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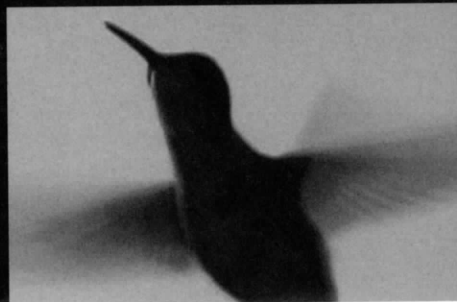
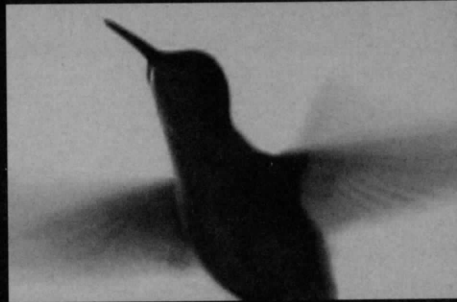
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No Where Near the End, or, Notes Towards Trading the Future

by b.h. Yael



From Trading the Future (working image), b.h. Yael

A few years into the millennium, the memory of its hyped and threatening beginnings is still close. Before 2000 I had attempted to avoid the hype, all the soothsaying and predictions. We passed the midnight hour, without calamity. Few computers wreaked havoc; the world did not end.

Only then did a strange fear of my own demise, one I had not known before, enter me. Or maybe I knew it very well, maybe all too well, because it has been with me for a long while and yet I had not recognized its dark grasp. I began to think about apocalypse. Of "The End." And I began to fear all over again.

When I was eight, not of my own accord, I entered the world of evangelical Christianity. It promised that I would be saved, all against the backdrop of a future heaven, a future end and a present danger of losing my life. This coincided with migration to a new country, a new father, a new language, but more so, to a new world-view bound by a vision that God worked through individuals to remake history and that

history brings us one more step closer to Christ's return.

When I was twelve, on a buzzing summer day I emerged from the basement calling for my parents. There was no answer. I sat on the front steps, fearing that Christ had returned and that I had been left behind. Four short years had inculcated me with fear. When Jesus comes back, his followers would meet him in the air; I had obviously not been worthy.

Now I prove my unworthiness. I question it all, albeit with a lot of fascination still. I enter a secular culture, rejecting religious dogma but seeking spiritual truths. The line seems very thin. Vestiges of apocalyptic convictions are everywhere. It may not be Christ's return that signals the end, but we do believe in an end. We, those of us, unbelievers, deniers of a religious apocalypse; we, refugees of almost every one of the West's and East's monotheistic cults, the cult of a god who would punish or destroy all of his creation; we still believe that the end is nigh.

20.

25 Years

Apocalypse is born of trauma, of a paucity of vision. It is the possibility that God gives up, rather than a god that values abundant life.

Apocalypse is inevitable and though we don't look to predictions of a specific end, marked in time, we know it is coming quick and coming sooner than we would like, but maybe not quite in our lifetimes. We are grateful that we won't be around. We have accepted that we cannot change these forces; they are completely out of our hands.

Cosmological theories assume an end of the world, but most predictions are millions and billions of years hence, almost incomprehensible. We believe that this is much more imminent. We accept that the earth will not sustain life; we are quickening the end as we believe in it.

We believe in the end more than any other thing we believe. Perhaps because we cannot imagine beyond death. Perhaps because we have accepted that life is limited, we assume it is for the earth as well. We have not been able to see death as an intrinsic part of life, not as the end, but rather as woven into the whole of life. Perhaps we have not been sufficiently loved, and therefore we cannot love the earth enough to sustain its nurturing resources. Maybe it is the concept of infinity that is so difficult. Maybe it is the fact that everything has a beginning and an end, a rise and a fall. This rise-and-fall metaphor however is inadequate, as history has shown that new forms have developed out of old ones. It may be that apocalyptic warnings of the past were not so much prophetic visions of a cataclysmic and final end of the world, but instead premonitions or warnings to specific and localized corners of the world, addressed to specific elements that preoccupied specific lives and specific geopolitical regions. Historical narratives tell us that there have been many prophecies and many destructions, that the world has ended many times over. In fact, we have had floods and genocides, volcanic eruptions and numerous disasters and colonizations that have

wiped out whole civilizations. These warnings, reified dreams or prophetic truths, these narratives of fear become visions of the future. Whatever the reason, these residual visions always point to death.

Apocalypse is born of trauma, of a paucity of vision. It is the possibility that God gives up, rather than a god that values abundant life. It is a vision that I distrust but one I know well; it is marked by hopelessness and powerlessness. The vision tells me I cannot affect change in the world, that nations will continue to war, that the earth will lose its ability to sustain life. These visions are both religiously and secularly formed; one becomes the other. The latter is devoid of a Messiah, someone who will save either a part or all of earth's inhabitants. The secular version is a technological disaster on an ecological or cataclysmic level. The secular messiah is science and technology; it is also the apocalyptic vehicle. We know that we have all the means and technologies by which to cause our own destruction.

The secular version of apocalypse is not so different from the religious one. The fact that we live in a secular culture can be questioned. Though Canadian statistics may vary significantly, American ones tell us that two in three have no doubt that Jesus would come to earth again, and that four in five are certain they would appear before God on Judgement Day. A recent *Time* magazine article noted that thirty-six percent of Americans listen to the nightly news for end-times news. We are neighbours to a nation whose president invokes God's blessing with every military strike on a foreign nation.

Apocalypse is not a religious reality or even the future. It is a political struggle.

Apocalyptic narratives, especially films, reinforce an idea of salvation, one that is often

divine, but more so imperialistic. America always saves itself. America has the technology.

In the last two years I have been working on a video and thinking about these apocalyptic narratives and in the course I have become totally overwhelmed by the gravity of it all. I have been caught in the middle of a spiritual war, not unlike that invoked by preachers, a fight for my soul.

I have been taken over by apocalyptic dreams, and by intense personal fears of cancer and death, and by a dread for all the environmental repercussions of our current consumption, let alone the nuclear sabre-rattlings. The question in the process was not about an analysis of apocalyptic narratives, but a question of choosing life over death. The narratives, however, became significant when I recognized that this was not only a singular, individual struggle.

It is dangerous to use the pronoun "we" in a text; inevitably someone will exclude themselves. The "we" here must acknowledge that it is not an individualized and personal consciousness that will change our visions of the future. I do not deny the power of individual convictions and visions of hope to affect others and to affect change. The main issue is that "we" work and live in collectives. Global survival does not distinguish between individuals. Collective actions speak louder than individual words.

The possibilities are endless. But the first thing is to imagine the future as endless. What would it look like? And would it be a vision that celebrates our natality, the fact that we are born, and would it recognize that death, as Thomas Merton noted, happens in the midst of life? It is not the end.