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**Salvaging the Future: Speculative Exercises in World(un)building**

This paper marks the beginnings of a somewhat strange and hybrid project. It is a project on practices and metaphors of salvage in the arts and humanities, informed by my background as a speculative fiction, literature and cultural studies scholar, but also by my transition into an art school and arts practice context at Winchester School of Art.

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This project is related to my past work on remix and appropriative art and heritage work and, as a white woman working in the higher education sector, to thinking through the use of this past work in light of the white supremacy, capitalism, and colonialism in humanities work. The project has stemmed from a process of looking for a more radical practice and politics of adaptation, remix, and revision, and of asking myself if the contemporary arts marketplace and arts higher education can and should be salvaged: what is actually valuable, and to whom?

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In other words, I have hit a point in my career where I am increasingly asking myself what all this is for, and what use it all is, in practice. So please take my words today with this grain of salt. They are part of my process of practicing salvage on my own work and systems of knowing.

Before I start, I want to read you something that helped prompt me when I was trying to write this talk for you.

[SLIDE] + QR CODE <https://rescripted.org/2023/08/04/decomposition-instead-of-collapse-dear-theatre-be-like-soil>

I’ll be reading this in a slightly abridged form, but you can use the QR code on my slide to navigate to the text online.

I want to read you an essay-poem, by the Goan-American playwright and director Annalisa Dias, published on the theatre and performing arts website *Rescripted* in 2023. In it Dias struggles with the collapse of the subscription based theatre model in the US, and the loss of many jobs and small theatre venues across the sector. ‘This essay’, she writes, ‘is for those interested in using the imagination to push past the limitations of our current social and economic containers’ (Dias 2023).

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Decomposition Instead of Collapse – Dear Theatre, Be Like Soil

**Beginning, middle, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

There are lists going around.  
Every day another closing.   
Another staff shattered.   
People ask “is anyone keeping track of the losses?”   
“Who’s watching?”  
“Do you see the magnitude of the disaster?”  
An archival impulse: make a list.   
Order the chaos.    
Name the emergency.

Do you realize we’ve become conservation biologists:  
Critically Endangered  
Endangered  
Vulnerable  
Near Threatened  
Least Concern

**Beginning, middle,  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

I need a different metaphor than “rock bottom.”   
I’m exhausted by the stories of scarcity, threats, and imminent collapse.   
I’m a playwright and dramaturg so what I know is:   
We have a narrative problem.

It’s the same narrative problem we have in climate organizing.\*

We keep spellcasting about all we’re losing   
and describing the immensity of the damage,   
It becomes too overwhelming to *imagine* building something different.   
It becomes impossible to build the political will to act.

I long for a different dramaturgy.

In Western dramaturgies, endings are final.   
In a capitalist narrative of constant growth and perpetual “sustainability,”   
endings are tragic.   
No wonder people are panicking.   
No wonder it hurts so much.   
We’ve been telling ourselves that endings = failures.   
Institutional and, worse, personal.

What if instead of dramaturgies of collapse,   
we looked to the earth and learned from natural processes of *decomposition*?

**Decomposition is gruesome**  
     Pieces of an organism get pulled apart.  
**Decomposition is intimate.**  
     Decomposers digest the dead.  
**Decomposition creates new worlds.**  
     Nutrients recycle and release back into the ecological system.

A dramaturgy of decomposition  
Is a tender invitation beyond loss  
Toward re-membering our interconnected futures.

Can we be like [mycelium](https://www.nationalforests.org/blog/underground-mycorrhizal-network)? Can we be like soil?  
What might we re-compose   
with the nutrients being released into the system right now?   
What if this moment, painful and raw though it be (and [grief has its place](https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/grieving-is-how-flowers-bloom-an-invitation)),   
is not just the ending of a world   
but the beginning of something new?   
What if instead of at “rock bottom,”  
we’re at the dawn of an arts ecology that’s more healthy?   
More loving?   
More free?

**Beginning, middle, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and then…**

In a recent conversation someone told me, “The field is ablaze. It’s up to us to put on our vests and be firefighters.” Someone else said, “These institutions want to be told what to do. They’re looking for someone to save them.”

But we don’t need saviors. So many leaders of color have been appointed in the last 5-7 years and expected to be singular saviors of institutions that enclosed wealth for decades. So many more are about to be appointed. This again is a narrative problem: we know what happens to saviors. They are designed to be crucified.

No, we don’t need saviors. We need world builders.   
And thank goddess our field is rife with them!

I see world builders making bold choices to leave behind buildings.  
I see world builders mapping and pooling collective resources.   
I see world builders (re)investing in local ecologies.  
We need mycelial networks and compost and… time.

Where do you see them?   
([What you pay attention to grows](https://www.akpress.org/emergentstrategy.html).)  
People keep talking as though there’s a single solution to “the business model.”    
(As though it was *ever* singular.)  
Like whoever can crack the code first will *win*.   
(What [game](https://simonsinek.com/books/the-infinite-game/) are they playing?)  
There won’t be a single magic remedy for the whole field. 

We need to build a solidarity economy of ideas. Not every idea will work for everyone. Not one intervention but many interventions. Not one vision, but many visions.   
[To change everything, we need everyone.](https://peoplesclimate.org/)

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No, we don’t need saviors. [writes Dias] We need world builders.

When I read this I felt inspired. I love this idea, of decomposition instead of collapse, of worldbuilding and speculation and stories as tools to save the world. Of course I do! I’m a speculative fiction scholar, specifically a Gothic fiction scholar, and in Gothic Studies we love a good mushroom.

Dias is talking about theatre when she writes that worldbuilders are everywhere, but we could say the same of screen media, of literature, of visual art. We are in a golden age of speculative fiction. “Science Fiction & Fantasy is on a Nielsen BookScan record trajectory, sure to crack the £50m mark for the first time ever”. In film and television SFF continues to be a studio mainstay, and independent SFF is also thriving. Contemporary speculative fiction is incredibly diverse, its politics increasingly visible.

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For NK Jemisin, ‘Worldbuilding is what makes SFF unique’ (<https://nkjemisin.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/WDWebinar.pdf>). Worldbuilding is power: in the literal sense, but also in the metaphorical sense of using the future or the past to reimagine the present.

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Mainstream culture is also beginning to take seriously the power of SFF worldbuilding to shape perceptions on, and help re-imagine our present reality. In product design, speculative frameworks posit that ‘ideas freed by speculative design increase the odds of achieving desirable futures […] doing more than making technology easy to use, sexy, and consumable’ (Dunne and Raby 2013, vi).

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In marine climate science, researchers have used computational text analysis to generate themes and contexts which were then turned into SFF stories (radicaloceanfutures.earth 2023). This project aimed to develop collectively held visions of the future, while helping scientists to narrativize their work in more accessible ways.

Stories have the power to inspire, and represent, and to help bring about real world change.

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In a 2015 essay, the American writer and artist Walidah Imarisha suggests that ‘all organizing is science fiction. When we talk about a world without prisons; a world without police violence; a world where everyone has food, clothing, shelter, quality education; a world free of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, heterosexism; we are talking about a world that doesn’t currently exist. But collectively dreaming up one that does means we can begin building it into existence’ (n.pag.).

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No, we don’t need saviors. [writes Dias] We need world builders.

Unfortunately I am also a pessimist, and a pragmatist. I spent my last project examining how monsters (historically figures of otherness) get appropriated and mainstreamed in popular culture. I feel like we have been promised these new, transgressive worlds before. But how do we get there in practice? How do we rebuild the world, and keep hoping and working for better when we know that, in all likelihood, we will not own the future? When we know that hope has too often been co-opted to discourage action in the face of oppression? Our culture is great at greenwashing, and rebranding, and extracting.

Progressive artists and activists are not the only worldbuilders.

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In their book *Reverse Colonization: Science Fiction, Imperial Fantasy, and Alt-victimhood,* David M. Higgins explores stories that ‘ask Western audiences to imagine what it’s like to be the colonized rather than the colonizers’. ‘By identifying with fantastic forms of victimhood,’ they write, ‘subjects who already enjoy social hegemony are able to justify economic inequality, expansions of police and military power, climatological devastation, new articulations of racism, and countless other forms of violence—all purportedly in the name of security, self-defense, and self-protection.’

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO, a US-dominated political and military alliance of countries ‘committed to protecting each other from any threat’, has also commissioned and published a science fiction anthology. This anthology imagines, ‘the future of conflict’ (Gaub 2024), writing 75 after NATO’s formation, and looking 75 years into a future where NATO still exists. The aim of course also being to shore up NATO’s status in the present ‘While NATO might be about defence,’ writes the anthology editor, ‘it is first and foremost a political enterprise, a promise for the future’ (ibid). Its stories include (quoting again from their own website):

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* telepathic weaponry
* a floating ocean city built on the wealth of harvesting pure water from icebergs
* the enlargement of NATO to include Japan, Australia and other countries in the Indo-Pacific
* an AI nation state, unbound by territory, also joining NATO
* libraries becoming highly valuable military targets

NATO’s anthology is just the latest in a long line of speculative fictions that have been put to service imagining imperialist and militaristic worlds in the future, to justify conflicts, and extractive systems being built in the present.

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No, we don’t need saviors. [writes Dias] We need world builders.   
And thank goddess our field is rife with them!

But so is theirs.

Speculative fiction is a genre that imagines and builds new worlds, past, present, future. But can worldbuilding alone save us, when this building is happening across the political spectrum, and when so many of the building resources are monopolised by a select few?

To this end I want to suggest an alternative. We need world builders, undoubtedly.

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But we also need world un-builders. We need salvagers.

What does it mean to salvage the world, and is this something speculative fictions, stories we usually think of as *building* *new* or alternate worlds, can do? How distinct is the work of salvage and *un*building from building, ultimately, and what might this work look like in practice?

These are the questions I’d like to explore with you in the rest of this talk, and the questions I’m currently thinking about for my own work – so your ideas and examples in the Q&A are really welcome.

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Salvage is a practice that began at the core of the military industrial complex. It is a term that, in English, was originally associated with the *payment* received 'for saving a ship from wreck or capture'. Salvage came to describe the actual *act* of saving something in the late nineteenth century*.*

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As cities grew, and the risk of large-scale property loss became more central, insurance underwriters found it profitable to establish fire salvage services to reduce losses.

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A later meaning, evolving during WWI, refers to the 'recycling of waste material' – that is, the combing of battlefields, here by the British Army's Salvage Corps, which re-purposed the parts and property of fallen machines and soldiers for continuing use in the war effort.

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As Evan Calder Williams writes in 2010, the primary definition of salvage today in English is ‘waste sorting and *value recuperation*’. Salvage is a strategy for minimising financial loss, a thing we do when an object has lost its value to us in its current state. When it becomes precious to us only in what we can salvage from it. It involves re-evaluating the value of things, extracting value from waste, sometimes making other kinds of waste in the process.

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Google: salvare (wrong/incomplete)

Collins dictionary: salvage · 1. (saving). (of ship etc) **salvataggio**. (for re-use) ricupero

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Worldbuilding, but also colonialism, imperialism, and extraction, are all systems in which salvage is a key process. In Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s analysis of ‘salvage accumulation,’ for instance, she characterises salvage not as ‘an ornament on ordinary capitalist processes’, but as ‘a feature of how capitalism works’, where ‘civilization and progress turn out to be cover-ups and translation mechanisms for getting access to value procured through violence: classic salvage’ (Tsing 2015,63).

These are kinds of unbuilding and salvage that require borders and futurism and optimism to function, but today I will be talking particularly about salvage and unbuilding in crisis; on the losing side of conflict, in spite of destruction and collapse.

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This because, as Imarisha notes, unbuilding the worlds of white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal capitalism requires that we ‘see those who have been marginalized not as victims but as leaders and recognize that their ability to live outside acceptable systems is essential to creating new, just worlds’ (Imarisha 2015).

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What happens, ask scholars like Tsing, if we turn salvage practices back on the systems that produce them? In these situations salvage sometimes enables ‘the deconstruction of the fantasies that conceal this apocalyptic actuality; and the exploration of the (post)apocalyptic landscape in search of utopian possibilities’ (Wilson 2023, 3).

At the moment I am transitioning from a literature department to an arts practice one, and so my current work is really trying to understand the idea of artistic and speculative practice as method, in the case of salvage. What things do people intentionally and habitually do when they salvage, and what things do they feel? I would like to outline, to start, two practices in this speculative work of salvage against white supremacist, hetero-patriarchal, capitalist worldbuilding, with some examples from speculative fiction and practice. One I see as individual, the other as communal. One is about saving (the one meaning of salvage in English), the other about scrapping (the other meaning).

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I use practice here as taken from arts practice: ‘more than the artwork you create’ [...] more than practicing your art. A creative practice defined is how you intentionally approach your work’ (Sauder 2024).

Salvage is not a linear process; each part may be returned to repeatedly and in different orders. The work of salvage does not stop – as Evan Calder-Williams writes, ours is a ‘combined and uneven apocalypse’.

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The first practice of salvage takes place, paradoxically, at the point where narrative fails us. It starts, as with Dias’ essay poem, at the point of collapse.

In her book on monuments beyond saving and palliative care in the British Heritage industry, Caitlin DeSilvey writes about a tension between narrative and meaning-making when it comes to attempts to preserve our heritage in the face of catastrophe. She gives the example of Mullion Harbour, a historic building in Cornwall being allowed to slowly decay as part of a ‘managed withdrawal’ by the National Trust: the building was too costly and difficult to preserve, also when weighed against other support and revitalisation efforts around the coast. DeSilvey contributed to commemorating the project, using historical narratives about the building to talk about how its legacy would remain to the community into the future, even if the structure itself were to be lost.

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But when an unexpected storm tears the harbour apart, DeSilvey muses ‘what force did my narrative have against this event? I had spent years thinking about change and transience in this place, and how it could be navigated and negotiated. I had offered up a story as an antidote to loss. But now that the unraveling had begun, the story seemed starkly irrelevant to the lives of the people who lived in the place, and who were now watching it fall apart’ (p. 59-60).

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In contrast to her academic narrative about the building, DeSilvey describes how salvage work took place in this community in practice. Rather than a new narrative or a new building, the salvage work resulted in a pile of historical paving stones, collected by individuals from the sea and deposited on the beach. Though the work was individual, the result was collective: ‘Meaning arose from the encounter with the materials and the unscripted, instinctive impulse to recover what had been lost […] The salvage occurred at the point where narrative failed.’ (DeSilvey 2017, p. 67).

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In other words, salvage is practiced in the moments between the collapse of one story and the building of another. On our return to the wreckage. When we don’t know how to move on to a new world, but when stopping means extinction. When we must deconstruct to see how (and if) moving forward is possible.

This is more than a metaphorical deconstruction. Sometimes it requires looking at the materials we have, and using them, in new, sometimes painful ways. Painful because for all that is problematic and unwanted in the world, its materials have value to us. Mourning even imperfect structures can be hard, because they are ours.

Sometimes the process of salvage, of sorting through the waste, is the only way we can find value again.

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The Okinawan Islands have been colonised by various global powers since at least the 17th century. In 1609 this disparate set of islands near Taiwan, each with distinct languages and culture, were annexed by Japan’s Tokugawa Shogunate, which used them as a proxy to conduct trade with China in a time when the country was ostensibly closed off to the world.

In 1879, Japan annexed the islands, grouping them as the ‘Okinawa Prefecture’. Okinawan language and culture were forcibly suppressed as part of the Meiji Restoration, which sought to standardise and shore up a sense of ‘Japaneseness’ to compete directly with Western conceptualisations of the modern nation state. Okinawans remained very much second class citizens in the Japanese Empire, only gaining the right to vote in 1912, and remaining severely underrepressented in political office (including their own government) until the end of the 20th century. From 1945 to 1972 Okinawa was governed by the United States, handed back to Japan as part of a treatyship agreement. A full 25% of Okinawa remains occupied by military bases, and in fact, an expansion and update of these bases is currently underway to allow the US and Japan not just ‘better defense’ against China, but also first strike capabilities. The result of all this is an extremely complex and multiple Okinawan cultural identity, further complicated by its continued status as Japan’s poorest prefecture.

Okinawans are well versed in salvage. They have faced more than their fair share of apocalypses, and have had to build and rebuild themselves multiple times over the centuries.

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In 1945 the islands of Okinawa were firebombed as part of one of the largest assaults of World War II, known as the ‘typhoon of steel’.

When the ground cooled at the end of battle and the shelling, there was very little left; records and knowledge of hundreds of years of traditional craft and art destroyed – glass, textiles, musical instruments – but also the materials used in the crafting. Some plants and animals would never return to the islands. Human knowledge and experience was also lost. An estimated one in four Okinawans died in the crossfire.

As the islanders sifted through the wreckage that they could not live in but could not leave, they did not yet know how to recover these arts, or if it could be done. Instead, they sorted and took what might be of value from this apocalyptic landscape: people, stories, songs, scraps. This was sometimes done in collaboration with others, but overwhelmingly accounts match DeSilvey’s description of the salvage of Mullion Harbour; people salvaged what seemed of value to them in the moment, for reasons they could not necessarily narrativise. It was, to start, a highly personal process, part of the decision to continue fighting to live. They salvaged so that something (perhaps themselves) would survive. Sometimes, they salvaged for their immediate communities.

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It was not, at the time, a grand story of salvation and reconstruction—though the US and Japanese governments would make it so, more than 30 years later, when some of these fragments were once again drawn together. “How resilient and cheerful the Okinawan people are”, accounts write, “how simple and vibrant and traditional their culture”. (and if you are not familiar, it is amazing, and they are resilient, but this has also become part of a rebranding strategy).

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Setsuko Yamazato, now 87, was just a child during the typhoon of steel, but when she talks about the things that were salvaged (instruments from military ration cans, glassware from coke bottles, hand-woven textiles from banana scraps) the emotion is something stronger than cheer, or than hope. The speculative creation it required had not yet thought about building a new future. It was the steel required to stop, and recognise that there is no future, and to choose to remain in the wreckage. ‘When I didn’t know what else to do,’ she says of facing military violence, ‘I sang’.

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These are the practices she still employs today to protest the expanse of military installations on her native Ishigaki. This is not some whimsical, inherently Okinawan island practice – though Okinawan culture and community certainly put its stamp on the forms the salvage took – this is intentional salvage, value reclamation, and survival.

It is not yet a story, but it is salvage. On the smallest of scales, one person, one step, at a time. And it is not just terrible. It is joyful. Capitalism and colonialism tell us that there cannot be joy in the wasteland. Capitalism and colonialism are wrong.

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Often salvage takes place after the end, but salvaging individual worlds and realities can be practiced at any point up to and through the end. We need only decide that the end is near.

At some point, artist and documentary filmmaker Larissa Sansour decided that there was no current reality in which Palestinians could hope for a bright future. Her documentary work could not create this future. Instead, she had to use speculation to take pieces of the past and the present and recombine them in new ways. Ways that were not imaginable in our current reality.

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In a 2017 interview, Sansour says: “I know that science fiction is not that first thing you think of when you think of the Israeli / Palestinian conflict, and l have always worked mostly with documentary. The more I worked with it, the more people didn't believe what I was saying. […] For me it became more honest to work in surreal way” [not accurate, subtitles]

So Sansour became a science fiction artist, with a growing body of short films that approach this conflict from a fantastical or surrealist perspective. This perspective is highly personal, often puzzling through Sansour’s own conflicts and memories as a second generation Palestinian-in-exile –

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see for instance *In Vitro* (2019), a film about a woman who has been cloned from the genetic material of a person killed in an ecological disaster. She has none of her own memories of this place, but many implanted ones—she beliefes she can feel the grass, and taste the olives, and feel the sun. In the film she has a discussion with the woman who made her about what use this kind of memory is. [can watch on Netflix until this weekend]

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Sansour’s latest film, *Familiar Phantoms* (2023) is [quote] her ‘most personal film to date […] Blending live action, special effects, private family photos and archival footage [and exploring] the impact of fiction on the creation and reinterpretation of memory.

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With partner Søred Lind, Sansour’s 2016 film *In the Future They Ate from the Finest Porcelain* tells the story of a provocatively named ‘narrative terrorist’, whose work is to lay underground deposits of porcelain, creating a fictionalised archaeological record that will let her people ‘influence history and support future claims to their vanishing lands’. Eventually, the outcome of this speculative fiction – both for the narrative terrorists for of Sansour and Lind’s film, might be building a new world, creating a new nation. But before it can do this, however, the task is to unbuild the world that is, as that world is defined and constructed by another set of worldbuilders. This world must be destabilised, its foundations loosened or cast into doubt, before rebuilding can take place.

Sansour’s films offer no templates for a better or alternate future. Rather hers is a cinema of salvage, working through the impossibility of narrativizing ‘truly’, and envisioning the complex emotional and technical work that unbuilding your own world requires. They are vehicles for the things she has salvaged, and the things she wants to unbuild.

This approach shares characteristics with, for instance, indigenous futurisms, but in contrast this work is not about building new futures. In fact, despite its science fictional aesthetics it is not future oriented at all; it does not yet believe in the future. It is speculation for speculation’s sake, the practice of salvagine, waste sorting, value recuperation, in the absence of an alternative that is not silence. Sansour’s work, together with that of

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other Palestinian speculative artists, acts as a kind of pre-archive, anticipating the end, and not yet knowing what will be of use to the new beginning – only what is valuable in the now.

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‘To turn the archive into something living’

This is terrible. Yet it is also joyful.

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Is it utopian? As Ines Doujak and Oliver Ressler write in their exhibition 2015 exhibition catalogue *Utopian Pulse*, there are many approaches to utopia. For them, utopia is not about constructing entirely new worlds, nor is it ‘a matter of “listing what’s wrong with the world as though listing it could change it”. Utopia is, we agreed, “the assertion of the unrealized *in* and *against* the real”’ (Doujak and Ressler 2015, 12).

Here then we come to what I see as a second key practice of salvage; refusal. Scrapping. Wasting.

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In *Economies of Abandonment*, Elizabeth Povinelli asks why refusal is seen as unproductive, referencing an Ursula K. Le Guin short story in which some of the citizens of a utopia called Omelas, on discovering that this ‘perfect’ society is built on the suffering of one girl, decide to walk away.

‘To say, “not this,” does not tell us “what then?” or “where then?” Where are all those people going, those who walk away from Omelas?’

‘What appears to be a radically empty gesture (“not this”) is revealed to be a positive act. The citizens of Omelas who say “not this” act insofar as they make a statement. Stan’s continual refusal to collapse under the weight of a thousand mute obstacles (“not that”) should be understood as a series of quasi-events that provide the preconditions in which some new social content might be nurtured. My Indigenous friends, who are trying to create an augmented reality project that would then support them socially and economically, continue to do something as long as they refuse to do nothing. All of these fictive and real characters are acting positively in a social world that is built in such a way that it is unreliable for them whether or not the statement “not this” immediately produces a “what then.” “Not this” makes a difference even if it does not immediately produce a propositional otherwise.’ (193)

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I like this idea, but want to modify it slightly, returning to Dias, who likewise imagines utopia in terms of departure:

I see world builders making bold choices to leave behind buildings.

Sometimes walking away is the right choice. Sometimes, and I am speaking for myself in this case, the ability to leave is one of privilege. Some cannot walk away. Some can and choose refusal – squatters, salvagers taking what they can use from the buildings, bit by bit. One choice is not better than the other, but the question is: how do we refuse the wasteland we cannot leave? We can’t burn it down – we live here!

How does individual survival and salvage become collective unbuilding?

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In their second edition of the leftist magazine *Salvage* the editorial collective frames our global

situation as a post-apocalyptic one, in which sometimes "it seems hopeless, and yet,

and yet. We go on, despite that" (Salvage Editorial Collective 2015b). This strategy is

grounded in a utopian pessimism which offers, in place of hope, "a strategy for

despite" (Salvage Editorial Collective 2015b), "a pre-emptive potential aftermath. We

have come to it after many failures, and now in guarded advance - but it is

conditioned by the fact that we are always truly open to its other. For which 'hope' is

too weak a formulation" (Salvage Editorial Collective 2015a).

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I call this practice utopian spite.

For salvage-Marxism, in the absence of futurity, the challenge is to imagine (and

dramatize, or make interesting) the work of community building. This is not an easy

task! But it is one a growing number of science fiction artists undertake in their work. I have elsewhere written about Rivers Solomon’s *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, for instance, a science fiction novel that takes place in the colonial and white supremacist world of the plantation spaceship *Matilda*.

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As one reviewer notes, the "cross-class, cross-racial, wonderfully queer relationship" between the black narrator Aster and white character Theo, the child and heir of Matilda's brutal overseer, makes cooperation seem, if not easy, then achievable: "where another author might exploit these communication glitches to drive a dramatic wedge between them, Solomon demonstrates the ease of repair" (Milks 2018).

Aster and Theo can maintain their relationship through every hardship, salvaging the *Matilda*’s resources and spaces for the benefit of their communities, because they share a common goal and a common enemy.

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In Miriam Aouragh's words, speaking about joint black and Palestinian activism and the work of

anti-racism, "solidarity [between these groups] has grown because both understand the relationship between state violence, the prison system, and militarised surveillance" (Aouragh 2019, 21). [AND here a picture also of Okinawan protestors] Alliances can form not only through a shared vision of or hope for a new world, but through an understanding of the parts of the old world that must go, that must be salvaged or scrapped. This solidarity in turn opens a space where vulnerability and growth are possible.

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This involves, in Jack Halberstam’s words, turning from the language of capitalist production and scarcity to a language of plenty, to ‘the language of unmaking, unbuilding, undoing, refusing capital’s vertiginous techniques’ (Halberstam 2019, n.pag.). The world is rubbish! There are plenty of systems to scrap, and joy to be had in the salvage.

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China Miéville similarly advocates "an end to one-nation apocalypse" and the idea that 'we

are all in this together', instead offering a "hope that abjures the hope of those in

power" (Miéville 2015, 189). Salvage-Marxism asks us reframe and re-evaluate the

utopian impulse through hope's opposites: pessimism, fury, and spite.

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In *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, as in salvage-Marxism, a recognition of difference (of

class, of race, of gender) is not enough: "Worse, it is poor substitute for an admittedly more difficult task-activism invested in taking on structural inequality through the tough work of coalition building" (Aouragh 2019, 17). For Aouragh it is the desire for and joy in that salvage and coalition-building work *in spite*, not the hope of its future acknowledgement, that needs to be repeatedly and persistently imagined.

[SLIDE]

Elsewhere in Solomon’s work we find reference to Le Guin’s Left-handed commendement speech, where she writes “*when you fail, and are defeated, and in pain, and in the dark*” […] “*then I hope you will remember that darkness is your country, where you live, where no wars are fought and no wars are won, but where the future is*.”

[SLIDE]

Salvage-Marxism, likewise, promises that it will continue to "seek to understand and

plan what we must do, what we already do: Salvage, like countless activists, like all

the clear-eyed Left, goes on in the face of outrages, despite capitalism's despite [...] a

socialism that can survive the contempt and spite of the rulers, and that weaponises

its own back at them" (Salvage Editorial Collective 2015b).

[SLIDE]

What might this salvage work, of taking away what is useful and leaving the rest to mulch, look like when applied to the university, to teaching, to the canon, or to science fiction studies? In some cases this might necessitate pallative care, in others utopian spite. The challenge lies in finding joy and wonder in it! Both the hard kind and the soft kind. And this is where speculative fiction can shine.

[SLIDE]

To conclude, paraphrasing Dias,

No, we don’t need saviors

But we do need salvagers!

[…]

We need to build a solidarity economy of ideas. Not every idea will work for everyone. Not one intervention but many interventions. Not one vision, but many visions.   
[To change everything, we need everyone.](https://peoplesclimate.org/)

[SLIDE]

THANK YOU