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Whose Apocalypse? Unfuturability and the Politics of Settler-Colonial Futurity in Western Apocalyptic Narratives

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Abstract

This paper argues that reading Western settler-colonial apocalyptic narratives—including films, video games, and novels such as *The Road*, the *Fallout* series, *Children of Men*, and *Interstellar*—through the lens of unfuturability reveals their underlying political function. I distinguish between "apocalypse-as-genre," the spectacular collapse imagined in these works, and "apocalypse-as-structure," the slow violence already endured in places such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Papua. The analysis identifies three recurring settler-colonial tropes that work to secure the future as a racially exclusive domain: the reimagining of land as an emptied frontier, the rebirth of the hunter-hero through righteous violence, and the salvation of the future through a settler adoption fantasy. These tropes function as a form of "white property" by controlling who inherits futurity. In response, unfuturability is proposed as both an analytic and an ethic: a political refusal of the colonial future that opens space for plural, relational worlds already being built through Indigenous land stewardship, Black mutual aid, and decolonial archival practice. By using unfuturability to name and critique these narrative patterns, this paper offers a framework for reading apocalyptic culture beyond the horizons secured by settler futurity.

Keywords: apocalypticism, settler colonialism, futurity, temporality, unfuturability

Apokalips Milik Siapa? *Unfuturability* dan Politik Futuritas Kolonial-Pemukim dalam Narasi Apokaliptik Barat

Abstrak

Artikel ini berargumen bahwa membaca narasi apokaliptik kolonial-pemukim Barat—termasuk film, permainan video, dan novel seperti The Road*, seri* Fallout*,* Children of Men*, dan* Interstellar*—melalui lensa unfuturability (ketaktermasadepankan) menyingkap fungsi politik yang mendasarinya. Saya membedakan antara "apokalips-sebagai-genre," yakni keruntuhan spektakuler yang diimajinasikan dalam karya-karya ini, dan "apokalips-sebagai-struktur," yakni kekerasan lambat (*slow violence*) yang telah dialami di tempat-tempat seperti Sumatra, Kalimantan, dan Papua. Analisis ini mengidentifikasi tiga tropus kolonial-pemukim berulang yang be-*

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kerja untuk mengamankan masa depan sebagai ranah yang eksklusif secara rasial: pengimajinasian ulang tanah sebagai frontir *yang dikosongkan, kelahiran kembali pahlawan-pemburu melalui kekerasan yang disucikan (*righteous violence*), dan penyelamatan masa depan melalui fantasi adopsi pemukim. Kiasan-kiasan ini berfungsi sebagai bentuk "kepemilikan kulit putih" dengan mengendalikan siapa yang mewarisi futuritas. Sebagai tanggapan,* unfuturability *diajukan baik sebagai sebuah analitik maupun etika: sebuah penolakan politis terhadap masa depan kolonial yang membuka ruang bagi dunia-dunia majemuk dan relasional yang telah dibangun melalui penjagaan tanah Adat, bantuan timbal balik Kulit Hitam, dan praktik pengarsipan dekolonial. Dengan menggunakan* unfuturability *untuk menamai dan mengkritik pola-pola naratif ini, makalah ini menawarkan kerangka kerja untuk membaca budaya apokaliptik melampaui cakrawala yang diamankan oleh futuritas pemukim.*

Kata kunci: *apokaliptisisme, kolonialisme pemukim, futuritas, temporalitas, unfuturability*

Introduction

In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, the post-apocalyptic American landscape appears as an ideologically blank slate—a world "cauterized" of all history and memory. This genre's fantasy of a guilt-free new beginning sharply contrasts with a different kind of apocalypse: a slow, structural crisis already unfolding for millions of people in regions like Sumatra, Kalimantan, and Papua. This ongoing structural apocalypse is visible through widespread deforestation driven by oil palm expansion[1] and devastating peatland fires.[2] Although these realities are deeply connected to the global condition, they are often ignored or dismissed as background noise in a world captivated by fictional stories of spectacular, sudden collapse.

This contrast reveals a deeper ideological problem at the heart of my argument. I distinguish between two concepts: "apocalypse-as-genre," which refers to fictional narratives of rapid, dramatic endings, and "apocalypse-as-structure," which describes real, ongoing crises that often remain unseen and disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Drawing on Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence"[3]—a delayed, gradual form of de-

[1] K.G. Austin et al., "Shifting Patterns of Oil Palm Driven Deforestation in Indonesia and Implications for Zero-Deforestation Commitments," *Land Use Policy* 69 (December 2017): 41–48, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2017.08.036.

[2] Jukka Miettinen and Soo Chin Liew, "Status of Peatland Degradation and Development in Sumatra and Kalimantan," *AMBIO* 39, nos. 5–6 (July 2010): 394–401, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-010-0051-2.

[3] Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, First

struction that occurs out of sight—I argue that popular apocalyptic narratives act as a form of "white property." By this, I mean these stories claim exclusive ownership over the imagery and imagination of world-ending, securing the future as a space reserved for Western, racialized fantasies.

This paper argues that by reading Western apocalyptic narratives through the lens of *unfuturability*, we can expose their settler-colonial logic and open a critical space for reimagining the future as a site of collective creation. To develop this argument, I employ a temporal critique that brings together Christina Sharpe's work on the "wake" and Elizabeth Povinelli's concept of geontopower. The paper is structured in four parts. The first section, "The Future as Racialized Property," establishes the theoretical foundation that the modern idea of the future was constructed as a form of colonial property. The second section offers a critical analysis of popular apocalyptic stories, highlighting settler-colonial tropes and neoliberal spectacles in key Western cultural texts such as *The Road* (2006), the *Fallout* video game series, Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), and Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014).

The third section, "The Apocalypse is Now," shifts toward alternatives by exploring counter-futures rooted in Black and Indigenous thought. Finally, the paper concludes with "Unfuturability and the Politics of the Present," which proposes an ethical framework for inhabiting a damaged world through practices of relationality and opacity.

The selection of case studies is deliberate and integral to the paper's multi-lensed critique. While there are countless examples of post-apocalyptic media, these four works were chosen because they collectively represent the ideological spectrum of settler-colonial fantasies. The first pair, *The Road* and *Fallout*, function as a primary mode of colonial fantasy, explicitly depicting the post-apocalyptic landscape as a *terra nullius* and the survivors as hunter-heroes who must eliminate dehumanized "others" to rebuild a new civilization. This thematic thread allows for a direct application of Povinelli's theory of geontopower to deconstruct how certain lives and landscapes are rendered as "non-life" to justify their elimination. In contrast, the second pair, *Children of Men* and *Interstellar*, represent a more subtle form of colonial fantasy that centers on reproductive and biopolitical anxieties. These films, through their "white savior" narratives, allow for a critique that applies Stoler's work on the racialization of time and the policing of reproduction, revealing how the future is channeled through a project that is ultimately owned and secured by

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Harvard University Press paperback edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013), 2.

whiteness. By examining these narratives, the paper shows how their ideological work of erasing history and securing a 'white future' function to obscure the very real, ongoing apocalypses faced by communities in places like Sumatra—turning their slow violence into the invisible background of a global story.

The Future as Racialized Property

The modern idea of the future as an open and conquerable territory is a relatively recent development closely tied to the logics of capitalism and colonialism.[4] As historian Reinhart Koselleck explains, the modern era introduced a fundamental shift in how history is understood—a process he calls the temporalization of history (*Verzeitlichung*).[5] Time ceased to be seen as a repeating cycle and instead became a unique, singular, and forward-moving project. This conceptual change created a sharp distinction between the "space of experience" (the past) and the "horizon of expectation" (the future). This ideological leap—where the future can be imagined as radically different from the past—lays the groundwork for the settler-colonial fantasy of a new beginning. The idea of a tabula rasa future, a blank slate, became the conceptual justification for the physical erasure of Indigenous life and history on the colonial frontier. Such a fantasy recurs throughout apocalyptic narratives, where the apocalypse acts as a total rupture that erases history and creates a blank slate on which a future, free from the burdens of the past, can be claimed and possessed.

This claim of ownership over the future has always operated in a racially exclusive way, a dynamic that can be better understood through Elizabeth Povinelli's theory of geontopower. Geontopower is a system that enforces a distinction between dynamic "Life" and inert "Nonlife" to justify exploitation.[6] It governs not just life itself but the very boundary between the living and the non-living. Povinelli's figure of the "Desert" captures this logic perfectly: it is a landscape "emptied of life" that can be rendered habitable again through technological or managerial intervention. These ideas help us understand how

[4] Franco Berardi, *After the Future*, ed. Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn, trans. Arianna Bove et al. (New York: AK Press, 2011), 12–13.

[5] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, with American Council of Learned Societies, Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 2–3.

[6] Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University press, 2016), 16–17.

apocalyptic narratives like *The Road* and the *Fallout* video game series reproduce this ideology by portraying post-apocalyptic worlds as lifeless, empty frontiers. In these settings, certain groups—such as cannibalistic gangs or ghoul-like mutants— are ideologically rendered as "non-life," which justifies their elimination and establishes a new hierarchy of the living.

The colonial project, then, was not only about the theft of land and labor but also about the monopolization of time itself. This process is vividly explored in Ann Laura Stoler's work on the biopolitical regulation of European domestic life. Stoler argues that the "intimate" sphere—including sexuality, marriage, and child-rearing—was not a private domain but a central site where imperial power was constructed and maintained.[7] This involved strict control over reproduction and racial hierarchies, with European women positioned as "custodians of morality" tasked with protecting against "cultural and sexual contamination." This intense policing of the domestic realm to secure a "pure" European future is the conceptual inheritance that informs the modern-day "white savior" trope. It effectively racializes time by reserving it for those deemed "fit" and "civilized."

This racialized sense of temporality—where the future is an exclusive domain—finds clear expression in films like *Children of Men* and *Interstellar*. In these narratives, the survival of humanity depends on the reproductive and heroic acts of a white savior figure. These stories symbolically reproduce colonial logic by channeling the future of all humanity through a project ultimately controlled by whiteness. Together, they form an analytic frame that links colonial and metropolitan anxieties about time, race, and futurity.

Apocalypse as a Settler-Colonial Dreamscape

The imperial logic of preserving the future as an exclusive, racialized property is powerfully reproduced in popular apocalyptic stories. These stories function as settler-colonial dreamscapes, creating hyperreal "blank slate" scenarios where the violent work of dispossession is achieved through a seemingly natural or neutral cataclysm. In doing so, they absolve both the hero and the audience of any historical guilt. This ideological work is accomplished through three recurring narrative maneuvers: the reimagining of the land as an empty frontier, the rebirth of the hunter-hero through righteous violence, and the rescue of the future through a settler adoption fantasy.

[7] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule: With a New Preface* (Berkeley Los Angeles London: University of California Press, 2010), 110.

Fantasies of an Empty Frontier

Apocalyptic narratives often perform their ideological work by rendering the landscape as *terra nullius*—a "no man's land" devoid of history or prior inhabitants. In Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), the American Southeast is not merely destroyed but "cauterized" into a de-geographied America: the sky "dark beyond darkness," days dim "like the onset of some cold glaucoma," and the land "barren, silent, godless."[8] Charred trees lean over roads lined with skeletal cars; buildings stand blackened and hollow; ash settles over everything in a frozen monochrome. McCarthy's stripped punctuation, limited lexicon, and paratactic sentences formally mirror this desolation, forcing the reader into a halting, breathless rhythm that feels like trudging alongside the father and son. The absence of place names and landmarks severs the setting from historical specificity, creating an ideologically "blank" terrain suggestive of an unlikely Eden "awaiting once again those perfect names."[9]

Encounters on the road become symbolic acts of salvage: a tableau of the slain, a charred corpse in a doorway, or the ritualized discovery of a single can of Coca-Cola in a collapsed supermarket. In the latter, the father withdraws the can "slowly," inhales the fizz, and passes it to his son[10]—a gesture that transforms a mass-produced commodity into a sacred relic. This is not preservation for its own sake but, as postcolonial theorists note, an act of appropriation[11]—the remnants of a destroyed world are selectively recovered to rebuild the future in the image of the old. Such moments enact what Ann Laura Stoler calls the "archiving of the everyday," where mundane artifacts are curated with tenderness as a form of possession.[12]

This preservation is bound to the father and son's self-image as "the

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[8] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road*, 1. Vintage open-market ed., [Nachdr.] (New York, NY: Vintage International, 2009), 2.

[9] Ashley Kunsa, "'Maps of the World in Its Becoming': Post-Apocalyptic Naming in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," *Journal of Modern Literature* 33, no. 1 (December 2009): 57–74, https://doi.org/10.2979/JML.2009.33.1.57.

[10] McCarthy, *The Road*, 12.

[11] Samuel J. Redman, *Prophets and Ghosts: The Story of Salvage Anthropology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press, 2021), 55–56, https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674270015.

[12] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

good guys," those morally fit to inherit and steward what remains. Refusing cannibalism, they maintain an ethical frontier that distinguishes them from the "savages" outside, embodying the Slotkin-esque "hunter-hero" [13] whose survival and moral authority rest on defending a purified order. "We wouldn't ever eat anybody, would we?" the boy asks. "No. Of course not," the father replies. Even starving, they would not, "because we're the good guys… and we're carrying the fire."[14] Yet the novel's cannibalism motif can also be read as a metaphor for the "blind consumerism" and "utter drive to consume" that precipitated the apocalypse[15]—a reminder that the purified order they cling to emerges from the very logic that destroyed the world.

In the *Fallout* series, the frontier logic becomes both explicit and interactive. Set after the "Great War" of 2077—a two-hour nuclear exchange that annihilates most life on the American continent—the player emerges from a subterranean Vault-Tec shelter into a scorched "wasteland" where 1950s billboards peel beside rusted diners, and retro-futuristic Power Armor stands amid irradiated ruin. This blend of Cold War optimism and speculative science fiction parodies postwar American exceptionalism, exaggerating its aesthetics to grotesque proportions. Yet the parody coexists with a romanticized settler fantasy—a vast, emptied America ready for reclamation. Crucially, this is not an empty landscape in a literal sense, but a world that has been emptied of a living, non-player history, whose artifacts and ruins are available for the player to re-purpose

Core mechanics place the player in a loop of violent salvage: scavenging weapons, food, and "pre-war relics"; building settlements; and eliminating enemies whose bodies yield meat, scrap, or other resources. Violence is not incidental but infrastructural—the game's Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System (VATS) freezes time for the surgical dismemberment of raiders, Super Mutants, Deathclaws, and other "monstrous" beings. In *Fallout 3*, the moral choice to either detonate or disarm the nuclear bomb in the town of Megaton literalizes the player's role as arbiter of life and death on the frontier—an act framed less as collective governance than as an individual test of morality. Perks like "Cannibal" or "Lead Belly" recast survival as bodily transformation

[13] Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600 - 1860*, 4th print (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan Univ. Pr, 1987), 176.

[14] McCarthy, *The Road*, 75.

[15] Jordan J. Dominy, "Cannibalism, Consumerism, and Profanation," *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 13, no. 1 (September 2015): 143–58, https://doi.org/10.5325/cormmccaj.13.1.0143.

through moral transgression, while the very act of killing becomes a form of resource extraction. Here, Richard Slotkin's "regeneration through violence" is not just narrative but systemic: progress depends on the purging of threats.

The construction of these threats draws on colonial techniques of dehumanization. Ghouls and Super Mutants—visibly marked as "withered" or "mutated"—are presented as irredeemable Others, their monstrosity justifying campaigns of eradication by factions like the Brotherhood of Steel. In *Fallout: New Vegas*, the Brotherhood's "purification" missions, framed as necessary to contain technological corruption, operate as frontier wars against an inhuman foe. Raiders function as the game's stand-ins for hostile "tribes," while in-game propaganda uses animalistic and pathogenic imagery to frame enemies as vermin or disease.

The player's role as Vault Dweller or Lone Wanderer thus mirrors the settler-founding father archetype: charting an "empty" land, neutralizing its inhuman denizens, and repopulating it through settlement. Although *Fallout* flirts with moral ambiguity—offering pacifist dialogue options, satirical posters, and questlines that critique corporate greed—its mechanics consistently align survival with purification. The presence of pacifist routes does not subvert the settler fantasy but rather makes the player's choice to be violent a more complicit act, a deliberate endorsement of the hunter-hero archetype. Violence is framed not only as expedient but as a moral imperative in restoring a purified post-apocalyptic order. In this way, the series transforms the open-world RPG into a playable myth of settler futurity, where the apocalypse clears the slate for the fantasy of a guilt-free frontier.

The worlds of these narratives are also a male-locked microcosm, where female characters vanish or play minor, subservient roles. For example, the mother in *The Road* commits suicide, which many critics interpret as a failure to embody the traits deemed necessary for survival in the novel's brutal world. Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz observes that she "never showed the confidence and strength of character necessary to survive,"[16] framing her decision as shaped by despair rather than cowardice. The novel itself presents her choice as grounded in a fatalistic but lucid appraisal of their situation. In a chilling exchange with the father, she questions his ability to protect them: "You have two bullets and then what? You can't protect us." She anticipates a horrific fate for all of them, "Sooner or later they will catch us and they will kill us.

[16] Aitor Ibarrola-Armendariz, "Cormac McCarthy's The Road : Rewriting the Myth of the American West 1," *European Journal of American Studies* 6, no. 3 (September 2011), https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.9310.

They will rape me. They'll rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it."[17] She rejects what she sees as the futility of waiting: "You'd rather wait for it to happen. But I can't. I can't." And she reveals her longing for annihilation:

> The one thing I can tell you is that you won't survive for yourself. I want to be gone. When one has nothing left, make ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them. [...] My only hope is for eternal nothingness and I hope it with all my heart.[18]

Critics such as Lydia Cooper describe the mother's "abject lack of pity for or emotional connection to her child" as symptomatic of being "poisoned by the internal and external death of her world,"[19] while Naomi Morgenstern reads her as an allegorical figure of death, one who "would call 'you' seductively to your death."[20] Though her logic is clear, it contrasts sharply with the father's blind optimism—a tension that ultimately results in a future from which she is excluded. Her choice to embrace "eternal nothingness" is not merely a gendered act of despair, but the novel's most profound expression of unfuturability, a refusal of a future that she deems unlivable. Her absence thus underscores a gendered vision of endurance: the future being secured is not only a white future, but a male-driven one.

In the *Fallout* series, this gendered logic persists, albeit in a more diffuse and interactive form. While the games offer the option to create a female protagonist, the narrative world remains saturated with masculinist tropes of conquest, technological mastery, and moral arbitration. The existence of a female protagonist does not transcend this settler-colonial logic but rather forces her to inhabit it. Key female characters—such as companions, quest-givers, or faction leaders—are often framed through heteronormative romance subplots, serve as narrative foils to male authority figures, or function as exceptional "tokens" whose competence confirms rather than destabilizes male dominance. Even the celebrated openness of the game's design, described by developers Tim Cain and Leonard Boyarsky as accommodating pacifist playthroughs,

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[17] McCarthy, *The Road*, 32.

[18] McCarthy, 33.

[19] Lydia R. Cooper, "Cormac McCarthy's 'The Road' as Apocalyptic Grail Narrative, *Studies in the Novel* 43, no. 2 (2011): 218–36.

[20] Naomi Morgenstern, "Postapocalyptic Responsibility: Patriarchy at the End of the World in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*," *Differences* 25, no. 2 (September 2014): 33–61, https://doi.org/10.1215/10407391-2773427.

largely unfolds within a framework of traditionally masculine-coded skills: combat proficiency, mechanical repair, barter, and leadership over resource extraction. Tim Cain explained their design philosophy for main story quests:

> "What that meant was every main story quest had to be, we had to examine it to make sure that any kind of character could do it. So, if you weren't that good at fighting, if you were not that good at stealth, well then you were going to talk your way past it, what if you didn't put many points into dialogue? […]. I wanted to encourage a pacifist playthrough."[21]

Leonard Boyarsky reiterated this core design principle:

> "You know, you could lie, I mean you could talk, steal, or fight your way through everything, every? Well, most major encounters in the game. That was basically our mantra for making the game."[22]

The interactive structure—balancing fixed story "skeletons" with player-driven questlines—grants the player the power to shape the world, but rarely disrupts the default fantasy of the lone, self-reliant (and implicitly male) savior rebuilding civilization. The 1950s retrofuturist aesthetics and Vault-Tec satire may critique the American Dream that caused the apocalypse, yet the game invites players to reconstruct that same dream on an ideologically emptied continent, reinforcing the same gendered futurity in which masculine agency defines who survives and who matters. In both *The Road* and *Fallout*, the post-apocalyptic future is not simply rebuilt—it is re-secured as a masculine inheritance, sustained by the colonial conviction that survival belongs to those who can master, purify, and repopulate the world in their own image.

From Conquest to Rescue

In ostensibly more progressive apocalyptic narratives such as Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), the core colonial logic persists, but it is reconfigured. The film is set in a xenophobic, dystopian United Kingdom where Theo, a former activist turned apathetic bureaucrat, must escort Kee, the first pregnant woman in eighteen years, to a mysterious sanctuary. Cuarón constructs this world through dense mise-en-scène and an autonomous, roving camera: dilapidated streets strewn with garbage, cages of detained refugees,

[21] Daniel Joseph Dunne, "Following the Fallout: Narrative Structures in a Videogame Franchise" (Master's Thesis, Swinburne University of Technology, 2018), 174.

[22] Dunne, 191.

omnipresent propaganda ("The Homeland Security Bill: Protecting Britain"), and the unbroken, immersive long takes that place viewers inside chaotic spaces such as the Bexhill refugee camp. Kee's pregnancy is revealed in a cramped, manger-like barn, its warm, ecclesiastical light evoking a Nativity tableau that starkly contrasts with the film's grim urban palette. This contrast frames hope as fragile and contingent—yet also racialized, as Kee is a dispossessed Black refugee.

Through the lens of Ann Laura Stoler's biopolitical critique of empire, *Children of Men* is less a break from colonial governance than a reconfiguration of it. Kee's reproductive capacity becomes the most contested site of political meaning precisely because it is racialized, instrumentalized, and oversignified, echoing colonial anxieties over concubinage, mixed-race offspring, and the governance of intimacy. By portraying Kee as a Black refugee rather than the white British woman in the source novel, Cuarón dramatizes these anxieties: her body is simultaneously undesirable to the state yet indispensable for species survival, claimed by every faction not for her sake but as a vessel of political fantasy.

The birth scene at Bexhill crystallizes this dynamic. Amid explosions and gunfire, the baby's cries halt combat in a moment of collective awe. As Guy Debord's "society of the spectacle" suggests, the lived reality of collapse is here displaced by a cinematic, almost religious image.[23] Susan Sontag's reflections on disaster aesthetics help explain this seduction: the beauty of the moment anesthetizes critique, inviting viewers to feel moved without confronting structural causes of collapse.[24] Slavoj Žižek calls this depoliticized humanitarianism[25]—an affective high that replaces political transformation with sentimental attachment to life-as-image.

The narrative positions Theo as both protector and midwife of futurity, enacting what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang call the "settler adoption fantasy," in which the future of the Other is safeguarded but only under white moral stewardship.[26] Kee may carry life, but Theo legitimizes it through proximity, paternal sacrifice, and alignment with white affective codes. The

[23] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, with Ken Knabb (London: Rebel Press, 2005), 7.

[24] Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," *Commentary*, October 1965, https://www.commentary.org/articles/susan-sontag/the-imagination-of-disaster/.

[25] Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times* (London: Verso, 2010), 4.

[26] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

film's realist aesthetic—handheld camerawork, natural lighting, documentary pacing—recodes colonial nostalgia as cinematic authenticity, making its politics feel inevitable. And yet the ending complicates this frame: Theo dies, Kee survives, and the final image is not of a triumphant father figure, but of a Black woman and her newborn adrift toward an uncertain horizon. This ambiguous closing gestures toward alternative imaginaries of solidarity and care, even as the emotional crescendo reinscribes the sacrificial masculinity it appears to subvert.

Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* pushes this logic further, expanding the colonial fantasy to a cosmic scale. Set in a near-future Earth devastated by ecological collapse—a crisis that visually and thematically recalls the 1930s Dust Bowl through Nolan's use of actual documentary footage—the film presents space colonization not as a violent conquest, but as a scientifically justified salvation. In doing so, it reinforces a form of futurism that bypasses systemic repair in favor of spatial escape. Cooper, the film's central protagonist, is both a farmer and an astronaut, embodying the American settler archetype, now extended into the stars. His journey through the wormhole becomes a modern reiteration of Manifest Destiny, where the frontier is no longer the American West, but entire galaxies. This ideological structure mirrors what Stoler calls the colonial policing of futurity, wherein power is maintained through the moral authority of white masculinity, domesticity, and heroic sacrifice.[27]

The narrative is driven by Cooper's paternal love, a force elevated to cosmological importance. The film's climactic "tesseract" scene visually represents how this love, "just like gravity, can travel through space-time and affect reality." When TARS asks how Cooper can transmit a message, Cooper explicitly states: "Love, TARS […] it's the key." This makes love a metaphysical principle, a catalyst of the universe and life itself. Crucially, this focus on paternal love is not just a patriarchal trope; it is a specifically settler-colonial one. It forms the emotional core of the bootstrap paradox, serving as a divine justification for Cooper's righteous claim over the future and positioning his personal love as the ultimate moral authority to decide humanity's fate. This focus on paternal love effectively marginalizes other forms of affection, as maternal and romantic love are absent or dismissed in favor of Cooper's grand mission. This narrative choice thereby reinforces a patriarchal structure in which the survival of humanity hinges on the actions and emotions of a white male hero.

The film's aesthetic choices work ideologically to normalize this cosmic

[27] Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, 63–64.

expansionism. The cinematic spectacle, which Nolan grounds in physical realism by eschewing CGI where possible, and by Kip Thorne's scientific consultancy, makes the fantastical elements of space travel feel like ours, inviting the audience to participate in the story's process rather than merely spectate. The spectacle of collapse—dust storms, crop failures, abandoned schools—is rendered through gorgeous cinematography and grounded scientific realism, making catastrophe not only believable, but strangely beautiful. This aesthetic serves both a critical and a normalizing function: while it makes the horrors of collapse viscerally real, it also presents the resulting politics of salvation as inevitable. This is further reinforced by the film's gorgeous visual of the new planet, which becomes a utopian space depicted with "vivacious green colors of ripening fields,"[28] obscuring any colonial implications and presenting colonization as a righteous endeavor. The film's musical score by Hans Zimmer, especially the use of the church organ, injects a profound sense of "religiosity" into the narrative, giving the mission a sacred and epic quality and lending it universal significance.[29] The wormhole, the tesseract, and even time itself become tools in service of the chosen savior, reinforcing a bootstrap paradox in which a white male hero is both cause and solution to human survival.

As in *Children of Men*, the fantasy of continuity—of species, of nation, of future—is made possible through a selective mode of salvation that celebrates individual sacrifice while sidestepping deeper critiques of the systems that necessitated the apocalypse in the first place. Both *Children of Men* and *Interstellar* exemplify how apocalyptic cinema uses emotional spectacle to redirect political critique. The child becomes not a subject but a fetish; the family not a unit of care but a political weapon. The audience is interpellated into a position of affective complicity: we cheer for the father, we mourn his loss, we feel hope in the child. But what is lost in this exchange is the very possibility of imagining different futures—futures not built on rescue, but on repair. These narratives celebrate a future that is diverse, even post-racial, but only if it is delivered by the hands of a chosen savior.

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[28] Patrycja Podgajna, "Between the waste land and no place - Christopher Nolan's futuristic dystopia Interstellar (2014).: Między dystopią a utopią - futurystyczna wizja świata w filmie Christophera Nolana Interstellar (2014).," *Studia Humanistyczne AGH* 15, no. 2 (2016): 51, https://doi.org/10.7494/human.2016.15.2.51.

[29] Rasmus Mathias Carlsson, "Non-Diegetic Film Music as a Narrative Agency in Christopher Nolan's Interstellar (2014)" (Master's Thesis, Lund University, 2019).

The Ideology of Form

While the previous sections deconstructed the thematic content of these settler-colonial fantasies, this section shifts its focus to an explicit analysis of their ideology of form. In contrast to the previous discussions where formal elements served as secondary support, here I argue that the ideological power of these narratives lies not just in the stories they tell, but in how their formal delivery re-routes potentially radical critiques into safer, more manageable channels. I will demonstrate this through three key examples representing distinct media forms—*Children of Men* as a cinematic form, the *Fallout* series as an interactive, gaming form, and *The Road* as a literary form—to show how the apocalypse is presented as a mode of consumption that shapes how collapse is felt, experienced, and ultimately, politically repackaged.

The film *Children of Men* exemplifies this ideological work through its formal aesthetics that functions on two distinct levels. On an affective level, its renowned cinematography, characterized by long, unbroken takes and a handheld, documentary-like aesthetic, serves to immerse the viewer in the chaos and violence of the dystopian world. The car ambush scene (a 247-second shot) and the Bexhill battle (a six-minute take), are intentionally designed to make the audience feel like first-person witnesses with no aesthetic distance. On an ideological level, this stylistic choice, which makes the film feel like "footage of journalists in war zones,"[30] works to normalize the chaos and subtly funnel the viewer's attention away from structural critique. By rendering the catastrophe as an inescapable and authentic reality, the film makes the individual's struggle for survival the only plausible solution, thereby naturalizing the narrative of the white male savior as the sole source of hope. The film's bleak and gloomy style, with its focus on piles of black garbage bags and incinerated cars, further embeds a social critique of contemporary political realities. Director Alfonso Cuarón explicitly stated his mantra: "We're not creating; we're referencing here,"[31] reinforcing that the film's form is a deliberate commentary on the "horrific political realities of the post-9/11 world."[32]

[30] Julia Echeverría Domingo, "Liquid Cinematography and the Representation of Viral Threatsin Alfonso Cuarón's Children of Men," *Atlantis* 37, no. 2 (2015): 137–53.

[31] Marcus O'Donnell, "*Children of Men* 's Ambient Apocalyptic Visions," *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 27, no. 1 (March 2015): 16–30, https://doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.27.1.2439.

[32] Dan Dinello, *Children of Men*, Constellations: Studies in Science Fiction Film and TV (Leighton Buzzard: Auteur, 2019), 24.

Similarly, the *Fallout* series uses its interactive form as a kind of ideological camouflage. The diegetic interface—Pip-Boy wrist computer, in-game radio, and collectible "Holotapes"—makes progress dependent on curating and archiving pre-war artefacts. This mirrors the colonial archive's logic of preserving what is deemed valuable while discarding "junk." The Pip-Boy's retro-futuristic design merges maps, biometric data, quest logs, and inventory into a single apparatus of self-surveillance, training the player to manage the body as an object of optimization. Holotapes, branded foodstuffs, and other relics of "atomic culture" satirize mid-century consumerism,[33] a function that allows the player to feel intellectually superior to the world they are exploring. Yet their preservation—echoed in the Brotherhood of Steel's techno-hoarding ethos—re-enacts an archival politics of value and exclusion. The soundscape shifts between jaunty swing tunes and the guttural roars of wasteland predators, embedding the player in an emotional loop where nostalgia is inseparable from threat. Even acts of consumption are ambivalent[34]: food heals while inflicting radiation, binding survival to both the pleasures and the perils of the past.

Core mechanics center on scavenging and rebuilding, directly casting the player in the role of a recolonizing figure. In *Fallout 4*, "settlement building" missions evoke the founding of new frontier towns, positioning the player as a moral custodian of an emptied continent. The Karma and reputation systems suggest moral complexity, but their consequences are easily offset, keeping the player within a heroic subject framework. This produces a subtle form of ludonarrative dissonance: while the narrative hints at ambiguity, the gameplay rewards self-sacrificing heroism. [35] The retro-futuristic aesthetic—blending 1950s optimism with science-fiction spectacle—offers a satirical critique of the American Dream, yet the gameplay loop steers the player toward rebuilding the world in its old image. This is not a contradiction, but the very engine of the camouflage; the satire acts as a permissive structure that satisfies the player's critical impulse, effectively inoculating them against a deeper critique of their own actions.

By granting agency not just to witness but to enact the reclamation, the

[33] Sarah Stang, "Irradiated Cereal and Abject Meat: Food as Satire and Warning in the *Fallout* Series," *Games and Culture* 17, no. 3 (May 2022): 354–73, https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120211030800.

[34] Stang.

[35] Dunne, "Following the Fallout: Narrative Structures in a Videogame Franchise," 99–100.

series turns the colonial project into an experience of mastery. Having been given permission to feel "in on the joke," the apocalypse becomes an interactive blank slate, where starting over is not only permissible but pleasurable, transforming the fantasy of a guilt-free frontier into a consumable gameplay experience.

Finally, *The Road* performs a similar ideological work through its distinctive literary form. McCarthy employs a stripped-down, script-like style often described as "prayerful minimalism,"[36] with language pared to its bare essentials. The refusal of quotation marks, the scarcity of dialogue tags, and the alternation between clipped exchanges and sudden lyrical passages create what critics call a "pared down, elemental" austerity.[37] This formal minimalism erases conventional narrative boundaries, and its halting, fragmentary rhythm—discrete paragraphs separated by blank spaces—disciplines the reader into a slow, deliberate temporality akin to survival under scarcity. However, rather than simply staging collapse as a purgation for renewal, the form holds the reader in a powerful, unresolved tension. The "de-geographied" landscape and minimalist style simultaneously evoke a profound sense of absence—a world emptied of meaning and future—while also suggesting a kind of elemental purity, a world stripped to its essential truths where moral order might be reforged.

The ideological power of the novel lies not in resolving this conflict, but in using this formal tension to re-route the terror of absolute loss into a poignant, quasi-spiritual meditation on endurance. It forces the reader to experience the father's irrational hope as a profound duty even as the form itself constantly reminds us of its impossibility. In this context, the recurring attention to artifacts like the Coca-Cola can becomes more than nostalgic longing; these relics are anchors for that fragile hope in a sea of formal and narrative absence, making the desire to "carry the fire" feel like an essential truth, precisely because it is so utterly unfounded.

The Apocalypse is Now

While settler futurity frames the apocalypse as something still to come—a cataclysm that conveniently wipes away the past to allow a guilt-free new beginning—many communities are already living in its wake. For Black, Indigenous, and stateless peoples, the "end of the world" is not a future possibility

[36] Ibarrola-Armendariz, "Cormac McCarthy's The Road."

[37] Kunsa, "'Maps of the World in Its Becoming.'"

but an ongoing, structural reality. In Hollywood narratives, the fantasy of a "clean slate" acts like an ideological time machine, allowing settler societies to imagine a future in which the contradictions and injustices of their past have simply vanished. These stories reproduce the "logic of elimination" by erasing the presence of others, fulfilling the core aim of settler colonialism without ever acknowledging historical wrongdoing.

In response, Black and Indigenous thought offers radical counter-futurities that reject the singular, linear timeline of colonial progress. For the Black diaspora, the defining experience is what Christina Sharpe calls "the wake": living in the afterlife of the Middle Passage, an apocalyptic rupture whose trauma continues to shape the present.[38] Sharpe's work in *In the Wake* reframes our understanding of disaster by arguing that slavery functions as a "singularity"—a cataclysmic event that remains active and continues to shape the present.[39] She writes that this ongoing reality is manifested as a persistent and oppressive climate she calls "the weather," which she explicitly defines as "the totality of our environments" and "the total climate" that is antiblack.[40]

Similarly, Indigenous thought reframes the apocalypse not as a looming disaster, but as an "ancestral dystopia"—a catastrophe that, as scholars like Kyle Whyte and Grace Dillon note, has already occurred and continues through ongoing colonial dispossession.[41] From this perspective, the anxieties over a future climate crisis are seen as challenges that Indigenous communities have already endured. This view stands in sharp contrast to colonial temporality. Kyle Whyte's concept of "spiraling time," rooted in Anishinaabe traditions, grounds ethics in cyclical, intergenerational relationships with the land, rather than in the linear, forward march of progress. Such a framework directly challenges what Katharina Hunfeld calls the "coloniality of time,"[42] which imposed a racialized, teleological order that devalued Indigenous tem-

[38] Christina Elizabeth Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2016), 10.

[39] Sharpe, 76.

[40] Sharpe, 75–80.

[41] Kyle P. Whyte, "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1, nos. 1–2 (March 2018): 224–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618777621.

[42] Katharina Hunfeld, "The Coloniality of Time in the Global Justice Debate: De-Centring Western Linear Temporality," *Journal of Global Ethics* 18, no. 1 (January 2022): 100–117, https://doi.org/10.1080/17449626.2022.2052151.

poralities and their enduring ethical responsibilities to both past and future generations.

This resistance is not merely theoretical; it manifests in concrete, decolonial practices. While Hollywood films often glorify the lone hunter-hero, these counter-futurities foreground communal and relational ways of being. In Indonesia, for instance, the revitalization of the Javanese ecological calendar, *Pranata Mangsa*, and the durational, community-centered art of figures such as Tisna Sanjaya embody the reclamation of temporal sovereignty.

The revitalization of *Pranata Mangsa*—a traditional Javanese calendar established in 1855 and based on the sun's annual cycle—is a powerful act of reclaiming temporal sovereignty. More than a dating system, it reflects the collective wisdom of *ilmu titen* ("the science of observing and remembering"), drawn from generations of meticulous observation of natural phenomena, from animal behavior to wind patterns.[43] This knowledge offers a locally grounded guide for agricultural life. At its core, *Pranata Mangsa* embodies a worldview that regards the Earth not as a resource to be exploited, but as *pertiwi*—a nurturing mother to humanity. This philosophy fosters harmony with nature and strengthens communal resilience and hope (*pangarep-arep*), even in times of scarcity.[44] By prioritizing long-term ecological balance over short-term economic profit, it offers a clear counterpoint to the extractive logic of modern industrial agriculture and the accelerated timelines of the global market economy.

Similarly, Tisna Sanjaya's practice operates as a communal act of remembering the land's histories while caring for its present. In *32 Tahun Berpikir dengan Dengkul* (1999), he paraded a massive sculptural knee joint through Bandung's government district, its rough surface crowded with satirical imagery: cartoony portraits of Soeharto and Habibie, batik patterns, wayang silhouettes. The work collapsed the boundary between installation and performance, artist and audience. Flanked by communal banner-painting and impromptu street performances, it became a relational object rather than a static exhibit, drawing passersby into an orbit of shared protest. Its central

[43] Setyasih Harini, Sumarmi, and Anggit G. Wicaksono, "Manfaat Penggunaan Pranata Mangsa Bagi Petani Desa Mojoreno Kabupaten Wonogiri," *Jurnal Inada: Kajian Perempuan Indonesia Di Daerah Tertinggal, Terdepan, Dan Terluar* 2, no. 1 (2019): 82–97.

[44] Ali Badrudin, "PRANATA MANGSA JAWA (Cermin Pengetahuan Kolektif Masyarakat Petani Di Jawa)," *Adabiyyāt: Jurnal Bahasa Dan Sastra* 13, no. 2 (December 2014): 229–52, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajbs.2014.13204.

forms—inverted human figures of bamboo and wire, heads buried or streaked with black-and-white lines, a blindfolded Garuda Pancasila beneath a bowing president—visualized the "stupidifying" suppression of thought under Soeharto's regime.[45] Green mourning banners, defiled *mooie indie* landscapes, and soiled t-shirts translated this critique into the idioms of Islamic ritual and vernacular craft. Rejecting a polished, gallery-ready aesthetic, Sanjaya fused handmade and ready-made materials into a profane visual language illegible to official art circuits yet resonant in local memory. In Saidiya Hartman's sense of "critical fabulation," the work assembles fragments of lived history into a form that resists closure and institutional co-optation—a refusal underscored by its eventual destruction by the Satpol PP in 2003,[46] an act that deepened its function as social critique and solidarity-making.

Often working through performance and installation, Sanjaya invites direct public participation, fostering shared experiences rather than solitary contemplation. Many of his projects transform urban slums into "living galleries" through murals, festivals, and other participatory forms, turning art into a vehicle for community empowerment. By mobilizing residents to reclaim their environment and their stories, Sanjaya cultivates a communal way of being that stands in stark contrast to the lone-hero narratives celebrated in much of Western media. For him, art is also a spiritual act—"Berkesenian bagi saya adalah doa" [47]—a form of prayer that connects his practice to the deeper cosmological worldview reflected in *Pranata Mangsa*.

Together, these practices affirm that alternative ways of living and imagining are not only possible, but are already taking shape within the fractured landscapes of the present. They resist what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe as the "settler move to innocence"[48] by reasserting Indigenous knowledge, spirituality, and communal relationships as legitimate and dynamic visions of the future. These examples show that decolonial resistance is not an

[45] Dea Aulia Widyaevan, "Kajian Kritik Seni Instalasi Tisna Sanjaya - '32 Tahun Berpikir Dengan Dengkul,'" *JURNAL RUPA* 2, no. 1 (January 2018): 23, https://doi.org/10.25124/rupa.v2i1.752.

[46] Widyaevan, "Kajian Kritik Seni Instalasi Tisna Sanjaya - '32 Tahun Berpikir Dengan Dengkul.'

[47] Widyaevan, 24.

[48] A "settler move to innocence" refers to strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve settlers of feelings of guilt or responsibility without requiring them to give up land, power, or privilege, or change much at all. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor," 10.

abstract ideal, but a lived reality—rooted in the traditions, worldviews, and creative practices of non-Western societies.

Unfuturability and the Politics of the Present

The dominant way of understanding time—as something linear, progressive, and controlled—has served as a key tool of colonial and heteronormative power. I do not mean to suggest that this "Western time" is a monolithic block, but rather to identify the dominant temporal logic that systematically seeks to erase other timelines. Presented as universal, this system pushes non-Western peoples into a permanent past, seen as behind, underdeveloped, and only redeemable through Eurocentric ideas of progress.[49] From the enforcement of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) as the global standard to "universal" apocalyptic narratives that hide the protection of white futures, this racialized system of time erases multiple ways of experiencing time and denies the ongoing reality of colonial and racial violence.

I call "unfuturability" a political and ethical refusal of this system. It is not a rejection of imagination, but a refusal to accept the forced demand to fight for a future that was never meant to include everyone. Crucially, this refusal is not an end in itself; it is the necessary first step to create space for different worlds. I argue that unfuturability is a critical framework that opens up space for various decolonial projects, breaking the colonial Future's exclusive control over time and allowing many different worlds to emerge. This idea builds on Lee Edelman's critique of reproductive futurism—where the figure of "the Child" represents a single, normal future—and insists on ending the future as a way to free it.[50] This approach connects different critical ideas, such as Christina Sharpe's "wake work," Saidiya Hartman's "waywardness," and Indigenous understandings of time. While their theoretical projects are distinct—one rooted in posthumanist ethics, another in historical anti-racist struggle—all of these, in their own way, reject settler colonial visions of the future and commit to worlds that have long been excluded by the dominance of one singular timeline.

The political practice of unfuturability is expressed through fugitivity—a lived experience of dispossession and refusal. As Stefano Harney and Fred Moten explain in *The Undercommons*, this is not just an abstract idea but a

[49] Hunfeld, "The Coloniality of Time in the Global Justice Debate."

[50] Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, ed. Michele Aina Barale et al., Series Q (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 14.

real, unassimilated underground presence that exists "in but not of" dominant institutions.[51] It moves through these institutions under false pretenses, rejecting their rules and ways of inclusion. This is a persistent inhabiting of absence, where "undisciplined study" and "fugitive planning" work to dismantle a world that accepts certain kinds of suffering as unavoidable. I argue that Saidiya Hartman's concept of *waywardness* makes this approach historically visible. It describes the lives of young Black women in early twentieth-century northern cities who refused domestic servitude and resisted the controlling gaze of reformers.[52] By doing so, they created "beautiful experiments" in love, kinship, and joy amidst the aftermath of slavery's destruction. In boarding houses, cramped tenement rooms, and the informal gathering spaces of the streets, they developed a rebellious, ungovernable way of living—open, diverse in form, and continuously imagining a different world. These "beautiful experiments" were not attempts to gain acceptance into the dominant future; rather, they powerfully enacted unfuturability itself.

For communities already living a structural apocalypse, unfuturability is not a distant fear but an urgent condition of survival. Building on Christina Sharpe's concept of the "weather" of anti-Blackness, I understand this as a pervasive climate of racial violence—both historically entrenched and unevenly experienced across places—that saturates the present so fully that, for many Black and Indigenous peoples, the apocalypse is not a future event but a lived reality. This ongoing apocalypse is made visible through the foreclosure of the future by environmental destruction intertwined with racial capitalism's legacies. Indigenous nations in the Pacific face rising seas that consume ancestral burial grounds, a slow and relentless drowning deepened by histories of forced displacement and resource extraction. In the United States, similar patterns emerge: the Gullah Geechee communities of the southeastern coast confront intensifying hurricanes and the loss of their lands[53], while Louisiana's

[51] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe New York Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 25–30.

[52] Saidiya V. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, 1st ed (Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: W. W. Norton & Company, Incorporated, 2019), 8.

[53] Laura Jane Brubacher et al., "Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and Indigenous Peoples' Health and Wellbeing: A Systematic Umbrella Review," *PLOS Global Public Health* 4, no. 3 (March 2024): e0002995, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0002995.

"Cancer Alley" exposes predominantly Black towns to dangerously high cancer rates due to petrochemical plants established on former plantation sites.[54]

This is why I locate *wake work*[55] as the central praxis of unfuturability. It is a deliberate commitment to sustaining life within hostile conditions through acts of care, memory, and creativity that resist erasure. I contend that this practice operates on two intertwined fronts. On the symbolic level, it refuses white apocalyptic narratives that center the preservation of white futures while rendering racialized Others as expendable. On the material level, it confronts the cumulative devastations that Rob Nixon identifies as "slow violence"—from poisoned rivers on Indigenous lands to the radioactive aftermath of extractive wars—damages that blur the boundary between past trauma and present survival. These violences, which on a planetary scale are physically inscribed into the Earth itself[56] (what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls the Anthropocene), are made manifest in the local realities of Louisiana's "Cancer Alley" and the sinking coastlines of the Pacific. In a world where Elizabeth Povinelli's concept of "geontopower" reveals how colonial governance treats land, minerals, and racialized bodies as resources to be extracted, conventional ideas of a linear "future" collapse. Instead, Black and Indigenous temporalities assert spiraling, entangled times where the past remains alive and opens possibilities for prophetic resistance—reordering social relations so that those socially erased become the architects of worlds otherwise.

I locate the ethical foundation of unfuturability in Donna Haraway's call to stay with the trouble. Rather than retreating into fantasies of a perfect future or surrendering to inevitable collapse, unfuturability demands that we remain rooted in the messy, immediate, and interconnected present. Haraway urges us to be "truly present" as "mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings," resisting the "self-indulgent and self-fulfilling myths of apocalypse" that saturate dominant narratives.[57]

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[54] Md Mahir Daiyan, "The Impact of Climate Change on Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Practices," *Praxis International Journal of Social Science and Literature* 6, no. 6 (June 2023): 75–80, https://doi.org/10.51879/PIJSSL/060611.

[55] Fundamentally, wake work is an insistence on existence, an active commitment to protect and sustain self-determined life in the here and now, particularly in the face of ongoing racial violence and dispossession Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 20–21.

[56] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "ANTHROPOCENE TIME," *History and Theory* 57, no. 1 (March 2018): 5–32, https://doi.org/10.1111/hith.12044.

[57] Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Experimental Futures. Technological Lives, Scientific Arts,

Her ethic of response-ability and sympoiesis—"making-with"—rejects the myth of the lone, self-made hero, instead promoting shared responsibility and collective creation of life and meaning.

The very idea of a stable future is often anchored in "rugged masculine whiteness," a savior narrative that shifts responsibility for destruction onto racialized others.[58] This myth is bound up with a broader belief system known as reproductive futurism—a "secular theology" that treats the biological Child as the ultimate guarantee of a collective future.[59] Against this, BIPOC futurisms offer a powerful counter-ethic. They refuse the assumption that biological reproduction is the sole pathway to continuity, instead embodying Haraway's call to "Make Kin Not Babies" by embracing mixed heritage and cultivating flexible, adaptive forms of kinship—a vital "resource of Black survival." In these practices, unfuturability is not a resignation to collapse, but a radical mode of creation: building worlds not from the sterile abstraction of a predetermined future, but from the living, relational, and generative present.

One of the most tangible expressions of this unfuturable ethic emerges in mutual aid networks. When a community organizes mutual aid, it is not merely filling the gaps left by the state; it is enacting an ethic of collective survival. As organizers like Dean Spade emphasize, mutual aid unsettles dominant assumptions about what a "future" should look like.[60] Rather than seeking safety in the false promise of stability offered by oppressive systems, these communities cultivate a different kind of home—what Harney and Moten describe as the undercommons. This is not a fixed location but a "wild," ongoing practice of "fugitive planning" and "undisciplined study."[61] Its spaces are fragile, imperfect, and often under threat, yet it is precisely within this precarity that their strength resides. By refusing the clean, linear logic of the colonial future, mutual aid becomes an act of *militant preservation*[62]—a deliberate and relational labor that protects and sustains self-determined life in the here and now.

Anthropological Voices (Durham London: Duke University Press, 2016), 1 & 35.

58 Audra Mitchell and Aadita Chaudhury, "Worlding beyond 'the' 'End' of 'the World': White Apocalyptic Visions and BIPOC Futurisms," *International Relations* 34, no. 3 (September 2020): 309–32, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117820948936.

59 Edelman, *No Future*, 66.

60 Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity during This Crisis (and the Next)* (London: Verso, 2020), 33.

61 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*, 7.

62 Harney and Moten, 76.

These ethics of care and refusal are not confined to activist networks; they are equally alive in Indigenous land stewardship, food sovereignty, and decolonial archival work, which do not wait passively for a promised future but cultivate life here and now. Indigenous land stewardship rejects settler-defined notions of environmental conservation, instead restoring reciprocal relationships with rivers, forests, soils, and ancestral territories. This restoration is carried out through ceremonies, seasonal harvests, and the revival of practices such as controlled burning that sustain ecological balance. [63] Food sovereignty movements—from the Zapatistas in Chiapas[64] to Hawaiian ʻĀina restoration projects[65]—likewise rebuild local food systems not for profit but to nourish extended kin networks. These are more than survival strategies; they are living enactments of "response-ability" and "sympoiesis" (making-with), where humans exist as part of a co-constitutive web with the land. Such practices emerge from temporalities that refuse the straight line of colonial progress, holding past, present, and future in active relation. In the Māori concept of whakapapa,[66] genealogy is a living web linking ancestors, the living, and the unborn. Ubuntu ethics extends this sense of continuity, binding the living, the living-dead, and the yet-to-be-born in a reciprocity that creates responsibility in all directions of time. [67]

Decolonial archival work carries this same temporal ethic into the domain of memory, but it is not simply about preserving the past. It is a practice of world-making in the present. The colonial archive has never been a pas-

[63] Kira M. Hoffman et al., "Conservation of Earth's Biodiversity Is Embedded in Indigenous Fire Stewardship," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118, no. 32 (August 2021): e2105073118, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2105073118.

[64] Carol Hernández, Hugo Perales, and Daniel Jaffee, "'Without Food There Is No Resistance': The Impact of the Zapatista Conflict on Agrobiodiversity and Seed Sovereignty in Chiapas, Mexico," *Geoforum* 128 (January 2022): 236–50, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2020.08.016.

[65] Noa Kekuewa Lincoln et al., "Restoration of ʻĀina Maloʻo on Hawaiʻi Island: Expanding Biocultural Relationships," *Sustainability* 10, no. 11 (October 2018): 3985, https://doi.org/10.3390/su10113985.

[66] Joni Māramatanga Angeli-Gordon, "Whakapapa, Mauritau, and Placefulness to Decolonise Indigenous Minds," *Genealogy* 8, no. 4 (October 2024): 124, https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy8040124.

[67] Angelo Nicolaides, "Duty, Human Rights and Wrongs and the Notion of Ubuntu as Humanist Philosophy and Metaphysical Connection," *Athens Journal of Law* 8, no. 2 (March 2022): 123–34, https://doi.org/10.30958/ajl.8-2-2.

sive storehouse of facts; it has functioned as an active instrument of governance, producing maps, ledgers, and ethnographies to codify dispossession and script the erasure of Indigenous life.[68] To counter this, projects like the Sámi digital archive or the Native Hawaiian ʻIke Wai water data repository create living records that honor oral histories, songs, personal letters, and ritual objects—materials the colonial state once dismissed as "non-archival." These are not inert collections but archives of affect, designed to circulate memory outside the timelines and evidentiary rules that sustain colonial authority. In prioritizing what was deliberately excluded, they refuse the teleology of "progress" and the extractive logic that treats history as a resource to be mined. Instead, they preserve the textures of lived relation and, in doing so, keep open other ways of being and knowing. Such archives do not point nostalgically backward, nor do they wait for some sanctioned future; they operate in the thick of the present, stitching together past and future as resources for survival and transformation now. In this sense, preservation itself becomes a horizon-making act. The very work of keeping alive what the colonial state sought to erase is not only refusal but a form of hope—hope grounded not in the abstract promises of the colonial Future, but in the fact of already living otherwise. This is a hope that grows out of practice, not prophecy: it is there in the tending of land, in the circulation of songs and stories, in the care for kin both human and more-than-human.

José Esteban Muñoz's vision of queerness as a utopian horizon offers a language for this orientation. He describes an "ideality" or "not-yet-here" distilled from the past and carried forward to imagine a different future.[69] For Muñoz, this is both a "critical affect" and a methodology—one that faces the "quagmire of the present" without surrendering the possibility of collective transformation. His notion of "educated hope" directly counters Lee Edelman's "No Future" argument, refusing to abandon "politics, hope, and a future that is not kid stuff."[70] Here, hope is not an endpoint to be reached, but a daily practice: kin-making, gatherings in the undercommons, fugitive collaborations, and the quiet persistence of archives that keep other worlds alive.

For me, this is where unfuturability makes its most radical demand: to see the refusal of the colonial Future not as the end of possibility, but as its

[68] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.

[69] José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 10th Anniversary edition, Sexual Cultures (New York: New York university press, 2019), 1.

[70] Muñoz, 92.

expansion. What follows that refusal is never an empty void—it is a dense, relational present, thick with memory, creativity, and the slow, deliberate work of making worlds otherwise. I do not think of hope here as the shimmering reward that waits at some distant horizon. Hope, in this register, is the act of living as if those worlds are already taking shape around us, in our gatherings, our care work, and our stubborn commitments to one another.

This is not a naïve or escapist hope. It is what we might call a critical hope—one that refuses the seduction of tidy redemption arcs and instead looks for life in the fractures. Such hope finds political grounding in Édouard Glissant's concept of the right to opacity—the deliberate refusal to be fully legible to the colonial gaze. Opacity, as Glissant reminds us, is not "enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy," but a rejection of forced transparency that protects distinct ways of being and what he calls "irreducible singularity."[71] It is a shield for worlds that cannot—and should not—be translated into the master's grammar. To live opaquely is to live waywardly, fugitively, queerly, embracing Glissant's notion of *errantry*[72]: a sacred, relational wandering that resists the "totalitarian root" of dominant thought and invents the world in the very act of moving through it. This is not to say such work is always invisible. Rather, the right to opacity safeguards the core of a people's being, while the act of public protest—like the women in Kendeng[73]—is a tactical demand for the right to maintain that opacity.

Such wandering insists on a different question: "Whose apocalypse?" This question is not answered by crowning new rulers after the end, but by turning toward those who have already survived the end of their worlds. Dominant apocalyptic narratives secure futures for the powerful by masking the violence that underwrites such survival. In contrast, many Indigenous and other marginalized communities live in the aftermath of catastrophe—in the long shadow of forced relocation, cultural erasure, and ecological collapse. For them, the task is not to make an imagined future safe, but to release the colonial Future altogether, letting other ways of being, relating, and imagining take root.

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[71] Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, Nachdr., trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 190.

[72] Glissant, 11.

[73] S P Hadi et al., "Community Movement for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources: Case Study of North Kendeng Mountain Area, Central Java, Indonesia," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 448, no. 1 (March 2020): 012069, https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/448/1/012069.

If we dare to ask *"whose apocalypse?"*, unfuturability answers with a refusal. Unfuturability rejects the narrow, violent vision of the future and turns instead toward a poetics of relation—the messy, complex work of making worlds together, here and now. This work is slow, often invisible, and deeply material. It rests on practices of deep interdependence, where survival is collaborative and improvisational, sustained even amid disturbance. Such temporalities refuse rigid separations between past and present, holding memory and possibility in the same breath. In Papua, for example, Marind communities resisting palm oil expansion do more than protect land; they preserve a web of relationships with ancestors, rivers, forests, and future generations that cannot be reduced to economic value.[74] In Kendeng, Central Java, women encasing their feet in cement to protest limestone mining defend not just a mountain, but a way of life that treats the earth as kin rather than a resource.[75] Along the sinking coasts of Demak, fishing villages have rebuilt mangrove belts with their own hands—not as climate projects for external agendas, but as acts of safeguarding ancestral shorelines and the nonhuman life they sustain.[76] These struggles show that unfuturability is not resignation; it is the ongoing, collective practice of breathing together under the weather of an apocalypse already in motion. It is a stubborn, generative refusal to be folded into the clean lines of someone else's ending. With every act of care, every preserved story, and every new relational world built in the present, unfuturability protects a life that refuses to be undone by the past or confined by a future it never chose.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that popular apocalyptic narratives are not merely entertainment, but a form of "white property" that safeguards a racially exclusive future by erasing the historical and ongoing violences of colonialism. Distinguishing between "apocalypse-as-genre" and "apocalypse-as-structure" reveals how spectacles of collapse work ideologically: they absolve hero and

[74] Sophie Chao, "In the Shadow of the Palm: Dispersed Ontologies among Marind, West Papua," *Cultural Anthropology* 33, no. 4 (November 2018): 621–49, https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.4.08.

[75] Hadi et al., "Community Movement for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources."

[76] Ekaningrum Damastuti and Rudolf De Groot, "Participatory Ecosystem Service Mapping to Enhance Community-Based Mangrove Rehabilitation and Management in Demak, Indonesia," *Regional Environmental Change* 19, no. 1 (January 2019): 65–78, https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-018-1378-7.

audience alike of historical responsibility, while naturalizing a linear, progressive time that renders the "slow violence" already endured by marginalized communities invisible. In works like *The Road* and the *Fallout* series as well as *Children of Men* and *Interstellar*, settler-colonial fantasies persist through the empty frontier, the hunter-hero, and the salvation of the future via a sanitized, masculine-coded violence.

Against this, I have proposed "unfuturability" as a political ethic that refuses the coercive demand to fight for a future never meant to include all. Unfuturability is not despair, but a militant reorientation toward the present—a commitment to the living work of repair, care, and relation already practiced in Indigenous land stewardship, Black mutual aid, and decolonial archival work. In *Pranata Mangsa*'s ecological timekeeping, in the community-based art of Tisna Sanjaya, and in countless other grounded practices, we see Haraway's *sympoiesis* ("making-with") displacing the lone hero with collective survival. Here, hope is not deferred to a distant utopia but cultivated daily in the ruins.

Ultimately, unfuturability reframes the central question: "Whose apocalypse?" The answer lies not in imagining new rulers after the end, but in standing with those who have already survived. It affirms nonlinear temporalities, embraces Glissant's right to opacity, and protects ways of being that refuse translation into the colonial grammar. As a politics of relation, unfuturability insists on making worlds together—messy, plural, and unassimilable—and on building a future unburdened by the violences that built the present.

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