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Continuing the Conversation: How Will Art Survive Us?

Posted by [Tal Beery](#), artist, activist, and educator

Tal Beery with Agora participant from "How Will Art Survive Us?" Wednesday July 13, 2016, Photo: Manuel Martagon. © 2016 The Museum of Modern Art, New York

How Will Art Survive Us? I had the pleasure of presenting on this beautifully provocative topic at MoMA's [Agora](#) program this past July. I discussed two works, one ongoing pedagogical project, [School of Apocalypse](#) at Pioneer Works, and one sculpture, *Eroding Plazas and Accumulating Resistance*, made with the [Occupy Museums](#) collective. Facing social and ecological changes that may threaten the very survival of our species, our times require large-scale collective adaptation. The arts, and arts institutions, are crucial here. They hold space for new stories and act as arenas for the rehearsal of new structures and modes of engagement that will be the most effective tools for surviving what we have become.

But this is an uphill battle. Since the Enlightenment, we have imagined just about everything—from birds to humans to ecosystems—as complex machines that can ultimately be mastered by human ingenuity and science. Control is simply a matter of gaining the right knowledge. But when do we know enough to act? We have a history of being overeager, often finding ourselves acting at too large a scale with significant gaps in understanding. Our recklessness has been supercharged by fossil fuels and today we find ourselves at a frightening precipice, facing a mass extinction event, global warming, and many other worrying symptoms of reckless human intervention. When we look back on it, the 20th century may very well be the Century of Unintended Consequences.

But no, we aren't heading to some spectacular apocalypse. We can expect no revelatory moment; no divine flood will humble us. Neither God, nor Nature, nor the Universe reserves its great rewards and its great punishments for our species alone.

The point is we are not heading to an End. Instead, we have already entered an interregnum, a time between the reign of one monarch and the next, a pending, parenthetical moment of uncertainty and unrest as we grapple with cultural, ecological, and technological phenomena that challenge basic assumptions about human existence.* We can no longer proceed in our current form. We must become something new if we want to survive.

How does art participate in this transformation? What kind of influence do artists have over its direction? What responsibilities should our cultural institutions take in facilitating it? What will art be like when it's over?

If you would like to join a community of artists and thinkers who are actively engaging these ideas, join us at any upcoming School of Apocalypse [event](#). If you'd like to read on and consider these questions for yourself, I have prepared a list of books and resources that I've found exceptionally helpful to me recently.

[Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics](#)

By Timothy Morton (Harvard University Press, 2007)

[The Future](#)

By Marc Augé (Verso Books, 2015)

[Utopia and Organization](#)

Edited by Martin Parker (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003)

[Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World](#)

By Timothy Morton (University of Minnesota Press, 2013)

[Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology](#)

By Gregory Bateson (The University of Chicago Press, 1972, 1999)

[Apocalypse Culture](#)

Edited by Adam Parfrey (Feral House, 1987)

[The Century of the Self](#)

A four-part film series by Adam Curtis that aired on BBC TV, 2002

[Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture](#)

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By Gregory Sholette (Pluto Press, 2010)

[Culture Class](#)

By Martha Rosler (e-flux books, 2013)

[The Neoliberal Undead: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics](#)

By Marc James Léger (Zero Books, 2013)

[Strike Art: Contemporary Art and the Post-Occupy Condition](#)

By Yates McKee (Verso Books, 2016)

[“The Author as Producer”](#)

Address by Walter Benjamin delivered at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris, April 27, 1934

[L'1% C'est Moi](#)

By Andrea Fraser (Texte Zur Kunst 83, September 2011, pp 114–27)

[Download pdf here](#)

[“Making Museums Moral Again”](#)

By Holland Cotter (*The New York Times*, March 17, 2016)

[How the Rich Are Hurting the Museums They Fund](#)

By Ben Davis (*The New York Times*, July 22, 2016)

[Framemakers: Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change](#)

By Daghdha Dance Company, Jeffrey Gormly (editor)

Read especially: Michael Klien's "Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change"

Tags: [Agora](#)

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