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"A Space for Justice: Messianic Time in the Graphs of Climate Change"

Callaway, Elizabeth

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This article turns toward scientific literature to consider the basic strategies used in presenting the temporality of climate change. While the majority of literary criticism argues that the experience of climate change is either apocalyptic or banal, the scientific graphs of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change organize time in a way aligned with Giorgio Agamben's concept of messianic time. Like Agamben's messianic time, the figures of the IPCC depict a disjointed present. Every figure is either a reconstruction of past climate or a projection of future climate—never a reconstruction the past that moves through the present and projects the future. Crucially, it is this disjuncture at the present moment that perhaps leaves a space open for justice—a justice that reveals itself in a series of figures that exhibit an underlying ethical relationship to the past and future. As a literary analysis, this paper brings out new aspects of scientific figures. Instead of focusing on the data these graphs communicate, it reveals how formal choices in presentation affect meaning and how scientific figures structure, articulate, and inform our experience of time. (Text from author's abstract)

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