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PRESS RELEASE

The Narrative of Decline

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- - Curated by Bernhard Buhmann

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This is the way the world ends

Not with a bang but a whimper

— T.S. Eliot

Decay has its own beauty, as Thomas Mann observes in his monumental work, *The Magic Mountain*. Andrea Roelig expands on this idea in her essay, "The Narrative of Decline": "We stand between death and life, and decline is dangerously enticing because it also carries an element of seduction." Like a rollercoaster ride—the feeling of weightlessness as it plunges downward, both terrifying and liberating.

The French sociologist Roger Caillois calls this intoxicating state "Illinx," the dizziness that follows a loss of stability, order, and control. Social structures begin to falter, disorientation spreads. Illinx—an ecstatic panic that emerges when everything teeters on the brink, when certainty gives way to chaos and the course is not yet set. Creation in reverse—where there was once something, now there is to be nothing.

This erosion of the given is fueled by the constant flood of stimuli and the disorientation caused by social media. Fake news or Truth Social—overdosed on information, facts become mere playthings of the opinion leaders of the moment. The claim to truth dissolves, identities become fluid. Anything can be, as long as it is repeated often enough.

The frantic pace of modern life elevates this dizziness to a collective level—everything spins, a carousel ride where one clings to the seats to avoid being flung off too soon. Ultimately, this liminal space of neither nor provides a breeding ground for all manner of radical movements. Once the ship begins to capsize, there is no stopping it. Ideas are unleashed without restraint, primarily repackaging the old as something new. "Make America great again"—a narrative of decline that inevitably leads to the familiar trope of paradise and salvation, the necessary apocalyptic cleansing, and the promise of rebuilding.

And there they are again, against the backdrop of nostalgia for an impending downfall: the familiar narratives of decline, seeking out supposed culprits and reducing the world to simple cause-and-effect explanations—flattening it back into a disc. Total emotionalization, in every sphere, without exception. After all, the world is hanging by a thread. And in this, too, there is an undeniable pleasure: the thrill of telling the story of decline, amplified by the awareness of real threats. The wild revelry at the brink of the apocalypse.

Now nothing matters anymore—"It's the end of the world as we know it (and I feel fine!)."