

## **The Apocalypse Will Not Be Televised! Baroque Lessons in Apocalypticism, Demagoguery, and Reality Literacy**

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On January 9, 2017 God TV aired a documentary titled “Apocalypse and the End Times,” in which host Paul McGuire interviewed author, radio personality, and public speaker Bill Salus, from the Prophecy Depot Ministries, about his 2016 book *The Now Prophecies: Disaster in Iran, Destruction of Damascus, Decline of America, The Final Arab-Israeli War*. During the course of the interview, Salus repeatedly claimed that the biblical prophecies of the apocalypse are fast converging in our own time. His conclusion is that all the signs point to the fact that we are living “in the end times.” The homepage of the Prophecy Depot Ministries shows that Salus is far from done trumpeting (and profiting from) the imminent end of the world:

ALERT: the APOCALYPSE has ARRIVED! NOW AVAILABLE: *Apocalypse Road, Revelation for the Final Generation*. Enjoy a thrilling Novel and a Bible commentary at the same time. If you enjoyed the Left Behind books, you will appreciate the biblical explanations provided in *Apocalypse Road* . . . Millions of Christians disappeared, apparitions of the Virgin Mary have reappeared, and meanwhile the Antichrist begins his beastly career [. . .] ARE YOU AND YOUR FAMILY PREPARED FOR THE APOCALYPSE? CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION. (prophecydepotministries.net)

Whether we consider the religious media markets (Christian and otherwise), or the secular zombie mythology that fills an endless stream of best-selling novels, survival manuals, blockbuster films and wildly popular television

**Writing in the End Times: Apocalyptic Imagination in the Hispanic World**

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shows like *The Walking Dead*, there is no doubt that the apocalypse is big business today. But the recent presidential election in the United States suggests that the apocalypse is also big politics. As noted by a wide cross-section of national and international news-media commentators, the Donald Trump presidential campaign fed on and contributed to the normalization of a form of paranoid speech of apocalyptic overtones that used to be thought of as fringe politics attributable to the radical right in Europe and the United States. Indeed, the Trump phenomenon may be described most accurately as the political coming out and the converging of fringe and mainstream cultural and ideological apocalypticisms. Referring to the highly publicized speech at the Cleveland Convention of the now president, the Editorial Board of the Washington Post published an opinion piece aptly titled “Donald Trump. The Candidate of the Apocalypse,” stating that Trump exploited the public’s fears and anxieties as he “took real challenges and recast them in terms that were not only exaggerated but also apocalyptic” (The Post View, July 21, 2016). While the Post editorial reflected the reaction of much of the mainstream media to Trump’s somewhat shocking (yet largely predictable) speech at the 2016 Republican Convention, progressive news outlets were even more attuned to the apocalyptic rhetoric of the Republican nominee. A good example would be the article “Trump’s Apocalyptic Message: Biblical Prophecy, Survivalist Ideologue and Racist Conspiracies in One Package” published by John Feffer in the online news service Alternet:

The World according to Donald Trump is very dark indeed. The American economy has tanked. Mexico has sent a horde of criminals over the border to steal jobs and rape women. The Islamic State, co-founded by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, is taking over the globe. ‘Our country is going to Hell,’ he declared during the Republican primaries. It’s ‘like medieval times,’ he suggested, during the second presidential debate. ‘We haven’t seen anything like this, the carnage all over the world,’ For Trump, it’s not morning in America, it’s just a few seconds before midnight on the doomsday clock” (<http://www.alternet.org/election-2016/trumps-apocalyptic-message-biblical-prophecy-survivalist-ideolog-and-racist>). Now, as is well known, he has taken this view straight into the presidency, trumpeting it for the world to hear in one of the darkest, most fear-mongering inaugural addresses ever given. For many in this country and around the world, that speech will be remembered for lines like, “this American carnage stops here!

Whether or not “medieval times” might offer a fair historical parallel to our own troubled present in terms of the “carnage all over the world,” what we can say is that, in the context of Trump’s political rhetoric, the allusion to “medieval times” is meant to evoke images of widespread instability, violence and chaos, a hellish present-future for the United States and indeed the whole world from which only his presidency can save us. This is of course a familiar rhetorical trick. As specialists of the early modern period, we can think of rhetorical parallels in the political culture of Habsburg Spain, none more fitting perhaps than the baroque writings of seventeenth-century royal theologian Cristóbal Lozano (1609–1667). His dramatic description of the fall of Christian Spain (the medieval Visigoth kingdom) to hordes of Muslim barbarians in the year 711 is just as rich in apocalyptic imagery: “quedó España perdida, despobladas sus ciudades, cautivos sus hijos, saqueadas sus riquezas [. . .] la fe cristiana extinguida, muertos sus ministros, desechos sus santuarios, derribadas sus iglesias [. . .] tanto cuerpo difunto como puebla la campaña” (Spain was lost, its cities deserted, its children enslaved, its riches looted, [. . .] the Christian faith extinguished, its ministers dead, its sanctuaries destroyed, its churches in ruins [. . .] countless corpses everywhere) (64–65; our translation).

In Lozano’s version of history, the darkness of medieval times would have plagued Spain well beyond the Christian conquest of Granada of 1492—which had marked the culmination of the Spanish Reconquista—, stretching into the early seventeenth century when Phillip III decreed the expulsion of the *moriscos*. But even the mass-deportation of hundreds of thousands of new Christians or *crisianos nuevos* (every man, woman, and child suspected of Muslim ancestry) that took place between 1609 and 1614 would have to be followed by the proper cultural cleansing needed to insure the nation’s safety. As one of us noted in *Baroque Horrors*, even the remnants of the unchristian past needed to be locked away behind impenetrable walls to prevent the advent of a new dark age. This is ultimately the point of Lozano’s updating of the legends of the cave of Toledo in “La cueva de Hércules” (The Cave of Hercules) and other stories included in *Los nuevos reyes de Toledo* (The New Monarchs of Toledo) and *David Perseguido* (David Persecuted), available today in the collection *Historias y leyendas* (Histories and Legends).

Lozano’s creative mixture of spiced-up story-telling, dire warnings, apocalypticism and biblical commentary may be said to have anticipated the rhetorical flair of John Salus and other popular Christian writers, radio hosts, and televangelists, particularly in their familiar recycling of Old Testament motifs. Thus, when Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson reworked the Old Testament logic of divine punishment in The 700 Club, the flagship television

program of the Christian Broadcasting Network, to explain the tragedy of 9/11 as America's punishment for its many sins—among them the nation's tolerance of abortionists, homosexuals, feminists, and liberals—these present-day leaders of the Christian right were inadvertently taking a page from Lozano's dramatic account of the destruction of Spain at the hands of Muslim terrorists as a punishment for the moral failings of the Visigoths: "Con mil estragos de religión y costumbres se hallaba el imperio gótico, cerca de los años de setecientos y once [. . .] esto fué la causa que España se perdiese" (52) (The Visigoth Empire was plagued by the corruption of religious values and behavior in the years preceding the seven hundred and eleventh [. . .] this is what caused the loss of Spain) (our translation).

Similarly, we can't help but hear echoes of the political rhetoric that justified the Habsburgs' campaigns of racial cleansing in today's calls for mass-deportations, anti-Muslim immigration laws, Muslim-American registries, and Trump's promise to build a massive wall along the United States Southern border to prevent Mexicans from stealing "our" jobs, raping "our" women, and destroying "our" way of life (where the "our" clearly indicates that his implicit audience is largely white and male). At least at the rhetorical level, Trump's calls for (and commitment to) an effort of national resurgence, "Make America Great Again," share in the logic of religious and cultural fundamentalism that drove the monarchical cause of national restitution in Imperial Spain. As Robert Tate noted in his seminal article "Mythology in the Spanish Historiography of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance," the recovery of Spain, which royal chroniclers proclaimed with the phrase "Hispania tota sibi restitute est," was entangled in an ideology of national purification coded as a defense against external encroachments (14–15).

On the other hand, those who have read *Trump. The Art of the Deal*, might be inclined to believe that the real estate mogul and TV star was simply trafficking in fear, anti-immigrant sentiments, and racially-tinged fantasies of national superiority in the same way that his business persona admittedly traded in misrepresentation and hyperbole in playing to the fantasies of potential clients. As he explained in chapter two of *Trump. The Art of the Deal*, aptly titled "Trump Cards: The Elements of the Deal": "I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get excited about those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration—and a very effective form of promotion" (58).

Indeed, based on his frequent use of hyperbole and misrepresentation, it would seem that Trump recycled his businessman's "Trump cards" for his

political campaign; and he has not ceased trying to use them as president either, no matter how much they fly in the face of facts. Of course, in the political arena this form of self-serving hyperbole and the manipulation of perceptions that plays to people's fantasies and prejudices have a long and distinguished history of tragic success; and the politicians and public figures who are known to have employed such techniques are commonly referred to as demagogues, a term defined by the Oxford dictionary as "a political leader who seeks support by appealing to popular desires and prejudices rather than by using rational argument: 'the Senator was a gifted demagogue, with particular skill in manipulating the press'" (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/demagogue>).

The reference to the demagogue's manipulation of the press in the example provided by the Oxford dictionary seems particularly insightful in the present context. Here's Trump again, this time discussing his handling of the press: "One thing I've learned about the press is that they are always hungry for a good story, and the more sensational the better. It's in the nature of the job and I understand that. The point is that if you are a little different, or a little outrageous, or if you do things that are bold and controversial, the press is going to write about you. I've always done things a little differently, I don't mind controversy [and] got a lot of attention, and that alone creates value" (56–57).

Trump's self-promoting confessions read as a how-to manual for today's business leaders in the same way that such works as Baldassare Castiglioni's *Il Cortegiano* (The Courtier) (1528) and Baltasar Gracián's *Oráculo manual y arte de prudencia* (Pocket Oracle and Art of Prudence) (1647) were meant to serve as practical guides for the power elites of their age. Remarkably, the baroque lessons in worldly wisdom that fill the pages of Gracián's books are at times virtually indistinguishable from Trump's own recommendations in *The Art of the Deal*. The self-promoting businessman and the Jesuit moralist draw very similar conclusions as they take stock of the crucial importance of the public's perception. They focus on the need to embellish reality and manipulate appearances to serve one's self-interest and bend the will of others. This is what Gracián calls "el saber coronado" (the crown-jewel of wisdom) (*El criticón* 3.6). He even makes the case that obeying one's self-interest or *conveniencia* "es virtud y pecado el ir contra ella" (is virtue and sin to go against it) (*Oráculo manual* 64; our translation).

Both Trump and Gracián see the world as public theater and man's life as a game of thrones. In talking about his life-long pursuit of success, Trump makes an interesting confession: "Money was never a big motivation for me, except as a way to keep score. The real excitement is playing the game" (63). Here we are reminded of the confessions of the fiction-

al president played by Kevin Spacey in the Netflix series *House of Cards* when he tells his audience in one of his characteristic asides that he has no respect for those who are motivated simply by money; the real prize of the game is power. This is also the end-goal of the practical wisdom that Gracián was offering to the elites of his time, power over hearts: “Es gran victoria coger los corazones [. . .] nacida del genio superior y ayudada de los méritos” (*Oráculo manual* 122) (It is a great victory to capture hearts [. . .] born from the authority of the superior genius with the assistance of his merits) (our translation). And again: “Poco es conquistar el entendimiento si no se gana la voluntad [. . .] Conseguir esta gracia universal algo tiene de estrella, lo más de diligencia propia” (*El héroe* 12) (Conquering minds has little value if wills are not subjugated. [Such] supreme grace can be achieved through good fortune but most of all through personal diligence) (our translation).

Regarding the subject of apocalypticism, Gracián’s view of the present state of the world is just as dark as Trump’s. He draws on the traditional baroque motif of the topsy-turvy world, *mundo trabucado*, to paint his doomsday picture of the state of the century, a scene of irredeemable chaos with hordes of hyenas standing atop deserted dunghills and all manner of beasts invading the cities (*El criticón* 1.6) (our translation). Like other baroque writers, Gracián attributes the sorry state of Spain to the erosion of the traditional social barriers and the shuffling of estates: “Barajados los estados, metiéndose los del uno en el otro, saltando cada uno de su coro” (*El criticón* 2.5) (Social standings shuffled, trespassing from one to the other, reaching beyond their place) (our translation). But Gracián does not seem interested in proposing political solutions, unlike the aspiring reformers known as *arbitristas*, or even reactionary writers like Francisco de Quevedo, who celebrated the old glories of Spain, even amidst the ruins of the present: “Miré los muros de la patria mía, / si un tiempo fuertes, ya desmoronados, de la carrera de la edad cansados, por quien caduca ya su valentía” (I looked upon the walls of my fatherland, / once strong, now they are decayed, / exhausted by time’s inevitable race, / their bravery defeated by old age) (<http://biblioteca.org.ar/libros/157909.pdf>; our translation). Gracián detests the arbitristas and political reformers; he refers to them as huddling rubble or *vulgo en corrillos*. His recommendation for the man of substance is not to attempt to change the world, no matter its present estate of devastation and decay, but to retool and adapt, making judicious use of the political arts of concealment, dissimulation, deception, and manipulation (*El criticón* 2.4 and 2.7).

While the Jesuit uses the familiar motifs of the world upside-down and the age of decay to set up the stage for his defense of cynical reason, other theologians struggle with what they see as unmistakable signs of moral bankruptcy and impending doom: rampant corruption, widespread violence and

devastation, the absence of charitable souls and basic human empathy, and the deepening crisis of the Christian faith. Even the once idealistic American missionaries who had been intent on (re)building the Christian utopia in the New World would be overcome by a tragic sense of disillusion, as they witnessed “the destruction of the Indies,” as Bartolomé de las Casas had candidly called it in his well-known denunciation of colonial devastation in the Americas.

As Fernando Rodríguez de la Flor explains in his landmark article “Sacrificial Politics in the Spanish Colonies,” the Jesuits had supplied “the court, as well as the military and administrative establishments of the colonies, with the necessary justification for the ‘politics of dissimulation’ embraced by the discourse of power; [but] once the possibility of ‘historical intervention’ has failed, revealing the demoniacal face of colonization, [. . .] the monstrous political body created by the imperial power [. . .] begins to be visualized—dreadfully so—as a land ‘uninhabited by God’” (247–250). De la Flor also notes that, in the American context, the scandal of colonial slavery will be seen as the ultimate failure of the Christian ethos and the final proof of the moral bankruptcy of the Spanish Empire. These tragic revelations will be “sublimated, in missionary discourse, in a type of sinister allegorical story about a ‘fallen’ world devoid of the possibility of redemption, in which a humanity deprived of utopias and ideals of self-fulfillment simply awaits the end of all suffering” (252).

In the eyes of such disillusioned missionaries as Jerónimo de Mendieta, America had become a literal valley of tears and a new devastated Jerusalem. As he writes in his *Historia eclesiástica indiana*: “visto los adversos fines en que todo esto ha venido a parar, no solo no puedo ofrecerle cántico de alabanza por fin de historia, mas antes (si para componer endechas tuviera gracia) me venía muy a pelo asentarme con Jeremías sobre nuestra Indiana iglesia, y con lágrimas, suspiros y voces que llegaran al Cielo (como el hacía con la destruida ciudad de Jerusalem) lamentarla y plañirla, recontando su miserable caída y gran desventura” (Mendieta II, 121) (Having seen the adverse ending everything has come to, not only can I not offer a song of praise at the end of my history but would much rather (had I the grace to compose a lament) sit down with Jeremiah over our Indian church, mourning with tears, sighs and cries to the Heavens (as he did over the devastated city of Jerusalem), recounting its miserable fall and tragic misfortune) (our translation).

The apocalyptic accents of Mendieta’s *History* and the confessional writings of other disillusioned missionaries like Gregorio de Matos, known as the first American eremite, have little or nothing to do with the rhetorical apocalypticism of royal theologian Cristóbal Lozano and the Jesuit moralist Baltasar Gracián, or the end-times talk of Christian leaders like Bill Salus, Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson today. The apocalyptic imagery that we see

in their writings springs from their painful coming to terms with the contradictions of evangelical reason and their first-hand experience of colonial devastation. Unlike the type of doomsday rhetoric that blames racial, religious, cultural, or social others for the decline of our nation and/or the imminent end of the world, their apocalypticism may be considered a redemptive *mea culpa* as much as a way of speaking truth to power; a last-resort denunciation of colonial violence. Their tragic voices urge us today, just as they did in their own age, to look in the mirror as we search for the lurking horsemen of the apocalypse.

While we may speculate about the reasons behind the cultural obsession with the apocalypse in different time periods, including the baroque age of disillusionment at the dawn of modernity and our own age of the post (post-modern, post-human, post-truth), what the literature suggests—then as well as now—is that apocalypticism is a *rhetoric of warning* and a *call to action*; to get busy averting the impending disaster or preparing for its aftermath. But as we have seen, those warnings and urgent calls diverge vastly, even in the relatively stifling ideological environment of Imperial Spain. The signs may point to an outside threat, which is why we would need to strengthen our borders and beef up our military, even engage in pre-emptive war; or they may shine a light on the moral failings of our neighbors, the sins of our fathers, or the consequences of our own lifestyle. Conversely, the horsemen of the apocalypse may look like alien invaders, Muslim terrorists, biblical plagues, radiation leaks, planetary chemical saturation, or genetic modifications; they might even look like President Obama or President Trump depending on which side of the political spectrum you find yourself.

To help us make this point, we would suggest running a couple of google searches pairing terms like “apocalypse” or “end-times” with the word “genetic,” for example, or the name “Trump.” On the subject of genetics we quickly found two short pieces making diametrically opposed claims. The first is from a Christian blog called The End Time. Its title is “Genetic modification of humans, animals, food; dinosaurs and the Nephilim.” Here is part of the argument:

The Bible describes Noah as being perfect in his generations, indicating that his bloodline hadn't been contaminated by the fallen angels' and the Nephilim's genetic tinkering, and that his seems to have been the only pure human genealogy left from which a redeemer could come (Gen: 3: 14–25) [. . .] Having failed to corrupt man through the direct tactic of genetic manipulation from marriages of themselves to daughters of men, they now pollute the food we eat, embarking on an indirect method to corrupt us.



Have you ever wondered why we are experiencing the ever-earlier onset of puberty? [. . .] Or why we are all huge? [. . .] Or why suddenly, celiac disease has sprouted up [. . .] Or why food has to be genetically modified in the first place? (<https://the-end-time.blogspot.com/2010/08/genetic-modification-of-humans-animals.html>).

The next quote is from a piece published in the website KQED Science Quest with the title *Explosive hypothesis about humans' lack of genetic diversity*:

Genetically, we are pretty much the same. A massive volcanic eruption 75,000 years ago may be why. Last blog I talked about how East Africans are generally more diverse than Asians, who are generally more diverse than Native Americans [. . .] Species are in danger long after they go through a bottleneck. They have a pretty limited gene pool which means they may not be particularly healthy and are in danger of being wiped-out by, for example, a single disease. (<https://ww2.kqed.org/quest/2008/03/17/explosive-hypothesis-about-humans-lack-of-genetic-diversity/>)

Clearly the authors of the articles quoted above hold to very different assumptions about the kinds of potentially catastrophic genetic dangers that we are (and have been) facing. While the first piece warns against genetic contamination attributable to diabolical forces, the second makes the point that the danger of mass-extinction lies in our lack of genetic diversity. The first piece would seem to advocate for the preservation of our genealogical and genetic integrity so we can be as pure as Noah's generation; by contrast, the second suggests that we should strive to diversify and muddle our genetic pool, to be more like our West Africans neighbors. We could certainly imagine very distinct—possibly opposing—ideological projects that might be conceived as a response to such apocalyptic warnings.

As for the pairing of Trump with the keyword “apocalypse” in a google search, we came across a good number of entries referencing Trump's tough talk (some call it honest) about the sorry state of the Union and the need for a full-on campaign of national restoration, as well as journalistic articles dealing with Trump's apocalyptic rhetoric; but we also landed in a progressive Trump Apocalypse Watch, which keeps track of his controversial cabinet nominations ([http://www.slate.com/topics/t/trump\\_apocalypsewatch.html](http://www.slate.com/topics/t/trump_apocalypsewatch.html)). Moreover, we found several pieces that pointed to Donald Trump himself as the ultimate

sign of the impending doom and the primary agent of the apocalypse, citing, for instance, the frequency of the appearance of the number 666 in relation to Trump (<http://metro.co.uk/2016/11/10/people-think-donald-trump-is-the-antichrist-and-hes-bringing-the-apocalypse-6249004/>; <http://yournewswire.com/nostradamus-predicted-trump-victory-and-the-apocalypse/>).

So what should we do with (and about) the seemingly unprecedented spike in apocalyptic rhetoric and the wave of demagoguery that accompanies it? In *Medialogies*, we argue that apocalypticism is in part a result of the kind of mis-information overload that plagues our media culture, as it did that of the early modern period. We refer to both these historical periods as ages of inflationary media, which is why we look to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the search for ways of dealing with the practical consequences of living in the end-times. Our take-away is that we need to re-learn, not so much the art of the deal, but the art of “reading reality,” for in the context of our vast mis-information overload, “reality literacy” may prove to be the true art of worldly wisdom. We go back to the meta-fictional work of Miguel de Cervantes and forward to the comedic craft of Stephen Colbert, both of whom we consider supremely versed in the art of reality literacy.

There are others, of course. The rapper Kendrick Lamar’s most recent video as of this writing has rightfully drawn a great deal of critical praise. In “Humble” he raps “I’m so fuckin’ sick and tired of the Photoshop / Show me somethin’ natural like afro on Richard Pryor / Show me somethin’ natural like ass with some stretchmarks,” against images of a woman’s buttocks, a model, and his own face being shown in a split screen with and without photoshop-ping. The theme continues throughout the video with camera movements that alternately conceal and reveal the framing strategies that permit “reality” to be perceived in certain ways. Shots of Lamar teeing off with a golf club quickly change perspective to show him standing on the wreck of a car in the dystopic setting of L.A.’s giant run-off canals.

The take of such a video is that of what we call a defender’s-of-being approach to reading reality. Defenders of being recognize that what is at stake in reading reality is clarifying or revealing the multiple and embedded interpretations within which reality always appears. It means focusing on the *qui bono* of those interpretations instead of ever claiming to present reality as unadulterated. Such an approach to apocalyptic themes in general can be formulated as “The Apocalypse Will Not be Televised,” in a riff on the 1970 R&B classic by Gil Scott-Heron, “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.” That song begins with the famous lines

You will not be able to stay home, brother

You will not be able to plug in, turn on and drop out  
 You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and skip  
 Skip out for beer during commercials  
 Because the revolution will not be televised.

Scott-Heron's song is primarily a call to arms against black oppression coupled with a cautionary alert that the media's "culture industry" is constantly working to sap attention from the proper focus of political struggle. As he goes on to sing,

The revolution will not give your mouth sex appeal  
 The revolution will not get rid of the nubs  
 The revolution will not make you look five pounds thinner  
 Because the revolution will not be televised, Brother

The lyrics suggest that "the revolution" is to be equated with all that underlies the distractions of the televised, media world. Especially important for our current mediological climate, however, is a later line that states, "There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down / Brothers in the instant replay," since, of course, something like this, namely, cell phone videos recording the repeated slaughter of young black men by police officers, is exactly what has permitted the rise of such revolutionary social justice movements as Black Lives Matter.

Our contemporary manifestation of the media-framing Scott-Heron depicts in his lyrics thus, by nature of the very flexibility built into today's medialogy, wraps itself around and incorporates such protest. If the new technologies allow for the "television" of what could not be seen before, the medialogy must find a way to render that invisible as well, or if not invisible, then irrelevant. This it does by cultivating a general apocalyptic sensibility according to which western civilization is under siege by the forces of chaos—terrorists, protesters, refugees, etc. "Our" reality is white, smooth, clean, and well-mannered. "They"—dirty, mostly black or brown, speaking incomprehensible languages and undermining our civic institutions—threaten that reality with destruction.

The apocalypse is in this way a made-for-television fantasy, and a verifiable and ultimately containable threat. It is personified by the brown/black zombie hordes living outside the walled-off hypergentrified Manhattan in Romero's *Land of the Dead*, but not as seen by that slyly subversive film, but rather as seen by the walled-off and well-healed citizens of the very real

hypergentrified Manhattan today, where crime is at a historical low precisely because poverty—along with graffiti, broken windows, and a whole lot of black and brown people as well—has been photoshopped and/or stop-and-frisked right out of the picture.

In other words, what this fantasy version of the apocalypse elides is precisely the apocalypse that won't be televised, the one that the very policies supported by and enacted by today's establishment politicians hasten along. The Trump Administration is quickly turning out to be the ad absurdum of the externalizing logic of today's medialogy, by which the coherence of the fantasy depends on the exclusion of disruptive matter whose exclusion exacerbates the very conditions that lead people to cling in fear to the fictions holding that fantasy together. Just take the example of coal: surrounded by beaming coal miners, Trump happily rolls back the Obama era executive orders intended to reduce our reliance on coal. This rollback will have no effect on coal mining jobs, which already accounted for fewer than 5 percent of West Virginia jobs prior to the regulations because of innovations in the industry and competition from other fossil fuels and renewable energies. But the rollback, along with the general policy of non-compliance toward and abandonment of U.S. support of international climate treaties, does threaten to exacerbate current global warming trends. This, in turn, will increase demand around the world for renewable energy sources and hence ultimately undermine the very livelihood those smiling faces are hoping to retrieve.

While the real apocalypse is not being televised, the medialogical disconnect between framed and real apocalypses is being registered in another subgenre of television, one that resonates closely with the fake-news plague of the last and current year. In a wide range of shows such as *Legion*, *Westworld*, *Mr. Robot*, the inability to tell the difference between framed reality and some external, possibly real world, is the entire point of the show. As *The New York Times*'s television critic James Poniewozik writes in a recent review of these shows, "there is undoubtedly something timely about stories in which there's no stable baseline of agreed-on reality" ([https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/28/arts/television/legion-finale-surreality-tv.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/28/arts/television/legion-finale-surreality-tv.html?_r=0)). Poniewozik goes on to mention "a pair of spectacles that allow [a character from 'Legion'] to see through a mental projection created by the show's villain," as he points out, "a nod to John Carpenter's *They Live*," before adding: "There may not be a better metaphor for the way our own mediating devices—electronic, social, political—come between what happens in the physical world and the perceptions our brains relay."

Programs like these show us that, if the apocalypse will not be televised, its failure to be televised can itself become television. This, in a nutshell, is what reality literacy entails: a hypersensitivity, trained by art and fiction,

to the strategies deployed by today's medialogy that render invisible the exclusions and externalizations which lend reality its fantasy of coherence. The reason "all lives matter" is an absurd and even racist rejoinder to "black lives matter" is that "black lives matter" doesn't signify as a declarative description of reality. Rather, it is an exercise in reality literacy, a reminder that the coherence of the frame in which, precisely, all lives *seem* to matter, has depended on a violent reality in which some lives very clearly matter less than others—not merely because blacks are stopped, arrested, and imprisoned at up to four times the rates of whites, but because these statistics are in many ways the result of a historical pattern of systematic oppression beginning with slavery, spanning through Jim Crow, and continuing even during the Civil Rights era in the form of housing and education discrimination.

As we argued in *Medialogies*, the apocalypticism in the first age of inflationary media was oriented toward an ultimate but deferred reality behind the veil of appearances, some real and stable thing undergirding a world of copies. In contrast, our current medialogy eclipses and engulfs that model, making of those copies—the bodies that refer to souls, the subjects that refer to citizens, or even the paper money that refers to a nation's wealth—into unanchored floating things, independent of any grounding commons. For us today the world appears to consist of *resources* that individuals, corporations and states use and manage. When the entire world is conceived as an ultimately expendable resource, the concept of sustainability comes into play. In other words, the truth of sustainability as a concept or ideology is the unconscious or implicit belief that the world, which before was the ineffable common ground of all appearances, has become just a greater resource among equals.

And in an analogous way the logic of today's medialogy is that of the disintegration of the commons, of a feeling of community underlying the multiple expressions of individual and group claims for recognition. Hence the desperate cry that Black Lives Matter reveals the truth that all lives don't in fact matter, that mine and those of my clan in fact matter, and that I base their mattering on my blindness toward your people's plight, whether "you" be historically underprivileged groups in the United States. or the ever-growing waves of refugees seeking succor from the clash of violent states we have supported and fanatic movements our actions and inactions have helped foster.

This then is the challenge in the age of Trumpism: not to see in one pitiful man some ultimate agent of the apocalypse, but rather to see in all our apocalyptic fantasies the truth of our own complicity. The apocalypse will not be televised; it's sitting on your couch watching TV.

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