

Postcards



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Flotsam and Jetsam: Art, Allegory, and Shipwreck in the Twenty-First Century (III)

DAVID BRIAN HOWARD
NSCAD University, Canada

Abstract

This allegorical postcard is organized around two groups of photographs. The first group was the result of a joint collaboration with the Vancouver artist Scott Saunders, and it produced photographs which have peppered several of my previous texts published by *American, British and Canadian Studies*. The second is a series of photographs taken by Scott Saunders from the window of his apartment in Vancouver, in which he documents the street life constantly ebbing and flowing on the sidewalk below. The catalyst for bringing these two groups together was a photograph I took several years ago in Sambro, Nova Scotia (a small fishing village located just outside of the city of Halifax), depicting a forlorn sunken fishing vessel. The term “flotsam” is applied, according to the *Oxford Reference Dictionary*, to “the wreckage of a ship or its cargo floating on or washed up by the sea,” while “jetsam” describes the things or objects deliberately “thrown away, especially from a ship at sea and that float toward land.” Combined, these images of words and devastated human beings are caught in an apparently endless circulation of violence and contingency located at the heart of the urban fabric of a modernity bereft of any horizon of hope, redemption, or rescue.

Keywords: shipwreck, flotsam, jetsam, modernity, allegory, ephemerality, epistemology



“God has broken the world into little pieces.”

(G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, qtd. in Slavoj Žižek, *Event: Philosophy in Transit*. Penguin Books, 2014, p. 39.)

“Yet I will have to warn you that we will eventually approach a moment, in evoking radical social change and in describing what it is perfectly proper to call a revolution, when the practical project necessarily passes over into utopian projection.”

(Frederic Jameson, “An American Utopia,” qtd. in Frederic Jameson, *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, edited by Slavoj Žižek, Verso, 2016, p. 20.)

“In our darkness there is no place for Beauty.”

(René Char, *Feuillets d'Hypnos*. 1983, qtd. in Comay, "Testament of the Revolution" [Walter Benjamin], *Mosaic*, vol. 50, no. 2, June 2017, p. 232.)

"But, it needs to be underscored, the self-destruction of the imperial truth discourse of the post-Enlightenment incumbent on the fulfillment of its ontologic should not merely be thought in terms of resisting an oppressive and banalizing tradition. For this dis-closure of its plenary circle also and simultaneously releases *pro-jective* possibilities. To think positively the spectral Other that haunts Occidental thought – 'the shadow that the light of Being has not been able to illumine,' in Enrique Dussel's resonant formulation – is, therefore, to open up the possibility of a different idea of the polis from that envisioned by the metaphysical (and Roman) West. It is, finally, to bring into being (to liberate) the thought of a differential polity, a polity in which the dialogue that is the essential condition of our mortal being-with takes place not in the seductive paradisaal realm to which it has, in fact, been strategically confined by liberal democracy, but in *this* unequal world, where imbalance of power – and injustice – always rules."

(William V. Spanos, *America's Shadow: An Anatomy of Empire*. U of Minnesota P, 1999, p. 206.)

"How odd it is to think that a broken pier laced by gulls and kneeling into the foaming pull was once an empire."

(Lisa Robertson, "Utopia/," qtd. in Lisa Robertson, *R's Boat*. California UP, 2010, p. 51.)

"In your ruins I find shelter."

(Samuel Beckett in a letter to E. M. Cioran, 21 Apr. 1969. Web. Accessed 30 Aug. 2022.)

“In the end, or from the beginning, this necessity of involvement or response – this ethical ‘strength’ of continued engagement, this coldness of future linages – is what one might call the legacy of hope as speed in Adorno. While the slowness of chiasmic reversal ruins thinking as a totalization and thereby offers its own kind of future hope, the movements of speed as linkage offer another kind of open-ended ethical ‘hope’ in his texts: the tools for reinscribing culture elsewhere. As Adorno writes in one of his last essays, “Thought is happiness, even where it defines unhappiness.” [Adorno, *Critical Models*.] And we learn from Adorno that it’s never too late for such a speedy intervention, no matter how dire the hermeneutics of the situation may seem. “Hurry up, please. It’s time.” [William Burroughs paraphrase of T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land*.]

(Jeffrey Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Just-In-Time Capitalism*. Stanford UP, 2012, p. 112.)



Scott Saunders, “Untitled.” (2020). Digital Photograph.

“My skiff is without a rudder; it sails with the wind that blows in the lowest regions of Death.”

(Franz Kafka, “Texts on the Hunter Gracchus,” qtd. in Franz Kafka, *Investigations of Dogs and Other Creatures*. Translated by Michael Hofmann, New Directions, 2017, p. 64.)

“The persistence of abject poverty within a system premised on the expansion of private wealth presents ‘one of the most tormenting problems agitating modern society,’ Hegel writes . . . – a contradiction that will inevitably precipitate into open rebellion (which, however, does not in any case seem to Hegel to present much of a solution). In at least one place in his lectures, Hegel appears to defend the rabble’s right to rebellion. However, one chooses to interpret this passage (readers

disagree), Hegel is explicit that this would not be simply a ‘momentary right of distress’ (*Notrecht*) – a provisional suspension of law under exceptional circumstances, for example, in self-defence or in the face of natural calamity (the starving man’s right to steal a loaf of bread, the drowning man’s right to the plank, etc.) – but express a permanent state of exception at the heart of the modern liberal regime. Poverty is an ‘infinite injury to existence’ that challenges the founding principle of the bourgeois order: it presents a permanent emergency in the light of which even the bourgeois right to property becomes only a relative right, and the freedom to acquire only a ‘limited existence of freedom.’”

(Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution*. Stanford UP, 2010, p. 140.)

“When we are hoping for rescue, a voice tells us that hope is in vain, yet it is powerless hope that allows us to draw a single breath.”

(Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, qtd. in Matthew Waggoner, *Unhoused: Adorno and the Problem of Dwelling*. Columbia UP, 2018, p. 121.)

“In addition to reinforcing his Hegelian belief in the objective value of displacement, Adorno’s exile in North America underscored his view that the predicament of modern life lies in a tortured relationship to mass culture; that is, change or revolt against the past is inevitable, but something of substance is always irretrievably lost. For example, in the aphorism entitled “Refuge for the Homeless,” Adorno writes, ‘Dwelling, in the proper sense, is now impossible.’ In this passage Adorno does not suggest that a return to the traditional notion of home is even fully desirable: ‘The traditional residences we grew up in have grown intolerable: each trait of comfort in them is paid for with a betrayal of knowledge, each vestige of shelter with the musty pact of family interests.’ His tone is grimly nostalgic: ‘The house is past.’ Modernity has

brought both bombs and technology to eliminate the middle-class, European comforts that Adorno once knew. He describes a culture that produces progress in order to destroy itself.”

(Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Duke UP, 1996, p. 118.)

“As the two guards marched in, . . . struggled to his feet (from the spot in the center of the wall. (The guards were both men this time.) Another man, less portly and with more hair, came in and asked . . . the identical questions – verbatim, he realized at the same time he realized (and began to worry that) his own answers were at least worded slightly differently. At the end, the man took something out of his side pocket that looked like a watch with fangs. He came over and jabbed it against . . . shoulder – . . . twisted against the pain, not that it did much good the way the guards held him.

‘Don’t wince!’ the man said. ‘It’s supposed to hurt.’”

(Samuel R. Delany, *Trouble on Triton*, p. 137.)

“The knowledge is there, the bits and scraps, flickering on and off, turn-about, winking on the storm, in league to fool me.”

(Samuel Beckett, *Stories and Texts*, (1967), qtd. in Glazier, *Digital Poetics*, p. 76.)

“The crowd is the experience of the commoditized future in formation. Tossed about and dragged along by it, the individual is reduced to being a mere product offered up to anonymous tides. Offered up, going with the flow. In a crowd, there’s always this impression of being effectively consumed: by the movements that constrain the body, the paroxysm that shake it. One is consumed by the streets, the boulevards. The signs and

shop windows are only there to boost the circulation and exchange of goods. The stroller does not consume and is not consumed. He practices urban foraging, or even theft. He does not, in the manner of the walker of the plains or mountains, receive the landscape as a gift for his effort. But he captures, furtive moments, fleeting coincidences. He doesn't consume, but nevertheless continues to capture vignettes, to bring down on himself a drizzle of images stolen in the improbable instant of the encounter."

(Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, p. 180.)

"A new underground arises
below the below."

(Yehuda Amichai, *Travels*. Translated by Rutha Neva, Sheep Meadow Press, 1986, p. 49.)

"The word 'shattered' [*erschüttert*] has been used *ad nauseam*. So perhaps something may be said in its defense. It will not distance itself from the sensual for an instant and will above all else cling to one fact: that shock leads to collapse. Do those who assure us after every theater premiere or every new book that they were 'shattered' really wish to tell us that something inside them has collapsed? . . . Anyone who has climbed a mountain on his own and arrived at the top exhausted, and then turns to walk down again with steps that shatter his entire body – for such a person, time hangs loose, the partition walls inside him collapse, and he pushes on through the rubble of the moment as if in a dream. Sometimes he tries to stop, but cannot. Who knows whether it is his thoughts that shatter him, or the roughness of the way? His body has become a kaleidoscope that each step presents him with ever-changing figures of the truth."

(Benjamin, "Ibizan Sequence" 1932, in Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, Volume 2, 1927-1934, pp. 592-3.)

“These are the oft-told legends. Many more exist that are local, from a magical barberry that tricks travelers into returning, to a ghost-ship crewed by drowned sailors. Then there were the travelers themselves, who skillfully mythologized their idling and daydreams”

(Chris Moss, “Homeland,” *Utopia*, edited by Russ Bradshaw, Five Leaves Publications, 2012, p. 69.)

“Through depths of the unknown to come upon the New,”

(Charles Baudelaire, qtd. Marcel Proust, *On Art and Literature*. Capo Press, 1997, p. 41.)

“To be against purity is to start from an understanding of our implication in this compromised world, to recognise the quite vast injustices informing our everyday lives, and from that understanding to act on our *wish that it were not so*. I believe that this orientation is at the heart of prefigurative, loving, social movement practices whose point is not only to interpret the world, but to change it. We cannot predict what might emerge from individual and collective practices of staying with the trouble, except that it holds the possibility of another world, still imperfect, still impure, and another one after that. The possibility of other worlds, hospitable to hosting many worlds, might be beyond our capacity to imagine. Still, such a possibility can only arise because of our imperfect attempts to make it so.”

(Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*. U of Minnesota P, 2016, p. 204.)



“At a certain crossroads we will win
The harvest of our discipline.
Swollen flesh, minds fed on wilderness –
O what a blaze of love our bodies press!”

(Leonard Cohen, “The Priest Says Goodbye,” in Leonard Cohen, *The Spice-Box of Earth*. McClelland and Stewart, 1961, p. 37.)

“Whoever wrote the message and put it in, sealed the bottle and threw it into the sea had no idea when (if ever) the bottle would be found and whether [the recipient], . . . would be able and willing to read the text, understand the message, accept its content and put it the kind of use the author intended. The entire equation consists of unknown variables. . . . At best, [the author] could, repeat after Marx *Dixi et salavi animam meam*: [he] has . . . done all in his power to save the message from extinction. . . . The message in a bottle is a testimony to . . . the duration of hope, to the indestructibility of possibilities and the frailty of adversities that bar them

from implementation. In Adorno's rendition, critical theory is such a testimony – and this warrants the metaphor of a message in the bottle."

(Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, qtd. in James Hellings, *Adorno and Art*, p. 164.)

"The way I see it, there can be no direct connection between art and message, especially if the message is political, without running the risk of being burned by the artifice."

(Marcel Broodthaers, "Ten Thousand Francs Reward," qtd. in Birgit Pelzer, *Marcel Broodthaers. Rewriting Conceptual Art*, edited by Michael Newman and Jon Bird, 1999, p. 197.)

"Inversely, we might begin to inquire whether the retreat from the objectification, commodification, and institutionalization of traditional art models, which has characterized the tactics of certain more (theoretically) radical segments of the art community, is not so much a function of the realization of inherently noxious qualities which those models possess, as the instinctive recoil against *that which they represent*: the commodification and institutionalization of human history and endeavor. While such activities now appear naïve and unsuccessful on the one hand, in mistaking for ethic or style that which is in fact part of a more profound social and economic reality, they *do* signify a positive and potentially liberating capacity; that is the will to change, to re-examine, and, more importantly, to 'call to arms' the tools that make radical and contextual critique conceivable. Suppose we imagine this capacity as a medium, a methodology, and not an end in itself. We can *learn* as much, in a sense, through the 'failure' of concept art as we do through its partial success; while being critical of the (self) presumptive and reductionist aspects of formalist tradition, we exist as its inevitable heir."

(Sarah Charlesworth, "A Declaration of Independence." 1975. *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson, MIT Press, 1999, p. 316.)

"What is a work? How does it occur? Where does a work begin and end?"

(Michael Newman, "After Conceptual Art: Joe Scanlan's Nesting Bookcases, Duchamp, Design and the Impossibility of Disappearing," *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, edited by Newman and Bird, Reaktion Books, 1999, p. 221.)

"We then find ourselves facing two kinds of questions. What is the worth of the other signs, those that constitute the realms of life? In and of themselves, what do they teach us? Can we say that they already set us on the path of art, and how? But above all, once we have received from art the final revelation, how will this revelation react on the other realms and become the center of a system that leaves nothing outside itself?"

(Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*. Translated by Richard Howard, U of Minnesota P, 2000, p. 50.)

"No word is banal. All words are insofar as they do not escape wear and tear. So it is not a matter of saving them from banality, but of turning to them as to the common ovens or mills which everybody had to work as rent to the lord of the estate."

(Edmund Jabès, "To Enlarge the Horizons of the Word," in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, edited by Mary Ann Caws, U of Nebraska P, 2001, p. 681.)

"Good citizens reproduce the traumas

Of memory and transgression, thus
Guaranteeing a futurity for Rome's citation. I myself walk towards
The fantasy of the Imperium."

(Robertson, "Coda: The Device," in Robertson, *Lisa Robertson's Magenta Soul Whip*, p. 87.)

"Art is social because its alienated existence is entwined with the very process of enlightened liberation from nature (disenchantment): art's very actuality is derived from domination and mastery. Furthermore, art itself, in its technique, does violence to its object. This makes artworks socially culpable; yet each, Adorno argues, seeks to expiate this guilt through its synthetic expression, to rescue over into form something of the amorphous to which they ineluctably do violence (*Aesthetic Theory*: 234. 50). The wordless gesture of art turns out to be in fact its most powerful and important aspect for it opens up to the subject a consciousness, an experience, of what is repressed for the sake of its own being, and therefore what is also still a part of it."

(Martin Morris, *Rethinking the Communicative Turn: Adorno, Habermas, and the Problem of Communicative Freedom*. State U of New York P, 2001, pp. 179-80.)

"Someone who often went off the beaten path had this to say when asked about it."

(Ernst Bloch, *Traces*. Stanford UP, 2006, p. 105.)

"[They] were walking on the road." They walked on. "There is a great temptation to read the fluttering phrases describing the Companions' perambulations as conveyors – if not as conveyors *of* meaning then as conveyors *toward* meaning."

(David Greenstein, *Roads to Utopia: The Walking Stories of the Zohar*. Stanford UP, 2014, p. 215.)

“The working word. The use of another place is to go to. Baked goods the meaning of *rise*. To discuss glamour on this afternoon. Mileage hurtles by a reasonable man. The card game someone lasts through. The difference ‘Wordlessly.’ ‘Without words.’ The sameness silenced.”

(Karen Mac Cormack, *Quill Driver*, qtd. in Gerald L. Bruns, *The Material of Poetry: Sketches for a Philosophical Poetics*. U of Georgia P, 2012, pp. 4-5.)

“Life on the road – what I keep in my room: Japanese rice crackers wrapped in seaweed, grapes, bananas, dried fruit, single malt scotch, mineral water.”

(Michael Palmer, “The Danish Notebook,” in *Active Boundaries: Selected Essays and Talks*. New Directions, 2008, p. 143.)

“The subjugation of life to the process of production imposes as a humiliation on everyone something of the isolation and solitude that we are tempted to regard as resulting from our own superior choice. It is as old a component of bourgeois ideology that each individual, in his particular interest, considers himself better than all others, as that he values the others, as the community of all customers, more highly than himself. Since the demise of the old bourgeois class, both ideas have led an afterlife in the minds of intellectuals, who are at once the last enemies of the bourgeois and the last bourgeois. In still permitting themselves to think at all in the face of the naked reproduction of existence, they act as a privileged group; in letting matters rest there, they declare the nullity of their privilege. Private existence, in striving to resemble one worthy of

man, betrays the latter, since any resemblance is withdrawn from general realization, which yet more than ever before has need of independent thought. There is no way out of this entanglement. The only responsible course is to deny oneself the ideological misuse of one's own existence, and for the rest to conduct oneself in private as modestly, unobtrusively and unpretentiously as is required, no longer by good upbringing, but by the shame of still having the air to breathe in hell."

(Adorno qtd. in John Lysaker, "Extolling Art in an Intolerable World," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2007, p. 44.)

"In the unsayable, useless words lie hidden which we will claim later. Stars. Little stars."

(Jabès, "To Enlarge the Horizons of the Word," in *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*, edited by Caws, U of Nebraska P, 2000, p. 680.)

"This meaning is itself historical. The organic connection between the sign and meaning attained in the concrete historical act of the utterance exists only for the given utterance and only under the given conditions of its realization.

If we tear the utterance out of social intercourse and materialize it, we lose the organic unity of all its elements. The word, grammatical form, sentence, and all linguistic definiteness in general taken in abstraction from the concrete historical utterance turn into technical signs of a meaning that is as yet only possible and still not individualized historically. The organic connection of meaning and sign cannot become lexical, grammatically stable, and fixed in identical and reproducible forms, i.e., cannot itself become a sign or a constant element of a sign, cannot become grammaticalized. This connection is created only to be destroyed, to be reformed again, but in new forms under the conditions of a new utterance."

(M. M. Bakhtin / P. N. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle, Harvard UP, 1985, p. 121.)

“An iced-in polar ship
Seized in a vice of glass,
Searching the fatal path
Of this imprisoning trip;”

(Baudelaire, “The Irremediable,” 1861, in Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, p. 161.)

“ . . . trace the shell of the city its dead words. . . . ”

(Z. Scoulding, *Remains of a Future City*, 2008, qtd. in *Nutopia: A Critical View of Future Cities*, edited by Malcolm Miles and Jennie Savage, U of Plymouth P, 2012, p. 123.)

“The coming extinction of art is prefigured in the increasing impossibility of representing historical facts.”

(Adorno qtd. in Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*. U of Chicago P, 2007, p. 66.)

“There is no work of art which does not break its affirmative stance by the ‘power of the negative,’ which does not, in its very structure, evoke the words, the images, the music of another reality, of another order repelled by the existing one and yet alive in memory and anticipation, alive in what happens to men and women, and in their rebellion against it. Where this tension between affirmation and negation, between pleasure and sorrow, higher and material culture no longer prevails, where the work no longer

sustains the dialectical unity of what is and what can (and ought to) be, art has lost its truth, has lost itself. And precisely in the aesthetic form are this tension, and the critical, negating transcending qualities of bourgeois art – its antibourgeois qualities. To recapture and transform them to save them from expulsion must be one of the tasks of the cultural revolution.”

(Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. Beacon Press, 1972, p. 93.)

“... the rescue from the Fascist flood via the Word [*Schrift*].”

(Gershom Scholem qtd. in McFarland, *Constellation: Friedrich Nietzsche and Walter Benjamin in the Now-Time of History*. Fordham UP, 2012, p. 181.)

“Then does one, in thinking of poems, does one walk such paths with poems? Are these paths only By-Paths [*Um-Wege*], bypaths [*Umwege*], from thou to thou? Yet at the same time, among how many other paths [*Wege*], they’re also paths on which language get a voice, they are encounters, paths of a voice to a perceiving Thou, creaturely bypaths [*kreatürliche Umwege*], sketches of existence perhaps, a sending oneself ahead toward oneself, in search of oneself . . . A kind of homecoming [*Eine Art Heimkehr*].”

(Paul Celan, “*Der Meridien*,” qtd. in Aubrey L. Glazer, *A New Physiognomy of Jewish Thinking: Critical Theory After Adorno as Applied to Jewish Thought*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2013, p. 45.)

“The act of walking is to the city what the speech act is to language.”

(Michael W. Brooks, *Subway City: Riding the Trains, Reading New York*, 1997, qtd. in Goldsmith, *Capital: New York, Capital of the Twentieth Century*. Verso, 2016, p. 466.)

“Benjamin, in his memoiristic essay “A Berlin Chronicle” (1932), frames his own way of walking in the city as a kind of individual act of rebellion: ‘Perhaps the same sabotage of real social existence is to be found even later in my manner, already described, of walking in the city, in the stubborn refusal under any circumstances to form a united front, be it even with my own mother.’ Recalling ‘the pedantic care with which, on these walks, (he) always kept half a step behind her,’ he rejected the obligation to walk in step with the family, class, and whatever impending discussion was at hand. Though in his reflection Benjamin alludes to what might be characterized as a teenager’s stubbornness, his youthful experience of the possibility for walking against the norm is instructive and provides a model, however young and simple, for Surrealists’ own revolutionary steps.”

(Lori Waxman, *Keep Walking Intently*, p. 46.)

“When we walk the city we are quoting the walkers who have come before us, and performing communal turns on each quotation.”

(Ben Jacks, “City Walking: Laying Claim to Manhattan,” in Goldsmith, *Capital*, p. 468.)

“... a movement of return that never comes full circle; that in turning back, leaves itself open at each and every turn, at each and every second, to the coming of another.”

(Levine, *A Weak Messianic Power*, p. 9.)

“I’ve found a peaceful circular ride
In an amusement park at night
I could ride it forever.”

(Alice P. Notley, *Disobedience*, 2001, qtd. in Frank Lagapa, *Negative Theology and Utopian Thought in Contemporary American Poetry: Determined Negations*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 116.)

“But, in art, he who takes but one step,
In any direction, is already lost. (Clark Coolidge)”

(Waldrop, *Dissonance*, p. 231.)

“To the degree that the world is now made up of divergent series (the *chaosmos*) . . . the monad is now unable to contain the entire world as if in a closed circle that can be modified by projection. It now opens on a trajectory or a spiral in expansion that moves further and further away from the center. A vertical harmonic can no longer be distinguished from a horizontal harmonic, just like the private condition of a dominant monad that produces its own accords in itself, and the public condition of monads in a crowd that follow lines of melody. The two begin to fuse on a sort of diagonal, where the monads penetrate each other, are modified, inseparable from the groups of prehension that carry them along and make up as many transitory captures . . . They identify variation and trajectory, and overtake monadology with a “nomadology.””

(Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*, qtd. in Timothy Murray, *The Digital Baroque: New Media Art and Cinematic Folds*. U of Minnesota P, 2008, p. 133.)

“Art is no more able than theory to concretize utopia, not even negatively. A cryptogram of the new is the image of collapse; only by virtue of the

absolute negativity of collapse does art enunciate the unspeakable: utopia. In this image of collapse all the stigmata of the repulsive and the loathsome in modern art gather. Through the irreconcilable renunciation of the semblance of reconciliation, art holds fast to the promise of reconciliation in the midst of the unreconciled: this is the true consciousness of an age in which the real possibility of utopia – that given the level of productive forces the earth could here and now be paradise – converges with the possibility of total catastrophe. In the image of catastrophe, an image that is not a copy of the event but a cipher of its potential, the magical trace of art's most distant prehistory reappears under the total spell, as if art wanted to prevent the catastrophe by conjuring up its image."

(Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, qtd. in Maxim A. Pensky, "Natural History and Aesthetic Truth in Aesthetic Theory," *New German Critique*, vol. 48, no. 2/143, Aug. 2021, p. 40.)

"The circle of history closes."

(Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, p. 145.)

"Words – a few – continue to come: enough words, enough consolation, to make a promising end for the story, and evoking at the same time the prospect of more stories, 'other worlds.' As long as there are words, words coming, hope endures. And what the narrator teaches with those words he emphatically reclaims for a sense of humanity at once promising and provocative, 'all imagination.'"

(David Kleinberg-Levin, *Beckett's Words: Theodicy, Justice and the Promise of Happiness*. 2015, p. 220.)

“[A]rt’s last line of resistance coincides with the commodity’s most advanced line of attack.”

(Walter Benjamin qtd. in *Walter Benjamin and the Aesthetics of Change*. Edited by Anka M. Pusca, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 144.)

“The West’s crisis of trust in itself, in its knowledge, in its language, in its reason, in its liberalism, in its subject and in the world, actually dates back to the end of the 19th century; it breaks forth in every domain with and around the First World War. Cybernetics developed on that open wound of modernity. It asserted itself as a remedy for the existential and thus governmental crisis of the West. As Norbert Wiener saw it, ‘We are shipwrecked on a doomed planet. Yet even in a shipwreck, human decencies and human values do not necessarily vanish. We shall go down, but let it be in a manner to which we may look forward as worthy of our dignity. Cybernetic government is inherently apocalyptic. Its purpose is to locally impede the spontaneously entropic, chaotic movement of the world and to ensure ‘enclaves of order,’ of stability, and – who knows? – the perpetual self-regulation of systems, through the unrestrained, transparent, and controllable circulation of information.’ ‘Communication is the cement of society and those whose work consists in keeping the channels of communication open are the ones on whom the continuance or downfall of our civilization largely depends,’ declared [Norbert] Wiener, believing he knew. As in every period of transition, the changeover from the old economic governmentality to cybernetics included a phase of instability, a historical opening where governmentality *as such* risks being put in check.”

(The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*. Semiotext(e), 015, MIT Press, pp. 108-9.)

“When the Golden Age meets the Apocalypse the earth begins to quake.”

(Mark Lilla, *The Shipwrecked Mind: On Political Reaction*. New York Review of Books, 2016, p. 142.)

“What are the grounds for hope in this world of wrecks?”

(Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, p. 107.)

“An economic cycle is coming to an end, the ‘American century’ is over and we are witnessing the gradual formation of multiple centers of global capitalism – the U.S., Europe, China, maybe Latin America – each of them standing for capitalism with a specific twist: the US for neo-liberal capitalism; Europe for what remains of the welfare state; China for the ‘Asian values’ (authoritarian) capitalism; Latin America for populist capitalism . . . In this world, the old and new superpowers are testing each other, trying to impose their own version of global rules, experimenting with them through proxies, which, of course, are other small nations and states.

The present situation thus bears an uncanny resemblance to the situation around 1900, when the hegemony of the British empire was questioned by new rising powers, especially Germany, which wanted their piece of colonial stake, and the Balkans was one of the places of confrontation. Today, the role of British empire is played by the US, the new rising superpowers are Russia and China, and our Balkans is the Middle East. It is the same old battle for geo-political influence: not only the US, but also Moscow hears calls from Georgia, and Ukraine; maybe it will start hearing voices from the Baltic states. . . . (Furthermore, one should note that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Russia was perceived by many in England and Germany as the next world superpower, which would surpass others in twenty to twenty-five years; but although the Russian economy was exploding, so were social antagonisms. The same holds for today’s China, where social tensions are the dark obverse of fast economic development.)”

(Slavoj Žižek, *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Living Dangerously*. Penguin Books, 2017, p. 284.)

“After shattering myth, the tide of materialism has washed its fragments out to sea. Once the motor force of this tide, the bourgeoisie will end up as so much foam drifting out along with all the flotsam. When he describes the mechanism whereby the king’s hired assassin returns in due time to carry out his orders upon the one who gave them, Shakespeare seems to offer us a curiously prophetic account of the fate reserved for the class that killed God. Once the assassins of the established order lose their faith in the myth, or, in other words, in the God who legalizes their crimes, the machinery of death is turned against its devisers. Revolution was the bourgeoisie’s finest invention. It is also the running noose which will help it take its leap into oblivion. It is easy to see why bourgeois thought, strung up as it is on a rope of radicalism of its own manufacture, clings with the energy of desperation to every reformist solution, to anything that can prolong its life, even though its own weight must inevitably drag it down to its doom. Fascism is in a way a constant response to this hopeless predicament. It is like an aesthete dreaming of dragging the world down with him into the abyss, lucid as to the death of his class but a sophist when he announces the inevitability of universal annihilation. Today this *mise en scène* of death chosen and refused lies at the core of the spectacle of incoherence.”

(Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, PM Press, 2012, p. 93.)

“Which raises the distinct probability of the emergence of new forms of authoritarian rule at home. We are on the road to what Bertram Gross has called “friendly fascism.” Unlike its European predecessors, American fascism may not be marked by an “open terroristic dictatorship.” The foundation of fascism has already been laid in the consolidation of political and economic power in incredibly few hands.”

(Kathy Acker, *Portrait of an Eye: Three Novels*. Pantheon, 1992, p. 287.)

“It isn’t the promise of resolution that the allegorical presents but the fact of an irresolvability, an impasse. And it is this impasse – as a negativity rather than a totality (and, indeed, as a register of a collapse of totality) – that, at the moment, gives us the best hope of better things to come.”

(Lyn Hejinian qtd. in Michael Golston, *Poetic Machinations: Allegory, Surrealism, and Postmodern Poetic Form*. Columbia UP 2015, p. 225.)

“... a shipwrecked person adrift on the wreck, having climbed to the top of the mast which is already torn apart. But he has the chance from there to give a signal for his rescue.”

(Walter Benjamin qtd. in Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. MIT Press, 1991, p. 37.)

“Live literature does not set its watch by yesterday’s time, nor by today’s, but by tomorrow’s. Live literature is like a sailor who is sent aloft; from the masthead he can descry sinking vessels, icebergs and maelstroms which are not yet visible from the deck. You can drag him down from the mast and put him to work in the boiler-room or on the capstan, but that won’t change a thing: the mast is still there and from the masthead another sailor will be able to see what the first sailor has seen.”

(Zamayatin, *On Literature, Revolution and Entropy*, qtd. in Somay, *The View from the Masthead*, n. p.)

“...they had just escaped a shipwreck of blood. ...”

(Frederico Garcia Lorca, “Dawn.” Web. Accessed 20 Aug. 2022.)

“But even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who’ll come along later and find his bones and his ledger, and learn his fate. . . . Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past.”

(Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, qtd. Jennifer Wagner-Lawlor, *Postmodern Utopias and Feminist Fiction*. Cambridge UP, 2013, p. 79.)

“. . . let us continue to strive with genuine compassion, personal integrity and human decency to fight for radical democracy in the face of the frightening abyss – or terrifying inferno – of the twenty-first century, clinging to ‘a hope not hopeless but unhopeful.’”

(Cornel West, “Black Strivings in a Twilight Civilization,” in Cornel West, *The Cornel West Reader*. Civitas Books, 2000, p. 118.)

“We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us – indeed, we have gone further and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! . . . and there is no longer any ‘land.’ Over this fragment taken from the *Gay Science* is written, as if to remind us of Pascal, ‘*In the horizon of the infinite.*’”

(Hans Blumenberg, *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm of a Metaphor for Existence*. MIT Press, 1996, p. 19.)

“The epistemic value of Blumenberg’s metaphor nevertheless allows the shipwrecked, even the most ‘embarked’ one, to adopt for a moment – ephemeral but crucial – a distant view of the downfall he has experienced. Like Proust in *The Guermantes Way*, who comes back to the house of his grandmother after a long absence and suddenly, in front of her portrait, feels that he sees an old woman as unknown to him, the melancholic vanquished can contemplate his defeat from an external observatory. Just for a moment, he can neutralize his emotional commitment to an

exhausted experience and scrutinize it as the viewer of a photograph. Of course, an image cut from its familiar world is emotionally mutilated and 'unredeemed' but it deserves an iconological approach, relieved of any subjective involvement or identification, and such an estrangement can be epistemologically fruitful. According to Siegfried Kracauer, 'melancholy as an inner disposition not only makes elegiac objects seem attractive but carries still another, more important implication: it favors self-estrangement,' which is a premise of critical understanding. Instead of deepening a pathological attachment to a dead, engulfed past, this melancholic vision enables one to overcome a suffered trauma.'"

(Enzo Taverso, *Left-Wing Melancholy: Marxism, History, and Melancholy*. Columbia UP, 2016, p. 25.)

“And when today he lights up his cigarette, he uses a flintstone and a fuse, like everyone else. ‘In a boat,’ he says, ‘that is the best way. The wind blows the matches out, but the harder the wind blows, the more the fuse glows.’”

(excerpt from Michale Taussig, *Benjamin's Grave*. Web. Accessed 30 Aug. 2022.)

“One day: stronger than anyone expected. Stronger than
ever before in the recording
of such. Un-
natural says the news. Also the body says it.”

(Graham, *Sea Change*, 2008, qtd. in Griffiths, *The New Poetics of Climate Change*, p. 161.)

“O humanity, in how many storms must you be tossed, how many shipwrecks must you endure, so long as you turn yourself into a many-

headed beast lusting after a multiplicity of things! You are ailing in both your intellectual powers, as well as in the heart.”

(Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, in Melvin J. Lasky, *Utopia and Revolution*. U of Chicago P, 1976, p. 24.)

“The sea grows quieter and quieter/To the very depths.”

(Walter Benjamin, “Sad Poem,” qtd. in Stephen Paul Miller, “Articulating a Radical and a Secular Jewish Poetics: Walter Benjamin, Charles Bernstein, and the Weak Messiah as Girly Man,” in *Reading the Difficulties: Dialogues with Contemporary American Innovative Poetry*, edited by Thomas Fink and Judith Halden-Sullivan, U of Alabama P, 2014, p. 49.)

“Or say that the end precedes the beginning,
And the end and the beginning were always there
Before the beginning and after the end.
And all is always now.”

(T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton,” qtd. in Joan Dienstag, *Dancing in Chains: Narrative and Memory in Political Theory*. Stanford UP, 1997, p. 139.)

“Death, old admiral, up anchor now,
this country wearies us. Put out to sea!
What if the waves and winds are black as ink,
our hearts are filled with light. You know our hearts!
Pur us your poison, let us be comforted!
Once we have burned our brains out, we can plunge
to Hell or Heaven – an abyss will do –
deep in the Unkown to find the new.”

(Charles Baudelaire, "Travelers" (*Le voyage*), qtd. in Christopher Cutrone, *Adorno's Marxism*. Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2013, pp. 379-80, Web. Accessed 30 Aug. 2022.)

"At long last our ships may venture out again, venture out to face any danger," because "the sea, *our* sea, lie open again" . . . "perhaps there has never yet been such an 'open sea' . . ."

(Andrew Culp, *Dark Deleuze*. U of Minnesota P, 2006, p. 60.)

"I was at the beginning
again"

(Nathaniel Mackey, "Splay Anthem," qtd. in Jason Lagpapa, *Negative Theology and Utopian Thought in Contemporary American Poetry*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 57.)

"To whoever embarks on terrible seas."

(Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals, Ecce Homo*, qtd. in Mike Gane, *Baudrillard, Critical and Fatal Theory*. Routledge, 1991, p. 3.)