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"Hope"

Kirksey, Eben

Kirksey, Eben. "Hope." *Environmental Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2014): 295-300. doi:10.1215/22011919-36155501.

Powerful forces have tried to steal the very idea of hope. As an empty political slogan, "hope" has bulldozed over our dreams. Yet, in the aftermath of disaster— in blasted landscapes that have been transformed by multiple catastrophes—it is still possible to find hope.

Looking to possible futures, rather than to absolute endings, Jacques Derrida draws a helpful distinction between apocalyptic and messianic thinking. Messianic hopes contain "the attraction, invincible élan or affirmation of an unpredictable future-to-come (or even of a past-to-come-again)," according to Derrida. "Not only must one not renounce the emancipatory desire, it is necessary to insist on it more than ever." Yet, Derrida's sense of expectation is not oriented towards a specific figure, event, political project, or Messiah. In contrast to Christian traditions, which pin hopes to a particular figure, Jesus Christ, Derrida's notion of messianicity is "without content." He instead celebrates a universal structure of feeling that works independently of any specific historical moment or cultural location: "the universal, quasi-transcendental structure that I call messianicity without messianism is not bound up with any particular moment of (political or general) history or culture." (Text from author)

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Source URL: http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/8089
Print date: 02 November 2026 16:47:30