CAPAS
KÄTE HAMBURGER CENTRE
FOR APOCALYPTIC AND
POST-APOCALYPTIC STUDIES

UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

APOCALYPSE
QUARTERLY
2/24

ARID LANDS

DEAR READERS,

Have you ever noticed the presence of desert imagery in apocalyptic narratives? This issue's lead article traces the development of desert imagery, from the 18th-century view of deserts as ruined forests to modern representations in science fiction. Author and CAPAS-Fellow Adam Stock argues that such depictions provide profound insights into power dynamics and colonial encounters. Intrigued? Discover more on the following pages.

The theme of deserts, though green ones, and their socio-ecological impacts, is further examined in the article "The Infrastructure of Fire" (pp. 7-9). Author Mário Gomes impressively describes the merciless exploitation of nature in Chile, which is made possible by political elites. How things can be done differently is shown in the article "Back to the Roots" (pp. 12/13) about the people of Mangaia, an island of the Cook Islands archipelago, who have recently reintroduced an ancient tradition known as *Ra'ui* in order to sustain the natural food supplies.

The CAPAS team wishes you a stimulating lecture and a relaxing summer break to those living in the northern hemisphere!

If you have feedback concerning the newsletter, please let us know: capas@uni-heidelberg.de

MAPPING THE APOCALYPSE

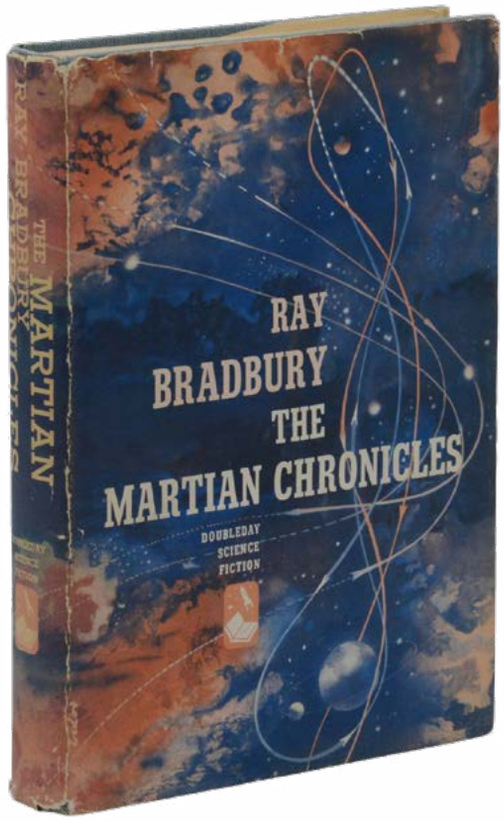
DESERTS, APOCALYPTIC SCIENCE FICTION AND COLONIALISM by CAPAS-Fellow Adam Stock

What is the link between deserts, science fiction and colonialism? CAPAS Fellow Adam Stock examines the cultural and historical perceptions of deserts, particularly through the lens of European colonialism and apocalyptic science fiction. In his article, he traces the development of images of deserts, from the 18th century view of deserts as destroyed forests to contemporary representations in media such as *WALL-E*. In doing so, he emphasises the political implications of desert imaginaries and argues that apocalyptic narratives can offer insights into power dynamics and colonial encounters.

"Making the desert bloom"—this poster by the Jewish National Fund from the 1940s bears witness to the utopian colonial dream of the time to make the desolate land fertile.

The idea of deserts as unoccupied, uncultivated land unsuitable for pasture has a long cultural history. But as Diana Davis notes in *The Arid Lands* (2016) in the eighteenth century some Europeans began to perceive deserts as "ruined" former forests, where the felling of trees had caused drought and aridity. A similar logic is employed at the start of Andrew Stanton's Disney Pixar film *WALL-E* (2008), in which the camera sweeps through the galaxy down to a deserted and desertified planet lacking any plant life, where the eponymous trash-compacting robot lives. *WALL-E* reflects the post-Enlightenment belief that deserts are produced through human activity. While the film lays the blame on consumer waste (*as if the trash itself produces the climate*), historically European colonisers blamed traditional nomadic grazing techniques and a lack of proper stewardship by "uncultivated" desert inhabitants. The late nineteenth-century utopian colonial dream to "make the desert bloom", a phrase later used as a rallying call by Zionists including early Israeli Prime Ministers David Ben-Gurion and Levi Eshkol, assumed tree-planting and agriculture could "restore" deserts to a mythical Arcadian past.

Such agricultural science narratives developed alongside representations of dystopian and apocalyptic desert environments in the emerging genre of science fiction. Mars became the desert planet *par excellence* for stories exploring colonial treatments of arid environments. In an article on "Martian Modernism" for *Modernism/Modernity Print+* (2022), Eric Aronoff argues that Ray Bradbury's story "--And the Moon Be Still as Bright" from *The Martian Chronicles* (1948) "revises the mythology of frontier expansion in the American West, with Martians in the role of 'the American Indian'… lamenting the destruction wrought by the pioneers". Chickenpox, recently introduced by humans, has killed all Martians, leaving behind empty but perfectly preserved villages and towns. Arriving with a rowdy rocket crew, an anthropologist named Spender disappears to study these artefacts. Realising the Martian culture's embodiment of ancient and harmonious values he decides to kill the crew rather than allow them to colonise and destroy the towns. During a brief truce, Spender tells the captain, "No matter how we touch Mars, we'll never touch it. And then we'll get mad at it, and you know what we'll do? We'll rip it up, rip the skin off, and change it to fit ourselves". Yet Spender's attitude is questionable too: he treats *recently inhabited* Martian towns



Mars: the desert planet *par excellence* for stories dealing with the colonial approach to arid environments; for example in *The Martian Chronicles*, a science fiction novel by the American writer Ray Bradbury published in 1950.

as timeless artefacts of a distant past civilisation, much as American anthropologists sought to preserve the cultures of once highly populous Indigenous nations in colonial museums.

Bradbury's speculative treatment of Mars reflects some of the historical reality of Indigenous peoples who have experienced genocide and forced removals from ancestral lands. As Nathalie Koch argues in a 2021 article for *Geoforum* entitled "Whose apocalypse?", "the curious consistency of the desert in… apocalyptic imaginaries poses important questions about who specifically draws on these tropes and narrative threads and, in turn, *whose* apocalypse 'we' are being sold". In this regard, the perspectives from which cultural depictions of deserts are written, the way in which such terrains are imagined, and how we are oriented toward them has important political implications. As Sara Ahmed argues in *Queer Phenomenology* (2008), our orientations shape our perspectives, our knowledge base, and "'who' or 'what' we direct our energy toward". This interacts in important ways with the environment around us. For example, in Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965), the doomed Duke Leto Atreides sees the planet Arrakis at night as "barren rock, dunes, and blowing dust, an uncharted dry wilderness", but, cast out into the desert, his son Paul, who takes up the mantle of a Messiah to the native Fremen, finds "a beautiful place… like a fairyland" full of "bushes, cacti, tiny clumps of leaves – all trembling in the moonlight".

The implications of viewing a colonial desert terrain from an apocalyptic perspective is critically explored in Claire G Coleman's *Terra Nullius* (2017), an alien invasion novel initially presented as if set in early twentieth century Australia. Alien outsiders experience the Australia as an "alien landscape", with "alien trees… the wrong colour" dotting the "alien, Native bush", and Natives who are "merely part of the inhospitable environment they are trying to tame". Against this, Native characters see the geological forms and fauna

LANGUAGES OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Adam Stock presented his research on desert imaginaries at the international multidisciplinary conference "Languages of the Anthropocene", which took place in Rome from 18 to 20 June 2024. Launched in 2023, this annual conference offers a comparative analysis and collective rethinking of the role of language(s) in the personal, communal, transnational and planetary confrontation with environmental catastrophe. It is jointly organised by the British School in Rome and University College London: Cities Partnerships Programme (CPP) and UCL Anthropocene, the Heidelberg Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS), the Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies, Sapienza University Rome and the Department of Humanities, Roma Tre University, Rome. Further information: https://www.ucl.ac.uk/anthropocene/projects-and-seminars/languages-anthropocene

Deserts occupy 40-45% of the Earth's land mass and are home to 38% of its population. Here: The pyramids of Giza with clouds of smog over Cairo.

of their environment as co-constitutive parts of web-of-life relations, in line with Aboriginal cosmology. Coleman's novel produces Australia as a postapocalyptic space which fundamentally challenges European perspectives on human/non-human/other-than-human relations. Halfway through, the novel reveals the events of the story are set in 2041. Readers are wrenched from a temporal perspective (of the past) into another (of a speculative future), functioning to make them review the past from the perspective of the colonised. This simple apocalyptic revelation has deceptively complex results: the crossing and mapping of the Australian interior is seen elegiacally as one of the last places to resist the advance of European colonialism, and World-ending at a local level is identified with planetary upheaval. Colonialism (rather than indigeneity) becomes metonymically identified with the alien other.

Despite occupying 40-45% of the Earth's landmass and supporting 38% of its population, deserts and their inhabitants have often been treated as marginal by Europeans. Dominant western imaginaries frequently read deserts as empty, ruined, and allied to the phantasms of Christian eschatology. But the apocalyptic can also provide a map to the suspension or reversal of power structures. By reading the apocalyptic as what, in his provocative text *Combined and Uneven Apocalypse*, Evan Calder Williams terms "a spatial organization" rather than merely a temporal event, new perspectives emerge on colonial encounters in arid lands. ●

Adam Stock is a Fellow at CAPAS and Senior Lecturer in English Literature at York St John University, UK. His research seeks to better understand the intersection between political thought and representations of temporality and space in modern and contemporary culture, especially speculative fictions.

#SCIENCE APOCALYPSE

THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF FIRE

by Mário Gomes

Wild volcanic landscapes, deep blue lakes, millennia-old araucaria forests, vast unspoilt wilderness—Chile is considered by many to be a natural paradise. However, regions once rich in flora and fauna now resemble a "green desert": pine and eucalyptus monocultures as far as the eye can see. The state policy that favours these monocultures goes back to Decree 701 from the Pinochet era, which promoted the commercialisation of nature. This has not only led to ecological degradation and increased forest fires, but also to social impacts such as the intensification of conflicts with the indigenous Mapuche people.

Chilean Route 156 runs southwestwards from the city of Concepción alongside the Biobío river up to Nacimiento, a small town hosting an overdimensioned paper pulp factory. Road 156 is nicknamed Ruta de la Madera, the timber route. Dozens of wood-laden trucks pass it daily, through a landscape that has certainly once been what one may call beautiful, but that is nowadays a scenery of mortified nature, with monocultures, mainly of pine trees and eucalyptus, reaching as far as the eye can see: On both shores of the Biobío river, a green desert, as it is often called here, extends. Here and there, some patterns of grey and brown appear in the distance. Soon after passing the city of Santa Juana, these greyish brown tones become the predominant colors of this landscape. For miles and miles, the timber route crosses a territory ravaged by the 2023 wildfires, considered one of the biggest natural catastrophes in the history of a region that certainly does not lack natural catastrophes. Here, in the Biobío region, 200,000 hectares of land were affected by the fires, with 14 people killed. In Santa Juana and its environs over 50% of the houses were destroyed, with approximately 14,500 persons being displaced. At national level, the Chilean Ministry of Economy estimates the financial damages of the fires at over 882 million US dollars, with additional social costs calculated at 2.275 billion.

Figures like these are evidently too abstract to quantify anything, especially when it comes to blurry concepts such as social costs, i. e. the costs of the "loss of human lives and serious injuries, forced displacement, environmental contamination, impact on mental health, and loss of natural capital", as a report from the Ministry of finance tries to analyse. It turns out to be surprisingly simple though to calculate these costs, at least in the report of the Chilean Ministry of Economy. Here, this calculation is done by assigning a value of 32.5 USD per ton of CO2 emitted by the fires. A carbon-based logic in a carbon-based economy. What matters is to find a countervalue that can then be converted into any currency, in this case it is CO2 that is converted into US dollars. Evidently, whoever wrote this report and whoever came up with this formula are aware of the fact that certain damages, such as the impact on mental health, cannot be represented by these figures. Again, the solution is simple: They are left out of the equation.

This line of reasoning is not problematic, because it is arbitrary; it is problematic above all because it reduces the range of socio-ecological issues to economy. Nature, at any rate, is not even regarded as nature, but commodified and labeled as natural capital. It gains relevance only once it can be converted into figures. This way of reasoning reflects deeply rooted economical beliefs, according to which the benefits of so-called natural services are only taken into consideration once they outweigh the profits of exploiting natural resources.

Despite the magnitude of fire catastrophes in recent years in Chile, the advantages of a working forestal ecosystem when compared to the risks of monocultures remain too abstract. The revenue of planting fast growing trees is much more palpable. It happens, however, that the trees that grow fast and sell are also the ones that burn best. Eucalyptus trees in particular are known to contribute to the intensity and spread of wildfires, as they not only contain highly combustible oils, but also shed bark and leaves regularly, creating a build-up of easily ignitable fuel on the ground. After a fire, eucalyptus trees, with their fire-adaptive traits, are the first ones to recover. They live in symbiosis with fire. The green tufts that can be seen here and there in the brown landscapes along the Ruta de la Madera are eucalyptus.

The proliferation of tree monocultures in Chile has not merely economical reasons. It is the consequence of state policies, in particular of the famous decree law 701, one of the longest-running afforestation subsidies in the world and a legacy of the Pinochet regime. This decree from 1974 entailed substantial subsidies, covering up to 75% to 90% of plantation expenses, coupled with tax exemptions for plantation activities. These favorable conditions facilitated the rapid expansion of companies like Arauco and CMPC and transformed vast stretches of land, especially in the regions of Biobío and Araucanía, into areas of monocultures. Although decree law 701 was conceived to incentivize afforestation on lands that either lacked tree cover or were heavily eroded, it quickly lead to the deforestation of native forests and their replacement by tree monocultures. This was seen – and is still widely seen – as a contribution to ecology, and it is often argued that monocultures, in particular pine trees, perform better in carbon storage than native forests. This is at least questionable, as additional storage from subsidy driven plantation expansion is "outweighed by losses in storage in native forests and shrublands", according to Robert Heilmayr, professor of Environmental Studies at the University of California. But even if this were not so: That man-made nature, apart from being an oxymoron, should be able to enhance natural services at such a large scale is at best wishful thinking. The advantages of monocultures in any case are not on the side of ecology. On the contrary, what is lost by the massive plantations, i. e. the loss of biodiversity, is something that can be seen with the naked eye.

Mário Gomes completed his doctorate at the Universities of Bonn and Florence on the inner monologue and scientific fantasies of the transmission of thought around 1900, and presented a post-doctoral thesis on the concept of the dispositif at the University of Lisbon under the supervision of Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. He has taught literature and media studies at the University of Bonn and the Berlin University of the Arts and is currently a DAAD lecturer at the Universidad de Concepción in Chile.

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#FELLOW APOCALYPSE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT
EMILIA ROIG

What does the apocalypse and/or post-apocalypse mean for you?

Emilia Roig: I see the apocalypse as a radical rapture, in some respects as the only means to achieve transformation. Rather than referring to a particular timeframe, "radical" refers to the depth of the rapture. Apocalyse usually has a negative, catastrophic connotation but I consider it vital for the evolutionary process of our species and planet. The word conveys an idea of some imminent catastrophe which will take place in the future, but the world is currently undergoing multiple apocalyses – many worlds are currently ending. Eurocentricism has equated "World" with the West/Global North for so long that we believe that as long as Europe and the United States, and the most privileged people within these geopolitical spaces, are safe, the apocalypse is far. However, people in Congo, Sudan, Gaza, in remote parts of the Amazon Forest and at the European and US-American borders are already undergoing some form of apocalypse. The relevance and seriousness of any apocalypse depends on the degree to which Capital is affected.

Emilia Roig is a bestselling author and political scientist. She is dedicated to inspiring people to divest from systems of oppression and to shift collective consciousness. She has taught at universities in France, Germany, and the U.S. on intersectionality theory, postcolonial studies, critical race theory, queer feminism, and international and European law.

What is your fellowship trying to achieve?

My research project explores the possibility of a money-free world and whether current developments point to an erosion of the global financial system. In our global capitalist system, power is irreducibly linked to economic and financial power, both of which determine access to political, cultural, and symbolic power. The global climate, economic, social, and political crises are intrinsically linked to a profound redefinition of concepts such as "value", "worth", "growth", "wealth" and "poverty". While the resolution of these crises will possibility entail the disintegration of our financial and monetary system, the end of oppression will inevitably imply a profound paradigmatic shift around the concept of power, including regarding the role, meaning and materiality of money. Current developments in the realm of financial markets and on the global political stage prefigure the erosion and disruption of our global economic system. Such a disruption could, in fact, lead to the end of the world as we know it. My research will explore the apocalyptic world that would emerge from such a transformation – and the opportunities it presents for humanity and our planet.

The objectives of this research are to question the perceived indispensability of money in our late capitalist world, analyse whether current developments prefigure the erosion of our global money system, and explore which possible alternative models could emerge in its aftermath.

What are some of your favourite pop culture references to the/an (post)apocalypse—what can you recommend?

I would say my best source of reference are psychedelic plants such as ayahuasca and psilocybin. They have enabled me to envision a post-apocalyptic future in a much more realistic and profound way than the human mind alone will ever be able to imagine.

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#FELLOW APOCALYPSE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT
BRONWEN NEIL

What were your first thoughts when you saw the call for applications for the fellowship?

Bronwen Neil: When a Dutch friend sent me the advert, I thought: this is perfect for me and my current research project on food sustainability in the Cook Islands!

What does the apocalypse and/or post-apocalypse mean for you?

Bronwen Neil is Professor of Ancient History in the Department of History and Archaeology at Macquarie University (Sydney). Her research focuses on Roman cultural history from the fourth to tenth centuries, with an emphasis on east-west church relations, letters, gender and hagiography.

For me the idea of the apocalypse is the Christian teaching I have grown up with, where the Apocalypse is a future event that will happen at an unknown moment in history, when the world will end with the second coming of Jesus, maybe preceded by the Antichrist. But from a disciplinary perspective, I have learnt from my research into different traditions that many religions have a version of this idea, and there is a lot of variation across cultures. In the Greek, it just means a ‚Revelation', and there have been a lot of revelations about how and when it will occur.

What is your fellowship trying to achieve, which questions is it addressing, and with which methods?

I am trying to show how an ancient culture dealt with food shortages by looking at how the people of Mangaia, the southernmost island of the Cook Islands archipelago, organize their access to local food sources as a group. Nowadays, there are 474 permanent residents in Mangaia and it is one of the oldest islands in the Pacific. Their nearest neighbour is Rarotonga, a 24-hour sail by sea canoe. So, they have good ideas about sharing and protecting food sources until they are really needed, for times of feasting as well as times of shortage. Their methods have been used for several centuries across Polynesia and could be helpful to people of other islands including my own country, Australia. The main method is field research, interviewing people in the Cook Islands in conversation with other Indigenous people from Tahiti and Aotearoa (New Zealand), which like the Cook Islands are also part of Polynesia.

How does the fellowship project build on or connect to your previous career or biography?

This work is based on a project I've been doing with Prof Tom Murray, an Australian filmmaker, on documenting how the people of the Cook Islands deal with food scarcity. They manage it traditionally through temporary bans on harvesting certain species of fish, crab, taro – basically whatever they normally find to eat on their island through fishing, hunting or planting. It varies with the seasons, and the harvests are being affected by climate change. So, people are quite worried about the future and are looking for ways to make their local food supplies more plentiful and last longer.

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#SCIENCE APOCALYPSE

BACK TO THE ROOTS

FIGHTING THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE WITH TRADITIONAL METHODS

by CAPAS-Fellow Bronwen Neil

In an era marked by the looming specter of climate change, food security is a major concern, posing a substantial threat to the traditional ways of life and the stability of urban and rural systems around the world. In response to this pressing challenge, on Mangaia, the southernmost island of the Cook Islands archipelago, an ancient tradition known as *Ra'ui* has recently been reintroduced in order to sustain Mangaia's natural food supplies.

Ra'ui is a cultural ban used to protect and conserve food supplies and species of cultural significance to the people of the Cook Islands. It seems to have been used for several centuries across Polynesia before the arrival of Europeans and has continued in the past 200 years to make a sustainable lifestyle possible on this remote island of the Pacific. In the Cook Islands, it is used to preserve seafood, plant and animal foods, and to replenish animal and bird populations that are not eaten but have cultural significance.

Ra'ui has recently been reintroduced as a community practice on Mangaia, one of the oldest Pacific Islands (and the oldest with exposed volcanic rock). This brief article contains some reflections on the ways that traditional customs of care are making Mangaia's natural food supplies sustainable in the coming decades, during the era of climate change, which some might call an apocalyptic threat to their way of life.

In Mangaia, traditional ways of preserving and conserving food sources are still practiced as part of a Polynesian mode of subsistence, a way of life that traces its origins back to 800-1200 CE. Coconut crabs, parrot fish and the Mangaian kingfisher have been protected and allowed to flourish by periods of non-harvesting, known as *ra'ui*.

The Mangaian kingfisher was on the endangered list (the 'Red List' of the International Union for Conservation of Nature) until the *ra'ui* was imposed some years ago. Now it is off the danger list and doing well. Likewise, the number of young parrot fish is increasing as they are allowed to grow bigger before being taken from the sea in some areas of Mangaia's coastline. The huge coconut crabs, which can climb trees and knock down coconuts to open the coconuts lying on the forest floor, have also been protected and saved for when they are needed most, when big feasts are laid on for family, guests, and official visitors.

Pigs and chicken foraging on coconut husk heap, Mangaia.

View from the deck of the sea canoe "Paikea" on its way to Mangaia. Photos: Bronwen Neil

The collection of data on the successful use of *ra'ui* on Mangaia over the last five years shows how Cook Island people can still work together collectively to protect and guarantee the security of their food sources. Even as sea levels are rising in the Pacific and ocean temperatures are climbing due to climate change, Mangaian people have been able to use traditional knowledge to protect their most vulnerable species, which for them is a matter of survival.

Across the Pacific, local people, scientists, and academics from other fields are working to bring together scientific and cultural data for the successful management of future food resources that are threatened by the impacts of climate change. Scholars in the humanities – including local historians, anthropologists, creative artists, and geographers – have a role to play in recovering traditional knowledges in the fields of Pacific ecology, its peoples' care for land and sea, and in studies of its rare animal, plant, and bird species.

Thanks to the "Te Puna Marama Voyaging Foundation" and the "Okeanos Foundation for the Sea", which supported our research. ●

#SCIENCE APOCALYPSE

MEANINGFUL APOCALYPSE

MEXICO AS AN APOCALYPTIC HOTSPOT

On April 29, 2024, CAPAS Director Robert Folger was invited by University College London to deliver the prestigious annual Tagore Lecture Series in Comparative Literature. His lecture, entitled "Mexican Apocalypses: 2023 | 1521 | 14,000 BC", addressed the particular temporalities of apocalypse and post-apocalypse, focusing on Mexico as an apocalyptic hotspot.

Artistic reflections on apocalyptic events and narratives in Mexican history, in particular the apocalypse of colonialism, were shown in an exhibition co-organised by CAPAS at the Mexican Museum of Anthropology.

In his introduction, Folger used the examples of the Netflix adopations of Chinese author Cixin Liu's 2008 *Remembrance of Earth's Past* trilogy and of the popular role-playing video game franchise Fallout, to illustrate, on one hand, the particular temporalities of apocalypse and postapocalypse, and, on the other the existence of a topology of the apocalypse that does not only imply particular spatial configurations but also the marking of specific spaces as apocalyptic, meaning that they are "gravitational centers" for apocalyptic narratives and images. The lecture focused on Mexico as an apocalyptic hotspot in historical perspective.

Reviewing different instances of apocalyptic events and narrations of Mexican history, that is, the so-called Dinosaur Apocalypse, the apocalypse of coloni-

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© Gregor Kohl, CAPAS

Robert Folger: "The apocalypse implies the lifting of a veil and a confrontation with a "mystery" that hegemonic instrumental rationality cannot comprehend."

alism from a European and Indigenous stand-point, and the reflections of these apocalyptic framings in Mexican artifacts and art work of past and present that were at display in an exhibition at the Mexican Museum of Anthropology in 2023-2024, co-organized by CAPAS, Folger suggested in his lecture to understand the apocalypse in Mexico as an apocalyptic history. At the same time, he elaborated and deepened through the case of Mexico some crucial concepts regarding apocalypse and post-apocalypse, in particular in relation and opposition to the Anthropocene and the booming notion of extinction. He argued that modern temporality and spatiality allows us to conceive of apocalypse only in terms of a "naked apocalypse" (Günther Anders), total annihilation and extinction, which implies that post-apocalypse is an unfinished end of a world that is not the *end* of existence but the end of life understood as an *acuerdo*, habitual agreement, in the sense given to the term by Mexican philosopher Zenia Yébenes Escardó.

Hence, the apocalypse is not "naked," but rather implies the lifting of a veil and a confrontation with a "mystery" that hegemonic instrumental rationality cannot comprehend. This form of meaningful apocalypse challenges the epistemological regime related to linear temporality, the dictatorship that the present exercises over both the past, which becomes material subject to hermeneutic violence, and the future, which is merely a linear extension of the present because the possible, as Slovenian philosopher Elena Zupanič says, is based on what exists. ●

TAGORE LECTURE SERIES

Annual Tagore Lecture Series in Comparative Literature at the University College London, named in honor of the poet, playwright, painter and musician Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), has the goal to "establish long-term perspectives that foster creativity in research, education and enterprise, and to encourage new generations of thinkers in their pursuit of a collaborative, cosmopolitan, critical and creative understanding of our present, its past and the futures it may inspire." Previous "scholars of international distinction," include Karen Pinkus (Cornell, 2023), N. Katherine Hayles (UCLA, 2021), Ursula K. Heise (UCLA, 2020),and Rita Felski (University of Virginia, 2019). The 7th Annual Annual Tagore Lecture Series in Comparative Literature at the University College London was delivered by CAPAS director Robert Folger on April 29, 2024.

CAPAS EVENTS

WEDNESDAY
10
07

7.00 PM **Karlstorkino, Heidelberg**

Apocalyptic Cinema

IMAGINING END TIMES

2024 | Spanish/English OV with subtitles

Premiere of the CAPAS in-house documentary followed by a panel discussion with Robert Folger (CAPAS director, Romance Literature), Adolfo Mantilla Osornio (Anthropology, Academy of Arts Mexico, Curator of the Exhibition 'Imaginar El Fin de Los Tiempos') and artist Federico Cuatlacuatl.

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THURSDAY
11
07

6.00 PM **Völkerkunde Museum Heidelberg**

Artist Talk

TRANSBORDER NAHUA FUTURISMS

Artist talk with Federico Cuatlácuatl. The Mexican artist's work is invested in disseminating topics of Nahua indigenous immigration, social art practice, and cultural sustainability.

© Federico Cuatlacuatl

FRIDAY
12
07

9.30 PM **Mathematikon, Heidelberg**

Apocalyptic Cinema Open Air

AFIRE (ORIG. ROTER HIMMEL)

2023 | German OV with English subtitles

Academic commentary in German with Sascha Keilholz (Artistic and Managing Director IFFMH).

In cooperation with 73. IFFMH – International Film Festival Mannheim Heidelberg

© Marco Krüger Schramm Film

FRIDAY
19
07

9.30 PM **Mathematikon, Heidelberg**

Apocalyptic Cinema Open Air

TIDES

2021 | English OV with German subtitles

Academic commentary in English with Adam Stock (CAPAS-Fellow 2024, English Literature, York St John University).

© Constantin Film Verleih GmbH

FRIDAY
19
07

tba **Heidelberger Kunstverein**

Public Talk

SEX REENCHANTED

Discussion with CAPAS-Fellow Kate Cooper at the exhibition “Sex Reenchanted”.

More Info: https://www.hdkv.de/de/ausstellungen/sex-reenchanted

© Heidelberger Kunstverein

All CAPAS events at www.capas.uni-heidelberg.de/events.html

CAPAS

KÄTE HAMBURGER CENTRE
FOR APOCALYPTIC AND POST-APOCALYPTIC STUDIES

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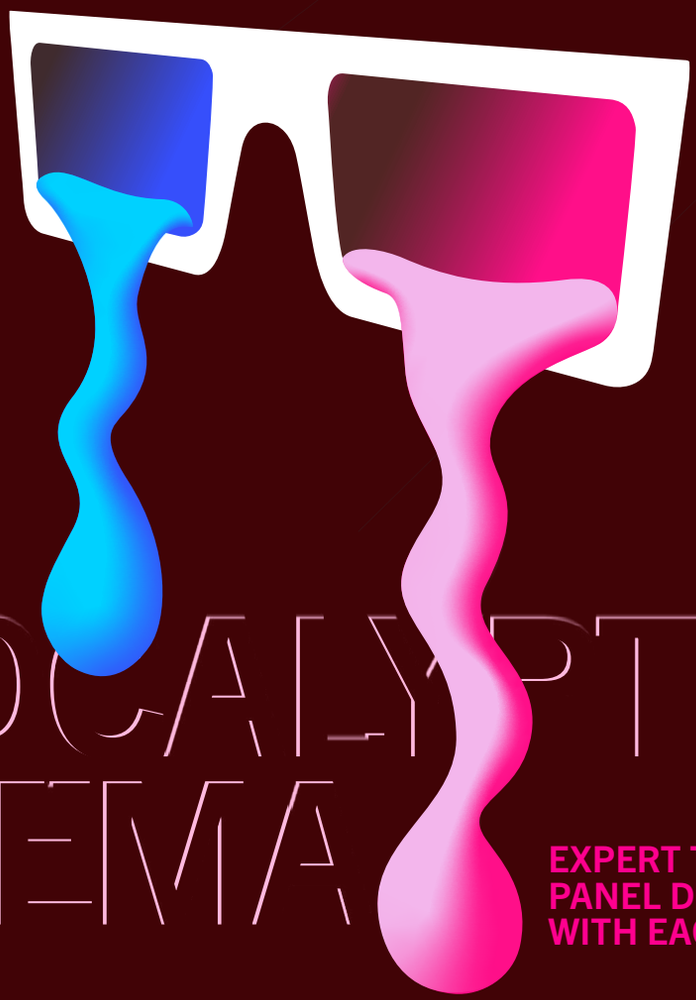

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@ **MATHEMATICON**
FRIDAYS, 9.30 PM

21.6. | DIE WAND (2012)

12.7. | ROTER HIMMEL (2023)
COLLABORATION WITH IFFMH

19.7. | TIDES (2021)

@ **KARLSTORKINO**

24.6. | ON THE MORNING YOU WAKE (TO THE END OF THE WORLD) (2022)
4 PM
& PANEL DISCUSSION ON BOOK THE OCEAN ON FIRE (2024)

28.6. | PACIFICTION (2022)
7 PM
COLLABORATION WITH IFFMH

10.7. | IMAGINING END TIMES (2024)
7 PM
PREMIERE OF THE CAPAS IN-HOUSE DOCUMENTARY

SPONSORED BY THE
Federal Ministry of Education and Research

#PEOPLE APOCALYPSE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

TAYLOR DOTSON

What were your first thoughts when you saw the call for applications for the fellowship?

Taylor Dotson: My first thoughts were "They have a research center for that?!" But I was also very curious. As a scholar, I don't have much interest in esoteric minutiae. I don't do boring. And you can't get any bigger or exciting than studying the end of the world. It wasn't very difficult to write an application, especially as I had already started digging into the idea of the apocalyptic on my own.

Taylor Dotson is Associate Professor of Social Sciences at the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology in the United States. His research focuses on the intersection of science, technology, and politics, specifically on public issues involving large-scale or global risks.

I had just finished up another research stay in Leipzig studying biodiversity change. That's an area, like the climate crisis, where apocalyptic scenarios abound. Some even worry that the planet faces an impending "sixth mass extinction" event. I was excited about the opportunity to dig deeper into the perception that environmental challenges pose existential risks to humans.

What does the apocalypse and/or post-apocalypse mean for you?

I think of myself as a recovering apocalyptician. Fifteen years ago I was very concerned about climate change and peak oil, to the point of losing sleep when I thought about climate refugees, or about if, where, and how I might ensure a good life for my future children. Now I'm less certain. That uncertainty has come not only from being surprised by the resilience of humanity, but also from my disciplinary perspective. After earning my PhD in science and technology studies, I am critical of how science gets used to present certain political claims as beyond dispute. I still have concerns about humanity's environmental future, but those worries as now colored by both skepticism and hope.

What is your fellowship trying to achieve?

While I've been at CAPAS, I have been exploring how the idea of the apocalypse shapes people as political beings, specifically for environmental challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss. How is apocalyptic thinking in tension with democracy? Can or should democratic societies be more responsive to cataclysmic anxieties, or seek to redirect them?

My approach is often called "middle range theory." I don't aspire to construct grand narratives like famous social theorists. Rather, my aim is to synthesize theory and existing empirical data to arrive at practical insights and recommendations, which are hopefully usable by a broader range of people, not only by academics.

I hope to come away with some reasonably well founded ideas about how we might better respond to apocalyptic worries. These shouldn't be dismissed as paranoid or irrationally dystopian. Yet, they rarely seem to lead to productive politics. Is a more inclusive, hopeful, and democratic apocalypticism both possible and sustainable?

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#SCIENCE APOCALYPSE

“I SHALL NOT SEE A WORLD WHICH WILL BE DEAR TO ME”

THE APOCALYPSE IN ‘CELTIC’ MYTHOLOGY

by Clara Scholz

Apocalyptic stories have long served as powerful mirrors reflecting humanity’s deepest fears, hopes, and beliefs. We have held an obsession with our own demise and the end of the world as we know it for seemingly as long as we have existed, and it has shaped our culture, our religions and the stories we have told each other for thousands of years. As used as we are to scriptures and prophecies telling us how the world will come to an end and to pantheons of gods shaping our lives in tales and legends, it is hard to accept that peoples and tribes have existed whose mythological ideas and beliefs seem to elude us still. Yet the so-called ‘Celts’ do exactly that.

Despite the popularity the ‘Celts’ and their many associations enjoyed in pop-culture today, what we really know about their lives and mythology is deflatingly little. Everything that seemed to define these tribes—their language, the way they dressed, the objects they created, as well as their religious views—must be viewed in the context of their huge settlement areas and the long time they spent wandering, developing, getting conquered, and eventually settling over many parts of ancient Europe.

Can we say anything about the ‘Celtic’ culture for certain, then? In itself, it must have been a melting pot of different cultures, beliefs and religious ideas, influenced by the places the tribes came from or by the people who joined or conquered them. Considering that a singular group of people referring to themselves as ‘Celts’ never existed, it is impossible to refer to a unifying mythological world, a family of gods or even a common religion among the many different groups attributed to this name. Unfor-

Traditional Celtic crosses on an Irish cemetery.

tunately, archaeological material is difficult to use as evidence of supernatural beliefs and what little remains of 'Celtic' inscriptions, of images of Gods and cult objects, is fragmentary and often contradictory. Literary sources are also often full of gaps and must be viewed as dependent on the place where and by whom they were written down. Reconstruction through speculation can be especially dangerous in this context, as it might quickly lead down a path to incorporating themes and ideas unsupported by any tangible evidence.

What of the 'Celts' views on the Apocalypse then? According to Strabo, the Greek philosopher and geographer, the druids believed that, though the universe and the human soul were indestructible, fire and water would eventually prevail over both. Alexander the Great shared the now famous anecdote of a group of 'Celtic' warriors replying to his question of what they were afraid of that the only thing they feared was the sky crashing down on their heads; the falling of the sky clearly being associated with some end of the world. This also draws similarities to Norse mythology, where the burning of the World Tree causes the sky to fall, heralding the end of the world. Thus, we can assume that the end of the world must have played some role in 'Celtic' mythology, even though we only find fragmentary evidence of it today.

While on the European mainland, monuments and inscriptions (mostly on stone) remained that might have belonged to a religious or cultish background, on the British Isles, we find mostly written documents. It is these literary sources that we draw most of our assumptions about 'Celtic' mythology from today—in Ireland, this is the *Tain* and in Wales, the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*. These collections are not specifically tales about gods or religious beliefs but rather legends and tales which sometimes feature gods, as well as other supernatural creatures, or pseudohistorical collections of tales connected to their place of origin. But even these literary sources must be taken with a grain of salt as none of these documents were written down by people we would today refer to as 'Celts'. Most of them stem from the pen of Romans or Christian monks. The most famous of these sources is most likely Caesar's *Bello Gallico*, which describes the members of 'Celtic' religions as well as their Gods as cruel and bloodthirsty, a clear agenda to contrast the supposed barbarity of the 'Celts' with the sophistication of the Roman. Why do we

have such little textual evidence regarding the religion and mythology of these people written by themselves? Most likely because their knowledge was passed down orally and closely guarded by those who had access to it.

Hints to one collective mythology do exist—it was generally believed among 'Celtic' tribes that an otherworld exists, that the gods can walk freely among humans and interact with them, and evidence pointing towards a kind of death cult has also been found. It was generally believed that the gods lived 'elsewhere', possibly within hills, underground or on islands far out at sea. In Welsh mythology, this place is called *Annwfn*, and in Irish *Tír na nÓg*. Nonetheless, large gaps exist in our knowledge of the mythology of the many tribes, and it is oftentimes impossible to read between the lines of what the—often Christian—final redactors might have added to the remaining sources.

Clara Scholz has a background in Celtic Studies and English Literature. She is currently enrolled in the MA Cultural Heritage Protection at the University of Heidelberg and has been with the CAPAS since April 2024. Her passions include Irish history, science-fiction novels and taking care of her house plants.

We find the strongest hint of the Apocalypse in tales that feature prophecies of the end of times, in Irish as well as Welsh mythology. These visions usually refer to a linear Apocalypse, telling us of an end of the world which is inevitable and leaves no way of ever returning to the way things have been. These prophecies are often spoken in the context of battles or conflicts. Historically, this does make sense, especially since the disruptions caused on the British Isles during the Viking age seem to have been a stimulus for elaborate apocalyptic prophecies and thoughts of the end of the world. Considering the destruction the Vikings caused, it is not surprising that it must have felt like the end of times to many. A theme of social upheaval and inversion of the traditional order is common for the texts composed at this time, even those set in the distant past.

Cath Maige Tuired ('The second battle of Mag Tuired'), found in the Irish Mythological Cycle, is a prime example of a text composed during this troubled time, as it blends native and Christian apocalyptic motives. In it, the ancient supernatural race of the *Tuath Dé* is most prominently featured, as well as the battles they fought with the demonic overseas race known as the *Fomoiri*, as possible stand-in for the feared Viking invaders. Their conflict is the central theme of the tale. At the end of the story, after the battle is won, Mórrígan, one of the *Tuath Dé* and an important character in the mythological cycle, utters two poems. The first is a vision of abundance: "Peace up to heaven / Heaven down to earth / Earth beneath heaven / Strength in each". The second, on the other hand, is a vision of apocalyptic horror: "I shall not see a world / Which will be dear to me: / Summer without blossoms, / Cattle will be without milk, / Women without modesty, / Men without valour. / Conquests without a king . . . / Woods without mast. / Sea without produce. . . / False judgements of old men. / False precedents of lawyers, / Every man a betrayer. / Every son a reaver". She predicts social upheaval to the point of incest, war, and general chaos. As poetic as this is, we cannot be sure if this draws an accurate picture of what the 'Celts' believed the end of times would look like.

In Welsh mythology, we find a similar example of an apocalyptic vision, also uttered by

a woman. In it we can clearly see the influence of Roman and Christian mythology; it is most likely based on the Latin *Oracles of the Tiburtine Sibyl*. *Llyma Prophwydoliaeth Sibli Doeath* ('Here is the Prophecy of Sibyl the Wise') which describes a dream in which Sibyl sees the downfall and apocalyptic end of the world after many bounds of human wickedness and natural disasters. She sees nine bloodstained suns appear in the sky, each representing a generation that will come before the end of the world, and she predicts that evil despots will rule the world with much bloodshed before the earth is finally cleansed by fire and water. The images seem related to the day of judgement in the Christian Apocalypse, while the end of the world in fire and water reminds one of the druidic visions of the end of the world in Ireland.

Other Apocalyptic elements that we are familiar with today also appear in 'Celtic' mythology, prominently the appearance of the zombie-like undead. In the tale of Branwen, the daughter of Llŷr, found in the second branch of the Welsh *Mabinogi*, a war is waged between the Irish and Welsh over the marriage of Branwen to the king of Ireland. To pacify the king, he is gifted the *pair dadeni*, the cauldron of restoration, which will revive his soldiers even after they have died in battle. For this to work, the *Mabinogi* tells us, "the dead were thrown into the cauldron, until it was full. They would rise up the next day—fighting men as good as before, except they would not be able to talk". Some would argue that these zombie-like Irishmen make the perfect soldiers—ready for battle but unable to complain or protest.

Despite only fragments of the mythology of the 'Celts' remaining in what few sources they left us, it is clear that they, like many other peoples, were occupied with a possible end of the world. Interconnected as these images are with Christian and Roman influence, they likely had their own ideas of the otherworld, of death and the creation and end of the world. Whatever hopes and fears they had, they processed them in tales and stories that seem surprisingly modern—not only when focused on their Apocalyptic motives. ●

Old Irish Ogham-Inscriptions—an Early Medieval form of alphabet or cipher, sometimes known as the "Celtic Tree Alphabet"—on standing stones, exhibited at University College Cork.

#FELLOW APOCALYPSE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT
KATE COOPER

What were your first thoughts when you saw the call for applications for the fellowship?

Kate Cooper: I thought: these people sound mad, just like my kind of people—I must get to know them! It seemed to me that studying different apocalyptic ideas across time and space was such a fantastic idea. And of course this turned out to be true!

Kate Cooper is Professor of History at Royal Holloway, University of London. Her research explores how women, children, and adolescents changed history in various ways. She is especially interested in religious and social change, and the distinctive institutions of daily life such as marriage, asceticism, slavery, domestic exploitation, and violence.

What does the apocalypse and/or post-apocalypse mean for you?

The medievalist Marjorie Reeves defined the term *apocalyptic* as 'the disclosure of hidden divine purpose in history'. Her definition arises from the literal meaning of the Greek word 'apokalypsis'—'unveiling' (the word is derived from the combination of 'apo' ['away'] with 'kalypsis' ['covering']).

In the first century, the Apostle Paul suggested that the end-time [Greek: 'eschaton'] was coming, and this should be read as a sign from God, that the faithful should organize their lives as a search for God's hidden plan. I believe this is why the ideas of eschatology (the end of the world) and apocalypse (revelation) began to be entwined with one another, with the result that modern thinkers often refer to the end-time as 'the Apocalypse'.

What is your fellowship trying to achieve?

My project explores early Christian 'apocalyptic ethics'—the idea that there will be a final moment of judgement in which time collapses and God's purpose in history will be revealed. In this scenario you often see what we call 'eschatological reversal', where the meek inherit the earth and the powerful are called to account. This idea reaches back to the Psalms and is expressed vividly in the sayings of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Across time, different communities discovered different meanings in these sayings.

How does the fellowship project build on or connect to your previous career or biography?

My earlier work focuses on gender and the household in late antiquity. And, of course, things that resonate with your previous work always jump out at you! So, one of the most fascinating things about my current project is discovering how important gender ideas are in the apocalyptic imagination.

To get some practical advice: What would be the three things you would definitely need in a post-apocalyptic world?

You know, in all the dystopian films, people start out with all sorts of useful gadgets, and they lose them one by one: they drop the flashlight into a well or whatever, and finally they are left with their own resources. So, in the end I think you probably just have to make the most out of whatever you stumble across!

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#PUBLIC APOCALYPSE

GENDER AND APOCALYPTIC ETHICS

FROM DESERT SAINTS TO DRAG SCENES

by CAPAS-Fellow Kate Cooper

Every May, a grass-roots network of researchers in hundreds of cities across five continents holds the 'Pint of Science'—a global science festival in which big ideas get talked about in an informal setting over pints of beer (or other nice things to drink). This year, CAPAS contributed with a session called 'From Desert Saints to Drag Scenes'.

The idea behind this session was apocalyptic ethics: how the idea of the apocalypse can disrupt this-worldly habits and commitments and allow people to move into a liminal space where the sense of self is challenged and expanded. In both the ancient and modern worlds, our 'gender habits' are some of the ones that are hardest to disrupt.

The first half of the event, *Pelagia, Queen of the Desert*, was focused on my research on early Christian saints who disrupted ancient ideas of gender. In an earlier book, *Band of Angels: The Forgotten World of Early Christian Women*, I explored the early Christian idea that a deeper connection to the power of God can lead to questioning or challenging earthly gender roles, and the fascination of early Christian writers with women who challenged social norms. My project for CAPAS builds on this work to ask how apocalyptic thought gives energy to these early Christian ideas about gender disruption.

© Wikimedia

Mary of Egypt is considered one of the most provocative of the early gender-destroying saints. This seventeenth-century icon draws the viewer's attention to how her gendered characteristics began to fade away as her body was transformed by ascetic practice.

We explored the lives of two of the most provocative of the early gender-disrupting saints, Pelagia of Antioch (4th century) and Mary of Egypt (7th century). Early Christian writers were fascinated by women who dressed as men, or who 'became' men—whether transformed physically in a dream as in the case of Perpetua of Carthage (d. 203 C.E.), or who were 'made into men' spiritually, such as Mary Madgalene as she is depicted in the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas (2nd century). And an important theme in the lives of the early female saints, from the second-century *Acts of Thecla* well into the medieval and Byzantine period, was this: when women first heard the early Christian message that the world would soon end, some of the most saintly among them chose to disguise themselves as men in order to be able to leave their families and follow the rootless life of a wandering preacher. The idea shared by these early Christian texts is that while gender roles in our daily lives may have their own value, they can distract us from what is really important.

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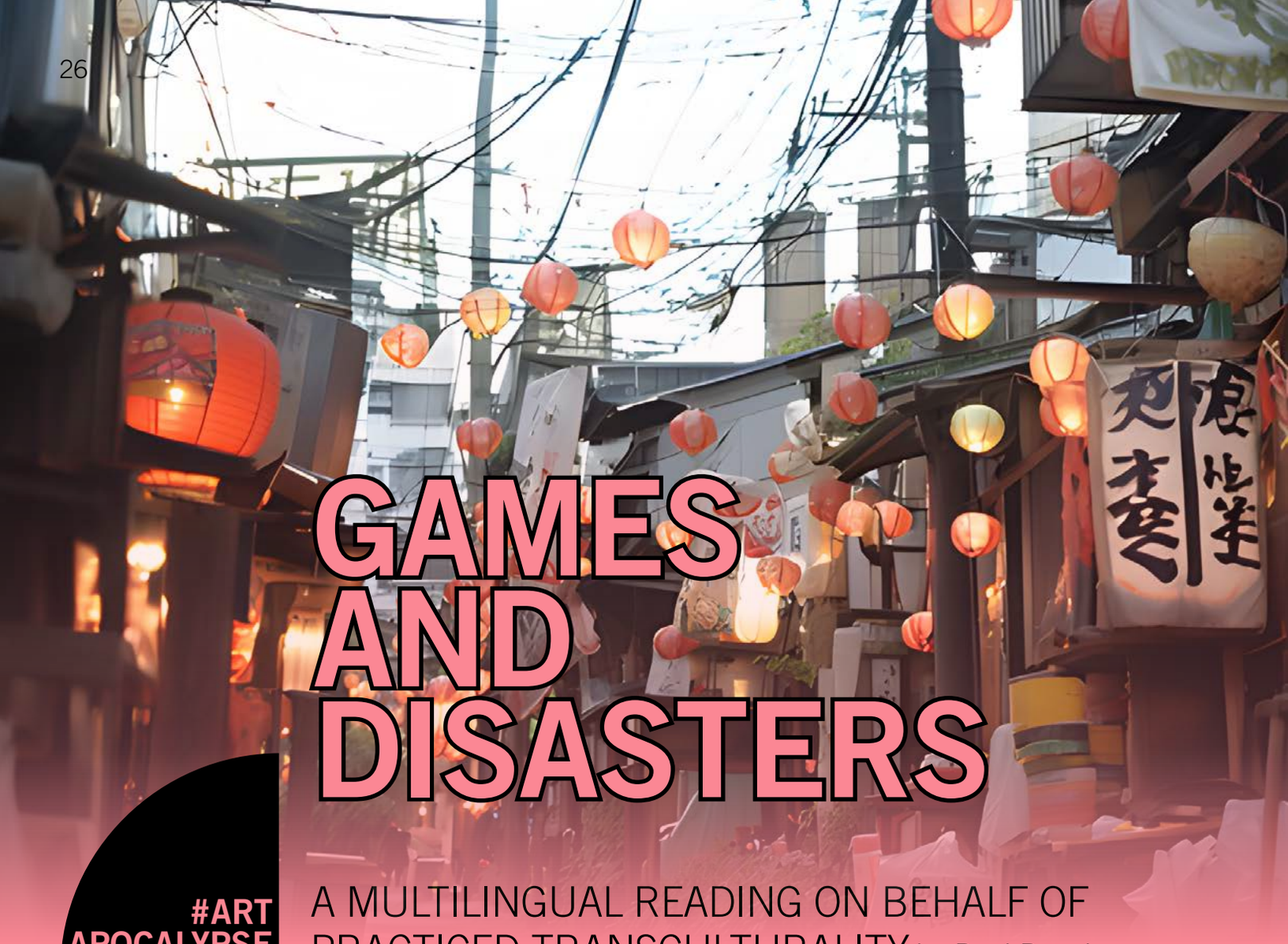

GAMES AND DISASTERS

#ART APOCALYPSE

A MULTILINGUAL READING ON BEHALF OF PRACTICED TRANSCULTURALITY by Paul Busch

On April 25th, CAPAS hosted an event with Yoko Tawada, held in the auditorium of the Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies (CATS). Yoko Tawada, a Japanese-German writer and international scholar whose work is characterized by its multicultural and poetological morphology, attracted significant interest not only among students and staff of Japanese Studies beholden to the semantic context. It also proved to be highly appealing to those who wish to experience transculturality in a more comprehensive way than usually assumed.

A large number of participants attended both the performance and the discussion of Tawada's poetry by exploring their background with regard to apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic imaginaries. With a remarkable amount of skilfully implemented humour, para-verbal presence, and multilingual virtuosity, Tawada effortlessly managed to captivate the audience: what made her poetry so convincing was not only the empathic and observational sensitivity evident in her vocal engagement with Japanese modernity and the peculiarity of German quotidian matters. She also made use of a remarkable variety of onomatopoeia, which lent her performance a unique degree of tenderness that could not be expressed with fragmented vocabulary alone.

The roughly one-hour reading was complemented by a panel discussion with Tawada, Marcus Quent (CAPAS-Fellow 2023-2024, Berlin University of Arts), and the German sinologist

THICK (太)

A time will come when dawn will melt into dusk
Warmth will mean the same as cold
Walk slowly and the station will feel nearer
A single cracker will fill our stomachs
And at the moment one wants to stop writing,
a poem appears on the page

(Aus dem Japanischen: Jeffrey Angles)

The multilingual poetry reading with Yoko Tawada (right) was followed by a panel discussion with Marcus Quent (CAPAS-Fellow 2023-2024, Berlin University of the Arts) and the German sinologist Barbara Mittler (Institute for Chinese Studies, Heidelberg University).

Barbara Mittler (Institute of Chinese Studies, Heidelberg University). The three managed to engage the audience by addressing various transcultural and apocalyptic topoi such as Fukushima as starting points for a further reaching transdisciplinary and cross-cultural dialogue. As one person in the audience maintained accurately, it is the multilingual character of Tawada's writing that enables us to juxtapose it with and reflect it through the necessity of performatively synthesising existential divergences in light of disastrous incidents. ●

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Yoko Tawada was born in Tokyo in 1960. She came to Hamburg in 1982 where she studied German language and literature and obtained her doctorate in Zurich. She has lived in Berlin since 2006. Her first book was published in 1987. She writes in German and Japanese and has received numerous literary prizes, including the Akutagawa Prize (Japan), the National Book Award (USA) and the Kleist-Preis (Germany).

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LAST WOMAN STANDING

A SCIENTIFIC COMMENTARY ON *THE WALL*

by Elisabeth Kargl

#PUBLIC APOCALYPSE

On June 21, the Apocalyptic Cinema screened the film adaptation of Marlen Haushofer's novel *The Wall*. Doomsday scenarios such as in *The Wall* express a desire for radical change and new beginnings, creating spaces for alternative social concepts and identity models, often focusing on the motif of the last wo-/man or a small group of survivors. These narratives enable the reimagining of people without social constraints, raising questions about self-redefinition in extreme situations. Elisabeth Kargl, an expert on Austrian literature and history, comments on Marlen Haushofer's *The Wall*, which explores the protagonist's forced loneliness as a narrative of (eco-)feminist interpretations, questioning social power structures. The novel and its film adaptation mix oppression and idyll, depicting loneliness and catastrophe as both liberation and the basis for a new existence.

The motif of loneliness is present in numerous texts by Austrian author Marlen Haushofer. It is almost always female characters who withdraw, who deliberately choose a secluded life, or who are forced by strange and unexplained catastrophes to find their way in solitude. This is probably the case in her best-known novel *Die Wand* (*The Wall*) from 1960, but also in *Die Mansarde* (*The Attic*), *Eine Handvoll Leben* (*A Handful of Lives*) and *Die Tapetentür* (*The Wallpaper Door*). In *The Wall*, an invisible and yet insurmountable wall suddenly appears one morning, forcing the first-person narrator to live a completely isolated life in the mountains. In *The Attic*, an equally sudden and unexplained deafness strikes the narrator, who is practically banished by her family to a remote forester's lodge in the forest. In *The Wallpaper Door,* a text with clear echoes of Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator is banished by her husband to a room with yellow wallpaper.

Haushofer's motif of being locked up is often read as a symbol of the gender rela-

tions of the patriarchal society of the 1950s and 60s, which the author addresses in almost all of her texts. Sometimes, however, it is also understood as an allegory of melancholy or depression. This motif is quite ambivalent in Haushofer's work, as confinement and loneliness can also harbour a form of freedom that enables the protagonists to free themselves, at least temporarily, from any social burden. Director Julian Pölsler also takes up this ambivalence in his film *Die Wand* (*The Wall*), which is very closely based on Haushofer's novel.

DISASTER

In the novel *The Wall*, the nameless first-person narrator goes on a trip to the mountains with a couple of friends. While her friends go back to the village in the evening, the narrator stays behind in the forester's lodge. When she wakes up the next morning, an unspecified catastrophe has struck the mountain landscape (and most probably the whole country). The narrator is suddenly trapped behind a transparent wall: "Puzzled, I stretched out my hand and touched something smooth and cool: a smooth, cool resistance in a place where there could be nothing but air. Hesitantly, I tried again, and once more my hand rested as if on the pane of a window". In the film, the wall materializes with a particularly unpleasant buzzing sound, but neither the novel nor the film provides any further details about the catastrophe or about this mysterious wall, which is simply suddenly there.

The sudden loneliness of being trapped behind the glass wall in the mountains naturally causes fear at first. The narrator notes in her diary: "Fear creeps up on me from all sides". The director Julian Pölsler, who also worked with the writer and psychiatrist Paulus Hochgatterer, emphasizes in an interview for "Austrian Films" that the novel paints a picture of depression for him. Marlen Haushofer herself also described the wall as a symbol of a mental state: "But, you know, the wall I'm talking about is actually a mental state that suddenly becomes visible to the outside world".

PROTECTION

At the same time, however, this wall also takes on a protective function, as the narrator notes: "The only enemy I had known in my life so far had been men." Even if being trapped is the consequence of a (natural?) catastrophe, this does not necessarily mean complete loneliness. The narrator is surrounded by her animals and the close relationship she builds with them seems incomparably more valuable to her than

that with people: “It’s just that it’s much easier to love Bella or the cat than a human”. Haushofer describes humans as violent and selfish, and so in *Die Wand* the animals also replace the narrator’s family.

FREEDOM

In Haushofer’s work, being locked up can also symbolize freedom. Behind the wall, the narrator is liberated from her former life: “I can allow myself to write the truth; all those for whose sake I have lied all my life are dead”; “The circumstances of my former life had often forced me to lie; but now every reason and excuse for lying had long since disappeared. I no longer lived among people”. And so she can do as she pleases, which had never been the case before “because someone or something had always been found with deadly certainty to ruin my plans”. Being locked up does not always mean being trapped, but can also imply a form of freedom. However, this freedom is always relative, because behind the glass wall there is no longer any connection or communication with other people.

HOPELESSNESS

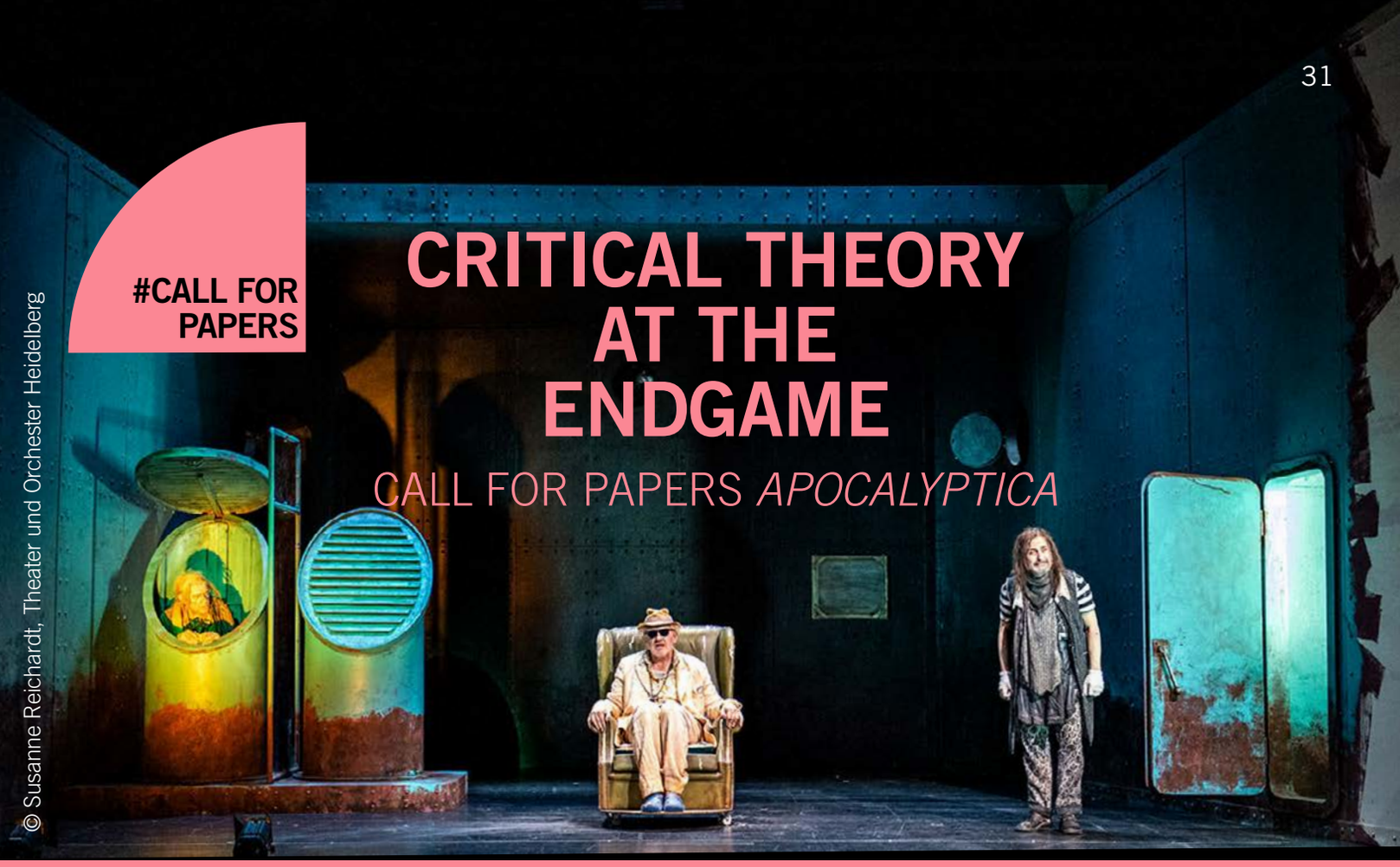
Marlen Haushofer’s narrators do not rebel against their circumstances, but accept them almost without resistance and make themselves as comfortable as possible behind walls. This resignation can be interpreted as a symbol of human life itself: “There could never be any talk of external freedom, but I have also never known a person who was inwardly free”. All attempts to escape are impossible; with Haushofer there is no revolt. In an interview she states: “I wouldn’t know what hope I should see. The very fact of death makes everything we do seem futile”. Even writing against the fear of going mad has something pointless about it: “It’s a strange feeling to write for mice. Sometimes I just have to imagine I’m writing for people, it’s a little easier for me then”. For Haushofer, there is no liberation from the human condition. Only organizing life as well as possible and in harmony with nature and animals allows for happy moments.

ECOFEMINISM

Haushofer anticipates the Anthropocene age in her texts: “Everything we eat has become inedible. Chickens, pigs and calves taste like swollen flannels. Everything is getting more and more expensive, tastes worse and worse and is bombastically packaged”, she writes in *Die Mansarde*. In the city, parks and gardens are wasting away, nature only seems to exist behind the wall. And only there, in seclusion and without any contact to the outside world, can a form of female utopia (and not Robinsonade!) be temporarily realized. There, it is no longer a capitalist and patriarchal society that determines the course of events, but only nature, which Haushofer does not idealize, however, but also portrays as cruel. But there the narrator can be herself and is forced to acquire new, much more useful skills. However, she does not imitate Robinson’s attitude of making the land and her companions “her own”. The narrator behind the wall is not a mistress but a protector, a “patient sister” to the animals. At the same time, she also becomes a hunter and, in the end, a murderer in order to protect her animals. Haushofer does not deny violence, but sees it as part of human nature. The narrator is aware of the finality of life behind the glass wall and so even the idyllic moments can only be temporary. ●

Elisabeth Kargl is a profesor at the German Department of the University of Nantes and programme coordinator of the trinational Master’s programme “Media Culture Analysis” in cooperation with Vienna and Düsseldorf. After studying Comparative Literature, Romance Studies and German Studies in Vienna, Nantes and Paris III Sorbonne-Nouvelle, she obtained her doctorate in Vienna and Paris III on the translation of Elfriede Jelinek’s early plays.

#CALL FOR PAPERS



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CRITICAL THEORY AT THE ENDGAME

CALL FOR PAPERS *APOCALYPTICA*

"The destructive character knows only one word: to make room; and only one activity: to clear away. Its need for fresh air and open space is stronger than any hatred[.] But because it sees a way everywhere, it also has to do away with everywhere. Not always with brute force, sometimes in refined ways."
Walter Benjamin, "The Destructive Character", 1931

The next issue of the *Apocalyptica* is dedicated to the topic of "Critical Theory at the Endgame". We seek contributions that explore questions such as the following: Is the apocalypse a meaningful topic for critical theory beyond its religious significance? What role does it play in modern philosophy from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel to Karl Marx and his followers? Is it possible to demonstrate, through works of art, how apocalyptic and perhaps post-apocalyptic imaginaries help us excavate the past in search of a new future? On the other hand, how do literary and cinematic representations of apocalypse reinforce dominant cultural ideologies? What role do dystopian visions play in shaping the conservative political discourses of our historical context? Can apocalyptic literature and cinema be seen as an ideology of neoliberal capitalism?

Apocalyptica is an international, interdisciplinary, open-access, double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal.

SUBMISSIONS

Please submit your article (**8,000-9,000 words**, including an abstract of 250 words and bibliography) as well as a short bio (50 words) by **1 November 2024** to **publications@capas.uni-heidelberg.de**.

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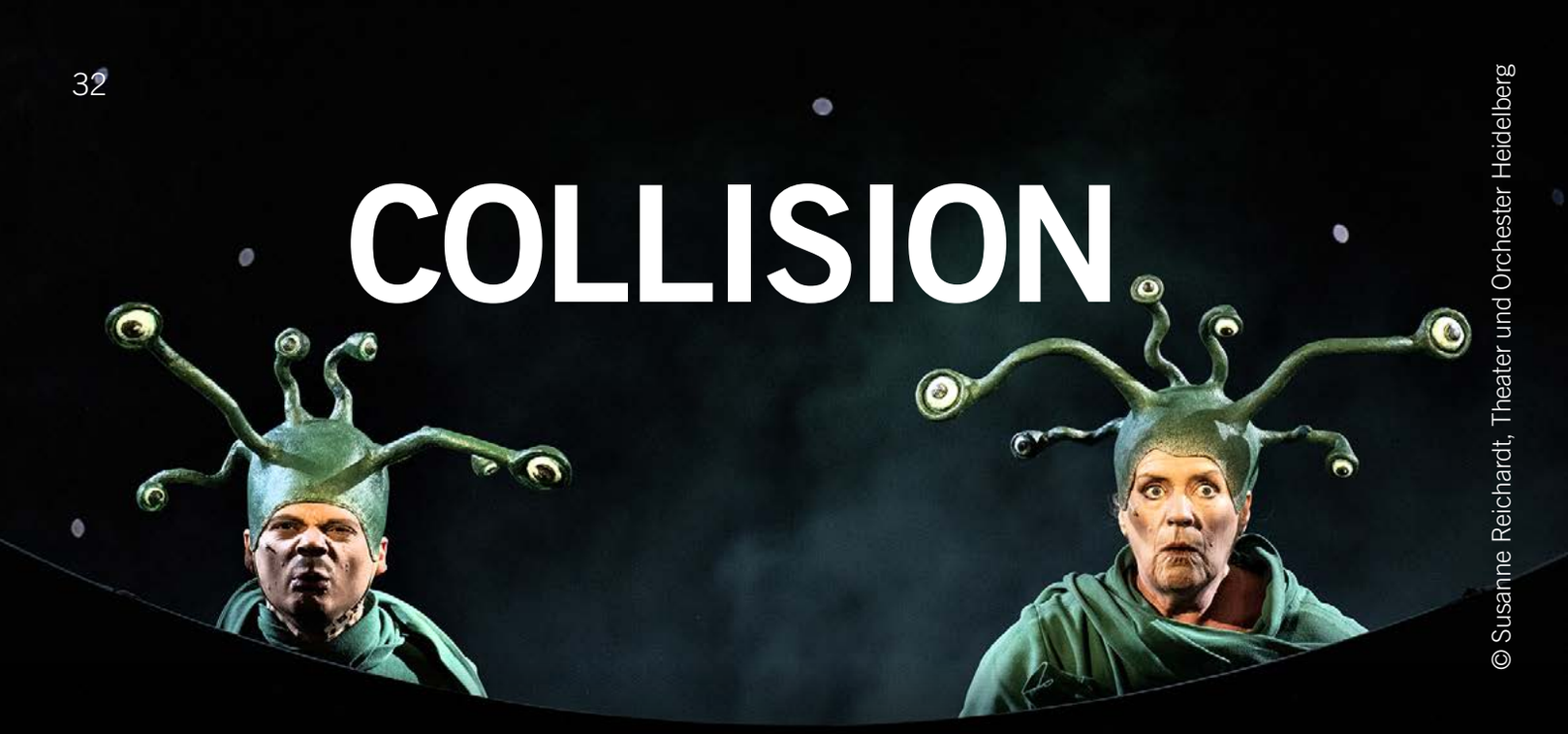
COLLISION



END OF THE WORLD—AND THEN?

by Richard Wilman

#ART APOCALYPSE

From 'When Worlds Collide' to 'Collision': End of the World—and then? The film screening of 'When Worlds Collide' at the Apocalyptic Cinema Open Air 2023 was the start of a collaboration with the Theater and Orchester Heidelberg. On 23 June, CAPAS was invited to accompany the opera 'Collision' with a supporting programme. Former CAPAS-Fellow Richard Wilman and current Fellow Nikita Chiu commented on the opera 'Collision' from their viewpoints of astrophysics and space innovation and technology governance, respectively. Thereafter, they answered questions from opera director Ulrike Schumann and the audience about the probability of a cosmic end, the current state of science and the connection between science and art.

Richard Wilman (3rd from left) and Nikita Chiu (2nd from left) in conversation with opera director Ulrike Schumann (left).

The end of the world or the entire universe in a cosmic catastrophe represents the pinnacle of apocalyptic destruction, the decisive end of humanity and possibly of everything. For centuries, humanity has contemplated this threat, with celestial phenomena playing a major role in diverse cultures and providing rich narrative material for stage and screen. In April 2024, Theater and Orchester Heidelberg premiered a new production of the comic opera 'Zusammenstoß' by Ludger Vollmer, based on the 1927 libretto of Kurt Schwitters and Käte Steinitz. The plot begins with the discovery of a 'green globe' or comet, which an astronomer, Virmula, calculates will collide with the Earth. With a strong dose of slapstick reflecting Schwitters' Dadaist heritage and his own offshoot artistic movement 'Merz', subsequent scenes depict the rising human drama—and a view from Mars—as the collision draws near, until at the last moment an error in the calculations is discovered and the cataclysm is averted.

The libretto was inspired by the dramatic events of the 1910 approach of Comet Halley in which the Earth passed through the comet's tail amid much public hysteria. On that occasion, the panic had been

Richard Wilman is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physics at Durham University, UK. He is interested in natural cosmic hazards and their threats to life on Earth and elsewhere. During his fellowship at CAPAS in 2023, he investigated the apocalyptic threat of rare but devastating cosmic hazards and the long-term (post-apocalyptic) future of life in space.

stirred up by the erroneous claim that toxic gas discovered in the comet's tail would penetrate the Earth's atmosphere with fatal consequences. These events were researched by my working group during my CAPAS Fellowship in 2023. Here, I review their scientific background, highlighting some important Heidelberg connections, and offer a contemporary perspective on the cosmic impact threat.

The 1910 return of Comet Halley was the first to take place in the era of modern astrophysics. Photographs of the comet were taken for the first time. Astronomical spectroscopy was used to analyse its composition, the techniques having been pioneered in Heidelberg by Bunsen and Kirchoff for their analysis of the Sun in 1859. The comet was first spotted ahead of its 1910 return in September 1909 by Heidelberg astronomer Max Wolf. Since the orbits of comets can be difficult to calculate precisely, exactly when and where in the sky it would re-appear was not certain.

Max Wolf was the founding father of modern astronomy in Heidelberg and we encounter him in the opening Overture of Zusammenstoβ. He calculated that in May 1910 the Earth would pass through the tail of the comet, in which spectroscopic analysis revealed the presence of the toxic gas cyanogen. The French astronomer Camille Flammarion had a high public profile and inadvertently incited much hysteria by his claim—a mis-reported Gedankenexperiment—that the gas would enter the Earth's atmosphere and extinguish all life. There were other wild speculations about the consequences of such a close approach of the comet.

Although the danger was downplayed by other leading astronomers—the gas in the tail is simply too diffuse—the comet's approach in May 1910 was still met with much trepidation; fraudsters sold 'anti-comet' pills and there was a rapid trade in gas masks. Some blamed it for the death of King Edward VII that same month, but another comet which appeared just before Halley, the Great Daylight Comet of January 1910, was even more spectacular.

The frenzied public atmosphere surrounding these events in 1910 vividly demonstrates how scientific findings can become distorted and misrepresented with dramatic and dangerous consequences. This is especially the case when the science has a high public impact and is rapidly evolving, as with the astronomer Virmula's changing calculations of the comet's orbit, and indeed as we all witnessed when the Corona pandemic unfolded.

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#FELLOW APOCALYPSE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT
ANAÏS MAURER

What does the apocalypse and/or post-apocalypse mean for you?

Anaïs Maurer: I recalled the famous poster sign by an anonymous bookstore worker: “FYI: post-apocalyptic fiction has been moved to our current affairs section”

Anaïs Maurer is an Assistant Professor at Rutgers University. In addition, she is an Affiliate Faculty at the K=1 Project in the Center for Nuclear Studies at Columbia University. Her research focuses on topics related to nuclear studies, post-apocalyptic narratives, climate activism, decolonization, and indigenous knowledges in the context of the Pacific region.

What is your fellowship trying to achieve?

In the field of critical nuclear studies, the nuclear apocalypse is often presented either as narrowly avoided during the Cold War era, or as a looming catastrophe dependent on the whims of unpredictable world leaders. It is rarely conceived of in its true temporal dimension, as an ongoing apocalypse. With thousands of nuclear and thermonuclear “tests,” nuclear-armed nations have already unleashed the nuclear Armageddon onto the bodies of the Indigenous, colonized, and/or racialized peoples on whose lands these weapons of mass destruction were overwhelmingly detonated. It is important to provincialize northern speculative nuclear futures, and to foreground historically informed narratives from the Global South that analyze the environmental racism at the roots of the apocalyptical nuclear industrial complex.

What is your fellowship trying to achieve, which questions is it addressing, and with which methods?

I am working on a manuscript retracing the artistic history of Māʼohi resistance to French nuclear colonialism. With a collective payload hundreds of times the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima, French nuclear tests constitute an apocalyptic event that ushered the end of a world in Māʼohi Nui. I seek to retrace the half-century of Māʼohi creative resistance to the bomb, from the 1960s to the present. I argue that Māʼohi artists retrieve the traces left by the most marginalized victims of nuclear colonialism, which cannot be found in state archives. Antinuclear art thus offers a cathartic space through which to express the ongoing emotions associated with half a century of state lies, medical negligence, and environmental racism.

What do you hope to take with you from the project and its results?

Germany relies upon American and French nuclear umbrella policies for its international defence. I find it meaningful to see a nuclear-complicit state fund a Centre like CAPAS, which recognizes nuclear colonialism as an apocalyptic event. I am grateful to be able to use research funds from a nuclear-complicit state to further irradiated communities’ quest for nuclear reparations and nuclear disarmament. The results of my work will be shared with various associations for nuclear justice in the Pacific, and will contribute to disseminating the history of decolonial indigenous resilience in various languages across the region.

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