



KÄTE HAMBURGER CENTRE  
FOR APOCALYPTIC AND  
POST-APOCALYPTIC STUDIES



UNIVERSITÄT  
HEIDELBERG  
ZUKUNFT  
SEIT 1386

APOCALYPSE  
QUARTERLY

3/23

# THROUGH GRIEF TO CHANGE





# DEAR READERS,

Floods, heat waves, species extinction – the manifestations of the climate crisis are omnipresent. Grief is one of the obvious emotional responses to these catastrophes. Researcher Silvia Vittonatto, who presented her work at the CAPAS symposium “Languages of the Anthropocene” in Rome (p. 6), asks whether grief helps or hinders us in coping with the climate crisis. Her article “Through Mourning to Change” guides us into the fall issue of our *Apocalyptic Quarterly* (pp. 2-5).

As articles on several workshops in this issue show, CAPAS members had an intense academic summer (pp. 7-11/p. 21).

However, public events were not neglected either: in June, artists performed the piece “D\_\_ance for the disappeared” at Karlstorbahnhof in Heidelberg with the goal to explore how interdisciplinary collaboration might allow us to deepen our understanding of human disappearance (pp. 12-13). On the occasion of the German Science Year 2023 with the theme “Our Universe”, CAPAS also organized an “Asteroid Week” with lectures, film screenings and other events (pp. 22-23).

The CAPAS team wishes you an interesting and inspiring read!

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

## THROUGH GRIEF TO CHANGE ON THE ROLE OF GRIEVING IN THE CLIMATE CRISIS by Silvia Vittonatto

**As this record-breaking hot summer has made more apparent than ever, the tangible and intangible losses caused by the climate crisis are (and will continue to be) innumerable. Naturally, the emotional response to loss is grief. However, the role of grief and other mournful emotions in the context of the climate crisis is a somewhat controversial topic. The core question is whether grief is a potentially helpful feeling or a counterproductive one. This question might appear problematically utilitarian – especially when applied to cultural production – but it encourages reflection on what motivates action (and what kind of action) in times of crisis.**

Ecological grief is an umbrella term that encompasses various forms of grief related to the consequences of climate change: the loss of habitats, ecologies, and biodiversity; the extinction of species; the loss of cultural practices, rites, habits, and local identities; the instabi-

lity caused by forced displacement and so on. A comprehensive list of losses connected to climate change is listed in [this article by W. Neil Adger and others](#), for example. Ecological grief is experienced internally and collectively, is expressed in literature and art, and is

The losses caused by the climate crisis are innumerable. Naturally, the emotional response to loss is grief. As researcher Silvia Vittonatto states, the encounter with this grief might be the very first step toward meaningful change.



currently an increasingly important subject of discussion in the Environmental Humanities and related fields.

**Silvia Vittonatto** is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at University College London (UK). Her project considers how ecological grief is articulated in contemporary literature through elegiac modes and is generously supported by the Wolfson Foundation.



### Languages of the Anthropocene

Silvia Vittonatto presented her research on ecological grief in contemporary literature at the International Multidisciplinary Symposium “Languages of the Anthropocene”, which was organized by CAPAS and took place at The British School at Rome on 20-21 June 2023 (see p. 6). Here, she presented her paper *Resistant Grief and Futurity in the Contemporary Climate Change Memoir* that focuses on autobiographical expressions of ecological grief in hyper-contemporary texts, such as Daniel Sherrell’s [Warmth](#) (2021).

Much of the discussion around ecological grief centres on the most paralyzing and pessimistic attributes of this emotion. However, framing ecological grief as an apathetic response that results in immobilism and defeatism means failing to appreciate its potential for rethinking reality in light of loss. This type of binary thinking opposes grief and hope, mourning and resisting, despair and consolation, and thus fails to acknowledge that grief is in many ways future oriented, profoundly connected to care, and harbours the radical aspiration that things may be very different from what they are (on grief as a reality-shaping force, see [this article by R. Clifton Spargo](#)). Such attributes of grief, and the ambivalence that characterises this emotion, are brilliantly captured by several literary texts that engage with the climate crisis. For instance, novels like Jenny Offill’s *Weather* and Jesse Greengrass’ *The High House* grapple with ecological grief from different temporal standpoints. In *Weather*, anticipatory grief disrupts the peace of a relatively stable present, while *The High House* focuses on post-catastrophe mourning.

What, then, should we do with our grief? First, making space for expressions of



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The list of losses connected to climate change is endless.

grief publicly, privately, and within the cultural sphere paves the way to accepting and coming to terms with the reality of the climate emergency without

denying or underplaying its consequences and implications. Secondly, according to ecopsychologists and social scientists, grief can be harnessed to demand change and channelled into collective action, activism, and resilience (see, among others, [this volume by Lesley Head](#)). Moreover, engaging with grief serves different purposes, including: overcoming denial and repression, promoting a sense of responsibility and ecological interconnectedness (see [this volume by Joshua Trey Barnett](#)), shaping our value system, fostering a preparatory dimension and potentially mobilising action, and contributing to psychological and emotional resilience. For instance, Ashley Cunsolo suggests that '[mourning has the capacity to be a more psychologically healthy emotion to incite political action](#)' and '[enhance individual and collective resilience to loss](#)'.

Ecological grief may feel overwhelming, but it is denial that is holding us back. Far from being the antithesis of hope, the encounter with grief might be the very first step toward meaningful change. ●



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# LANGUAGES OF THE ANTHROPOCENE

Conference Report by Florian Mussgnug

**How do we speak and write about global warming, mass extinction and the pressures of a fast changing planet? What does it mean to address questions of political inequality and environmental justice in a variety of languages? In June 2023, researchers from seven nations and a wide range of humanities disciplines met at the British School at Rome (BSR) to consider the role of languages and language-focused scholarship in the Anthropocene.**

Organised by researchers from University College London, CAPAS, the University of Bologna, Sapienza University Rome and Roma Tre University, the conference brought together scholars of literature and culture, anthropologists, human geographers, political theorists, philosophers and theologians. Discussions focused on the relation between human multilingualism, situated practice and the translatability of more-than-human communities and temporalities. Speakers called for methodological pluralism and versatile approaches that can query Anthropocene discourse from the position of its least privileged and most vulnerable designations.

Environmental violence unfolds globally but unevenly across self-perceived centres and peripheries of political, economic and cultural power. It cements and exacerbates century-old patterns of imperial and colonial exploitation. How can we articulate these inequalities and hope to transcend them? Anthropocene discourse foregrounds universality, in ways that risk to marginalise or silence vulnerable communities. Against this trend, our symposium sought to create a space for the collective

re-thinking of cultural and linguistic difference, amidst the fundamental unpredictability of post-holocene societies and ecologies.

The conference was jointly funded by the UCL Cities Partnerships Programme in Rome and CAPAS, with administrative and logistic support from the BSR. Plenary and keynote speakers included Lara Choksey, Michael Dunn, Daniel Finch Race, Robert Folger, Lydia Gibson, Flurina Gradin, Ursula K. Heise, Tommy Lynch, Florian Mussgnug, Mads Rosendahl Thomsen, Stephen Shapiro, Jenny Stümer, Pieter Vermeulen and Silvia Vittonatto. ●





#SCIENCE  
APOCALYPSE

# DOING THEORY AT THE END OF THE WORLD PART I: PARANOIA

Workshop report by Robert Kirsch, Emily Ray & Jenny Stümer

On 29 June 2023, CAPAS Research Area Coordinator Jenny Stümer and visiting Fellows, Emily Ray and Robert Kirsch, hosted a one-day workshop on doing theory in an apocalyptic register, or, as the title put forward, at ‘the end of the world’. A key motivation for coming together in this way was a lingering question about what it means or can mean to theorize in the context of world-changing and potentially world-ending shifts taking place and to cast light on the role of academic thinking in confronting those fissures and changes. We were interested in exploring the relationship between different disciplines as well as opportunities and limitations of transdisciplinary encounters. Most importantly, this workshop was meant to initiate a conversation about how we come together as scholars and humans, and how we talk to each other in the emerging field of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies. Put simply, the workshop provided an opportunity to reflect on what this field could be and *do*.

To get us started, we chose Eve Sedgwick’s “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or: You’re so Paranoid You Probably Think This Essay is About You” as key reference. The workshop investigated what it means to read in a paranoid style, and interrogated the stakes of theory in a world that is increasingly marked by environmental and social degradation, political tensions, and myriad forms of collective and individual anxiety. Our aim was to start a long overdue exchange about forging dynamic

intellectual pathways (forward, backward, and sideways) in, through, and after the end of the world.

While all participants acknowledged the value and need of paranoid styles and thorough analytical investigation, participants also explored productive ways to expand paranoid theorizing, debating the potentials of generative, messy, reparative thinking as a way to attempt to untie the crusty knots of a more or less tidy, but also self-referential and paranoid theorizing that struck us as fatigued and increasingly unequipped to take account of what it means/has meant/could mean to find oneself in the cloudy middle of a world-breaking shift.

The valence of the (post)apocalypse was especially evident when discussing how paranoid reading insists that there cannot be any bad surprises. The apocalyptic horizon, in many ways, demands the radical contingency of absolute surprise, good or bad. Yet reparative reading is not a panacea, and the workshop explored the tensions of reparative and paranoid readings. It also provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on



What does it mean to theorize in the context of world-changing and potentially world-ending shifts taking place and to cast light on the role of academic thinking in confronting those fissures and changes? CAPAS Research Area Coordinator **Jenny Stümer** and visiting Fellows, **Emily Ray** and **Robert Kirsch**, hosted a one-day workshop on doing theory in an apocalyptic register.

how intellectual life in a paranoid “digital claustroom,” to use Amber Trotter’s term, prevents a generative or reparative interiority of theorizing.

The apocalyptic moment asks that theory be both generative and paranoid when needed, and for its theorists to internalize the same. The workshop likewise tackled the persistent imposed division between “theory” and “the real world” which is evident in Povinelli’s work addressing the demand that theory take a normative position and put forward a prescription for whatever problems it addresses itself to.

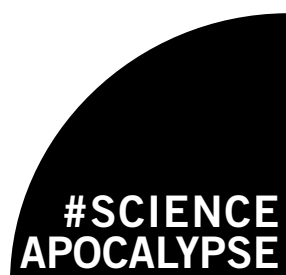
**Theory at the end  
of the world benefits from  
a level of playfulness  
that avoids ultimate mastery over  
a subject  
or problem.**

Apocalyptic- and postapocalyptic studies make a particularly suitable topic for wrestling with the work of theory since very often those problems, crises, and moments considered apocalyptic defy ready-made

solutions. Theory at the end of the world benefits from a level of playfulness that avoids ultimate mastery over a subject or problem, and sometimes embraces opacity and complexity rather than attempt to overcome them. Studying, thinking about, and approaching apocalyptic studies in this way is a rich terrain for critical thinking and for theory to turn both outward and inward.

As Walter Benjamin has long put it, the fact “that ‘things just go on’ is the catastrophe”. Apocalypse in this sense requires a different approach to thinking and acting, to political consciousness and academic practice, proposing an enormous challenge. Theorizing in particular is a critical and valuable exercise in interrogating deeply held beliefs and assumptions about what theory is and does, and requires a reckoning with the perceived gap between thinking and action.

The title of the workshop speaks to this as “doing” theory, understanding theorizing as strategy, method, and ultimately action. The workshop provided a foundation for further inquiry into what theorizing apocalypse means, how theory works in a transdisciplinary environment, and how to work and live with the complexities that theory raises in the face of urgent and distant concerns. ●



## ON WORLDMAKING AND THE (POST-)APOCALYPSE

Workshop report by Mia M. Bennett

On Tuesday, July 4, 2023 the Joint Workshop of the Heidelberg Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies (CAPAS) and the Joint Center for Advanced Studies “Worldmaking from a Global Perspective: A Dialogue with China” was held at CAPAS. To start off the sunny morning, Barbara Mittler (Worldmaking) & Robert Folger (CAPAS) introduced their respective centres and aims for the workshop, which was organized to create an opportunity for members of the two centres to get to know one another and discuss their research.





After the introduction, the first of three panels kicked off. The opening session, chaired by CAPAS member Rolf Scheuermann, focused on the timely topic of “Catastrophic Diseases”. Chen Hao (Pe-

king University/Worldmaking Fellow) shared his presentation titled, “Non-human Animals in a Human Pandemic: Entangled Histories.” His wide-ranging talk considered the multispecies ecologies of the Covid-19 pandemic with attention to the interconnectivities between

humans and non-human animals. While a part of collective memory of the pandemic prioritizes the human death toll, Chen reminded us of how other animals such as minks and deer also suffered, while reflecting on ways that wider ecologies can recover together.

*“It was a rich workshop and I particularly liked how diverse and yet complementary the presentations were. It seems like a rare experience to learn about alien life forms and late nineteenth-century Chinese literature during the same event and not end up thinking that the organizers have lost their marbles. In the end, it all nicely came together under the “apocalyptic” umbrella of the CAPAS. “*

**Matthias Schumann**, Joint Center for Advanced Studies “Worldmaking from a Global Perspective: A Dialogue with China”

*“For me, this workshop is an unforgettable experience to gain intersecting perspectives on how science and technology are posited from humanistic viewpoints. Also, the presented topics of research show depth in their historical awareness, not only about historiographical studies but also a prospective vision to enlighten the future.”*

**Meng Xia**, Fellow, Joint Center for Advanced Studies “Worldmaking from a Global Perspective”

Next, Patricia Murrieta-Flores (Lancaster University/CAPAS Fellow) offered insights into previous epidemics that ravaged Central and South America following the arrival of Europeans in her talk called, “Mesoamerican Apocalypse: A Large Scale Analysis of the Indigenous Perspective on the Sixteenth-Century Epidemics of Colonial Mexico.” Integrating methods from the digital humanities, computer science and GIS, Murrieta-Flores painstakingly brought to life how diseases such as smallpox took a major toll on the millions of people living in colonial Mexico, centred on Tenochtitlán (present-day Mexico City). Taken together, the talks demonstrated how new encounters between species and peoples can have deadly consequences while reshaping the future of society and ecology in unexpected ways.

#SCIENCE  
APOCALYPSE

# NUCLEAR GHOSTS

Workshop report by Jenny Stümer

Bringing a long and interesting semester to an 'end', I organised (with exceptional support from Theresa Meerwarth) a workshop on nuclear ghosts from 25 - 27 July 2023. The workshop developed out of a special issue for *Apocalyptica*, which I am currently editing and which initially emerged as a response to the latest resurgence of interest in nuclear politics (and anxieties!) in the context of the War in Ukraine.

Negotiating a variety of fantasies, speculations, and suppositions about 'the end of the world', nuclear politics dominated the post-Cold War years, but have since fallen into a curious mode of collective forgetting. Nuclear politics, it seems, are treated as something of the past and something that does not ordinarily concern "us", and now only newly concerns "us" as a kind of "haunting from the future" (Schwab 2020) or a peculiar form of "retro-anxiety" to quote workshop participant Marisa Franz.

This sentiment is remarkable, given the ongoing repercussions of previous nuclear events, the enduring perpetuation of nuclear testing, and the ever-emerging entanglements, in [Karen Barads \(2007\)](#) sense, between nuclear violence and ongoing assaults of colonialism, racial capitalism, sexism, militarism, climate injustice and so on.

**"The derealization of  
the 'Other' means that it is  
neither alive nor dead,  
but interminably  
spectral."**

*Judith Butler, Precarious Life*

In fact, it appears that there is a friction between nuclear anticipation and nuclear practices, and that this friction is ripe for

a different kind of conversation, while also gearing towards something amiss in familiar fantasies about the end of the world or ends of worlds in the context of nuclear threat.

In this sense, the pressing forward of nuclear apprehensions in recent years is symptomatic of what [Avery Gordon \(1997\)](#) identifies as "ghostly matters" or a particular idea of haunting that allows us to "think through repressed forms of violence that bring 'something to be done' in the present." It beckons the question of what kind of worlds and what kind of endings become imaginable through the lens of nuclear threat – and vice versa, what worlds and endings are rendered unimaginable, inconsequential, or ghosted.

Bringing together scholars from decolonial, feminist and Anthropocene studies, the workshop provided an opportunity to challenge the systematic silencing of (anti) nuclear debates, theorizing the unfinished business of nuclear disaster and positing a meaningful politics of re-membering – both in terms of memory and piecing together the world – nuclear catastrophe and trauma, also in their intersecting forces with other ongoing structures of violence and oppression.

Steered by the keenly incisive, tremendously energizing, and thought-provoking keynotes by Gabriele Schwab, who recently wrote



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a much-debated and spear-heading book on *Radioactive Ghosts*, and Karen Barad, whose work on quantum physics and nuclear entanglements has been nothing short of ground-breaking and field-shifting in the humanities and beyond, particularly with regards to debates about nuclear violence and end-of-world-politics, participants were concerned with the formation of nuclear imaginaries and their material reconfiguration of individual and collective experience. They were concerned with the emergence of haunted landscapes and troubled subjectivities and they grappled with the allocation of agency, the identification of political intention, the acknowledgement of historical complexity and claims of ethical accountability, rethinking scales of apocalypse and considering the cultural, material, and ethical implications of radioactivity as everyday familiarity, as structure of feeling, as political injustice, and intimate apocalypse.

Working at the intersection between nuclear politics and decolonization, Jessica Hurley, Lisa Yoneyama, Annelise Roberts and Roxanne Panchasi discussed the many entanglements between colonial power and nuclear assault in the Pacific, Japan, Canada, Australia and the Sahara, highlight-

ing that these forms of violence had never in fact been separate forces and exploring the many modes of living on, connecting, returning and “co-conjuring” provoked by these histories. Katherine Guinness, Marisa Franz and Sonali Huria shed new light on nuclear experiences, uncovering the intricacies of nuclear intimacies in the thick of the everyday and exploring the ghostly through media, writing, art, and activism. Melanie LeTouze and Anaïs Tondeur further gave invaluable insights into the myriad ways in which their artistic practices are uniquely concerned and often enmeshed with nuclear pasts and mythologies. These presentations encouraged lively and enduring conversations among participants, culminating in a rich group discussion about the many intersections between nuclear ghosts and apocalypse at the close of the workshop.

In this way, the workshop approached haunting as something that “registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by social violence” (Gordon 1997) as well as the impacts felt in everyday life where ghostly matters incite “the something to be done,” as a form of historical materialism.

●●● **read more online**  
capas.uni-heidelberg.de



Photo: Brad Evans

#ART  
APOCALYPSE

## LEAVING TRACES

# D\_\_ANCE FOR THE DISAPPEARED

by Chantal Meza

The piece “D\_\_ance for the disappeared”, inspired by Gil Anidjar’s essay “D\_\_nce”, is an extension of the [State of Disappearance project](#) directed by Professor Brad Evans (Director of the Centre for the Study of Violence, University of Bath, and former CAPAS fellow) and Visual Artist Chantal Meza. It aims to explore how interdisciplinary collaboration might allow us to deepen our understanding of the various ways in which Human Disappearance occurs.

Involving Visual Arts, Dance, Music and Critical Theory, this collaboration was created by Mexican painter Chantal Meza, German dance artists Catherine Guerin, Miriam Markl and Elisabeth Kaul, Greek composer John Psathas and American author Gil Anidjar. The Album “Corybas”; a melodic composition performed by the New Zealand Chamber Soloists, the New Zealand String Quartet, Stephen

Gosling & the New Zealand Trio, was chosen as musical accompaniment.

The piece was showcased at Karlstorbahnhof in Heidelberg, Germany. While the dancers performed, a painter attempted to capture the disappearing movements on canvas in real time. The visual effects were further intensified when, together with the painter, the dancers

Photo: Brad Evans



traced their own movements with paint, leaving traces of their otherwise fleeting motions on the canvas. The final artwork is held on permanent public display at Karlstorbahnhof.

The *State of Disappearance* project is a collaborative response that brings together the arts, humanities, social sciences, and wider advocacy groups on the subject of Human Disappearance. Launched in 2017, it asks what forced absence means for societies and how we might better understand such violence in the 21st Century. Events associated with the project included a one-day workshop hosted by CAPAS. ●

Photo: Brad Evans



Photo: Brad Evans





## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# PATRICIA MURRIETA-FLORES

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

**Patricia Murrieta-Flores:** I think it can have many different meanings depending what perspective you are asking the question from (i.e. whether it is defined from a theological perspective and the point of view of Christianity, or whether it is used as a conceptual framework). In the context of my own

work, I use the word to rather signal the forceful and violent 'end' of a worldview as it happened for many Mesoamerican cultures at the arrival of the Iberians to the Americas. Defining what is meant by 'the end' in archaeology or anthropology, however, is also complex. In Central Mexico,

vital parts of the cosmivision, such as beliefs, architecture, and social, economic, and political structures radically changed in the course of a few generations. In other areas, this change was experienced at varying degrees of intensity, often accompanied by a process of entanglement of local and European worldviews.

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

My fellowship is looking to untangle some of the questions that have remained unsolved about the different

epidemics that desolated the regions that became territories of New Spain during the sixteenth century, focusing on present-day Mexico and Guatemala. This includes carrying out research in a systematic way, exploring the recorded experiences of disease, epidemics, and the remedies used, in a very large historical corpus called *The Geographic Reports of New Spain*. I'm using a methodology we developed at Lancaster university called Geographical Text Analysis. This combines a series of Machine Learning and computational techniques that allow for the identification, recollection, and analysis of large volumes of text, focusing on geographical aspects. Although there is a substantial amount of research dealing with this history, a large scale analysis has never been possible. These computational approaches unprecedentedly make possible the analysis of thousands of records at once.

### What were the aspects at CAPAS that were most valuable for you?

For me, the fellowship was the experience of a lifetime. The contact with so many different people and disciplines, all with their own subjects and perspectives, opened pathways that I could have never imagined. One of the many aspects I'm grateful for was the engaging ways in which the centre facilitated the learning of new theories, readings, and perspectives. Another great bonus was the establishment of new projects, networks, colleagues, and friendships.



**Patricia Murrieta-Flores** is Professor and Co-Director of the Digital Humanities Centre at Lancaster University. Her interest lies in the application of technologies for Humanities and her primary research areas are the development of Artificial Intelligence for the study of Latin American colonial history and the Spatial Humanities.



#FELLOW  
APOCALYPSE

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# RICHARD WILMAN

**What were your first thoughts when you saw the cfp for the fellowship?**

**Richard Wilman:** It's now almost 2 years on from when I saw the call, so my recollections are getting a bit hazy, but I do remember being instantly struck by how good a fit it seemed to be with my interests in world-ending cosmic catastrophes. I'd had connections a few years earlier with university institutes of hazard and risk, but

my astronomical focus, and thinking about events millions of years in the future or elsewhere in the Universe, was a bit too exotic for their liking and too far-removed from their more everyday concerns with geographical or public health matters. So I decided to apply pretty much there and then, as I was also keen for a change of environment following the Covid chaos of the previous

18 months. I took a day of holiday just before the call deadline, shut myself away for a few hours and wrote the entire application in a single sitting. I was naturally delighted to receive the fellowship offer a few weeks later.

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

From the perspective of my project, an apocalypse is an existential cosmic event that brings an end to our current human civilization and sterilises most life on Earth. This could, for example, be the result of a large asteroid strike (akin to the one which wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago), a solar super-flare, a nearby super-

nova or gamma-ray burst, or a disturbance of the solar system by a passing star or dust cloud — the list is long, and it would be arrogant to think that we know all the ways in which it could happen. Whilst events of this magnitude are expected to hit Earth on timescales of millions or billions of years, the likely existence of billions of habitable planets in our own galaxy alone means that such apocalypses are happening literally all the time in these far away places, which is fascinating to contemplate. In fact, the incidence of such hazards could well be a decisive factor in shaping when and where life elsewhere in the Universe, for which the starting ingredients may be common, could evolve from simple biology and develop to become advanced intelligent life.

The question of life elsewhere in the Universe brings us to another meaning of the apocalypse, harking back to the Greek roots of the word as being 'the revelation of that which is hidden'. The latter is a very apt description of the current state of our search for life beyond Earth: within the next decade or so, we will start to establish, with astronomical observations, the extent to which potentially habitable planets are in fact inhabited. Given the potential for an imminent, revolutionary change in our worldview, this feels like a very apocalyptic time for the subject.

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

A new planet, the technology to get there and set up home, and above all, a purpose for doing so.



**Richard Wilman** is Associate Professor (Education) in the Department of Physics at Durham University, UK. He is interested in the apocalyptic threat posed by rare but devastating cosmic hazards, and the long-term (post-apocalyptic) future of life in space.

# CAPAS EVENTS

WEDNESDAY

11  
10

🕒 7.00 PM 📍 Karlstorkino, Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Cinema

## MELANCHOLIA

Directed by: Lars von Trier (2011)

Scientific commentary:  
Robert Folger (CAPAS  
Director)

Discussant: Alexander  
Pawlak (Editor and scientific  
journalist Physik Journal,  
Programme council  
Karlstorkino)



TUESDAY

31  
10

🕒 11.15 AM – 12.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität,  
Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “TOWARD A DRACULA URBANISM: SMART CITY MANIA”

Public Lecture by David Wilson (University of Illinois at Urbana-  
Champaign, US).

TUESDAY

07  
11

🕒 11.15 AM – 12.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität,  
Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “ON LOVING IMAGES MORE THAN THE WORLD”

Public Lecture by Vincent Bruyère (Emory University, US).



TUESDAY

14  
11

🕒 6.30 PM – 8.00 PM 📍 Neue Universität,  
Lecture Hall 13, Heidelberg

Distinguished Lecture

## “BETWEEN DENIALISM AND APOCALYPTIC THOUGHT: FACING CLIMATE CHANGE”

The general lack or the slow pace of urgent human action on climate change stands in particular contrast to our growing knowledge of planetary environmental crises. This has sometimes led to apocalyptic forms of thinking in the humanities. In his distinguished lecture Dipesh Chakrabarty (University of Chicago, US) will use such thinking as its starting for exploring other possible human meanings of this seeming inaction.

Digital stream on <https://www.youtube.com/@CAPASHeidelberg>



TUESDAY

21  
11

🕒 11.15 AM – 12.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität,  
Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “APOCALYPTIC ORIENTALISM AND NARRATIVES OF WESTERN DECLINE”

Public Lecture by Jana Cattien (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands).

16-26  
11

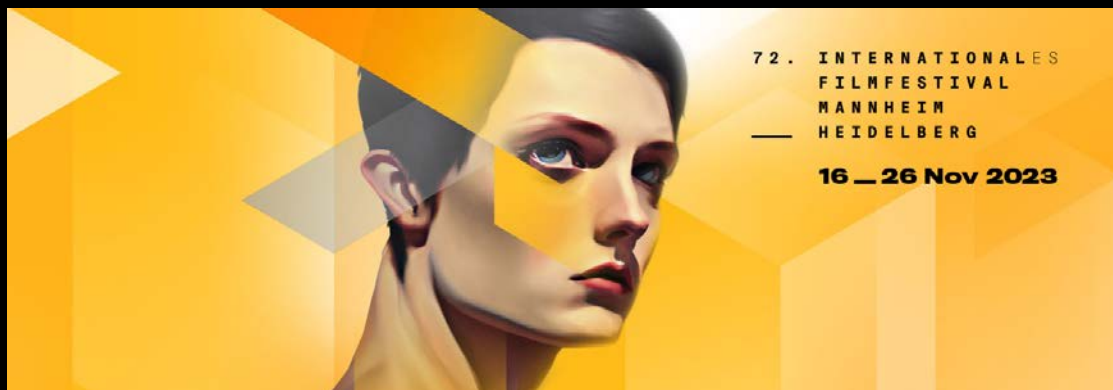
🕒 tba 📍 tba

IFFMH – International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg

## CAPAS PRESENTS: APOCALYPTIC IMAGINARIES

Films and dates are to be announced in October.

Scientific commentary: Robert Folger (CAPAS Director), N.N.



TUESDAY

28  
11

🕒 11.15 AM – 12.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität,  
Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “SURVIVAL BY DESIGN: DESERT ARCHITECTURE AT THE END OF THE WORLD”

Public Lecture by Pamela Karimi (University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, US).

TUESDAY

05  
12

🕒 11.15 AM – 12.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität,  
Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “APOCALYPTIC FRAMES: IMAGINING CRISES AND ITS AFTERMATH IN THE INTERWAR SOUTH ASIA”

Public Lecture by Prabhat Kumar (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi).

THUR-SUN

14-17  
12

📍 National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City  
Exhibition Opening

## IMAGINAR EL FIN DE LOS TIEMPOS: HISTORIAS DE ANIQUILACIÓN, APOCALIPSIS Y EXTINCIÓN

The Exhibition “Imaginar el fin de los tiempos: historias de aniquilación, apocalipsis y extinción” (Freely translated: *Imagining the end times: stories of annihilation, apocalypse and extinction*) is shown in the temporary gallery of the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.



Courtesy of the secretary of culture, the National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico.

The exhibition, curated by affiliated researcher and former CAPAS fellow Adolfo F. Mantilla Osornio, was developed as part of a collaboration between Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) and CAPAS. Almost 160 visual examples, drawn from a wide range of time periods, depict narratives of world endings across various world conceptions.

In the opening week (14.12.-17.12.23), an academic program is organised by CAPAS and Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH, National Institute of Anthropology and History). More information will follow soon.



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WINTER  
2023/24

KARLSTOR-  
KINO

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SCIENTIFIC  
COMMENTARY  
WITH  
EACH FILM

# APOCALYPTIC CINEMA

TICKET-INFO



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CAPAS PRESENTS:  
APOCALYPTIC IMAGINARIES

SILENT MOVIE SPECIAL WITH LIVE MUSIC BY GRAMM ART PROJECT

17 01 | 6 PM

THE END OF THE WORLD

8 PM

THE PLAGUE IN FLORENCE

DOUBLE FEATURE: DECOLONIZING PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

07 02 | 6 PM

AFRICAN APOCALYPSE

8 PM

HEART OF DARKNESS



#SCIENCE  
APOCALYPSE

# DIS:CONNECTIONS IN THE GLOBAL PUBLIC HUMANITIES

Workshop report by 25Humans

**Where in the world are the public humanities? At the July 3rd workshop at Käte Hamburger Kolleg global dis:connect at LMU München, the question of what it means to think about the public humanities in a global context stood front and center. Organized by former gd:c researcher Anna Sophia Nübling and the humanities advocacy group 25Humans, the day-long workshop featured concentrated discussions guided by impulse presentations from scholars at the forefront of the humanities' public role.**

Public humanities, an effort to connect humanities research with the needs of a wide array of potential publics, appears to be an increasingly necessary perspective for the humanities disciplines. The workshop's organizers and participants understood this to be a fundamental issue: it began with a session attempting to make sense of the global challenges facing the humanities. Premesh Lalu, founding director of the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape, and Sarah Dillon, Professor of English and Public Humanities at the University of Cambridge, set out some of these challenges and opened them to wide discussion. In a second

session, CAPAS's own Eva-Maria Bergdolt and Martin Puchner, Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard, set out some more concrete ways in which humanities knowledge and public concerns intersect in the contemporary. The digital humanities' potentials were the subject of the third section of the day, starting off with an input from Gimena del Rio Riande from the University of Buenos Aires. The workshop was concluded with "perspectives from below" presented by Inéz-Maria Wellner (25Humans), addressing how junior scholars and those speaking from various places outside of academia relate to the humanities.

In the evening, gd:c-director Roland Wenzlhuemer and Sarah Dillon shared the stage for a public discussion of the global public humanities. Open-ended and work-oriented, the workshop was just a beginning of discussions around the place and work of the public humanities both in the context of the KHK system and beyond. ●

## THE AUTHORS

25Humans is a global network for early-career humanities researchers and advocacy group organized by Inéz-Maria Wellner, Anne von Petersdorff, Tim Lanzendörfer, Canan Hastik, and Tessa Gengnagel. [25humans.org](https://25humans.org)



#PUBLIC  
APOCALYPSE

# OUR UNIVERSE AND ITS ENDS

## SCIENCE COMMUNICATION ON ASTRONOMY, ASTEROIDS, AND APOCALYPSES

Although they were not an astronomical conjunction, three significant events did converge in the summer of 2023. These events might not be cosmological in scale, but nevertheless led to a diverse combination of creative science communication activities on the universe, our planet, and astronomical apocalyptic threats. The three events were: the year of science 2023 based on the theme “our universe”, announced by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF); the UN-approved campaign for International Asteroid Day on June 30; and the continuation of the Apocalyptic Boardgame Day in Heidelberg.

CAPAS partnered with Haus der Astronomie (House of Astronomy) in Heidelberg to organize a complete week with a series of science communication events.

The BMBF’s decision to dedicate this annual year of science in Germany to “our universe” reflects a focus on the astronomical sciences, yet it is also meant to allow for broader e.g. philosophical perspectives or activities around environmental sciences. Quite fittingly, two CAPAS fellows in the summer semester 2023 – Duane Hamacher and Richard Wilman – worked explicitly at the intersection of this topical area and the surrounding scientific per-

spectives. Both of their research focuses dealt with apocalyptic astronomical phenomena and threats, especially comets and meteors. Additionally, International Asteroid Day, held annually on 30th of June each year, also coincided with the summer semester. This event was instigated in 2015 as a UN-approved campaign to raise public awareness of the hazards that asteroid impacts may pose. As part of the campaign, organizations around the globe organize science communication events on that day. The date June 30th was chosen because it is the anniversary of the Tunguska impact of 30th June 1908 – the largest impact of modern times, which destroyed over 2000 sq. kilometres of Siberian forest.

On this occasion, CAPAS partnered with Haus der Astronomie (House of Astronomy) in Heidelberg, the joint outreach institution of the various astronomy-related research institutes in Heidelberg, to organize a complete week around June 30 with a series of science communication events. CAPAS fellow Richard Wilman and



Heidelberg Geologist Mario Trieloff kicked off Asteroid Week with public talks on meteorite impacts and space risk.

During the Asteroid Week, CAPAS brought together astronomers and apocalypse scholars, wine and science, researchers and the public, and a wide range of perspectives and discussions.

One of the highlights of Asteroid Week was the meteorite wine tasting and film screening: The Domaine du Météore winery in southern France got its name from a local peculiarity: one of its vineyards is located in a round depression 200 metres in diameter that resembles an impact crater. Until recently, the claim of a meteorite impact was used only for marketing pur-

poses by the winery, without ever actually being confirmed. But in 2022 scientists led by cosmochemist Prof. Frank Brenker from Goethe University in Frankfurt conducted rock and soil analyses and confirmed that the crater was once actually formed by the impact of an iron-nickel meteorite. When this becomes officially confirmed, it will become the 42nd officially recognised impact crater in Europe, and the 191st worldwide. For this event, we savoured two wines from this winery, accompanied by talks from Frank Brenker and CAPAS colleague Michael Dunn.



This culinary approach was followed by a visual one. A special edition of the CAPAS Apocalyptic Cinema was arranged in order to screen Werner Herzog and Clive Oppenheimer's film "Fireball: Visitors From Darker Worlds". The film "takes viewers on an extraordinary journey to discover how shooting stars, meteorites and deep impacts have focused the human imagination on other realms and worlds, and on our past and our future." We were glad that Clive Oppenheimer followed our invitation for a live discussion after the movie together with CAPAS fellow Duane Hamacher.



Another highlight of the week were the activities coordinated by Haus der Astronomie, such as a presentation by Richard Moissl, head of European Space Agency's Planetary Defence Office. One of the activities was reaching a very different target group. Carolin Liefke, Natalie Fischer, and Esther Kolar organized a kids and family event. Children and parents could explore the world of asteroids and comets in a planetarium. They could also do practical experiments which allowed the youngest participants to try for themselves what happens when large chunks hit other celestial bodies: Impact craters are formed!



#PUBLIC  
APOCALYPSE

# SUMMER OPEN-AIR 2023 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 third summer in a row.

The open-air opened with the film “Beasts of the Southern Wild”, with a scientific commentary by Dr Jenny Stümer, Research Coordinator at CAPAS, about climate grief, Hurricane Katrina, and the meaning of resilient community. The film by Benh Zeitlin combines visions of doom with spirited courage and portrays a community exposed to uncontrollable nature.







As part of the roadshow 'Universe on Tour - Lights out! Stars on!' for the BMBF Science Year 2023 'Our Universe', the screening of "When Worlds Collide" was set for July 21. The film is about a group of chosen people being shipped to another planet in a rocket in order to ensure the survival of mankind. Dr Richard Wilman, an astrophysicist at Durham University (United Kingdom) and a CAPAS fellow, talked about cosmic threats; his research project at CAPAS, and the depiction of human nature through different reactions to a planetary catastrophe in the film.

On July 28, CAPAS screened the German-Catalan science fiction production "Eva" by Kike Maíllo. In this film, set in 2043, robots have long lived in harmony with humans. Commentator Prof. Dr. Ullrich Köthe from the Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science discussed with the audience to which extent robots should develop an emotional memory. He commented on emotions, AI, ethics, and dilemmata in these realms.



For Stanley Kubrick's classic "Dr. Strangelove: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb", an overwhelming amount of 140 people showed up. The film was commented on by our guest lecturer Dr Christoph Pistner, division head of Nuclear Engineering and Facility Safety at the Öko-Institut e.V. Darmstadt. He talked about nuclear winter as well as weapons and deterrence of nuclear threats. Together with Robert Folger, he answered questions on the post-apocalypse and nuclear ghosts.



#PUBLIC  
APOCALYPSE

# DESTROYER OF WORLDS

Film Review by Theresa Meerwarth

Just a few days after the anniversary of the Trinity Test, the first ever explosion of an atomic weapon, Christopher Nolan's star-studded Hollywood movie *Oppenheimer* was released in cinemas. The film combines elements of biopic, spy movie and Cold War thriller, and explores the trajectory of the "father of the atomic bomb", Julius Robert Oppenheimer.

In order to create separate perspectives, the film is narrated along two storylines. "Fusion", filmed in black and white, follows the antagonist Lewis Strauss played by Robert Downey Jr. "Fission", shot in color, centers around the hearing that ends up with the suspension of Oppenheimer's security clearance and tracks Oppenheimer's earlier career in physics until he, as director of the Los Alamos laboratories, becomes the leading scientist to build the atomic bomb.

Oppenheimer's story climaxes in the Trinity Test, the first detonation of an atomic weapon. Observing the audience's reactions while watching *Oppenheimer* in the movie theater was very telling of the cinematography; viewers were riveted to their seats and shared in the excitement of Oppenheimer's fellow scientists as Nolan managed to mesmerize his audience with anxiety

inducing visual effects. The epic cinematography of the explosion scene exemplifies the use of an aesthetic of the "nuclear sublime": It leaves the audience with a mixture of awe and horror and invokes a particular fascination with the bomb and admiration for the responsible scientists. Tension is also effectively created by the film's soundtrack and other epic audio-effects: The overwhelming noise of the explosion is followed by a long silence during which one only hears the sound of excited, pulsating heartbeats and then, finally, Cillian Murphy's Oppenheimer repeats the now infamous quote of the *Bhagavad Gita*: "Now I am become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds". In keeping with this quote, the film invokes apocalyptic imaginaries of extinction. Mankind – with an emphasis on *man* – has now created a weapon deadly enough to destroy the human species itself.



Watching *Oppenheimer* through a critical lens, the omissions and misrepresentations are more interesting than the plot itself: While all efforts are made to

achieve an authentic portrayal of historic dates, places and the science behind the process of building the atomic bomb, the film pays no attention to the representation of the accomplished female scientists working within the Manhattan Project and shows

other female characters through Oppenheimer's male gaze as hysterical drunks, objects of his desire or almost invisible helpers. The advances in uranium mining are symbolized through miraculously appearing marbles that are repeatedly filled in a glass bowl, a misrepresentation that shows a total disregard of the history of uranium mining in Africa. Furthermore, the film is oblivious to the colonizing practices of the Manhattan Project and consequently erases the story of indigenous peoples from the plot, like the Navajo Nation. The production of the first atomic bombs has left Navajo territories contaminated and their communities faced with high levels of health damages, a legacy of the Manhattan Project the film doesn't show. In addition to this omission, the cinematography serves to repeat the colonial trope of *terra nullius*, "unoccupied land", depicting the home of first nations annexed for the laboratories as wide and empty landscape in "the middle of nowhere".



●●● **read more online**

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#FELLOW  
APOCALYPSE

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT JULIET SIMPSON

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

**Juliet Simpson:** I was very attracted by the unique aspects of the Fellowships' thematic focus, as well as the wonderful opportunities to develop new angles on my research

interests in a richly transdisciplinary community of debate and exchange. The call came at just the right moment for my current research, offering the scope and space to build on my international project (scholarly exhibition and research publi-



**Juliet Simpson** is Full Professor of Art History (Modern and Contemporary), Chair of Cultural Memory and Research Director for the Centre for Arts, Memory and Communities at Coventry University, UK. She is a specialist in long nineteenth- and early twentieth-century art and visual culture.

cations) on *Gothic Modern, 1875-1925: Edvard Munch to Käthe Kollwitz* with Ate-neum-FNG (Helsinki), the Alte Nationalgalerie in Berlin and the Oslo Nationalmuseum (2024-25). The CAPAS Fellowship was the galvanic stimulus for expanding the core conceptual enquiry linked to the final stages of this collaborative project. I saw it as my opportunity to tackle the bigger question of meanings of Apocalypse and Revelation in the art and visual cultures of the early twentieth century, particularly in the dislocations following 1918.

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

The study of Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic worldviews is of pivotal significance to opening new frameworks and questions

about cultural production – its meaning and value across geo-political, cultural, temporal and spatial contexts of difference, beyond cultural binaries, linear temporalities of 'modernity' and narrowly rationalist scientific or utopian world-views of 'progress'. With regards to the arts, art history and historical memory (my core fields), this offers specific opportunities, in particular, to rethink canonical paradigms and hierarchies of meaning which underpin constructs of Western art and culture. We can use a lens of 'end times' to re-situate such constructs from perspectives which open new narratives for how art and cultural production navigate and reveal fundamental arenas of struggle and human truth, beyond antagonistic structures – about difference, crises, death, revelation, endings and world-making.

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

(1) A grow-bag-incubator for seaweed production (climate crises-human disaster resilient post-apocalyptic food!). (2) Cave furniture: follow the example of the rock monasteries or Hermit Saints. (3) A capsule library (the re-invention of imagined worlds-communities must go on!)

**What are some of your favourite pop culture references to the (post)apocalypse?**

Ingmar Bergman's 1957 film, *The Seventh Seal* – an enduring, must-see classic which brings a uniquely brilliant medieval 'dance of death' imaginary into an iconic struggle for all time between love and death, darkness and light.

●●● **read more online**  
capas.uni-heidelberg.de

#PEOPLE  
APOCALYPSE

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# VISITING RESEARCHER

## LYN HAGAN

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

**Lyn Hagan:** My conception of the apocalypse is directly linked to a time 20 years ago when I was homeless in London. Though I have since gone on to achieve a measure of success and stability, I remember keenly what it felt like to be in



**Lyn Hagan** is a Newcastle based writer and artist.

‘survival’ mode – to be hungry and have nowhere to sleep. Society only notices and includes you when you contribute economically to its imagined progress. At some point, having believed whole-heartedly in space colonization and made artworks in relation to that, I realized that a regression or collapse is more likely. I accept it and through art and writing, prepare for it.

**What are you trying to achieve in your current project?**

Just before the invasion in Ukraine, I was given a three-year research grant

to install artworks in Chernobyl. These would have been GPS mapped for urban explorers to discover. It is no longer ethical, or even logistically possible to ride on someone else’s catastrophe and having been part of the Nuclear Ghosts seminar, I understand better the extended form of colonialism that artwork may have been perceived as. CAPAS has empowered me to recentre the work. It will now focus on making an archive of messages for a future (symbolic or actual) audience that will be stored both terrestrially and extra-terrestrially.

**What are the aspects you are looking forward to with respect to input from other disciplines, other perspectives, and the exchange with the fellows and people at CAPAS?**

I have heard talk of interdisciplinarity for many years now. Writing is the sketchbook for my art and I write for a few hours each day, and make an artwork every three years or so. Dialogue with astronomers, philosophers, critics and other writers and artists are the foundations of my writing, and so my work. CAPAS is the only place I have been to, apart from the European Graduate School, that fosters this kind of essential dialogue.

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

A gun and pack of sandwiches. ●

LECTURE  
SERIES  
WS 2023/24

TUESDAYS  
11.15 – 12.45

NEUE  
UNIVERSITÄT  
LECTURE HALL 14



# APOCALYPTIC THINKING

## IMAGINARIES AND MATERIALITY

31.10.

David Wilson  
Toward a Dracula Urbanism:  
Smart City Mania

7.11.

Vincent Bruyère  
On Loving Images  
More Than the World

14.11.

Dipesh Chakrabarty  
Distinguished Lecture  
Lecture Hall 13, 6:30 PM

21.11.

Jana Cattien  
Apocalyptic Orientalism and  
Narratives of Western Decline

28.11.

Pamela Karimi  
Survival by Design: Desert  
Architecture at the End of the World

5.12.

Prabhat Kumar  
Apocalyptic Frames: Imagining  
Crises and its Aftermath in the  
Interwar South Asia

9.1.

Susan Watkins  
Ageing, Apocalypse and Adaptation

16.1.

William Sherman  
Afghanistan, Apocalyptic  
Encounters, and the Making of  
the Early Modern World

23.1.

Katie Barclay  
Feeling Safe at the End of the World:  
Raising Early Modern Children

30.1.

Timo Storck  
Fear of breakdown: Psychoanalysis  
of time after the end of time

6.2.

Marcus Quent  
Apocalyptic Present(ism):  
Constructions of Time

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