Storying the Ecocatastrophe

Contemporary Narratives about the Environmental Collapse

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Narratives of hope and multispecies justice in contemporary ecofiction

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Contemporary discourses on climate change, mass extinction, and systemic injustices tend to promote narratives of collapse and end-of-the-world scenarios, a symptom of a widespread failure of the imagination. We are in fact currently experiencing an epistemic blindness to ways of being that exist beyond fatalistic futures, especially in western imaginaries, which consequently generates paralysing anxiety and resignation, and even outright denial.[1] While it is important to acknowledge and legitimise the reality of environmental grief and eco-despair, we need to be alert to the ways in which neoliberal fatalism interferes with political mobilisation as much as corporate-funded climate denialism.[2] The dominance of apocalyptic thinking in current political debates concerning the climate crisis demonstrates a fixation on a politics of low expectations as well as on a weak rhetoric of welfare reform that pervades virtually all climate discussions. Both frameworks, I argue, should be considered active contributors to what Rob Nixon has termed 'slow violence,' in that they limit the possibilities of radically changing the social structures and ideologies responsible for this crisis in the first place.[3]

A similar attitude of resignation manifests itself also in the stories we tell. In fact, post-apocalyptic stories of (solely) human survivors, colonial fantasies, and white saviours are prevalent in dominant cultural narratives, including in many ecotopias, which are often built on heteronormative, racist, and elitist premises, exacerbated by an anxiety-driven tone (de Haan, 2019: 55–72). Besides reproducing oppressive social dynamics, depictions of the future that are anthropo-focused generate a scenario that, echoing Vandana Singh's words, 'is a sign of a deep malaise, apart from being utterly boring and unrealistic' (2014). Among the factors that contribute to our limited imaginative horizons is a vision of future urban environments as biodiversity wastelands depicted as the main stage for violent conflict across species for survival. While it is true that the city remains a shared space of conflict due to pervasive speciesist ideologies and infrastructures,

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this does not mean that the literary imagination must reproduce such conflictual dynamics and ignore the richness of urban ecologies, which are far from being void of more-than-human presence.

Promisingly, recent publications dedicated to speculative writing reframe futurity from the lens of the oppressed, and at times even embed in ecological thought. Nevertheless, more-than-human animals tend to remain at the outskirts of solidarity discourses, especially those deemed consumable and who remain stuck within a chain of production supported by a hierarchical ideology of violent domination.[4] In particular, the fracture between individuals considered 'wild' and those who have been 'domesticated' remains strikingly unchallenged, thus revealing visions of ecological futures built on speciesist premises. As a consequence, in contexts not explicitly attentive to undoing normative ideas about the subordinate positioning of non-human animals in society, ambivalent forms of care and control arise, particularly within animal consumption discourses, which limit the possibilities for radically dismantling interlinked systems of oppression.

Given these premises, now more than ever, a critical shift in our imagination is key in disrupting historic and ongoing practices of colonialism, capitalism, industrialisation, and anthropocentrism responsible for enabling exploitative and extractive relations with the more-than-human world.[5] As José Medina affirms, 'the imagination can be both empowering and disempowering. It can create and deepen vulnerabilities, but it can also make people stronger and able to resist' (2013: 253). In response, then, to the widespread obituaries of nature, such as the one for Iceberg A68a and for the Bramble Cay melomys, the first mammal to go extinct directly because of human-caused climate breakdown, radical hope within the literary page can function as a reconfiguration of our conceptual toolbox aimed at actively investing in the future as a response to the problems of the present. Of course, hope must not be interpreted as weaponised optimism or toxic positivity, especially given the political economies that manifest themselves through uneven distributions and experiences of hope, but rather, as a rejection of the notion that we are unable to change the current flow of events, or, as Andreas Malm has so perceptively put it, 'a hope that acknowledges the immensity of the defeats and the desolation. Yet it refuses to capitulate' (2021: 255).[6]

Thus, by recuperating the creative, liberating potency that lies in speculative imagination, this chapter turns to speculative writing, promoting solution-oriented approaches to socio-ecological adversity with the aim of daring to temporarily materialise forms of existence not yet realised, but nevertheless ripe enough in the present to become an actuality.[7] In particular, I take the literary genres of solarpunk and ecopoetry as my point of departure to celebrate the potential for (re-)emergence from ruins: the first, in the anthology of short stories *Multispecies Cities: Solarpunk Urban*

Futures (Rupprecht et al., 2021), the second in Tamiko Beyer's collection of poems *Last Days* (2021). More specifically, drawing on abolitionist frameworks, urban ecology, and multispecies studies, I investigate how these works may contribute to transforming the conditions rooted in white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, corporate power, and speciesism fuelling the present global crises as well as how they may – or may not – designate more-than-human actors as allies and worldbuilders in facing uncertain futures. Likewise, I look at how these works participate in destabilising the presumption that cities are exclusively populated by humans, while helping to re-envision interspecies solidarity against structural violence and oppression within the cityscape.

As a result of a comparative analysis of speculative literary narratives by writers who centre the experiences of the Global Majority, more-than-human perspectives, and queer imaginaries, I engage with the following questions: how are marginalised individuals – of all species – (re)imagined within these texts as thriving in multispecies communities? What shape do such alliances take, and in whose interests might they work? What does ecological and social healing look like when, and if, practised from the perspective of interspecies liberation? How can we avoid perpetuating anthropocentric ecologies in charting paths towards more just futures? By addressing both the speculative potentials and epistemic limitations inherent to the selected texts, the aim of this chapter is twofold: to engage with narratives framed as hopeful in a strategising effort to catalyse our imaginaries for present action in the political struggle for collective liberation; and to reclaim the central role of radical imagination in dismantling interlocking systems of oppression affecting disenfranchised human communities as well as the more-than-human world.

Multispecies kinship and worldbuilding in solarpunk storytelling

Over the last decade, solarpunk sprouted online as a subgenre of cli-fi. As a response to grimdark narratives, this evolving lifestyle and storytelling trend quickly took off through crowd-sourced publications, that is, outside the economic logics of centralised publishing houses.[8] Its emphasis on community-building through cooperation is reinforced by the aim for a unity of theory and practice reliant on a forward-looking aesthetic, and grounded in high technology coexisting with or even complementing nature.[9] Foundationally, however, this rejection of dystopia does not mean embracing utopia. Rather, by combining realism with hope, the goal of solarpunk is to arise from a political mood of resistance against capitalist logics leading to the destruction of the environment. While the aspiration of this literary movement is to function as counter-hegemonic media by intertwining issues of race, gender, sexuality, class, and colonialism with an

ecological ethic, the genre's lack of racial diversity has been highlighted by writers within the community, as well as its still-too-often anthropocentric approach, reinforced by sanitised futuristic cityscapes that rely on civilisational tropes.[10]

A step in an auspicious direction is, however, exemplified by the anthology *Multispecies Cities: SolarPunk Urban Futures*, published by World Weaver Press in partnership with the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature in Kyoto, Japan. In the introduction, the editors accurately recognise that 'what sets these stories apart is the foregrounding and focus on examining and including these [interspecies] relationships as a core element of world-building' (Rupprecht et al., 2021: 17). By platforming authors from and stories set in the Asia-Pacific region, and by showcasing abundant queer representation, this collection grapples with issues concerning systemic oppression towards marginalised populations through tales of overcoming and redemption. In addition, sustainable practices such as composting and tiered gardens are narratively intertwined with AI systems, holographs, and biomimicry, thus establishing the imaginative conditions for urban resilience. Among the main ecological concerns are questions of de-extinction and coexistence with 'wildlife,' which proliferate in the collection by giving space to characters who are often excluded from discussions of interspecies care on the literary page, including seagulls in search of nest sites and eels inhabiting underground water systems.

A thrilling example of multispecies inclusivity can be found in the depiction of interspecies coalition in Amin Chehelnabi's short story 'Wandjina,' inspired by the 2020 Australian bushfires. In response to the government's lack of action to help the native species of Australia, a group of human rescuers sets out in a blasted landscape to help the non-human animals at risk of dying. When the crew breaches the resource clause using resources and equipment for helping animals instead of Australians, an act that harbours jail time and even torture, a police vehicle approaches them to halt their mission. Using their bodies as literal shields 'against [their] oppressors' (Chehelnabi, 2021: 256), the crew of humans, bandicoots, wallabies, and dingoes fiercely fights for survival against the police officers. This literary scene of multispecies resistance echoes the many real-life stories of nonhuman animals who either escape, come to the aid of other animals, or fight back for their liberation.[11] Thus, instead of reading this act simply as an anthropomorphic gesture, this moment of interspecies solidarity needs to be understood as a manifestation of non-human agency and personhood as well as an expression of the desire to access the phenomenological world of our more-than-human kin.

Similarly, in 'Old Man's Sea' by Meyari McFarland, an act of resistance beyond the human species is imagined in a flooded world devasted by wars: an orca once exploited for military operations and now living with PTSD comes in defence of a human sea-dweller who is being targeted by a military boat. In the future outlined in this story, while land-dwellers continue to fight brutally over the little land that is left, the human-animal boundary is deliberately subverted beneath the ocean's surface as a sign of evolutionary adaptability to climate change and militarism. In fact, the relationship that is established between a new version of human who 'wasn't a fish and wasn't an orca and wasn't, really, a land-dweller, either' and an orca with cybernetic limbs and a human voice because 'the military wanted their sea-going conscripts to sound like any other soldier' underscores not only histories of trauma shared by marginalised identities across species, but also the strength of liminality as a space of possibility where ecological resilience and new social configurations may arise (McFarland, 2021: 39–40). Thus, by stretching the imagination without losing credibility and touch with reality, a sense of hope is instilled in the multispecies refusal to surrender to anthropogenic acts of violence.[12]

Besides devoting considerable attention in the collection to rethinking our relationships with 'wildlife,' the ethical ambivalence that characterises our current relationships with species deemed as food also comes to the surface. In fact, by illustrating the enduring difficulties inherent in grappling with the long history of human domination over the more-than-human world, which includes the internalised speciesism legitimising exploitation per se, the narratives raise crucial questions regarding bodily autonomy and values surrounding definitions of multispecies justice. So, for instance, intensive farming and overfishing are indeed recognised as problematic practices and the consumption of artificial meat is occasionally normalised within the narrative space for environmental reasons (Spires, 2021: 71).[13] Yet, at the same time, non-human animals as food, either as flesh or secretions, appear in a scattered way throughout the collection: maguro (tuna) sashimi, ham, smoked salmon, and mac and cheese, among others. All of these iterations imply – both in real life and at an epistemic level – the commodification of animal bodies, a value system that relies on the existence of raising and processing facilities, which in these futuristic visions at times continue to be concealed geopolitical spaces whose ties to interspecies violence, capitalist ideologies, and environmental racism are overlooked.[14] An example that puts the spotlight on these cultural contradictions within a single story, occurs in 'It Is the Year 2115' by Joice Chng, in which a future without caged animals is conceived as a reality, to the point where reminiscing a past when chickens were kept in cages leaves the protagonist

horrified (2021: 110). However, soon after, the same character enjoys a stir-fry with 'strips of chicken' advertised as Kampung Chicken, a particular breed known for being raised using free-range production techniques:

> I turn my attention to the stir-fry, some of the kai lan and Chinese kale from row 11. I toss in some strips of chicken. It is touted to be Kampung Chicken, because the fowl run free in the farms. The *you tiao* uncle talked about caged chicken . . . Imagine that. Either way, it is going to be my delicious dinner.
>
> (Chng, 2021: 112–113)

While the elimination of cage systems represents an important milestone to aspire to, this dinner scene signals a future investment in welfarist approaches preoccupied with chasing a mode of production still based on ownership and killability of other animals, thus exposing the contradictory impasse between animal consumption and multispecies kinship. In other words, only what is considered excessive exploitation activates an emotional response, leaving unchallenged other forms of violence that continue to be regarded as 'natural' and therefore as socially acceptable.[15]

The short story that more directly exposes our troubling consumption practices is 'A Life with Cibi' by Natsumi Tanaka, which takes place in a future where humans live alongside genetically modified beings known as Cibi (from *cibus* – food in Latin) designed to be consumed by humans. Blurring the line between plants and animals, this 'new crop of edible creatures' (Tanaka, 2021: 160) wanders around the city and freely offer their flesh to be eaten. Suffering is not an issue, they do not feel any pain when sliced; on the contrary, they actually die sooner if not consumed. In the introduction to the collection, the editors interpret the story as a parable on reciprocal consumption, intended to support the claim of humans as eater and potentially eaten, and as a demonstration of 'how our need to consume can conflict with any universalist notions of bodily autonomy and individual freedom.' At the same time, they argue that multispecies justice 'does not simply mean straightforward notions of care, guardianship, and living and letting live, but rather acting both responsively and responsibly in both life and death' (Rupprecht et al., 2021: 7). Yet, if read as a cautionary tale, just like with the previous literary example, this story forces us to consider who benefits from this type of interspecies dynamic and from whose perspective we approach the question of multispecies justice.[16]

In fact, besides illustrating our relations with other animals as guided primarily by our consumption interests, the editors' statement defends an idea of justice rooted in notions of anthropocentric ecologies that safeguard the comfort of the human species while supporting oxymoronic practices of sustainable exploitation. If the aim is to envision a future

community that crosses the species barrier and honours the ethical and political subjecthood of more-than-human animals, it is crucial, in the words of Fayaz Chagani, to embrace 'an openness to the question of the animal as a question of (social) justice' that finally comes to terms with 'uninterrogated anthropocentrism and the representational and physical violence which it legitimises' (2016: 634). Additionally, the humans in the story are never at risk of being eaten, hence never in the position of becoming potential prey. As part of their privileges, they also take advantage of the Cibi's ability to shift shape, since they 'prefer not to eat [Cibi] in its human form' (Tanaka, 2021: 160). However, once the human protagonist starts living with one of them, the leap into companionship makes him uncomfortable to slice his 'dear Cibus' (Tanaka, 2021: 162). This reaction outlines a common psychological mechanism emerging from speciesist categorisations and hierarchies that is often triggered by consumption practices. It must also be noted that none of the stories in the collection depict a future with humans as both eater *and* eaten, thus leaving the prospect of a primitivist human-animal relationship based on mutual edibility unexplored, which further demonstrates a disconnection between the aspired philosophical premises outlined in the introduction and the actual imaginative worldbuilding of the collection.[17] By preserving, then, normative relations of subjugation upheld by claims of 'necessity' versus the right to bodily liberty, the reading proposed by the editors underestimates the ethical conundrum that the humans in the story constantly face, while restricting the potentiality of new epistemological and ontological paradigms that could lead to expanding our vision of what multispecies kinship may signify.

The contribution that perhaps most strikingly displays an all-encompassing anti-oppressive stance is Priya Sarukkai Chabria's 'Listen: A Memoir.' The story alerts us to an incredibly populated world by bringing to life the pulse of the more-than-human, which functions as a reminder that 'everything speaks' (Chabria, 2021: 21).[18] This near-future story draws in part from the writer's response to the pandemic and the global forced isolation from the natural world, and in part from her childhood in Madras (now Chennai) where she lived with her grandparents and believed she could understand some of the languages of our more-than-human kin. The garden of her childhood mapped into her consciousness increasingly found its echoes in the city, 'in the rip of sky between towers, damp petals on the pavement; light that changes tar roads into glistening rivers, in the sleep of stray dogs' (Sengupta, 2021). Driven by a desire for interspecies connection, enabled by a sharpened capacity for listening, the author transfers a multisensory embodied experience informed by vibrant multispecies soundscapes to the page that 'reverberate with affective, gestural significance' (Abram, 1997: 55).[19] In the attempt to translate species-specific knowledge, emotions, and

concepts, a rich language of poetic wonder and speculation permeates the story: dragonflies spoke to her 'in their language'; two squirrels befriended her, 'barking into [her] face in their loud voices'; she overhears conversations between spiders, 'though [she] can't decipher the exact words'; and she speaks in 'snail tongue' to her lover (Chabria, 2021: 14–18). While the risk of misinterpreting more-than-human languages remains a real possibility, the employment of 'strategic anthropomorphism' (Iovino, 2015: 16) destabilises anthropocentrism, thus urging readers to extend their empathy and creative imagination to our fellow earthlings. Moreover, acknowledging the value of more-than-human languages entails honouring their political voices as well as reimagining accepted views of language – namely logo/human-centric frameworks.[20] To further stress the semiotic interconnectedness between all lifeforms, the writer mentions that the protagonist and her grandmother speak in 'preserved Tamil' (Chabria, 2021: 13), conscious of the links between the flourishing of linguistic and biological diversity.[21] The writer's recording of habitually backgrounded voices deeply resonates with Alexis Pauline Gumbs's formulation of listening for trans-species communion, which she defined as 'a transformative and revolutionary resource that requires quieting down and tuning in' (2020: 15). Yet, the author's attunement with the more-than-human is not limited to 'wildlife' creatures, but rather optimistically extends to the species used for human consumption. In fact, while reminiscing the past, the young narrator notes that 'people used to own, grow and eat animals. As a child I wonder why people wanted to eat their friends. Perhaps because people didn't hear them sing, gossip and lament; didn't know the stories of their lives, big, small, and even smaller, which are much like our own, but oh-so frail' (Chabria, 2021: 16).[22] It is then the longing for more inclusive dialogues and non-exploitive relations that sets the foundations for the emergence of a multispecies society where all its members are actually given true respect and dignity. Through the speculative lens of this story, it is also possible to leave behind the imaginary of survival due to someone's extinction or killing: everyone survives, everyone lives. And this gives flickering hope.

Embodied cross-species solidarity in Tamiko Beyer's ecopoetry

On her personal website, Tamiko Beyer defines *Last Days* as 'a poetic practice of radical imagination for our current political and environmental crises.'[23] Inspired by adrienne maree brown's principles of 'emergent strategy' (2017) as well as by Robin Wall Kimmerer's 'grammar of animacy' (2013), her poems give voice to inequalities and troubled histories among human populations alongside the urgent needs of the more-than-human world, while centring immanent resilience and ecocentric inclusiveness grounded in hopeful speculation. Despite the apocalyptic tone of its title hinting to

an end, a temporal end, the poems actually vibrate on the notes of hope by celebrating the beauty of interconnectedness between all organisms. From the very first pages, a resilient spirit takes over by recognising the necessity for ‘a system of recovery, of remedy’ (Beyer, 2021: 11) in order to thrive in the ruins, both literal and metaphorical, caused by current eco-social catastrophes. At the same time, the poems offer space for futurity and for possibility, such as in the poem titled ‘[ ]’ in which neoliberal attempts to stifle political imagination are countered with an embodied awareness of collective and personal trauma, leading to an empowered response necessary to concretise the desired future: ‘I carry my weight on my heels. I am always leaning forward’ (Beyer, 2021: 66–70).

Throughout the collection, the process of mapping the way towards a more just future is always marked by a ‘we,’ a collectivity bounded by ecological proximity and precarity. In fact, collective solidarity is hereby extended to all those affected by systems of oppression: from Black and Brown people, to migrants, and the more-than-human world. In doing so, Beyer compels her readers to see their complicity in racism, environmental destruction, and a general permissiveness for violence in all its forms. Additionally, traditional notions of the poet standing apart from nature to observe it or to use it as a trope are abandoned. Invoking what she defines a ‘queer::eco::poetics’ (2010), the poet expands the very idea of ‘nature’ by writing from within, conscious of being inextricably related to all surrounding elements. It is within this context that new possibilities for attachment, kinship, and care are imagined. Each poem is meant to uniquely destabilise our perspectives, starting with the very first one titled ‘What It Means To Be Human,’ which sets the tone for deep ontological questioning and necessary deconstruction. The imagery presented in this opening poem establishes a thematic thread rooted in body politics and what I define a poetics of light, breath, and flame: a match is lighted, a fist is raised, animal muscles gallop, and fingers become wings (Beyer, 2021: 1). The body becomes the vehicle for this porousness of form, for the dissipation of all artificial dichotomies and categories, violently constructed to separate, to delegitimise one’s essence. The trans-species fluidity envisioned through human-to-bird bodily mutations and metonymic galloping are a clear demonstration that, in David Harvey’s words, ‘the body is not a closed and sealed entity, but a relational “thing” that is created, bounded, sustained, and ultimately dissolved in a spatiotemporal flux of multiple processes’ (2000: 98). Coming full circle, in the last poem, the author identifies her ‘ambiguous skin’ as ‘mammal’ (Beyer, 2021: 76), thus rejecting the historical weaponisation of animality towards marginalised populations, while creating the conditions for cross-species kinship based on a shared lived experience of embodiment.

The poems also boldly support an abolitionist approach, from prisons to police and geographical borders, and intersecting oppressive systems,

such as colonialism and capitalism, which affect also the lives of other animals through commodification practices, objectification, biopolitical control, systemic violence, and erasure.[24] Social justice is thus framed ecologically and extended to the more-than-human world: trees 'planted when white/men drafted a constitution' participate in the collective struggle for liberation by 'showing their roots,' as a sign of resistance to a violent history of white supremacy and colonial genocide to which their existence is coercively tied (Beyer, 2021: 7).[25] To stress further the intersectional ecologies speaking to dynamics of privilege, the poet understands that 'the odds stack up by species, neighborhood, race, and wealth' (Beyer, 2021: 5), thus including, along with race and class, species discrimination among the social markers that generate in-group favouritism. In response to these hierarchical social structures, the liminality of the body once again functions as a site of protest amplified by ecological mergings: 'If we flood/the streets with salt water, we can/flood the sky with wings' (Beyer, 2021: 72). The syntactic parallelism between the flooding of both skies and streets creates a metaphorical, yet experiential, continuity between the urgency for collective (re)action, traceable in the 'we' taking to the streets, and the resulting opportunity for social and ecological change, for dreaming winged flights of freedom. This semantic continuity is further reinforced by the entangled nature of human bodies with bodies of water, thus stressing once again the interconnectedness between vibrant elements in the fight for liberation. In the same poem, addressed to 'a child of the near future,' an uplifting speculative tone conveys the vision of a shared meal: 'One day, I hope to set a table, invite you/to draw up a chair. Greens steaming garlic./Slices of bread, still warm' (Beyer, 2021: 72). While the invitation is specifically extended only to a generalised human child, the absence of animal flesh on the table leaves open the possibility of including more-than-human animals as active interlocutors driving ecological recovery rather than as consumed objects, shaping a future where 'we climb/out of our greedy mouth.'

A similar illustration of potential cross-species solidarity based on non-oppressive reciprocal relationships is explored in the poem 'Wintering' (Beyer, 2021: 12). Inspired by a real-life encounter with a 'four-legged creature' whose species remains unknown to the poet, the 'I' establishes a connection with them through a shared moment of blindness caused by the overwhelming presence of whiteness in the surrounding landscape. By establishing a lexical synchronisation between their lived experiences, 'I'm blinded by so much white. . . . skinny creature/blinded by so much white,' the individuality of the mysterious animal person is not only recognised, but it is also elevated to characterhood within the literary sphere. The snow, the sound of ice, the frozen river, all contribute to giving form to a wintering process that engages metaphorically with whiteness, a power structure that thrives on homogeneity, which is just one of the many ways in which

it contributes to the annihilation of (bio)diversity. As a reaction to their shared vulnerability, at the end of the poem, their bodies synchronise: ‘Our spines show./We cross the frozen river.’ In the act of collectively crossing a precariously dangerous surface affected by the wintering process, there lies not only the possibility for interspecies coalition but also – and most importantly – the potential for envisioning multispecies flourishing beyond the frozen river.

By the end of the collection, a renewed sense of connection with the natural world is established, and it is at this point that the poet’s voice surfaces more vigorously, such as in the poem ‘I Vow To Be The Small Flame’ in which she invites the readers to commit to a promise, to repeat after her: ‘I vow/a ravenous undoing./I vow to love the fire always’ (Beyer, 2021: 63). So, while these are certainly narratives of loss and struggle informed by racial violence, abusive immigration practices, and ecological disasters, they are also crafted to animate hope, or at least to support an awareness of a future that is partly open and promising. In order then to fully embrace a ‘ravenous undoing’ (Beyer, 2021: 63) of the engrained social structures and cultural assumptions impeding collective liberation, it is necessary to rethink the meaning of multispecies kinship through an anti-speciesist lens that challenges us to include the more-than-human world in pressing political, social, economic, and cultural issues. Despite an overall representational absence of ‘domesticated’ species, which may indicate an epistemic lack of reconciliation between their struggles for liberation and intersectional conceptualisations of justice, the poems clearly create a space for a process of unlearning to occur. In the uplifting spirit of ‘constructing strategies, drafting poems’ (Beyer, 2021: 29), Beyer views poetry

> as a means to help us re-think and re-imagine our relationships – our relationships to language, to meaning, to each other, and to what surrounds us . . . Poetry (that is, a text that takes nothing for granted and requires the reader to actively participate in meaning making) can help to raise questions, and to open up new possibilities for interactions, to the benefit, I hope, of the earth’s survival.
>
> (Chin-Tanner, 2013)

It is precisely by celebrating these possibilities for growth and by embracing discomfort leading to collective healing and liberation that we will make it to the other side of the frozen river.

Conclusions

Collective visions have power – *stories* have power. And because of this, they hold the transformational potential necessary for fuelling hope for the

future; in other words, 'humans need stories and art to engage in imaginative play to develop alternative perspectives on reality' (Räpple, 2019: 123). Thus, literature, and speculative writing in particular, with its capacity to undermine the dichotomy of practical use and aesthetic value (Felski, 2008: 8), can become a vehicle with which to activate and cultivate a political and ethical imagination that can project on reality. Viewed through this lens, the narratives analysed in this chapter may function as ecological models, that is, as openings for alternative strategies that can guide us towards meeting our aspirations going forward. They can also give us access to fragments of lives that we can model from while viscerally feeling their impact. The enduring value of speculation lies precisely in its insightful critiques of the limitations of present structures and modes of being, which inevitably requires shattering the perceived immutability of the 'Now,' an epistemic practice that, as a result, demonstrates that other worlds are indeed possible. By exploring how the awareness of the current ecological crisis has influenced the selected texts, an alternative etymology of the Greek *katastrophē* emerges: an 'overturning' or 'sudden turn' in individual or cultural consciousness. This is the only kind of catastrophe we really need: the formation of a new cultural paradigm in solidarity with our more-than-human kin; a relationship with the future that involves attunement to environmental change.

As Alexis Shotwell candidly admits,

> it is hard for us to examine our connection with *unbearable pasts* with which we might reckon better, our implication in *impossibly complex presents* through which we might craft different modes of response, and our aspirations for *different futures* toward which we might shape different worlds-yet-to-come.
>
> (2016: 8, original italics)

Yet, embracing futurity through a multispecies justice lens, rooted in an infrastructure of hope that critically and radically challenges anthropocentric values, holds the power to shift the cultural practices and social structures responsible for the ecological rupture affecting our relationships with the more-than-human world. Nonetheless, if the ramifications of anthroparchy are not fully problematised, there is a risk of collapsing into anthropocentric ecologies that still put human interests first, drastically limiting the scope of our ethical responses and epistemic frameworks.[26] In order, then, to overcome the obstacles preventing us from extending solidarity across species and liberation movements, it is necessary to welcome an expansive and omni-comprehensive idea of multispecies kinship that accepts the uncomfortable challenge of ceasing to benefit uncritically from anthropocentric power structures.[27] It is also necessary to reject explicitly and

actively the use and exploitation of other animals, which entails 'choosing to negotiate a world stacked against the nonhuman without giving up on the possibility of systemic cultural and institutional transformation' (Quinn, 2021: 267).[28]

Besides revitalising our imaginary, the narratives presented in these works encourage us to notice the cultural and social constructs that currently prevent futures of multispecies flourishing not dependent on ideals of selective justice. At the same time, what the selected works all have in common is that they promote a sense of interconnectedness that pushes the readers to rethink the ontological split between Human and Nature that underpins apocalyptic discourse. The adoption of such a stance lays the foundations for more radical re-imaginings of systems as well as visions of multispecies kinship based on notions of justice that transcend logics of commodification, instrumentalisation, exploitation, and extraction, rather than rely on unquestioned systems of violence and domination. 'Before the realisation comes the dream, the conception,' as Vandana Singh reminds us (2008). Ultimately, end-of-the world stories will unlikely be as useful as restorative narratives, which is exactly the subversive epistemological project promoted in these literary works. To conclude with the visionary, yet pragmatic, words of Priya Sarukkai Chabria,

> Listening to others – other species, other ways of imagination, other cultures, is just the beginning in a long process of loving, sharing, and emerging from the shackles with which we imprison ourselves, while reaching towards an abundance, a boundarylessness. A major shift in our thinking is required, whether or not we hear birdsong and insect songs, fish bubbles and eggs hatching, the sound of flowers opening. However, it will be much more amusing if we do listen, if we do accept the old Jaina thought – to a large degree – that all life wants to live, all living beings fear death, all life dreams.[29]

Notes

1 See, for instance, Vogelaar et al. (2018); McFarland (2021). Amitav Ghosh has notably associated the climate crisis to a cultural and imaginative failure in *The Great Derangement* (2016). On the ideology and rhetoric of denial in environmental discourse, see Almiron and Xifra (2020).

2 On the links between mental health and climate crisis, see Wray (2022); Frumkin (2022).

3 According to Rob Nixon's definition, slow violence is 'a violence that 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). Among the examples, Nixon includes climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, and other 'slowly unfolding environmental catastrophes' (2011: 2). On weak sustainability, see Ergas (2021: 21–72).

4 Examples include Ring (2020); Sjunneson-Henry et al. (2018).
5 On the connections between colonialism and climate change, see White (2017: 153–162).
6 Controversies of hope are discussed in greater detail in Shewry (2015: 11–16). On the political economies of hope, see Cook and Cuervo (2019: 1102–1117); Out of the Woods Collective, 2020.
7 'Potency is the energy that transforms the possibilities into actualities' (Berardi, 2017: 1). The imaginative force of utopian econarratives is stressed also by Alberro (2021: 273–288).
8 Among the most notable solarpunk collections are Lodi-Ribeiro (2018), Ulibarri (2018), Grzyb and Sparks (2017), and Wagner and Wieland (2017).
9 For an overview of the aesthetics of solarpunk, see Johnson (2020). A text considered foundational for the movement is Flynn (2014).
10 On the lack of racial diversity, see Cameron (2019). Robyn Eckersley discusses at length the anthropocentric nature of social ecology (1992), an ideology universally upheld by solarpunk literature. See also Kopnina et al. (2018: 109–127).
11 Animal resistance has been thoroughly theorised by Hribal (2011) and, more recently, by Colling (2020).
12 Besides tackling the impacts of militarism on multispecies ecologies, this story also denounces institutional racism in the police 'No resource for sea-dwellers because they were floating trash, that was what the cops always claimed. Mama said that people with dark skin or poor people or just those passing through used to be treated the same. Cops were cops, dedicated to serving the rich and powerful instead of protecting everyone' (McFarland, 2021: 37).
13 For instance, in 'The Exuberant Vitality of Hatchling Habitats' by D.A. Xiaolin Spires, intensive human fishing is called out for depleting the food sources of seagulls. However, no explicit reference is made to the fishes trapped in this practice of systemic killing (Spires, 2021: 84).
14 In a short story based in Singapore and focused on healing through gardening, the protagonist mentions in passing meeting with friends at McDonald's. While the inclusion of this multinational fast food chain may be an intentional move on the part of the author, for instance, to build character, it also signals the persistence in the imagined future of a capitalist, imperialist, and exploitative economy that clashes with solarpunk ideals as well as with the objective of the collection to offer optimistic visions of future urban spaces.
15 On the historical weaponisation of the natural/unnatural false dichotomy, see Bedford (2021: 1–16).
16 For a more thorough discussion of this topic, see the introduction to Chao et al. (2022: 1–21).
17 By siding with Val Plumwood's philosophical theory of eco-animalism, which supports the fundamental edibility of the human (Plumwood, 2012: 77–90), the editors dismiss veganism as a 'delusion' for disrupting the predator-prey dynamic (Rupprecht et al., 2021: 7). These claims not only invalidate the indeed relational nature of veganism, but also offer a constrained view of veganism as devoted exclusively to questions of food consumption, thus disregarding its political dimension and core commitment to dismantling systems of oppression and exploitation. A convincing and superbly articulated critique of Plumwood's claim regarding ontological veganism as imperialist can be found in Struthers Montford and Taylor (2020: 129–156).
18 My deepest appreciation to Priya Sarukkai Chabria for engaging in an enriching email correspondence with me on the themes explored in her short stories and, more broadly, in the edited collection in which it is included.

19 For a substantial overview of multispecies soundscapes in (anglophone) literature, see De Bruyn (2020) and Yong (2022).
20 On the political voice of more-than-human animals, see Meijer (2019).
21 This topic is discussed in greater depth by the writer in Sengupta (2021).
22 Conceptually similar is Roanne van Voorst's speculative experiment in 'futures anthropology' on food practices free from animal exploitation (2021).
23 See www.tamikobeyer.com/books. My sincerest gratitude to Tamiko Beyer for accepting my invitation to have a conversation on her collection of poems, radical imagination, and collective liberation.
24 An emblematic manifestation of prison abolition can be found in the following lines: 'Black women and femmes chanted incantations of their ancestors and the cages of Rikers blew open. San Quentin dissolved. Framingham shattered. All the prisons evaporated' (Beyer, 2021: 56).
25 Examples of this violent history in the United States are, for instance, lynching trees and liberty trees.
26 Humanity must not be intended as a monolithic agent of violence; rather, its definition relies on Sylvia Wynter's genealogy of humanity (2003) and on Syl Ko's model of the 'human' (2017).
27 Several recent publications incorporate a vegan liberationist praxis into their methodological framework. See for instance Quinn and Westwood (2018), Giraud (2021), and Hodge et al. (2021). For a brief definition of total liberation, see Pellow (2019: 295–304). For a call to action directed to those concerned with urban nature and biodiversity to adopt more critical and repoliticised understandings of 'nature' and multispecies relations, see Arcari et al. (2021: 940–965).
28 On the concept of radical hope, see Strazds (2019).
29 Shared with the author's consent from our email correspondence.

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