



KÄTE HAMBURGER CENTRE
FOR APOCALYPTIC AND
POST-APOCALYPTIC STUDIES



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

NEWSLETTER
1/21

A stylized illustration of a person wearing a pink hood, shown in profile drinking from a black cup. The person's face is rendered in black and white, contrasting with the pink background of the hood.

THE APOCALYPTIC TONE

DEAR READERS,

we are happy to present to you the first newsletter for our newly established Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS), an advanced research centre, at Heidelberg University.

Our newsletter series will successively introduce CAPAS, the team, and the fellows, inform you about our activities and events and provide insights into different scientific perspectives on apocalypses, publications, and popular culture depictions of apocalypses.

Since space is limited in the newsletter, only abbreviated teasers have been included. The full versions of the texts are available on our website via the “●●● read more” link at the end of the articles.

If you have feedback on the newsletter or suggestions for future topics, please let us know with an email at:

capas@uni-heidelberg.de

The CAPAS team wishes you an interesting and inspiring read!

THE “APOCALYPTIC TONE”

Interview with directors Robert Folger and Thomas Meier

Albrecht Dürer's
visualization of
John's Revelation:
The Four Horse-
men of the Apoca-
lypse (1498)



How did everything start: what were the reasons that led you to conceptualize a Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies?

Robert Folger (RF): I have been fascinated for years by the massive proliferation of apocalyptic and increasingly post-apocalyptic visions and scenarios in books, movies, TV series and art. Moreover, the “apocalyp-

tic tone”, as Jacques Derrida has called it, in current pressing political issues, primarily in relation to climate change, but also smaller scale threats like terrorism, caught my attention. Even the debate around immigration in Germany was framed in terms of “Germany abolishes itself”. Talking about the end of the world, fearing it, hoping for a millennial salvation, have been a reality for most of human history, but the fervor

of today's debate, as well as the strangely morbid fascination we seem to have with the world's end is a sign of our present.

Prof. Dr. Robert Folger, director of CAPAS and professor for Romance literature



At the same time, my work on colonial Latin America, where indigenous peoples suffered extreme violence and hardship that brought them to the brink of extinction (in some cases beyond) showed me that the apocalypse is not a sort of collective fantasy but a human experience in the sense that traumatic change is framed in terms of an end of the world. What is particularly interesting, in the case of the Americas, is that

The first funding phase of CAPAS will focus on the imaginarium of the apocalypse and post-apocalyptic worlds as the subject of global transcultural and transversal processes. Current end-time scenarios, for example in the wake of climate change, demonstrate the timeliness of such imaginaries.



their apocalypse, as a historical event and as a narrative, is a collusion of European and indigenous ideas of the end of the world. In other words: it is essentially trans-cultural. From these observations stems the

basic premises: a) not to treat the apocalypse as an inconsequential periodically appearing fantasy of the "Western World", which is the approach on most of the previous research undertaken on the topic, and b) to recognize the impact of apocalyptic thinking in our experiences and our reactions to radical, catastrophic change in the public debate, but also in the empirical sciences.

Talking about the end of the world, fearing it, hoping for a millennial salvation, have been a reality for most of human history

An outcome of the latter premise is that the apocalypse is a topic that requires collaborative research which brings together a broad spectrum of disciplines from all over the world.

The initial concept for CAPAS was developed before the global COVID-19 pandemic hit the world; then came the year 2020. Did it bring with it new directions for the Centre?

Prof. Dr. Thomas Meier, director of CAPAS and professor for pre- and early history

RF: COVID-19 ties perfectly into the basic premises of the Centre, both in the sense that catastrophic events are a reality, and that ideas of the end of the world influence how we deal with these events. The topicality of the CAPAS research agenda is not something anyone can have wished for, but it is also an unforeseen chance to observe the unfolding of a post-apocalyptic scenario.

Thomas Meier (TM): An early draft of the application included “pandemics” as an apocalyptic scenario, but we dropped it for lack of space and, while Europe became aware of COVID-19, the application had already been handed in. During the interview in early August 2020 COVID-19 was certainly a great boost for our application demonstrating its immediate relevance.

Organisationally speaking, it was and continues to be a challenge to launch CAPAS during the COVID-19 pandemic as personal contacts are restricted and any contact still means an unclear risk. People at CAPAS, as elsewhere in society, are dealing differently with this situation, some are more open to risk, others are more hesitant and cautious (including myself).



“Catastrophic events are a reality.”

But let me take a step back: In terms of our concept the current pandemic highlights

the relationality of any apocalypse. I assume that five centuries ago this pandemic



would have gone unnoticed: A long period of incubation, rather diverse symptoms – if any – and a rather low lethality (compared to e.g. plague, cholera or epidemic typhus) would have obscured what we today perceive as a pandemic on the basis of the concept of a virus. It is definitely not my intention to play down the very severe individual harm and suffering brought on by the Coronavirus, but compared to pandemics of the past COVID-19 is very mild at the level of population.

The current pandemic highlights the relationality of any apocalypse

Nevertheless, it is publicly framed as an apocalypse, because it questions our Western way of living and our self-concept of being in control of nature. To me the current situation is a warning that apocalyptic talk means very different things at very different times, but is a rhetoric means to raise a heightened state of awareness and is an indicator that the one who speaks feels threatened by the actual situation. There is no threshold of an event's intensity which makes it an apocalyptic reality or not; it's all a matter of relational realities.

●●● [read more](#)



cfs

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Annual Conference, 29-30 April 2022

CAPAS invites calls for individual paper and panel proposals to be included in our annual conference on “Worlds ending - Ending worlds?”, 29-30 April 2022.

For **individual paper proposals**, we request scholars to submit an abstract of 300-500 words (including the title) that outline their original research to be presented at the conference along with a short CV.

Scholars who wish to conduct collaborative research projects are invited to submit **panel proposals**. We request

prospective panel chairs to apply with a short panel abstract (max 200 words including title) for a session of 90 min (3x30min). The application should include a list of participants, titles of individual papers, individual paper abstracts (300-500 words) and short CVs of all participants. Panel participants do not need to send an additional individual application.

Deadline: 15 October 2021

Please, direct your applications and inquiries to: capas@uni-heidelberg.de



cfs

CALL FOR PAPERS APOCALYPTICA

We are seeking submissions for our newly established, interdisciplinary journal

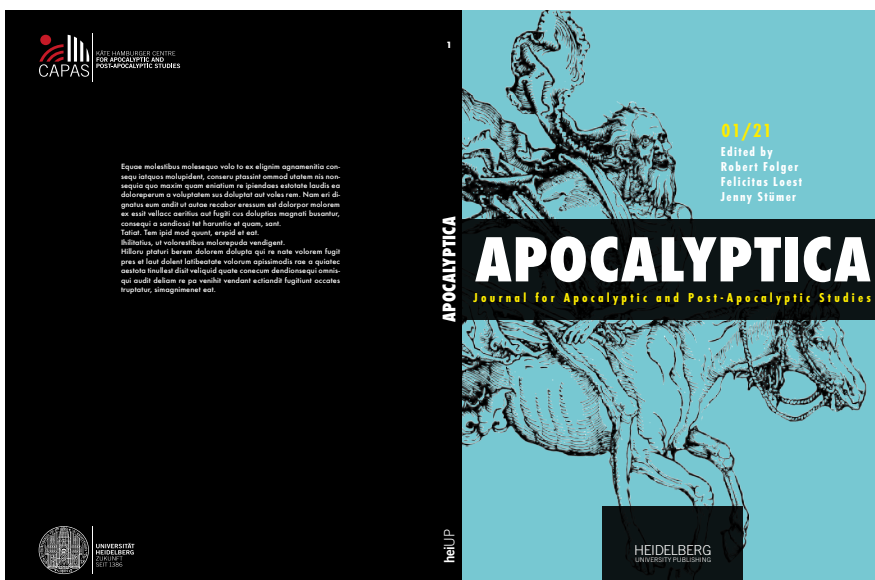
Apocalyptic that actively explore the apocalypse as a forceful figure of thought in order to grapple with the historical experiences, present confrontations, and future possibilities of (up)ending worlds.

We welcome submissions from a broad range of fields in order to champion the imaginative and (potentially) transformative force of thinking with and through the (post-)apocalypse.

Article length: 8,000-9,000 words

Deadline: 15 November 2021

Please, direct your submissions to:
publications@capas.uni-heidelberg.de



CAPAS EVENTS

EVERY
TUESDAY

🕒 6.30 PM – 8.00 PM 📍 Neue Universität, Lecture Hall 14; followed by a filmed online version

CAPAS Lecture Series

THURSDAY

14
10

🕒 7.00 PM 📍 Neue Universität, Aula

Public Inauguration

Inauguration of the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies with the Inaugural Lecture by Slavoj Žižek

FRIDAY

22
10

🕒 5.00 PM – 6.30 PM 📍 online format

“Ein Leben nach Corona”

A round table discussion (in Cooperation with the Käte Hamburger Centre Erlangen) at the Humanities Festival “Was wird werden?”

Please register [here](#)

WINTER
SEMESTER

Apocalyptic Cinema

In the winter semester we will continue our cinema series “Apocalyptic Cinema”. Additionally, we are working towards a cooperation with the film museum DFF which is currently hosting an exhibition: “CATASTROPHE. What comes after the end?”. Please stay tuned for more events via our [event website](#) for updates.

Registration for all CAPAS events at www.capas.uni-heidelberg.de/events.html



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UNIVERSITÄT
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14 OCTOBER
2021

7.00 PM
Admission 6.30 pm

NEUE
UNIVERSITÄT
Universitätsplatz 1
Heidelberg

3G PROOF
REQUIRED
(tested, recovered,
vaccinated)

AUSGEBUCHT
Online-Stream
verfügbar

SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

REGISTRATION
REQUIRED



www.capas.uni-heidelberg.de

INAUGURAL LECTURE

OF THE
KÄTE HAMBURGER CENTRE
FOR APOCALYPTIC AND POST-
APOCALYPTIC STUDIES

GEFÖRDERT VOM



Bundesministerium
für Bildung
und Forschung

IN THE FACE OF THE APOCALYPSE

Interview with CAPAS Fellow Dena A Al-Adeeb



“Apocalypses are not in the future! Apocalypses are happening now!” Scholar, artist, educator, and cultural worker Dena A Al-Adeeb knows this first-hand; after all, she experienced the apocalyptic reality of war several times throughout her childhood and youth in Iraq and Kuwait. Consequently, she has dedicated herself to the interdisciplinary study of global war geographies, militarisation, and oil economies as they manifest in the work of contemporary artists, collective memory, material and visual culture in West Asia.



As a member of the first CAPAS fellowship class, **Dena A Al-Adeeb** spent four months in Heidelberg during which she was free from other commitments to devote herself to her research.

Apocalypses are not only the subject of your studies but also lived experiences. Is that why you chose to work on them?

Dena A Al-Adeeb: Indeed, my research interests are a reflection of my lived experiences. I was born in Iraq and as a child my family was forced to flee Bagdad just before the Iran-Iraq War broke out. We escaped to Kuwait and as a child this experience definitely resembled the end of a world as far as I knew it. When I was a senior in high school—a crucial developmental phase in which life is “typically” perceived as expansive—we were displaced for a second time. Due to the Iraqi invasion

of Kuwait and the subsequent 1991 First Gulf War we had to involuntarily relocate to San Francisco, California. Again, the world as I knew it came to an end. Moreover, I found myself out of place, estranged from the country wreaking havoc on my homeland. I was confronted by media coverage, images, and narratives dominated by a Eurocentric worldview and informed by Western geo-political and economic interests. Furthermore, media portrayal of the war was horrifically disconnected from the embodied lived experiences of violence and destruction on the ground. The footage of the war strategically taken from above depicted an aerial view of the bombing campaign, which allegedly portrayed a ‘targeted and sanitary operation with minimal collateral damage’. The smouldering explosions must have obscured the bloodbath on land while the smoke overshadowed its memory. These experiences led me to be involved in the anti-war and social justice movements as well as community organizing.

After the 2003 US-led invasion, I returned to Iraq and between 2003 and 2010, I conducted fieldwork in Baghdad and Karbala (Iraq) as well as in Dubai and Abu Dhabi (UAE). In 2004, I relocated to Egypt where I pursued an MA degree in sociology and anthropology at the American University of Cairo. Six years later, in 2010, I moved back to the United States to complete a doctoral degree in Middle Eastern and Islamic studies at the New York University. Since then, my research focuses on global war geographies and oil economies as they manifest through visual culture, material culture, and collective memory.

●●● [read more](#)

FUTURISTIC PERSPECTIVES

The New Home of CAPAS

Against this backdrop, it's not hard to imagine a utopian future: The new home of CAPAS on Heidelberg University's natural sciences campus, Im Neuenheimer Feld.
© Tobias Schwerdt



INTRODUCING CAPAS

The Administrative Office



Who are the people working at CAPAS? What are their backgrounds and what are their working areas and interests? We are going to introduce the CAPAS team over the course of the next newsletter editions, starting with the Administrative Office. This seems a logical first step, especially since they were working for CAPAS even before it became a reality.

Felicitas Loest, managing director of CAPAS, coordinated the application process for the Centre. After growing up in a

There, she was teaching at a bilingual public school, which led to her interest in child language acquisition, second language phonology acquisition, and speech-language pathology. Subsequently, she graduated from Heidelberg University with a first-class master's degree in English studies.

The apocalypse is digital: at least when considering the challenges of online and hybrid research and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, we are glad that CAPAS is supported by our



The team of the administrative office (from left to right): Felicitas Loest, Laura Mendoza, Gregor Kohl, Max Sieckmeyer

small city in the Atacama Desert, Felicitas Loest studied German, Spanish and European art history at Heidelberg University and at King's College London. Felicitas is writing a PhD thesis on topoi of the sublime in descriptions of Latin American landscapes. Her research interests concern conceptions of identity and the subject in relation to space as landscape or territory, influenced by de- and post-colonial theory, as well as gender studies perspectives.

The fellows are the key component for the scientific work of the Centre, and the fellowship manager is the key component for making all this possible: **Laura Mendoza** takes care of that. She completed her teaching degree at Universidad Pedagógica Nacional in Bogotá, Colombia and continued with a Master's of Education in the United States.

media technician **Gregor Kohl** who completed his training as an event technology specialist at the Kulturhaus Karlstorbahnhof Heidelberg. Subsequently, he was self-employed with a focus on sound engineering for national/international bands and festivals and also as a sound engineer for TV productions.

The team of the administrative office is completed by **Max Sieckmeyer**, who is responsible for the administrative handling of our Centre. He studied Near Eastern archaeology at Heidelberg, completing his Magister Artium with a study of the painted ceramics from Tall Bi'a/Tuttul. Before joining CAPAS, he worked as assistant to the managing director of the Collaborative Research Centre 933 Material Text Cultures at Heidelberg University.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR...

... Alejandra Bottinelli



Can you name the three things you would definitely need in a post-apocalyptic world?

Alejandra Bottinelli: First of all: paper and pencil, because it is necessary to document, produce, and safeguard the memory of the borderline experience and what it means for us, insignificant human beings, to have gone through the most terrible situations and then to be able to tell others about it; to tell, for example, what it is like to continue walking after the catastrophe. The second thing, of



course, is a little bag with a variety of seeds from the world that was left behind, to help us to start again, but also to contain the memory of what helped us to live in that world, what nature itself created and provided us with for our life on earth. The third thing I would suggest is to take souvenirs, small pieces of that world: canvases and photographs, and, of course, a book of poetry. Personally, I would choose the complete works of César Vallejo, a great Peruvian poet and

one of the greatest in Latin America who also thought about the end, in connection to the great societal transformations but also to the “changes of the world” in personal experience.

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

The apocalypse is, for me, above all, a figurative resource for thinking about the transformation of our world, and is therefore, at the same time, a call to think about our limits: the limits of our space/time, how we consider the present (and our genealogy, as we have discursively configured it, and how we have affectively experienced it), and how we project the future as a transformation of this state of affairs. Apocalypses presuppose an imagination about the time to come, about how human beings will arrive at the culminating moment of the upheaval of our world, and what it will be like in the aftermath.

Which questions is your fellowship addressing?

The questions I intend to address at this stage in the fellowship have to do with how the end appears in Latin American fiction. Particularly, I intend to look at the eschatological perspectives that emerge in contemporary writings related to the crisis of the present as a crisis of our environment (the discussion on the Anthropocene; on the pollution of our environments; on global warming), as a crisis of the spaces of development of human beings, especially in those places affected by dynamics of excep-

Alejandra Bottinelli holds a PhD and a master's degree in Latin American studies from the University of Chile and is assistant professor at the Department of Literature of said university. Her research and teaching work addresses the figurations of the body in the current narratives of Chile, Argentina, and Peru, and the modalizations of modernity and modernisms in the discourses and intellectual writings of the late 19th century in Latin America.

tion: the so-called zones of sacrifice, the borders and “non-places” (as Marc Augé says) of immigration; and in the margins impoverished and “discarded” by the territorial order of the states. I aim to explore how the crisis of the body is also expressed today, in pandemic form, as a crisis of our ways of relating to others in contexts of isolation, of confinement, of suspense and uncertainty about what is to come, in which the sense of loss of control over existence and the individual and common future is strengthened is also a crucial area of study. In particular, this situation in which we live constitutes the body itself as the first scene where the socio-health emergency is fought,

with consequences not yet observed on a subjective and psychosocial level.

I am interested in the question of how this imagination of the end constitutes another way of imagining the body and affects in contemporaneity and how this occurs in a special scene which I call “the confines”, on the periphery of our imaginary order, in spaces that we think of as borderline and marginalised. My main question then is how contemporary fictions of the last decade, staged in the confines and the periphery of the territory, imagine the end of the known world and its aftermath, from the body and the affects.

●●● [read more](#)

BOOK REVIEW

Vladimir Sorokin’s ‘The Blizzard’ is aptly appropriate for a pandemic, and, in equal measure, no less surreal. A detestable antihero, the doctor, drives through a horrendous blizzard to save a village from the outbreak of a mysterious virus. Caring very little for all the supporting serfs, the doctor finds himself willing to put himself and his kind hearted, simple Chekavian driver, the metonymically named Crouper (as well as his beloved horses) at risk; repeatedly driving them too hard into the mud-died snow and frozen earth. The book speaks directly to the heart of those driven by the obsession to do what’s good and right, revealing that sometimes that obsession can be more disastrous than we might care to admit. The book is almost impossible to place as strange psychedelic scenes of a post-apocalyptic Russia meld with those of the simple Slavic surroundings as snow, storms,

and sublime elements wage war. The reader is inundated with surroundings, objects, and characters reminiscent of a Tolstoy styled past, which, at times, feels like a psychologically and technologically charged future. Platon Ilich’s refusal to give up and his obsession with the hero complex reflects the actuality of human helplessness and frailty against the uncontrollable forces of nature while Crouper’s miniature horses mock the modern world; taking on a grotesque comedic form revealing possibly the biggest tragedy of all: human-kinds destruction of the most necessary of resources, nature itself.

Michael Dunn

Vladimir Sorokin: The Blizzard, 2015

Penguin Modern Classics (2018)

192 pages

Paperback: 12,52 €

ISBN: 0241355133

ARTISTIC CONNECTION

CAPAS at NEW NOW Festival for Digital Arts

Fellows and researchers discussed “Another end is possible” with artists at the conference of the NEW NOW festival (Zollverein, Essen, 27.08. – 03.10.21). For more details stay tuned: “Apocalyptic Encounters” is a 360° video filmed with NEW NOW artists at Zollverein and will premiere on the [YouTube channel](#) soon.



In September, the CAPAS guest of honour was the Mexican writer and performer Rojo Córdova who presented his book and art installation in Heidelberg.



THREE QUESTIONS FOR...

... Tommy Lynch



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

Tommy Lynch: Since I first started working on this topic during my PhD, we've seen the rise of ISIS, the election of Trump, the European refugee crisis, Brexit, the pandemic and, in the background, a spreading awareness of the scale of climate change. There are lots of crises! In this context, apocalypticism is often invoked to demand action; in order to avoid the apocalypse,



we must curb emissions or obey lockdown measures.

The call for applications made room for projects that are not focused on solutions but understand the nature of apocalypticism. I am interested in apocalypticism as a theoretical orientation. What does it mean to think about, or even desire, the end of the world? These are unnerving questions and often I feel that they have to be smuggled in. The call for applications clearly welcomed these kinds of theoretical investigations.

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

I am more interested in apocalypticism than 'the' apocalypse. Apocalypticism, as a theoretical orientation, tries to think against the world. Most of my work is an attempt to think through the implications of an enigmatic statement made by Jacob Taubes in his lectures on the Apostle Paul. Taubes gave these lectures here in Heidelberg as he was dying of cancer. During the lectures he says: 'I can imagine as an apocalyptic let it go down. I have no spiritual investment in the world as it is.' I have taken this passage as my starting point; what does it mean to persistently disinvest from the world as it is?

What is your fellowship trying to achieve?

I have two main goals for my time in Heidelberg. First, is to think about the use of apocalyptic discourse during the pandemic. For all the tragedy and suffering that the pandemic continues to cause, I am not sure that it is really apocalyptic. What has changed? The distribution of suffering follows familiar economic, geographic, and racial patterns. The past year has seen the very richest get richer while many people dramatically reconfigure their daily lives for the sake of continuing to be productive at work. People whose lives were already characterized by precarity, such as those working in the gig economy, added the threat of serious illness to the risks of their labour. Describing the pandemic in apocalyptic terms serves to justify responses to the pandemic which have reaffirmed this world. Without mini-

Tommy Lynch is senior lecturer in philosophy of religion at the University of Chichester. He is interested in the connections between political theology, continental philosophy and interdisciplinary research on race. He has explored these ideas in essays in critical research on religion, method & theory in the study of religion, and philosophy & social criticism. Across this work he focuses on the limits of liberal political thought in the face of mounting global crises.

mizing the many forms of loss experienced by people, what is striking is how little the world itself has changed.

My second goal is to investigate the way that apocalypticism creates the possibility

of new forms of community or relationality. Disinvesting from the world is an arduous project and I am curious about the ways that this work opens up new kinds of relationships.

●●● [read more](#)

FILM REVIEW



WHAT TO EXPECT?

Los Angeles, 9am, 2024. Citizens must do a face scan via an app on their phones which can determine their bodies current temperature. If the app detects fever, the person is visited shortly thereafter by the 'sanitation' department which banishes the person into quarantine quarters; of course, only if the person survives till then.

The movie **Songbird (2020)** depicts a rather horrifying futuristic scenario: from the start of the pandemic in 2020 to 2024 the COVID-19 virus has evolved during multiple mutations and the future virus COVID-23 is controlling all aspects of hu-

man life. The protagonist of the film, Nico, works as a package delivery man thanks to his immunity. Is this a coincidence or a bizarre correlation between the production company of the film, Amazon, and this storyline? Producer Michael Bay also introduces, in true Hollywood cliché, a little love story between two of his characters.

TO WATCH OR NOT TO WATCH?

Interestingly, the public audience liked the movie or disliked it. The ratings tended to rank from either 5 to 1-star recommendations with very little in between.

In regard to its proximity to reality, especially when watching it during lockdown, watching the movie can be a horrifying experience. We argue, since it is the first major cinematic project produced during the pandemic of COVID-19, whilst being about the pandemic, it is still an interesting watch.

Eva Bergdolt

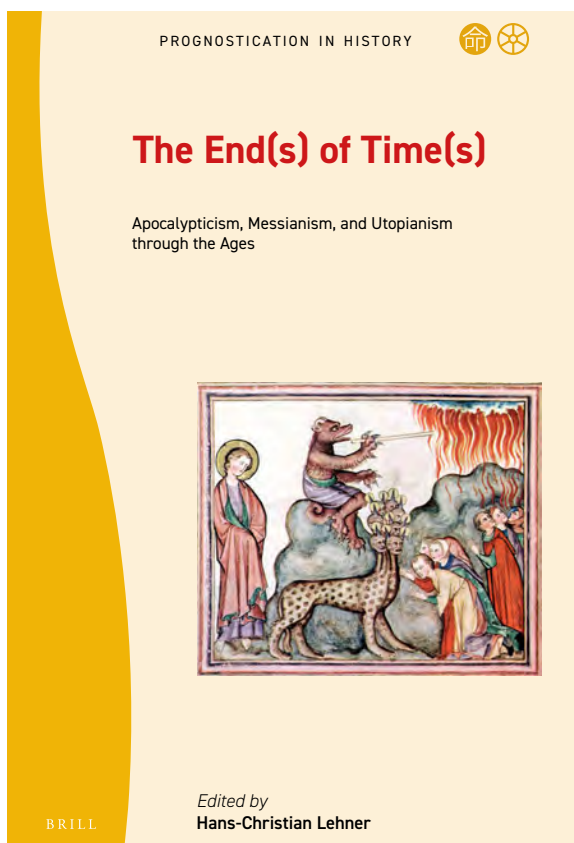
SONGBIRD, 2020

Producer: Michael Bay
Director: Adam Mason
Actors: K. J. Apa, Sofia Carson, Craig Robinson
Genre: thriller, science-fiction, romance

●●● [read more](#)

BUDDHIST DYSTOPIAN NARRATIVES

by Dr. Rolf Scheuermann



Dystopian narratives may have contributed significantly to the *longue durée* of Tibetan Buddhism as Rolf Scheuermann shows in his paper published in the volume “The End(s) of Time(s)”.



Whether it is the end of the world as we know it or the end of an era, Tibetan Buddhists maintained and still maintain different notions of the ends of times. Many of these have their origin in the influence of Indian eschatological ideas that are reflected in numerous Tibetan religious treatises.

From its outset, Indian Mahāyana Buddhism has quite a utopian scope as it centers on the ideal of the bodhisattva, a being who, in their spiritual career, develops a compassionate mindset of vast dimension. A bodhisattva vows that he/she will not enter into Nirvāṇa until all sentient beings are liberated from the endless cycle of rebirths characterized by suffering. Following the idea that the number of sentient beings is limitless, this implies that a bodhisattva will take rebirth in the world forever.

Tibetan Buddhism, a syncretic form of Mahāyāna Buddhism, houses a multitude of Buddhist and non-Buddhist elements that arrived in Tibet via India, China, and other pathways. Accordingly, Tibetan religious literature offers a vast array of utopian and dystopian narratives. Focusing on the dystopian narratives, this paper examines their role in the context of Tibetan Buddhist soteriology, particularly analyzing how such presentations were employed. By contrasting statements of Tibetan authors found in Buddhist philosophical literature of different periods, I argue that dystopian narratives are ever-present and have been widely used as a pedagogical device, helping the student to develop an urge to apply and preserve the Buddhist doctrine.

At a cosmological level, the notion of the end of time surfaces in everyday contemplative practices such as the meditations on impermanence. At the level of the individual, many Tibetan Buddhists believe to live during a time of degeneration that will finally lead towards the end of the doctrine. As the examples presented in this contribution demonstrate, this does not only hold true for Buddhist practitioners in the Tibet of old but also for contemporary tradition, at least in parts, be it in the East or the West. In this way, dystopian narratives may have contributed significantly to the *longue durée* of the religion.

Rolf Scheuermann, “Tibetan Buddhist Dystopian Narratives and their Pedagogical Dimension” in: Hans Christian Lehner, *The End(s) of Time(s). Apocalypticism, Messianism, and Utopianism through the Ages*, Leiden: Brill 2021, 91–114.