the stage as one of contention not unlike the attacks of critics in "A Drop of Tar". Once its purpose is introduced, it, too, begins by creating a bifurcated path for the world by nesting the current world as a failure since the fall of Eve, for the "whole of creation groaned" until Christ came (qtd in Stein, "A Candid Statement" 515). But the way of Christ and his world is not a given, but a practice and those who fail to live properly within the right world will be sorted, as signaled by the Biblical language of the last judgment (517). Even more like that original modern manifesto, it next moves to solidify Shaker legitimacy by establishing a faith history from which it emerges, but also cutting itself off from the religious practices of the old world to solidify the distinct work of the new (mainly here celibacy, an eschatological Christian tradition since Paul). Shakers, even in their early stages, are quick to see themselves as split off from the world eschatologically, a part of a different whole.

Nor was *Dunlavy's Manifesto* the only "manifesto" in the Shaker canon. The Shakers began publishing their own newspaper in 1871, which in 1878 titled itself as a "Manifesto" (*Shaker Manifesto* VIII.1), only thirty years after the first publication of *The Communist Manifesto*. At the time, Shaker numbers were dwindling and the publication became an attempt

to revitalize the faith. In their first ever periodical publication, Elder F. W. Evans—a socialist convert to the Society of Believers—declares their sect "Communist Christians" and makes clear that their abject, too, is private property: "The Shakers will ever meet correspondents, in its various communications upon 'Does Christianity admit of private property?' with a negative answer" (I.1 1). This first manifesto defines itself as a break from others and the past Christian communities that came before it, seeing their distilled faith as similar to how "we shake a carpet as we do grain to remove something from it that is not an integral portion of the fabric. Parents and school teachers sometimes shake a child for a similar purpose, to separate a fault from its character" (I:1 1). Evans then goes on to pull passages from the Book of Revelation that feature "shaking," uniting the concept with the sect's apocalyptic origins. This eschatological narrative remains in the publication through its twenty-nine years of circulation, clearly structuring the Shakers' communal identity as communistic and against history: "A retrospective view of past eras shows that erring humanity has wrought much in harmony in the world, and builded that which must be pulled down and cast away to give place to something better, more enduring, as the race advances to more progressed conditions" (Jane Knight II:1 7). Using apocalyptic thinking and even threats not unlike those of Dunlavy quoted above, the Shakers hoped to inspire the performative change of conversion, not unlike the Russian's call to a *novyj byt*. The first issue of the *Shaker Manifesto* even takes on a similar structure to that of the avant-garde manifesto, as the manifesto ends with a list of numbered conclusions of who the Shakers are and situate themselves in relation to the imperfect past (I.1 8). Though less destructively focused in their religious apocalypse than the Russian avant-garde, the two movements' manifestos share similarities that join them in their ideological formation, each meant to build a more perfect world.

In this way, the manifestos of both post-apocalyptic societies were used to inspire, through the theatricality of their apocalyptic rhetoric, not only a destruction of past ideologies but also a communal identity under the doctrines of an apocalyptic utopian society. These new ideologies created narratives of utopia dominated by their place in history, or rather, outside of it. Both the Shakers and post-revolution avant-gardes claimed to have reached the end of history and, in doing so, also claimed to have achieved a novel world with no desires left unmet. As is visible in the manifestos above, the Russian avant-garde's utopia was "influenced by the 'apocalyptic events' of the first twenty years of the century. . . They wanted to participate in the creation of this new world and this new [person]" (Wachtel and Vinitsky 183). As the unsurpassable Communist utopia, this new person would have to rise above the bourgeoisie *byt* to live in the *novyi byt* (Matich 59). The Shakers, similarly, detail their apocalyptic narrative in terms of "perfection" and seeking the new, more divine state: "Those who inhabit the New Jerusalem, or Shaker Order, must leave the old, and become new creatures in Christ, having their affection placed on things above—forsaking the accidental or partial relationships of the earth, and forming the perfect Christian character by living like angels in the resurrection heavens" (*Shaker Manifesto* II.1 7). Manifestos in both cases aided this transition from one world to the next, though less a world "to win" than one to make livable.

Make It So: From Construct to Construction

If apocalyptic thinking in manifestos helped idealize and dramatize a more perfect world, it also provided impetus to begin seeing that world through to its complete manifestation. What is perhaps surprising, then, is how the apocalyptic narratives continue to shape that world and its effects towards realization, beyond the seemingly momentary rupture and new idealization.

Though each of these early communists held different ideals for the world—particularly in regard to industrialization—both groups contain a common residual apocalypticism in their attempts to manifest a reality for their worldview. These eschatological narratives are embedded in their communal identities, and therefore their everyday activities and performative acts. Influenced by similar apocalyptic narratives, both societies prove similar in the ways in which they live out their commitments to their post-apocalyptic utopias, particularly in two ways: anti-procreative measures and a functionality-driven aesthetics. In comparing their post-apocalyptic world-building, we can trace how the commitments of apocalyptic thinking move from theatrical representations to the very furniture of the world.

In both our cases of apocalyptic utopia, the usual eschatological narrative of reproducing is reversed. Instead of the common narrative of abstaining so as to prevent the birth of the child during the horror of apocalypse (think of the Book of Revelation's survivors wishing they were dead or *Game of Throne*'s myths about parents enduring in winter), these post-apocalyptic societies are anti-procreative because such progression is no longer necessary. As Olga Matich expresses in her article "Remaking the Bed: Utopia in Daily Life," "the establishment of the socialist paradise would mean the end of history, bringing the procreative cycle to a halt and making the marital bed obsolete" (Matich 63). According to Matich, the Russian anti-reproduction tendencies can be traced to origins in the 1860's in Dostoevsky's work *Demons*: "What is the use of children, or of progress, seeing the goal has been attained?" (qtd. in Matich 64). Seeing apocalypse as utopia, children are irrelevant.[54] Shakers, too, share a similar mentality. Though sex itself is rejected by the sect as sinful, it is also rejected as deterring "progress" (*Shaker Manifesto* I.8 59). Like the Russian utopia that was seen as a final stage in a societal evolution, Shakers saw themselves as beings of the "higher life" that no longer needed

pleasures of the body (III. Extra 6). The Shakers also claimed this no-sex policy as freedom from sexism: "Women can never be free until liberated from physical maternity" (IV.9 67). Children, in the end, proved to be irrelevant; as signs of progress, they had no place within the apocalyptic narrative, and therefore in these utopian ideals.

The best evidence of this Soviet celibacy mindset, as Matich exhibits in her article, was the design of beds themselves. Beds were designed as singles, not only to discourage procreation but also to avoid the stigma of the bourgeoisie family values of marital-bed (Matich 63). Instead, the single bed was "supposed to give a woman a sense of privacy, a room of her own, and to contribute to sexual equality" and hoped to disentangle marital power relations by affording isolation (Matich 63). Even more dissuading, beds were de-sacralized by their multi-functionality. Constructivists began to create designs for beds that converted into other types of furniture, such as a desk or a table. This, according to Matich, was an attempt to make the bed "invisible . . . so that its procreative function would be concealed" (69). Thus, the function of the bed became another aspect of life, making sleeping and sex no different from the eating you might do on the very same bed-table. A similar mentality is found in the construction of Shaker furniture. Shakers, too, had single beds, and often slept a few same-sex people to a room. To emphasize the role of the bed as purely for sleeping and to make them easier to use and clean, Shakers put wheels on them (See Fig. 1). Like the later Russian beds, the wheels gave a better multifunctional purpose to the beds as well as reinforcing their place as just another part of the day to day.

But the functionality of these bed designs served more than their simple anti-reproductive purposes, as these multi-functional furniture designs merged with narratives of functionality. In *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism*, Christina Kiaer

argues that the post-revolution avant-garde sought not only to escape bourgeoisie commodity fetishes but also its "possessive" and alienated relationship to the object (Kiaer 7). Instead of an ascetic denial of material goods, these artists proposed a new relationship, what Kiaer calls "object-as-comrade" (1). By maximizing usefulness, constructivists such as Aleksandr Rodchenko saw "the material object as active, almost animate participant in social life" (1). This meant a re-imagining of life, goods, and their production, demanding a more self-aware construction. Constructivist artists began to perceive this need as the call of art in the new Soviet life. Varvara Stepanova, famous for her novel fashions and textiles (Fig 4), asserted that "true construction appears only in real things, operating in real space" (*INKhUk* qtd. in Kiaer 10). Artists sought "true" construction, a construction that could not be divorced from its function and therefore the everyday. The Russian avant-garde wanted to merge the everyday activities of living with art, and as art, create a new people worthy of a new age. In "What Does Lef Fight For," Makavosky and his colleagues demand that life and its objects become part of an active new world: "Lef will fight for the aesthetic construction of life" (Lawton 195). Object activity, object-as-comrade, meant reaching into an object's useful role in society and maximizing these functional qualities.

Different groups within Russian avant-garde began to invent or reinvent objects to the purpose of maximum functionality so that they could be supremely valued in their use. Vladimir Tatlin experimented with many new designs for everyday objects, especially clothes. In "The New Everyday Life," an article published in the popular magazine *Krasnaia panorama* (Fig 3), Tatlin shows off his new designs and fabric patterns for a practical suit and a men's sportswear suit (Kiaer 41-45). The designs clearly reflect a desire for usefulness, in place of fickle capitalist fetishes, and Kiaer translates Tatlin's notes: "This clothing is made with the advantage of being

warm, not restricting movement, being hygienic and lasting longer" (qtd. in Kiaer 44). Tatlin also went about constructing a design for a new stove, (Fig. 14) an already multifunctional part of the home, as it provided heat and hot water, and was used for cooking (Kiaer 71). Nor was Tatlin alone. At around the same time, Rodchenko's students were designing the bed-chairs and bed-tables. But despite the proliferation of these works amongst the avant-garde, it is important to remember it did not last: "Rodchenko and Mayakovsky, as well as other Constructivists, were deprived of key sites of intervention into Soviet production and consumption starting around 1926, precisely at the moment the Soviet state enterprises were moving toward becoming the exclusive supplier of everyday goods" (Kiaer 244). This factor is the major difference between the Russian aesthetics of multi-functionality and that of their American post-apocalyptic predecessors, whose production was infringed only by the slow decline of their membership.

The Shakers, too, re-imagined their relationships to objects. Just as the Russian artists tried to merge art and life into a newly profound experience, the Shakers saw their work, their everyday life, as a type of worship. Work was a transcendent state, one realized through its place within the apocalyptic narrative. Understanding "a house set in order" as an eschatological metaphor of the Bible, we are able to discern how Shaker Maria Wheeler demonstrates the end-narrative's role in this work relationship: "I believe it is a beautiful condition to have the 'house set in order' to live on earth, as beyond the earth, I am earnestly engaged in this work" (VIII.5 110). Usefulness, too, was a part of the is transcendent work experience: "All work done, or things made in the Church for their own use ought to be faithfully and well done, but plain and without superfluity. All things ought to be made according to their order and use; and all things kept decent and in good order according to their order and use" (Fr. Meacham qtd. in Andrews 60). The Shaker relationship to work was revitalized in their community, and it was this

communal nature that made such functionality possible. These grand inventions were motivated by the Shaker's communal mentality, where personal problems were shared with the group and pondered over. A perfect example of this is illustrated in the Shaker invention of the circular saw, which was surprisingly invented by Sister Tabitha Babbitt. As the story goes, "while watching her spinning wheel, [she] pondered that a revolving water-powered blade could saw planks at speeds infinitely faster than gangs of men laboriously operating hand saws" (Shea 24). The Shaker desire for functionality and flexibility led to a renaissance of household goods, tools and, in particular, furniture.

Shaker furniture is uncannily similar to Russian avant-garde furniture in its inventive sense of multi-functional use. Not only were beds constructed for the purpose of multifunctional use and against procreation, but so too were various other types of household goods. Cupboards and tables had extra built-in writing surfaces that could be dually used as desks and many unique table extensions made it possible for tables to grow and shrink according to the current need. In a worldview not unlike that which inspired Rodchenko's students' bed-tables, Shakers also saw the possibility of one piece of furniture having the function of many. But the religious sect also designed all their goods with purposeful awareness, with maximum attention paid to its use. Shaker functionality was its very decoration, as each room was lined with pegs on which to hang things, including chairs and other pieces of furniture (Fig 5). Dining table legs were constructed with a rising foot, "to allow toe room at the ends" (Shea 45). A personal favorite of mine is the shoemaker's candlestick, which, built on a spiral, allows the candles to spin up and down according to lighting needs (*Shaker: Furniture and Objects* 77, Fig 2). Clearly, the Shaker call to usefulness—a mentality born of apocalypse—was truly manifested in their work.

This mentality also affected the Shakers' relationship to space they inhabited, which of course was manifested in relation to their ideal. As God, who perfectly ordered the world, was the antidote to the world's man-made chaos, Shaker aesthetics meant to reflect that order back into the world, to the extent that "Shakers consciously linked the good with the beautiful and the beautiful with the good" (Promey 69). Consider Polly Jane Reed's "Spiritual Map: the Holy City" (Fig 7): the elemental focus on shapes perfectly calculated to intertwine displays a sense of the holy designed, a type of ideal organization meant to replicated on earth. More than neat order or even hegemonic representation, the holy city in this map depicts the harmony in the relationship between things, evidence of a more perfectly ordered and purposeful world (and therefore unlike the corrupted, dysfunctional old world where form was distanced from purposeful function). Manifesting the holy order is so emphasized that Clarke Garrett suggests we even understand the villages as "stage sets… designed to serve as perpetual reminders to believers and visitors alike that heaven had come to earth in the ordered polity of the Shakers" (qtd in Promey 68). Shaker villages attempted to build their world around such beautiful order, particularly in the architecture itself.

The Shakers may never have wholly realized such a perfect, grid-styled social structuring, but Constructivists working in Ukraine nearly did. Perhaps the Holy City's clearest and most awesome realization is the 1928 government building Gosprom (Figs 8 & 9). At the time of its completion in the then new capital of Ukrainian SSR, Kharkov, Gosprom was the tallest building in Europe and the most spacious building in the world, uniting twenty-five governmental offices in its interconnected halls. If size alone did not speak to its capacious function, the design promoted a certain interconnectedness, with a smattering of prominent skybridges uniting each of the identical (though seeming not so, due to the semi-circle

promenade) blocks (Fig 9). These bridges also serve its aesthetic purposes, as it is clearly constructivist-inspired in its clean meeting of bisecting lines, in addition to the nicely balanced shapes. Again, this visual stress on the intersection of shapes and lines—the semi-circle park façade, the skybridges, the windows—not only speak to a simplistic, useful aesthetic of the future, but oddly parallel those utopian ideals of the past in the work of the Shakers, such as in Reed's city.

But the ideal, ordered city is not the only shared architecture of these two apocalyptic groups; the emphasis on formal, unadorned order fostered its own ingenuity in both. Take the Pleasant Hill twin spiral staircases' simplicity (Figs 10 & 11). Though the only of their kind in Shakerdom, the spiral staircases embody the aesthetic potential of the useful and attention to the simplicity of shapes, here two lines. They also speak to Shaker resourcefulness; creator Micajah Burnett never formally trained as carpentry or architect and his single plank banister is considered a kind of wonder of the 19th century American world. These staircases (one for women and one for men, thus manifested in accordance with their eschatological call to celibate perfection) spin in opposite directions, forming a kind double helix—a shape with radically modern relevance.[55] Less a monument to utility than ideals realized in wood, these stairs' aesthetics replace the adornment of old-world aesthetics with purpose-driven functionality, an order uninhibited by the ornamental accretion of the past.

Though Guy Davenport is thinking of the Shaker's objects as he describes these functionality-centered designs as "proof that beauty and usefulness are the same thing" (56), the same is often written about Tatlin's Tower, his model for the Monument to the Third International. The tower (Fig 12), though never realized beyond model form, was meant to realize the blended beauty not only of aesthetic and function but in a variety of functions itself.

The potential state building utilized various shapes to encompass different tasks: a cube (and in later models, cylinder) for legislative work, a tetrahedron for housing administration, and a smaller cylinder for information services. Each shape was also meant to slowly revolve at a rate according to its function. The double-helix structure of glass and iron (yes, like the staircases) purposefully broke with unnecessary ornamentation of bourgeoisie architecture, finding beauty and purpose in the careful attention to shape and form. Tatlin's constructivist monument, though recognized by Trotsky himself for its non-nationalistic design and lack of ornamentation, was ultimately critiqued on what could be said were the same grounds of its representational value, its current usefulness: why construct something so momentous when they were just "beginning to repair the pavements a little, to relay the sewage pipes" (Trotsky qtd in Lynton, 103). Exhibited in two different models in 1920 and in 1925 across Russia and in Paris, the monument was ultimately put to rest in the favor of other constructivist projects such as the playful Letatlin flyer. Though never realized, the model was perhaps motivated by (and would go on to inspire) the same functional-encompassing ideal Thomas Merton finds in a Shaker chair: "the peculiar grace of a Shaker chair is due to the fact that it is made by someone capable of believing that an angel"—or future communist agent—"might come and sit on it" (Merton xiii).

The simple revision of living and working spaces for both communities is equally inventive and aesthetically definitive. Take the Round Barn at Hancock Shaker village (Fig 13). Constructed in 1826, was the first of its kind in America. Though the only circular barn the Shaker's built, it was designed with attention to easing work: the top level allows the farmers to empty hay wagons without backing them up, the middle has up to seventy cows facing inward to receive said hay, and below them their manure is stored to be later used for composting. Similarly functional and aesthetically unique, the middle level is also divided into four

concentric circles to aid ventilation and ease worker access. Unburdened of any intentions outside the ease of their own work, the Shakers opted to change the architecture itself to better facilitate the life they envisioned and in the process developed a novel aesthetic. The same is true of constructivist design. Also on display with Tatlin's Tower in 1925 at the Paris International Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Arts was Rodchenko's Worker's Club (Fig 6). Just like his chairs, Rodchenko's club was about multifunctionality: the main table arched and flattened for reading or work, the chess board flipped to help players into their seats, and a retractable screen and raised podium integrated new media technologies to watch and debate without invading the workers' space when not in use. Like other constructivist work covered in this chapter, the club reflected the same sparse aesthetic that drew attention to distinct shapes and colors that reflected a new world ideology: not just Soviet ideology injected into everyday discourse (in the emphasis of propaganda in the screen and podium, the predominance of red and black, and the inclusion of a Lenin corner) but also a minimalist, modern worldview breaking away from the ornamentation and ideology of the past. Such innovations perhaps best encompass what Davenport means when he states of the Shakers, "they reinvented the world. They invented a new kind of light, a new kind of space"—a world, light, space modeled from an apocalyptic vision of a new world of perfect yet realizable order (56).

The useful aesthetics of the post-apocalyptic lifestyle thus realize not only the foundational commitments inspired by the end of an old world and that imagined inhabiting of the new, but also the blending of an apocalyptic worldview into the very world it helped inspire and shape. Functionality freed from the forms of the past both embodies the commitments of these apocalyptically-derived worldviews both through the aesthetic reminder of the world they inhabited, where these items professed a new relationship to object and work, as well as the

production itself. Such work and its works are the manifesto's call to new world commitments made manifest, the materialization of world-committing beliefs. Perhaps the import of this realization is best explained though Merton's claim that the Shakers' craftsmanship is a "deeply existential approach to reality," because "'spirit,' 'form,' and 'actualization' are all one in the same" (Merton xi). This, in sum, is the radical potential of apocalyptic thinking: to shatter world-committing beliefs (perhaps "spirit" for Merton) is to begin the work of actualizing another.

The End of the End

We recognize that we have the ability to end the human world all too easily. Less understood is that we have the ability to "begin the world over again"—first via commitment then in action. As I have argued in this chapter, apocalyptic thinking isn't simply a breaker of totalities, it's also the beginning of utopian thinking. It can embrace an urgent call to action capable of identifying a new possible world image and mobilizing, converting, or compelling others to commit to such a world-ideal. Because end-of-the-world rhetoric can rupture the blindspots of our old worldviews and remind us of the theatrical positions from which we view the world, the apocalypse can be a spark for the reorganization of new world-committing beliefs, new ideals worth committing to. Manifestos are clear examples of this, as are the committed lifestyles of those who saw themselves living in a post-apocalyptic world and "played house" accordingly. The end of the world can thus be seen as a midwife to new worlds, both in terms of belief and also the new ways of being and relating that occur within such concepts and beliefs.

As Octavia Butler notes through her character who sparks a new religious movement (not unlike that of the Shakers) in *Parable of the Talents*, "Belief / Initiates and guides action— / Or it does nothing" (348). But we should also take note from Butler's final, unfinished novel of the

same series, which sees the revolutionary religion of the first novel take root and over generations embrace slavery and reenact the other injustices that the first believers sought to overcome; a newly committed ideal is no more freed from the same problems of the previous world beliefs and justifications, from the same reified complications we saw in chapter two. Apocalyptic thinking can only promise to think the world again, and differently. It can rewrite what it found to be wrong. It can rewrite our relationship to the world. It can rewrite the ways we thus inhabit those worlds we commit to. It can only promise an end—and all the possibilities, negative, positive, or otherwise, that come with it.

Appendix of Images

Figure 1 Bed on wheels, Hancock Shaker Village Museum

Figure 2 Shoemakers candle stand, The Andrews Shaker Collection

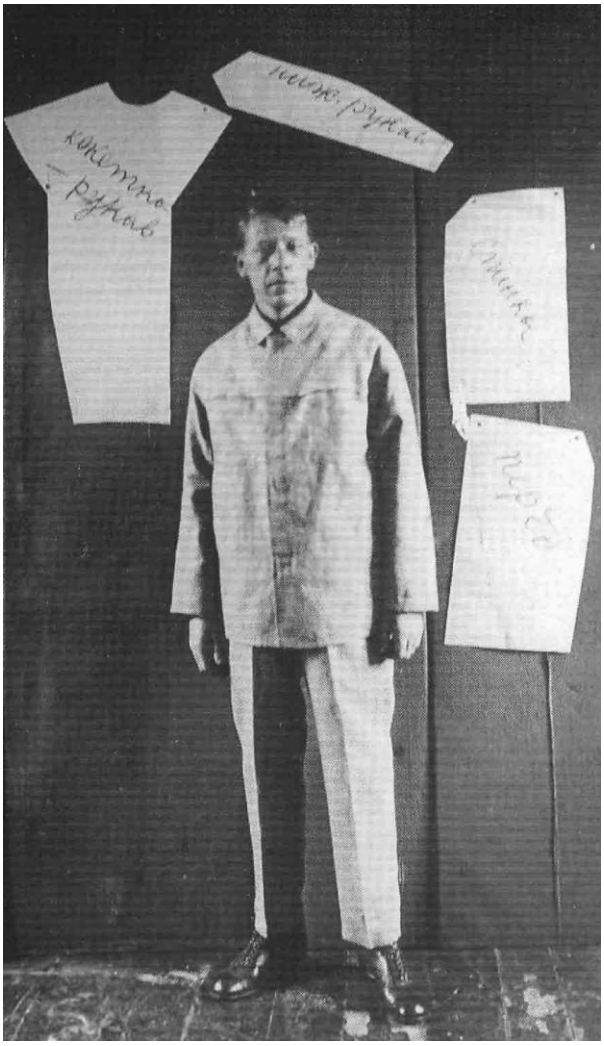

Figure 3 Vladimir Tatlin modeling his leisure suit

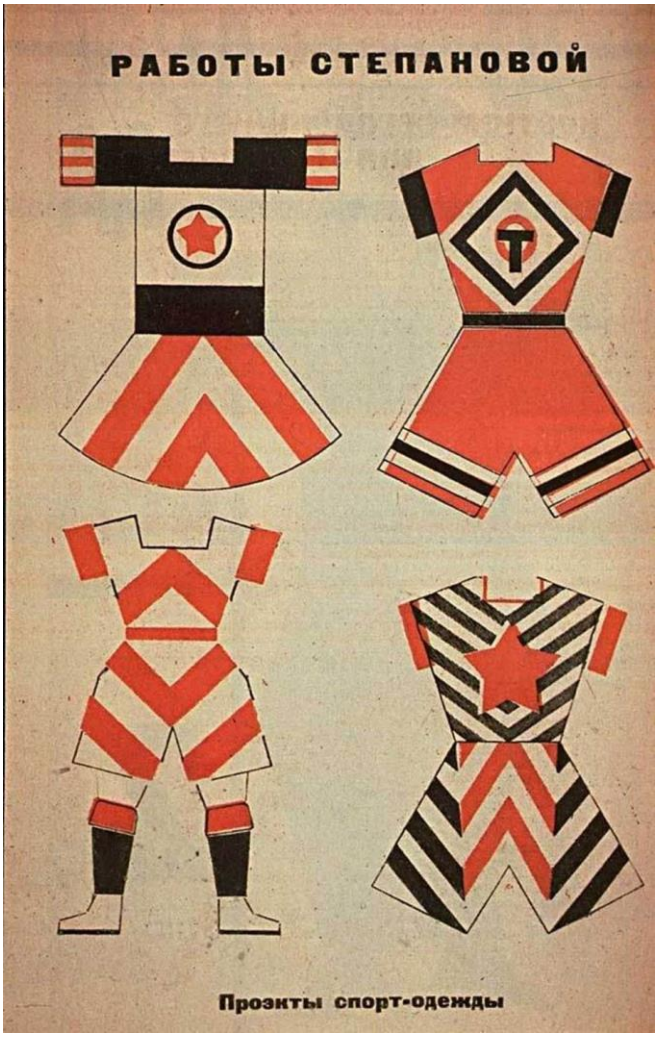

Figure 4 Designs by Varvara Stepanova published LEF, 1923

Figure 3 "Shaker Symmetry"

Figure 6 Alexander Rodchenko's Worker's Club

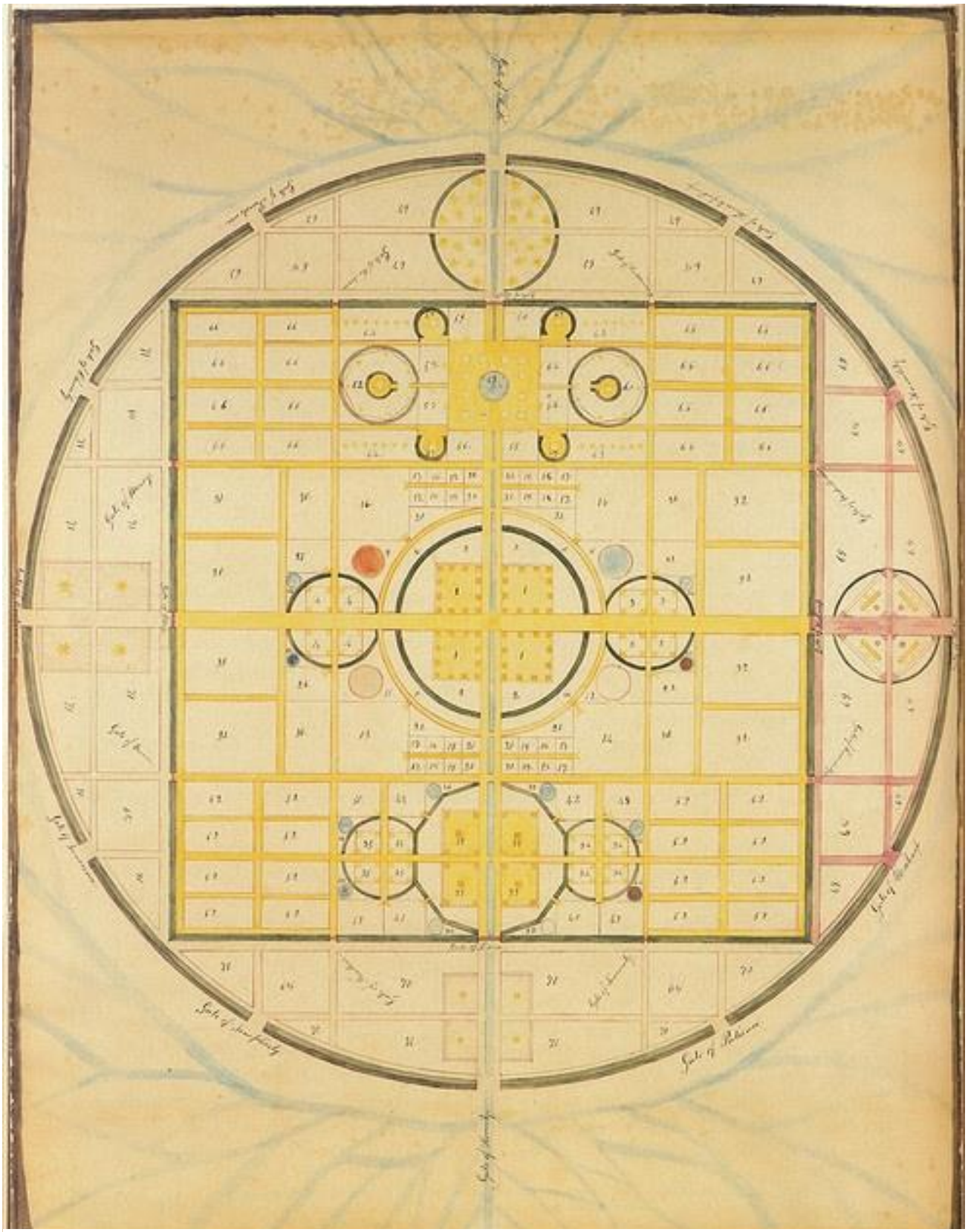

Figure 7 Polly Jane Reed's "Spiritual Map: The Holy City"

Figure 8 Gosprom, Photographer unknown 1930s

Figure 9 Gosprom, Photographer unknown 1930s

Figure 10 Spiral Staircase, Pleasant Hill Shaker Village

Figure 11 Spiral Staircase, Pleasant Hill Shaker Village

Figure 12 Vladimir Tatlin with his Monument to the Third International model, St. Petersburg, 1920

Figure 13 Round Barn at Hancock Shaker Village, photo by Julie Nicoletta, 2010

НОВЫЙ БЫТ

Фот. Ольшевского.

Отдел материальной культуры при музее Художественной культуры (Главнаука), ведя исследовательскую работу в области изыскания новых форм, одной из основных своих задач поставил опыты по реорганизации быта.

В основе этой работы—максимум внимания к простейшим, окружающим нас вещам. Художник должен органически участвовать в создании новой вещи, а не только пользоваться старыми вещами. В связи с этим Отдел выработал задания и уже удалось даже заготовить образцы одежды, отопительных приборов, мебели и пр. На характеристике этих образцов мы остановимся.

Характерные черты данного на рисунке пальто следующие: несколько расширенная в плечах и торсе (корпусе) и суженная книзу форма создает следующие качества: тепло не выдувается снизу, материал не облегает тела и оставляет воздушную прослойку, — с одной стороны удерживая этим лучше тепло" (принцип двойной рамы), с другой создает более гигиеничные условия.

Покрой сделан с таким расчетом, чтобы движения человека в нем не были стеснены и давал возможность сохранять естественное положение: напр., карманы располагаются соответственно длине рук (рис 1). Кроме того, пальто имеет две сменных пристяжных подкладки: фланелевую (осенью) и меховую—баранью (зимой), эти прикрепляются к мягкому непромокаемому верху (чехлу) специальным шкертом.

Ввиду того, что пальто состоит из трех отдельных, по мере надобности скрепляемых, частей, то каждая из них по износу может быть заменена новой. Костюм сконструирован по тому же принципу в общих чертах покроя. Рукава куртки и брюки также с'ужены к низу. Жилет совсем отсутствует. Комбинированный воротник может быть застегнут наглухо. Коркасный приклад целиком отсутствует. Пальто и костюм выполнены совместно с трестом Ленинградодежды.

Из пяти выработанных образцов нормальных печей поясним указанный на рисунке № 3: печь эта имеет экономическую топку, обеспечивающую при небольшой затрате дров (6 полен) большой тепловой эффект. Печь снабжена духовкой и большим герметическим шкафом, который сохраняет воду и пищу горячими в течении 28—30 часов и одновременно при одной топке обогревает помещение, размером 8 ар. × 6 ар. при 6-ти ар. высоты до 48 часов, сохраняя температуру от 16° до 14° по Реомюру. Помимо этого, разрабатываются новые конструкции кроватей и др. предметов.

Работа ведется коллективно группой сотрудников, в число которых входит художник Татлин, являющийся одновременно заведывающим указанного отдела Материальной Культуры.

1—4) Фасон нового типа пальто: сделан с таким расчетом, чтобы движения человека в нем не стесняли. Пальто служит и летом и зимой—с переменой подкладки. 2) Зав. Отд. Матер. Культуры—худ. Татлин. 3) Новый тип печки, обеспечивающей большое тепло при небольшой затрате дров. В духовом шкафу пища сохраняется горячей в течение 28—30 часов.

Figure 14 Vladimir Tatlin with his designs for clothing and a stove, illustrated in Krasnaia panorama, 1924.

[51] One case of such thinking that this dissertation has returned to repeatedly is Timothy Morton's *Hyperobjects*, particularly regarding his description of defeatist "apocalyptic" environmentalism. But he is not alone in this impulse. For more on this apathy in an environmental context see, John Gow and Terry Leahy, "Apocalypse Probably: Agency and Environmental Risk in the Hunter Region." For an interesting form of fatalism, see also David Wojcik's "Avertive Apocalypticism", which focuses on those who believe the apocalypse is preordained but think it can be averted or postponed, which suggests a kind of agency but only after accepting a defeatist stance.

[52] See *The Economist*'s "Shakers and Movers: The Dying out of the Sect's Last Members May Not Mean the End for the Shakers" for more on the last remaining Shakers and Stephen J. Stein's *The Shaker Experience in America* for the overall decline since the late nineteenth century.

[53] For more on this influence, see for examples Hans-Christoph Schmidt am Busch, "'The Egg of Columbus'? How Fourier's Social Theory Exerted a Significant (and Problematic) Influence on the Formation of Marx's Anthropology and Social Critique" or David Leopold, "The Structure of Marx and Engels' Considered Account of Utopian Socialism".

[54] This of course means such a utopia is not sustainable. Since the Shakers enforced these beliefs, much of their struggle and decline after the mid-nineteenth century surround the lack of youth and laborers in their aging community. See Stephen J. Stein's *The Shaker Experience in America,* (241-243).

[55] See Nico Israel's *Spirals: the whirled image in twentieth-century literature and art* for more on the role of the spiral in modern art and thought.

CODA

Image from the end of Tarkovsky's The Sacrifice

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