COVID-19: A CRITICAL ONTOLOGY OF THE PRESENTE*

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Introduction: The end as apokalyptein

The year 2020 started with a bad spin; calamitous events ranged from the massive wildfires in Australia which killed millions of animals, and the looming food shortage in Kenya caused by the destructive Desert locusts, to the potential war between America and Iran, and the widespread of coronavirus, just to name a few. These events have caused a great deal of worldwide panic, horror, and dismay, which assumed their full meaning with the rabid outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19 henceforth). This virus, which is said to have a documented genealogy, the so-called corona family, blew a fuse in 2019 in China. First detected in Wuhan, the virus soon jumped to other parts of the world. Highly contagious as it were, the virus soon knew the sinister upgrade from plague to pandemic. During the first weeks of the outbreak in China, the world was receiving audiovisual leaks and reports from Wuhan, with utmost curiosity, concern, and trepidation; sometimes also with a pinch of indifference, for the problem, after all, to some heart-hardened-screen-observers is part of the other’s problem, who dies of the virus behind the screen: you scratch the screen, and nothing comes out.

Bit by bit, the thin layer, the slight screen, that is between here and there, home and away began to liquefy, allowing the shards of horror to fly through the screen. Realizing the thinness of the curtain separating the horror at play and the audience, some countries started to fly their national citizens to their home countries. Indeed, the petrified calls for help from people locked down in China on social media kept piling up, while the pressure from their families at home gained momentum.

Wuhan was completely shutdown; now people across the globe were following extremely frightening videos and clips coming from Wuhan of people falling
in the streets, people trying to infect other people, licking elevator buttons, and supermarket carts. At first, it felt for some as though this is something they could watch, lying back on their couches, with pop-corn on the side. Some social media users were assembling an extremely cold front-rowed spectatorship, through the apathetic line: “watching from (name of the country/or city)”.

The privilege of spectatorship marks people’s abysmal (un)responsiveness to the horror happening on the ground in Wuhan. This unresponsiveness soon grew into a ghastly fit of nauseatingly contagious bigotry, heralded by attacks on Asian people in Europe and the US. On social media the racism and anger were mingled with jokes of horrible taste, culminating into a grotesque presence on the web. Slavoj Zizek calls these ‘epidemics of ideological viruses which were lying dormant in our societies: fake news, paranoid conspiracy theories, explosions of racism’.

Through a discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic, we seek to reflect on the complexity and polysemy of the concept of the end. Although there is no direct link between COVID-19 and the question of the end, as an absolute event, there is an analogical and critical interpretive frame-work within which (in)direct connections can be established. This framework claims a fairly justifiable analytical and methodological standing from its understanding of a critical treatment of the question of the end. The end is far from being apocalyptic in the archaic sense of the term; it could be a consequence or an outcome, but not necessarily a closure. Though it might come to signify a cessation and definitive eventuality, we will address the end, however apocalyptic, as offering the line an end from which it can proceed elsewhere. One tries to put this catastrophe forward through representation but to no avail. One attempts to remember it but cannot recover it completely, because that would be tantamount to dissolving its character as an event. It can-not be subsumed under what Lyotard calls “memorial history” which subsumes occurrences under an overarching narrative that smooths over tensions and subordinates the past to the future and binds temporality to a homogenizing subjectivity, thus repressing the heterogeneous. COVID-19 constitutes a catastrophic experience that is at once individual and collective, intimate and public, contemporary and historical (Munro 2015, p.33). It is an event that escapes the homogenizing influence of teleological narrative. Besides, we are inspired by the distance and distanciation proactive measures against COVID-19 to think of the end as that which centers on epistemological distance (proximity) between recognizable entities, the gap that resides between reality and simulation, science and myth, downfall and redemption, civilization and barbarism, apocalypse and post-apocalypse. COVID-19 rekindles the meaning of distance and distanciation in Mathew Gumpert’s understanding of catastrophe as ‘a suspension of temporality itself […] a rupture in the ordinary scheme of things, or one of the many modalities the-

reor: an irruption, an eruption, a disruption [... hence finally] an interruption. (2012, Xi). World reactions (from govern- ments and citizens) bring into being the interplay of the foregoing categories, which we can address by linking the idea of the end with that of the beginning. The apocalypse, we argue, drives through the overlap between the beginning and end. To understand this flap, we can speak of three moments of survival in human existence, the beneath, the behind and the beyond. We argue that it is the haunting image of the end (apoc- alypse) which informs people’s ability to find a new thread (a new beginning) at the end of the line. But apocalypse needs to be understood here not in the widespread understanding of the word as the end of the world as we know it, but more pertinently along the lines of its Greek etymological sense apokalyptein; as ‘uncovering, disclosure, and revelation’. On this interpretation, the current pandemic is the occasion to embrace a hermeneutic of suspicion and move beyond, behind, and beneath the surface of the event at hand. Our move along these orders has to be executed with suspicion, otherwise, we are at risk of erecting orders that universalize a Western narrative of humanity and civilization which is itself teleological. A performative contradiction of this kind resides essentially in the error of hermeneutical reliance on an ‘explanation’, on the one hand, of the three orders, and on an ‘understanding’, of them, on the other, that overlooks the complete reality of the ‘divided humanity’ in which the pandemic looms large. These are supple-

2 - A term used one of the reviewers that helps address the ques- tion of colonial difference.

mentary figures whose logic simultaneously invokes and works against historical totality, metaphorical moments that are not necessarily bound to, or in sync with a linear development of history. They should be under- stood alongside L.T. Smith’s synergetics of (de)coloniality, that allow us to look upon the lurking divisions, struggles, and tensions that can be possibly detected, suspected, and imagined in any of these orders.

It has always been a good theoretical exercise to define things, less through what they can do, more through what they cannot do, less through what they are, more through what they are not. Hence it is apt to contend that the three moments, far from indicating a discursive implication, a chronological refinement or a his- torical progression, need to be read as open systems, worldly outlooks, and symbolic narratives that cannot be satisfactorily verified within the scope of this paper; in Mignolo’s and Walsh’s understanding, they symptomize the pluriversal, which ‘opens rather than closes the geographies and spheres of decolonial think- ing and doing (2018, p. 3)’. They unravel as they unravel in the synergetics of telling and retelling, that express no wish at getting the story of the human existence right (see T. L. Smith, 2007).

COVID-19, we argue, debunks the politics of possession heralded by Hollywood mo- vies and other universalizing narratives that hold a strong craving for owning illimit- ed access to human- ity’s mythologies of existence and apocalypse. Instead of offering a singular reading of the disas- ter at hand, the pandemic has allowed us to think of how we
are situated at the intersection of experiences of and readings within, outside, alongside, across, and through concepts like accident, disaster, catastrophe and apocalypse. We offer orders whereby narrative structures, events, nations, locations, socialities, temporalities can overlap, interlock, multiply at any historical joint in the beyond. We take cue from the Moroccan sociologist and decolonial thinker Abdelkebir Khatibi who tells us that when we enter a dialogue with Western thinking of difference (that of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and contemporary thinking closer to us such as that of Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida) we take into account not only their style of thought but also their strategy, so as to put them to use for our own struggle, which certainly constitutes, another conjuration of the spirit, requiring an effective decolonization, a concrete thinking of difference (Khatibi, 1983, p. 20). Advocating the pensée autre and the notion of an irreducible, plural Maghreb or the disunity of Arab identity, Khatibi puts to use Western poststructuralist strategies to criticize the ideological manipulations of both Western and Arab épistèmes. Epistemology is so burdened with history that it can hardly cut itself off from the historical conditions of the site of its provenance; we are under the same burden. ‘The universal is no more than a particular that has become dominant’ is how Ernesto Laclau expresses this prevailing demystified view of modern European universalism (Laclau, 1995).’ Styling after Vattimo, we would like to suggest a universalism with weak foundations. In a context where thinking is ‘no longer demonstrative but edifying’, the intellectual’s role would not derive from the world as it is, but from the world viewed as the product of a history of interpretation. From our perspective as theorists educated within a Euro-Western ontology, we cannot lose sight of the extent to which the pandemic resulted in universalist and linear epistemic meanings that clash with how, in parallel, it sparkled an opportunity to look at ‘ourselves’ more deeply to interrogate this moment as that which is already ‘us’, hence spurring not begging the question: Whose Apocalypse?

The Beneath

The beneath marks the first existence of people in the exterior world. The ‘beginning’ of human history as the exterior world posed as a home for life for both animals and humans. This is a moment of nascence, in which humans have started to arrange themselves in relation to their immediate environment (see Harari 2014). The beneath comprises the very first stages of human development and assimilation of the world around them. The cave, tree, bush refuge did not generate a decisive rupture as to what is interior and exterior, marking no rigid separation between the inside and outside. Humans existed outside the idea of definitive exteriority, or absolute interiority. The beneath describes a time of organization; where human being’s history in the outside world has become more pronounced. This is a stage that indicates little display of signs, on the part of individuals or groups, as to the potential scheme for a divide between the self and the world. Space was not owned discursively, that is. It was shared and exploited for mere instinctive needs for self-sustenance (i.e.
food, survival). As an emergent self, that lacks knowledge about and hence control of the world, one existed beneath its supremacy. Human's potential at the construction of things (a refuge for instance) comprises no more than an accom- modative operation, through which s/he would come off poorly, like a guest that seeks to fit in, who needs to explore, learn and adapt. Located in a harsh environment of risk, people developed strategies of survival to hostilities which were also common to animals (hunting, defense) (Laughlin 1977; Koestler 1974). While honing their talents of survival, people operated outside the idea of civilization. This is a pre-industrial moment in Baudrillardian sense, that fits within the cognitive and agricultural stages of human development (see Harari 2014; Stringer 2011). The idea of production was limited to fighting tools (i.e. sticks, spears, fire), and the use of natural means as body accessories, such as coverings and ornaments. Consumption and production at this stage could not rise above the natural, which was replete with signs of the beginning and the end; beginning: in that the more people struggled the more they knew it was the beginning of a not-so-easy venture; the end, the natural positioned itself as a dominant threat, holding the end of individuals and groups, in its occasional natural disasters or wildlife; so people stayed beneath it, learning from the birds, animals, and insects how to build a civilization. Thus they learned how to unite, how to bury the dead, how to store food, and how to build homes. Thanks to human's ability to flexibly work in groups and unite against common dangers, they were able to survive, with the little tools they had, against even the most dangerous of animals, disasters or enemy humans.

The behind is an industrial stage, which instantiates human interaction with the outside world as a local entity. The local emerges here as an opportunity for individual and collective attainment. Locals have decided at this point to protect themselves and classify themselves by going behind fences and walls. They shielded themselves with a collective effort to leave behind them traces of themselves. This stage marks an escape from the pre-industrial era, in which so much of what was produced was never enough to overcome the syndrome of the ‘behind’; that’s to say, the efforts of survival did not add up to anything except the realization that they were far behind the potential of human power with respect to the outer world. They felt the power of this world in the climate it changes, the disasters it brings, the dangers it poses. Slowly they gathered some knowledge about the weather, the earth, the food, and strived to know “more” (not “enough”) that will help them, at this stage, take up after the greater pursuit to dominate, and not just fall behind the mysteries of the outside world. Seeking knowledge on the outside world to control it is an act prompted, first and foremost, by the realization that delay in human progress has been caused by the hunt logic, where the hunter has to run after, therefore behind, the prey. Same thing for the hunt for crops. They had to move all the time, like today’s nomads, looking for water, and food. As they march further in the land, they know they are somewhere behind it. The behind
stage is hence a tour de force, a struggle to bring that which is ‘there’ to the conven-
ience of ‘here’. This has been accompli-
shed through an adventurous revision of
the outside world, which, once quite wilder
than themselves, is now more governable.
The behind stage registers a moment of
remarkable actualization in the history of
humankind. Far from being pleased with
securing growth in terms of body, time and
food storage (to grow bigger and older
against the perils of the outside world),
people in the behind stage were occupied
with the idea of creation. Poking along the
merits of the human condition, people rea-
ized that change would come through a
more creative handling of the outside wor-
do. Hence they started making considerable
changes in their locality, building villages,
towns, and cities. They grew food in their
own lands. They industrialized it in great
quantities. They observed the bodies of the
dead and tried to conquer the mystery of
death. At this juncture, hunting has become
re-invented as play. With the rise of the
entertainment industries, games proliferated
because people did not have to worry a
lot about survival. They divided time into
leisure time and working time. They divided
the space accordingly. They no longer stand
behind in relation to the outside world. Now
they should move beyond it.

The Beyond

The beyond, as a symbolic order, is not yet
completely divorced from nor marks a rup-
ture with the behind. The beyond defines
a time in human history in which the local
has largely been re-shaped by the global.
Colonization by now has happened already
in the behind stage. The world had already
been put on the map by colonial encounter.
World print media, sciences, and goods have
been and continue to be shared. The outside
world knew a multiplicity of changes. Cities
rose from the vestiges of old ones, copied
and modified all over across the globe. Al-
though in the beneath and the behind
stages people, in the way they expanded
their resources and extended their roots,
were keen on reaching that which happens
to be standing beyond them, the beyond
stage is the only stage where beyondness
can be described as the core dynamo of
today’s world. It is by far the mover and
shaker of the world. It stimulates human
action everywhere. The world is now mar-
ked by the beyond more than any time in
history. On the geo-graphical front, people
no longer understand the beyond as the
territorial entities which they could or could
not reach, but as the spaces they could
not imagine. Biologically, far from learn-
ing about the biology of the bodies available
in nature, beyondists want to interrogate
these, not to determine what they are,
but rather to resolve inquiries about what
they are not, and what they could (not) be.

Today, genetic engineers, medical scientists,
human/natural scientists, war specialists,
thelogians, etc. all grapple with how to
go beyond. The foregoing statement that
COVID-19 sparked an opportunity to look
at ‘ourselves’ more deeply to interrogate
this moment as that which is already ‘us’
constitutes the impetus behind a webeast
on COVID –19

‘not our apocalypse’ by T. L. Smith. In this
presentation, she argues that the real apo-
calypse for the Indigenous peoples, with their fundamental pluralistic outlooks, histories, sexualities, spatial-ities, socialities, and traditions, is obviously not COVID-19, but rather colonialism. Colonialism has left them with the severe task of creating meaning out of the rubble caused by the colonial encounter, and of digging up, in what seems to be a tricky archeology, relics of their suppressed knowledges from under the stiffing vestiges of a resilient coloniality. Smith contends that as leading societies grapple with their apocalypse, they have a unique chance at picking up a revelatory hint, the edifying knowledge, that is, that their current apocalypse is tied in to the rudder of the apocalypses they let loose under the feet and above the heads of these Indigenous soci-eties. It is not retribution, but violent outbreaks of lucid revelations, microscopic and macroscopic, that make up the monstrous face of the current disaster as well as those in the making.

This explains why the beyond—during the beneath and the behind—revolved around the idea of ‘doing’, and why today it is and should be concerned with ‘undoing’. This will help us understand why virus-virality as world pandemic is part of a reversal of the chain of being beyond the known, certainly, one that plays backlashes to the beneath as the stage where humans felt almost crushed under the weight of natural ‘disasters’, from a hurricane to simple flu.

The idea of travel is intrinsic to the understanding of the beyond and its apocalypses for many reasons. COVID-19 is a good case in point. The ‘going beyond’ of the COVID-19 was possible through movement, to begin with. The inconvenience of distance that marked the beneath and the behind was trounced by people in the beyond stage. Cars, trains, aircraft, and ships were developed to perform better and move faster. Humans and the gadgets they created become, in return, carriers for anything that can travel (from a cultural artifact to a plague). The Olympics, through the breaking of records, reveal the truth about our obsession with speed, with the necessity to do things faster, urging things to operate outside the concept of limits. The viruses that live with us are also in a perpetual race to verge with our attempts at developing immunity. The more we want to globalize our societies, cultures, bodies to maximize the sense of an elevated protected self in a contracted global sociality, the more we achieve the complete opposite. This is reminiscent of the autoimmunity process that Derrida addresses his discussion of terror. For him, it constitutes ‘that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-suicidal fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its ‘own immunity’ (2003, p. 4). Alice Andrews warns that the use of this term is couched in a rhetoric of terror that emphasizes the threat of even worse events ‘to-come (2011, p.3).’ Our attempt at controlling virus, at knowing them with the hope to contain them and protect our bodies ‘does not close the immune body within a process of excessive defence, rather it destroys a living being’s ability to protect itself and opens it to infection and contamination’ Andrews 2011(p. 11).
Viruses show extreme resilience with our capacity at moving fast. They constitute a force of newness, of modification, of transformation and demonstrate that our genetic identities are volatile. This transformative power of an invisible entity problematizes the narcissism of our societies. With the proliferation of audio-visual media, smartphones, and social networks, travel, for example, is no longer merely conceived of in relation to the idea of the ‘maximum’ (that can be done), but with that of the ‘minimum’ (that can be done). To bring the idea of speed into practice, travel has become understood in the digital world as spatial and temporal relocation through the exertion of little to no movement at all. Therefore travel has been understood as the ability to move through time and distance through the nautics of immovability. Digital engineers unstrapped travel of its meaning as the capacity to literally move from one place to another; they tried to see beyond the capacity of travel, that’s. They took to travel for what it is not and rearranged it to mean un-travel. The beyond stage foregrounds a moment in history where a raid has been made on human thinking and imagination. We could extend our understanding of the beyond to a reflection on the ways modern movies work today, the same movies people associated with the pandemic or revisited to make sense of what was going on. These are interesting not because of how they capture the unrealistic (i.e. avatars, extra-terrestrial, zombies, imaginative planets). They are interesting because of how they evolved with the all-altering transitions in technology to blur the line between the real and the unreal. 3D productions are an example of the efforts invested in research and development to replace the illusion of life on the screen to that of life both outside the screen and inside it. COVID-19 blurred the line between these and is hence a very striking example of how a motion film which could, through the technique of depth perception, take place outside itself can overlap with an ongoing “movies” in real life that deploys an equal cinematic propensity. COVID-19 foregrounds a revolutionary statement about the way space (of the movie and of the real world) has been reimagined. Indeed, the fantastic has been systematically incorporated within the customary. This invites us to think whether the COVID-19 experience is the instantiation of a global situation that has marked ‘the disappearance of the outside’ (Dirlik 2003, p.14) in a context where every locality as Peter Mandaville tells us ‘possesses some aspect of translocality’ where the latter term is about […] recognizing forms of politics situated not within the boundaries of territorial space, but rather configured across and in-between such spaces. The cinema and reality feature dichot-omous yet similar lo-

Figure 1. Cinema in Canada closes with the poignant statement: Cinema closed until real life doesn’t feel like a movie. Stay safe. Be kind.
calities, but translocality has it that far from studying what is in them, we need to examine what flows through them (2003, p.50).

Figure 1 features a woman riding a bike past a cinema house. In the external panel, cinema staff share with the customers the sad news of its closing, which will be prolonged ‘as long as real-life does not feel like a movie’. This cinema house cannot sell a movie to people because the product could possibly sell, with its essential components of thrill, horror, tragedy, drama, and action is always already at work in reality. This statement entails that the way people are drawn into the nightmare taking place on the ground is the same way the movie they might offer them on screen, can cause them to duck, cover their face, jump on the seat, etc. COVID-19 reveals something about the technology of the beyond in times of a pandemic that can broadcast vivid scenes of a nightmare that leaves no place it visits untroubled. By filming the horror that is, people create a new real-world experience that blends with cinema experience, where the audience becomes part of the film, the film part of the real world, where that which is inside (the movie) is an inside no more, and that which is remotely elsewhere (the apocalypse) is possible here. Binary oppositions like reality and illusion, truth and falsehood, have imploded into one another and their basic differences have been neutralized. This brings about a seamless present tense of simulation, a de-differentiated world of hyperreality which, being more real than the real, abolishes the opposition between reality and fiction.

The closing of the cinemas should not be read as an act of passivity. For Gumpert ‘passivity, like surprise, is an attribute of ignorance [...] but in the experience of catastrophe, ignorance, paradoxically, is a form of knowledge’ (2012, p. xvi). The closing in the case of the cinema does not signal the limits of human knowledge, but rather the evacuation or transcendence of knowledge [...] the access to a piece of knowledge beyond knowledge: an ecstatic event. The rise of confusion in reality and simulation posing as one happens through the catastrophe which, for Gumpert ‘takes on the form of a luminous presence: that which was external is now internal; that which arrived—or was sent—from without, is now within, is now here, is now present’ (2012, p. xvi).

As it is closely associated with the idea of undoing, the beyond, on a similar reading, is almost apocalyptic. It is apocalyptic, not just in the calamitousness of its unfolding scenarios, where things get fixed and unfixed, but more quintessentially in how progress, in a globalized world, has ceased to be merely observable on the outside world as we know it during the beneath and the behind stages. The outside world has reached a point of saturation; our minds are swelling with the many exotic and non-exotic designs architects, novelists, filmmakers, etc., put into effect in reality and fiction, in the real world and the hyperreal. Nothing is powerful enough to blow us away, not cities in the ocean, not cars in the sky, not even an apocalypse. Social media networks throb with narratives of the pandemic as having already been predicted in Dean Koontz’s The Eyes of Darkness (2012) or Steven Soderbergh’s Contagion (2011). We
have seen more terrible killer viruses in our movies and fiction. We have been to all these scenarios of apocalyptic nature and beyond, on TV, in Cinema, and literature. We have experienced it all in our minds. The movies, video games, fantasy books we consume have changed the world. Not to a point of no return, but to a point of constant return. Through globalization and high-tech leaps in development, we only seem to go back to the ‘already’, to that which people dreamt about and imagined in the past. Our future is constantly marked by our movement into our past: fantasies of the future is even a great chance we go back to the beneath era with a simple push on the button of a nuclear control panel. But even that we know. Already.

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused most governments to adopt a state of emergency to contain the virus. Cinemas, theatres, coffee shops, bars, clubs, entertainment sectors, airports, public transportation, schools, and universities came to a halt until further notice, thank you very much. Besides supermarkets, hospitals, and pharmacies, the once-so-busy-avenues have now turned into silent and desolate pieces of land. This state of exception, as argues, has become a state of normal condition; Men have become so accustomed to living in a state of permanent crisis that they do not seem to realise that their life has been reduced to a purely biological condition and has lost not only its political dimension but also any human dimension. (Agamben 2020)

Thus, in order to maintain security, regardless of how frightened and suspicious one is, humanity bid its freedom. It bid its freedom because COVID-19, like all great catastrophes, as Gumpert has it, ‘present this form: that of a sudden suspension of everyday life. Catastrophe is that which wakes us up from the dream, now revealed as counterfeit, of the ordinary’. This is why citizens across the globe, just as catastrophes would like it, just before the ultimate lock-down, decided to enact their final consumer frenzy act of chaos; before the daunting fear to perish, people from all walks of life—blinded by panic—crossed swords in supermarkets over ‘consumables’ in preparation for the final scene. This barbarism stands an inch on the verge of the apocalypse-to-be, that is close to home, quite familiar to the majority, the ‘déjà-vu; some people strip off of their civilised stature as it feels that all that was built and fulfilled is inevitably coming to a halting end. The apocalypse is here and now, people felt. But we should not stand-ardize apocalypse as an event. The event is rather complex, and should we generalize the possibilities of what the event is or what it is not, without taking note of how the interpretive literature on the pandemic is growing by the minute, on either side of the colonial divide. The hoarding of consumables under the arc of the catastrophe is indicative of this divide, the divide as it were of our humanity. The stockpiling of toilet paper, for instance, is not a universal syn-drome, rather a statement on how ‘consumers’ in a particular socio-cultural location have
expressed their corporealism, which ‘refers to the circumstances that allow a person to have a solid grasp of the present situation of his body and predict its future (El Maarouf & Belghazi, 2019, p. 664)’. Our consumption preferences during the catastrophe are informed by the pre-rogative of location. It is a testament that our humanity is divided, and this division is particularly exemplified by the toilet paper scenes in the US and Europe, which have echoed differently in other socio-cultural arenas; this should not be misread as a question about our proximity to cleanliness, but rather about how cleanliness as concept invokes varying cosmopolitan views of what toilet paper does or does not, what it could (not) be: a preference (not the only method), a redundancy (in the presence of other cleaning methods), an inefficacy (the question of practical-ity), or insignificance (the economic/cultural/social/ideological question). With the outbreak of COVID-19, the foregoing mud-slinging fights over-cleansing (t)issues cushions a basic paradox, which brought into play, coupled with feelings of déjá-vu, apparitions of the beneath.

This got further fueled by the fact that the human mind has already traced the possibilities of near-human extinction in TV shows, movies, video games, and novels. From zombies and aliens, to viruses and nuclear wars, people humored the idea of the ‘end’; that idea today is assuming its full meaning with the vicious veracity of the viral virus at hand, or with the viruses that are yet to come. A few days ago, a friend from America sent us a photograph of her empty neighborhood, and it immediately rang a bell, reminiscent as it were of Francis Lawrence’s Am Legend (2007) (see Figure 2) which is a remake of the novel (1995), of the same name by Richard Matheson. The movie begins with wide-angle shots of an empty, post-apocalypse America where humanity has almost perished under the brutal assault of a virus that was manufactured to cure cancer. Matheson and Lawrance, among others, are beyondists, painting an image of a near-apocalyptic future, representing a good example of what Baudrillard calls ‘a reflection of profound reality’ (Baudrillard 1994, p. 6).

This scene reveals signs of the return of the beneath in a post-apocalypse American metropolis. US Army virologist Robert Neville is walking in a road almost eaten up by grass. Far behind them, the foliage of trees, constructing a bush, is deployed as an impending dose of wilderness, a double curtain.
Figure 3. The rise of the beneath in the beyond in I Am Legend.

The scene in Figure 3 features an advanced stage of this post-apocalyptic jungle-becoming city. The cars are almost entirely devoured by the forest, the roads disappearing beneath the rising Amazonian land. The buildings in the background look as though they have been eternally violently transformed by a rampant ecosystem of trees, ivy bush plants, and sky scraping flora. Analogously, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of the beneath is enacted by posts on social media depicting wildlife roving in abandoned places. In the course of the global lockdown, the waterways of the canals were said to have cleared for the first time in a tourist-free Venice³, allowing dolphins, fish, and swans to return. Similar posts proliferated on social media about how nature is repossessing itself, reclaiming its rightful resources and spaces. To be sure, the fact that no dolphins returned to Venice, far from being a piece of disappointing news, is indicative of helpless efforts that seek to re-enact the post-apocalypse to the ongoing apocalypse, working by the motto that if there be no (post) apocalypse, it should be invented. Some people were ready to misfire, making rounds of this fake news. Most alarmingly these gestures are pointing to a deep-seated politics of possession, of wanting to anchor the post-apocalypse on the western mark. Similarly, I Am Legend lapses in the intertextual footsteps of other American movies that invest no effort in masking the desire to own the apocalypse, and its integral package (victimhood and heroism). Apocalyptic films are possessive in that they refuse to deny other regions in the world the right to claim their own version of the apocalypse. These politics of possession are driven by two factors, a) the weight of location (a pressing need for the western location to be the one likely to be hit hard or chosen by the catastrophe (i.e. plague, asteroid, first-class criminal, aliens) and by b) ‘the concession of praise’, that ensues after saving the world. In all these movies, the final acts of heroism pose as universalisms, which, in reality, are inflated particularisms that have taken on transcendent and cosmic dimensions. To be sure, these supreme acts of salvation are particularisms expanded as universalisms (see Laclau, 1995), and synecdoches masquerading as metaphors (Schor, 1995, p.9). In the times of COVID-19 the ‘concession of praise’ has been enacted through highlights of lab-scenes, from Europe and the US, closing up on clinical genetics technologists and chemists, fully immersed in what seems to be a race against a ticking time-bomb, analyzing chromosomes and preparing samples, while the helpless and hopeful others turn every once in a while for updates to see how far the high-thinking

scientific legions have gone. The countries ‘located in the oppressed side of power relations’ (Grosfoguel, 2007, 213) within (and without) movie (especially in coronial times where the line between reality and cinema has grown fuzzy) experience three possible apocalyptic realities, 1) the movie’s epistemic exclusion of them as potential victims or heroes 2) their inability to offer an epistemic subaltern knowledge (see Grosfoguel, 2007) that would subvert the existing metaphor that frames the meaning of disaster and its heroics and the worst of all 3) their possible ‘thinking epistemically like the ones on the dominant positions (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 213).’

The beyond as disappointment: The big secrets of the apocalypse are not secrets at all. Given the foregoing, the apocalyptic mood with which we treat the beyond springs from the idea that whatever we achieve in the outside world is pinned down to the disappointments of the ‘already’. This third stage is a moment where all things to happen have already happened, including the (post)apocalypse itself. The already here is symptomatic of what Virilio calls an integral accident, which is different from the symbolic accident, in the ‘Titanic’ sinking somewhere in the North Atlantic, taking fifteen hundred people to the bottom (Virilio & Lotringer 2005, p.99–100). COVID-19 is part of what Virilio calls integral accidents, ‘that integrate other accidents’ like Chernobyl which also ‘continuously integrated the phenomenon of contamination’ (Virilio & Lotringer 2005, p. 99–100).’

‘Americans literally read their fate in panics.’ David A. Zimmerman argues in his study of panic novels and panic films (Zimmerman 2006; p. 1). For that reason, they, among others, have cast an investigating study of the different types of phenomena that can trigger panic in society. If Martian aliens invade us we will think they intercepted our plans to populate their planet. Are we going to die of shock to discover that other species, other than ourselves, also exist? Of course not. Our children might even offer to enlighten us as to what Martians are capable of doing, while we witness the invasion on TV. Are we going to feel obliged to explain to them what aliens are? Not today. Things like Twitter, zombie pranks, Godzilla, and all the bird, insect and metal super-power men (i.e. Batman) have changed our perception of the outside world.

The mysticism of the beyond is canceled by our incontrovertible faith in it, challenged as it were by no sense of irresolution or conservative agnosticism. The apocalyptic nature of the beyond defies the beneath’s sense of perplexity, the reluctance, and skepticism of the behind. The apocalyptic is a modern syndrome, affecting atheists and believers alike. It is a time of certitude, where everything that has not yet happened has already happened somehow and is likely to happen. The lack of emphasis during the beyond on the non-importance of a clear distinction between the real and the unreal has its implication on the kind of matter-of-fact reactions we have towards new inventions. Change has been the leading fact about things in the physical world. It has already remarkably changed

4 - Novels and films that are “overtly preoccupied with financial panic and economic crisis.” (Ibid.)
that any further change does not grab our attention. It neither surprises nor shocks us. Our attention has been shifted from the ‘how possibly’ of things (i.e. how they were possibly made) to the ‘what’s next’ of them. People would thirst after what will come next, the beyond of the already, so much so that what they own soon loses its aura, by the forwardness of the next generation. The impression of new items that we acquire gets annulled because its physical materialism has been furthered in our minds. Our pre-supposition of the next already degenerates its value, because the ‘next’ is for sure. The cure of COVID-19 is, in the time of this writing, still non-existent, but in the beyond it is already available. People in quarantine and self-isolation act out, in the humor they produce about it, the fear they express towards it, the ecstasy of the triumph of humanity. The way doctors are celebrated, the way the military is lionized for ensuring people are staying home, the way corona parties are organized, at the absence of a cure, and even how concerts are organized to challenge COVID-19, says something about how for people are making a move to the post-virus stage of deliverance. The ultimate proof of the coming of the next, that’s the beyond, explains our attitude towards the ‘seen’. This has been approached, on a different cadence by Arjun Appadurai in his treatment of the idea of progress and the ‘global village’.

For with the advent of the steamship, the automobile, the airplane, the camera, the computer, and the telephone, we have entered into an altogether new condition of neighborliness, even with those most distant from ourselves. (Appadurai 2003, p.29) The idea of neighborliness comes wrapped up within the idea of beyondness. The impression of the new thing that we acquire gets annulled because its physical materialism has been furthered in our minds. Our pre-supposition of the next already degenerates its value, because the ‘next’ is for sure. We tend to imagine that those who line up on different geography are grant-edly there. This attitude has it that if one-goes-to-Britain-one-finds-the-British. One might imagine how the people in the UK look like, socialize, live, etc., but Britain itself is taken for granted to exist. We don’t have to go there to be sure of its existence on the map. We are certain it is there. This ‘there’ gesture in the case of Britain and the British, mental as it were, is the same one displayed in relation to COVID-19 and its cure. It undermines the actual distance between ‘here’ and ‘there’, but it does not do just that. It causes ‘there’ and ‘here’, “virus” and “cure” to interact on basis of a principle of the ‘already’ with regard to the information, which, as it reiterates constantly, gets substantiated; it becomes physical. The US, France and other countries are using or combining medication used for other illnesses, not only because they are acting upon the frenzied attempt to save lives, but because they are drawn toward the phantasmal call that the medicine needed to quarantine the virus is already somewhere in the pharmacy’s drawers. Neighborliness of the unseen virus (the invisible enemy) is a modern paradox that has been generated through the present world’s new and revolutionary
methods of ‘seeing beyond’. We become conscious that the media, in connection with the idea of the global village, create contaminated communities and plagued societies with “no sense of place” (Meyrowitz 1985 as cited in Appadurai 2003, p. 21). For Appadurai, the world today is not only rhizomic (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), but also schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other. Here, we are close to the central problematic of cultural processes in today’s world (Appadurai 2003, p. 21). This explains our nostalgia for the Beneath, such as being also a ‘nostalgia for the present’ (Jameson 1989, as cited in Appadurai 2003, p.30). Our feelings of weakness and helplessness in confronting the virus epitomize our imaginary gravitation in the beneath, where the roaring lions and the roaring thunder could both trigger the same amount of panic. We who thought we were defined by our will and our choice; we are stopped by our essential passivity, by our vulnerability (from vulner which signifies “wound” in Latin); that is to say by the possible alteration of the body, by its exposure to illnesses and its need for the cure of others. On the same reading, Appadurai, speaking of modernity in the US, in further elaboration on the concept of nostalgia, describes how Americans exist outside the present ‘as they stumble into the mega technologies of the twenty-first century garbed in the film-noir scenarios of sixties’ chills, fifties’ diners, forties’ clothing, thirties’ houses, twenties’ dan-ces, and so on ad infinitum (Appadurai 2003, p. 30).’

This is interesting because it inspires us to see the beyond not only as something that is an ‘already there’ that we expect to come, but also as an’ already there’ that had been there already, yet which we expect to “return” nonetheless, hence the paradox.

The apocalypse, far from roughly symptomatic of the end, has always been deployed as an incentive, a provocateur of human genius and imaginary. It symbolizes our enchantment with the unimaginable. The proliferation of topographic photography capturing the now gloomy, fully deserted alter bodies of the once-busy streets of big metropolitan cities, together with the wide circulation of images portraying the overlap of wildlife over bare cities resonates with sceneries that keep reiterating in apocalyptic, zombie-laden film productions. The death of one person because of the COVID-19 virus echoes the death of many who might, will, or will never die because of the virus. The possibility persists nonetheless. The unseen threat is around, posing as the world’s most feared of all serial killers. If one person catches the virus, likely, a radius of one hundred persons have also been plagued, and one can only imagine what these can do to their immediate circles. A mathematics of contagion resides behind the horror that the pandemic has triggered. That the end of one holds the promise for the end of all is most terrifying. The grand-apocalypse is advanced through daily clinical reports announcing the rising arrows of infected cases and deaths. We have been following the play of tragic numbers as people died in thousands in China, Iran, Italy, the US, France, and Spain, among others, daily. Besides the panic that it occasions, the pande-
mic adds the irony of taking away from us the singularity of our own death. It reduces us to mere numbers, to being only one of the thousands of victims of a scourge whose origin we ignore.

These multiple deaths are symptomatic of the reality of the end of the world; on a similar note, Derrida points out that “[f]or each time, and each time singularly, each time irreplaceably, each time infinitely, death is nothing less than an end of the world.” (Derrida 2005, p.140). In Baudrillard’s sense, the single death of one in colonial times carries the potential of death of the entire species. As we keep getting updates on the numbers of parting people, not knowing who infected who, who gave it to whom, traceability is overwhelmed by the escalating pitch of horror; more people die, panic soars, doctors catch the virus, and we drown in the images of a spectacular terror. Numbers of the dead multiply like copies coming out of a self-sufficient, self-reliant, image-mutating, ghost-haunted Xeroxing machine. Despite the interplay of the signs and symbols of apocalypse and death, it is evident that people have trained for this and other events of death. Humans have the ability to construct a simulation of future reality in the present the way a fortune teller uses divination to foresee the future. Only that, as the imagined reality of the future overruns actual existence, the real and its desert, a la Baudrillard, get unified. With that, the simulacrum or hyperreal copy of reality, that is media, evolved to inform the yet to come in a way that allows the hyperreal to precede our lived reality. According to Baudrillard, “it is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology) but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real. (ibid. p. 10)’ In the same vein, Gumpert points out that ‘today’s catastrophes are made-for-TV specials […] and] [i]t is commonplace to say we live in what Guy Debord called a society of the spectacle (socéte du spectacle): a world saturated by images, events mediated and disseminated for collective consumption (2010, Lxv).

The beyond as Redemption

This situation, what we call the beyond, is marked with cyclic movements and simulations as the latter feeds on the interplay of illusions and phantasms (ibid. p. 10). As fiction flirts with present/future realities, and these realities recall moments that have already happened, and as the copy washes its hands off of its original, one is ought to seek a restorative transition from the destructive reality. The end of the world teases the anticipation of a brighter future. The apocalypse and the end of the world in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, among other religions, implicate a frightful moment of complete devastation and destruction. However, the ultimate calamity is promised to be directly followed by a new peaceful beginning. The apocalyptic mood thus is at once cataclysmic and redeeming. As Peter Szendy notes in his reflection of the apocalypse from the account of St. John, “[t]he apocalypse […] involves a violent, destructive but potentially—selective—redemptive transition from one world to another, from one life […] to another and possibly better one’ (Szendy 2015; p. xii). The world will come to an end that rests on
zero-point which comprises ‘the chance of a new beginning’ (Zizek 2010, xii, Szendy 2015, xii), which nations around the world have tried to anticipate through what Lauren Berlant calls the ‘technologies of [global] patriotism’ (1998, as cited in A rnon et al., 2007, p. 202), which proceed through the promise that the human race shall win the fight against COVID-19, a promise underscored, for example, by a few international corona-centered choirs on YouTube.

In the sensitive period of quarantine and home confinement in the times of COVID-19, people benevolently began to suggest fun ways to reduce boredom to pass time at home. One of those people on social media suggested a list of movies that tackle the idea of a virus outbreak and the near extinction of humanity such as The Omega Man (1971), I Am Legend (2007), Cabin Fever (2002), Carriers (2009), World War Z (2013), and Contagion (2011), just to name a few. What we find interesting in watching these movies is their striking resemblance to the status quo. In the beyond stage, one receives the apocalyptic experiences twice at once; as one embarks the virus with social distancing and hygienic strategies, one consumes a representation of himself and his reality as operating on the verge of extinction. In so doing, hence, the apocalyptic comes full circle to us, as real and hyperreal copies of the apocalypse fly around (in meanings lost and found) like numbers and letters on a dashboard. Watching an apocalyptic movie in apocalyptic times is akin to having waking up from a nightmare to find oneself fully immersed in another. During the two-hours long movie, one runs through the different stages of the outbreak: from the eruption of the virus to the mortal journey of survival, to finding the cure, to life going back to normal; that’s to say, from the pre-apocalypse to the post-apocalypse in the movie, back to the slowly flowing time in the apocalyptic now (in reality). A movie within a movie, as it were, that causes the real-world movie to undermine the movie- ness of the movie on the screen.

Content creators have always worked with the concept of the apocalypse. They are seduced to think of that which will come after, like sweet orgasms that crash our sense of gratification. They have teased the idea of the end and lingered with that of a new beginning, the post-apocalypse. This idea that what lies beyond our pleasure is the end of our pleasurability, that’s of the post-apocalypse clicks into place in Haruki Murakami’s ‘After the Quake’ (2000). In this collection of short stories, he provides a unique prospect to the Great Hanshin earthquake, otherwise called the Kobe earthquake of 1995. All six stories in the collection speak of characters who do not live in, and have no connection to the place where the earthquake took place. All of the characters learn about the earthquake from the media (television or the papers), but the catastrophes unleashed by the earth forces them to rekindle an emptiness they have long tried to suppress. The earthquake, as massively destructive as it is, only exists as a background symphony for the characters in all six stories to dance in to. It is interesting to trace how people react in the face

5 - Word between brackets is ours.
of natural calamities, though they are not directly affected. The emptiness felt by the characters could be interpreted in any number of ways, but what could be sure is that the incident did not come forward with a new state of mind; rather, it only brought into the fore that with which the characters have always been ingrained. Those characters knew that there will come a time when the earth will unleash a devastating blow from bellow to those who live on the surface. Notwithstanding, in the busy events of the surface, the inhabitants are prone to forgetfulness. But when the reminder comes, it is already too late for some, and a shocking reality for the rest. Hence, he who survives the apocalypse, the earthquake, in this case, is ought to cast a revisionist look at his life choices and decisions. The same thing can be said in regard to COVID-19 or the ones that are yet to come. It is this very revision that the post-apocalypse promises as a new beginning.

(Dis) Closure: COVID-19 is Catastrophic but not Serious

After so many countries introduced stern warnings regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, together with severe self-isolation laws, people still had a hard time internalizing the protocols of self-isolation. Self-isolation may be obvious to some, but not everyone understands what self-isolation means or entails. Even worse, it is not even evident that everyone knows what COVID-19 is, and what it is capable of doing. In Egypt, people took to the street, burning flags with the coronavirus emblem, denouncing its colonialism of the world. In Germany people organized corona parties. In Brazil, people filled the streets declaring their extreme nihilist faith in the existence of COVID-19. In Morocco people in Fes, Tangier, and Sale organized demonstrations, crying at the top of their lungs mottos like 'Allah Akbar' (God is the greater), 'korona siri bhalak, almaghrīb mashī dyalak' (Go away Corona, Morocco does not belong to you). We can't say if these people, who were asked to self-isolate, are right or wrong in how they reacted. We cannot blame people for hoarding food, or toilet paper rolls. Panic here (over uncontrollable diarrhea for instance) is already a legitimate form of survival. Protest and resistance (against colonialism) are another. In How to Survive the Apocalypse, Robert Joustra and Alissa Wilkinson open their book by ruminating western society's obsession with the consumption of apocalypse series and films. The answer for them lies not completely in the easy answer that 'our fixation on the end of the world (and us) is itself a sort of sign of the end of civilization', or that we 'we're a bunch of lazy, privileged Westerners with no real wars to fight, no real struggles, and we have to watch this stuff to get our adrenaline fix' (Joustra & Wilkinson 2016, p. 2).

For them, [a]s long as we humans have been telling the story of our beginning, we've also been telling the story of our end [except that,] 'apocalyptic literature is not really just about the end of the world', for it could mean 'the dissolution of reality', or 'the dismantling of perceived realities' in Greek understanding of apokalypsis; for them, the apocalypse rekindles in the same manner that it terminates' (Joustra & Wilkinson 2016, p. 2). It renews as it destroys;
with its destruction, it brings an epiphany about the universe, the gods, or God. The pandemic, on this reading, leaves opportunities for recommencement, rejuvenation, rebirth, and recharging. Recharging of ethics. Rebirth of humanitarian values. Rejuvenation of political justice. Recommencement of a new arrangement of priorities. This arrangement has been signaled in the reversal of the law of intimacy during the COVID-19 lockdown: you have to be distanced from what you love. We are left with the paradox that social bonds are important, that the individual cannot survive alone, away from the community, but the best narrative of salvation resides in keeping everyone else at a distance. The COVID-19 pandemic is not about our demise in the future, but it is about a new beginning, that emerges from the decisions we take in confinement, now that—in the (un)desirable lockdown—we have got the opportunity to see who we are and how we can get healthier as a global society. Joustra and Wilkinson astutely point that ‘when the way we think about ourselves as individuals and societies changes, our apocalyptic-ses change too (Joustra & Wilkinson, 2016, p. 2).

In the beyond, the end of the world does not happen as a totality; it happens in segments.

Unlike our ordinary lives which are carried ‘as a sequence or syntax of ordinary events’, what catastrophes reveal is the terrifying aspect of the event as incision, as rupture, as asyndeton (2012, p. xxv); but the end, unlike an accident or a catastrophe, is not asyndetic, happening without coordinators or connectives (2012, xxv); the end has its own syntax with connections that are more revelatory than obscuring, explicit than implicit. Even the emotional charge of COVID-19 and its aftermaths will not veil our sense of judgment, which is premised as it were on criticism that Cultural Studies as a discipline has always promoted. The word criticism is derived from the Greek term kritos, which means to judge, krinein, which is to separate out and decide, and krei-to sieve, discriminate, or dislinguish (Gray 1999, p. 271). COVID-19 has hence posited us on the critical edge that endows us with the opportunity to be self-critical, seeing clearly the problems of our past actions.

Moreover, the articulation of the end is not the same thing as the articulation of a deadline.

The end is loose, imprecise, and ill-defined. A deadline is accurate and reliable. The looseness of the apocalyptic end is necessarily hooked to the idea of the end as comprising different versions of the end. This is why the end in apocalyptic filmic and literary productions is heterogeneous, premised on a multiplicity of possibilities of what the end could possibly be. Beside, the end is not merely open to the promise of alternation (as in the existence of many possible versions of the end), but also consists of comprising multiple installations, like sections and chapters in a book. The end does not happen precipitously but in parts. This reminds us of Tadeusz Konwicki’s perception of the end of the world. ‘You know, I think the end of the world’s coming. Why is everything falling apart? East and West. The beginning of the end of the world. But it could last a long time, the end. Centuries
p.152). For Konwicki, the end has its own multiple first phases and closing stages. The end unfolds like a train with many compartments. The end is not without the privilege of going back and forth through a compartmentalized apocalypse. Looking at contemporary history, every war, every terrorist attack, every massacre, every death, carries the verdict of the end, and is, to borrow from Konwicki et al., (1984). Taking a cue from Mathew Gumpert’s reminder that the 'catastrophic event is neither a beginning, nor a middle, nor an end (2012, Xxiv), we contend that the apocalyptic end itself is not meta, repressive of little ends, nor is it telos-driven, running towards a final station; it is compartmental, with intermissions that help produce cutting-edge judgments as well as more honest reunion opportunities for the world society. This does not happen in autopian organic way, but in away in which differences are acknowledged, forgiven, admired and reconciled through measures that allow distance to achieve equilibrium. To drive this idea home, Gumpert writes about the title of Bruegel’s painting, which for him is ‘not a painting of the fall of Icarus but a landscape with the fall of Icarus (… hence) Icarus’ fall, that is to say, his katastroph, is neither inside nor outside this landscape: it is with it. Similarly, the COVID-19 catastrophe is integral of catastrophes of the past (from the beneath onwards) and holds revelations about the way we always refill gas at the end of a line (the station of the present) to be able to tug along with more certainty, turning away from the disaster of an empty tank.

To bring our discussion to a dis(colosure), we feel complied to agree with Slavoj Zizek argu- ment, as sad as it is that humanity needed a catastrophe, a hard push to reach a higher level of consensus and solidarity. Zizek, building up on Fredric Jameson’s assertion, explains that:

Years ago, Fredric Jameson drew attention to the utopian potential in movies about a cosmic catastrophe (an asteroid threatening life on Earth, or a virus killing humanity). Such a global threat gives birth to global solidarity, our petty differences become insignificant, we all work together to find a solution — and here we are today, in real life. The point is not to sadiistically enjoy widespread suffering insofar as it helps our cause — on the contrary, the point is to reflect upon a sad fact that we need a catastrophe to make us able to rethink the very basic features of the society in which we live. (Zizek, 2020)

Apocalypse as a catastrophe, according to Mathew Gumpert, arrives, traditionally, in the man-ner of an accident: from the Latin accidents, meaning accident or chance; from accido, to fall out, come to pass, happen, occur. The accident is, in short, that which happens to us: it comes from without, and takes us by surprise (2012, p. Xv). As beyondists, however, we barely await the apocalypse to fall upon us from the skies. We have taken the lead in that we have become the ‘authors of our own destruction’ (Joustra & Wilkinson 2016, p. 3). In that, the apocalypse is at the tip of our fingers, at the threshold of our whims. Far from descending from afar, like an enemy army, as Gumpert insists, it is a catastrophe that is internal to the system; it inhabits the polis, just another citizen. After all, COVID-19 is not alien to us. Does it not already have a family of its own?
Have we not experienced its peers in the films and books we produced? We have exhausted the scenarios of what could possibly happen in apocalypse movies and literature. We have set a clear diagram of the things that might happen in the post-apocalypse. Borrowing from monotheistic readings of God’s all-knowingness, we dare to say that we know how that which will never happen be like should it ever happen. But our knowledge is not without paradoxes, most often-sible of which is that in the midst of such much ‘knowing’, we have invested less effort in ‘knowing’ the limits and inconveniences of our sweeping and impressive knowledge. As Jouštra and Wilkinson suggest ‘we want to peer through the lens of the apocalypse at ourselves, looking at these dystopias to see how we conceive of our life together—our politics [and] what is broken in our culture[s]’ (Jouštra & Wilkinson 2016, p.3).

The beneath, behind and beyond, fat from comprising a gesture of phylogenetic ‘periodization’, cast an uncombed profile of our present ontology. Far from reproducing a Western idea of time, they ‘[open] up coexisting temporalities kept hostage by the Western idea of time (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, 3). Therefore, we should continue to ‘imagineer’ them alongside T. L. Smith’s reading of (de)colonization, as ‘cautionary tales’ (2012, p.3), as moments of suspicion, that process decoloniality and decoroniality in the same weave. Ironically, COVID-19 advances—in the way it is depicted as a globular entity with prominent territory markers—the promise to coronalize us as evenly as its signposts disperse on its body. It is indeed ironic if not paradoxical how the way this coronavirus microscopically manifests and reveals that it has already come with the ‘invisible’ vaccine (the furtive hope) for shuttering our coloniality. In the way it wages a raid on the ‘human’ category, irrespective of visatic protocols, genetics of nobility, dialectics of skin, or politics of class, it helps us ‘center our concerns and world views’ (Smith, 2012, 39) the way the virus has its flags uniformly posited on its spherical order.

Amid all paradoxes, the meaning of the end as catastrophe will continue to spin in the Ferris wheel of uncertainties and ambiguities, that Zizek brilliantly captures in the light note on the telegram messages running between German and Austrian army officers, in the perilous times of WWI. Zizek relates that ‘the Germans sent the message that: ‘Here, on our part of the front, the situation is serious, but not catastrophic,’ to which the Austrians replied “Here, the situation is catastrophic, but not serious.”‘In the Ferris wheel, our best judgment about the end can be spot-ted during the spinning, but it cannot be fully grasped.

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6- The use of the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’ are used in toward the end of the text not to negate our divided humanity, but to call attention to our global common knowledge of what is going around, that we have encountered in literatures, movies, religious texts, folktales, and even our most instinctive existential soliloquies.

7- Plural form and italicization are ours, to fit the overall spirit of the piece.

8- https://www.versobooks.com/events/139-conversations-with-slavoj-zizek-the-situation-is-catastrophic-but-not-serious
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Bibliography


