

a milieu that is co-constitutive, opening new modes of becoming where we can no longer assume that our own form of communication is the only and best one. It is this experimentation that Gustafsson&Haapoja's projects initiate, acknowledging both its necessities, limits and its future challenges.

As such, Gustafsson&Haapoja's institutions, at their most experimental potential, propose a zone of indeterminacy between the human and the more-than-human, between institutions created by and for humans and those invented for and by new collectivities that surpass interspecies divisions. Such work does not simply expand human systems to the animal world. Rather, it queries and challenges the very borders between human and nonhuman, refuses to leave the conventional category human untouched, by enacting a form of aesthetic play—and indeed *The Trial* is ultimately a play of experimental theater—that is inherently animal. “Play is the arena of activity dedicated to the improvisation of gestural forms, a veritable laboratory of forms of life,” writes Massumi.⁶⁴ In other words, play brings new worlds into being in the act, allowing us animals to test and innovate skills for understanding and operating within them and their provisional formations. Play functions as a creative engine that generates constructive real-life applications and operates at the basis of language itself. Play offers a generative zone, a place to create and test out new possibilities, free of real-life stakes and consequences, a training ground for emancipated futures. If so, then with this conceptualization of play, one expanded through diverse modes of institutionalization, we have an apt approximation of the broader creativity of multispecies aesthetics that Gustafsson&Haapoja advance—an experimental activity that is intrinsically animal. In opening up a series of questions about potential postanthropocentric worlds, it implicates us all in a series of creative multispecies becomings, reinventing play to remake the world.

CHAPTER SIX

TO SAVE A WORLD

GEOENGINEERING, CONFLICTUAL FUTURISMS, AND THE UNTHINKABLE

The Anthropocene is proving to be an era of world war—or rather, worlds at war. Not that this is anything new. We are no doubt living in the continuation of long-standing onto-epistemological and politico-military conflicts set within (still unfolding) histories of colonial and global states of violence and dispossession. If catastrophe lies before us, then it flows from what has come before. Consider two ideological formations that speak to this current situation. First, the techno-utopianism of **geoengineering**, premised on climate-change fixes for the symptoms and increasingly alarming impacts of fossil capital's disastrous centuries-long transformation of the environment. Adherents suggest that solar radiation management and carbon capture—the two dominant forms of climate engineering, the first more extreme than the second—can stabilize temperatures so as to avert calamitous environmental breakdown, buying us time to come up with more long-term solutions (even though the technology is nowhere near implementation and at the necessary scales). With reference to this approach, the Breakthrough Institute, the California-based think tank advocating market-directed, pro-tech responses to environmental threat, offers a futurist vision of the “good



6.1 Arthur Jafa, *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* (video still), 2016. Digital color video, with sound, 7 min., 25 sec. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York / Rome.

Anthropocene,” articulated as a potential near-future world where “humans use their growing social, economic, and technological powers to make life better for people, stabilize the climate, and protect the natural world.”¹

The second formation is the devastating racial violence appearing in Arthur Jafa’s 2016 video *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death*, which also answers that footage with a redemptive **Afrofuturism**. Proposing one model among Indigenous and anticolonial visions appealing to and embedded within social movements dedicated to justice-to-come, it foregrounds the heartrending violence against Black communities as the fundamental basis upon which any alternative—one of coexistence, equality, love, and peace—can be imagined. Resonating with the impulses behind the platform of the 2016 Movement for Black Lives, itself built on long-standing African-American approaches to **socio-environmental justice** that insist on correlating existential vulnerabilities with racial and economic inequalities, Jafa’s video offers the occasion to bring far-reaching politico-ecological strands together in intersectional analysis.² It also offers the opportunity to counterpose that analysis against the technocratic framework and neoliberal values that guide climate engineering, which is increasingly becoming integral to dominant global climate policy within the framework of green capitalism.

what do we mean by "Environment"?
who is in charge?
who is on the ground?

The above two modelings of the future offer an expedient comparison—and more importantly a startling contrast—between the current technoscientific rationality of climate-change response and the socio-environmental justice concerns around racial capitalism. While the Breakthrough Institute’s policies have very little to do with the matters addressed in Jafa’s video, the latter does not explicitly or substantially reflect on climate breakdown, at least as conventionally conceived. This very segregation of concerns—between climate change and social justice—forms part of a problematic distribution of the sensible when it comes to the wider framework of environmental considerations, which I am intent on analyzing, challenging, and rearranging by drawing these distinct elements together into critical discussion. As such, the unlikely juxtaposition invites a much-needed discussion of competing approaches to what is to come, a future world that could potentially be locked in for hundreds, even hundreds of thousands, of years. That urgency is compounded by the fact that, while technocratic climate science tends to ignore or, at best, merely pays lip service to the differential impacts of environmental transformations on disenfranchised communities subject to ongoing racial and economic discrimination, social justice activism often shunts ecological matters to the side owing to an all-too-immediate and well-justified but ultimately limiting confrontation with police brutality, structural inequality, and political disenfranchisement. **Perhaps part of the problem, which helps keep these multiple strands separate to begin with, is the very meaning of environment.** Opening up that term, and resituating it through a recombinative politico-ecological analysis is urgent, and by doing so in the following pages, I hope to show that what is at stake in this improbable comparison is everything that matters.

OPTIMAL CLIMATES

In *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death*, **Arthur Jafa**, a filmmaker by trade, unleashes a ferocious archive of citizen-journalist, dash cam, and social media video clips, wherein we see Black folks subjected to innumerable acts of state violence, but not just. Set to Kanye West’s transcendent gospel-rap anthem “Ultralight Beam,” the flurry of images quickly cycles through recent and historical footage of shootings, attacks, and beatings, also including intermixed shots of ghastly civilization-destroying aliens and monsters borrowed from Hollywood sci-fi and horror films. It would appear that through this eye-watering assemblage Jafa is proposing an allegory for

the destruction of the world, where the systematic killings and unleashed brutality scales up to an apocalypse delivered by supernatural forces. More than that still, this world, shown as an agglomeration of social collapse and violent calamity, seems set on destroying itself, rising up in monstrous acts of suicidal catastrophe—one, in a parallel universe, where the catastrophe of racial violence is exchanged for climate breakdown, which geoengineering wishes to repair. Yet what we face with this comparison, between very different worlds and very different ends—which is so often not acknowledged as a comparison at all—is actually a missed encounter, which Jafa's intervention ultimately makes apparent: Technoscience's redemptive impulses appear wildly misdirected, just as horror movies picture far-flung catastrophes that often have little to do with our actual social reality. The challenge is to think these worlds together.

The Anthropocene thesis might be similarly criticized for its various problematic diversions.³ These include its regressive and narcissistic neo-humanism, its evasion of the differential causes and uneven effects of climate breakdown, its disavowal of petrocapiatist culpability, and its ecology of affluence, all of which are not unrelated to the present drama of self-destruction shown in Jafa's video. In past writings, my analysis has explored diverse visual-cultural expressions of photography and remote sensing data, the kind that offer "Whole Earth" utopian perspectives of the planet as if it were devoid of social conflict and safely in the hands of an emergent scientific mastery. These same tendencies continue to mark the mainstream theorization and unfolding reception of the Anthropocene today—despite parallel attempts to mobilize it critically, work progressively with its conceptualization, and also nominate additional terms to better comprehend current conditions, such as the Chthulucene and the Capitalocene.⁴ If considered expansively, Jafa's video contributes to this discussion by powerfully elucidating the problems with environmental mastery from an unexpected point of view: by dramatizing the extreme costs of the social asymmetries that go unaddressed within much climate science and technological approaches to climate breakdown. If the neoliberalization of the Anthropocene is ascendant—which the last couple of decades of dominant market-based and high-tech approaches demonstrate with increasing clarity—then the growth of climate engineering theory and practice in fact threaten any future grounded in social justice, at least the kind that Jafa points us to. It behooves us to carefully consider the stakes of these competing visions for future worlds, particularly as their mutually exclusive realizations are

already receiving substantial, if unequal, investments in the present. To that end, let me turn first to geoengineering.

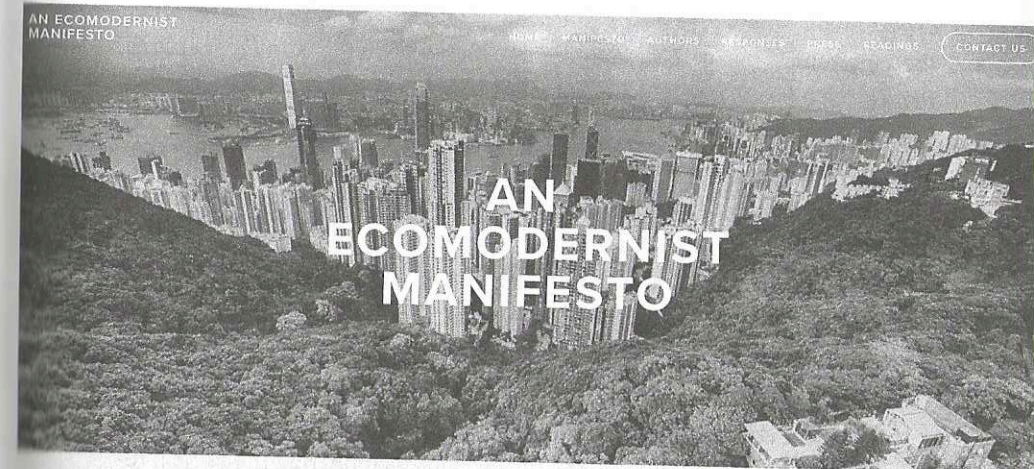
Geoengineering in fact unfolds directly from the Anthropocene thesis, beginning with the latter's initial 2000 terminological proposal made by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer to designate a new geological era where Earth's natural systems are increasingly determined by "human activities."⁵ As Crutzen and Stoermer explain in that formative publication, "an exciting, but also difficult and daunting task lies ahead of the global research and engineering community to guide mankind towards global, sustainable, environmental management."⁶ As Crutzen elaborates in his subsequent essay "Geology of Mankind": "Unless there is a global catastrophe—a meteorite impact, a world war or a pandemic—mankind will remain a major environmental force for many millennia. A daunting task lies ahead for scientists and engineers to guide society toward environmentally sustainable management during the era of the Anthropocene. This will require appropriate human behavior at all scales, and may well involve internationally accepted, large-scale geo-engineering projects, for instance to 'optimize' climate. At this stage, however, we are still largely treading on terra incognita."⁷ Looking toward the future, Crutzen soon followed up with more explicit suggestions for large-scale engineering projects, including his own proposal for stratospheric sulfur injections.⁸

But in looking toward the past, we can draw important historical lessons that would lead us to question Crutzen's agenda. To begin with, much dispute remains over the dating of this post-Holocene epoch: whether it began with the nineteenth-century Industrial Revolution, or nuclear science in the 1940s, or again much earlier with the Orbis Spike of 1610, which remains the most compelling boundary event proposal within critical Anthropocene discourse. This last coincides, as we have seen, with the geological implications of colonization in the Americas, which unknowingly dropped atmospheric carbon levels, and with them global temperatures, owing to the large-scale afforestation of once-cultivated lands left depopulated following the genocide of Indigenous peoples (owing to epidemics, warfare, famine, and colonial atrocities). Indeed, colonization left upwards of 56 million dead by the beginning of the 1600s, or 90 percent of the pre-Columbian Indigenous population, around 10 percent of the Earth's population at the time.⁹

In other words, the selection of the era's boundary event determines what kind of discussion the Anthropocene thesis generates, whether one

connected to the global formations of imperial violence and racial capitalism or one based in the technological developments of the Industrial Revolution or nuclear energy. In my view, most historically sensitive, politically enabling, and therefore compelling would be an expansive understanding that insists on seeing these formations within a mutually constructive entanglement unfolding within colonial, industrial, and capitalist modernity.¹⁰ For now, it suffices to point out that the Anthropocene is not only far from innocent in historical diagnosis: it matters both geologically and politically when we date it. As well, the term's conceptualization, particularly given its apparently causal connection to geoengineering, may very well be preemptive in technoscientific prescription for future response.¹¹ Essentially, by interpreting the past, we determine the future—and vice versa.

For Crutzen, engineering may be a last resort to forestall the catastrophic breakdown of Earth's systems, where reducing emissions otherwise simply proves insurmountable politically and economically for global society; for others, however, it represents an attractive first option to advance "ecological modernization," merging climate solutions with tech-guided economic opportunity, creating the ideal climate for wealth accumulation. This returns us to the Breakthrough Institute's notorious proposal for a good Anthropocene, founded on the dubious "decoupling" of economic growth from environmental impacts, as if endless financial expansion, as long as it is decarbonized, can be considered independently of climate change effects.¹² Yet the ideological nature of this proposal should be clear. Indeed, this "leading big money, anti-green, pro-nuclear"—and pro-geoengineering—"think tank in the United States" was founded in 2003 by Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, and they have long argued that economic growth in itself need not negatively impact Earth systems.¹³ In their 2004 essay "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World," Shellenberger and Nordhaus sought to dispatch what they term the "politics of limits"—the kind based in the regulatory environmentalism of the 1970s emphasizing Earth's finite carrying capacity—and replace it with a "politics of possibility" committed to technologically driven economic expansion put to task against climate breakdown.¹⁴ The institute notably counts Carl Page, brother of Google founder Larry Page, among its funders, a detail symptomatic of the growing convergence of Big Tech with green economics, which has only expanded in significance in recent years, especially as climate modeling has become increasingly dependent on big data and computer processing



6.2 "An Ecomodernist Manifesto," 2015.

capabilities. This economic connection may also indicate the shared class-based interests of the well-resourced institute, which informs its climate policy. Indeed, according to critics, the institute remains singularly "dedicated to propagandizing capitalist technological-investment 'solutions' to climate change," but doing so in the absence of any evidence that ecological modernization is a credible thesis.¹⁵ The clearest articulation of the Breakthrough Institute's recent position is "An Ecomodernist Manifesto," written by eighteen authors, including Shellenberger and Nordhaus, which attempts to justify their techno-solutions-based wealth-generating goal via eco-cultural claims: "More-productive economies are wealthier economies, capable of better meeting human needs while committing more of their economic surplus to non-economic amenities, including better human health, greater human freedom and opportunity, arts, culture, and the conservation of nature."¹⁶

Yet despite its familiar trickle-down economic theory and liberal-coated goodwill sentiment, which have been thoroughly debunked no less economically as ecologically, the manifesto's expansive spatiotemporal scales and abstract rhetoric—like much of the Anthropocene thesis's planetary imagery and deep-time framing—overshoot the figural, the local, and the

experiential, where arts and culture actually reside.¹⁷ It is not surprising, then, that the “politics of possibility” as articulated in the manifesto fails to mention the terms *race*, *equality*, or *justice*, which, if included, would at least help connect its future vision to the actual, even glaring, antagonisms, inequalities, and injustice of current social experience. In contrast, the lofty, liberal, and generalizing language of human, *technology*, and *growth* abound. By evading such key facets of justice-centered environmentalism—which they do their best to consign to the grave—ecomodernism’s color-blind formulations reflect yet another version of what Van Jones has called “the unbearable whiteness of green,” unbearable not only because the manifesto’s enviro-economic utopianism utterly fails to consider the intolerable social conditions of current reality but also because it apparently seeks to extend those conditions infinitely into the future.¹⁸ By disappearing the critical reflection on social inequalities in its performance of an ecology of affluence, ecomodernism implicitly commits justice and equity to the realm of the impossible or negligible. Meanwhile its priorities are confined to the biogeophysical and financial, conveniently not challenging its own socioeconomic privileges or those of its funders. Consequently, the manifesto’s stated dedication to “stabilizing the climate” can only be read in this limited way—as a modality of “sustainable development,” wherein “environment” is understood as an ideal, privileged bioeconomic realm.¹⁹ Alternately, if we can describe Jafa’s video as expressing an environmentalism of sorts—which I argue we can, although the video’s reception to date has largely eluded such an analysis—then it is one attuned to what Christina Sharpe terms “antiblackness as total climate.”²⁰ Indeed, Jafa’s piece offers a compelling vision of how an environmentalism founded on that contention might enter into aesthetic form and poignantly contest the ecomodernist agenda and its underlying technoscientific reason.

GEOENGINEERING’S MONSTROSITY

In contrast to the many conceptual loopholes of “An Ecomodernist Manifesto,” *Love Is the Message* is laser-focused on figurations distorted within and by the actual everyday environments of racial capitalism and its necropolitics, where climate policies impact real people in ways that are inextricable from sociopolitical differentials. Indeed, the dominant system’s climate policies might be said even to produce and manage those differentials. Jafa’s stream of rhythmic edits moves relentlessly through shots



6.3 Santiago Álvarez, *Now!* (publicity poster), 1965.

of police hitting, pummeling, punching, shooting, and brutalizing Black persons. In so doing, his video recalls and updates militant approaches of Third Cinema from decades past meant to operate as a cinematic weapon against imperialism, sometimes by re-presenting popular news media footage and showing its gruesome violence directly.²¹ Specifically *Love Is the Message* evokes *Now!*, the 1965 short by Cuban revolutionary filmmaker Santiago Álvarez and its then-and-still-shocking portrayal of US racist policing set to Lena Horne's rousing civil rights musical number. Similarly visualizing the state's controlling of distinct climates of life and death premised on anti-Blackness but turning more toward our current era, Jafa includes scenes of the 2015 murder of Walter Scott in South Carolina, the abusive 2014 arrest of Kametra Barbour in her car with her four children in Dallas, and the cruel ground-tackling of fifteen-year-old, bikini-clad Dajerria Becton by a white police officer at a pool party in McKinney, Texas, in 2015. Going beyond this incisive acknowledgment of the continuation of civil rights-era racial violence, the sideways comparison with geoengineering allows further insights that invite an expanded reconceptualization of environment today.

Jafa's video clearly refuses clear distinctions between environmental management as a form of carbon capture and temperature modulation, on the one hand, and biopolitics as the governance of life and lives, on the other. These scenes of police violence, as contextualized in Jafa's piece, portray social engineering as a technique that joins the management of biophysical conditions (specifically through police batons, bullets, and fists) with the controlling of environments (state-produced milieus maintaining social order), which together organize and exacerbate race, gender, and class inequalities. These are, in other words, modalities of climate control, situating environmental conditions in longer-term patterns of historical duration and institutional management of biopolitics. If geoengineering seeks to regulate the state of regional environments, then the local determination of life-and-death conditions for individuals through remote precision drone attacks and aerial bombing, as shown in Jafa's *The White Album* (2018), his subsequent video of psychocultural environments of whiteness, represent further examples of *militarized climate control*. Elsewhere in *Love Is the Message*, Jafa contextualizes these climates of anti-Blackness with additional footage drawn from the historical archive (again resonating with *Now!*), depicting midcentury scenes of police fire-hosing Black protestors, striking civil rights activists with nightsticks, whites brutalizing lunch counter protestors in North Carolina, and imagery from D. W. Griffith's

notorious 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*, with its scandalous portrayals of Ku Klux Klan members and white actors in blackface. In other words, *Love Is the Message* offers a short lesson in US climate history, where environment has little to do with protected wilderness zones, global warming, or melting ice. Rather, it designates systematic patterns of institutional racism, unleashing the ambient violence of atmospheric anti-Blackness by referencing the affects, tonalities, rhythms, and spatial arrangements that generate discrimination and segregation in everyday life. Similarly drawing together ecology with racial politics, Alessandra Raengo asks, "What is the ontology of black lives, when they are so thoroughly wrapped in an atmospheric anti-blackness?"²² *Love Is the Message* provides one answer.

Returning to ecomodernism, we can see that the Breakthrough Institute inadvertently contributes to the widespread invisibility and erasure of precisely those scenes Jafa highlights, disappearing from its imagined geo-engineered future what might be called the Black Anthropocene—wherein ecology is inseparable from the social terms of racial capitalism.²³ While engineering models aim for climate control at regional levels, as in its solar radiation management proposals, Jafa's video, which in fact exhibits tacit and sometimes explicit affinities with the fields of political ecology and climate justice, grounds environment as the realm of sociopolitical and techno-economic inequality, which also connects to the geophysical conditions of climate change.²⁴ This equation of *ecology-as-intersectionality*, which offers another way to comprehend this formulation, is most overt where his video includes passages of African Americans wading through the superstorm flood waters in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, a situation in which global warming's extreme weather became understood as inseparable in its effects from institutional racism and urban inequality.²⁵ For many New Orleanians, years of structural negligence, municipal and infrastructure defunding, systemic racial inequality, and impoverishment were compounded by that "unnatural" disaster, which cannot be extricated from its realization within the field of disproportionate impacts resulting from collective in/capacities and lack of access to resources. "In every phase and aspect of a disaster—causes, vulnerability, preparedness, results and response, and reconstruction—the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus," as Neil Smith wrote insightfully about Katrina.²⁶ In fact, taking that context writ large, geoengineering—as another form of disaster response—appears to be a technological construct mobilized in part precisely so as not

to address social injustice, and more cynically, functions as a social calculus of social injustice, one wielded to restrict our understanding of environment to the biogeophysical realm. Showing how police brutality enacts the everyday and sometimes spectacular meanings of US environmental management, *Love Is the Message*, in contrast, brings climate control down to the racialized and classed figural scale, even as it opens onto historical formations dating back to conquest and slavery—in a way similar to how Stefano Harney and Fred Moten saw in the 2015 killing of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, the instantiation of “the ongoing event of resistance to, and resistance before, socioecological disaster,” where “modernity’s constitution in the transatlantic slave trade, settler colonialism and capital’s emergence in and with the state, is The Socioecological Disaster.”²⁷ With Jafa’s video, too, we witness how white supremacy, disaster capitalism, and authoritarian neoliberalism, which operate climatologically at granular levels, were formed—even *geoengineered*, insofar as worlds were actively constructed, others destroyed—over centuries, since 1492. If these forces more recently have converged to represent the ruling order of Trumpist governmentality, then that is because the latter is itself a signature instance of the pathologies of late Anthropocene rationality.²⁸

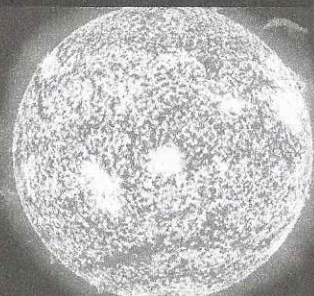
“Climate change is global-scale violence against places and species, as well as against human beings,” Rebecca Solnit reminds us.²⁹ Naomi Klein extends that insight when she writes about how “the reality of an economic order built on white supremacy is the whispered subtext of our entire response to the climate crisis,” a crisis that is far from accidental but rather “the result of a series of policy decisions the governments of wealthy countries have made—and continue to make—with full knowledge of the facts and in the face of strenuous objections.”³⁰ It is within this broader matrix of mainstream climate policy that we can further situate the Breakthrough Institute and geoengineering’s technofix proposals. Attacking the proclaimed goals and decision-making procedures at UN climate summits, the Sudanese diplomat and climate negotiator Lumumba di Aping, we recall, has predicted the results to be “climate genocide,” where limiting warming to two degrees Celsius means accepting a global average that will translate into four to five degrees in some places, given differential impacts, meaning “Africa will burn.”³¹ Geoengineering, which (at least in its current guise) enables the fossil fuel economy to progress without major interruption, will likely make this eventuality ever more possible. Given the massive scales, delayed implications, and tremendous complexity of climate science, as well as its networked agencies built of depersonalized cybernetic systems, the

challenge is urgent to render these critical insights into visual evidence capable of forming collective political subjects who act, so that we can shape the future we want to live in—at least while there is yet time left to do so.³² Jafa’s video aids in this critical project.

Even while *Love Is the Message* does not specifically reference geoengineering (at least in its conventional definition), it nonetheless offers a discernable cry of protest against the latter’s ambition to sustain our present with no alteration to its governing sociopolitical and economic arrangements, with mitigation technology only intervening at the level of regional weather control, and atmospheric waste management as a matter of addressing carbon pollution. Yet it does propose connections between these diverse facets of reality. By virtue of its montage, Jafa’s video joins passages of police violence to close-up shots of angry sun flares, as seen from NASA’s International Space Station near-live feed, thereby establishing a link that resonates with environmental justice positions that view global warming as a threat multiplier, which, impossible to average and generalize, exacerbates social conflict and inequality. According to well-documented research extending out of environmental justice activism, disenfranchised and impoverished communities of color experience higher levels of exposure to toxicity, food and water shortages, major health risks, and other forms of environmental vulnerability and debility, all exacerbated by climate-related disasters and their aftermath.³³ Global warming aggravates the very social crises that, in the absence of social service provisions, invite security-based, and increasingly military-oriented, responses to the conflict. Indeed, according to Jasbir Puar, we are witnessing the globalization of debilitation as a spreading logic of inequality, where “debilitation is caused by global injustice and the war machines of colonialism, occupation, and U.S. imperialism.”³⁴ Geoengineering, responding to a wider context of climate breakdown, stands to expand these modes of biopolitical control and neoliberal extraction, remaking the world according to those very forces.

In this vein, it is feasible to understand *Love Is the Message* as a powerful counternarrative and critical interruption to dominant climate policy. If the video unveils something like a world-destroying apocalypse, then it also performs the original meaning of that term as a modality of revelation. The video’s appropriated footage of the creature’s dripping secondary jaws from Ridley Scott’s 1979 classic *Alien*, and those of the city-destroying monster from *Cloverfield*, Matt Reeve’s 2008 faux-found-footage horror film, provide some of the elements of Jafa’s hieroglyphic scaffolding of

AMAZING
SPACE



6.4 Arthur Jafa, *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* (video still), 2016. Digital color video, with sound, 7 min., 25 sec. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York / Rome.

meaning-construction around climate apocalypse, ultimately forming a rebus of excessive signification. It constructs an allegory serving to elevate the tragic-but-quotidian documents of police violence and racial oppression to the realm of cosmopolitical magnitude, the arena where worlds are annihilated and remade.³⁵ In other words, any given police attack cannot be seen merely as a stand-alone local event (a simple weather report); instead, by virtue of Jafa's stream of collected footage, each forms part of the systematic patterns of widespread violence, and further, that violence becomes a matter of civilizational threat akin to the horror of an alien assault on planet Earth. The monstrous tells a story of global warming driving racial injustice, a narrative of postnatural dystopia resulting from, or figuring as, runaway climate change. These scenes of invasion and annihilation propose so many film fables that might be read variously: whether as representing the greedy and senseless destruction of the world conducted by the rapacious power of carceral capital, bolstered by police climate control, the colonization of debt, and the chains of spectacle; or the radical and threatening otherness

of racial difference, including whiteness, become a predatory behemoth; or alternately, a justice-seeking revenge fantasy upon white-supremacist culture (an overarching political, economic, and social system of domination) by what lies beyond recognition; or the materialization of contemporary fears of a genetically and geoengineered Frankensteinian science in creating postnatural dystopias and apocalyptic climate change. Or indeed it might suggest some element of each all mixed together without articulate or stable meaning: a figuration of intersectionalist ecology.

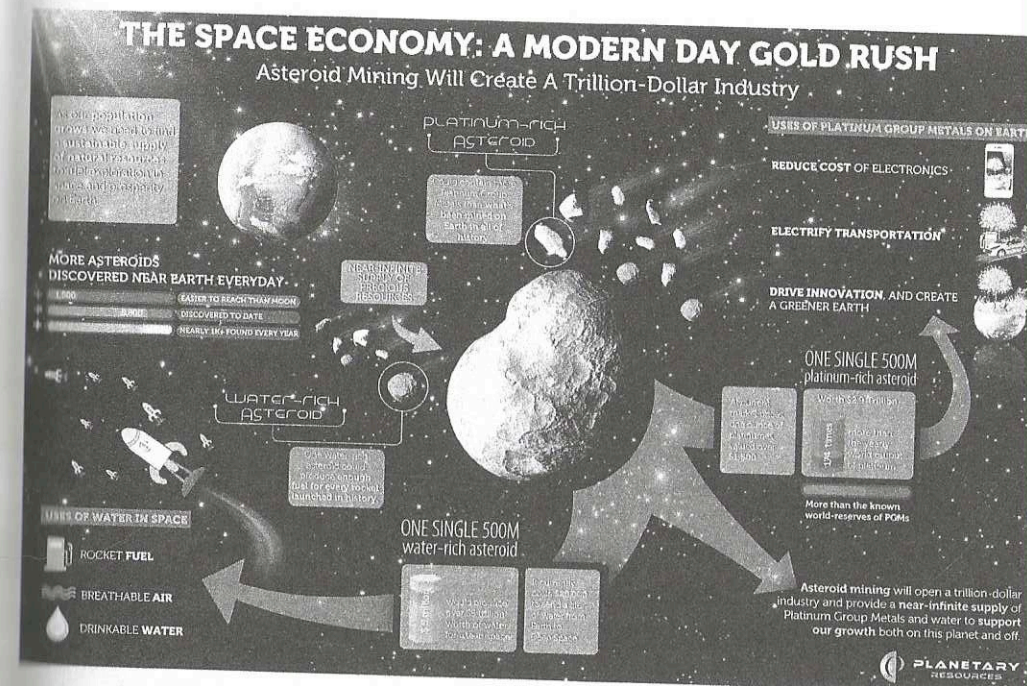
THE NEOLIBERAL ANTHROPOCENE

The Breakthrough Institute also references the monstrous, our “contemporary Frankenstein”—putting it to work and enlisting no less than Bruno Latour in its theoretical machinery. In his essay “Love Your Monsters,” Latour argues that we must not disown the planetary monster we have created—the Earth of the Anthropocene—but learn to love and care for it through further technological acts of “modernizing modernization.”³⁶ It is true that Latour subsequently came around to explicitly reject climate engineering—“as Gaia cannot be compared to a machine, it cannot be subjected to any sort of re-engineering. As the activists say: ‘There is no Planet B.’”³⁷ However, his earlier position had already been put to task, and remains live on the institute’s website (as of December 2019), continuing to support the latter’s mission into the present. Responding to Latour’s position, Naomi Klein overlooks his posthumanist call for an updated “compositionist” relearning as a necessary part of that modernizing modernization, entailing “a process of becoming ever-more attached to, and intimate with, a panoply of nonhuman natures,” but she rightly criticizes the presumptuousness of his embrace of technology, especially where it aids in the institute’s pro-engineering agenda: “The earth is not our prisoner, our patient, our machine, or, indeed, our monster. It is our entire world. And the solution to global warming is not to fix the world, it is to fix ourselves.”³⁸ Adding to mounting opposition to geoengineering, she highlights the multiple problems of the practice, including its potential unintended side effects (e.g., interfering in monsoons in South Asia, exacerbating drought in North Africa, widening the ozone hole); the lack of any global regulatory protocol for climate interventions with transnational implications; the lock-in effect that makes it next to impossible to abandon the technology once it has been implemented, to the point where catastrophic temperature rise would occur as soon as its protective shielding

came to an end; its antidemocratic basis in an era of unregulated globalism led by a handful of powerful developed nations; and, crucially, its directing of precious resources away from the causes of climate disruption, in favor of addressing its symptoms.³⁹

Resonating with these critiques, in recent years popular resistance movements have formed around the theory and practice of climate justice, asserting the fundamental principle of “system change, not climate change,” where justice means prioritizing equality, fairness, and the inclusion of the most vulnerable and frontline communities in the deliberation of climate solutions.⁴⁰ These areas of climate-justice activism are also invariably intersectional in their political ambitions: think of the ongoing battle in central France to stop the new airport and invent a noncapitalist commons at the territory known as the Zad; Standing Rock’s ongoing opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline and expression of Indigenous sovereignty and land-based environmental rights; the many examples of Blockadia pitted against fossil fuel infrastructure and extraction projects across the Americas, including mobilizations in Louisiana against the Bayou Bridge Pipeline, in British Columbia against the Trans Mountain Pipeline, and those in Ecuador against oil drilling in Yasuní National Park; and the proliferating European climate camps and the Ende Gelände (Here and No Further!) movement in Germany, where the state is currently threatening to tear down the ancient Hambach forest to dig for coal, evicting activists along the way.⁴¹ More than mere anti-climate change protests, these are all pledged variously to the goal of reinventing forms of life dedicated to democracy, equality, and ecological flourishing, based on the refusal of the imperatives of capitalist growth and its market-based mechanisms for addressing climate breakdown. In other words, they seek to expand the social technologies of justice in the name of new climates of ecosocialism, cultivating environments of equality and self-determination as well as thriving multispecies life.⁴² But despite growing momentum toward creative transitions, it is becoming clear with the ongoing development of geoengineering that massive resources and funding bodies are mobilizing that technology under the star of the neoliberal Anthropocene.⁴³

Consider Breakthrough Initiatives—which has no relation to the institute other than sharing a trending term, one with alarming violent connotations, within the field of competitive tech development. It is one among many organizations trying to “save the planet,” motivated in doing so by what some see as a \$12 trillion opportunity.⁴⁴ Funded in part by Facebook’s



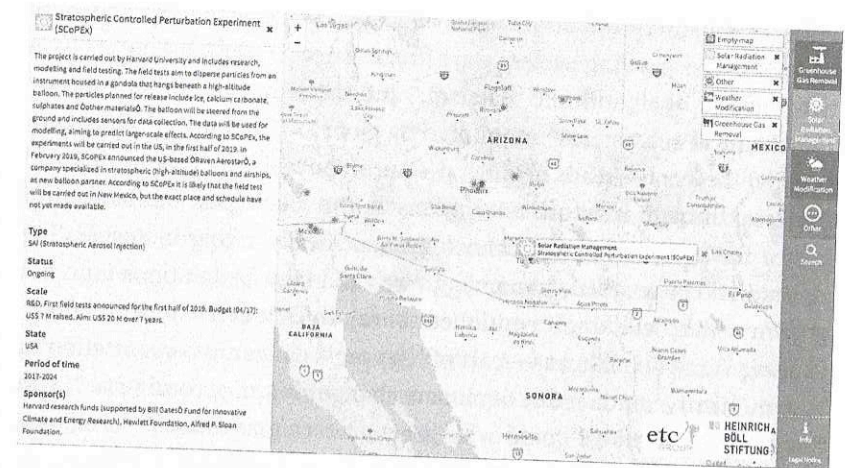
6.5 Planetary Resources, “The Space Economy,” 2012.

Mark Zuckerberg and Israeli Russian venture capitalist Yuri Milner of Digital Sky Technologies, and counting the late Stephen Hawking among its collaborators, the project recently put \$100 million into an interplanetary radio wave project to search for alien life.⁴⁵ Inspired by a techno-libertarian entrepreneurialism that derides the outmoded and bureaucratic state agencies of the Cold War including NASA, Breakthrough Initiatives is part of a growing “colonial futurism” premised upon the neoliberalization of outer space. It connects to the projects of Silicon Valley’s modeling of “NewSpace,” as in the rhetoric of Tesla entrepreneur Elon Musk, set on asteroid resource mining, terraforming other planets like Mars, and extending property claims far into the galaxy.⁴⁶ With the neoliberal corporate-military-state complex determined to occupy and settle the very space that many Afrofuturists have long sought in science and sonic fiction as an emancipated destination to escape colonized Earth, such starry-eyed fantasies stand to become grim off-planet industrial realities in years to come.⁴⁷ Yet if anything, this technoscience engineering formation parallels and joins the same forces that support the militarization and technologization of police functions, border

security, and endless war. These forces also operate to expand economic inequality and generalized indebtedness, supporting the creation of for-profit prisons and security technologies, as well as the criminalization of protest, to the point where the state increasingly treats any opposition to this emerging global regime as terrorism.⁴⁸

Other engineering initiatives focus their attention on Earth's climate, exemplifying how the same neocolonialist spirit haunts new-wave environmentalism. Consider SCoPEX, Harvard University's current \$20 million "Stratospheric Controlled Perturbation Experiment," notable for its first-ever plans to test solar radiation management technologies outside the lab in the Earth's atmosphere, in this case above Arizona (representing a vertical politics of colonization above lands occupied by settlers long ago). Led by David Keith, Harvard professor of applied physics, founder and board member of the private corporation Carbon Engineering, and signatory of "An Ecomodernist Manifesto," the project is supported by Microsoft's Bill Gates and his Fund for Innovative Climate and Energy Research, as well as by the Hewlett Foundation and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation (this last is a revealing beneficiary, considering that it is named for the longtime CEO of General Motors and indicating how fossil capital now fuels engineering as the favored response to climate threat and as a diversified strategy of wealth accumulation).⁴⁹ Notable as well for its funding model that joins university engineering and climate-science research to Big Tech capital, SCoPEX parallels a marine cloud-brightening field experiment in Moss Landing, California, led by the Joint Institute for the Study of the Atmosphere and Ocean (JISAO) at the University of Washington, directed by Thomas Peter Ackerman, professor of atmospheric sciences, with Paul Crutzen as a senior advisor. With \$16 million in support from Gates and others, the project plans to shoot seawater droplets into the atmosphere from a ship with high-pressure nozzles, creating a solar shield to deflect sunlight, mitigating global warming.⁵⁰

Recalling Achille Mbembe's diagnoses of creeping precarization as "the becoming-Black of the world"—meaning the generalization of racialized dispossession, indebtedness, and loss of powers of self-determination under late capital—geoengineering's desire to save the world by whitening the sky dramatizes how completely detached color-blind technoscience is from the socioecological catastrophes currently occurring on the ground in the here and now.⁵¹ While geoengineering may follow from love of Earth, its message is premised on the death of social justice, racial and economic equality, and democratic governance.



6.6 Geoengineering Monitor map showing Stratospheric Controlled Perturbation Experiment (SCoPEX), Arizona, 2019 (<https://map.geoengineeringmonitor.org>).

The go-to guide for Zuckerberg and Gates is Yuval Noah Harari's recent book *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, which, tellingly, includes a chapter, titled "The Anthropocene," very much narrated from a pro-tech position (in fact Gates favorably reviewed the book for *The New York Times*).⁵² Driven by an endless quest for "bliss, immortality, and divinity," *anthropos*, in this narrative, figures as ultimate and divine self-creator, for whom no challenge—climate change, agricultural failure, artificial intelligence, planetary hunger, even death and extinction—will be beyond technological overcoming, especially when matched to Silicon Valley capital. According to critic Joanna Zaluska, "There is a very clear sense in many of the science papers on the Anthropocene and their popularized media versions that the salvation from the Anthropocene's alleged finalism will come from a secularized yet godlike elsewhere: an escape to heavens (i.e., a planetary relocation), or an actual upgrade of humans to the status of *Homo Deus*. In both of these narratives Man arrives in the post-Anthropocene New Jerusalem fully redeemed—and redesigned."⁵³ In this regard, *Homo Deus* resonates with Breakthrough Institute affiliate and ecomodernist Mark Lynas's 2011 book, *The God Species: Saving the Planet in the Age of Humans*, itself an update of ecomodernist Stuart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* motto from the late 1960s: "We are as gods and have to get good at it."⁵⁴ It is easy to see how the likes of Zuckerberg, Gates, and Musk could be seduced by such delusions of grandeur. At the same time, the cost of this new world order, according

to Harari's analysis, will be greater social inequality guided by technocracy, featuring an expanding useless class (formerly called the working class), a new religion of algorithmic "dataism," and the reduction of humanity to "biochemical subsystems" monitored by global AI networks.⁵⁵ More prosaically, the good—read: neoliberal—Anthropocene emerges in this and the Breakthrough Institute's narrations as the ideological mechanism of choice for accelerating geotechnology, specifically aiding in suspending contradictions between economic growth and climate solutions (another version of the "delinking" mentioned above). In fact, even climate change-denying Texas Republicans—part of "the most dangerous organization in human history, on the issue of climate change alone," according to Noam Chomsky—can get on board with geoengineering as a not-to-be-missed pro-tech economic opportunity, requiring no need to debate sources of environmental transformation or hold petrocapi-talism responsible.⁵⁶ In the process, climate breakdown causality (and along with it, accountability and justice) is sacrificed on the altar of techno-solutionism.

The Trump administration has infamously defied the scientific consensus on climate breakdown, supporting fossil fuel deregulations at every turn (merging neoliberal extractivism with evangelical denialism, although those ties are beginning to fray). Its February 2018 budget, supported by many in the US Congress, included the first-ever tax breaks for new applications of atmospheric carbon capture, a key geoengineering technology (although this form may be one of the lesser evils, and even necessary for future drawdown, it still does redirect precious funding away from mitigating the causes of climate disruption). Meanwhile, the Hoover Institution, the Heartland Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute—all key conservative think-tanks—support this move, the latter hailing geoengineering as nothing less than "a revolutionary approach to climate change," where "climate change" seems synonymous with "regime change" in moving closer toward the new world order of *Homo Deus*.⁵⁷ Even more alarming is the current conceptualization by Keith and others of "counter-geoengineering," the tactical counteracting of the militarized weaponization of climate manipulation technologies as deployed by imagined rogue states or non-state actors.⁵⁸ This additional danger dramatizes engineering's ultimately ungovernable status and the potential for its destructive instrumentalization. Even more than biologically regressive, neohumanist and universalist, depoliticizing and neocolonialist, Anthropocene geoengineering may well prove most threatening where techno-utopianism merges with military

unilateralism in proposing (and thereby helping realize) near-future global weather wars, going far beyond anything imagined during the Cold War.

THE ABJECT SUBLIME

The horror of those systems, expanding from depersonalized networks of political economy and technological assemblages to everyday acts of violence, are, as we have seen, devastatingly presented in *Love Is the Message*. Yet that's not all Jafa's video presents. It also powerfully intercuts those traumatic and traumatizing passages with scenes portraying the remarkable resilience, accomplishment, and beauty of African American culture—despite all—in activism, politics, speculative imagination, rhetoric, music, dance, literature, athletics, and, profoundly, quotidian forms of creativity. There is Martin Luther King Jr. riding in a car during a civil rights-era protest; Malcolm X speechifying; and Louis Farrakhan besting Mike Wallace on TV in 1996 during a 60 Minutes interview. There are glimpses of Angela Davis from the 1970s, and of Black feminist scholar Hortense Spillers more recently. We see President Barack Obama singing "Amazing Graze" in Charleston after the racist shooting of Black churchgoers. Michael Jackson dances in the backseat of a car; gospel musician Mahalia Jackson sings and hugs Louis Armstrong. There are shots of Black Lives Matter protests. There are images of the Notorious B.I.G., Jimi Hendrix jamming, rapper Earl Sweatshirt performing. There is Serena Williams dancing after her 2012 Olympics tennis win, basketball wiz Stephen Curry in action, and legends Michael Jordan and Scotty Pippen celebrating on court. All of these, and more, intercut and interrupt the relentlessly unfolding images of anti-Black violence.

The positive and the negative, love and death, repeatedly and relentlessly oscillate and converge in explosive combination in this piece, proposing something like a singular Vine compilation of cutting philosophical import, or an Instagram feed of alternating soul-destroying and restorative affects. Jafa terms it "the abject sublime," an extraordinary rhythm of beauty and horror, issuing from a remixed archive of Black visual culture that seems infinite in its range of experiences.⁵⁹ For the filmmaker, this ultimately beyond-quantifiable record of being and becoming, of life and lives, a Black poetics in aesthetic form, stems from an ontological construction inseparable from the wake of transatlantic slavery, even while it unfolds in infinite acts of resistance and overcoming.⁶⁰ The video's description-defying vastness, its overwhelming multivalence, is signaled in Greg Tate's



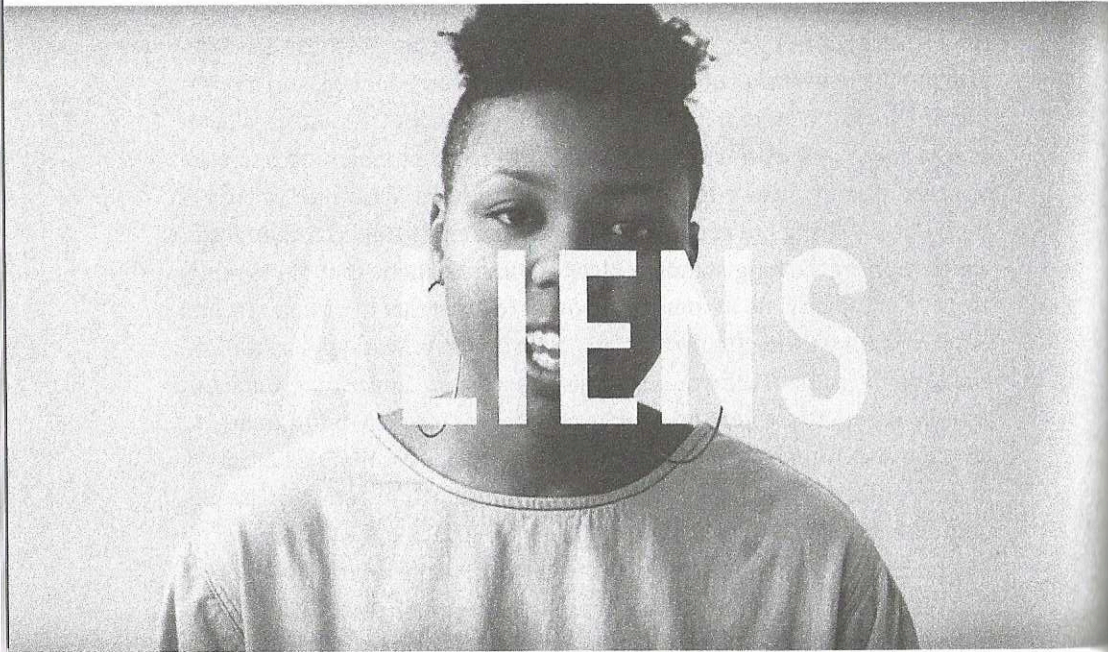
6.7 Arthur Jafa, *Love Is the Message, the Message Is Death* (video still), 2016. Digital color video, with sound, 7 min., 25 sec. Courtesy of the artist and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York / Rome.

appropriately transgressive grammar used in describing the piece: "The viral outgrowth of an aborted found-footage exercise, the 7-minute video is an alternately mirthful-cum-melancholic-cum-cardiac-arresting meditation on race-agency wrapped in a visually sermonic recitation of race tragedy wrapped in a nuanced and feverish exultation of diverse Black American lives at various states of collapse and regeneration."⁶¹

Yet even though the video offers an amazing and startling account of generative ambivalence and creative survival, and even while it also gives rise to encompassing hopefulness-in-action in collective moments of love, solidarity, ethical conviction, and collective justice-seeking, it simultaneously obliterates any consideration of extending or sustaining its world of horror—one of beyond-grotesque inequality, impoverishment, and violence that renders Black life and lives matterless by the state and its technohuman apparatuses. Unlike the Breakthrough Institute, which, as we have seen, proffers art and leisure as rewards for technofixed climate futures, Jafa's video grounds cosmopolitical magnitude within the vernacular

instances of in/justice, of situated and embodied expressions that may be future-oriented but are intimately historically informed, which are dedicated to the reinvention of quotidian life, art, culture, politics, and mourning. It follows, then, that Jafa would extend solidarity to a younger generation of cultural practitioners and visionary thinkers by including reference to artist Martine Syms's 2015 "Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto" in *Love Is the Message*. During her cameo appearance, she reads from her manifesto, which reprises the long-standing Black cultural aesthetic that draws on visions of a utopian time to come but in order to insist that it must be reached only by passing through the traumatic alienations, past and present, of racial capitalism. In other words, Syms's is a *mundane futurism*, founded in worldly experience where no simple time travel, off-planetary exodus, or easy shapeshifting is possible, especially if it means escaping from reality in an act of naïve utopianism. In this regard, "Mundane Afrofuturists recognize that we are not aliens," she explains while facing the camera seated behind a desk, responding to earlier generations of Afrofuturists, such as Sun Ra, who claimed to be from outer space and to understand it as an ultimate field of emancipation.

Jafa borrows that clip from Syms's manifesto that inspired the eponymous documentary shown online on KCET.⁶² Over the course of its hour-long duration, Syms appears in various passages reiterating points made in her written account.⁶³ In it, she eschews the depoliticized fates of past Afrofuturisms, despite their important explorations of alien identifications within Black culture as allegorizing the historical experience of slavery's kidnappings and violent decontextualizations, even though these alien identifications have also come to symptomize a problematic departure from current reality that may negatively reinforce racial difference.⁶⁴ According to Syms, classic versions of Afrofuturism have gradually sunk into hackneyed fashions, commodifiable styles, and stale pop-cultural spectacles severed from any radical imagination-inspiring collective liberation. Moreover, she warns against acritical escapism, as when "magic interstellar travel and/or the wondrous communication grid" lead to "an illusion of outer space and cyberspace as egalitarian," as if those places would not also extend earthly alienations and inequalities, as we have seen in the case of off-planet extractivism and neocolonial terraforming. For her, "jive-talking aliens," "reference to Sun Ra," and "Egyptian mythology and iconography" are all outmoded, and she calls instead for "a new focus on black humanity: our science, technology, culture, politics, religions, individuality, needs, dreams, hopes, and failings,"



6.8 Ways and Means / KCET, *The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto* (still featuring artist Martine Syms), 2015.

explaining that “Mundane Afrofuturism is the ultimate laboratory for world-building outside of imperialist, capitalist, white patriarchy.”⁶⁵

While *Love Is the Message* conveys solidarity with the oppressed and excluded, both human and non, Syms’s position rejects the simple equivalence between racial difference and the monstrous. In this vein, it resonates with what artist and writer Aria Dean diagnoses as the current conjunction of Afrofuturism with Black accelerationism, a superpositioning that entails both a catalytic movement toward “the end of the world” that is politically embraced (in order to stop injustice, to negate its abuses) and a revolution within and beyond the in/humanisms of racial capitalism (by inventing new forms of life, new futures, and new desires).⁶⁶ One can perceive precisely these in/humanisms—oscillating between abject dehumanizations and the sublime transcendence of those base circumstances in emergent forms of humanization as well as alien post-humanisms—as dramatized and materialized in the performative gestures, radical poetics, and scenes of revolutionary resistance re-presented and re-energized in Jafa’s video. As such, a younger generation has elected to update Afrofuturism, or at least

re-radicalize it, specifically via a double move that rhymes negative critique with positive transformation. Jafa in turn draws provocatively on these very dynamics, setting its complex energies to his own visual rhythms and “affective proximities” of audiovisual counterpoint.⁶⁷

The goal here, for me, is bringing this vision, this aesthetic infrastructure of social critique and liberation, into explicit connection—and more importantly, direct conflict—with the neoliberal Anthropocene, and to mobilize the former to oppose the latter’s threats of unjust climate control and extractive futurism. The ecomodernist agenda is, as we have seen, intent on shaping the world to come; and with deep resources and the political will to do so, it promises not only to set us on a track of unstoppable climate transformation for years to come but also to interminably extend forms of violent social inequality, including racial injustice and white supremacy.⁶⁸ If “capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable,” then we must move beyond those horizons.⁶⁹ Going beyond, we urgently need to invent and work toward cultivating futures beyond the world’s end, an end that has occurred and will occur, and where that end is no longer unthinkable beyond the current dominance of sociopolitical and economic arrangements.⁷⁰ In other words, the challenge is to think, imagine, and create a world beyond imperialist, capitalist, white patriarchy and its technofixes of (false) socioeconomic sustainability.

Doing so, it is vital to ask, why should this challenge concern communities living beyond or outside the cultural traditions of Afrofuturism? While it may not motivate all who remain comfortably shielded by whiteness and benefit from the current narratives, practices, and economic arrangements that uphold its position and privileges, that challenge directly inspires solidarity among all those dedicated to tearing down the toxic machinery of racial capitalism and its climates of control. For only such a political composition of alliances that defines the construction of a diverse “we” is capable of transcending identitarian differences in the articulation of a common political horizon, one that struggles against the divide-and-conquer tactics of dominant corporate power and its oppression of all. In this sense, diverse communities—working class, white and of color, migrant, multiply gendered, socialist, LGBTQ, and Indigenous, and in all of their intersectionalist combinations—stand only to benefit from Black liberation. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor writes, “While it is true that when Black people get free, everyone gets free, Black people in America cannot ‘get free’ alone. In that sense, Black liberation is bound up with the project of human liberation and social transformation.”⁷¹

For those of us opposed to racial capitalism and its engineering technologies, we enter into solidarity because we remain committed to a shared world where “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” as argued Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. That means bringing about an urgent dis-identification from the white futurism, godly aspirations, and whitewashed Anthropocene entailed in the technosolutionist project of geoengineering. Expressing a radical justice-to-come with new politico-ecological purpose, Fred Moten, in a recent public conversation with Robin D. G. Kelley, has updated that famous ethico-political formulation of King (who, it should be remembered, makes an appearance in Jafa’s video, and who consistently invoked the spirit of the indivisibility of justice). Moten posits the mission of contemporary Black studies as “on the most fundamental level to try to save the earth, and on a secondary level to save the possibility of human existence.”⁷² Kelley adds that this is a “project for liberation,” a “transformative project,” and, moreover, contends that if it does not mount a response to “the neoliberal, neo-fascist turn, then it’s worthless.” In equal measure, this project for liberation and transformation cannot but identify the overarching imperative of artistic practice today. If so—and I believe that it must—then art will name the practice of creative aesthetics that merges socioecological insight with political engagement in the hopes of not only saving what good we have left, but securing a flourishing and emancipated future for all.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE GREAT TRANSITION

THE ARTS AND RADICAL SYSTEM CHANGE

With the rise of Trumpism, the US finds itself in nothing less than a state of emergency. We face a conflictual and volatile regime of postliberal plutocracy dedicated to corrupt wealth accumulation, fueled by patriarchal and white supremacist resentment. With repressive attacks on independent media and civil society, the empowered administration is mobilizing populist rhetoric to militarize borders, using lawfare to arm the courts with neoreaction and unleashing counterinsurgency forces to fortify its rule, dividing and conquering via a politics of racist, sexist, antimigrant, and religious extremism. Moreover, this political formation is joining and inspiring analogues in Europe, Asia, and Latin America in defining the current global ascendancy of postdemocratic authoritarian capitalism (the Philippines, Brazil, Russia, China, Myanmar, and Israel come particularly to mind)—giving critics occasion to revive the term *fascism* in relation to our present.¹ Like those global examples, Trump’s ethnonationalist fixation on domestic “greatness” is thoroughly extractivist—attempting to exploit all available natural and human resources in an effort to maximize elite profits at a time of grotesque economic inequality translated into racial insecurity