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SHINY UTOPIAS



DEAR READERS,

Solving the world's most difficult problems through technological inventions and entrepreneurship—isn't that a beautiful dream? This magazine explores pressing issues at the intersection of technology, society, and the future. A key theme that emerges is the stark contrast between utopian visions of technology emanating from Silicon Valley and the harsh realities faced by platform workers in the Global South. Eduardo Altheman C. Santos' insightful piece reveals how the "Californian ideology" of tech utopianism morphs into dystopian working conditions for millions of platform wor-

kers in Brazil. As we hurtle towards an automated future, we must critically examine who benefits from and who pays the price for our tech-driven dreams.

The magazine also touches on fascinating concepts like Nahua futurisms, offering alternative visions of the future rooted in Indigenous knowledge and experiences. Such perspectives are crucial as we grapple with existential challenges and imagine more equitable futures.

The CAPAS team wishes you a stimulating and inspiring read!

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



SHINY UTOPIAS

DREAMED IN CALIFORNIA,
NIGHTMARED IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

by CAPAS-Fellow Eduardo Altheman C. Santos

Silicon Valley is often viewed as a beacon of technological utopia, promising solutions to global challenges through innovation and entrepreneurship. However, this idealism starkly contrasts with the harsh realities faced by platform workers in the Global South, particularly in Brazil, where precarious labor conditions and exploitation are rampant. The text explores how these dreams of autonomy and progress morph into nightmares of surveillance and instability, revealing a troubling link between Northern aspirations and Southern dystopias.

In the last decade and a half, most of us have grown accustomed to seeing Silicon Valley as humanity's shiniest utopia factory. Harboring over 40,000 startups and positioned at the intersection between tech entrepreneurialism, cyber-optimism, and libertarian fantasies—all sustained by massive streams of extremely volatile venture capital—the Valley represents the world's last resort to solve our most pressing existential problems. From the banking system to urban transportation, labor to health care, communication to information, it seems to have the correct answers to all questions and be able to solve any problems. Promises of a glistening new world in which technology “streamlines” the way we live as a society are embedded in a plethora of hi-tech components that make up the Californian apparatus from Amazon to WeWork—with anything from Facebook and Google to PayPal and Uber in between. While some of these platforms are not geographically located in Silicon Valley, they are all animated by what Richard Barbrook and

Andy Cameron called the “Californian ideology.” No wonder *Die Welt* went so far as to call it the “*Zukunftslabor der Welt*,” the world's laboratory responsible for producing nothing less than the future itself.

Nowhere are these grandiose visions more evident than in the Valley's projects to build manifestations of actually existing techno-capitalist-utopianism. Consider the Seasteading Institute, founded in San Francisco by Patri Friedman, a former Google software engineer and grandson of none other than Milton Friedman, and funded by PayPal mogul Peter Thiel. Aiming to bypass any existing governmental legislation, the institute desires to build “startup communities that float on the ocean” as “a revolutionary solution to some of the world's most pressing problems.” Its mission is quite simply to “Enrich the poor. Cure the Sick. Feed the Hungry. Clean the atmosphere. Restore the oceans. Live in balance with nature. Power the world sustainably. Stop fighting”. Thomas More's fictional account

The “Californian ideology”: Visions of a glistening new world such as floating communities.





Another “wonder project” of the Silicon Valley: The Mars colonization program devised by SpaceX .

thus reverberates in fictitious capital entrepreneurship.

Or the prominent “[Mars colonization program](#)” devised by SpaceX and promoted by businessman and investor Elon Musk, notorious for the foundation, ownership, or leadership roles in Tesla, Inc., X Corp. (formerly known as Twitter), Neuralink, and OpenAI—who happens to be one of the wealthiest individuals on Earth, with an estimated net worth of over US\$221 billion. In his quest to “make humanity multi-planetary” and build a future “spacefaring civilization... among the stars”, Musk aims to establish one million Earthlings on the Red Planet in roughly two decades. As the ethereal yet very terrestrial 1% of humanity marches on to consume the planet’s natural resources, SpaceX presents itself not only as the species’ last chance of survival but also as an opportunity to expand on a galactic scale what we comprehend as “home.” As one world ends, many others are thus born. Now, it is Arnold Schoenberg’s second string quartet or Ursula Le Guin’s speculative fiction that echoes in financial-speculative tones.

The Valley’s strategy to energize its wonder projects often resorts to progressive ideas as sources of utopian energies. “Occupy Mars,” “disrupt everything,” “think different” (sic), “fail early, fail fast, fail often,” and “move fast and break things:” all these otherwise subversive ideas are often employed by tech corporations to advertise their main product, namely, the unique craftsmanship of bringing dreamworlds to life. The Valley even has its own [Manifesto](#), a form popularized by left-wing organizations and artistic collectives, now unsurprisingly written by a billionaire venture capitalist labeled the “[Chief Ideologist of the Silicon Valley Elite](#).” As the “Patron Saints” of techno-optimism, it tellingly mentions openly fascist supporters like Filippo Tommaso Marinetti alongside neoliberals such as Ludwig von Mises, Milton Friedman, and Friedrich Hayek (all of whom also supported far-right authoritarian regimes, if not fascism per se), and, last but not least, tech tycoons like Jeff Bezos, founder and former CEO of Amazon, the world’s largest e-commerce and cloud computing company—who coincidentally also happens to be one of the wealthiest persons alive.



Since 2019, platforms such as “Uber” have become Brazil’s largest job providers.

While these utopian visions may glimmer and seduce, one does not need to wait for the construction of fluctuating municipalities or extraterrestrial abodes to gauge what these idealistic landscapes could resemble. In fact, one can already witness the realization of these Californian dreams elsewhere to fully grasp how, when turned upside down, they reveal what they indeed are: deceptive mirages.

In the last five years, I have conducted in-depth interviews with platform workers and

digital ethnography in Facebook and WhatsApp groups congregating thousands of platform workers in São Paulo,

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a metropolis with over twenty million inhabitants. Since 2019, platforms have become Brazil’s largest job providers. Research from May 2021, conducted under the paired lethal effect of the Covid-19 pandemic and the administration of Jair Bolsonaro, showed that over 32 million Brazilians, 20% of the national adult population, used some platform as an income source, whether selling products and services on Facebook, Instagram, or WhatsApp, driving around for Uber and 99 (a transportation platform founded in 2012 in Brazil and subsequently bought by the Chinese giant Didi Chuxing, thus becoming the country’s first unicorn), or delivering food, groceries, and medicine on iFood (a Brazilian-founded delivery platform that, since its launch in 2011, has become a sector leader in Latin America with over 300.000 active couriers and over 55 million clients). Brazil, therefore, offers a glimpse into the apocalyptic present and future of a platform-run society.

“People don’t join apps because they want to; sometimes, it’s the only way to pay their household bills. If I had not joined, I would probably starve.”

Carlos, courier in São Paulo

The scenario is devastating: extremely low and uncertain remunerations, unlimited working hours, instant and unjustified terminations, “partners” (who are not even correctly labeled as “workers” in a platforms’ strategy to circumvent taxation and labor legislation) being obligated to buy their very work equipment, dead-end jobs with zero promises of upward mobility, no communication or transparency between

the C-level and the workers, the intensification of performance by gamification protocols, injured platform workers receiving messages from platforms asking why they were not logged in to their accounts, and even the infiltration of undercover agents sent by platforms to undermine collective action aiming to organize platform workers—these are the elements that comprise the aftermath site of a dream turned nightmare and show who carries the load of an alleged weightless economy.

Even amidst these ruins, platforms still try to advertise themselves as utopian experiments where individuals may exercise their yearnings for autonomy and freedom. In this milieu, workers are transubstantiated into “independent contractors” and “partners” in a horizontal web of mutual dependency, free to establish their working hours and even be their own bosses. Nevertheless, the routine of platform workers points to an inverted portrayal in which non-stop surveillance, überprecarious labor relations, unsustainable mineral

The employees of Rappi, Glovo and PedidosYa demonstrate together with the ASIMM trade union for better safety conditions

extraction, capital monopolization, data colonialism, and behavior manipulation hide behind the façade of an allegedly neutral apparatus. These not-so-long-ago apocalyptic forecasts have meanwhile become ubiquitous for millions worldwide. The apocalypse, thus, becomes less a future-situated turning point than a process that has already begun and urges us to rethink our present and how our lives are affected by the ongoing technological catastrophe.

“We need to press the apps so they see us differently, not just as a bunch of couriers. Whether it’s me or so-and-so doesn’t matter to them. We are the ones who make the deliveries; we are the platform and the face of the platform; iFood is just a name.”
João, courier in São Paulo





© Cliffson Shoitit via Pexels

Platforms still try to advertise themselves as utopian experiments where individuals may exercise their yearnings for autonomy and freedom.

This is not the first time dreams conceived in the global North have become cataclysms in the South. From 15th-century visions of a brave new world that brought about colonialism and slavery to free-market delusions that revealed themselves as neoliberal shock treatments from the 1970s onwards, a complex link between utopia and dystopia seems constitutive of the economic, social, and political relationship between North and South. Silicon Valley's technocratic utopia, which finds its dystopic version assembled in the South, represents the latest update of this enduring scenario.

However, while our time is one in which catastrophe has already taken place, another wave of technological “disrup-

tion” is set to shake our existence soon: self-driving vehicles, delivery drones, fully-automated plants and logistics warehouses, seller-less stores, Internet of Things, Generative Artificial Intelligence, machine-learning scripts—the apocalypse within the apocalypse—promise to undermine even further a modern ontology based on human labor and interaction. If platforms such as Amazon, DiDi, and Uber had already amalgamated a precarious global workforce, what happens when even these “bullshit jobs” are turned obsolete by technology—and, with them, humans who perform such tasks?

“I began to see that the app’s strategy is bulletproof against any movement that borders on unionism.

Because if you go on strike, first, they have your data. If you’re not smart and leave your cell phone at home, they have your data and will make decisions.

The guy who manages to get all the delivery couriers together and say, “Let’s go on strike.”

What will be the app’s decision? Will it meet the demands or approve a bunch of people on the waiting list?

Approve! There are a lot of unemployed people waiting!”

Pedro, courier in São Paulo

While at CAPAS, I will build on my empirical data to develop theoretical research on the apocalyptic present and future of platform and technology-mediated labor and what that means for a modern ontology based on labor and value extraction as its fundamental forms of sociability. ●

#FELLOW
APOCALYPSE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

EDUARDO ALTHEMAN C. SANTOS

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

Eduardo Altheman C. Santos: My first impression was that I could not believe such a place existed! An advanced center for interdisciplinary, critical inquiry that places our most pressing existential issues at the core of its concerns—this was definitely a welcome surprise, especially in a time when

the Humanities are increasingly underfunded and critical thinking is seen as a relic of bygone days. The fact that the German Department of Education and Research decided to foster (and gladly continues to do) such a Center is not minor. It shows us how deep down we are in this rabbit hole and how terribly we need to address issues such

as climate breakdown, social inequality, all forms of exploitation and oppression, war, and nuclear power in a less cynical fashion.

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

The apocalypse represents a rupture process during which we are compelled to radically question what went wrong. What choices—often made not by us but for us—led to the end times? What (non-)answers continue to be provided in the vain hope that we can just patch up a leaking damn and pretend nothing is happening? The most critical elements of our cataclysmic scenario have been experienced

in the daily lives of many people around the globe. Genocide, repression, subjugation, expulsion, violence, torture, famine, extinction – these extreme elements have manifested many times before, contingent upon where in the globe you live, your gender, race, class, and sexuality. It's long overdue that we stop seeing them as isolated, exceptional issues and acknowledge that this is our civilization's very foundation. Only then can the apocalypse acquire true meaning and signify not the end of the world per se, but the demise of a form of unlife that needs to perish.

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

If we are serious about the proposition of the apocalypse not as the indefinite negation of all forms of life, but of the existent and dominant ones, we can grasp the post-apocalyptic world as this realm where all ideas become possible, even those we cannot begin to fathom in our present state of affairs. In one of the most beautiful excerpts of *One-Dimensional Man*, Herbert Marcuse states that the radical rupture with this world “would plunge the individual into a traumatic void where [they] would have the chance to wonder and to think, to know [the]mself (or rather the negative of [the]mself) and [their] society,” thus impelling them to “learn [their] ABCs again.” So, in a post-apocalyptic world, I would need pencils, paper, and rubber to help devise a new collective alphabet—though I hope we will come up with another way to write that does not require cutting down what is left of our forests. [...]



Eduardo Altheman C. Santos is a post-doctoral fellow in Sociology at the University of São Paulo (USP), Brazil. His fellowship at CAPAS runs from June 2024 to February 2025.

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 #ART
APOCALYPSE

BRIDGING CULTURES AND COMMUNITIES

An Interview with Mexican Indigenous artist Federico Cuatlacuatl

Nahua futurisms is an emerging cultural and intellectual movement that explores future possibilities through the lens of Nahua philosophy, mythology, and cosmology. Rooted in the rich heritage of the Nahua people, particularly the Mexica (often known as Aztecs), this movement seeks to envision futures that are informed by Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. Central to Nahua thought is the concept of cyclical time and the recurring cataclysmic events known as “suns”, or eras, each ending in an apocalypse that leads to a rebirth. By drawing on these themes, Nahua futurisms challenge linear, Western-centric narratives of progress and catastrophe, offering instead a vision of renewal and transformation that honors ancestral knowledge, wisdom and resilience. This approach not only reclaims indigenous narratives but also provides a framework for addressing contemporary global crises through a perspective that values harmony, balance, and the interconnectedness of all life. In July 2024, CAPAS hosted two events with guest Federico Cuatlacuatl, where he spoke about “Cross-border Nahua Futurisms”. We interviewed the Mexican Indigenous artist about his contributions to the fields of art, culture and indigenous studies.

Nahua futurisms has been developing alongside increasing recognition of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives, particularly in the 21st century. For people who are not familiar with Nahua futurisms, could you give a brief definition, and explain what you see as its core principles?

Federico Cuatlacuatl: It’s important to mention that the Nahua cosmology is a large geographic and cultural portion of central Mexico. The way my work addresses Nahua futurisms is through non-monolithic real lived experiences of my community from Cholula. The community’s collective experience of being forced to self-displace since the early

90’s has led to displaced embodiments of transborder temporalities and spatialities. Nahua Futurity or intemporalities becomes a non-western set of mechanisms to endure these displacements and embody non-linear understandings of the past, present, and future. We left everything behind in the past to defy borders and subsist in the present. In the present we’re always dreaming of a better future, a future in which we return to our past to everything and everyone we left behind. Local traditions keep us strongly rooted to our community, to our land and the instinctual need to keep these traditions alive across borders, time, and space. Nahua futurity in my work are prefigurative imaginaries constructing



alternative futures in which we're resilient and thriving beyond subsisting.

The Nahua perspective challenges linear narratives, offering visions of renewal and transformation based on Indigenous knowledge and resilience, and addresses contemporary crises through a lens of interconnectedness and balance. Can you discuss the importance of cyclical time, cataclysm and apocalyptic themes in Nahua futurisms?

Looking at the past with full transparency is a fundamental need in order to appreciate better or other futures. Recognizing and holding accountability for colonial genocidal and oppressive patterns in the past allows us to think of healthy renewed temporalities. Nahua cosmology is rooted in a deep connection and appreciation for fertility, healthy agricultural seasons, and abundance of sharing. Every year, Nahua communities offer rituals, prayers, and other manifestations of seeking healthy and rainy agricultural seasons. This ancestral heritage reflects in today's communities understanding and embracing a beginning and end. Death, is embraced as part of life and not necessarily as an evil. We celebrate and embrace our loved ones who have left us, entering a new cycle of remembering and honouring, to never forget. Timekeepers also hold this conceptual understanding of cyclical time and cataclysm at the hands of natural phenomena. The timekeeper for the volcano understands that this greater force has both the potential for cataclysm but also the force to give rain, fertility, and life. These non-linear patterns and relational values inform the way that Nahua futurism constructs temporalities and spatialities.

Your work entails themes related to Indigenous identity, cultural heritage, social justice, and environmental issues.

In relation to the film IMAGINING END TIMES you mentioned that your work includes different concepts of temporality. Can you describe how you incorporate these concepts in some of your key projects on Nahua futurisms?

My artistic practice and research is constantly looking at the collision of temporalities, amplifying the importance of looking at historical events in order to better understand the present contemporary issues faced by Nahua real lived experiences. The ability to be able to imagine alternative futures is deeply shaped by a critical understanding of the past and present conditions. My works are constantly referencing historical events that have led my community to forced self-displacements. At the same time, my artistic productions seek to amplify and celebrate all that has survived and thrived for more than five hundred years. In imagining and constructing Nahua futurisms, ancestral knowledge and practices continue to be celebrated and nourished. The past is the future and the future is the past.

Through your art, you interpret Nahua culture and narratives in the contemporary. Can you explain why and how you use various forms of media, including digital art, animation, and film, but also materials, such as textiles and helmets, to address historical and contemporary experiences?

There's a broad notion that indigenous communities belong to the past as a result of colonial efforts intending to bury these identities into the forgotten cultural memory of modernity and 'progress'. Multimedia productions and the materiality in my works has allowed me to visualize these collisions of historical and contemporary experiences in order to build a different sense of our past. To define and celebrate our temporalities is an act

of agency. In a way, it feels like I'm trying to constantly capture the real-time experiences of the collective diasporic transborder embodiments and self-preservation efforts. Inevitably, we find ourselves always 'smuggling' our traditions, materials, ancestral knowledge, and cultural values in order to reclaim a sense of belonging... on stolen lands. I find myself constantly 'smuggling' materials for wearables and sculptural works. My reality is that I was smuggled as a child into the U.S, therefore 'smuggling' becomes an agency and a tool for resistance, self-preservation, and to continue to defy borders.



Federico Cuatlacuatl, an artist born in San Francisco Coapan, Cholula, Puebla, Mexico, and currently based in Virginia, is invested in an artistic practice at the intersection of Nahua immigration, social art practice, and cultural sustainability.

As an individual who has experienced the challenges of growing up as an undocumented immigrant and formerly holding DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), Federico's practice is an exploration of the complex interplay between Indigeneity and immigration within the context of our contemporary era. His creative practice is a testament to his commitment to shedding light on Nahua indigenous immigration, a topic that holds personal significance to him.

Federico's recent research and artistic production pivot around the convergence of transborder indigeneity, the experiences of migrant indigenous diasporas, and the possibilities of Nahua futurisms. His thought-provoking work has garnered recognition on both national and international stages, with independent productions screened at various esteemed film festivals and exhibitions featured in museums and galleries across the globe.

One of your projects was displayed in the exhibition "Imaginar el fin de los tiempos". Can you explain what it was and how it connected to the overall topic, and to the exhibition's themes annihilation, extinction and apocalypse?

I had two sculptural wearables and one short experimental video as part of "Imaginar el fin de los tiempos" exhibition. These works are part of the ongoing series of videos and wearables depicting futuristic *tiemperos* (timekeepers). *Tiemperos*, in Nahua cosmology, are elders who mitigate healthy climate and rain through rituals, offerings, and communication with mountains, volcanos, and local ecosystems. These futuristic *tiemperos* in my works remind us of past cultural genocidal histories that Nahua communities have survived. These works remind us of everything that has been lost in the past but also celebrating everything that has survived in order to imagine and construct other alternative futures. Futures in which Nahua transborderness has endured and thrived under cultural annihilation histories.

You are a researcher and artist. During your talk, you mentioned that the arts help to think across systems and create forms of world-making. How does your academic research intersect with your artistic work on Nahua futurisms?

Inevitably as an artist I find it urgent to continue to ask critical questions regarding my community's experiences. This often leads to various engagements with other academic fields in anthropology, history, archaeology, and cultural studies. It has been fundamental to understand why my community was forced into marginalization and precarious conditions. This has entailed extensive research both in various academic fields

but also investing in artistic research that grows with relational values, conversations and much listening within my community. Cholula is a central place geographically but also historically in the colonization of Mexico. Much of the history has been intentionally blurred, erased or violently fragmented. My work recognizes the urgency to heal these histories and the need to heavily research in order better understand how to envision alternative futures.

Follow up: What methodologies do you use to study and represent Nahua philosophy, mythology, and cosmology? Can you discuss any specific findings or insights from your research that have significantly influenced your creative projects?

Over the past few years I have been paying more attention to local efforts by other academics and creative practitioners in the region of Cholula. At the same time, I have been narrowing down my work to engage directly with elders, family, and friends from my hometown. Because not much of our history is archived or transparently written, I have developed a stronger investment in ancestral knowledge, traditions, and oral engagements to continue to shape my artistic productions. In 2017, I met Don Antonio Analco, a timekeeper from Santiago Xalitzintla, Puebla. He has a direct communication and relationship with the active volcano Popocatepetl, to mitigate for healthy agricultural cycles and rain. Meeting Don Antonio has deeply influenced and inspired my artistic productions to learn more about this millennial Nahua practice and how this informs new works. In January of 2024, I spent about a week up in the national park of Popocatepetl to work on a new video production focusing more on this specific landscape, cosmology, and nuances of futurity. [...]

In your talk, you addressed issues on migration and decolonization. How do you envision the future of Nahua futurisms within the broader context of Indigenous futurisms and decolonization movements?

My works are constant gestures of counter-homogeneity, amplifying the complex and unique experiences of my community in order to understand the broader issues of immigration and indigeneity. At the core of my work is the urgency to see our histories with more transparency and accountability in order to better understand the needs of current and future generations to thrive and nourish our roots. Futurism in my work emphasize the importance to be able to look at the past with a critical lens. The challenge is to be able to establish visibility, agency, and support for migrant indigenous communities both in Mexico and in the U.S. It's important to recognize how these communities envision alternative futures and this requires much learning and listening to the many ecosystems embodied collectively on both sides of the border.

Nahua futurism proposes that societal and environmental crises can lead to renewal and positive transformation. In detail, how do you address contemporary global crises, such as climate change and social justice, through the lens of Nahua futurisms?

Much of the inspiration and energy that feeds my work comes from the resiliency of the diaspora and the many efforts they have taken to sustain hope. It is within these active modes of resiliency that we find renewal and positive transformation for constructing our own futures and alternative non-western home away from home. Unjust forced self-displacements can have emotional, spiritual, and physical violent consequences. Nahua mi-

grants have been building a new sense of home and belonging for almost 30 years. This resiliency and deeply rooted ancestral traditions have allowed the diaspora to build a new vision of their future, a future in which we can sustain our agricultural cycles and nourish cultural sustainable ecosystems across borders. Transborder Nahua futurism reclaims space, time, and land to build new visions of futurity. In the U.S, the diaspora continues to endure the hardships of undocumentedness while celebrating and nourishing our cultural roots. In Mexico, the community continues to fight against land appropriations, for clean water, and to maintain ancestral traditions. Crises and positive transformation coexist simultaneously in real time across the border, across time and space.

The creative practice of Mexican artist Federico Cuatlacuatl is a testament to his commitment to shedding light on Nahua indigenous immigration.

Follow up: Can you share any examples of how Nahua concepts of balance and interconnectedness inform your approach to these crises?

The concept of timekeepers is something that deeply informs ways in which we build relational value with one another and with our surrounding landscapes. A timekeeper is someone who understands the importance of giving thanks to rain and agricultural cycles through communality and collective offerings. This to me stands out as a part of the Nahua cosmology and values that have survived and continue to be nourished as part of our way of understanding each other's relational value and connection to the land. In my hometown, the most appreciated cultural curren-



cy is time, based on relational values. Lending a hand to family and friends is building currency through communality. If you lend your time to help family and friends, you're building reciprocity for future events in which you will need people to lend you their time. In moments of difficulty and crises, the community helps one another but also comes together unified under any emergency or external threats. The interconnectedness of time, traditions, and connection to the land has allowed for Nahua ancestral knowledge and practices to endure more than five hundred years of marginalization. The diaspora follows these same patterns of communality as currency, apparent in the unified efforts to keep carnivals, gatherings, and traditions alive in the U.S under so much xenophobia, racism, and othering.

The Nahua interpretation of time underscores resilience, adaptability, and the potential for continual rebirth, aligning with Indigenous philosophies that value harmony and balance with nature and the cosmos. What role do you believe Indigenous knowledge and perspectives can play in creating these futures?

For my community it can be as simple as understanding that we depend on the land for healthy agricultural cycles and as complex as understanding that we embody more than five hundred years of knowledge on working with the land. These millennial embodiments can help us understand the urgency to build more sustainable futures and to protect cultural ecosystems who have nourished this knowledge. A deep respect and honouring of our elders and those who have passed away are protected values that guide us and help us understand how to move forward into better futures. The sacrifice, resilience, and adaptabil-

ity of those who defied the U.S border inherently becomes a collective gesture of resistance against the state that has caused these forced self-displacements and the state who continues to impose imperialistic practices under a global humanitarian crises of immigration. Amplifying the visibility and narrative of this community becomes the driving force in constructing these imaginaries of migrant Nahua futurisms.

On a rather personal note: What has been your journey in connecting Nahua perspectives and communities while engaging in discussions on decolonization and global challenges?

This has been an ongoing journey of defiance, resistance, and conviction in addressing these contemporary issues without romanticizing any matters but rather by asking critical challenging questions. The state I'm from, Puebla, is one of the most conservative, racist and classist states in Mexico. This has made it particularly challenging but at the same time more urgent to amplify these issues that indigenous communities continue to endure. This is why I decided to launch an artist residency in my hometown in 2016 in my parents home. A home they've built for nearly 30 years but haven't been able to inhabit it. The spirit of this project always intended to introduce national and international artists to the community, to witness and experience this universe that shapes who I am. This has also been an effort to offer the community workshops, communal projects, and creative means of amplifying our culture and traditions. My work has never been about my individual narrative as a means to advance decolonial efforts but rather relying on communality and highlighting the collective transborder experiences as agency for change. ●

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APOCALYPSE

OVERLOOKED APOCALYPSES WE HOPE FOR THE BEST

In fiction, the apocalypse has been enjoying greater popularity for some time now: Hollywood blockbusters with meteorites hurtling towards the earth and zombie hordes in the streets of American cities, as well as comics with epic end-time battles and global catastrophe scenarios. But there is more to apocalyptic representations in comics. A joint seminar at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design Halle in the summer of 2024 by comic artist Markus Färber and CAPAS affiliated researcher Philipp Schrögel explored the nuanced, overlooked and maybe marginalized perspectives on apocalypses through and in comics. Which and whose perspectives are barely present? Which aspects of the end of the world are hardly in focus? How can apocalypse be thought of differently?

The diverse dimensions and perspectives of apocalypses put into a comic.

Over the course of the semester, the seminar combined an artistic as well as a scientific perspective on apocalypses and

comics. Examples of apocalyptic graphic novels were analyzed as well as the medium of non-fiction and science comics in terms of their potential for communicating complex content. The goal was to develop comic narratives based on discussions with experts—including former CAPAS fellows Stephen Shapiro, Florian Mussgnug and Teresa Heffernan—and artists delivering guest lectures.

The result is a rich comic book, hand-printed by the students as part of the seminar, that brings together a range of different artistic perspectives on the diverse dimensions and perspectives of apocalypses in combination with different disciplinary scientific facets. The book is nominated for the Burg Giebichenstein design price, the final decision will be announced in November 2024.

Looking into the diverse styles and topics covered in the book, one example is the role of volcanoes on the one hand as destroyers of worlds and existences—such as the eruption of the Indonesian volcano Tambora in April 1815, which turned the following year into a “year without summer”, with storms, crop failures and famine worldwide. On the other hand, as the crea-



The comic “Wir hoffen das Beste. Übersehene Katastrophen“, hand-printed by art and design students, is nominated for the Burg Giebichenstein design price.



tor of new worlds, whether literally through the creation of new islands as living worlds or through the fertile volcanic ash as the basis for new life. Or other perspectives on mass extinctions, which have occurred more frequently in the history of the earth.

With a view to a post-apocalyptic “after” of whatever kind, the question arises as to how artefacts and intangible cultural heritage will be interpreted by a post-apocalyptic civilization? What has been preserved and by whom? How is it presented, which perspectives are ignored? These are questions that, due to the long overdue current

discourses on colonial appropriation and Western museum practice, no longer lie in a fictional future, but are directly relevant.

Apocalyptic metaphors are often used in social discourse. In relation to the climate crisis, for example, there is intense debate as to whether this is beneficial, as it conveys urgency and creates attention, or whether it is a hindrance, as it can convey overwhelmingness and powerlessness. But apocalyptic framing can also have drastic consequences when it comes to external attribution. During the AIDS crisis in the 1980s, terms such as “AIDS apocalypse” and the “gay plague” (presumably sent as a “judgment”) contributed to the exclusion and stigmatization of those affected. At the same time, there were also symbols of hope and solidarity during this difficult time, in which many lost their personal lives—such as the Blood Sisters blood donation centers organized by the lesbian community.



Philipp Schrögel is an associated researcher at CAPAS and a researcher in public participation with science at Technical University of Chemnitz. He also

works as a freelancer in practical science communication. His research interests include science communication especially as dialog and participation and creative forms of science communication such as, art and science, science comics, science games or science street art.

The prints of these and all other stories in the volume will be presented at Silbersalz Science & Media Festival from 20.10. – 03.11.2024 in Halle/Saale and an interactive reading of selected comics together with a scientific commentary will be presented on November 1st. ●

#SCIENCE
APOCALYPSE

HOT OF THE PRESS: *APOCALYPTICA* VOL. 2 POSTHUMAN SURVIVAL

For the latest issue of peer review and open-access journal *Apocalyptica* we turn to the notion of posthuman survival. Undoubtedly, the concept of the posthuman encapsulates a diverse and vast range of theoretical approaches, the scope of which by far exceeds the discussion we are suggesting here. However, at its core, posthuman thought questions the centrality of the human, which gains particular significance in the context of evolving anthropogenic crises.

The issue opens with lead editor Jenny Stümer's exploration of how nuanced vulnerabilities and injustices complicate our conception of humanity, underscoring the significance of the tensions, conflicts, and ambiguities examined in the subsequent articles. This is followed by a re-imagined and elaborated version of Robert Folger's "(Un)veiling Extinction: Notes on an Apocalyptic History of Mexico," his bold Annual Tagore Lecture held at UCL, London, United Kingdom back in April.

The collection features a series of compelling articles on posthuman survival,

ranging from elemental zombie apocalypses to borderscapes and nuclear memory through transmedia storytelling. These innovative pieces, including an original article contribution from former CAPAS-Fellow Teresa Heffernan, are complemented by a philosophically rich yet pertinent commentary on Derrida and Nietzsche's perspectives on the notion of a 'coming' apocalypse. Two insightful book reviews round out this section, with Florian Mussgnug (Affiliated Researcher and former fellow at CAPAS) examining Kowalewski's edited collection *The Environmental Apocalypse* (2022) and Anchal Saraf discussing current CAPAS-Fellow Anais Maurer's captivating new work *The Ocean on Fire* (2024).

The issue concludes with a dossier entitled "Imagining the End of Times," reflecting on CAPAS's recent exchange with cultural and scientific institutions in Mexico. Curated by former CAPAS-Fellow Adolfo Felipe Mantilla, who conceived the exhibition "Imagining the End of Times: Stories of Annihilation, Apocalypse, and Extinction," the dossier features illuminating contributions from Patricia Murrieta-Flores, Alejandra Bottinelli Wolleter, Emily Ray, and Robert Kirsch, all former CAPAS-Fellows.

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Apocalyptica is an interdisciplinary, international, open access, double-blind peer-reviewed journal published by CAPAS. The journal explores the many sides of apocalyptic thinking in order to investigate an archive of the apocalyptic imaginary and to assess experiences of apocalypse and post-apocalypse as they unsettle the past, present, and future. Looking for thought-provoking voices and diverse perspectives invested in the end of worlds, we highlight scholarship from a broad range of fields that champions the potential of critical thinking and cultural analysis in the humanities, social-, and cultural-science as an imaginative and (potentially) transformative force. The aim is to actively explore the apocalypse as a figure of thought in order to grapple with the cultural politics of disaster, catastrophe, and the (up)ending of worlds.



02/23

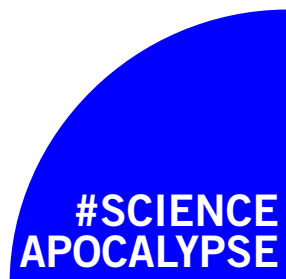
Edited by
Robert Folger
Jenny Stümer
Felicitas Loest

APOCALYPTICA

Journal for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies



HEIDELBERG
UNIVERSITY PUBLISHING



WORKING GROUP REPORTS 2024

FROM SAND TO THE SUPERNATURAL

This semester's working groups saw fellows and team alike tackle topics that were both novel in their approach and theme and yet continued to create a symbiosis between the previous research undertaken at CAPAS. With *Dune's* renewed cinema success, again shedding light on the most successful sci-fi series of all time, Frank Herbert's narratives of geoengineering, colonialism, and resource extraction are almost prophetically (something the author himself was infinitely wary of) predicated by our moment of modernity: "Was it not presumptuous, he [Paul] wondered, to think he could make over an entire planet" (*Dune Messiah* 2023, 31).

"ARID" APOCALYPSE



While topics of the topoi of deserts and "arid" spaces, once again, become popular, the "Arid" Apocalypse group approached apocalypse, the Anthropocene, and general anxieties concerning the end of worlds through various literary and academic works. The importance of the group's research wasn't only underpinned by its relevance as a topic as yet 'unexplored' at CAPAS but by the ongoing lived experience of desertification of the countries from which the writers originate. Their initial aim, as a group, was to examine desert landscapes on the brink of depopulation and/or collapse from a diverse set of perspectives. This meant bringing in to

question the very concept of landscape as both a colonial and fantastical geography that tends to the utopian. Looking beyond these texts to Thomas Cole's apocalyptic paintings *The Course of Empire* (1833-36), the group set the tone for the apocalyptic temporalities, spaces, geographies, and viewership of deserts seen histori-

cally as areas of climate envy and voids, a *terra nullius* of empty expanses that isn't at one with the flourishing life that litters the landscape. Unsurprisingly, this approach led the group to a posthuman postulation of deserts, and environment more generally speaking, as active agents.

With an incredibly broad list of inspiration, from Natalie Koch's brilliant and bold *2023 Arid Empire: The Entangled Histories of Arizona and Arabia* to the translation of the uncensored version of Jalal Al-e-Ahmad's *Occidentosis: a Plague from the West* (1978), the group managed to magnify the importance of

HAUNTING & (POST-)APOCALYPSE

the desert space from an area of gender disruption, religious dichotomies, and geopolitical struggles, linking the past to the present with the current, ongoing, and ever-accelerating genocide of the Palestinian people. “Arid” Apocalypse, as such, suggest, rightly, that those living in arid areas of the earth equally have not only the right but the restitution to reclaim the apocalyptic narratives that these environments unfold.

●●● [read more on PubPub](#)
capas.pubpub.org



Hot off the heels of lead editor Jenny Stümer’s special issue on Nuclear Ghosts of journal *Apocalyptica* (see pp. 16/17), the working group Haunting & (Post-) Apocalypse attempted to intensely explore the figure of the ghost, as well as the habitual haunting at the heart of said construct. While avoiding the temptation of taxonomy, grasping at the ghostly tends to give the grasper little to hold on to, the group approached ghosting and monstrosity as broad topics that nevertheless always tell the haunted something, even

if it is that they are being haunted. Beyond the now standard texts by Jacques Derrida and Avery Gordon, the group gathered these ideas of ghosts as social figures who demand a reaction or revelation, and asked who is the monster that troubles the binary division between the apocalypse and a supposedly distinct post-apocalypse.

Looking at a large array of academic, literary, artistic renderings of ghosts and ghostly figures from Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner’s viciously visceral poetry which shifts the monstrous blame away from stillborn children to the contamination by military men of countless islands with nuclear toxicity, the necessary link between psychedelics, haunting, and apocalypse through decolonial and anticapitalist perspectives, and Gothic literature scholar Fred Botting’s perhaps oxymoronic *Monstrocene*. Behind all of which, the backdrop of a sense that academics and the general public alike are genuinely haunted by the ecological devastation of climate change offers up new and novel ways of being in the world via an ecoGothic that focuses on ecological injustices as opposed to sublime romanticism and capture. There is a power to ghosts, they are not easily exorcised, and neither should they be. Looking beyond the monsters of the Anthropocene that reveal sameness and closed futurities, sitting with our ghosts gives us the opportunity to sit with the uncomfortable recognition that the horror of the Anthropocene is only horrific or uncanny for those of us in the West. How ghosts demand justice and how the ghost as both social and supernatural construct contend for important missives, is at the heart of haunting. While, elsewhere, at the forefront of climate change, ecological devastation is often an everyday experience.

●●● [read more on PubPub](#)
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#PUBLIC
APOCALYPSE

FROM ATOMIC TESTS TO RISING SEAS

THE OCEAN ON FIRE:
PACIFIC STORIES FROM
NUCLEAR SURVIVORS
AND CLIMATE ACTIVISTS

When nuclear-armed powers developed their nuclear arsenal, they detonated the equivalent of on Hiroshima bomb a day, every day, for half a century, on the Pacific islands they used as their nuclear playground. Well before climate change became a global concern, nuclear testing brought about untimely death, widespread diseases, forced migration, and irreparable destruction to the shores of Oceania. Anaïs Maurer's latest publication, *The Ocean on Fire*, analyzes the Pacific stories by Indigenous survivors that incriminate the environmental racism behind radioactive skies and rising seas.

In *The Ocean on Fire: Pacific Stories from Nuclear Survivors and Climate Activists*, CAPAS-Fellow Anaïs Maurer identifies strategies of resistance uniting the region by analyzing an extensive multilingual archive of decolonial Pacific art in French, Spanish, English, Tahitian, and Uvean, ranging from literature to songs and paintings. Pacific storytellers reveal an alternative vision of the apocalypse: instead of promoting individualism and survivalism, they advocate mutual assistance, cultural resilience, South-South solidarities, and Indigenous women's leadership. Drawing upon their experience resisting both nuclear colonialism and carbon imperialism, Pacific storytellers offer

compelling narratives to nurture the land and each other in times of global environmental collapse. These multilingual stories should be shared the world over, particularly in other frontlines against militarism and petrocapi-talism.

The first two chapters of *The Ocean on Fire* explore the ideologies mobilized in the ongoing assault on Pacific peoples. For centuries, Westerners have seen Pacific islands as isolated islets outside of modern history. Imagining the tropical Island as marooned at the earliest stage of a supposedly unilinear path to "progress," Western narratives have denied Oceani-



Raised in Mā'ohi Nui, **Anaïs Maurer** is Assistant Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Rutgers University, and Affiliate Member at Columbia University's Center for Nuclear Studies. Her research foregrounds how Pacific artists and activists have resisted environmental racism in Oceania, from the genocidal epidemics of earlier centuries to our contemporary period of nuclear colonialism and carbon imperialism. From January to December 2024, she conducts research as a fellow at CAPAS.

ans both the right to history and the right to a future. Indigenous people were contaminated with viruses and irradiated by nuclear bombs because they were considered outside of the realm of humanity, and doomed to disappear. Today, the very same imperial obliviousness structures Western nations' responses to the climate crisis, which ranges from compassionate apathy to downright indifference. Countering this ideology, Pacific philosophies challenge the Western-lead glorification

of Cartesianism, or the belief that (some hu)man(s) can become master and possessor of nature. Pacific stories suggest rather that, in Oceania, modes of being in the world stem from the consciousness of sharing a genealogical relationship with the ocean, which can only be protected collectively.

The remainder of the book explores looming or ongoing climate threats that have already been inflicted upon Pacific peoples under nuclear colonialism: the threat of estrangement from other-than-humans, the threat of increased death and diseases, the threat of exile and forced migration. Nuclear colonialism shattered the relationships between humans and archipelagic creatures as fish and birds became irradiated; Oceanians communities were ravaged by nuclear-induced diseases affecting the living and their descendance for generations; and Pacific people were forced into exile as their islands were seized by colonial powers to be turned into nuclear testing sites. Drawing from traditional forms of genealogical recitation, Indigenous humor, and Indigenous mourning rituals, antinuclear writers and artists pay homage to their irradiated lands, their loved ones, and the broken multispecies relationships that sustain them, all the while suggesting the decolonial potential and regenerative power of traditional storytelling in the face of the apocalypse.

Unlike antinuclear activists and climate militants in the global North who barely talk to each other, Pacific environmental activists today draw from their experience of the nuclear apocalypse to cultivate resilience and regeneration in times of climate collapse. Oceania was the first continent destroyed by thermonuclear fire on a previously unimaginable scale. It is also the first continent to imagine the new world emerging from the ashes of the old one. ●

#PUBLIC
APOCALYPSE

EXPLORING NUCLEAR LEGACIES

EXPERTS REFLECT ON PACIFIC NARRATIVES AT BOOK LAUNCH

by Aanchal Saraf

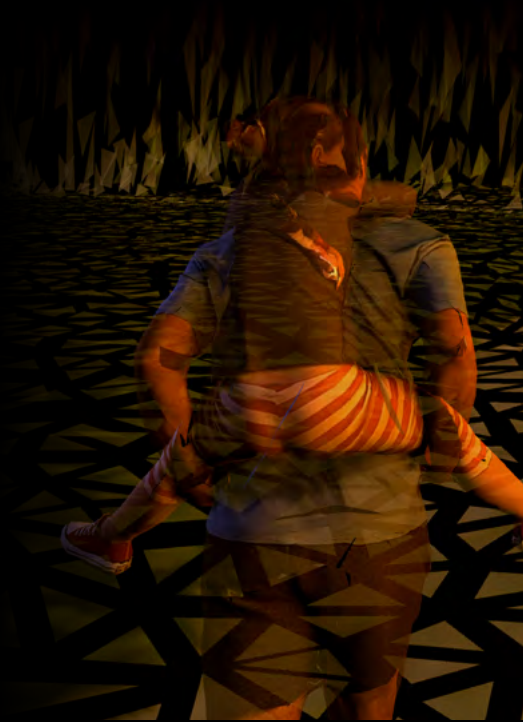
On June 24th, 2024, the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies hosted an event celebrating the recent publication of a monograph by CAPAS-Fellow Dr. Anaïs Maurer, *The Ocean on Fire: Pacific Stories from Nuclear Survivors and Climate Activists*. The event featured a film screening followed by panelists Dr. Jessica Hurley, Dr. Teresa Shewry, and Dr. Rebecca H. Hogue responding to Maurer's book, with Dr. Aanchal Saraf moderating the proceedings.

Anaïs Maurer (Rutgers University/CAPAS), Aanchal Saraf (Dartmouth College) and Rebecca Hogue (Harvard University) during the discussion at the book launch.

Attendees met at the Karlstorkino to view the film *On the Morning You Wake (To the End of the World)*, a virtual reality documentary that recreates the

experiences of people in Hawai'i in 2018 following the issue of a false alert indicating that a ballistic missile was inbound. The film is 38 minutes long, the same amount of time that Hawai'i residents were suspended in a state of uncertainty before the alert was confirmed to be erroneous. The film nodded to some of the topics of Maurer's book, but as the panelists later discussed, tended towards reproducing the problems contained in many apocalypse stories. It was speculative, mobilizing past histories of nuclear weapons testing towards a fear of what *might* happen, a "looming threat." But as Maurer's book poignantly argues, there are entire communities in the Pacific who have experienced the nuclear apocalypse, and their stories are anything but speculative.

The panel began with remarks from Hurley and Shewry, who were joining over Zoom. Hurley described Maur-





© On the Morning You Wake



Aanchal Saraf is an Assistant Professor of Comparative American Studies at Oberlin College and Conservatory. She researches and teaches about entangled geographies and cultures of war, empire, and

knowledge. Her current project *Atomic Afterlives, Pacific Archives* theorizes the ‘colonial fallout’ of U.S. nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands as an ongoing logic that shapes dominant spatiotemporal, geopolitical, and disciplinary imaginaries of the Pacific. Her project engages official archives, Asian American and Pacific Islander cultural production and performance, and ethnography with nuclear-displaced ri-Majeļ on the Big Island of Hawai’i. Aanchal’s creative and scholarly works have appeared in *Literary Hub*, *Fruit Magazine*, *The Journal of Transnational American Studies*, and *Women & Performance*, among other publications.

er’s monograph as demonstrating the ways Pacific peoples are “apocalypse experts, both practically and aesthetically.” She praised the wide-reaching value of Maurer’s theoretical contributions, which introduced new genres for understanding the end(s) of the world(s). Shewry reflected on the importance of discussing nuclear and climate issues together, as well as the rich archive Maurer constructed through both translation and curation. Hogue echoed a shared gratitude for the impressive contributions Maurer’s scholarship has made to the study of contemporary Pacific literatures and noted the important shift in our assumptions surrounding the origins of anti-nuclear organizing in the Pacific. Maurer begins her book not with the 1960s in Fiji or the 1970s rise of the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement, but with an anti-nuclear song from Uvea written directly after World War II. The room was full of curiosity and questions, many asking Maurer to speak more to the work of translation or to enumerate the genres of apocalypse that Pacific Islanders have lived (and died) through.

The event in whole was the celebration of a great accomplishment, and the praise Maurer received was well deserved. Maurer’s collection of (post)apocalyptic stories genuinely transforms us, and it prepares us for the multiple apocalypses that humanity has endured and will endure still. Her translations and close readings honor the deep epistemological work present in Pacific storytelling, and they refuse a speculative approach to apocalypse. Instead, having read *The Ocean on Fire*, we can approach the end of the world with renewed clarity, guided by those whose worlds have ended many times over. ●



APOCALYPSE THROUGH FEMINIST LENS

GENDER AND THE END TIMES

On 21 June 2024, CAPAS hosted a one-day workshop exploring apocalyptic thought through a gender lens. Participants included Master's students from Gender Studies of the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg and their professors, Anna Sator and Marion Mangelsdorf. Together with CAPAS Fellows Kate Cooper and Tristan Sturm, they explored how apocalyptic narratives intersect with gender and power. The group was also introduced to public engagement and science communication. Led by Eva Bergdolt and Melanie Le Touze from the CAPAS Outreach Team participants applied knowledge from their earlier discussions to analysing *The Wall*, a film adaptation of Marlen Haushofer's eponymous novel.

To open the session, Kate Cooper provided an introduction to the history of early Christian women and explored how apocalyptic thinking has influenced gender relations. By analyzing biblical passages, particularly from the Book of Revelation, Cooper illustrated how certain narratives, such as the portrayal of the “Whore of Babylon” and Jezebel—depicted as a greedy and immoral Phoenician queen—were used to construct misogynistic archetypes of women. However, Cooper also highlighted the disobedient and courageous aspects of these biblical women whose actions catalysed social or political change. She pointed out that these characters, such as Jezebel, were constantly challenging societal norms, prompting participants to reconsider conventional interpretations of gender roles in Christianity. Hildegard von

Bingen's apocalyptic visions further enriched the discussion, leading to reflections on the ethical dimensions of how Christian stories are told.

Building on Coopers panel, Tristan Sturm introduced millennialism and apocalypticism as belief systems that claim that supernatural powers will destroy the world, except for a select few who will survive on a new, transformed, and perfect earth. While analyzing the works of American scholar and author Lee Quinby, the students critiqued apocalyptic thinking as a masculinist practice that perpetuates gender, sexual, and racial hierarchies. They argued that such thinking exploits apocalyptic fear to justify these inequalities, deferring the pursuit of equality and justice to an indefinite future. This critique laid the groundwork for

The discussions in this workshop highlighted how apocalyptic thinking can be reimagined through a gendered lens, revealing deep connections between feminist theory and ecological studies.





The Whore of Babylon. Detail from a woodcut by Albrecht Dürer

Certain Christian narratives, such as the portrayal of the “Whore of Babylon”, were used to construct misogynistic archetypes of women.

a more profound exploration of how these themes are represented in contemporary literature and movies. How are patriarchal narratives embedded in apocalyptic films, even those that ostensibly seek to challenge them? This inquiry allowed participants to reflect on the ideological underpinnings they had been taught. The conversation concluded with Quinby’s critique of “technopression”—the idea that technological perfection is a masculinist ideal—and Ursula Le Guin’s *Rant about Technology*, which resonated with many of the participants.

This led into the second part of the workshop, which applied earlier discussions to Marlen Haushofer’s novel *The Wall* and its film adaptation. This part of the session focused on ecocriticism, post-human worlds, and eco-apocalyp-

tic scenarios in the absence of digital technology. The story, which is centered on a woman’s survival in isolation after an apocalyptic event, became a springboard for discussions on human responsibility in developing post-anthropocentric and eco-ethical behaviors. The novel’s portrayal of symbiosis between humans and nature—particularly through its depiction of animal-human relations—echoed themes in Donna Haraway’s essays, such as *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature and The Companion Species Manifesto*. These texts helped guide the group’s thinking on post-humanism and the breakdown of boundaries between humans and non-human entities.

CAPAS EVENTS

SATURDAY

28
09

🕒 10.30 PM 📍 TOLLHAUS Karlsruhe

Participatory Dance Workshop

HOW SOON IN NOW? PERFORMING CITIES

Do you like to dance? Then join the kick-off for the participatory dance workshop “How soon is now? performing cities”, a production of the DAGADA dance company. Together professional and lay dancers will create movements over four intensive weekends and show the piece at the TOLLHAUS as part of the TANZ Karlsruhe dance festival!



© Yasemin aus dem Kahmen, minz&kunst photography

The production deals with individuals in the face of global problems. How do we feel? What can we do? The participants will discuss, rehearse, write and receive input from experts from the Käte Hamburger Center for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS), University of Heidelberg.

More Info: <https://www.tollhaus.de/de/376/>

TUESDAY

22
10

🕒 6.00 PM 📍 Neue Universität Lecture Hall 5
Heidelberg University

Distinguished Lecture

JAYNE SVENUNGSSON: POLITICAL THEOLOGIES AT THE END OF THE WORLD

The idea that the world is coming to an end has never been far away in cultures rooted in the biblical tradition. In a *longue durée* perspective, the sense that the end is drawing near seems to have been the rule rather than the exception. Yet it is difficult to deny that the past decades have been particularly ripe of events that seem to



herald the end. This heightened sense of urgency is reflected in the notion of 'polycrisis'. If it is true that our times are facing challenges of apocalyptic proportions, what should be the proper philosophical response the situation? This lecture will address this question in dialogue with some leading political theologians and philosophers of our time.

THU-FRI

24-25
10

🕒 All-day 📍 Centre for Interdisciplinary Computing
Heidelberg University

Workshop

TOWARD APOCALYPTIC EXPERIENCE: IMAGES AND NARRATIVES OF THE END

Imagining and talking about apocalypses instil fear and aid in managing fear. In Western intellectual and cultural history, there is a semantic and experiential charge given to the notion of the apocalypse, whereby catastrophic and incomprehensible events appear as real and graspable. Simultaneously, apocalyptic thinking channels the arising emotions through narratives and images that anchor the end of the world as an orienting focal point. Thus, the apocalyptic imaginary can refer to real existential risks and scenarios as well as cataclysmic change, motivate counteractions, but also contribute to resignation or 'disappointment'.

The workshop will shed light on how the apocalyptic imaginary in historical perspective and cultural diversification provides the building blocks and a grammar for apocalyptic experiences. It is organized by CAPAS and Lund University, Sweden.

SATURDAY

02
11

🕒 3.00 PM 📍 Gloria Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Cinema

WE'RE ALL GOING TO DIE

2024 | by Ben Knight

Expert talk and discussion: Wolfgang M. Schmitt (film reviewer, YouTube: Die Filmanalyse), Ben Knight (film director), Ralf Stadler (co-author), Melanie Le Touze (CAPAS team).

In cooperation with Drop-Out Cinema eG
Mannheim.



© YKnight Errant Films

7-17
11

🕒 tba 📍 tba

Apocalyptic Cinema at IFFMH

CAPAS PRESENTS: APOCALYPTIC IMAGINARIES

The joint film screening of CAPAS and the 73rd International Film Festival Mannheim Heidelberg (IFFMH) will follow in November. Whether Berlinale, Venice, Locarno or Cannes—the festival at which the film has already screened successfully and the topics it is dedicated to will be announced at the end of October—as will the exact date of the screening. One thing is certain: The film and its apocalyptic meaning will be discussed after the screening.

TUESDAY

05
11

🕒 7.00 PM 📍 Karlstorkino Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Cinema

BACURAU

2019 | by Kleber Mendonça Filho & Juliano Dornelles

Expert talk and discussion: Bruna Della Torre (CAPAS)



© 2019 Photo Cinemascópio

WED-SAT

13-16
11

🕒 All-day 📍 India International Centre | New Delhi

Interdisciplinary Symposium

PRECARIOUS WATER FUTURES AND THE END(S) OF WORLD(S)

This international symposium aims to explore how the expertise from a wide range of academic disciplines can fruitfully interact to study the complex and intertwined interrelationships of water emergencies in times of climate crisis and the related looming end(s) of world(s). The symposium is organized by the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS), Heidelberg University, in collaboration with the M.S. Merian—R. Tagore International Centre of Advanced Studies 'Metamorphoses of the



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Political' (ICAS:MP), New Delhi, the School of Environmental Sciences (SES), Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, the Rachel Carson Centre (RCC), Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, and the South Asia Institute (SAI), Heidelberg University.

THURSDAY

28
11

🕒 All-day 📍 CAPAS Conference Room
Heidelberg University

Workshop

ECOTOPIA: MAPPING AND MOBILISING POST-APOCALYPTIC ECOLOGICAL IMAGINARIES

The climate crisis has often been perceived in apocalyptic terms, both as a *revelation* or *unveiling* and as an *eschaton*, as part of a wider set of intractable eco-social crises threatening widescale destruction. Paradoxically, the closer we appear to get to irreversible demise the more paralysing the planetary scale crisis operating across multiple temporalities seems to be.

The workshop will explore creative social responses to crises, via investigation of the imagination of better environmental, social and political worlds.

SAT & SUN

30.11. &
01.12.

🕒 30.11.: 8.00 PM | 01.12.: 6.00 PM

📍 TOLLHAUS Karlsruhe

Dance Performance

HOW SOON IN NOW? PERFORMING CITIES

As part of the TANZ Karlsruhe dance festival, the production “How soon is now? per-forming cities” by the DAGADA Dance Company will be on show. Professional and lay dancers rehearsed the piece together over four intensive weekends. The production deals with the individual in the face of global problems. How do we feel? What can we do? During the rehearsals, the participants talked to experts from the Käte Hamburger Center for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS), University of Heidelberg, and received input from them.

More Info: <https://www.tollhaus.de/de/376/>



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THURSDAY

03
12

🕒 7.00 PM 📍 Karlstorkino Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Cinema

POLARIS

2022 | by Kirsten Carthew

Expert talk and discussion:
Maya Dietrich (film expert,
Karlstorkino)



© Filmoption International 2021

SATURDAY

14
12.

🕒 10.00 AM 📍 UnterwegsTheater Heidelberg

Dance Performance Kickoff
Heidelberg

HOW SOON IN NOW? PERFORMING CITIES

Do you enjoy dancing and feel concerned by the global problems we are facing? Then join the Dagada Dance Company project and contribute to the contemporary dance performance "How Soon Is Now?". During the rehearsals, participants will exchange with researchers from the Käthe Hamburger Kolleg for apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies on crises we are facing.



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#FELLOW
APOCALYPSE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT ADAM STOCK

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

Adam Stock: I've found the apocalyptic a generative concept in several ways. Firstly, as a literary scholar, the apocalyptic is important to my work as a generic narrative form. Like all genres, the apocalyptic has its own history and story of development, and as a cultural historian it has been interesting for me to find out more about the

connections of the apocalyptic to material history too—especially the history of colonialism, which has often been experienced as an apocalyptic upheaval by Indigenous communities. As I'm working on a project about deserts, I am also concerned with the spatiality of apocalypse in the sense of the types of landscape which are often culturally figured as apocalyptic and/

or postapocalyptic. In thinking about arid lands, the apocalyptic has an important and underappreciated role in the environmental humanities. Finally, since I've been at CAPAS I have been working on what it means to adopt an apocalyptic perspective: to term something apocalyptic is to make both an aesthetic and political judgement, since it is a way of seeing or reading the chaotic, contingent events of history within the confines of a narrative form.

What is your fellowship trying to achieve?

I've been working on a book project, tentatively entitled *Deserts in Speculative Fictions: Arid Lands in the Environmental Humanities*. I use methods including lit-

erary close reading techniques; political, media, and discourse analysis; and historical and archival study to interrogate political and environmental issues in cultural representations of deserts. My focus is on modern and contemporary desert settings in apocalyptic, utopian, dystopian, and science fictions. One question I'm exploring is why deserts are so often associated with the apocalyptic. This has had material and practical implications as well as cultural and intellectual consequences: deserts have long been treated as wildernesses and wastelands. They are often (wrongly) assumed to be empty, but they are healthy, vibrant and diverse ecologies. This has led to some irreparable harm, including vast mining operations and the detonation of nuclear devices. Such practices feed into the association of deserts with apocalyptic wastelands, in a circular logic. Given these stakes, it's no surprise deserts have also been sites associated with the violence of both colonial aggression and decolonial/ anticolonial resistance. In sum, I want my work to help overturn some common assumptions about deserts, desert life, and desertification.

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

Being at CAPAS has been a transformative experience for me. In career terms, it has provided me with unmatched research opportunities and support. When I look back on the fellowship in years to come, I will also remember Heidelberg as a place where I could enjoy a balanced work and home life, and a time when I felt my work as a researcher had real value. [...]



Adam Stock is senior lecturer in English Literature at York St John University. 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. His fellowship at CAPAS runs from March to December 2024.

●●● [read more online](#)

capas.uni-heidelberg.de

#ART
APOCALYPSE



EXPLORING SURVIVAL IN THE 21ST CENTURY ART MEETS APOCALYPSE

an Interview with Curator Georg Diez

“Coconut Leaf Fondue – First Light” (2016) by Julian Charrière

This artwork centers the harsh realities of nuclear power, particularly the suffering of Bikini Atoll’s inhabitants due to nuclear testing. Bikini Atoll was the site of 23 nuclear explosions between 1946 and 1985. It critiques the cost of industrial modernity and its impact on geography and human life.

The “Survival in the 21st Century” exhibition at Deichtorhallen Hamburg features works by around 40 international artists exploring themes of survival, technology, cultural preservation, and future sustainability. It will be on display from 18 May to 5 November 2024 and includes nearly 100 workshops, lectures, and activities under the “School of Survival” program, aimed at developing strategies for future challenges. The idea is to encourage visitors to rethink assumptions and engage with current issues through art. We spoke to Georg Diez, journalist and author, who curated the exhibition together with Nicolaus Schafhausen as well as the research curators Lena Baumgartner and Frances Fürst.

The exhibition and its artworks explore the foundations of life in the age of the polycrisis. What role did the concept of the apocalypse play in the creation of the exhibition?

Georg Diez: We started working on this exhibition around 2019. This was a different time. We were talking about climate change and the sense of an ending, the understanding that life on earth is in danger. But we wanted to see the potential in this moment. How can we change the way we behave, interact, and connect; more concretely: How can we use other forms of knowledge, like indigenous world views, practices and philosophies to reconceive how we grow food, organize our economies, how we govern? The exhibition was

called “Speculations” then, because the future seemed to be open, the future needed to be claimed or reclaimed, we thought, it has been lost as a concept for emancipation and change and we wanted to bring it back.

Along the way, something changed. There was a shift in consciousness, we perceived, mostly in terms of dealing with climate change. The word, in different forms, was adaptation. It was not so much about change anymore, it was about dealing with the fallout. This discourse came into the political sphere through Jem Bendell and his concept of Deep Adaptation, it came into the economic sphere as a lot of business leaders and also politicians openly agreed that we are fucked, so to speak,



“Un mondo che muore” (2022) by Olaf Nicolai

This work delves into the concept of survival in the age of climate change, reflecting on the anxiety of a dying world and the possibility of a better one emerging.

“Superhero Sighting Society” (2019) by Taus Makhacheva with Sabih Ahmed

This piece connects the climate crisis with cultural identity, symbolizing the pursuit of superheroism through the conquest of the world’s highest peaks. It questions the fear of losing individual, cherished worlds, such as a beloved bookstore, rather than fearing a monumental global catastrophe.

and need to best deal with it. No more explicit talk about changing the economy in a fundamental way. No more challenge to the status quo. To the contrary, the status quo seemed to be reinforced by the threat of radical changes.

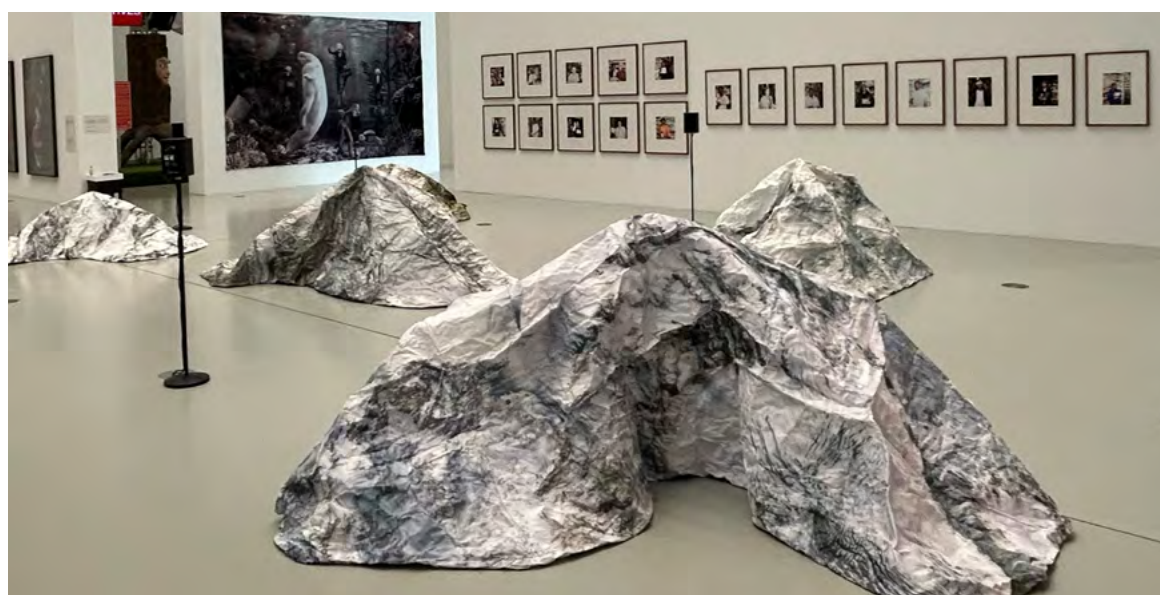
Is this apocalyptic? I am not sure I would use this term, and Nicolaus Schafhausen and I have never used it in any of our conversations. I am not sure that it works for this moment. It has a history which is not ours, a religiously tainted notion of doom, it has a political context which has been taken over, in some part, I would say, by the political right. Can this term be used to create change? This is what I want from terminology, from words: To open up possibilities, not to shut down the process of thinking. What happened is that a sense of ending entered the mainstream. Or rather, the understanding that we live in a continuum of time which bends towards a

future which is radically different from the present. Fear is a common reaction to this, as is denial. I am more interested in these human pathologies and not the philosophy of doom.

Humanity is dealing with enormous issues like climate change, wars, and disasters. What exactly inspired you and your team for this exhibition? How did you select the artists and works featured in the exhibition to create a cohesive narrative addressing themes of survival and sustainability?

We talked a lot as a team about how we perceive the changes in the world: What does the understanding of climate change do to the human psyche? What is the potential of indigenous perspectives and where does it become instrumentalized, exotifying, and an excuse not to think more profoundly about the obvious contradictions in our own thinking and systems, politically, economically, technologically, existentially? We sought out artists who share this probing approach to the present, who have a sense of crisis, who see ahead, in some way, without explicitly stating it. Art is not an answer, but art can be a tool. [...]

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#ART
APOCALYPSE

SEX REENCHANTED

FEMINIST ART SHOW CHALLENGES COLONIAL
NARRATIVES an Interview with Curator Mehveş Urgan

A current feminist group art show at the Heidelberger Kunstverein explores sexuality from a non-Western perspective and questions the colonial logic that the Western world often applies when appropriating feminist ideas. The exhibition “Sex Reenchanted” runs from June 22 to September 22, 2024, and presents works by eight international artists. It includes nearly 20 workshops, lectures and activities that aim to develop strategies to decolonise our bodies, transform our perspectives on sexuality and reflect on misogynistic stories from the Bible that influence our European worldview. The artists present pre-capitalist narratives and art forms that have disappeared. They invite visitors to rethink knowledge, especially gynaecology and medicine, and to engage in a feminist appropriation of historical practices, in line with the call of political philosopher and activist Silvia Federici for a re-enchantment of the world. CAPAS spoke with curator Mehveş Urgan about the conception of the exhibition.

What inspired the concept of the “Sex Reenchanted” exhibition? Why did you choose to explore the theme of sexuality in an artistic context, and how did the idea for the exhibition originate?

Mehveş Urgan: Through my internal and academic engagement with the concepts of emancipation and feminism, I realized that the Western world often imposes a colonial logic when it appropriates feminist ideas. This logic seeks to liberate women

sexually from the constraints of their traditions, but this narrative doesn’t necessarily align with or support the struggles and representations of all women. Women’s rights are under threat globally, and creating a hierarchy that puts tradition-bound, oppressed Muslim women against the modern Western world poses a serious danger to intersectionality.

I wanted to curate an exhibition that brings together artistic perspectives that draw on

their past to inspire discussions about sexuality. “Sex Reenchanted” is a decolonial feminist group show that explores sexuality from non-Western perspectives. The Western world often appropriates various struggles without acknowledging the specific conditions faced by racialized people. My goal is to offer a narrative that goes beyond the depiction of sexual identities in contemporary art. I chose artists who use elements inspired by their historical heritage, rather than their own bodies, to express these ideas.

What criteria did you use to decide which works and artists best convey the central message of the exhibition?

I’m not sure if the exhibition has a central message beyond employing a decolonial approach to challenge dominant narratives, such as the idea that Islam is inherently prudish. Since I aimed to critique Christian morality in contrast with the erased knowledge from the Ottoman era, I had to avoid extremely provocative works that might get reactionary repulses rather than foster discussions.

Şafak Şule Kemancı:
untitled, 2022. Photo
by Tanja Meissner
(Karlsruhe), Courtesy
& Copyright Heidelberger Kunstverein.

What role does the term “Reenchanted” play in the context of the exhibition?

We must defend love! We must advocate for strong bonds through sex. Today, as with everything in a liberal economy, sex has become a basic exchange within the boundaries of consent, with our bodies made constantly available and desirable. But are we really enjoying this? Through installations like CANAN’s *Shahmaran* and Dalila Dalleas Bouzar’s monumental embroidery of prehistoric drawings, the exhibition creates an atmosphere that prompts us to ask: Don’t we need spirituality in all these interactions? I don’t know—maybe not! The exhibition is inspired by the Silvia Federici’s call for a “Re-enchantment of the world”, in which she maps connections between previous forms of enclosure brought by capitalism and the destruction of the commons. She calls to appropriate historical practices and forms of knowledge in a feminist perspective. The exhibition tries to be in line with this call and to contribute by appropriating the history of Sex.



Monia Ben Hamou-da: *Venus as a River II (Gymnasium)*, 2023. Courtesy of the artist and ChertLüdde, Berlin. Photo by Tanja Meissner (Karlsruhe), Courtesy & Copyright Heidelberger Kunstverein.

How has the audience responded to the exhibition, and what discussions has it sparked so far?

The exhibition is perceived very positively, and people really love it—not only young women who want more sex-positive shows but also a wider audience spanning different ages. One reason for this is that the exhibition is aesthetically beautiful, and its narratives are subtle. The idea that contemporary art has to be provocative and even irritating is specific to European culture as a legacy of modernity. I'm very happy to avoid provocation in these delicate subjects.

To what extent do you see the exhibition as a contribution to the current

debate on sexuality and identity? What societal or political issues did you particularly want to highlight or comment on with this exhibition?

In Europe, you have to come out as a queer person and then fight for your rights and visibility. It is the mainstream way of becoming an activist! Right now, I'm reading Aruna D'Souza's *Imperfect Solidarities* (I recommend it wholeheartedly), and it discusses whether the experiences of the oppressed must be translatable into



the language of the dominant culture or if the colonial subject has the right to remain opaque. The author advocates for the right to opacity. There are two queer positions in the exhibition, expressed in very different visual forms, both articulating their desire, pleasure, and right to coexist without replicating Western expectations of sexual identity. Şafak Şule Kemancı's ecosexual works create an erotic language with plants and flowers, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all existence.

And last, but not least: What connection do you see between the Apocalypse and the exhibition *Sex Reenchanted*?

There are different connections between apocalyptic narratives and the exhibition. For example, there is one apocalyptic aspect in the exhibition, embodied by the figure of Shahmaran, the half-woman, half-serpent king of snakes. She is a powerful figure with a rich mythological history, and some people still believe she exists. The story goes that if humans create unbearable chaos, she will command her snakes to emerge from the underground and take over the earth. And I'm just waiting for the snakes to come—I keep asking myself why they're so late! ●



Mehveş Ungan works as a curator and public educator at the Heidelberger Kunstverein. She studied in Heidelberg and at the Free University of Berlin. She focuses on decolonial and eco-feminism, and the legacy of historical elements in contemporary art. Her first exhibition was Marwa Arsanios' 'Matter of Alliances' (co-curator with Søren Grammel). She organises various public events and teaches at the Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg.

#FELLOW
APOCALYPSE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT TRISTAN STURM

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

Tristan Sturm: My first thought was I need to be a part of this centre, whether as a fellow or as a collaborator. Indeed, Andy Crome (Manchester Metropolitan University) and I wrote a grant with CAPAS on the topic of “Popular COVID Apocalypses” just after the centre was announced.



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

That as geographers, we need to move from thinking of the apocalypse as a global event to thinking of apocalypse

Tristan Sturm is Associate Professor of Geography at Queen’s University Belfast since 2015.

He researches apocalyptic thought related to climate change, conspiracies, and religious movements in the USA and Israel/Palestine as well as critical health geopolitics. He was a fellow at CAPAS from April to July 2024.

as a regional, local, and even personal emergence, one that is taking place in some places right now, or has already taken place. As Margaret Atwood once said, “It’s the end of the world every day, for someone” and I would add, somewhere.

What was your fellowship trying to achieve?

I spent my fellowship working on a book. This book is a decade-long ethnographic study of American Christian Zionist pilgrims whose religious (Jewish-Christian) and national (American-Israeli) identities are formulated through an expectation of an apocalyptic future. This is a future that finds expression in landscape pilgrimage sites in Israel and Palestine. The principle

contribution to the study of Christian Zionism is the application of both a geographical perspective and recent futures theories. The book interrogates landscapes of the future: an anticipation of an emergent future that is imagined by American Christian Zionists in Israel and Palestine and how this future is made possible through the visible construction of past territorial claims of lived, ritualized, and administered space from the perspective of landscape lookouts.

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

I’ve studied the apocalypse—whether Christian Zionist, climate related, or conspiratorial—since my Master’s degree. I think I’m the only Geographer who claims to be a scholar of the apocalypse.

What was particularly valuable for you at CAPAS?

The silos our universities and disciplines re-enforce are not productive. CAPAS was an incredible opportunity to challenge those boundaries and hear how other disciplines think about apocalypse. As a result, the CAPAS fellowship has been invaluable and rewarding.

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

To paraphrase Douglas Adams [a British writer and author best known for “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy”], you only need one thing: a towel. [...]

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#PUBLIC
APOCALYPSE

SUMMER
OPEN-AIR
2024

APOCALYPTIC CINEMA

The apocalyptic cinema open-air took place in cooperation with the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science at the Mathematikon at Heidelberg University for the fourth summer in a row. The film series kicked off with 'Plan B'. Due to the rain, the open-air moved indoors to Karlstorkino. The screening of 'The Wall' was commented on by Elisabeth Kargl, cultural scientist at Nantes Université, and Melanie Le Touze of CAPAS. The film, directed by Julian Pösler, is based on a novel by Marlen Haushofer, which can be read as a post-apocalyptic feminist scenario. In this film, the concept of the last humans on earth is first and foremost an examination of the self and its relationship to society.



In combination with the book presentation and panel discussion of 'The Ocean on Fire' by CAPAS fellow Anaïs Maurer, the Apocalyptic Cinema screened 'On the Morning You Wake (To the End of the World)' (2022), a virtual reality film about nuclear tests on the coasts of Oceania that led to premature death, widespread disease, forced migration, and irreparable destruction.



Following the events that week on nuclear colonization in the pacific, 'Pacification' was shown in collaboration with 73. International Film Festival Mannheim Heidelberg (IFFMH). The subsequent lively discussion with Estelle Castro-Koshy of OSPAPIK – Ocean and Space Pollution, Artistic Practices and Indigenous Knowledges, Université de Bretagne Occidentale, Temiti Lehartel of Centre for Urban and Social Global Studies, RMIT, Melbourne and Anglophone Pacific Literature, Université Paul Valéry, Montpellier III and Sascha Keilholz, Artistic and Commercial Director IFFMH, focused on the political significance of the film and the cinematic work of director Albert Serra.

A special highlight was the premiere of the documentary film 'Imagining End Times' (2024), a collaborative project by CAPAS and Onkel Lina. The documentary presents the special exhibition organised by CAPAS together with Mexican partners at the world-famous Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, which featured cultural artefacts and works of art, as well as scenarios and traces of the end of the world in Mexico from the Stone Age to the present day. Robert Folger, curator of the exhibition Adolfo Mantilla, guest artist Federico Cuatlacuatl, guest commentator Laura Rabelo Erber, IIAS Universiteit Leiden, and Eva Bergdolt guided the audience through the film.



Finally, the weather allowed the Apocalyptic Cinema open-air edition. On a warm summer night, we screened 'Afire' (2023) in cooperation with the 73. International Film Festival Mannheim Heidelberg and accompanied by the managing director Sascha Keilholz. The film, directed by Christian Petzold, is about a group of friends who are confronted with their own inner demons during a forest fire at the Baltic Sea.

This open-air summer ended with 'Tides' (2021), directed by Tim Fehlbaum. Adam Stock, science fiction expert and fellow at CAPAS, commented on the temporalities and dystopian landscape in the film. The film tells a dystopian future where an astronaut must decide whether humanity deserves a second chance on Earth.





#ART
APOCALYPSE

UNRAVELING COLONIALISM'S IMPACT

Maternity of the Gods

Justo Carrillo de la Cruz & Ximena Carrillo Robles, 2022

BRITISH MUSEUM EXPLORES WIXÁRIKA GENDER HISTORY

The digital exhibition *How the Intimate Lives of Wixárika People Were Changed Forever*, hosted by the British Museum's Santo Domingo Centre of Excellence for Latin American Research (SDCELAR), delves into the gendered cultural history of the Wixárika people. Using archival records, photographs, community testimonies, and a curated bibliography, it provides insights into how colonialism profoundly altered the lives of the Wixárika, an Indigenous group of approximately 48,000 people living in the southern Sierra Madre Occidental of north-west Mexico.

This presentation illustrates the deeply gendered process of colonization, revealing how it disrupted the community-organized structures of Indigenous peoples. Colonialism, as portrayed here, represents not only the loss of lands and identity but also the destruction of entire ways of life. The exhibition seeks to rebuild and reconnect pre-colonial memories while challenging conventional historical narratives.

For anyone seeking to deepen their understanding of colonial issues, this virtual exhibition offers a valuable opportunity. It invites viewers to explore the history and contemporary realities of the Wixárika people from their own perspective—a viewpoint often obscured by traditional colonial narratives.

●●● visit the exhibition

www.sdcelarbritishmuseum.org/exhibitions

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