

Apocalypse How?

Anu Bonobo

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We catch ourselves reading the *Book of Revelation* because we cannot face the failure of the revolution. We consult the Mayan calendar and post-modern prophecies about the year 2012 because we can no longer realize mutual aid as an interpersonal policy that suffuses all of daily life.

The prevailing critique of all forms of “collapsism”—the notion that the end is both inevitable and imminent coupled with the subsequent idea that all radical acts for present transformation are thus futile—correctly chides its proponents. The latter half of the formulation finds collapsist rhetoric contributing to the contagion of apathy; this apathy then acts as a mental pesticide, drowning and choking the roots of resistance deep inside the collective consciousness of our culture. But if we are so brash as to suggest we break apart the collapsist formula, decoupling our acceptance of the inevitable from our subsequent sense of defeat, then all things are possible. It really is a go-for-broke moment, then, when we realize that tomorrow is in fact today. But why don't our actions reflect this?

If dramatizations of “the end”—even politically and philosophically savvy ones—find their home inside video games or on television programs or on the big screen at the bubba-plex or in home-made clips posted to YouTube, these are acceptable and sensible places to ponder the impending doom and gloom or blissful rapture, depending on which school of millennialism you subscribe to. The medium massages your fear and guilt and serves just the right flavor of KoolAid to fend off despair, insanity, or righteous revolutionary rage.

Since so many of our favorite venues for studying the apocalyptic vision are hypermediated, it follows that the platform promoted therein tends to one school over all the others. In fact, for those who see transhumanism and the Singularity (please see Ray Kurzweil and a gazillion others studying this notion) as our future, the internet is the virtual world promised by the cyber-prophets and nano-priests. Therein we can find all forms of formulation to foster the myth-as-fact that we will become the machine in our lifetimes.

To read these theories (that actually ring like theisms) thoroughly boggles the merely biological and social animal that some of us still claim to be. Indeed, the rhetoric of technological logic intensifies and accelerates in just the manner its proponents claim the actual artificial intelligences are developing to free us from our fleshly cages. For these futurists, the new world will be eternal; the flesh made machine will heal itself and live forever. Nothing in my decades of dabbling in Sci-Fi could prepare me for this deluge of high geekery-cum-godliness.

Looking back at Donna Haraway's proclamation that she would rather be a cyborg than a goddess and the accompanying “Cyborg Manifesto” from which that thesis came can teach us how far we have traveled into the outer reaches. Really, Haraway reads as a rather quaint predecessor compared to the current cadre of anti-biological and pro-tech philosophers.

While many readers of this magazine may recall our Chicken Littleism meets Ned Luddism of the 1980s and 90s where the main thing that distinguished our exhortations from Zerzan and Ted KACZYNSKI is that we recoiled at (and still do) the idea of advocating terrorist acts to achieve primitivist goals. But in the intervening years, our ecotopian dreams failed to fully materialize. Moreover, many fresh strains of radical futurism have emerged to remind us that we are the real fundamentalists, the true conservatives, the green meanies.

While most of us reject such reductions, the anti-authoritarian fuel in the engine of transhumanist Singularitians burns bright. With religious levity and rigorous research, the body of thought promoting future fusion begs to better our bodies with a new body made of a new kind of flesh. Injecting us with the serum of nanotechnology, the doctors of the new day will make the days of death and disease a cultural memory as distant as our days in the cave, our days of foraging and hunting, our days of laboring in the field.

When I found out that radical performance artist Genesis P. Orridge (of Throbbing Gristle and Psychic TV fame) had undergone significant body modifications—what his website describes as a “ritual/surgical” procedure—to morph into a new entity *with* his partner Lady Jaye Breyer P-Orridge, a “metaphorical mash-up of their two selves,” I knew I had to give the radical wing of this transhumanist tendency a little more time. From this process, the mutant P-Orridges share the “visual ambiguity of identity and gender of the Pandrogyné.” Perceived through an anarchist lens, the biological body born is then its own State apparatus and our binary gender system its police force. In “Freedom ov Salvation” (part of the larger work *This Is The Salivation Army*), P-Orridge elaborates,

“Once the atom was split, and consciousness was split by psychedelics, and literature and painting were radicalized by the process of the ‘cut-up,’ and behavior was made malleable by contemporary, functional, and intuitive new magical ritual by collectives like Temple Of Psychick.Youth, all preconceptions had to be suspended once and for all in favor of an immersion in possibility and individual refuting of the despotism of all forms of conceptual and media ideologies of linearity.”

She, he, or it continues: “Once Burroughs and Gysin split the cultural atom in a meticulous and methodical manner, all models of reality were up for grabs. Linearity is defunct, long live particularity. *This Is The Salivation Army* is both prophetic and practical. A manual of discontent, built from the individually validated and selected building blocks of consensus stagnation in order to co-opt and author language and SELF, both as a protest against bigotry and creative denial, and as an example to all.” This is heady and hefty rhetoric, even for a counter-culture icon like P-Orridge. While his methods are as super-freaky as it gets, it’s hard to argue with the anti-authoritarian impulse of his message:

“What we are totally engaged in right NOW! is a battle over authorship of our own story. ‘Over narrative’ itself, as my dear friend Douglas Rushkoff puts it. Existence, experience is no longer a fixed and linear program. We can re-engineer the genetic text, adjust absolutely our inherited behavior, and attack the very foundations of pre-modern culture and stasis. We have become capable of, and responsible for, asking the correct questions. At last...we are given the impeccable revelation of infinite malleability of incontrovertible subjective reality as an experiential validation. Everything is true, and everything is permitted.”

What can be more revolutionary than turning the insurrection inward and building bonfires in the streets of our selves? Following from this, then, to be truly radical, we don’t need to tear down the corporations—we just need to attack the corporeal. Reading profuse P-Orridgisms, I recalled the last fifteen years of following the debate in the transgender and transsexual communities concerning surgery or not, hormones or not, pronouns or not, and all the rest.

In a society with entrenched and powerful elements so radically anti-sex and anti-queer, it’s not impossible to understand the allure of the transhuman revolution as an extension of the transgender revolution that has grown out of the queer revolution. But where do we want to take this? In the Spielberg-Kubrick collaboration *AI*, the viewer cannot shake how the filmmakers portray the anti-robot masses as closed-minded bigots. Discrimination against machines is just the new form of fag-bashing and race-baiting.

I see hints for the missing part of the puzzle in P-Orridge’s misreading of the construct he calls the “pre-modern.” Radical anthropologists, historians, and other writer-researchers have argued for decades that we realize the amazing accomplishments of so called primitive persons in creating desirable social and spiritual realities that the modern human has never replicated. Some even suggest we recover the lost crafts of the shaman and the sorcerer. Yet, the techniques of the herb-gathering tribal magician cannot be so easily transposed upon the high priests of our post-modern, hyper-technological period.

But the green wing(nuts) who espouse a collapsist perspective have no use for technological prophecies and brave new worlds; they’re too busy preparing to survive the old world “after the fall.” When civilization crashes—whether from factors economic or ecological, political or social—some people believe they can actually be prepared. This league of collapsist thinkers may not even be opposed to the idea of intelligent machines for any moral reasons,

they just believe that global warming, Peak Oil, species extinction, and capitalist meltdown all have better odds of arriving before the robots are ready to rescue us from our poisoned but still polymorphous prisons of piss, shit, cum, and sweat.

Contemplating the various aspects of this discussion challenged me to dig deep into my own bias against the virtual narrative promoted by the cyborg camp, against transhumanism and the Singularity in particular and against technology in general. When Genesis P-Orridge ventured to make *re-engineering my genetic text* a sexy and radical prospect, I dug deep into how far I'd gone to leave my wide and wild world behind. I contemplated how many hours in the last month I'd spent online or in other virtual spaces compared to how few minutes I'd spent hiking the hills and hollows. With my face pressed too close to the computer monitor yet still too far away to caress the virtual bodies writhing voluptuously in the virtual wilderness, I had to confess that the most radical act to save the earth I'd committed this week (other than riding my bicycle to work) was to donate \$15 to an ecologically rad, non-profit porno site called "Fuckforforest.com."

Sadly, most of us have been sucking the nipple of the megamachine for far too long. With our lips firmly fellating the exhaust-pipe of Disaster Incorporated, we consume, consume, and consume some more. For various reasons, we've had to trade our flag of revolution for ranting against the ranters who read ragged texts like *Revelation* literally.

It all returns to an old Situationist mantra: desire. We never wanted it bad enough. We got bought and paid for by the trinkets of our various trades. The same people that once went to protests are instead watching pseudo-liberal and centrist comedian Jon Stewart make fun of protesters on *The Daily Show*. The ones who once contemplated radical property damage or economic sabotage in the spirit of the Boston Tea Party and our contemporary Elves are instead donating a portion of their pitiful wages to the websites set up to help support our radical green comrades who are now in jail.

With the blood sucked from our various so-called movements by the very blogs we thought would save us, the End looks good at least from one vantage point: it will get Mama Earth out from under the boot of pollution without end. Like in the annals of prehistory, life may yet emerge triumphant when the beast of the modern and post-modern ages has fallen on its own sword. If you don't have a post-disaster plan, a suicide pact may have to suffice.

Make no mistake that the enemies of life and freedom have maps and underground bunkers, stockpiles of food and weapons. The capitalists have plans to profit on their own demise, and then, when their pitiful way of life has gasped its last breath, the surviving conquerors and predators and other imperialist jerks have plans to find out where we are hiding.

Then, when nothing is left of their wretched and arrogant existence, they will want to find our sustainable organic farms, take over by force, and demand that we grow the food for them, milk the goats for them, and slaughter the free-range chickens for them. Meanwhile, they will destroy our churches based on ancient wisdoms, great music, and psychedelic orgies.

Even if the green radicals have their backwoods communes and collectives organized in a truly sustainable fashion, we need not depend on the threats from marauding capitalists on attack raids for water and women. A long view of history might suggest that we be better equipped to get along amongst ourselves to survive the hard days ahead. Mutual aid is as important as is preparing for a showdown as is training in armed self-defense.

Before, during, and after the Civil War, lots of anarchy prevailed throughout the outback regions of the rural south. Sure, lots of mutual aid existed of a Jesus-fearing and moonshine-sipping variety. But one-room churches and homemade whiskey apparently inspired a lot of random killing, too. The old days had a share of utopian socialist enclaves, but neighborly feuds that resembled low-intensity guerrilla warfare were at least as common as killing possums.

We don't know which version of the apocalyptic vision will usher in the next phase or what that period will actually mean for us in practical terms. But I've been preparing for it, at least mentally and spiritually, for my whole life. I grew up certain I'd never live to write this article, at least not on a computer! When the nuclear war with the Soviet Union didn't destroy life as we know it, I began the countdown until 1999. With my Prince record cued up, I bought into the whole Y2K fiasco. What a letdown!

I know it's historically arrogant to think that we are living in the End Times. Moreover, I realize that my collapse tendencies can sometimes lead to counter-intuitive behavior and counter-revolutionary thinking.

Even still, I don't mind *praying* for a shift in global consciousness that could help humans evolve out of their warmongering and earth-raping ways. But I'm not counting on it. I'm as prepared as anyone could be for the "worst-case-scenario," which only folds back to feed more self-indulgent echoes of Michael Stipe's gloriously selfish and cynical refrains in "It's The End of the World As We Know It." It's the end of the world, and if we don't feel fine—what exactly are we going to do about it?

Anu Bonobo would like to thank all the other writers and thinkers who inspired this article. This essay was mulled over for months and manifested in mere hours, on a drop-deadline, on the eve of John Lennon's 67th birthday and the 40th anniversary of Che Guevara's death, fueled by coffee and chai, proofed by the author alone amid other tasks required to finally finish the issue. Please comment directly to: fifteenthstate-at-bolobonobo-dot-org

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