

Book Review

Joanna Page – “*Art and environmental change: beyond apocalypse*”, pp. 87-110 – taken from the book “*Decolonizing Science in Latin American Art*”, London, University College London, 2021.

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Joanna Page's book addresses issues of the link between science and art and actions that can be taken to slow global warming. The study *Art and Environmental Change: Beyond the Apocalypse* is a stand-alone chapter that aims to highlight a range of ways in which artists communicate the existential risks of which we are increasingly aware of. The visual corpus combines artistic ingenuity with technology that can help combating natural disasters through various interventions or video installations located in remote places that aim to project an environment where humanity is marginalised, sending an alarm signal that is difficult to ignore.

Joanna Page is a writer who works on literature, film, graphic fiction and visual arts in Latin America, particularly Argentina, Chile and Brazil. Many of his recent projects are related to the broader theme of science and art, but he has also explored issues of *memory, modernity, capitalism, posthumanism, decoloniality* and, not least, *ecological thinking* in Latin America. The author is distinguished by a very extensive academic activity and has written numerous studies on the relationship between science and art, some of which are worth mentioning: "*Creativity and Science in Contemporary Argentine Literature: Between Romanticism and Formalism*", "*Science Fiction in Argentina: Technologies of the Text in a Material Multiverse*", "*Posthumanism and the Graphic Novel in Latin America*".

This paper is divided into two sub-chapters, which in turn are divided into several sub-sections highlighting technological approaches in conjunction with artistic approaches to combating the problem of natural disasters. The key concepts in this study are: *sustainability*, which involves the use and development of natural resources without leading to their depletion; *geodesign*, in this case explained in terms of reflecting on the understanding of climate as a highly integrated system that may not be "fixed"; *precariousness*, which emphasises the uncertainty, fragility and temporality of life forms in the environment; and last but not least, the concept of the *anthropocene*, explained through the actions of humans, but also the consequences for relief, vegetation and climate.

The chapter opens with the vision and thinking of Joanna Zylincka, writer, researcher, but also artist from the UK, who proposes a "counter-apocalypse" that aims to illuminate the Anthropocene and technological perspectives that shape the apocalyptic narratives of the climate crisis. Global warming and natural disasters are considered from two different angles, but centred on artists proposing different installations.

The first sub-chapter is entitled "*Art and Geodesign for Climate Change*" and presents the case of Joaquín Fargas, a researcher involved in educational programmes to promote the approach of artistic creativity in the study of science and technology, both in academia and in publishing. Fargas' work includes a series of installations in Antarctica, which in recent years has become a privileged place for artists working on science and climate change. The year 2017 was marked by the Antarctic Biennial with a number of Latin American artists.

Entitled "*A Quixotic Effort to Freeze the Arctic Again*", the Biennale will present the installation "*Glacier*", located on the glass territory protected from human presence. It consists of a series of solar-powered robots with small rotating legs that, as they move through the snow, help to compact and crystallise it, eventually turning it into ice. The facility is designed to reverse the ice melt that has provided some of the most alarming evidence of global warming.

Another important work is "*Don Quixote*", which shows three windmills generating electricity to cool everything around them, demonstrating the possibility of creating ice to recharge the polar ice caps, but also to slow down the melting process. Zylincka makes a critical comment about this installation, pointing out the difficult attempt to preserve ice in this location under the conditions of rapid warming we are currently in. In this case, there are opposing views and a

refusal of the "masculinist-solutionist" approaches that aim to emphasize the Anthropocene and the technical perspectives that shape the apocalyptic narratives of the climate crisis.

However, the artists' installations draw attention to the fact that it would be difficult, but not impossible, to resupply the world with ice. It is important to point out that the problem of global warming reflects the need to act as quickly as possible, as one of the greatest climatic emergencies is looming before our eyes.

The second sub-chapter, "*The Future of the Environment Beyond the Precarious: Symbiosis and Resilience*", revolves around the discourse of artist Paul Rosero Contretas and his collaboration with scientists and designers in a series of multidisciplinary projects aimed at environmental and climate issues. Under the title "Plant Life and the Long History of Evolution", the Antarctic Biennial 2017 will be brought back into focus, but under a different vision of the environment and the polar future.

In contrast to the artistic intervention mentioned above, the "*Arriba!*" placed by Rosero consisted of a glass "time capsule" containing a cocoa plant, along with audio recordings of a cocoa plant. This work created a contrast between the glacial landscape and the presence of the tropical plant, along with the recording that contained birdsong from the Amazon rainforest at a fairly high volume. By placing a tropical plant in such a glass environment at the Biennale, Rosero draws attention to the capacity of colonization, self-regeneration and adaptation of plants that existed in different environments before humanity and will therefore certainly survive our absence.

The adaptability of other species is highlighted in the section "Coral Reefs: Collaboration and Coevolution" and simultaneously captured in the second video installation "*Purple Haze*" from 2018, filmed underwater near the active volcanic island smoke Redonda in the Galapagos archipelago. Like the installations "*Arriba!*", "*Purple Haze*" offer a speculative fiction that intersects different time periods and locations, questioning the future of coral reefs and, implicitly, the environment.

The subheading "*Changing the Paradigm of Evolution*" presents the artists' installations that hold the secrets of the origin of life. In particular, the work "*Purple Haze*" demonstrates and argues for collaborative survival techniques. The new biological and biosemiotics paradigms emphasize the conditions we share with other species. This is not about uncertainty, but about the cooperation and generosity that characterize relationships in the natural world. Towards the end

of the article, in the subsection "*Ruins and Regeneration*", he focuses on the intrinsic recognition and capitalization of nature and on the subjectivity of the different species. The following subsection, "*Nature, Culture and Technology*", poses a series of questions that shed light on the relationship between technology and climate change, as well as the attitude required for such a critical environmental crisis.

The final section, "*The Future of the Environment Beyond the Precarious*", sums up the message of the two artists by highlighting the struggle we must constantly wage against catastrophic climate change. While Fargas' work serves to reinforce the linear notion of time that underlies the events and narratives of the climate apocalypse in our lifetimes, Rosero's work opens up a perspective on the contingent and the many ways in which the future of the environment and the evolution of species is possible even through the marginalization of humanity or even its absence. By harnessing these solutions to combat global warming, we can create a technology-friendly future where we want to find solutions to promote life in all its forms.

The author manages to show us that the future depends on us, on how open we are to creating a more sustainable environment and at the same time how important science and technology are in our lives and in saving the environment. This theme of the environment and the connection between science and art has also been addressed in scientific papers, as in the case of Hayley Jean's "*Connecting Art and Science: An Artist's Perspective on Environmental Sustainability*", which discusses the problem of the current climate issue, but also the need for scientists to bring about climate change. Art and science connect across disciplines and open up new ways of imagining how we can live in a healthier environment.

Author Joanna Page's work is based on an up-to-date and solid bibliography, which is very useful in both the scientific and artistic fields through the approaches mentioned, but also through the examples of artists and critics she proposes. The work is innovative through the examples offered, but also through the solutions it offers for building a friendlier environment.



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