

Nekronology: The End of the Future at the Hudson Yards

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Abstract: The following offers a novel approach to critiquing and contesting the chronology of colonial capitalism. By examining the spatio-temporality of The Vessel—the suicidal shrine to neoliberal development in the heart of New York’s Hudson Yards micropolis—this article illuminates heterodox notions of time, death, and economics. Borrowing from Achille Mbembe’s necropolitics, I develop this “nekronology” to illustrate how the future is pillaging the present. I argue that architectural abstractions like The Vessel colonise the present from the future, taunting the present with the excess wealth derived from perpetual economic growth. Developments such as the Hudson Yards and neighbouring High Line exemplify this wealth pollution—the unhealthy disposal of excess wealth in public places. I then investigate the nekronology of current trends in postcolonial apocalypse and auto-homicide. Finally, I examine the aesthetics of nekronological time wealth via an analysis of dystopian sci-fi films and the temporally emancipating art of Black Quantum Futurism.

Keywords: capitalism, necropolitics, apocalypse, New York City, Black Quantum Futurism, Achille Mbembe, architecture

... we’re sort of living in the prehistory of a radically other world. (Reed 2018)

Introduction

The Vessel—a shiny new 16-storey climbable sculpture tower in New York—was shut down in January 2021 after the third young person in less than a year jumped to their death from its top tier. After re-opening four months later with nominally enhanced security features, a 14-year-old jumped to their death on 29 July 2021, forcing The Vessel to close down once again. Sadly, the terminal allure of this architecture was rather predictable. Aside from sheer design negligence (lack of guardrails or equipped staffing), The Vessel epitomises an antagonistic temporal tension between present and future compressed within a single urban neoliberal development. The auto-homicidal impulses evident at The Vessel, I argue within, are a response to this tension. The Vessel has become a centrepiece of contemporary dystopia, a suicide machine from the future bent on harvesting the vitality of the present.

This article dissects the manner in which The Vessel (and neoliberal architecture more broadly) accomplishes these diabolical ends, arguing that such structural

incursions into urban space signify a mutinous temporality. Drawing on Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, I offer the term "nekronology" to describe the dead time in which The Vessel exists and circulates. As necropolitics suggests the *power to (let) die*, nekronology suggests the *time to (let) die*—a phrasing with multiple readings. Nekronology (spell it as you wish) will be traced here through the Hudson Yards development which surrounds The Vessel, illustrating how excess wealth pollutes public spaces with a toxicity radiating from the future. To entwine the machinations of neoliberal development with nekronology, I examine postcolonial apocalypses and trends in suicide over the preceding decades. I conclude with an aesthetic survey of the dystopian cityscape, exemplified by the Hudson Yards, via science-fiction films and the emancipatory timeplay of contemporary Black Quantum Futurism artworks.

The underlying premise of this article is that the future is killing the present; has infected the present with the imperative to grow wealth, thus forcing *now* to exploit all its resources—animal, mineral, and vegetable. While this framing, with its neologisms and hyperstitional conceits, may come across as irreverent, this should not be read as dismissive of the tragedies occurring at The Vessel. Rather, the goal of this approach is to unravel the ludicrously unjustifiable ecocides and genocides that have become naturalised over the past three centuries. The hope is that denaturalising the violence of the status quo may be best achieved by setting this status quo within the phantastical to fully display its lunacy. While others have valiantly diagrammed the numerous temporal contradictions and incongruencies of capital (Cooper 2008; Gibson-Graham 1996; Harvey 2010; Jameson 1991), this has had little impact in subduing their rampage. The following is a frustrated polemical elocution of pitchforks and torches being unleashed on The Vessel and the capitalised future it represents.

Wealth Pollution

Billionaire supervillain Stephen Ross and visionary architectural darling Thomas Heatherwick have blood on their hands. They should be brought to trial on four accounts (to date) of manslaughter. Ross put up much of the financing of the Hudson Yards development and pulled the political strings necessary for city officials to sanction the construction of a suicide theatre on top of the former rail-yards. Heatherwick (and his eponymous studios) designed the centrepiece of the development, taking special care to spatially manifest a soulless geometric void that promotes the futility of organic life.

The genesis of the Hudson Yards is a common tale in modern urban development (Larson 2013; Ruby 2010). Redundant infrastructural spaces (such as train depots) that had been publicly held and operated are sold off (at below market rates) to well-connected billionaire developers with little to no transparency—i.e. no input from local communities. A similar process occurred at Brooklyn's Atlantic Yards a few years earlier when Mayor Bloomberg's buddy Bruce Ratner was handed 22 acres of real estate in Downtown Brooklyn to fill with condos and basketball arenas.

These aesthetically imposing projects tend to be approved and authorised behind closed doors. Only after a vociferous outcry from local residents was the

Atlantic Yards project brought under public scrutiny. And despite the valiant efforts of numerous community organisations battling for nearly seven years and forcing the city to open up the project to other bids and proposals, the foregone conclusion was ultimately foregone. The Ratner project went through much as it was initially pitched despite his company's bid being notably lower than competing offers for the space (one concession being that the Frank Gehry design for the basketball stadium was dropped due to excessive cost, and of course the promised housing units lagged a decade behind the basketball stadium).

Stephen Ross, "possibly ... the most powerful man in New York" (Swanson 2019), is a significantly more entrenched powerbroker than Ratner and accordingly the Hudson Yards are a significantly more expensive and higher profile project—the most expensive real estate development in American history according to *New York Magazine* (\$1 billion per acre). The final price tag is estimated to be around \$25 billion, \$5.6 billion of which is taxpayer funded (Fisher and Leite 2018). It also received significant funding from the EB-5 visa programme, which basically sells permanent resident status in the US to high-end foreign investors. The Hudson Yards project grew out of New York's failed bid to secure the 2012 Summer Olympics. During the Olympic bidding, several stadiums and facilities were proposed and designed for the Hudson Yards region. After the relief of losing the Olympic bid, many New Yorkers didn't think of the Hudson Yards again for the next decade. Then, the skyscrapers began creeping up, casting new shadows across the city.

The Hudson Yards development is situated within an impressive stretch of architectural wealth deposits along Manhattan's West Side. This steamrolling neoliberal homogenisation went full throttle with 2009's opening of the High Line—an abandoned elevated railway converted into a boutique park winding its way through expensive hotels and restaurants. The High Line inaugurated a 21st century aesthetic trend that I have elsewhere termed "wealth pollution" (Schwartz 2019). In 2015, the southern extent of the High Line was capped with the newly designed Whitney Museum of American Art and now the Hudson Yards anchors the High Line's northern end (interestingly, Hudson Yards developers wanted to tear down the northern High Line during construction, a request that was ultimately refused). Zooming out, a six-mile stretch of uninterrupted wealth pollution has emerged from Battery Park at the southern tip of Manhattan to about 79th Street in the north. In 2021, the onslaught was complemented by "Little Island", an undulating park blooming out of the Hudson River on 280 concrete stems and built almost entirely at the behest of billionaire Barry Diller (see <https://littleisland.org/>).

The aesthetic of wealth pollution is not entirely uniform; it can range from large-scale useless shiny things like the artwork of Jeff Koons to subtly aged iron facades. It can take the form of commissioned sculptures, residential architecture, or public parks, but the movement is united in its impetus and impact, specifically how it induces despair and, in the extreme (as epitomised by *The Vessel*), suicidal impulses. Wealth pollution is the disposal of excess wealth over organically evolved public spaces via glimmering prisms of exclusion. While the space may remain open to the public, as with Little Island or the High Line, it is curated

“with gentle reminders that it’s important to make money so that our spaces can look nice” (Schwartz 2019:269). In the case of Koons’ art, which is widely understood to be a rubbish bin for storing excess wealth (or “valorized stupidity” and “willful superficiality” as Ben Lerner [2014:131] calls it), the polluting aspects of this aesthetic trend are obvious, but in other cases it can be quite subtle (Lieberman 2014).

Pollution, following Mary Douglas’ (1966) classic formulation, is “matter out of place”. It is difficult to imagine a more apt description of fabrications like *The Vessel*—a simultaneously towering and diminutive reflective chrome spiral full of emptiness (see <https://www.hudsonyardsnewyork.com/discover/vessel>). The object clearly inspires more distress than conventional litter (plastic bottles, candy wrappers, etc.), yet for some reason neighbourhoods with old soda cans on the ground are considered “dirtier” than the killing fields of the Hudson Yards. In the Hudson Yards people live and shop inside the garbage (excess steel, glass, and concrete); they design fancy vertical landfills out of socially superfluous synthetics in which they can sleep and eat.

While concerns over pollution often point to landfills, oceanic plastic gyres, and the half-life of electronic obsolescence, the rapid erection of skyscrapers (and attendant resource extraction) is far more emblematic of the root cause of today’s climate crises: the perpetual growth of wealth. The steel, glass, and fuel required to sustain rich people is more problematic than the used coffee cups that line the gutters of low-income neighbourhoods. Often privileged classes view urban homeless populations or built-up litter in de-sanitised neighbourhoods as pollution, but the garbage wealthy people leave lying around (e.g. Jeff Koons statues and *Vessels*) can be unhealthier both mentally and environmentally.

The High Line doesn’t beautify public space; it makes public space expensive. Urban planners such as Amanda Burden (the principal architect of Mayor Bloomberg’s wealth pollution brand) mistake “beauty” for “what rich people find aesthetically pleasing and comfortable”; mistake “beauty” for “increased property values” (this makes sense because Burden’s extended family includes Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, and founding fathers). This is in line with Stein’s (2018) progressive gentrification or Checker’s (2011) green gentrification—methods of dispossession through investment. Such processes are much more nefarious, not in rich neighbourhoods like Chelsea, but in mixed-income neighbourhoods like Crown Heights where “the production of new affordable apartments is always linked to an expansion of the luxury market” (Stein 2018:775).

Few New Yorkers would argue at this point that *The Vessel* is not utter rubbish; a piece of garbage doing great violence to the city. Yet, after it killed three young people, rather than have the Department of Sanitation deconstruct and haul away this \$100 million piece of trash, the developers at the Hudson Yards decided to charge people \$10 to walk up it, the idea being that those who want to kill themselves couldn’t afford or wouldn’t be willing to pay \$10. Maybe they were right. The 14-year-old who was killed by *The Vessel* in July 2021 was accompanied by their family (as mandated by the new safety guidelines, you cannot enter *The Vessel* alone) who paid the entry fee.

Discussions of suicide in the press are handled delicately, both out of respect for the families, but also for fear of suicide contagion. The CDC (1994) notes “a scientific basis exists for concern that news coverage of suicide may contribute to the causation of suicide”. In his comprehensive work on the matter, Durkheim (2006) denied the existence of suicide contagion, instead developing four motivating categories for the act: altruistic, anomic, egoistic, fatalistic. While Durkheim’s framework may be overly simplistic, perhaps Vessel suicides could be discussed more openly to generate more creative thinking on their root causes. The CDC (1994) warns against “[g]lorifying suicide or persons who commit suicide”, but a greater disservice may be in discussing suicides as individual failures. If Vessel deaths are indeed caused by an antagonistic future, they should be honoured. Rather than adopting a preventative admission fee, The Vessel’s curators should construct a prominent memorial to its four victims. If the “fatalistic” see that the causes of their suicidal impulses are being addressed, this may prevent dystopic architecture from claiming further lives. Surely this would be better than reifying the “logic that coaxes many into willfully overlooking ... what becomes normalized as unfortunate ‘costs’ of progress and development. Even many of those who recognize the production of death under neoliberal reforms embrace such a logic” (Kaushal 2015:53).

In lieu of such discussions, Hudson Yards has recently offered what must be the most insensitive promotional “adventure” ever conceived. Thrill-seeking New Yorkers can pay \$185 to participate in City Climb, wherein they “scale the outside of a skyscraper more than 1,200 feet above the ground, then lean out and look down from the highest outdoor platform in New York City”. In the promotional video for the activity, climbers can be seen dangling over the edge of the skyscraper, looking directly down into The Vessel (see <https://www.edgenyc.com/en/cityclimb>).

The Hudson Yards has been described as Stephen Ross’ “vision of tomorrowland” (Swanson 2019). This apt description speaks to the way that “the future simply imposes itself” (Konings 2018:30). Ross has built a nekronological empire, first as a slum lord, then as a luxury developer. In each case he is redistributing resources (housing and urban space) from the citizens of the present to the future. With this latest venture, he has engineered a portal for the victims of nekronology to exit this chronology. Ross boasted that The Vessel would become an Instagramming destination on par with the Eiffel Tower. Tragically, one of the victims of The Vessel’s hopelessness did release a posthumous Instagram suicide note, fulfilling Ross’ nekronological vision.

Time Lines

At first glance, the opening claim that the future is killing the present might seem to require a suspension of entropy’s arrow of time or at least a willingness to indulge in counter-narrative whimsy. By all means, the reader is welcome to such indulgences, but the anachronic claims within are meant to be applied to a materialist-realist universe. Perhaps more palatably, in discussing austerity and pessimism in the UK, Coleman (2016:92) argues that “the future is brought into

the present so that the possibilities of the future come to determine the present". Such sketches of neoliberal time can be read as assaults on the present.

The opposite sentiment is often uncritically assumed to describe the baseline mechanics of causality, i.e. the actions of the present make and shape the future. I would suggest this default is no more or less temporally presumptuous than its inverse. The idea that the present controls or determines the future denies (or suppresses) contingency. One could play the hypotheticals and say that if Barack Obama had not been elected president, Donald Trump would not have been elected president. But few would argue that those who voted for Obama were "making" a future in which Trump became president. Nor (I imagine) would many Obama voters in 2008 have switched their vote to John McCain if you told them it would prevent a Trump presidency.

Hypotheticals like this run pretty thin though when it comes to the long-term foreseeable effects of actions, such as climate change. Traditional environmentalist rhetoric asserts that we ("we" is used here as a synonym for "extant consumers") are destroying the future, or more precisely, as the mural in Figure 1 suggests, "capitalism is killing our future". These laments are understandable. Residents of the present exploit resources and alter environments at such a rate that, if trends continue, there won't be resources left (including our own biomass) for the future. Thus, the conclusion is drawn that the present is selfishly hoarding the planet's bounty, accumulating the riches of the millennia for itself in utter disregard of alter-temporalities.

This is both naïve and hubristic. It suggests that those alive today are the architects and guarantors of a galactic timeline. Why is the present undertaking such rapid and excessive harvesting of the planet? If, as the mural insists, capitalism kills our future, this suggests that the present is vital, lively, or at least alive. Perhaps the message in Figure 2, draped over a construction site in Dresden, is more telling as it speaks from the future to threaten residents of the present. Capital is defined by most dictionaries as wealth used to generate more wealth (through time). Thus, *capitalism* is foremost the practice of perpetually shifting wealth from the present to the future. The primary motivation, then, for deranging environments is that the dominant populations of the present believe that wealth must grow—that the future must be wealthier than the present. Rather straightforwardly, anthropogenic environmental and climate devastation is caused by the future. If this sounds sequentially audacious, Mbembe (2021:16) reminds us that capitalism is a "hallucinatory phenomenon", suggesting the capacity to render any temporal framework operable.

There is a prevalent notion that empowered interests today exploit the wealth of the planet in order to ensure their own material comfort; that we eat hamburgers because we care more about satisfying our own desires than the welfare of our hypothetical grandchildren. No. We eat hamburgers (or other environmentally scarring foods, including soy- and corn-based hamburger alternatives) because the only way most of us can (legally) feed ourselves is via an agricultural system designed to redistribute wealth from the present to the future; designed to ensure that profits grow into the future. Right now, those profits happen to be going to future Monsanto or Tyson Foods shareholders, but even if individual companies come and go, the profits continue accumulating. Every decision made



Figure 1: Mural in Halle, Germany, suggesting that capitalism is killing the future (photo by author) [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

by those unscrupulous multi-nationals is designed to enrich the future at the cost of those that inhabit the present.

The idea that we are doing something to the future (e.g. changing future temperatures or sea levels) conforms easily to teleological, enlightenment-humanist thinking. However, despite what the five-day forecast tells us, the future doesn't

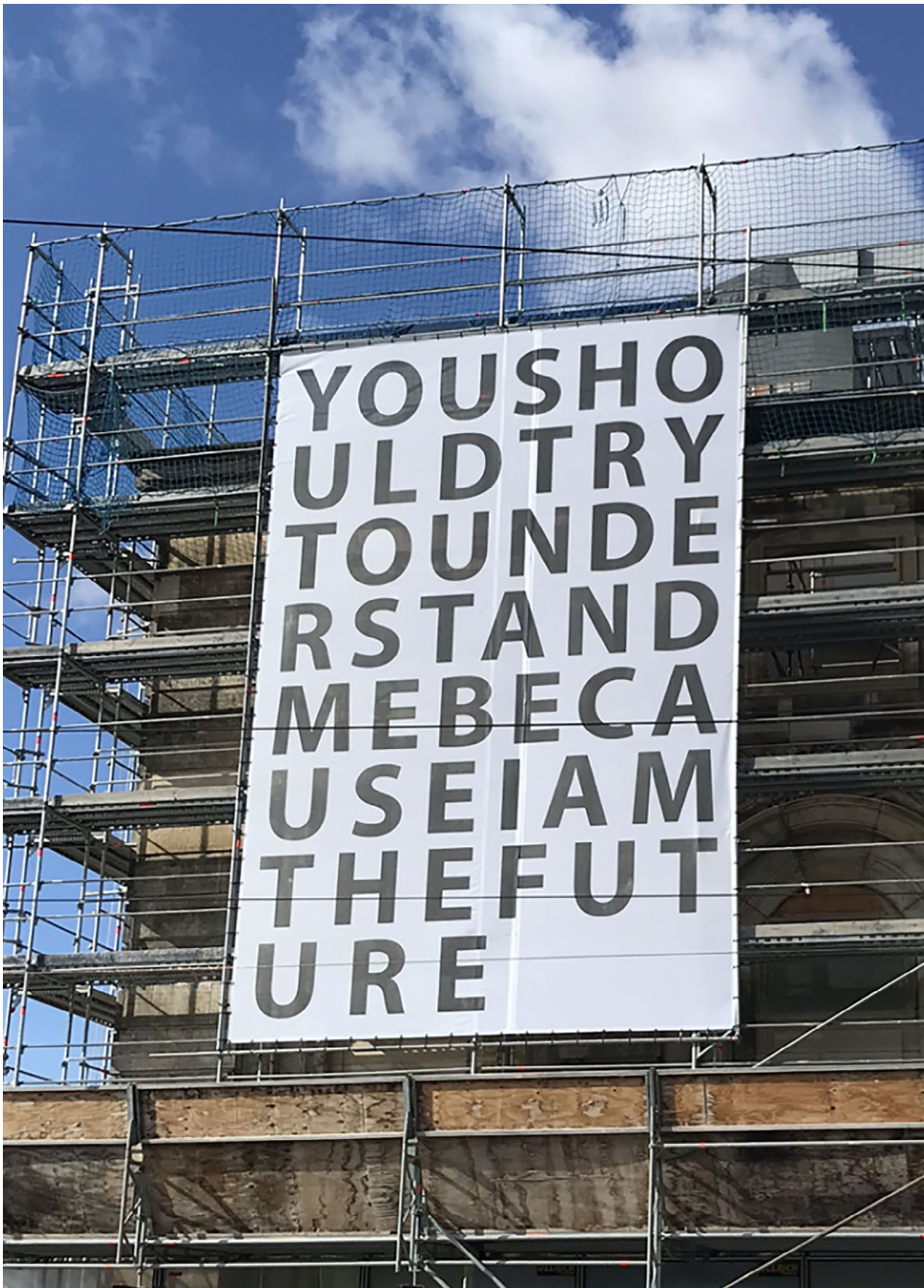


Figure 2: Banner in Dresden from the future threatening the present (photo by author) [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

have a temperature to change. The future doesn't have any material properties. That is why it needs to confiscate those of the present; "...capitalism is an invasion from the future by an artificial intelligent space that must assemble itself

entirely from its enemy's resources" (Land 1993:479). We are all (CEOs or anarchists) enemies of capital. If you are a living entity, you are an enemy of capital, in that the wealth needed to procure your survival potentially cuts into the profits of the future.

Does it seem like we are currently enjoying the spoils of a victorious subjugation of the future? Or are residents of the present subjugated by the oppressive omnipotence of the future? The one-billion-plus malnourished citizens today (Downey 2015) or the millions lost to "deaths of despair" may not feel like we are sacrificing the future to improve today's quality of life. When welfare is cut, when taxes on the rich are lowered, when healthcare is privatised, these are direct displacements of wealth from the citizens of the present to the future (i.e. wealth that would otherwise be consumed is "invested"). When shorelines and rainforests are desecrated to extract resources, this is a direct transfer of wealth from the present to the future (i.e. the use-value of habitats is taken away from living entities to grow profits). When politicians say we can't afford to provide universal healthcare or overhaul energy infrastructure, they are saying "the future" deserves wealth more than living people. When Chevron invests \$54 billion in 1972 for its Gorgon gas extraction project off the coast of Australia, it is not because they value present material comfort above all else (Klein 2014:145). It is a 100-year plan to ensure Chevron is wealthier in 2072 than it is today (Schwartz 2020).

The present is under attack from a future insatiable in its pursuit of growth. Since the hegemony of capitalised social relations—the convergence of lending at interest, insuring, and investing—the future must always have more wealth than the present. "Capitalism depends upon the belief in and expectation of growth" (Coleman 2016:89). This suggests rethinking platitudes about "building a better future" or saving the future for hypothetical children. Rather, the future needs to be deprived of wealth, cut off. Arresting economic growth halts the compulsory exploitation of the planet's flora and fauna. Rather than Greta Thunberg's valiant Fridays *For Future* protests, perhaps Lee Edelman's (2004:31) provocation would be more useful for averting the direst climate crises: "the future stops here".

There have been many discussions of cross-cultural perceptions of time in anthropology, Fabian's (1983) notion of coevalness being prominent among them. Such work wrestles over whether one can speak of time ontologically—is there *one* universal time or is the relativity of perceived time evidence of a temporally pluralistic universe. Such enquiries tend to lead to unresolvable plateaus (Birth 2012, 2013). Thus, in the vein of Thompson's (1967) "time and work-discipline", my goal here is to focus on articulating capitalised time. Jane Guyer (2007) and Lisa Adkins (2017, 2018) have made valuable contributions in this area. Laura Bear's (2017:153) recent work on financialised time, "a timescape that, whatever our ethical mediation of it, generates inequality", is also insightful here. Perhaps more innovatively, Michelle Bastian (2018) has proposed a critical horology to complement works in critical cartography.

David Harvey (1990) has discussed the "compression" of capitalised time, but Hito Steyerl's (2015) "junktime" perhaps best captures the wiring of today's time. Junktime is:

reverberating asynchronicities and the continuous breakdown of riff raff timetables ... With junktime, any causal link is scattered. The end is before the beginning and the beginning was taken down for copyright violations. Anything in-between has been slashed because of budget cuts.

The notion of intergenerational care, which has received much attention in the field of heritage studies (Harrison and Sterling 2020), somewhat counters the vision I lay out in this article. Much heritage work addresses strategies for how residents of the present attempt to preserve cultural resources *for* the future. My concern is how to save cultural resources *from* the future. For example, how can we prevent the warehouses of big data being collected today on every aspect of the world from being used for surveillance and control purposes by future entities? This is not meant to suggest a selfish hoarding or hedonistic feasting on the present, with no concern about those living in “subsequent presents” (I resist the word future because no one lives in “the future”). Rather, it is to emphasise use-value over exchange-value. Most commoning communities establish quotas on foraged resources to ensure the resource is not depleted. Hicks et al. (2019) document just such a case over a 1,000-year period in Iceland. Such practices do not exchange the present for the future. They are efforts to maintain the present level of resources. They are not “investments”.

Neighbourhood Nekronology

Capitalised nekronology is a form of social organisation centred on killing time, specifically the time period known as the present. Capitalism “reduces the present to an empty vehicle to the future” (Xiang 2021:239). Capitalism *is* a war the future wages on the present. “[L]ate twentieth and early twenty-first century capitalism has found ways to cycle even the most gratuitous and voluptuary discharges back into the ‘powder keg’ of ceaseless accumulation” (Clark and Yusoff 2018:19). Despite these obstacles, I wish to argue below that capitalism’s nekronology can be hijacked. While capitalism is killing our time, it is also a time we can let die. That is, we can let *this* future die.

Like Chevron’s century-forward investments in fossil fuel extraction, urban real estate is a long game that diverts wealth to the future on decadal scales. This has been abundantly demonstrated in the case of New York urban planning since the 1950s. The *longue durée* of real estate value is exemplified by the racialised red-lining and policing policies of New York from the 1950s through today. Neighbourhoods were intentionally devalued based on racial make-up, then bought up and redeveloped for more affluent residents. This is an ongoing process enforced and supported by the political-financial-policing coalition (Bloomberg’s stop-and-frisk policing was an extension of red-lining). The systematic exclusion of Black populations from home ownership was an attempt to write Black urban neighbourhoods out of the future; an attempt to disempower Black futures. As artist Alisha Wormsley has wryly confirmed however, “There Are Black People in the Future” (see <https://alishabwormsley.com/there-are-black-people-in-the-future>).

In the past 20 years, the aesthetics of this strategy have become highly visible in the form of gleaming condo-rises. By the time geographers developed robust critiques of this process from the 1980s to 2000s (Harvey 1989; Smith 1984), however, the gears had become difficult to derail. Today, as the Hudson Yards is completed and the geotemporal violence is impossible to ignore, the fear is that the critique remains decades behind the disempowering pursuit of future profit. As the “Billionaire’s Row” pencil towers enclose Central Park, we must strive to beat the future to the present. Thinking nekronologically can help. Just as the mechanisms of necropower and biopower must be exposed to be contested, so must the flow of nekronology. Mbembe (2003), building on Foucault, suggests that killing is the limit of sovereignty. It’s understandable that these thinkers (or anyone for that matter) point to the ability to legally murder as the ultimate extension of self-determination and control. Sadly, this ceiling suggested by Mbembe has been eclipsed in recent years (roughly with the commodification of precarity under Regan-Thatcher neoliberalisation). Rather than the legal capacity to let die or murder, nekronology is the induced desire to die, to exit or end time. Colonial-capitalist power no longer needs to expend energy on mass murder. Mbembe (2019:5), continuing to work through necropolitics, writes of the colonised as having “blocked their desire to live”. Discontents will kill themselves if an appropriate socio-spatial suicide machine can be engineered, e.g. the Hudson Yards’ Vessel.

The term nekronology is a bit polysemous. The *time* to (let) *die* suggests that those that control perceptions of time can use this to manage living and dying. A nekronological era may denote a time in which its adherents all die (an apocalypse, end times). Nekronology could suggest that now is the moment when we agree to let time (the concept) die (and adopt a novel perception of duration). Further, it could suggest killing time, i.e. wasting or filling time frivolously until a more important or relevant time arrives. While any of these connotations could describe capitalised chronography, when I suggest that nekronology suppresses opposition to the dominant exploitative social order, I am suggesting capitalist powerbrokers possess time—the ability to give it or take it away. Tangibly, this may be considered through the basic operations of finance. Interest, life and health insurance, stocks and bonds—these instruments induce time warps. Those that wield these mechanisms are capable of shuttling wealth back and forth and in and out of different times.

[F]inancial technology is a time machine we have built ourselves ... Finance has stretched the ability of humans to imagine and calculate the future ... Finance has increasingly made us creatures of time. Financial architecture exists in—and shapes—the possibilities of the temporal dimension. (Goetzmann 2016:2)

The precarious, employment-tied health insurance offered in the US makes millions of people fear the future.

The emerging nekronological regime actively fosters the desire to avoid the future; the desire to have nothing to do with the future; the desire to get out of time. As Toni Morrison (1996:3) writes, “the future has nothing to recommend itself”. This urge is so compelling among many that suicide is seen as the

appropriate attainment of this cessation of time. Unlike diagnoses of suicidal tendencies centred on irreconcilable depression or inability to cope with traumas or painful circumstances, I would suggest recent suicides have been structurally engineered. Kaushal (2015) suggests that with India's large-scale push toward neoliberalism in the 1990s and concurrent individualisation, group political action has subsided. The future—its conditions or resistance to them—has been individualised. Suicide, in this framing, is an individualised resistance (not necessarily political, simply an objection) to the future.

While the four suicides at the Hudson Yards are highly visible and make a compelling frame for this exposition, the approximately 500,000 suicides by Indian farmers since the late 1970s bring this trend into much starker focus. Surely a wide range of motivations and emotions were endured by these victims, but a prevailing theme in these cases is an inability to pay back loans; an inability to give money to banks (who then safely pass it into the future). These are financialised suicides (Sadanandan 2014). These farmer suicides skew younger (mostly between 28 and 47 years old) and more middle class than might be expected (Mohanty 2013), suggesting that those with the most future to endure are more afflicted; those for whom the weight of the future might be more burdensome.

In the US, as recent litigation has confirmed, the opioid crisis (and the thousands of lives lost to it) was also proactively engineered to ensure the profits of Purdue Pharma and Johnson & Johnson. In these cases (and many more instances of buying and selling other people's precarity), socio-economic activity is organised around encouraging suicidal withdrawal from temporal existence. Most efforts to grow wealth in the 20th century focused on the promotion of delusional optimism. While some of this lingers, optimism is increasingly losing its share of the market to despondency and anxiety. "There is no such thing as non-precarious capitalism" (Stein 2015).

Indian suicides or rust belt drug addiction could be described, not as exercises of political power over death, but rather as demonstrations of time over death (nekronology). Whereas Mbembe (2003:12) imagines "politics as a form of war", here time is a form of war. The future is wielded as a weapon against the present. The future is a weapon that paralyses indebted farmers. Less dramatically, "banks command a power to make available time" (Konings 2018:79). Financial institutions are the conduits, conveyors, and henchmen of the future. Banks don't own the future. Banks don't make the future. Banks carry out the bidding of the future.

Patricia Reed (2014:88) further explains how the temporal economics of neoliberal debt:

... can only operate under the presupposition of an ever-more prosperous future where debts can be reimbursed. In reality ... this type of debt-bondage essentially cancels the possibility of a future ... instantiating in its place a society subtended by asymmetric power relations, between the few who supply credit and the rest who are indebted ...

While I agree in spirit with Reed's above assessment and Coleman's (2016:89) account of contemporary pessimism—"capitalism captures and controls the

future, turning it into a time that is colonised and exploited”—I would amend their phrasing to emphasise that capitalism *is* the future. That is, colonisation and exploitation are happening right now. Not *in* the future, not *to* the future, but *from* the future. So, when a developer or politician offers some slick language about this or that policy or proposal being an investment in your community’s future, this should raise an eyebrow. This is usually not so subtle code for diverting wealth and resources from those who need it now to those who don’t need it in the future.

Post-Apocalyptic Auto-Homicide

In Mbembe’s (2001) essay on the “Aesthetics of Vulgarities”, he dissects how power reverberates in the postcolony. Subjugation is entwined with a refractive irreverence. Subjects do not necessarily use vulgarity as a successful form of resistance nor is their subjugation made any less total by the effacement of reverent objects, but it is precisely Mbembe’s aim to illustrate that power exists outside of simplistic resistance–submission dichotomies, particularly in the postcolony.

I am compelled, however, to read Mbembe’s outline of postcolony power onto the standard operating procedure of neoliberal power more broadly. It is in this sense the nekronologically induced resistance to the future (suicide) should be read—a vulgar gesture of “compliant resistance”—playing out the scripted role of disgust. Mbembe notes the obscenity, the mockery, the confusion over who the joke is being played on in Cameroonian politics—these all seem equally applicable to power flexes from the 1990s onward in the colonising Western nations (Mbembe’s thesis was originally published in English in 1992). All capitalised subjects are being degraded, the rich along with the poor, the empowered and the disempowered. Even the revered middle class is the target of ridicule.

The reason for these sympathies between Mbembe’s postcolony and current configurations of EuroWestern capitalised humanist-enlightenment control is that the latter has finally entered a post-apocalyptic terrain similar to earlier colonised regions. Colonisation was and is apocalyptic. Colonised peoples and regions experienced the end of the world. “For the native people of the Americas, the end of the world already happened—five centuries ago” (Viveiros de Castro and Danowski 2018:191). EuroWesterners don’t recognise colonialism as the apocalypse because it made them richer, but it’s difficult to argue that it hasn’t ruined the world, at least the world(s) that existed before. To discuss the postcolony should be to discuss the post-apocalypse—Mbembe’s *On the Postcolony* could be read as *On the Post-Apocalypse*.

Fanon (2004) framed decolonisation as a world ending project, but colonial-capitalism is not and has never been a world. It has always been an apocalypse. As Stengers (2018:86) puts it, the “global West is not a ‘world’ and recognizes no world ... I would rather characterise it as a ‘machine’, destroying both politics and ontologies. No peace is possible with this hegemonic machine, because it knows only ... police operations”. Colonialism is a thousand apocalypses. Worlds came to an end. Gods were killed. Environments and landscapes were torched and scarred. Perhaps the negative effects of this apocalypse are being visited upon the

EuroWest now, but as Aimé Césaire's (1972) *Discourse on Colonialism* insists, what the Europeans call fascism is "just colonial violence finding its way back home" (Teixeira Pinto 2019:335).

Efforts by activist geologists to brand the post-apocalypse as the Anthropocene sugarcoat the devastation wrought over these past few centuries. We currently reside in an apocalypse (or post-apocalypse since the apocalypse already began). Like Paul Crutzen and his colleagues debating the onset of the Anthropocene, apocalypse scholars can hold their debates over when the apocalypse actually started, but like the Anthropocene, it doesn't really matter. Some might place the onset of the apocalypse with the atomic bomb, 9/11, or COVID-19. Just as the "Anthropocene" is a very Eurocentric designation (i.e. it assumes that all humans think and behave like Europeans), it is very Eurocentric to think the apocalypse hasn't already happened.

For argument's sake, I'd say EuroWesterners became fully aware of the post-apocalyptic nekronology they inhabit in June 2018 when the suicide of Kate Spade was followed three days later by the suicide of Anthony Bourdain. Spade, the multi-millionaire founder of the eponymous fashion line, hung herself to death in her Manhattan apartment. Bourdain, a millionaire TV chef, hung himself to death in a hotel room on the French border. Both celebrities wanted out of the future, despite each having pre-teen children at the time of their deaths (a reason often suggested for wanting to continue living).

As famous humans and brands in themselves, press releases and statements were offered upon the deaths of Spade and Bourdain. Spade's husband published a note mentioning her struggle with depression and concluding, "And it clearly wasn't her" (The New York Times 2018a). Who was this person that killed themselves then, if it wasn't the Kate Spade known to her husband? Who or what was it that killed himself on 5 June 2018? Bourdain's mother said that "He is absolutely the last person in the world I would have ever dreamed would do something like this" (The New York Times 2018b). Such expressions are common following suicides. By describing the death as a total shock, unpredictable, or out-of-character, it alleviates the responsibility of the past to have prevented the death. The idea here is that the suicide is so surprising that no one could have done anything to prevent it. The past couldn't have been corrected to prevent the present. In these cases, the past isn't responsible for the present.

I believe Mr. Spade that it wasn't Kate Spade that killed Kate Spade but some other possessed entity. I believe Anthony Bourdain's mother that he was the last person in the world that would kill himself. And I would like to think that the four victims of *The Vessel* would not have killed themselves either if they weren't equally possessed. But what possessed them? If the past cannot be used to explain the present (cannot take responsibility for the present), what can explain the present? If nothing that happened in the past caused these suicides, then maybe it was something in the future? Within neoliberal nekronology the future offers a more adequate explanation for the present than the past. Anthropologist Morten Nielsen (2011, 2015) has well-documented the politics and economics of such inverted temporalities in Mozambique:

... the future asserts itself by opening up the present. It wedges itself within the present moment as a transversal movement and establishes temporal differentiations without indicating a progressing trajectory. In a peculiar inversion of conventional linearity, the present becomes the effect of the future rather than vice versa. (Nielsen 2014:170)

If such postulations are true, a reconsideration of history-making may be warranted. Just as modernising “[h]umanity recognized itself as making history, as introducing irreversibilities” (Konings 2018:71), apocalypsing humanity must recognise itself as being made by the future, as subordinate to contingencies.

Auto-homicide as a response to these contingencies is driven by a wish to not be subservient or oppressed by the future. Killing oneself is the ultimate refutation of subsequence. Motivations for not wanting to be a part of the future may vary, but to be incorporated into *this* future is to be exploited, marginalised, dehumanised, compressed, and abstracted. Suicide, then, could be conceived of in similar terms as the vulgar contestations of power Mbembe describes in postcolonial Cameroon. To be clear, these aren’t necessarily political refutations, but acts of disregard for dominant trajectories. To call suicide a “lifestyle choice” has a very cold ring to it, but in the register of Mbembe, suicide is a performative stance toward power. Invoking Bataille, Mbembe (2003:15) writes that “death is therefore the point at which destruction, suppression, and sacrifice constitute so irreversible and radical an expenditure—an expenditure without reserve—that they can no longer be determined as negativity”. Could then suicide be perceived not as negation or negativity, but a conscious occupation of a time and a space. The four victims of *The Vessel* occupy the structure now in a manner that no tourists or surrounding condo dwellers ever could. Indeed, its victims will occupy *The Vessel* for as long as it exists.

This approaches the radical openings suggested in Lee Edelman’s screed against the future. Edelman (2004:4, emphasis added) argues that to be queer is “to withdraw our allegiance, however compulsory, from a reality based on the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism ... Abjuring fidelity to a futurism that’s always purchased at *our expense*”. Or perhaps, as in M. Night Shyamalan’s 2008 film *The Happening*, suicidal impulses are just being released from plant life as a defence mechanism against further human encroachment.

The Architecture of Apocalypse

The Vessel’s necropower is amplified by the specificity of its aesthetic and location. With its angular glass protrusions and blinding gleam, the entire Hudson Yards complex resembles the sci-fi imaginaries of dystopian films (particularly *Minority Report*’s Washington, DC, 2054). Surprisingly (or perhaps not), the apocalypse actually looks a lot like how the sci-fi movies told us it would. The style and aesthetic now popular in urban capitals are eerily similar to two spectrums of dystopian sci-fi—the gloom of *Blade Runner* (bathed in perpetual glow shadows) and the sunny obliviousness of *Demolition Man* (where profanity and junk-food have been banned). Both dystopias are perpetuated on deep class stratifications, disempowerment, hegemonic surveillance, and suspension of civil liberties.

Both these worlds are reflected in contemporary New York architecture. The soft windy features and thick whiteglow of Frank Gehry's 2007 IAC Building (a project also spearheaded by Barry Diller) or the High Line in Manhattan radiate a perpetual brightness reminiscent of *Demolition Man*. These visions bring to mind Hito Steyerl's (2013) admonition that "whole cities pretend to be YouTube CAD tutorials". Conversely, the sky-high neon nightshine of the Bank of America building or Downtown Brooklyn's "Hub" bathe their long-shadows in holographic emissions like *Blade Runner*.

The whole point of dystopian sci-fi is to offer a warning and critique. From 1984 to *The Hunger Games*, the authors are screaming at the present about the dangers posed by the future. Yet, like the red-pilled incel communities that aspire to the reality of *The Handmaid's Tale*, urban architectural aesthetics seem to strive toward these dystopias. One must ask, are the developers aware that the styles they are replicating are dystopian? And that dystopias are undesirable places of misery, suffering, dissatisfaction, and dejection? That dystopias are to be avoided? As architects design the future based on sci-fi depictions of misery, they need to be reminded that science-fiction is not a documentary of the future. It doesn't have to be like this. Or does it? Has the future already been locked in? It's "... as though the present was being reeled into a future which had always been guiding the past" (Plant 1997:13).

The contemporary art of Black Quantum Futurism (BQF) is currently engaging with and contesting these sci-fi tropes in an effort to derail the dystopian trajectory of neoliberal cities. Their work dismantles naturalised colonial temporality, engaging in a counter-propaganda campaign against the capitalised future. This capitalised future that imposes itself via wealth polluting sci-fi echoes like *The Vessel*—the future that is reaching back into the present to build itself—is de-teleologised in BQF practices. Among other ambitions, BQF critiques and challenges common sci-fi tropes, such as treating:

... the past as "dead", fixed, unalterable, and the future typically as deterministic, or as the result of a set of causes and effects that are easily pinpointed and measured. Even when the [time-]traveler(s) are changing the future, that future still typically needs to follow a pre-determined path or set of cause and effect factors in order to land on the "right" future ... and ensuring a future that maintains that status quo. (Black Quantum Futurism 2020)

Among the many forms and incarnations BQF artwork manifests, there are offerings on Temporal Deprogramming, Community Futures Labs, Black Womxn Time Camps, and Non-Linear Futures. BQF's Rasheedah Phillips (2021) writes on alter-temporal solutions to urban housing inequality:

It is only when people feel they have a stake in a future that is non deterministic, not associated with economic gain, and rooted in community, can possibilities for hope, creative control, and meaningful access spring forward ... Applying a Black quantum futurist lens to communal temporalities works to reappropriate time, stealing back time to actively create a vision of the future for marginalized people who are typically denied access to creative control over the temporal mode of the future, and redefining that future's relationship to the past and present.

This work directly confronts capitalised nekronology, actively attempts to construct an aesthetic alternative to the wealth pollution of futurised profits, and infuses the imaginations that have been dulled by neoliberal science-fiction depictions of the future as an inevitable extension of the capitalised world. Indeed, this is more pressing than is often acknowledged. Reed (2014:77) calls the “crisis of imagination” that followed the 2008 financial crisis far more distressing than the economic crisis itself. Within Durkheim’s (2006:305) suicidal typology, the “fatalistic” variant suggests an inability to imagine that the subsequent could be better than the present—“futures are pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked”. The work of BQF is critical in igniting much needed alter-imaginaries, not just in efforts to imagine a “better” future, but to rethink what “the future” means.

An Incursion from the Future

Claire Colebrook (2020:346) has suggested that the “present is not ... oriented to its own ongoing existence, but has already been captivated by a future in which humanity ceases to be”. Refusing to enter the future that tempts us from *The Vessel* is thus a radical act. It means NOT building the future; not transforming the present into the future. Let the future rot. No one has nor ever will live in “the future”; it’s a hypothetical zone that justifies perpetual exploitation. Toying with the famous Jameson quote, Ana Teixeira Pinto writes rather depressingly that not only is it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism, but for those in privileged positions vis-à-vis the future, “the end of the world is ... preferable to the end of the privilege afforded by racial capitalism” (2019:336).

This is a strong provocation to push back against this future. Within this article I have reluctantly deployed a few militaristic metaphors regarding antagonistic relations between present and future. I do this not to exaggerate the scope and scale of the problems facing the present, but rather to *trigger* an urgency in those that have passively let the future abuse them. Specifically, I am thinking of bankers and politicians who have suffered two centuries of abuse and exploitation at the whims of the future. I encourage these actors to join the ongoing struggle to emancipate the present from the genocidal aggressions unleashed by the future’s efforts to be wealthier than us.

Finally, how best to deploy this multivalent phrase, nekronology (or nekronomania or nekronophilia—a lust for the death of time)? Should it be used to encourage letting time die, letting it expire. More morbidly, is it an affirmation of current eschatological passions (both from environmental and evangelical movements)—it’s simply time to die? For the nekronomaniac is time an end in itself? Denise Ferreira da Silva’s (2014) “Black feminist poethics” asks what to do with endings. Should those exploited and marginalised by the current timeline aim to improve it, redirect it, or to end it? This article suggests it is time for the future to end.

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