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# ‡ FUTURALITY, AN ESCHATOLOGICAL METHODOLOGY

IZHAK BENYAMINI

## 1 – The Subject of Futurity

In my project I set out to articulate a theoretical position regarding contemporary visuality. With this end in mind, my work attempts to formulate a befitting methodology, a methodology attributing and discerning the significance of *temporality* to visuality. To understand imagery and visuality in general, namely as located between the screen and subject, in the contemporary *present*, a methodology emerged with two opposing techniques stemming from the very same logic: One is a genealogy which turns to the “past” as a term and essence, and the other an eschatological turning to the ‘future’ in much the same way—both for the purpose of making sense of an incoherent, or underdetermined, ‘present’.

From the onset of reading into the writing of the present text, we are immediately overwhelmed by a flow, almost alien to us, of questionnaire-consciousness, asking: what is the best route for examining the status of the viewed image today? It is an examination that should be undertaken from a certain *perspective*, of the investigation of the this same ‘perspective’, or point of view *in* the image. In other words, an examination of contemporary *subjectivity*—a subjectivity entirely involved in, evolved from, and enthralled with *image viewing*; a subjectivity whose future (or destiny) controls and designs its present. All the more, the present and future are bound together owing *to the knot of their Past*—what present subjectivity’s religious, constituting past had *spiritually* promised it: a specific scopic telos.

*A preliminary note.* The religious theme is here owed to a metaphysical

axiom that holds us to it concerning the construction of the image as such: the sphere of imagery as a human one in ancient times and nations was, and is, constituted principally by and through religious practices, in spite of all monotheistic despites. Moreover, this holds for the dream format *as the originary fountain of human imagery*. In ancient times the dream picture was understood as a supernatural or spectral dimension. Is it here that we have the seeds for the present and future of the image—along with its eschatological projections—to move beyond itself, as something despite itself?

Should we articulate our investigation as critical and rational, in the trivial sense that the investigative subject actively explores the passive object-image? Are psychoanalytic and philosophical discourses enough for the purpose of exploring the image and its beyond? Should our inquiries terminate in theology, in exploring the subject of visuality and its orientation in human spatiality? Are these common discourses, those which have permeated and sustained our deepest thoughts until now, limited in their ability to comprehend the image as it will be viewed in the future (or might we say, un-viewed in the future)?

Not without embarrassment, do we nonetheless need to evoke an *eschatological methodology*, one that gives us tools to contend with our present realm of visuality by means of its *distant future*? As half-mentioned above, it seems that the logic ruling the encounter of the image is tied to its past, as an ancient, basic factor of our cultural lives. Nevertheless, this same imagery is in a state of a forward motion, as the image is propelled both by and towards a technological futurity. Moreover, it is the imminent promise of our own epoch that delivers us the idea that *viewing* as such will no longer be comprehensible under current (dominant) critical discourses (and by the same token, neither will the concept of the viewing subject). Will this future even permit visibility—seeing and being-seen? Can the critical, academic discourse with all its anal-compulsive tendencies fulfill the necessary methodological demands? Or can we, without fear or trembling, offer a quite different paradigm: a paradigm that opens the blocked gate to the dimension of *a persecutory futurity of the present subject*, from a position of determination and trepidation as well as suspicious apprehension? This methodological paradigm will propose a suspicious analogy regarding the transformations of the screen and image, as correlative to those transformations in the alterity of monotheistic divinity.

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This current proposal for understanding the contemporary image assumes that, nowadays, a radical change is taking place in the existential mode-of-operation of the image. This is discernible on two levels—one *paranoiac* and one *eschatological*:

1. First, in the relationship between the subject (of the viewing eye) and the other (as the eye of the image) in which the relations between self and other are constantly *reversing*, with the viewing subject at one moment viewing the *other* and at another the *other* viewing the subject. This formulation stems from a psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious dynamics at play between these two figures: in Freudo-Lacanian discourse, *consciousness* is aware only of its viewing of the image and the viewed-other, while the inverted relation takes place at the *unconscious* level. But it is not a neutral other that gazes back but, rather, viewed-otherness itself.<sup>1</sup>

We denote the subject as S and the Other (*Autre* in French) as A. The direction in consciousness is:  $A < S$ ; and in the unconscious is:  $S < A$ . This is not confined, however, to the clinical or psychological scene alone. Indeed, human life is increasingly located in the field of the external gaze, more and more it finds itself within the complex structures of social panopticism. We can acknowledge the fact that the internal/psychological relation is nothing but an allegory for the political relations found between the different eyes populating and constituting our sphere of images.

2. In the second level, the *futurity* of the domain of image is moving towards a post-human/matricial world, a unification of subject and other, without separation:  $S = A$ , or being totally included:  $A(S)$ . The rapport of the subject and its other as (big) Other is discussed (as is well known) in psychoanalysis, a discourse grounded in Jewish and Christian theologies and their particular formulations of the relation between the *human* subject and the *radical* subject, Other: God. Indeed, in my larger project called *iChrist* (to be published soon) I have delved into the writings of Saint Paul, who wandered the ex-

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<sup>1</sup> See: Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire - X: L'angoisse* (Paris: Seuil, 2004).

tremely (infinitesimally) short highway leading from Second Temple Judaism to the establishment of autonomous Christianity; in which God is turned human and then splits again, a movement which radically changed the logic of the other and the logic of its gaze upon the subject. When, if ever, did this paradigm shift take place or, rather, have they always coexisted?

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In light of the chaos and abundance which swallows us in this age of high technology, hurling us towards an unknown future—unknown except in some current, deeply “metaphysical,” sci-fi films which seem to watch us more than we watch them—we narrow our question to the immediacy of everyday reality: what is the essence of the ‘subject’<sup>2</sup> characterizing our age? Stated differently, what kind of subject is uncovered at the root of our *presentness* who moves towards the future, that is to say, whose entire essence is movement towards the future?

Though the Western subject’s core is eschatologically-progressive, always moving towards a future, it now seems that this futurity no longer permits any *being* in the subject beyond a structural servility to the future. We will attempt to address this new form of subjectivity while taking into account the very being of every subject as hence conceptualized (that is, one whose very existence, without exception, is already scripted in a spiritual notebook which precedes us and determines our modality by a given concept as part of a philosophical, religious, or other cultural construct).

This conceptualization describes the subject and its being, but also constitutes it within the confines of the description, and what is this description and being if not essentially, existentially in movement, from the present to the future? This is a movement in which the past is erased, not even dialectically, for the pastness itself of the subject is erased, as the past *per se*.

Although the monotheistic subject (in its Jewish metamorphoses, as *en route* to Christianity and Islam) is commanded to remember and honor the traditions of its fathers, its past remains that of serving the present and future, and the past as such is not preserved, except as a past which is processed and

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2 The ‘subject’ here conceived on the one hand as a concept and on the other an existence consequent of yet exceeding its concept.

repressed dialectically through the resistance which the subject makes to it. This future is a kind of erasure (or foreclosure) of the repression or of forgetting of the past where its measure of violence towards it remains; a kind of play of tradition that is pseudo-faithful to that past while looking to its own future.

No hint of its character as pseudo-faith will remain in the future; where the past presently is: a total apathy towards the past—no negation or denial, no repression of the past. The past is simply not or even *not* (going so far as to deny the dimension of negation), since even the present is *no longer*; and hence the future will disappear from within this future futurity. Then, only the screen event, the instantaneous drug-like pleasure of the screen, will exist, without the need for temporal differentiation. The terms ‘uni-time’ or ‘uni-space’, in the sense of one-dimensionality, seem applicable. And what about the situation in which even entertainment cinema, from pornography to the most highbrow art films, encompassing 3D cinema and computer gaming moves to the actualization that the spectator experiences the virtual world in three dimensions through the use of virtual reality? It seems that in these cases the elimination of spatio-temporal dimensions grows more extreme in scope, approaching the temporal phenomena called “momentarity” (to the extent that time and space are reduced to the infinitesimal?).<sup>3</sup> This is already happening within the *screen-subject*, which is propelled into this dimensionless realm. Moreover, this motion, from the present toward the future, contains a conservative echo and protects the past, a dialectical echo of the foundations of the past. This is all a dialectical negation that seems to preserve the past, but actually leads towards its complete negation whereby the very erasure of the past is itself forgotten.

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We should now consider a text belonging to our past, a past increasingly shrinking as a cultural reference point, consciousness of its formative importance ever-fading. Nonetheless, the psycho-theological essence found in the depths of its pastness continues to resonate, at least until that time when its essence overtakes its cultural significance and it thus completely negates itself,

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3 For more on the various changes the concepts of time and space are undergoing, see: Paul Virilio, *La Crise des dimensions: La Représentation de l'espace et la notion de dimension* (Paris: ESA, 1983).

like a snake swallowing its tail and, eventually, entirely, itself: the moment of the final negation in which nothing will remain: a continuous on-going negation of the surplus-negations (which still exist for brief moments). (And is this not the final goal of the matrix machine envisioned in Ray Kurzweil's future?).

The verse: "A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God'" (*NRSV*: Isaiah 40:3), is later displaced from Isaiah by John the Baptist to the beginning of Matthew (3:3). The content of this verse (Jewish messianic sanctity), like its Christian displacement (a movement which necessarily translates it towards an eschatological resolution) mirrors the road of subjectivity, the way or movement of the subject, as well as the fact that the subject is being guided as such. This subject, in its entirety, is designed for ends (until we will be able to say that the entire highway is itself a subject incidentally infused with some object). This object, which imagines itself to itself as a subject, reaches its end and eventually dies along this route.<sup>4</sup>

The meaning of this current highway of subjectivity is its being-toward-a-future, terminating in the eschatological movement towards the negation of the subject. In the content of the verse we find the God-apparatus routing this process and its end point, a mechanism found at the basis of the Hebrew subject's existence (and by implication of the Abrahamic subject in general), leading this subject towards the paved road of the future (within the barren desert of the present), to a future redemption *a la* negation: an end reminiscent of a subject *en procès*.<sup>5</sup>

We should mention here in passing, something which is not marginal to our discussion: in the cited verse, as it rolled down to the mouth of John the Baptist, YHVH is presented as *kurios*, master, lord, in an attempt to express an affinity to YHVH as the *adonay* (literally: my lord) of the Hebrews, while in the New Testament it is not only an attempt to invoke the biblical God YHVH but the future Christ, while *dialectically erasing* YHVH. YHVH is the subject of the movement, He is that movement, He is the future subject in displacement, He: the "new" negation of the old by the new, until the final moment of appearance of the Subject-YHVH *of-the-road* at the eschatological dead-end.

4 Compare Lacan's interpretation of Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter": Jacques Lacan, "Seminar on the 'Purloined Letter'" in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English* (New York: W.W. Norton &, 2006), 6-46.

5 In the sense used by Julia Kristeva, "Le Sujet En Procès," in *Polylogue* (Paris: Seuil, 1977), 55-106.

What are the conditions of possibility for this type of dynamic subjectivity in Western culture, beyond those directly responsible for producing the contemporary scientific-technological condition; in other words, which foundations point us to monotheistic eschatology, and especially the Christian component of this axis? Along the scientific axis it seems that the contemporary subject is increasingly contrived under the biological-neurological order of cognitive research, understood through the paradigm of computing. Reflexively, such a paradigm symbolically represents the man-made creation of man himself. This is manifest in a reality where the subject internalizes more and more robotic actions, in its self-characterization.<sup>6</sup>

The metaphysical dimension of modern science in this sense no longer just describes the subject of science, but also elaborates an existence or a present for that subject. And in the actual world, the subject does not directly come about but rather only does so through and towards a futurity (with its subjectivity being the actual movement towards the future). In that futurity in which the subject is moving (though this is not necessarily *his own* future, but the movement is his and towards *that* future), coming about in the merger of the subject with the image: with the screen. Here, almost accidentally, the second axis is revealed, the theological-religious axis, and with it the specifically apocalyptic dimension it contains for the subject. The subject (in itself a natural desert) and the subject's path (the highway) come together, the subject merges with the *movement* of the apparatus—that which directs its constitution and end (the Other, God)—and moves towards the *simultaneous* disappearance of the subject altogether).

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Alas, in his essay on apparatus, Agamben notes that the most prominent apparatus in man's history on Earth is nothing but his own language.<sup>7</sup> It is an offhand comment by one who, criticized for being an apocalyptic-messianic thinker, made the assertion at the conclusion of a theo-political discussion concerning the Christian foundations of the apparatus (posed under the terms of *oekonomia* and *disposition*, originally connected to divine-ecclesiastical interven-

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6 As suggested by Vilém Flusser in *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion books, 1983), esp. chapter 8: "The Photographic Universe".

7 Giorgio Agamben, "What is an Apparatus?," in *What Is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).



tion). Moreover, we can indeed treat language as an apparatus or mechanism, as a *techne* engineering the mind, internalized and integrated with the same Self that conditions Mind<sup>8</sup> during its own life. While the older apparatuses operated by a double action of *horizontally* producing selves and *vertically* producing the distinction between self and self (regardless of the way in which a horizontalization of this distinction may be carried out in a deconstruction or postmodern critique). The futuristic apparatus, on the other hand, emerged as an external tool, which will overtake these coordinates of the individual self and render impossible any distinction between a self and its neighbor-self towards an *ocean of subjectivity* (in which the Internet, or something like it, will contain all of us embedded within it. This can already be spotted; each of our subjectivities is embedded until such a time when all subjectivity will henceforth dwell therein, and the respective borders of our different subjectivities will blend and disappear within this ocean).

A viewing of the 2008 film *Wall-E* reveals the radical infantilization of the screen-subject in the form of a future destiny of humans living in a paralyzing utopia on a distant spaceship run by a mothering apparatus in the form of a supercomputer with protruding eyes, blocking any possibility of growth or of returning to Earth. Indeed, through a reversal of the psychoanalytic formula, we discover regression, or perhaps an ontological-parody of it: from the submission of the subject-spectator to its absolute Other of the cinema show, through the narcissistic reflections passing between the user and the smartphone, till the forthcoming situation of the autoerotic screen-subject in a merger in which there is no longer a distinction between subject, screen and apparatus. An apocalyptic regression, or one aimed towards an apocalyptic experience, in which the subject undergoes a process of *reversal* of the Freudian *construction* of the subject out of auto-eroticism (the love devoid of any connection to the dimension of otherness), through narcissism (the love of the image as identical to the self, being the one image that is the only other possible) and finally towards the subject, to the attraction of the otherly-thing (the love of the object as an other).<sup>9</sup>

8 In Hebrew, as in the German “*Geist*,” the terms for the English “mind” and “spirit” can be given by a single word, in this case: “*ruach*.” Benyamini has likely capitalized it here to emphasize the use of this conjunction of terms in Hegel’s philosophical system. The Hebrew “*ruach*,” like the Greek “*pneuma*,” can also mean “wind” and “breath,” which adds to both the exegetical and eschatological heritage of the term [Ed.].

9 See: Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” in *Standard Edition*, vol. 7 (S.l.: Hogarth Press).

To what extent is this process influenced by the fact that these screens developed within the Christo-Western world and its emergent techno-subjectivity? And how much of it can be extrapolated to a universal subject through cultural colonialism? For a substantial portion of that subjectivity was formulated on the road in which the Pauline epistles made their way towards their everlasting audience. We take this into account in positing Christianity, like every systematized religion, as much more than a spiritual framework, but a wider cultural one.

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The discussion presented here regarding the relation between the viewer-subject and the screen, a discussion which has clear eschatological characteristics, is aimed at the trivial in its everydayness, but also at that which has surprisingly apocalyptic aspects, and ultimately at the superficiality of this coincidence which weds the contemporary with finitude itself. It seems that what is being outlined here is none other than a cultural paradox. To better perform this structural paradox, we stress the fact that today's intellectuals, no less than lay people, reject any argument claiming that our time is close to an apocalyptic futurity; they reject the absurd aspect of that claim, namely the contradictory relation between two radically different states, a relation that entails a peculiar proximity. Before the meaning of this paradox is clarified, its structure will be presented by an examination of this rejection, which expresses the structure of its futurity in a paradigmatic way.

The defensive response itself, which defends against this paradoxical situation, while expressing a sneering rejection of its actual presence or existence—especially in the extreme apocalyptic situation in which we find ourselves—serves as an example of the problematic nature of our contemporary logic insofar as it highlights how we face a problem that can be taken as *either* radical or trivial. But the choice of either pole misses the *larger* point regarding its parallax coordinates: concurrently democratically liberating and oppressively totalitarian. This is not an issue of different perspectives, but of a phenomenon that is the synchronization of both aspects into an inseparable mesh! The anti-dialectical rejection leaves us with only the trivial, hence arousing in us a suspicion concerning the apocalyptic way in which the apparatus consumes us.

In the hope that a conceptual clarification can elucidate the difficulties in which we find ourselves, we shall clarify that when we use the term “apocalypse,” we take into account the tension between its original-literal meaning and the more common-historical meaning as understood today, and through Christian history; *literal* in the sense of an illusionary spectacle which reveals a sub-reality of the present or and super-reality of the future, like that found in the title of the final part of the New Testament, “John’s vision”, Αποκάλυψη του Ιωάννη; and *historical* in the most common and well-used sense, in which the word is imbued with meaning following the *content* of that very text detailing an eschatological catastrophe at the end of days. De facto, in a broad cultural context, the meaning is perceived as mostly negative, especially to contemporary secular sensitivities, and is no longer a bearable mix of negative reckoning with positive redemption. The influence of Hollywood reinforces this trend with the paranoia that it instills in us, its viewers. Hence the cinematic renditions of Philip K. Dick’s paranoid plots, geared towards a dystopian pleasure which catches the viewer, completely embedding him in the monadic space created for him and him alone as he ironically identifies with the hero of the *Truman Show*.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the terrifying aspect of that imagery is connected to the manner in which Hollywood production understands, while pleasuring us in the most Catholic-bloody way, the imaginary depth of our relation to a future apocalypse.

Besides those noted above, who reject the apocalyptic claim, there are those who accept the ongoing change but experience it indifferently if not enthusiastically, who can claim that, as part of our attempt to conceptualize our condition, it is preferable to use the term ‘evolutionary’ and not ‘apocalyptic-catastrophic’, and who are astonished at the stubborn paranoia such as that expressed here which, to the sensibility of these greeters of the new, overly stresses the apocalyptic at the forfeiture of the liberating.

As a response to the claims described above, we wish to emphasize that from the perspective of the current moment that approaches the future, such as that described by Ray Kurzweil concerning the so-called *point of singularity*, this future is indeed a threat.<sup>11</sup> It is a future that seems to entail a threat that the contemporary subject senses from afar as its own negation,

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<sup>10</sup> Although thematically similar, *The Truman Show* is not based of work by Phillip K. Dick [Ed.].

<sup>11</sup> Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Viking, 2005).

dissolution into the field of computerized cognitive automation and robotics. Indeed, there is not even a possibility of discourse from the yet unknown perspective of future man, for whom this situation will likely be trivial. So we go far back in time to our past to make a statement about the future, the future whose seed was planted in our present, or so it seems. The very same past of our inquiry is also closely associated with the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition of the Second Temple's destruction. This past thus ties together destruction and anxious anticipation of the future, an *imagined* anticipation from the *present* point of view, that is nevertheless also already rooted in the future—a view towards what is insinuated from the present to the future. This is how Paul perceived messianic time. In this regard, Paul imbues the subject with an apocalyptic core through *visual identification* with the image of the crucified, an identification whose final degradation will lead to a mystical merging with Christ until the two—subject and sublimely suffering God—are indistinguishable.

And thus we can ask if we are experiencing the soft and pleasurable attack of an apocalypse rolling down to us, in and towards us, in which our subjectivity becomes habituated, to a slippery slope which ends in annihilation through a merger with the Object-Screen? And this stands in contradiction to the earlier subjective prophecies, in which the subject contends with a horrible reality, unique and sudden, in a situation so dire that the subject has no choice but to be immediately accustomed to the catastrophe, to the sudden change.

Which situation is worse: the slow process of growing accustomed to growing accustomed, or the very traumatic not growing accustomed to growing accustomed? And are we today dealing with the formation of a revolution, a formative revolution? Will we still be able to define revolution? This is a revolution whose primary evil is that it contains the process of growing accustomed to it—becoming habituated to it—which dissolves the very objective “fact” of its historical existence, its very existence as “past”. This habituation is part of an existence that slowly but surely can no longer distinguish between epochs and will not recognize its existence within a revolutionary situation. This is an existence, finally, apathetic towards time. An irony of sorts—this will be the end of the subject of *futurity*.

## 2 – Eschatological Methodology

Let us delve into what we have called *eschatological methodology*. If you as readers raise the screen from above the current investigation, it shall grow clear to you that the current way of *imagining* our plot of a hypothetical and fundamental debate regarding the *contemporary movement towards futurity* is an imagined plot that has already come down in favor of one of this debate's two sides. This is so since this *way of imagining* is corrupted and bribed by virtue of its *placement* inside the field of this debate that, necessarily, begets certain questions.

This *way of imagining* (as will be described in the following paragraphs), which some will slam as highly hyperbolic for the sake of inspiring anger, will call the debate in favor of one side in response to a question regarding the very *relevance* of *that* argument to our contemporary period: One, who is apocalyptic in his mind, says “relevant,” the second, more a-apocalyptic and more normative in mind, declares “not so!”

This *imagined formation* of the debate presupposes a problem of temporality which appears from the onset, in accordance with the *written text's* own fears as he carries on its back the current author's own *futurative* anxieties, since sadly he sucks up and internalizes the dread of his surroundings. The acknowledgment of this *futural* anxiety is well-timed with the acknowledgment of the fact that every Hollywood spectator, indeed, each and every one of us is swept away towards the contemporary apocalyptic-catastrophic position of *persecution*. This position maintains, almost unwilling and unwittingly, an assumption about the looming actualization of the psychical or mental demise of humanity: film scripts entail technologically advanced extraterrestrials taking over the Earth; the subjection of humanity to a matricial/wombly supercomputer; humanity dissolving absolutely into cyborg beings (when at last the machine merges with the human body and soul); and, exponential scenarios emerge in which anxiety is produced from the threat of a post-modern, post-human, or even post-extinction future. More than anything else, this position reveals a futural anxiety, one that is present for every human, even those in the most remote rainforest in the Amazon, who are relentlessly being devoured by the front of industrial technology or etched into the face of the globe by Google's satellite(s)—satellites which strives to suture the world under their unifying gaze. How much of this script is grounded in the Real, and how much stems only from embedded anxiety?

We find this dilemma, before its resolution, and while it carries this future resolution on its back (regarding the question of whether there is value in our presentation which reveals a certain anxious subjectivity and whether we are indeed faced with an imminent threatening future). the dilemma is itself the basis of the *eschatological methodology* as much as the very subject of its inquiry. Methodologically, we will not identify, let alone fully endorse, this paranoiac position regarding the future (or in other words, framing the future as the *Other* which haunts the subject and heralds its demise or subjection), *even though we accept the fact that this position is an integral part of the internal construct of contemporary being*. Moreover, we will closely follow, almost leech onto that very position, draw as close as possible to its disposition, and elaborate it as from inside.

Following such a radical position so closely could chart a path of investigation into our presumed contemporary modality whilst itself serving as the subject of research, the object of investigation; the radicalness of the assumption regarding the future, the radicalness of that anxiety, and the radicalness of any anxiety (which is always an anxiety of an object, and it is always physically or temporally removed from us and thus always of-the-future, geared towards an encounter with the subject). Hence even if the assumption is found to be completely false, we will perhaps *only* stand to gain—*with a strong stress on the adverb*—by assuming, in any case, and as has been stated, that it is not completely false, because we are not dealing with an external-objective truth but with the ominous presence of a mental aspect in the life of contemporary man.

The *way of imagining* the debate, the curtly qualified subject of the previous pages' discussion, has undoubtedly begun to exhaust our reader. It presupposes a dialogue in which the apocalyptic hold that our contemporary period holds nothing for us except its own presence, and not even in its independent dimensions or their relations to us, and without the existence of a metaphysical dimension indicating the forthcoming. On the other hand, those opposing the apocalyptic hypothesis will respond that these times *do*, in fact, entail a presence-toward-the-future; a presence with a special status, that of the existence of an independent metaphysical dimension (which falls from the sky at us and for us) shelling upon us while containing and concealing this very latent futurity.

*Presence* only contains a futuristic dimension, a dimension that is pre-

cisely responsible for our *Presence*. For the optimists, this future is not just a shift in timeframe but, moreover, opens onto the possibility of a significant “leap” (in the sense in which Ray Kurzweil and co. speak of the singularity) toward a different futural dimension, one which finally contains *futurism-as-a-constant-state-in-the-Present* = a larger acceleration, uncontrollable and possibly insufferable (like that which Virilio spoke of); an acceleration that commences *now!* The current Present is aimed toward a futural existence in which the present will, in its entirety, be as *Being-in-future* (a strange ring to this phrase, indeed).

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For the *Dasein* formed by the Heideggerian hammer, existence in the present is tightly connected to its *thrownness* (*Geworfenheit*) towards the future and a future death. This is a future that impedes our strides in the present, reversing, as it were, life in the current presence. Moreover, the future is not so distant, it is not that which-has-not-yet-existed, but rather it belongs to movement in the present, and even more relevant than the mere-present, although *only the present does exist* (while being designed by its future). Compare to that notion the optimists we have presented, who treat the futuristic-future as one that erases the present, not only coloring it: the future entirely engulfs the present and no longer promises a retroactive movement from the future to the past and present, and dissipates the equiprimordial dimensions of the temporality of the Heideggerian *Dasein*.

In other words, in accordance with the outlook of this disposition, whether or not their feelings are justified, *soon* the contemporary man will no longer be understood as being-there as a *Dasein*—there is no “being” there in the everydayness of the presence toward *the future*, but rather only a *being-towards, being-tomorrow*, whose being is not entailed in the present, but is *already-situated* in a futurity. For them, the contemporary historical moment of technological development is a critical moment in which immanent temporality sends humanity, for the first time, to *the-there*, to that-beyond (and not towards a general future or towards a future which retroactively reads the present in the Heideggerian sense, but rather to the *present-in-the-future*). In other words, it seems that the singularity of the contemporary subject lies not in its being-there as anticipating the future, but rather in being as *being-in-the-present* = the genesis of the *being-futuristic*.

And if we find ourselves at odds with the breadth of this futural obsession, which the previous passages sought to stress, we are constrained to seek our future-selves in those scholars and others who experience alternate modalities of temporality, if only by way of the fortune of history; times of a *future-towards-futural-apocalypticism*. In certain moments, in those end-times that proceed-the-Tomorrow, it is as though the present becomes equivalent with the future or time the latent futurity of the present in the most radical sense, and this might just mark the biggest horror: the present is no longer the present and the future is no longer the future; no longer respectively confined, they no longer preserve their own space, and due to mechanisms of high acceleration the momentary is entirely erased as a distant past. What a dreadful anxiety... and then future time is *also* negated in the futuristic because the ‘distant,’ of the distant future no longer exists; it is entirely *here* and its accelerated logic becomes indistinguishable from the instantaneous present. An instantaneousness which is wholly determined by its existence at the conceptual level but not at the ontological level. This momentarity is a destination which is always available due to the simple fact that there is no moment, the moment is crushed and erased under the future immediately: thrown to the waste of the past. For those futurists, both the threat and rejoicing of the current present are owing to the current present’s slippage towards such a futuristic-present.

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Moving forward, this essay attempts to differentiate between the modes of catastrophic presences, attempting to discern the different means by which these modalities manifest in human life: on the one hand, there is the symbolic-spiritual order, while the existential-material order comprises a second mode. This conceptual taxonomy should account for the reflexive confluence of such modalities in human life. Accepting these premises, such different genres of presence are split between the *speaking of the atrocity* and the *life of the atrocity*.

The atrocity is problematic only from certain subjective perspectives, not all of them. Take, for instance, the perfect and sublime ending to certain utopias; on the other hand for certain subjects, always split, this culmination is unbearable in its hideous heights of horror. Precisely what is this horrible



“atrocious?” Are we enclosed into a vertiginously tautological and exhausting experience of definition? What is so atrocious, so horrible, in the atrocity? There is atrocity, but there is horror that is not atrocious. There is no catastrophe more catastrophic than the horrible. And this ‘fact’ is more horrible than the just-atrocity. It cannot escape its own definition. And this is maybe what characterizes the catastrophic and the atrocious: although they seem respectively not to be so, they are very much so. Is this the Derridian supplement, but of *futurity*?

So, the *talk of atrocity* can be further categorized: between *speaking about the horror* and the *horrible speaking* (*de facto* both are recorded and lived in the depths of the apocalyptic written universe); and the *life of the atrocity* can be subdivided into *life within the horror* and the *horrible life*. In this sense it would be self-enclosed: lest the constant atrocity that man is within a circle in which all points aim in a single direction pointed at themselves, consuming itself in its circuit, without any point of beginning or end and every point moves along the circuit merging with the others. This recalls the logic of the Mobius strip (of which the most radical psychoanalyst, in his later years, would run along its edges to exemplify the co-determined rapport of the *RSI*) extends to all points of the circle. Since there is a logic which declares that the one walking on one side is bound to find himself on the other, and then by the same logic of the two-reversing-sides the circle materialize in its true form so that every point on the circle is always equal in value to the other points on the circle on all sides, as if the circle is a line with infinitely equal sides.

This model is presented to distinguish the concept of apocalyptic time from that of quotidian time (of the “common sense,” whether this is the one supported by science or not, and regardless of whether it maintains that the time is connected to events like those in the biblical ethic or whether time is an independently ontological essence which is unconcerned with the human clock). Quotidian time makes no real distinction between the past, present, and future, while the apocalyptic strives for a mystic consolidation of these temporal-units through a mutual influence between distinct units of time.

Our time itself, and not just its conceptualization, is guided in accordance with the ancient myths of faith recorded in monotheistic religion laid out by Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as their sectarian derivatives and antecedents, as in Persian-Zoroastrian and Hellenistic-Roman traditions. This is a point that Mircea Eliade noted by indicating the shift from the cir-

cular natural time of primitive religions to the Western concept of *chronological* temporality. The apocalyptic notion of time in the West is grounded in the biblical premise of a linear temporal-exhaustion, of its history from the genesis of Genesis to its end, the *eschaton*. But such coordinates actually undermine the very premise, or point of origin, as it cuts away from this linear axis towards an *imminent, or contemporary, end* that will reorganize and create the world anew.

Let us further develop this dialectic with words of the greatest scholar of religion from the 20th century, the Romanian fascist Eliade: “When the Messiah comes, the world will be saved once and for all and history will cease to exist.” And for Eliade, “In this sense we are justified in speaking not only of an eschatological granting of value to the future, to ‘that day’, but also of the ‘salvation’ of historical becoming.”<sup>12</sup> These claims highlight a certain aspect for our understanding of time, which is tied to futurist position in the imagined debate raised concerning the openness of the present towards a new temporal concept in which presentness is swallowed up by the futuristic. This aspect is expressed in the relation connecting the apocalypse to the distant future which condenses it from being *just-distant*, and which, in a way, threatens the present: the elimination of the future retroactively destroys the present.

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Let us learn from the Minor Prophets of the Tanakh. A prophet dated to roughly the Second Temple, adds a pitiful ‘alas’ when heralding the day of God: “Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes” (Joel: 1:15), using a play on words (preserved only in Hebrew) between a specific name of god (*Shaday*) and the arrival of a thief, a burglar (*Shoded*), an image that injected itself also into Saint Paul’s letter. The day’s arrival is imminent but also surprising—surprising and not surprising; Joel continues:

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick dark-

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12 Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Trans. Willard R. Trask, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959), 107. My emphasis.

ness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come. (Joel: 2:1-2)

A horrible day like it has never been and will never happen anytime. But moreover, the existence of the *presentness* in the *present* will no longer be the same again since *that day*. And for Amos—who lived during the time First Temple Period in the kingdom of Israel—we are dealing with a highly atrocious event which will also be horribly noisy:

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord: In all the squares there shall be wailing; and in all the streets they shall say, “Alas! alas!” They shall call the farmers to mourning, and those skilled in lamentation, to wailing; in all the vineyards there shall be wailing, for I will pass through the midst of you, says the Lord. The Day of the Lord a Dark Day; alas for you who desire the day of the Lord! Why do you want the day of the Lord? It is darkness, not light; as if someone fled from a lion, and was met by a bear; or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall, and was bitten by a snake. Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5: 16-20)

This is an unbearable day for the subject, in which its being is crushed, attacked by the future which overtakes it, a thief stealing being, its everyday. On the other hand, in Micah can some comfort in the day of God in which redemption does not entail horrendous destruction. Moreover, we are now talking about the “end of days.” A time in which no “day” will no longer exist:

In days to come the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth

of the Lord of hosts has spoken. For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever. (Micah 4:1-5)

Encountering these ancient notions, we shall ask about the right understanding of the current apocalyptic perception of time, as it is represented and manifest in cultural or cinematic imagery, while echoing between ourselves? The question regarding our current conception and not just the historical one so that it retroactively reads in reverse our history in an endless and insufferable circle in which the “historical” explains the present, despite the fact that history is pierced specifically in light of the present, while the present is not eschatological towards an evil empire like the United States or Babylon or Rome but rather regarding the apparatus-like world in contemporary technological entirety. Alas! The day of the apparatus!

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As stated, if we return to our initial distinction between the life and speaking of atrocity, then it becomes clear in wake of the shortening of the distant-future that in the apocalyptic perception of time the following movement takes place: for example, speaking about the future atrocity > the atrocity in the speech > living inside the atrocity > the life of atrocity. Nevertheless they are all equal although they move each other, in other words they are identical in their interaction with the horrible future but not in the *manner of the movement* towards that future. They differ in their modalities.

The threatening future can merge with the present and with speaking about the atrocious life, but there is also a futurity that has not yet come and which tickles the present and is only so-called talk. And not simply talk—the words create a world, a parallel universe in which other lives are represented. This full circle serves as a possible example of the essence of death, as a mix of life and words regarding atrocities—and all this in wake of the being of the Western *Geist* in which talk about death on the Cross created a new type of death, death and crucifixion, a catastrophe of an existence confined not only to the historical moment of Pontius Pilate, but to every moment. (There are those who suggest: go and listen to the opening movements of Bach’s St. John Passion, circular movements which penetrate the listener’s present with

pending futural doom).

The aforementioned distinctions will permit an understanding of the futurists' ideas concerning the future lurking about the futuristic-present's door, whilst simultaneously challenging their claims. They occasion the possibility of differentiating between the presence of the *experience of the present inside a future apocalypse* (the future is already here in such a horrible way that it erases the existence of tomorrow) and the *perception of the future which turns us towards an apocalyptic situation* (the future in the future). And indeed, by turning to earlier times, the Biblical author's positions regarding the future begin to demystify:

1. The author who penned the second part of the book of Daniel. Chapters 1-6 describe the history of Daniel in the Babylonian kingdom, and it is safe to assume that it was indeed drafted by Daniel himself. It seems, however, that chapters 7-12 seek to describe Daniel's prognostic visions regarding forthcoming happenings in Babylon and the later Hellenist period. The assumption here being a different author wrote this 'prophecy' through a procedure known as *vaticinium ex eventu*, prophecy from (after) the event, describes prophecy as that of Daniel, who lived in the time of the first temple, towards the end of days, taking place of the author of chapters 6-12, the **second** Daniel, so to speak. This second Daniel experienced historicity as present in days of the Hellenistic kingdom, but the *pseudo-epigraphia* written in the name of Daniel about the future's unfolding, is not the future or the past of the same author. Moreover, the-belonging-to-the-future begins to show signs of hope for the future, which begins to consolidate in the present of the real author and the vision of the imagined author, Daniel.

$$Past_1 > Present_1 \text{ (formulated as an imagined } Present_2 \text{ which is } Past_1 + \text{ apocalyptic } Future_2 = Present_1) > Future_1$$

2. And if we are speaking about "second," then we must remember that better known second, that is, the second book of Isaiah, whose words, to no fault of his own, were grafted from chapter 40, while his words are about his present and his being. And so for this paradigm as well John of the Apocalypse who lived in a present of depression

and frustration, with futural anticipation for the erasure of the great kingdoms. The future is perceived as distant but the author is calling for its nearness.

*Past<sub>1</sub> > Present<sub>1</sub> > Future<sub>1</sub>*

**3.** For Paul the future was always the continuous future in the present, so that his present is no longer a present but always a *towards-a-future*. Nevertheless, all of this is happening without technological acceleration, only a mystical one, one that heralds the unification between the present-future and final-future (in which man will unite with the Godly Other and the present will merge with the future, towards the end of history).

*Past<sub>1</sub> > Present<sub>1</sub> (a formulation of Future<sub>1</sub> which Present<sub>1</sub> merges into) > Future<sub>1</sub>*

For all intents and purposes, each of these three subjects lived in a certain way under a present towards-futurity, which is their own present. What is unique to the contemporary subject is that he is in a situation towards futurity, towards an apocalyptic situation, which is hiding until it can reveal itself (but there are those who would say that every subject is *exceptional* in regards to subjectivity as such). In the first case noted here, the future-writing dwells entirely in an imagined past gazing at the future. In the second, the future is distant and unique, and in the third, the future is already here and overtaking the present, from outside. Is this like a time in which the past, present and future are erased, in the apocalypse that was Auschwitz?

Maybe, as Agamben hints, in that state of emergency the apocalypse is the norm, because the present once laundered the future and the entire past, and turned its subjects into *Muselmänner*.<sup>13</sup> This is the moment of annihilation toward which the apocalyptic thought heralds and fears, no longer bogged down with questions of occupation and oppression of minorities, we can avail ourselves to questions regarding the occupation of the present by the future until a state in which the present will conquer the future. That which is described as future is none other than the present or the futuristic within the present.

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13 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive (Homo Sacer III)* (New York: Zone Books, 2002).

And why bother with such a methodological preface regarding the futuristic? The goal is simply to gain insight into the future implicated in the present, one that does not yet exist as independent from the present, a not-yet pure future. This move is possibly justified from the direction of our encounter with the future while examining our relation with the ancients from the future of their past, when for some apocalypticians the future *was a gaze at the present future from an imagined past*.

And from this we can learn about our relations with futurity and, perhaps, reformulate it. Thus we recreate our future, or the movement towards itself, and maybe thus also the relation between our real present and our real future as well as this movement towards an imminent merger between the present and future. He who can help us here is Paul, who was responsible for formulating the internal figure of the (contemporary) Western subject, and thus also its unique anxiety and dreadful anticipation of the future merger.

*\* Translated by Omer Benjakob and edited by Ilya Merlin*