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Post-Apocalyptic Visions: Biopolitics, Late Capitalism, and Trauma in *Children of Men* and *Naked City Spleen*

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Abstract

Alfonso Cuarón's film, *Children of Men* (2006), and Miru Kim's photographic series *Naked City Spleen* (2007) are essential to illustrate the causal process by which biopower accelerates—in the way that it fuses with late capitalistic tendencies—and transforms into the post-apocalyptic, the surplus of the recognizable, but unnameable “event” as considered by Žižek and Derrida on a global scale. As capitalism accelerates by means of technological and military advancement, it marks alterity in non-citizens as biological threat. There is always already the perception of imminent danger to the survival of the controlling structure. Neoliberal practices in late capitalism work as biopower in the societal body. The traumatic aftermath of this event can be observed in the film and the photographic series that are discussed in my article, both of which serve as case studies of how as late capitalism and biopower are bonded they become the source of communal and individual trauma.

Keywords:

Alfonso Cuarón, Miru Kim, Biopower, Late Capitalism, Trauma, Event, Apocalypse, Post-Apocalypse, *Children of Men*, *Naked City Spleen*

Mankind...can experience its
own
destruction as an aesthetic
pleasure.
Walter Benjamin

Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the
earth,
and their seed from among the children of
men
Psalms 21.10

Late capitalism tends towards profit exhaustively. Once profitability is achieved, the capitalist drive will exponentially reproduce the dynamics that lead to gains at the cost of anything and anyone. The radical tension between profits and costs means that the capitalist will constantly change, challenge, or bypass established laws, trade agreements, or environmental concerns. Political

decisions, economic and military reactions, the will to alter and dispose of individuals and collectives of people (communities, cities, and even nations) in the aftermath of their “apocalypse” is observable in Alfonso Cuarón’s 2006 film *Children of Men*, and Miru Kim’s photographic series *Naked City Spleen* (2007).¹

The works studied here are the culmination of an aesthetics of destruction as viewed by minoritarian artists/subjects while informed, bought, and distributed by a globalized cinematic and artistic market. In the case of *Children of Men*, a British-American co-production with Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón at the helm,² the film is the disaster/science fiction example at the heart of an informal, perhaps unintended, cinematographic movement that explores the effects of the confluence of migration, alterity, and calamity, as they are tied to the disruption/destruction of personal, communal, and national cosmologies. *Children of Men* is more relevant and timely than ever as it brings to the fore the possible authoritarian outcomes of fearing displaced, migrant, and refugee bodies.³

The earliest cinematic instance of the issues mentioned before is Guillermo del Toro’s *Cronos* (1993) as it reformulates notions of horror, language, and exile within a Mexican and international tradition. Carlos Reygadas’s *Stellet Licht* (2007; Mexico, France, Netherlands), González Iñárritu’s *Babel* (2006; United States, Mexico, France) and again, Guillermo del Toro’s *El laberinto del fauno* (2006; Mexico, Spain) are all examples of international co-productions that go beyond the scope of Mexican national cinema to question and process these preoccupations while, paradoxically, being funded, for the most part, by global corporations unperturbed by any other outcome than a profitable (cultural) product.⁴ In the case of New York-based Kim—who was born in the United States but raised in Korea—, she is at the forefront of ruins photography (“ruins porn” for its detractors). Her work evinced her foray in urban exploration. Kim achieved critical success by rearticulating and establishing a visual language by placing and documenting her own naked (minoritarian) body within the urban ruins and its environs.⁵ The works of both Kim and Cuarón, when placed in “South-South” dialogue, are essential to illustrate the causal process by which biopower accelerates—in the way that it integrates and fuses with late capitalistic tendencies—and transforms into the post-apocalyptic, the surplus of the recognizable, yet unnameable, catastrophic event.

Slavoj Žižek defines the “event” philosophically “at its purest and most minimal.” For Žižek, the concept, in its own very nature, comes as unexpected, shocking and above all, resides as a mystery in a non-place that affects reality. The event is surprising because it is: “something shocking,

out of joint that appears to happen all of a sudden and interrupts the usual flow of things; something that emerges seemingly out of nowhere, without discernible causes, an appearance without solid being as its foundation” (*Event* 4-5). There is something that is shattered as the event occurs because “[t]here is, by definition, something ‘miraculous’ in an event.” Furthermore, Žižek stresses the paradoxical nature of the event as “*the effect that seems to exceed its cause—and the space of an event is that which opens up by the gap that separates an effect from its causes*” (emphasis in the original, *Event* 4-5).

In his text, there is a recognition of the potency of the “event” in relation to the established order of things, normalcy, or the ordinary, because it establishes itself as a vague “space.” Žižek shares Jacques Derrida’s view of the event as an ambiguous, unfathomable space. Derrida explains that the “thinking of the event always opens a certain messianic space—as abstract, formal, barren, as un-‘religious’ as it must be” (*Ecographies* 11). Moreover, Derrida hints, in *Of Grammatology*, at what the aftermath of the “event” would entail if we think of it in terms of “surplus” and “supplement”:

The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the fullest measure of presence. But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as one fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself. (145)

By linking the definition of the post-apocalyptic to the Derridean concept of the “supplement” the relation of the event to a deconstructive and traumatological drive inherent to both biopower and late capitalism is highlighted. Furthermore, if Žižek is correct in understanding that break in causal constructions as “space” or “gap,” it will have to be filled (as the supplement “fills a void”) by spectral or residual presences that act as if imbued with subjectivity but are in reality substitutions or reverberations (supplements) of the regulating order still seeking control, over what remains, in the form of perverse control:

The supplement will always be the moving of the tongue or acting through the hands of others. In it everything is brought together: Progress as the possibility of perversion, regression toward an evil that is not natural and that adheres to the power of substitution, that permits us to absent ourselves and act by proxy, through the hands of others. (147)

These synecdochic “hands of others” are better explained by Michel Foucault, whose seminal work *The History of Sexuality* describes the politics behind biopower, a term coined by the author to showcase technologies of power that control population and subjugate the body through

the monitoring and self-monitoring of individuals and institutions. As bodies become regulated and inserted in the “machinery of production,” the speed of technology and the hierarchies of domination become entangled in a political process where the control of life is systematic and overarching (140-41). As Foucault points out “[i]f genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers . . . it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life” (137). This power is ingrained into every subject and future citizen as biopower and it should be understood as the power of the political system over all biological aspects of life including aging, reproduction, and thought processes. Biopower is an intrusion, a mechanism to produce in the subject different outcomes that will tie him or her to the institution: first, the subject loses self-control and free will, and second, biopower entrenches in the subject an imperative need to consume whatever service or product the system decides will “enhance” the quality of life of that individual and the rest of the populace. In return, the regulated and controlled population belongs, gives form, and reproduces in its own family structure the hegemonic societal or state apparatus.

While governmental institutions embark on a mission to control the body, the acceleration of late capitalism will lead entire populations to their demise by readjusting and managing their interests and consumption. Neoliberal practices in late capitalism work as biopower in the societal body. Frederic Jameson understands late capitalism as featuring two essential major tendencies: First, “a . . . web of bureaucratic control” which is the exponential impulse to hyper-organize. The second tendency is towards the “interpenetration of government and big business” (*Postmodernism* xviii). As late capitalism accelerates by means of technological and military advancement, it “incorporates” new ways to impose divisions of labor between the first and the developing world. This leads to an a priori marking of the Other as a biological threat or as an imminent danger to the survival of the controlling power.

The Other is used as a buffer (unto which alterity is placed and exploited) and also as a means to eradicate the possibility of life without the authority of the system of control. Eugenics, as part of this exclusory system of power, can be read as a drive. Eugenics then becomes the norm in both the developing and first-world societies because corporations and government (as they intermingle) need the categories established by it as a tool to differentiate the citizens and the non-citizens, subjects and objects, “us” and “them.” Eugenics allows for a differentiation between citizens and non-citizens by actively inserting the former in the bureaucracies imposed by the State while enabling a social order that benefits the upper echelon of society. The ones categorized as citizens will be allowed to “evolve” to a certain extent, climb social and economic scales, be

understood as worthy of mediated success, while non-citizens would have to perish. The selection process will self-replicate as it integrates only citizens, maintains old threats fresh in the memory of the population, and keeps developing new threats by discovering sources of “otherness” and thus engages in new wars, to save the motherland and “our way of life.” The eugenic process goes hand in hand with biopower, which in turn is utilized as another tool of late capitalism. The natural process that results in the amalgamation of biopower and late capitalism produces the “apocalypse.” The traumatic aftermath of the event (or events) can be observed in the film and the photographic series that are discussed in this article, both of which serve as case studies of how when late capitalism and biopower bond they become the source of communal and individual trauma.

In *Children of Men*, a select few are privileged with the preservation and amplification of a bourgeois way of life post-catastrophic event. The old structure is kept and the wealthy enjoy services and products even if they are scarce for the remaining population. In the photographs collected in *Naked City Spleen*, we see the results of massive exploitation of resources. This exploitation of materials (human, natural, intellectual) leads to scarcity and eventually to the erasure of human life and its architectonic, social, and cultural constructions. The exploitation leaves only remnants and debris. The destruction of the city and its technologies (always identified as markers of progress by entrepreneurs and capitalists) looms perennially over the photographed subject. The photographed female subject lives in absolute solitude. In the aftermath of apocalypse there is no human or animal life. The only spectators to her condition are the ruins of architectural structures, bent steel, rust and decay. The city becomes her sole witness.

Amongst the destruction, paradoxically, biopower wants to conserve life by regulating it. This goal of conservation will conduce it to maintain the established order that generates the catastrophic event or events. I understand these catastrophic events as “apocalypse” which will lead the human race to its demise. It is the aim of biopower to push forward the annihilation of not only the Other, but the citizens of the State inasmuch as their inscription into the capitalist system will make them consumers of products that will cause ill-effects on their bodies. When the State is in control of individual bodies, it can modify, relocate, and assure that they follow patterns of consumption that, beyond affecting them individually, impact entire populations. The clearest example is the creation and militarization of borders that will decide who enters the nation (alive) and who is left out to perish. Thus, post-apocalyptic scenarios are the result of the inscription of biopower in the individual body and the systematic abuse of different (other) communities and their land. This inscription turn into biopolitics and the transformation of the State into what Giorgio

Agamben problematizes as a “state of exception.” The “biopolitical significance” of the state of exception, argues Agamben, is as “the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension.” The law suspends itself in order to “take hold” of non-citizens and “radically erase” the “legal status of the individual.” Here, the non-citizen is rendered a “legally unnamable and unclassifiable being” (Agamben 3). This control of a population of “unclassifiable beings” affects migration by exploiting the natural resources of less militarized lands, making the inhabitants move and become disposable human capital. When multinational companies or imperial governments consume all their resources, they move on to the next territory, leaving behind a trail of death and displaced people.

The aesthetic pervasiveness of the ruin in the works that I analyze serve as metaphor for the events that lead to the “shattering of structures” that takes place when biopower takes hold of the subject’s body. They both show how the speed in which biopower is inscribed onto bodies results in a “ruinic” state of the individual and of the environment as well. These ruins serve as a “symptom” that we can read as the hastening of late capitalism as exemplified by its desire for the newest technology, and also self-reproducing technologies as well.

James Berger articulates, in *After the End*, that there is a clear distinction between present day Apocalypticism and that of previous eras. Berger states that the Apocalypse “may have already happened,” hence, the role of technology becomes that of accelerator of catastrophe because “we live in a *post-apocalyptic* world— and . . . technology has now informed, and is itself invested with, apocalyptic tendencies” (*After the End* 38). Hartmut Rosa adds to this vision of acceleration by explaining the process in which capitalism dramatically increases its speed as a “crucial factor of production,” since the creation of new technologies gives the companies an edge over their competitors (*Social Acceleration* 89). Whichever company acquires the latest technological advances generates the most profits. As the development of new technologies continue, the cycle of production speeds and competitors need to catch up. This phenomenon raises both the level of consumption and the desire for new technologies. In other words, technologies will regenerate themselves in order to increase their market share, create new revenue and dominate the business sphere at the cost of the individual subject, imposing their sphere into all the other areas of human interaction.

Paul Virilio links the cycle of production to profits in terms of an ambition to dominate by a two-pronged hegemonic apparatus: militarism and capitalism. He declares that “it is . . . impossible to clearly distinguish *economic war* from *information war*, since each involves the same hegemonic

ambition of making commercial and military exchanges interactive” (144) It is this same “hegemonic ambition” that inscribes the body within biopower and combines and recombines information through both technology and genetics, to form, in the words of the French thinker, “a single ‘weapons system’” (132).

This “weapons system” could be read as the trigger of trauma. Berger deepens this idea by theorizing that “Apocalypse and trauma are congruent ideas, for both refer to shatterings of existing structures of identity and language, and both effect their own erasures from memory and must be reconstructed by means of . . . their symptoms” (19). Biopower is the motor that moves forward the genocidal aspects of late capitalism. As biopower is inscribed within the subject, it “resets” its bearer from his or her identity by transforming them into either consumers that agglomerate everything in sight, or into objects, prime resources to be exploited. Moreover, biopower transforms the subjects that are not part of the system, the Others, into false embodiments of terror. This cycle produces a need for security for the citizens and the State becomes its sole purveyor rendering it a monopoly of security. A clear example of this movement of human capital can be seen in *Children of Men*.

Children of Men takes place in the year 2027, the world has collapsed and all women have become infertile. No child has been born in 18 years. Female bodies are criminalized if they refuse fertility testing. The government controls most aspects of human life and provides people with pharmaceutical products to commit suicide. Theo, an alcoholic bureaucrat, is the embodiment of the ruin. He is late on his rent and has only one friend, Jasper, a retired newspaper cartoonist. Theo’s hopes for the future were destroyed when his son died victim of a global flu pandemic. He is recruited by Julian—a left-wing revolutionary who happens to be his ex-wife and mother of the deceased baby—to get transit papers for Kee, a pregnant refugee. The papers are needed in order to get her to a safe place to have her “miracle” baby, key to the survival of the species.⁶

In the first scene of the film, Theo—arguably the main character—goes into a coffee shop to get his morning cup of coffee. One of the television screens in the shop informs that the youngest person on the planet, “Baby Diego” from Argentina, was killed by a fan in a bar fight because he refused to sign an autograph. As soon as Theo leaves the shop, we see a double-decker bus in passing, with a futuristic advertisement billboard that reads “Kidney £3000 * Instant Cash *.” Here we see how biopower is employed to agglomerate the resources that the ruling class needs by means of exploiting the less privileged. To prey on the lower classes to harvest organs while they remain alive, to perform unnecessary surgical procedures demonstrates how the social hierarchy

stocks on the invasion and control of the body to provide and enhance “life” and a real sense of well-being to those who the system determines valuable.

Another instance of this control of the body as shown in the film is the promotion and use of “Quietus,” a pharmaceutical product marketed and distributed by the government to induce people to commit suicide. The tag line in the commercial for the drug is “You decide when.” But this decision is not based on free will. It is a matter of volume, of the wealthiest class capturing as many resources as it can. If enough people consume the product, other vital natural resources will be available for the citizens that can afford them. It is a way to destroy a market intentionally for the sake of acquiring more products, more supply, for the remaining citizens. The system is killing the “demand” in order to “offer” a better cycle of consumption for the privileged. The life of its citizens and immigrants and non-citizens is reduced to becoming vessels where consumption is posited.

The criminalization of immigration after nuclear fallout in Africa is the conclusion of the politics behind biopower in Britain. Theo is taken to a shed where we can read the headlines of a newspaper that reads “Africa devastated by nuclear fallout.” On the same page two other headlines are linked to the main story. The first one reads: “millions of people died in seconds” while the second one pronounces “radiation is spreading fast across the African continent, leaving a path of destruction.” The collapse of all the major cities in the world and the destruction of a whole continent by radiation lead to mass migration towards Britain: the only nation that survived the horror of nuclear warfare, or, as it is strongly insinuated in the film, probably the producer the attacks.

Photographer Miru Kim also deals with the repercussions of nuclear holocaust in her work. She is an alumna of Columbia University where many of the experiments of the Manhattan Project begun. In her urban explorations and searches for locations to photograph, she went deep into the Physics laboratories at the university. The resulting set of photographs depicts a spectral figure haunting the place where the technological weaponization of energy accelerated as a result of the atomic race between Germany and the United States. This ever-present spectral being is a naked woman. Kim is keen to adopt buildings, tunnels, and underground spaces that have a sense of history, and which can be read as traumatic. For example, some of her work includes tunnels in Berlin and Paris that show their foundation and also the ruins of the bombings from the Second World War. I read this as an approach to the possibility of annihilation and a remembrance of the ruin. In “Columbia University, NYC, NY 3,” viewers observe the naked female subject standing, looking ahead and away into a two-level laboratory that looks abandoned but for some unexplained

reason continues to have electricity and remains powered. In what seems to be an underground facility, there is tubing and cables all around. Despite the continuity of the use of technology and electrical power, the human subject in the photograph gives the impression of melancholy or bewilderment. She observes her environment as if fascinated by the technological maze that surrounds her. Is it impotence or is she now a specter for all humanity?

Miru Kim's photographic series, *Naked City Spleen*, depict dilapidated city landscapes and buildings that are invaded by the inclusion of an anonymous naked Asian female subject. In a 2007 interview, she explains that she "like[s] the idea of these places being haunted by a ghost figure or a wild child or something, like this person who is the last person on earth" (*Esquire* Nov. 2007). If *Children of Men* captures the essence of the apocalyptic event (or events), *Naked City Spleen* goes a step further and shows us the aftermath of biopower. The series of photographs could be read as a continuation of the film in the sense that she could be that "last person on earth," that "wild child" that is, miraculously, still alive. If the "Child," as vision of futurity and redemption, is alone in the universe then the figure shatters into oblivion.⁷ The ghostly presence that Kim alludes to could be seen as the remnant of humanity left in a world consumed by capitalist hegemony: a world where the "Child" is not allowed to survive.

It is in this fight for survival that *Children of Men* positions the debate and constant tug-of-war between the "Fishes," Julian's revolutionary group whose purpose is to acquire rights for immigrants, and the government, which is heavily militarized and persecutes all foreigners as terrorists. Both sides want control over Kee and her unborn child for political purposes. When Julian is murdered by her own group, Theo takes the responsibility of delivering the pregnant girl to the "Human Project" boat which is a hospital disguised as a fishing boat. The "Human Project" was a panel of scientists and other intellectuals who were given the task to decipher why women became sterile. They became a splinter group from the government and supposedly created a sanctuary in the Azores Archipelago. Their status is mythical since none of their representatives appear in the film and no character has ever been in contact with them except for Julian.

In order for Theo to get the transit papers he needs to go to the "Ark of the Arts" to meet his cousin Nigel, who is in charge of it. Nigel sends an expensive and luxurious car with a chauffeur to pick him up. As the car leaves the city and goes through a heavily militarized checkpoint, the contrast between the working class citizens and those who are wealthy becomes more than evident. In the city, the spectators see a state of total ruin. There is trash everywhere. There is no color or vegetation. Gray and ash dominate the cinematographic palette. The buildings are not cared for and

the people are bombarded by all types of advertisement. The population that lives and works in the city is constantly monitored by the police, the military, and each other. Individuals are always surveilled. On the other hand, as we ride along Theo in the limousine through the suburbs, we witness a well-organized parade going towards a park where families are enjoying a picnic and listening to the music of a symphonic orchestra. Everything is green and clean.

Before Theo goes in the ark, (the camera appears to be a witness who follows the main character, as we also do as spectators) we first see the work of Banksy, an infamous graffiti and stencil artist. Part of the wall where his stencil is displayed has been moved from its original location. It has been captured and deemed worthy of the “ark.” It will be impossible for most people to see it. The commodification of Art plays an important role in the film since it allegorizes the human condition in that world. To deny access to beauty implies an aesthetic control of the body and the desire of the State for the disappearance of pleasure for the masses.

In the Ark’s vestibule we encounter Michelangelo’s “David” with a steel rod for its left leg. The image is a forceful metaphor of the invasion of technology into the human body. The Renaissance ideal of “Man,” as the perfect measure of the universe, is destroyed since “David,” that chosen male figure, is supported by a steel rod. The erosion of the leg can also imply lost liberties since the sculpture is a portrayal of King David right before he goes to battle against Goliath thus, trying to defend his people from oppression and annihilation. Here the catastrophic event would have occurred if Goliath defeated the king turning the cataclysm into an irresolvable trauma.

David, besides being the defender of his people, was also a writer. He composed the Book of Psalms from the Old Testament where the second epigraph of this work is taken from. In the verse, David curses humanity and asks God to destroy their sustenance and their ability to reproduce. The condemnation even embraces the figure of the king. The impotence of the idealized male to sustain itself mirrors the impossibility of human females to carry fetuses to full development.

After Nigel and Theo meet, they have a lavish dinner with expensive wine and other types of liquor in what appears to be total disregard to the vicissitudes that the rest of the population is facing. Meanwhile, the spectators observe Nigel’s son—Alex—being forced to take pills by his own father and simultaneously withdrawn permanently to a computer screen linked to his brain. The instantaneity of information does not allow Alex to see the works of art that surround him, ironically, *Guernica*, a painting that Picasso painted to warn about the terrible outcomes of war. The son appears to be drained out of his humanity by the internalization of the entanglement between

biopower and technology in his body. In this manner, even the upper classes are exposed and are controlled by the system's use of biopower as a mode of subjugation.

Kee, the pregnant girl, manifests an intuition about the process in which biopower is inscribed to the body by the social dynamics in place. In the scene, Miriam, Kee's nurse, brings Theo to a barn where the girl awaits for him. It is full of cows and technical farming equipment to extract milk from their udders. As soon as Miriam leaves, Kee starts the dialogue by expressing a concern for the cows in the barn. "You know what they do to these cows? They cut off their tits . . . Only leave four. Four tits fit the machine. It's wacko." Kee is questioning the logic of capitalism by using the production of milk as an example. "Why not make machines that suck eight titties?" The statement is pertinent since she will disrobe immediately to show Theo her pregnant body. In the future, she will breastfeed her baby. Besides the religious and messianic overtones that the film engages in by creating a parallelism between the cows and the young mother to be, the point is delivered by Kee with extreme resonance with the audience⁸.

She cannot comprehend why the producers of farm equipment do not create a machine that fits the cow's anatomy. Kee follows Julian's advice before her death, and decides that Theo will be the only person that she will trust. Once again, it is easier for multinational companies to destroy the body than produce a machine that fits it. There is no consideration for life, thus to "slice" the udders of cows is more practical and cost-efficient than to create a new machine. There will always be more cows to slice, more volume, and more ways in which the companies will profit with less effort. The logic of capitalism is, as Kee puts it, "wacko."

Miru Kim also explores the internalization of biopower and biopolitics in the human body. One of her most astonishing photographs, the naked female body, the anonymous subject appears as if it had just woken up on an autopsy table. The photographic subject is framed by a trashed surgical room that is part of a long abandoned hospital. We can see debris and water damage on the floor. To the right of the subject we can observe used and rusted surgical equipment. Cables are hanging down from the table and cans are also lying on top of it. We see a surgical lamp almost on top of her, as if she was being studied or undergoing a mysterious surgical procedure at some indeterminate point.

One of the striking features of the photograph is the spectator's inability to see the female's face clearly. The blur adds a sensation of action and dynamism but also of anonymity and fear. The body's movement creates this blur that makes us wonder if she is ready to escape, if she has seen

something dangerous or has become the witness or victim of something horrific that is making her flee. Can it be the terror of waking up as the last person on Earth?

Theo and Kee are also the last persons on Earth with new-found hope, or at least their custodians. The baby could possibly be the remnant or surplus of the collapse of the world. They are desperate to take her to safety. When Theo and Kee finally arrive at Bexhill, a citywide immigrant camp quarantined by the military, where all non-citizens and refugees are placed, they try to find a way to access the boat “Tomorrow” from there. Both the military and the “Fishes” invade the city. It is the beginning of the “uprising” for the “Fishes” and they need to use Kee’s baby as a flag because she was born of a refugee. The revolutionary group intercepts them and separates them. As Theo finds his way to the building where they take Kee and her baby, the military and the rebels begin shooting at each other. It is the start of war. Theo moves around in the line of fire. The city looks as if it was bombarded in the Second World War, simultaneously becoming pre and post-apocalyptic.

Emmanuel Lubezki (the film’s director of photography) uses a war documentary style for this pivotal scene. The camera follows Theo as a shadow; always looking over his shoulder. We, the spectators, are following the hero as if we were inside this post-apocalyptic world. Abruptly, as Theo goes into a yellow school bus that is being used as a home, one of the men living in its interior is killed by a bullet intended for Theo. Blood splatters the camera’s lens and us. The stains remain on it for several moments until Theo goes into the building to rescue Kee.

We can appraise the role of the photographic images and the film as a paradoxical technological and artistic function that makes us, the spectators, both witnesses and voyeurs of devastation. In doing so, we find pleasure in the cataclysm but are also warned of the destructive nature of neoliberalism. If Jameson is right in his assertion that “the postmodern must be characterized as a situation in which the survival, the residue, the holdover, the archaic, has finally been swept away without a trace,” then to witness the unspeakable, the unrepresentable, the erasure, gives us a future memory of the catastrophic event. Seeing it before it happens becomes both prophetic and traumatic. An example about the Jewish Holocaust could clarify this statement. It has been noted by Nanette Auerhahn and Dori Laub that “massive trauma has an amorphous presence not defined by place or time and lacking a beginning, a middle, or end, and that it shapes the internal representation of reality of several generations, becoming an unconscious organizing principle passed on by parents and internalized by their children” (*Intergenerational Memory* 22). That is to say, the “future memory” of the cataclysm is “internalized” and read by the survivors even if the event

already happened. The futurity of trauma lies in its persistence over time, making the event a constant specter that haunts the present.

Walter Benjamin predicted, as stated in the first epigraph, that humans will enjoy their “destruction as an aesthetic pleasure.” *Children of Men* and *Naked City Spleen* present the aesthetics of destruction as an instance of the human condition under a hegemonic structure. The use of biopower by the system and its claim that it protects life gives way to the subjugation of the body and the control of all the aspects that make us human. The process in which biopower transforms itself into the post-apocalyptic happens through the acceleration of late capitalism. The government’s genocidal dream can only be achieved by the concentration of capital and the ferocity with which it agglomerates resources, information, and people. This weapon is already destroying the environment and creates havoc and destruction in the Other.

The works analyzed underline the ways in which the catastrophic events are not an end to themselves, but a limit that has been crossed by the merging of militarism and multinational corporations as biopower and late capitalism. The ruins that appear visually and symbolically, demonstrate how fragmented humanity has become. It is these allegories of destruction that produce in us, the spectators, the ability to witness and enjoy a future corrupted by the domination of political institutions that impose their hierarchy. Our only redemption seems to be, as in the end of *Children of Men*, to find our own “Tomorrow.” Those of us who are immigrants are compelled to escape through parallel movements, to find a slower speed, a disguise, a mirror; to be alert and ready; to have the will to withstand capture by the system. We are compelled to resist in destitute times.

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Notes

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² Other key positions were also filled with Mexican filmmakers. Emmanuel Lubezki, arguably the most important cinematographer in Mexican film history, was tapped as director of photography in this and in other films by “global” Mexican director González Iñárritu. Lubezki developed new filmmaking methods specifically for *Children of Men*.

³ *Children of Men* is also the inheritor of the Science-Fiction trope of the “last man” where a lone survivor battles vampires, zombies, mutants or any other threat after a catastrophic event. While films adaptations of Richard Matheson’s novel *I Am Legend* like *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), *The Omega Man* (1971) and *I Am Legend* (2007; released eleven months after *Children of Men*) have focused on the idea of the sole survivor, the film studied here differs from past iterations of the trope even by focusing its attention to a minoritarian female subject and her pregnant body as the key to salvation. Perhaps a fruitful comparison could be made with the latest sequel in George Miller’s Mad Max saga: *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015). The female protagonist of the film escapes the clutches of a tyrannical ruler in order to save other women (one of them pregnant) who were forced into sexual slavery. After being unable to find paradise, she decides to return and fight for a better future for all. Although similar in a broad sense, *Mad Max: Fury Road* takes place in an indeterminate time in the future, while *Children of Men* is anchored in the plausible effects of social, economic, and political decisions.

⁴ It is interesting to note that “El Crack” literary movement, which started in the mid-nineties in Mexico, has a similar drive as the directors mentioned in that they move away from a national context to explore international narrative scenarios. These risky dynamics result in the creation of new dimensions for the novel/film even if they are based on blurred or invisibilized Mexican problematics or preoccupations.

⁵ According to Carrie Mott and Susan Roberts, previous scholarship has understood the urban explorer as “associated with ideals of rugged masculinity” (234) since the practice involves infiltrating, with or without permission, abandoned buildings and structures that may not be safe to witness and “interact” with the space. Most explorers take pictures to document their trespasses.

⁶ An obvious, yet distorted, reference to *Casablanca* (1942).

⁷ Lee Edelman, in his analysis of the book *Children of Men*, by P.D. James, describes how the “Child” then becomes a “hope of posterity” a form of “renewal” and meaning (*No Future* 1-32).

⁸ There are other instances of the use of religious imagery in the film. For example: cows are holy in Hinduism, Theo is derived from the Greek word for God, the “fishes” remind us of early Christians and are a revolutionary group, and the newborn is the key to salvation.