

2 Do not go gentle into that good night: contested narratives and political subjectivities in the Anthropocene

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Abstract

This chapter analyzes the uses of apocalyptic discourses in contemporary political imaginations of the Anthropocene. We conceptualize the geocratic narratives of the Anthropocene and analyze the risks associated with the apocalyptic aesthetics mobilized as a universal project, largely leaving capitalistic trajectories unquestioned. By conceptualizing the apocalyptic aesthetics and the depoliticizing narratives of Geopower, the chapter argues that novel grounds for meaningful political subjectivities can be found by drawing from emerging transition discourses of the Epistemologies of the South. We argue that only through the inclusion of a multitude or pluriverse of epistemologies, a more theoretically coherent understanding of agency, politics and governance of the Cosmopolocene can be found.

Introduction: the Anthropocene's uncommitted potential

In 1947, when Dylan Thomas wrote the poem 'Do not go gentle into that good night', the idea of progress was rampant. In the poem, there is an undoubtful approximation to the essence of modernity: 'rage against the dying of the light'. That is, to live in the fullest sense is presented as a narrative for both the limitations and capabilities of the human condition. The poem embodied a new meaning in Christopher Nolan's 2014 film *Interstellar* when Michael Cain's character reads the poem before launching the last manned mission to space and with it, the *last hope for humanity*. This interpretation of the lines in the film brings the poem into a new light, reflecting the human condition as a universalized 'we', who are in the midst of experiencing the Apocalypse. Nolan's film downplays the catastrophic elements. It does not linger in what originated the problem. Instead, it chooses to focus on the

technological feats of human hubris as the redeemer. The film's argument revolves around the phrase 'We [human beings] were not meant to die on Earth, *we were meant to leave it*' (Nolan, 2014, our emphasis).

The plot of *Interstellar* serves as an excellent backdrop to address the Anthropocene and the politics of the Apocalypse. On the one hand, the Anthropocene is a condition of modernization, produced by accelerating the 'overheating' of the planet, not only due to carbon-based economy but also due to overheating of cultural representations, mobility, identity and natural ecosystems, built on progression without an aim for a credible and effective regulatory vision (Hylland, 2016). Moreover, the Anthropocene can be described as the end of separationist natures, due to the overflow of ecological conditions to already once purified socio-cultures of modernity (Latour, 1993). The shock over claiming socially constructed nature is largely a *passé* (Swyngedouw, 2011), as it is increasingly hard to 'maintain a separationist [...] [belief] that nature is a completely separate domain from social life' (Descola, 2013: 31).

Apocalyptic narratives, on the other hand, have been mobilized as an existential threat, requiring urgent if not immediate policy interventions. Global environmental problems such as climate change, and biodiversity loss are framed as in need of extraordinary measures that, if not taken promptly, may lead to an apocalyptic and catastrophic scenario. However, while these threats are regarded as very much real, the emerging paradox is that the Apocalypse – represented as an external and antagonistic 'Other' or enemy – does not lead to exceptional measures, but rather micro and routine practices of risk management. The relentless invocation of the Apocalypse has led toward a piecemeal development and policies often led by technocrats, market-based instruments and technological innovations addressing the 'condition' of the Anthropocene in a post-political context (Methmann and Rothe, 2012).

Making of the apocalypse

Mainstream Anthropocene narratives pinpoint a particular use of the Apocalypse: mobilized as a prophylactic against alternative social and political imaginaries, ontologies and epistemologies seeking to disrupt the hegemonic notion of Geopower and promethean anthropocentrism (Rose, 2013). The Apocalypse is dreaded and invoked in three ways. First, it deploys a series of strategies and dispositives to reproduce capitalist economic order and absolute instrumentalization of nature, while simultaneously advocating for a profound agency of techno-managerial ecomodernism to reconfigure and retrofit neoliberal structures and subjectivities. Second, apocalyptic narratives are deployed as the source of a single 'origins story' of the Anthropocene, narrating a future of an imminently

catastrophic Apocalypse. This is despite the fact that for other cosmologies, cultures or 'worlds' the end has already happened or is slowly taking place (Yusoff, 2013; Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2016). Finally, future apocalyptic narratives are presented in a context of dystopia and catastrophe where solutions are temporally and spatially detached from the existing crisis by individualizing responsibility, and shifting guilt from global actors to a universalized population. Here, the looming Apocalypse is presented as a threat that can only be constrained through an interrupted and unquestioned deployment of Geopower. However, there seems to be two main limitations to these kinds of thoughts around the Apocalypse. First, such notions are presented in a limited sense, enabling a linear temporality to depict events only occurring in the future. Second, the Apocalypse refers to the 'world' as a single problematic grand narrative. In other words, when addressing the Apocalypse as a looming, universal possibility, one still has to ask: whose world exactly is coming to an end? Whose world has already ended? Whose world will prevail, and how? Or, how should we position ourselves when facing the potential of multiple endings?

This chapter argues that Apocalyptic politics foreclose and disavow a series of ontologies and epistemologies, in which all other forms of knowledge and imaginaries are rendered silent or eliminated, while the Anthropocene is presented as the ultimate 'challenge' for Geopower. This is a challenge that 'we' must face – much in line with the plot of *Interstellar* – in order for 'us' not to die on Earth but nor leave it, but, to make it manageable (again). Our purpose is to highlight how apothotic managerialism, conceptualized as Geopower, constitutes an inequality and abolition of political ecologies and imaginations through post-political processes manifested in universalistic notions of the Apocalypse, agency and change. We claim that these narratives ultimately fail to recognize the emerging *pluriverse* of alternatives or what we, drawing from Delanty and Mota (2017), refer to as the Cosmopolocene, as a series of governing practices delinked from the traditional beliefs of development and modernity (Mignolo, 2013).

This chapter is divided as follows: in the second section, we review some of the keyways to conceptualize the Anthropocene as a grand narrative. In the third section, we turn to narratives dealing with how the Apocalypse is mobilized as a prophylactic seeking to depoliticize the grand narrative of the Anthropocene and sustain a universalized narrative of the *Earth-in-Peril*. Finally, in the fourth section, we explore alternative possibilities of political agency and emancipation in the Anthropocene.

Naming the Anthropocene

In this section, we describe three different approaches from the geological and social sciences around the concept of the Anthropocene as a geological epoch and a geopolitical event. Finally, we discuss the possibilities of planetary agency after the interruption of Gaia, and introduce the concept of Geopower to capture political ideologies of selective planetary submission and the challenges to these narratives.

The end of separationist nature

One of the central aspects of modernity is the idea of a separation between nature and culture (Latour, 1993). Claimed as a new epoch, the Anthropocene effectively abolishes this modern tradition. The separation between geological (Earth's) and biological (human) history that has originated since the nineteenth century presents nature as something external to history. However, as historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) has argued, the sole presence of climate change demands a rewriting of history and globalization where the human and the non-human are reintegrated into the telling of 'deep history', a history in which the natural (geological) and human histories can be retold as a unified narrative leading us to the present geologic epoch: the Anthropocene. By canceling the separation between nature and culture, the Anthropocene forecloses the possibility to maintain any conception of external nature. This opens up an inquiry into political ecology of hybrid agency of nature and human societies. Thus, the Anthropocene needs to be understood as two particular, but not separate, conditions: as a *geological epoch* and as a *geopolitical event*.

The Anthropocene as an epoch and an event

In the geological epoch narrative, 'we' (the human species) have arrived at a new geological time where planetary conditions erupted as a direct causation of human activity on the planet: rapid acceleration of greenhouse gas emissions along with an unprecedented upsurge in energy use, biodiversity loss, air, water, land and atmospheric pollution, the intensification of biogeochemical cycles and the human impact on landscapes. These changes in the Earth's biosphere will leave an imprint of the 'human' presence for ages to come (Steffen et al., 2015). Thus, the geological Anthropocene presents a solid argument showcasing human influence and how it is affecting the parameters of the Earth system, accompanied by the potential to generate instability and even catastrophic shifts to the planet.

This epochal stance points to an understanding of the history of humans as overachievers in the planetary context (Hylland, 2016: 17–18). The geological aspect of the Anthropocene presents its thesis as an inescapable moment in space/time in which we have, inadvertently, ‘ended up’. However, the idea that we have suddenly made sense of our collective impact and become aware of this condition through a collective awakening on the consequences of human actions is a fable (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016: xviii). The notion of a universal human *species* that is just becoming aware of the consequences of our collective actions presents a depoliticized narrative of the long history that constitutes what it means to live in the Anthropocene.

For Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016), the Anthropocene is not a condition but a geopolitical event, where human choices are imbued with planetary significance. For them, ‘The Anthropocene is political inasmuch as it requires arbitrating between various conflicting human forces on the planet, between the footprints of different human groups (classes, nations), between different technological and industrial options, or between different ways of life and consumption’ (2017: 26). In other words, the Anthropocene is not merely a natural or inescapable condition of the Earth, but rather a cultural model to constitute a new object of knowledge and order of governance (Delanty and Mota, 2017). Simply framing the Anthropocene as an inescapable geological epoch or as a cultural condition, risks sustaining the idea of (Western) human superiority by radically depoliticizing, off-staging and foreclosing any other epistemological and ontological understandings of the past, present and future.

The Good and the Bad Anthropocene

The interpretation that the Anthropocene has *arrived* as an inescapable spatio-temporal condition has been associated with two main currents of thought. First, what some authors have labeled the ‘*Good Anthropocene*’ thesis (Dalby, 2015). This thesis is based on the faith on the ability of humans to ‘collectively assert control over socio-ecological systems to good effect’ (Dryzek and Pickering, 2019). Advocates of the Good Anthropocene – more commonly associated with the Breakthrough Institute’s ‘The Ecomodernist Manifesto’ (Asafu-Adjaye, et al. 2015, see also Shellenberg, 2020) – trust in human ingenuity, built-on large-scale deployment of, for example, genetically modified food, nuclear power, geoengineering and high-density urbanization. The main argument behind the Good Anthropocene is not that the human hubris and impact have gone too far, but rather that they have not gone far enough (Tsing, 2015). In this vein, humanity as a whole, would need to double down on the project of green capitalism, ‘decoupling’ (e.g. Bastani, 2019) to enable uninterrupted growth, development, urbanization and

progress through ambitious techno-engineering projects with high material investment and big science (Asafu-Adjaye et al. 2015).

As such, the Good Anthropocene has exploited the idea of the Anthropocene becoming an umbrella term, a ‘charismatic mega-category’ (Malhi, 2017: 2) for all manner of environmental concerns and doomsday scenarios. Indeed, the warnings of a sixth mass extinction event (Kolbert, 2014), paralleled with the exposition of acceleration of climate science (IPCC, 2018) and the transgression of planetary boundaries (Rockström, et al. 2009; Steffen et al. 2015), have been articulated around a shibboleth, an intellectual zeitgeist (Lorimer, 2017) putting catastrophism and apocalyptic imaginaries at the center. Here, the Anthropocenic crisis is elevated to a global humanitarian concern, through meticulously depoliticized imaginary: one that elevates the argument of a ‘more benign retrofitted climate exhaust[ing] the horizon of our social and political aspirations and imaginations’ (Swyngedouw, 2011: 264).

The ‘*Bad Anthropocene*’ (Dalby, 2015) narrative is built around the concept of ‘Planetary Boundaries’ (Rockström et al, 2009) which diversely supports the idea of ‘returning to a stable condition’ and ‘a safe operating space for humanity’, or in other words, the idea of ‘turning back the clock’ to the selectively stable conditions of a ‘Holocene 2.0’. These conditions, however, seem more and more elusive. Hence, the ‘bad’ Anthropocene is characterized by an inescapable condition requiring a thorough ‘reconceptualization and imagination of the institutions, practices, social structures, worldview, principles and systems’ (Dryzek and Pickering, 2019: 12).

In a similar vein, Christ (2016) refers to the Anthropocene as a discourse that actually excludes the possibility to challenge human rule. The gesture of naming an Epoch focusing on the ‘Anthropos’ exposes a weakness of this concept as it continues to place human beings at the center of the argument; it silences, obscures and nullifies the human and non-human others ‘who do not (as has been repeatedly established in the Western canon) speak, possess meanings, experience perspectives, or have a vested interest in their own destinies’ (Christ, 2016: 18). For Christ, the term ‘Anthropocene’ implies a poverty in our nomenclature, limiting us to look beyond the human and nature divide, and insists in placing humanity as an ‘ingenious unruly species’ embodying the problem and the solution.

Recompositing Gaia

The idea that agency is entirely social needs to be abandoned (Urry, 2011: 8), along with the idea that society exists outside the realm of nature (Delanty and Mota, 2017). This new material temporality pronounced by a deep history is marked by what Isabelle Stengers calls ‘the intrusion of Gaia’ into the sphere of the Anthropos (Danowski and

Viveros de Castro, 2016). Following Bruno Latour's notion, Gaia can be understood as the 'new state of nature' (Latour, 2017a), one that forces us to reckon with the impossibility of a human techno-utopia or perfect freedom resulting from the Promethean mastery of the Earth (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2016), and instead acts as a force or events that effectively interrupt the spatiotemporality of the Holocene, imposing on us the need to acknowledge the end of purely Human agency in the Anthropocene. The intrusion of Gaia turns concepts – like Sustainable Development (SD) – that seek to substitute nature for 'the environment' on their head by framing crises as a problem of risk management, exemplified by concepts like 'resilience', 'circularity', 'decoupling' and/or 'internalizing externalities', that ineffectively question the actual possibility of neoliberalized environments to actually achieve an equilibrium between the economy and the ecology. Instead, the presence of Gaia opens a possibility for the totality of Earth itself to become an object of experimentation through an all-encompassing subsumption of the state of nature in late capitalism, opening up a new form of governance that is concerned with both the management of life (the bios) and the Earth (the geos): Geopower (Luisetti, 2019: 347).

The 'intrusion' of Gaia (Stengers, 2015) not only marks the collapse of the modern idea of separation (between nature and culture) but problematizes narratives of (SD) and its reifications. Hence, the Anthropocene thesis goes beyond the SD paradigm which seeks to reconcile ecology with economics after decades of ignoring the debates of the limits of growth, instead seeking to institute a process of risk management and resilience, one in which the Earth/Nature is transformed into a repository of ecosystem services (Lohmann, 2019). Here, the environment understood as 'that which surrounds us, the place where humans went to extract resources, deposit waste, or even in certain places was to be left virgin' (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016: 20), becomes obsolete along with the siren calls of sustainability in which nature is presented as externalized and fortified. Hence, the intrusion of Gaia forces us to simultaneously reflect on the impossibility of maintaining the paradigm of SD and to question the way in which this interruption is to be acknowledged in the Anthropocene.

Geopower

Some scholars have focused on what Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz (2016) call 'the shock of the Anthropocene'. This approach argues that the geological character of the Anthropocene as an epoch (discourse) obscures and forecloses a series of narratives, cosmologies and imaginations that systematically present this epochal crisis as universally produced (Malm, 2017), proposing a single way forward to address the crisis: that of Geopower.

Geopower can be understood as the extension of the knowledge-power and governance of life (the bios) as an object and a political project (biopower) (Foucault, 2007), to the geos (the Earth as a whole), where the Earth becomes ‘an object of knowledge (geo-knowledge) and government (geopower)’ (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016: 88). Geopower advocates doubling down on human agency over the Earth’s systems and a neoliberal continuation of the political, economic and social structures of reproduction, consumption and exploitation. In other words, to guarantee that ‘the balance of power is preserved, and the dangers of circulation and environmental transformations are contained by geosecurity’ (Luisetti, 2019: 351). Indeed, the Anthropocene has become a dispositif to justify and deploy more apothecotic Earth management techniques to ‘sustain the unsustainable’ (Blühdorn, 2007).

Geopower can be considered as a combination of technocratic environmental interventions, geo-knowledge of imperial ecologies, Earth System Sciences and geoengineering (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016: 87–90). Drawing on the notion of biopower (Foucault, 2007), Luisetti argues that Geopower can be understood not only as the control techniques of population, but as *extended management of both life and non-life*. Thus, Geopower ‘shifts governmental techniques from populations and goods to species, energy flows and ecosystems, from political economy to imperial ecologies, from economics and biology to the Earth system’ (Luisetti, 2019: 351). Through Geopower, the Earth becomes a neoliberal repository of ‘ecosystem services’ in which natures are structured around neoliberal environments enforcing mechanisms to manage and control the Earth. The Anthropocene is thus understood as a new era of total subsumption of the bios (life) and the geos (non-life) under late capitalism, relating to what Mark Fisher (2009) assertively called ‘capitalist realism’: a process by which capitalism became ideologically uncontested, creating a ‘widespread sense that, not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it’ (Fisher, 2009: 2). Geopower systematically employs apocalyptic predictions as a source of fear and political mobilization where civilization and life, as we know it, may come to an end, unless something is done to avert the crisis (Klein, 2014). This process, fueled by what E. Ann Kaplan (2015) calls ‘climate pre-trauma’, renders a crisis into a manageable problem and is deployed as a strategy to disavow any attempts to disrupt, perturb and/or reconfigure the existing political order (Swyngedouw, 2018). Namely, only the technological and market-based solutions, such as extensive deployment of nuclear energy or geoengineering to cut current carbon emissions, are understood as possible solutions to the crises.

Contaminated options

As the Anthropocene sets the stage for the deployment of Geopower through neoliberal representations of natures and proposals based on technological optimism and market-based solutions, an aesthetic consisting of the Earth-at-risk is produced and advocated as a political ontology of commodifiable fear (Luisetti, 2019). This process is essential to the Earth project of Geopower. However, as the interruption and presence of Gaia becomes more and more evident, the Anthropocene has left us with no other choice but to ‘get acquainted with her’ (Latour, 2017b: vii). This means that the project of Geopower cannot simply manage the crisis but has to learn how to ‘deal with it’, opening new possibilities of governance and knowledge. However, despite a series of emerging epistemologies and ontologies in the Anthropocene, Geopower reduces ‘our’ options into four particularly politically contaminated options: (a) a prioritized trust in market-based solutions, (b) a total reliability in technological utopias, (c) an individualization of environmental responsibility (e.g., ‘footprints’) and (d) a romantic turn to conscious consumerism ‘as if the rift was made whole when a privileged few shop at the farmer’s market’ (Wark, 2016: xv). These positions not only offer depoliticized narratives displacing the environment from the political, but in fact foreclose other alternatives and plural knowledges that are essential in the questioning of Geopower. These alternatives are presented as a form of what Lauren Berlant calls ‘cruel optimism: the compromised conditions of possibility by which realization is discovered either to be impossible, sheer fantasy, or too possible, and toxic’ (Berlant, 2011: 24s). Wark (2016) argues that cruel optimism has been crucial in depoliticizing other liberation struggles and given rise to a technocratic ‘Carbon Liberation Front’ (CLF). This is understood as the global redistribution of molecules of carbon, giving birth to a sort of scientists-cum-revolutionary subjects capable of transforming the Earth through a large-scale deployment of geoengineering technologies and doubling down on the structures of Green capitalism, subsuming the whole Earth into a process of management and control (Armiero, & De Angelis, 2017).

To sum up, the Anthropocene has reinstated universal grand narratives by placing all humans face to face with a common problem.

However, a unifying universalism bears its own caveats. Placing a universalized ‘we’ in the center of the Anthropocene thesis risks maintaining modernity’s project of obscuring, foreclosing and eliminating subaltern ontologies and other forms of knowledge opposing the

separation of nature and culture. It demands a radical transformation of social and ecological relations and recognizes other forms of agencies from the non-human.

(Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019)

The following section argues that Geopower can be exemplified through the use of catastrophic and apocalyptic imaginaries, creating a socio-natural project seeking to manage the entirety of the Earth. The aesthetic and the spectacle of the Earth-in-Peril narratives that emerge from the doomsday scenarios brought forth by climate and environmental science, international negotiations and Hollywood disaster films are exploited by those advocating Geopower to normalize existing conditions of an actually existing and sustained unsustainability (Blühdorn, 2013), and depoliticizing the socio-ecological predicament by leaving it in the hands of the experts (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019: 34). We argue that, through this aesthetic, and not necessarily through the deployment of actual social-natural interventions, Geopower is able to colonize the global imaginary, and legitimize a sense of dependency on further acceleration and techno-managerial utopias to maintain current industrial civilizations indefinitely and unchanged.

'Managing' the apocalypse

Narratives about the Apocalypse are not new. Neither is the idea that humans generate their own demise. Every major religion has a version of this story, and the ethnographic records document a variety of ways in which human cultures have imagined their end. Here, we are interested in the political aspects of the Apocalyptic imaginations, aesthetics and narratives of Geopower in current Western politics and their use for precluding spaces of dissensus and disagreement to exert control over the population and the Earth (the bios and the geos).

As described above, the narratives and aesthetics of Geopower around catastrophism have become a central aspect of managing and sustaining the project of a *total management* of Earth, while perpetuating universal myths around the Anthropocene as an equal condition of humanity as a whole. The Anthropocene and the subsequent crises are then seen as the 'collective awakening' of our *species*, to the consequences of 'our' actions and impacts on the planet. As Ellis argues:

Perhaps the most popular interpretation of the Anthropocene [...] is a catastrophic, human induced shift in the Earth's functioning as a system. In this view, recognizing the Anthropocene is the same as acknowledging the serious global consequences of climate change, mass extinctions and other anthropogenic environmental changes [...] Yet the Anthropocene itself is a synthesis of existing evidence, and not a new source of evidence for these changes or their consequences.

(2018: 130)

Following on this notion of catastrophism, we highlight the main characteristics of apocalyptic narratives proliferating in contemporary politics over the essence and risks of the Anthropocene. We divide these characteristics into four themes: (a) mobilized inflexibilities, (b) guiding narratives, (c) rendering governable and (d) apotheosis.

Mobilized inflexibilities

First, the Apocalypse is mobilized to legitimize and fortify Geopower. Prime examples, such as CO₂ commodification through pricing and market exchanges, rely on extensive deployment of managerial governance regimes around risk calculation and financial tradings (Swyngedouw, 2010: 220). Furthermore, the deployment of geoengineering projects associated with Promethean promises and 'cornucopian-technophile utopias' (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2016) assures that the 'capitalo-parliamentary' order remains intact and unchallenged as the universal order (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019). Similar to the plot of the movie *Interstellar*, solutions to the existing catastrophe are presented as an issue of 'figuring out the science'. The 'Eureka moment' in the film is enough to sustain the existing order and effectively exit the Earth, depoliticizing the highly uneven impacts associated with the environmental degradation brought by capitalism. Here, the Apocalypse becomes a way to manage, bureaucratize and sustain the promise of redemption, via deployment of a limited set of both human and more-than-human socio-ecological options. This includes mobilized inflexibilities such as 'smart', 'sustainable', 'resilient' and/or 'adaptive' modes (Swyngedouw, 2019) of nurturing an imaginary capable of assuming a global supervisory role in managing the world's local and global ecologies (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019: 31).

Guiding narratives

Second, narratives of the Apocalypse present the public as a population without attributes, whereas scientists are presented as quasi-revolutionary subjects (Armeiro & De Angelis, 2017). A crucial aspect of narratives such as the ‘Good Anthropocene’ and Geopower is that they place transformative agency in the hands of a managerial elite: the scientists. Paul Crutzen’s seminal article in which he originally advocates for the use of the term ‘Anthropocene’ points to this:

To develop a world-wide accepted strategy leading to sustainability of ecosystems against human induced stress will be one of the great tasks of mankind, requiring intensive research efforts and wise application of the knowledge thus acquired... *An exciting, but also difficult and daunting task lies ahead of the global research and engineering community to guide mankind towards global, sustainable, environmental management.*

(Crutzen, 2002: 23. Our emphasis)

Crutzen’s argument echoes Brundtland’s report 15 years before: ‘the new reality’, referring to Earth as a single entity, ‘from which there is no escape, must be recognized – and managed’ (WCED, 1987). This aspect, which is most essential to Geopower, is sustained by dividing humanity into two categories: first, into a ‘silent majority’ of the world population – which has become a geological agent without realizing it; and second, into a scientific community holding a monopoly position capable of guiding masses and prescribing what needs to be done (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016: 80). Here, the Apocalypse is announced as a means to depoliticize the narrative, in which ‘we’ – the uninformed, passive, population without attributes – are presented as a universal victim of the coming Apocalypse. Simultaneously, the origins of the crisis (i.e. capitalism) are readily acknowledged but quickly externalized to a fetishized entity, which becomes a stand-in for the totality of the problem (CO₂ for climate change, externalities for biodiversity), and thus the enemy that must be eliminated to restore balance and justice (Swyngedouw, 2018: 303). As Armeiro and De Angelis (2017) argue, ‘The risk is to envision the Anthropocene as a space for villains and victims but not for revolutionaries’ (2017: 347), or as a space of futile citizenship, distanced from the realms and capacities of individuals to perceive causes and impacts of capitalist modernity, ‘leaving citizens nothing but gloomy asceticism...’ (Beck, 2010: 263).

Rendering governable

Third, the Apocalypse enables an immunological-biopolitical fantasy, to sustain an illusion of security and protection against the coming end of times. Swyngedouw and Ernstson (2018) define the Anthropocene discourse as an ‘immunological prophylactic against the threat of an irredeemable external and vengeful nature’ (2019: 35). They use the notion of biopolitics and immunitary politics (Esposito, 2008, 2011) to present a framework in which the governance apparatus (i.e., the set of practices, rules, institutions and techno-managerial proceedings) work to create an imaginary sense of protection and sequestration. This process takes control of the risks, dangers and fragilities of individuals to make them live in a huxleyan, peaceful manner, while obscuring any form of dissensus (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019: 35–37).

The fantasy of absolute immunization (against the external other – i.e., CO₂) enables an imaginary sense of protection and sequestration, one in which the fears of collapse are displaced into the terrain of the governable and the space of adaptation, mostly through market-based mechanisms and techno-managerial forms of Geopower. Despite the shock that emerges by experiencing the presence of Gaia, the demands for urgency of action (i.e. nature-in-risk) are quickly internalized and rendered governable to political projects against the ‘Other’, which in the process turns the immunized society into passive spectators while depoliticizing any form of disagreement with the established order (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019).

Thus, the apocalyptic catastrophe is rendered governable through the spectacular signing of international environmental agreements and further commodification of nature (Lohmann, 2019) where that which had been externalized (Gaia) is repurposed to sustain the socio-political and environmental composition of late capitalism. These choreographed spectacles of ‘common agency’ act as a form of stress relieving therapy where the spectacle (i.e. the signing of the Paris Agreement) is used to replace the global environmental crisis to overcome the fears over a self-made Apocalypse and restore trust in high-level decision-making. This process, what Swyngedouw and Ernstson (2019) call the Anthro-Obscene, ‘offers the promise of a radical reinterpretation of the apocalyptic endgame, without change; it promises the crafting of a fully manageable, manicured and inhabitable Earth’ (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019: 39).

Apotheosis

Fourth, the Apocalypse is mobilized as a way of presenting capitalism, and all its crisis tendencies (Fraser, 2014) as an inescapable natural condition generated with the advent of the Anthropocene. Here, the Apocalypse is mobilized as a catalytic event, a phantasmagorical imaginary threatening capitalist modernity, only to be solved by more capitalism. The argument here is brought back to the accelerationist processes and solutions promoted by apothecotic ecomoderns, fully automated luxury communists (Bastani, 2019) and the ‘cornucopian technophiles’, arguing that ‘the world that has already started must *finish ending*’ (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2014: 52, our emphasis). Thus, the Apocalypse is mobilized as a process in which the crisis tendencies and boundary struggles (the spheres of social reproduction, nature and politics), constituting the institutionalized social order of capitalism (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018), will eventually self-reform. Here, the techno-utopian dreams are capable of overcoming the limitations and contradictions that until now have been fundamental for the actual production of value and the cycles of accumulation of capital (Moore, 2015). Interstellar, and the dreams of space travel embodied in private companies like Space-X present a version of this narrative, one in which the expansion of capitalism is infinite and cannot be limited by the planetary boundaries. This is the ultimate and final desire of Geopower: to exert total control over the geo, a process that is no longer limited by labor power or any interruption and is capable of expanding and terraforming beyond Earth (Fisher, 2009: 18).

Narratives of a forceful overcoming

Mark Fisher’s analysis of Alfonso Cuarón’s *The Children of Men* provides a good metaphor to sum up our argument and question the dominant role of the apocalyptic aesthetics, and the expected spectacle of Apocalypse in late capitalist societies:

The catastrophe in *Children of Men* is neither waiting down the road, nor has it already happened. Rather, it is being lived through. There is no punctual moment of disaster; the world doesn’t end with a bang, (rather) it winks out, unravels, gradually falls apart.

(2009: 2)

Thus, the Apocalypse is not a singularity or an event that can be averted, but it is rather more in tune with what Rob Nixon calls ‘slow violence’, a process where violence ‘occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed

destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all' (Nixon, 2011: 2).

Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2016) argue for a multiple understanding of 'worlds at ends', and question the overarching and universalizing narratives of one world and one end that is implicit, not only in the Anthropocene thesis but also in the Apocalypse that comes with it. For them:

[The] variety of ends and of worlds [...] all seem to express the same fundamental historical condition: it has been disclosed to us that things are changing fast and not for the good of human life 'as we know it' [...] and more crucially, we have no idea what to do about it. The Anthropocene is the Apocalypse, in both the etymological and eschatological sense.

(2017: 22)

The World, perhaps, has not ended, but we are experiencing multiple *ends* through *the progress of this storm* (Malm, 2017) and hence our politics must recognize the multiple endings and conditions of precarity and uncertainty emerging from the ruins of neoliberal capitalism (Tsing, 2015). In the following section, we argue that politics in the Anthropocene must be an emancipatory project, one that questions the dominant nature of Geopower and opens spaces for the emergence of other epistemologies and ontologies ostracized in the current narratives of the Apocalypse.

New political subjectivities

Bonneuil and Fressoz (2016) set out to present different historical threads that seek to rethink the visions of the world and how to inhabit it. By revisiting different histories of the Anthropocene and drawing distance from the dominant 'geocratic' account of the Anthropocene, they (re)conceptualize the Anthropocene as (among others) an *Agnotocene* (a history of ignoring planetary boundaries), as a *Capitalocene* (an attempt at a joint history of capitalism and the Anthropocene) or, indeed, as a *Polemocene*: a history of resistance, contestation and survival through the *long durée* of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy by looking at the unequal relations of power and knowledges (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016).

The Polemocene exposes the existence of, ‘since the eighteen century,¹ an environmentalism of the poor fighting for social justice and environmental decency’ (Ibid.: 251), where struggles against environmental pillage, the enclosure of the commons and the exploitation of nature through a series of successive small coups, imposed situations and normalized exceptions has defined our epoch. We draw on these struggles and their ontological and epistemological frameworks to identify political subjectivities allowing us to navigate the increasingly diminishing world of the Anthropocene and the post-political project of Geopower, anchored on the construction of a looming Apocalypse.

Politics with Gaia

The Polemocene exposes how a notion of a collective agent misplaces the responsibility and simultaneously produces a mystification of the role of geologization of the social (Delanty and Mota, 2017). For Delanty and Mota, the Anthropocene has become a vehicle, or an arena in: ‘which the human world is re-imagined culturally and politically in terms of its relations with the Earth’ (2017: 34). The reconceptualization of spatio-temporal relations requiring us to ‘think with Gaia’ – given the impossibility to ignore or subvert her – has substantial implications in how ‘we’ govern the Anthropocene as a singular cultural model and moral space (Hylland, 2016), and needs to recognize the multiplicity of ecologies of knowledges (and knowledges of ecology) (de Sousa Santos, 2014: 42) through what they call a ‘Cosmopolocene’: a process that recognizes the alternatives and the plurality of ways of governing and inhabiting the Anthropocene (Delanty and Mota, 2017: 34).

The quest of identifying a political subject or subjectivity in the Anthropocene has also given rise to a new set of ontological paradigms questioning the agency of a supposedly universal ‘Anthropos’, the proposed genesis and adequate naming of the Anthropocene (see, for example, Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Haraway, 2016; Moore, 2015; Tsing, 2015; Lorimer, 2017; Malm, 2017). Advocates have focused their interests in producing a ‘myriad of temporalities and spatialities and a myriad of intra-active entities-in-assemblages- including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus’ (Haraway, 2016: 160).

Planetary precarity and struggles of the multitude

Anna Tsing (2015) argues that the notion of the Anthropocene diverts attention from the patchy landscapes, multiple temporalities, and shifting assemblages of humans and non-humans: the very stuff of collaborative survival (2015: 20). Indeed, by presenting the solutions toward a geoeingeneered future, the ways in which multiple forms of

cooperation (both between humans and non-humans) are entangled around the ruined landscapes of capitalism and those that emerge from their interactions (Tsing, et al., 2017) are shunned by the dominant discourses of technological development and market effectiveness. Tsing calls for a recognition of precarity as the predominant condition of our times, one in which the modern ideas of progress and the linearity of time cannot (continue to) be presented as the only solutions to the crisis. The ecomodern policies and practices that carried us into the Anthropocene foster radical precarity and uncertainty, and only by learning to live-with(-in) these conditions can a political strategy emerge.

For Armeiro and De Angelis (2017), the Anthropos in the Anthropocene is a misplaced subject. Drawing on the logic of the Capitalocene, they expose how the notion of a collective ‘we’ must be questioned and understood, not as a universalized humanity but as a multitude of subjects ‘whose practices are outside of the value practices of capital, often in the shape of commons systems’ (Armeiro & De Angelis, 2017: 348). Drawing on Naomi Klein’s (2014) concept of Blockadia and on the empirical evidence presented by the Global Environmental Justice Atlas (EJOLT), for them, the Anthropos is constituted by the struggles of *the multitude*, where *the commoners* are understood as the ‘social subjects who collectively control, direct and engage in the reproduction of the commons and for which the relation to capital may often be necessary but does not exhaust their social being and activity’ (Armeiro & De Angelis, 2017: 349).

Therefore, this brings the political to a crossroads: it forces us to recognize the excluded pluralities of knowledge that have been foreclosed by the totalizing narrative of the Anthropocene, and the ways in which struggles over the *commons* and the *multitude* can be politically articulated to challenge the narratives of Geopower and the Anthropocene. However, in doing so, it risks presenting an uncritical critique where we are ‘all’ victims of modernity and the Anthropocene, where the task would be to simply learn how to live in the ruined landscapes that come after capitalism (Chandler and Reid, 2019). The task then is to identify the multiple subjectivities that emerge from the cooperation and interactions between the human and the non-human, the pluriversal understanding of relational ontologies (Escobar, 2016) that can critically expose the depoliticizing narratives of the Anthropocene and the project of Geopower.

Searching for pluriversal politics in the Anthropocene: Epistemologies of the South

The problematization of a common Anthropocene opens a discussion over 'indigenous ontologies'. These ontologies are similar to what Latour called *the Terrans*: those others (non-moderns) that have continuously rejected the colonial and modernizing projects of development in the *long durée* of capitalism (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2016). The emergence of different narratives questioning the hegemony of concepts like growth in the Global North (Kallis et al., 2018) and development in the Global South (Sachs, 2010) have produced an epistemic-political field toward a pluriverse of alternatives (Demaria and Kothari, 2017), one that can be understood as a rainbow of cosmologies, knowledges and vital worlds (Escobar, 2018).

Engaging with indigenous ontologies has led some authors to argue that humanity must abandon modernity and instead shift to a project of 'becoming indigenous' (Latour, 2018). The project of becoming indigenous is a way in which *the moderns* can learn from those that have learned to live in an impoverished world, who either resist or, after undergoing modernization, decide to 'go back' (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro, 2016). Becoming indigenous is then a project of 'governing the imaginary of what it means to be an agent or actor in a world, which is held to demand new forms of adaptivity, resourcefulness and resilience' (Chandler and Reid, 2019: 2). While the main argument here is that there is a need to move away from the 'modernizing' and 'developmental' narratives that continue to animate the 'Good Anthropocene', the critique to such an endeavor is that it risks an understanding of the Anthropocene not as a world of loom and gloom and extinction, but rather as 'an invitation to speculatively explore other ways of being and knowing' (Ibid, 2019: 13). This is problematic because it risks ignoring the contemporary realities of indigenous peoples and erasing the histories of difference.

For Bonaventura de Sousa Santos, the question is not of actually becoming indigenous (understood as an identitarian essentialism), but of recognizing a plural way of thinking and knowing to diversify narratives and repositories of concrete utopias of other possible worlds (2018). He utilizes the framework of Epistemologies of the South (EoS) to represent 'the production and validation of knowledge anchored in the experiences of resistance of all those social groups that have systematically suffered injustice, oppression, and destruction caused by capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy' (2018: 1). This framework is then understood as a way to allow the oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms. For Arturo Escobar, unearthing such epistemologies itself takes an ontological turn: 'a process of multiple knowledges, or epistemes, refer to multiple worlds, or ontologies'. Here, the focus on the territorial struggles of peasants and indigenous communities serves as heuristics providing the essential elements for thinking about the profound cultural and ecological transitions needed to face the interrelated

crises of climate, food, energy, poverty and meaning; a process that is itself attuned to the needs of the Earth (2016: 21).

Emerging transition discourses

Escobar (2015, 2016), argues that the framework of EoS offer a path toward interactions of multiple sets of ontological possibilities. These look beyond a particular construction of a ‘One-World World’ (OWW) – that is, a reality made up of a single ‘World’– where the current existential crisis (the Anthropocene) points toward a need for a transition away from the reductionist colonial/modern construction of this particular vision of the World. Escobar (2015) refers to the interactions between the emerging transition discourses (TDs) in different geographies as the space for a transition away from the OWW perspective. Alternative political movements, such as degrowth in Europe and Buen Vivir in Latin America, have started to question the supremacy of growth and argue for the construction of convivial societies, through a radical reconceptualization of worlds beyond capitalism, development and growth (Brand, 2020). These TDs,

posit a profound cultural, economic, and political transformation of dominant institutions and practices. By making visible the damaging effects of dominant models of social life [...] they direct our attention to the need to transform culture and economy, oftentimes in tandem with these communities where the regimes of the individual, separation and the market have not yet taken a complete hold on socio-natural life.

(Escobar, 2015: 454)

A relevant aspect of these TDs is that they do not imply a regression. In other words, degrowth and Buen Vivir are not advocating for returning to a pre-colonial condition or to a ‘state of nature’, but instead seek to question the notion of linear singular progress and history, the obsession with economic growth, consumerism and the commodification of nature, displacing humans as the only endowed subject of political representation and the colonial/Cartesian separation of nature from culture (Chuji, Rengfo and Gudynas, 2019: 112). Bridging a dialogue between concepts like degrowth and Buen Vivir, as well as other transition discourses emerging from the epistemologies of the South, offers a way to radically question the mobilization of the apocalyptic and depolitical

narratives of Geopower. Consequently, this points toward a possible way forward of actually constituting a Cosmopolocene, that is, a radical unraveling of the capitalist, colonialist and patriarchal notions constituting a one-way notion of history, development, progress and growth, currently embodied by the Anthropocene monocultural project (Escobar, 2015). Hence, the main challenge that remains is how to mobilize a global solidarity movement that pushes for an epistemic decolonization that allows us to ‘degrow into a pluriverse’ (Escobar, 2015: 458). Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s (2020) notion of *the Ch’ixi* can be a good way to understand how these many worlds can cooperate and coexist instead of being reduced to a universal framing of the World (OWW), its end (The looming Apocalypse) and its way forward (Geopower). The Ch’ixi reflects the Aymara idea of *something that is and is not at the same time*. It is the logic of the included third. The Ch’ixi expresses parallel coexistence of multiple cultural differences that do not extinguish themselves but instead antagonize and complement each other (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2020: 66). Equivalent to a ‘motley’ society, the Ch’ixi recognizes the bricolage of identities, knowledges and practices and hence proposes a construction based on differences that complement and antagonize each other. In doing so, it radically opposes a notion of becoming indigenous, arguing that the resulting hybrid subjects could only lead to condescending forms of tolerance, superficial multiculturalism and epistemological and ontological homogeneity.

Proposals like the Ch’ixi modernity have begun to envision a third space where, instead of ‘becoming indigenous’, the recognition of these motley fragments of the subaltern and laboring classes can emerge as a space for active dialogue between the politically active and their multiple ontological understandings of the world (Gago, 2020). These processes are characterized by confronting the colonization of the imaginary and the construction of knowledge enabling a more dynamic, intricate and often antagonistic forms of politics that ‘allows the domains of the local and the planetary to become interwoven but without ever becoming hybridized or fused’ (Arboleda, 2020: 28).

Re-learning to die and live in the Anthropocene

Hence, a political subjectivity in the Anthropocene requires an open debate about the universalization of a collective ‘we’, a process that questions the role of scientists and experts as orchestrators of ‘our’ politics and the constitution of the political passivity that is deployed through Geopower. The emerging pluriverse of alternatives recaptures what has been rendered obscure by capitalist, colonial and heteropatriarchal forms of governance. The trouble that

erupts with the intrusion of Gaia opens new discussions about the way we should be able to navigate and live in the Anthropocene (Scranton, 2015). As such, Gaia is simultaneously exigent (it cannot be ignored) but it cannot be managed or mastered either (Stengers, 2018: 138). Rather, it requires that we think with and learn to live with Gaia, or succumb to the geoengineered future and the hyper-modernist project of Geopower. Perhaps Bruno Latour summarizes it best when he argues that in fact there are only two possible alternatives: to modernize or to ecologize (Latour, 2018: 46).

The ideas of a linear progress and time that are implicit in the idea of the Anthropocene and the project of Geopower's relentless pursuit of economic growth and efficiency have become almost ubiquitous in the contemporary world, inasmuch as they have become an end in themselves (Malghan, 2019). On the one hand, the proponents of a 'Good' Anthropocene backing up accelerationist, Promethean and cornucopian futures construct their utopias by mobilizing depoliticizing narratives linked to an Apocalyptic vision of an end that is forever postponed as a strategy for geo-security. While on the other, the proponent of relational ontologies (like becoming indigenous) risks producing an uncritical critique of the Anthropocene and the apocalyptic narratives of the ends of the worlds, which present the problem as a question of coping with the Anthropocene. Thus, questioning the hegemonic project of Geopower must be based in recognizing the multiple ecologies of knowledge (and the knowledge of ecologies) (De Sousa Santos, 2014) as well as the ways of learning and inhabiting in this pluriverse of alternatives (Paulson, 2018).

As we remarked before, our politics must not be based on the name that we choose for our present condition, or on passively waiting for the Apocalypse that is infinitely postponed, to sustain a deeply depoliticized project of sustainability and its intention to expand to a planetary (and perhaps interplanetary) form of Geopower (Swyngedouw, 2018; Luisetti, 2019). On the contrary, the political must be based on what Donna Haraway (2016) refers to as: 'staying with the trouble', a process that consists of recognizing multiple worlds and multiple endings, but at the same time challenges us to find new forms of cooperation that allows to inhabit the ruined landscapes of capitalism. However, doing so must also mean radically denouncing the spectacle and depoliticized notions of the good, geoengineered Anthropocene and interrupt the project of Geopower. Shifting attention to the heterogeneity and difference of the political demands that emerge from the grounded normativity of socio-ecological movements (Coulthard and Simpson, 2016) is a way of staying with the trouble and opening up spaces for (re)politicizing the Anthropocene.

Conclusion: inequalities of imaginations

This chapter has drawn from key conversations focusing on the depoliticizing aspects of the mobilization of apocalyptic narratives in the Anthropocene. By reviewing different explanatory narratives, we point toward planetary discourses employing foreclosing strategies that, in our opinion, are unfruitful due to their dependency on visions of techno-managerialism. The main task of this chapter is to understand how the narratives of the Anthropocene, both from the geological and social sciences, have been associated with particular Apocalyptic narratives and discourses, and mobilized through a series of dispositifs and technologies enabling concepts like sustainability, growth and development to colonize the imaginaries of the future, and hence eliminate disagreement against this universalizing project identified as Geopower.

Taking the Anthropocene as a statement of fact risks obscuring the long history of violence, accumulation and dispossession, created through environmental pillage that has constituted the project of colonization and modernity (Ranganathan and Doshi, 2019). At the same time, by arguing for a ‘good’ Anthropocene, we risk institutionalizing a depoliticizing narrative that ultimately places the role of scientists and experts-cum-revolutionaries that decides our politics, creating citizens as spectators that subscribe to the immuno-biopolitical fantasy of securitization and sequestration away from the threat of ‘the Other’, in this case, the apocalyptic revenge of nature as Gaia (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019).

Maria Kaika (2019) argues that the task of academics and intellectuals is to take on the challenge of trying to win the war of the imaginary – to link concepts to contemporary demands and struggles over socio-environmental change. This entails a step away from separationist teleologies. A global singularity is again on the agenda. But this is not due to the geologist framing of environmental change into manageable units to reduce ontological security (Giddens, 1991) of the affluent and adaptative, but due to political ecologization of the human existence, loss of flexibility due to material and political practices that allowed sumptuous and costly separation in the first hand. Yet, there is still a latent risk that the Anthropocene and apocalyptic framings become ‘capitalism’s latest apology: ‘as a new master narrative, and as politically vacuous and complacent as, say, sustainability’ (Kaika, 2019).

The task ahead then is to identify inequalities of imaginations and the ways in which dreams of utopias and apocalyptic visions lead to a radical foreclosure of alternatives in the Anthropocene. As Armeiro (2018: 198) argues, the Anthropocene does not deal with difference and is not interested in the nuances of the social construction of science nor situatedness. The immuno-biopolitical visions that emerge from these fantasies of securitization against

a fetishized other (i.e. CO₂, Nature or population growth) can be sustained through the use of Apocalyptic imaginaries of the future (Swyngedouw and Ernstson, 2019). However, with the emergence of Geopower, the control of life and non-life into a global hegemonic governance project produces what could be referred to as an *Immuno-Geopolitical framework* where life can be securitized, not only through human ingenuity and Promethean promises but through geological and non-living features of the *Whole Earth* as well.

In sum, our task is to search for the political subject in the absence of a universalized ‘we’, ‘our’ or ‘us’ based on a pluriversality or a Cosmopolocene, emerging from the recognition and demand for incorporation of different epistemologies and ontologies, to recognize existing inequalities and multiple political ecologies. Creating radical egalitarian spaces includes the capability of imagining, not the end of the world, but the people who will be able to inhabit it, to stay with the troubled future that is left to them. This process, as Bonaventura de Santos Sousa’s (2018) would argue, is not marked by lack of alternatives but by a lack of alternative thinking of alternatives.

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¹ We argue for a much longer historical understanding of the Capitalocene, or the Eurocene placing its origin in the sixteenth century with the colonization of the Americas and the input of cheap nature into the capitalist socio-economic system. See Moore (2015); Grove, (2019)