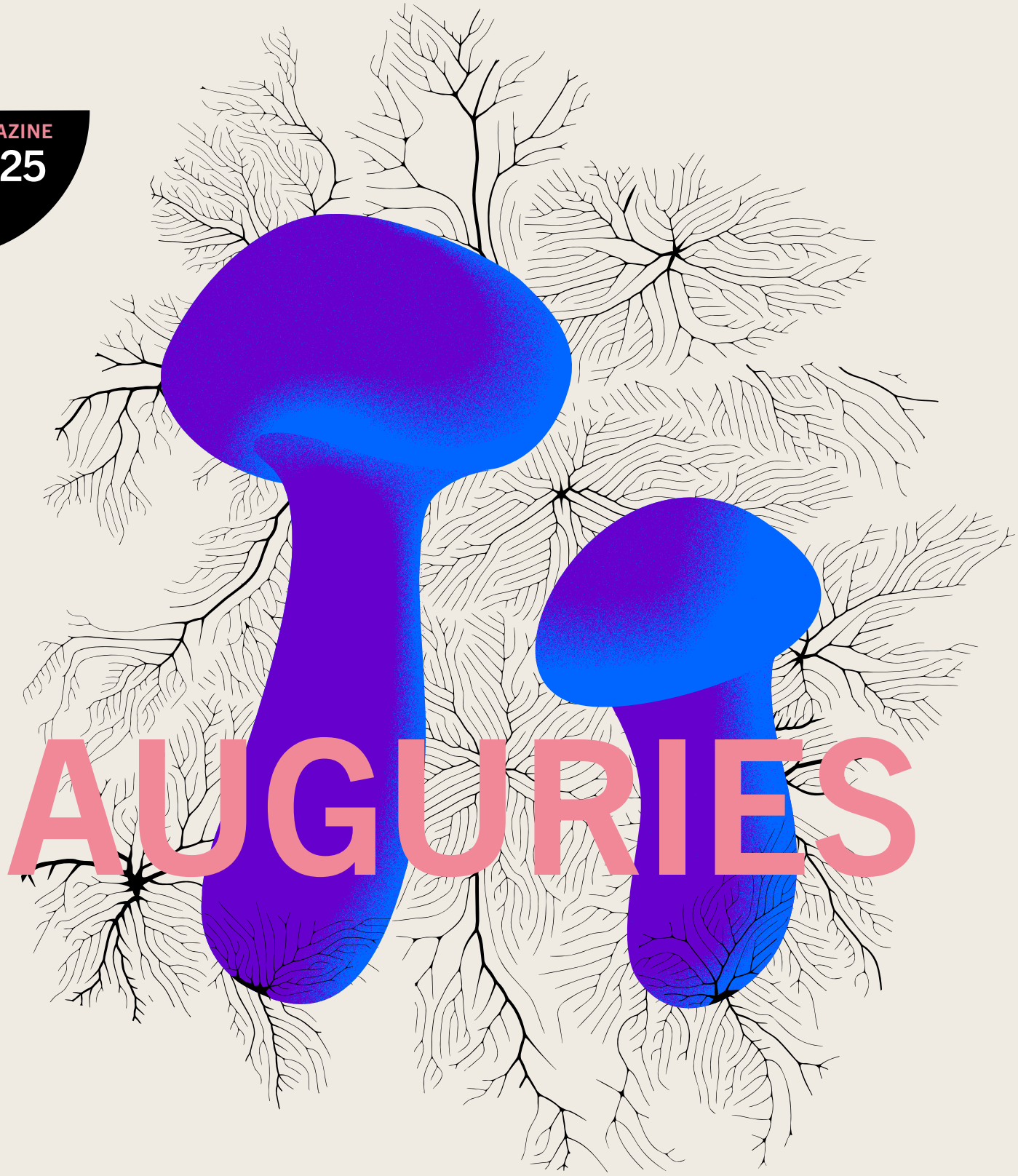
CAPAS

KÄTE HAMBURGER CENTRE
FOR APOCALYPTIC AND POST-APOCALYPTIC STUDIES

UNIVERSITÄT HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT SEIT 1386

MAGAZINE
2025



AUGURIES

Dear Readers

We are thrilled to open this edition with exciting news: the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies has been renewed for another four years! This means that our exploration of the many faces of the apocalypse will continue with renewed energy, curiosity, and collaboration.

With this new phase also comes a new editorial plan for the CAPAS magazine, which will now be published annually (for more frequent updates, you can subscribe to our newsletter at this link: https://www.capas.uni-heidelberg.de/en/outreach/newsletter). For the cover that will accompany the next four years, we have chosen fungi—organisms that flourish at the threshold between life and decay. Fungi break down what has ended, but in doing so, they make space for something new to emerge. In this way, they are a perfect emblem for apocalyptic thinking: endings are rarely absolute; they are also beginnings in disguise.

The title of this issue, Auguries, gestures towards another kind of threshold. An augury is a sign or omen—something in the present that hints at what the future might hold. The word originates in ancient Rome, where augurs were priests who interpreted the will of the gods by observing the flight of birds, the rustling of leaves, or other natural phenomena. The practice was rooted in the belief that the world speaks to us if we know how to listen. Today, "auguries" are often imagined as warnings of future trouble. Yet, like the apocalypse itself, they are not inherently harmful. An augury can point toward renewal as well as decline, toward beginnings as much as endings. It is an invitation to read the signals around us—and to imagine the many futures they might contain.

Inside, Jenny Stümer and Felicitas Loest open with "Apocalyptic Cycles: Four more years of CAPAS!," reflecting on our renewal and what lies ahead for CAPAS. We then introduce our new Academic Advisory Board, the group of scholars who will help guide the next chapter of our work, followed by an update on the new staff members who have recently joined the Centre. Alina Straub captures the spirit of the 2025 fellows in her portrait of the cohort, while Luis Pesce revisits our recent "Sustainability & Apocalypse" Alumni Conference, highlighting its global and interdisciplinary spirit.

From there, we move to the art world with Adolfo F. Mantilla's "Poetics of Anticipation," which takes us to Mexico City's Galeria Metropolitana, where artistic practice becomes a way to inhabit the tension between past, present, and future.

Verita Sriratana contributes "Shall We Dance? *Tomorrow and I*," a spectral/speculative review of Thai science fiction that reflects on necropolitics, gender, and the apocalyptic textures of everyday life in contemporary Thailand.

Laura Mendoza speaks with Robert Kirsch and Emily Ray in "The World in a Bunker," a conversation on prepping and Americanness as both practice and mindset.

Rejane de Souza Ferreira and Alejandra Bottinelli reflect on the 2nd Seminar "Poetics and Politics of the End," tracing a Latin American politics of the threshold that reimagines endings as spaces for critical and collective renewal, before Robert Folger closes the features section with "Game Over: Slow Apocalypse and Popular Culture," examining how the slow burn of catastrophe manifests in the stories we tell and the media we consume.

We hope this issue of Auguries invites you to read the signs with us—to think of the apocalypse not only as an ending,—but as an unfolding process in which renewal and radical imagination remain possible.

Warmly,
The CAPAS Editorial Team

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AT THE CENTRE

APOCALYPTIC CYCLES: FOUR MORE YEARS OF CAPAS!

by Jenny Stümer and Felicitas Loest

We are proud to announce that the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies is continuing its successful work in a second funding phase until February 2029. The funding was awarded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research based on a thorough evaluation of the centre that began in summer 2023 and culminated in February 2024 at an on-site audit by an international evaluating committee that confirmed CAPAS' outstanding work in building an internationally recognised and highly innovative centre for advanced studies in Heidelberg. After receiving the official funding note in December 2024, preparations for the second funding phase began, including the nomination of the new academic advisory board as well as the planning of the academic agenda and outreach programme for the next four years.

Our work in the second funding phase builds on the results of the past four years and continues to develop Apocalyptic Studies as an internationally visible, independent field of study. At the core of this aspiration lies an ex-

Detail from Koen Taselaar's "End, And" (2024), Jacquard woven tapestry, 350 × 1900 cm.

pansive engagement with the notion of *apocalyptic experience*, explicitly with a view to its temporal, spatial, and affective alignments. This central focus offers a multitude of new approaches, questions, and themes which shape the growing scholarship and creative practice at the centre.

New Approaches

Since the beginning of the first funding phase, our efforts have been dedicated to the comparative analysis of apocalyptic imaginaries. Our aim was to unpack how these imaginaries shape historical and present exposure to crisis, transformation, and rupture. In this second funding phase, we seek to develop these insights, specifically by engaging with the non-linear temporalities, distinct spatial constructions, and emergent affective dispositions of the apocalyptic we have repeatedly identified in our discussions.

The premise of an apocalyptic boundary object, which has helped us to contour the apocalypse as a form of cultural imaginary, both robust in meaning and interpreted differently

Detail from Koen Taselaar's "End, And" (2024), Jacquard woven tapestry, 350 × 1900 cm.

across communities, has led us to understand apocalypse as semantically and experientially charged—as something through which hyperobjects, in Timothy Morton's sense, appear real and tangible but also increasingly local and intimate. This insight has vast implications for a transdisciplinary analysis of apocalypse vis-à-vis its penchant for political and ideological articulation of 'the world' and for the identification of its varied emancipatory potentials.

Our application of 'apocalypse' is primarily interested in a nuanced and diversified confrontation with 'the end' which occupies collectives and individuals alike (often simultaneously) through the frames of discrete sensibilities, geographies, and histories. This lens is attentive to the widely different subjectivities, positionalities, and vulnerabilities emerging in the face of the (post)apocalypse or the many endings of our different worlds and times. As a method, apocalypse further puts these experiences into tension, offering novel opportunities to accentuate and converge a transdisciplinary engagement with the coordinates of worlding in the context of a newly emerging field.

Apocalyptic Studies

The focus on apocalyptic experience gathers the central concerns of our re-

search to date, including the anticipated and actual collapse of systems, the perspectives and expectations invoked by radical, catastrophic change, as well as the feelings, outlooks, and attitudes towards the aftermath of worlds and their real and imagined endings. In considering culturally and politically diverse socialities of lived rupture, apocalyptic experience is pivotal in bringing a critical politics of vulnerability and subjectivity to the critical discussion of the central risks of our time. While perhaps most acutely felt in the context of irreversible climate change, pending nuclear warfare, and uncertain ethics of emerging artificial intelligence, this line of inquiry involves not only questioning which constructions of subjectivity and experience have produced an increasingly apocalyptic world, but also discussing which practices of political, cultural, and scientific worlding are up to the challenges of today—or not.

In the wake of racial capitalism and global colonisation, we posit the loss of worlds and the experience of worldlessness as the central motifs of a habituated and destructive way of living.

We also draw attention to the various efforts and movements that tirelessly work against such forces, including those that are critical of futurity and progress, those that reflect on and potentially break with the legacies of violence, and those that question epistemological and ontological forms of de/worlding. The aim is to demonstrate how tensions between materiality, subjectivity, and power expand and challenge a previously taken-for-granted normative concept of the world, while simultaneously postulating far-reaching approaches to how these upheavals relate to established modes of knowledge production.

Annual Topics

In order to sharpen these tools, we are introducing annual topics in the coming four years: Starting with a consideration of *biopolitics* (2025), we will then focus the discussion on *subjectivity* (2026) and *vulnerability* (2027) before shifting the view to the prospects and constraints of *transformation* (2028). The four annual topics address key findings of the previous funding cycle. They also reflect central aspects of our current approach in an effort to simultaneously deepen and expand research in these areas through the purview of an apocalyptic prism.

As we reflect on the achievements and collaborations of the past phase, we look ahead with excitement and anticipation to the next four years of research and learning at CAPAS. As new questions emerge and urgent challenges continue to shape our world, we remain committed to fostering critical inquiry, inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue, and imaginative thinking. We are grateful to all who have contributed to the life of the centre and look forward to deepening these exchanges as we enter this new chapter together. ●

Jenny Stümer is Research Area Coordinator at CAPAS.
Felicitas Loest is Managing Director at CAPAS.

FACES OF CAPAS

NEW ACADEMIC ADVISORY BOARD

As we enter the second funding period of CAPAS, we are pleased to announce the formation of a new Academic Advisory Board. We extend our sincere gratitude to the members of the previous board for their invaluable guidance, support, and contributions throughout the first phase of our Centre's development. Their insights were instrumental in shaping the intellectual directions of CAPAS. At the same time, we warmly welcome the newly appointed members of the board, whose diverse expertise and perspectives will help us navigate the next stage of our research and outreach. We look forward to the continued exchange and collaboration that this renewed board will foster.

Meet our new members:

PROF. DR. MARÍA DEL PILAR BLANCO (CHAIR)

María del Pilar Blanco is Professor of Spanish American and Comparative Literature at the University of Oxford, where she also serves as Tutorial Fellow in Spanish at Trinity College. Her research and teaching explore the intersections of literature, science, and cultural memory in the Americas and beyond.

She is the author of *Ghost-Watching American Modernity* (2012), a study of spectral imagery in the cultural imagination of the Americas, and co-editor of two foundational collections on haunting and spectrality: *Popular Ghosts* (2010) and *The Spectralities Reader* (2013), both in collaboration with Esther Peeren. With Joanna Page, she also co-edited *Geopolitics, Culture, and the Scientific Imaginary in Latin America* (2020), which examines the entanglement of science and culture in Latin American thought.

Her scholarly work spans a wide range of topics, including Mexican fin-de-siècle popular science, Spanish American *modernismo*, spectrality studies, and Latinx cultural production.

PROF. DR. VOLKHARD KRECH

Volkhard Krech is Professor of Religious Studies at Ruhr University Bochum and Director of the Centre for Religious Studies (CERES), a leading hub for the academic study of religion in Europe. He serves as spokesperson of the Collaborative Research Centre 1475 *Metaphors of Religion*, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), and leads the Reinhart-Koselleck project *Theory and Empiricism of Religious Evolution (THERE)*. He also co-directs the interdisciplinary graduate program *RePliV*, which focuses on the governance of religious plurality. Krech previously directed the Käte Hamburger Kolleg *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe.*

His research centres on the theory and history of religion, globalisation and pluralisation, and the complex entanglements between religion, violence, and the arts. He is recognised for his integrative theoretical approach, which draws on systems theory, evolutionary theory, and semiotics to understand religion as a dynamic and communicative phenomenon. ●

Thomas Lemke is Professor of Sociology with a focus on *Biotechnology, Nature, and Society* at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Goethe University Frankfurt and Honorary Professor at the University of South Wales, Sydney. He is also the spokesperson for the DFG-funded *Fixing Futures. Technologies of Anticipation in Contemporary Societies* research training group and Principal Investigator of the ERC-funded CRYOSOCIETIES project, in which he explores how cryopreservation technologies shape our understanding of time, life, and possibility.

Drawing on interdisciplinary engagements with the work of Michel Foucault, Governmentality studies, Biopolitics, and New Materialisms, his research critically examines genetic and reproductive technologies, the governance of bodies and environments, and the emergence of a politics of suspended life. Lemke studied political science, sociology, and law in Frankfurt, Southampton, and Paris. He has held visiting positions at institutions including Goldsmiths, NYU, and Copenhagen Business School. ●

PROF. DR. THOMAS LEMKE

PROF. DR. KATE RIGBY

Kate Rigby holds the Alexander von Humboldt Professorship in Environmental Humanities at the University of Cologne, where she leads the MESH research hub, pioneering multidisciplinary environmental studies across the humanities. Originally from Australia, she has held foundational academic roles at Bath Spa University and Monash University, where she helped build the field of environmental humanities from its early national formation.

Rigby's scholarship spans literature, history, philosophy, and religion, with a strong emphasis on decolonial ecopoetics, multispecies perspectives, and disaster-focused environmental ethics. Her celebrated books—*Dancing with Disaster* (2015) and *Reclaiming Romanticism* (2020)—offer transformative frameworks for reading Romanticism through postcolonial and ecological lenses. Recognised internationally, she is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and a key figure in institutionalising environmental humanities scholarship. ●

Renata Salecl is a Slovenian philosopher, sociologist, and legal theorist. She holds the Professor of Psychology, Psychoanalysis & Law chair at Birkbeck College, University of London, and is a Senior Researcher at the Institute of Criminology, Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana. Her work interweaves law, psychoanalysis, and sociology to probe how concepts like choice, anxiety, and guilt shape legal practice and subjectivity. She has authored several influential books, including *The Spoils of Freedom* (1994), *(Per)versions of Love and Hate* (1998), *On Anxiety* (2004), and *Tyranny of Choice* (2010), which have been translated into 15 languages.

Salecl is widely invited as a visiting professor at institutions such as the London School of Economics, Cardozo School of Law (New York), King's College London, Duke University, and Humboldt University in Berlin. In 2010, she was honoured with the title Slovenian Woman Scientist of the Year by Slovenia's Ministry of Science. ●

PROF. DR. RENATA SALECL

FACES OF CAPAS

NEW AT CAPAS

We are pleased to welcome Eduardo Altheman and David Geng as new members of the CAPAS team. They bring fresh energy and expertise to the Centre's mission of fostering interdisciplinary dialogue around the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic. Their work will be central to CAPAS' evolving role as both a scholarly hub and a space for creative experimentation.

EDUARDO ALTHEMAN

After being a fellow in the 2024–2025 cohort, Eduardo Altheman C. Santos joins CAPAS as Events and Outreach Associate. With a background in critical theory, Eduardo is primarily responsible for coordinating the Centre's academic programming and supporting outreach initiatives. His research focuses on Marxism, authoritarianism, platform capitalism, neoliberal ideology, and the entanglements of technology, labour, and utopia/dystopia.

DAVID GENG

David Geng completed the M.A. Conference Interpreting program (working languages: Spanish and English) at the University of Heidelberg in September 2021. After working as an assistant researcher in the Department of German Language at the University of Dijon, he spent two and a half years as a translator, interpreter, and assistant to Ambassador Quiroga at the Embassy of Mexico in Berlin. Following this "apocalyptical" experience, he felt ready to return to beautiful Heidelberg and join CAPAS. He is currently responsible for Media and Outreach.

FACES OF CAPAS

MEET THE 2025 COHORT

by Alina Straub

Every year, a new group of thinkers, researchers, and creators joins CAPAS to explore the many faces of the apocalyptic. The 2025 cohort arrives with bold questions, unexpected connections, and a remarkable diversity of voices—from philosophy to film, climate science to mythology, political theory to performance. This year, their work revolved around the theme of *Biopolitics*, probing how life is managed, measured, contested, and governed in times of crisis. Together, they formed a temporary constellation of minds devoted to reimagining endings, transitions, and the strange, fertile space of the in-between. What follows is a glimpse into who they are and the journeys that brought them here.

SAHEED ADESUMBO BELLO

Saheed Adesumbo Bello holds a PhD in Theatre Arts from the University of Lagos, Nigeria, where he researched African narrative aesthetics at the intersection of film and literature in the postcolonial context. He is completing a second PhD in Philosophy at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, titled *Epistemology and Morality: A Decolonial Reading of the Oral Philosophy of Ọ̀rúnmìlà*. His interdisciplinary project draws from the Yorùbá Ifá tradition to challenge critiques of orality, decolonisation, and disciplinary boundaries in philosophy.

Bello has taught literary, performance, and cultural studies at the University of Lagos and held fellowships at the University of Bayreuth and SOAS University of London. At SOAS, he taught courses on African experience and global contexts while researching myths, spirituality, and philosophy in African cinema. He is currently developing a book with Routledge, *Africa's Fourth Cinema: A Yorùbá Ontology*, based on his work on film and philosophy.

JIM DONAGHEY

Jim Donaghey is a Research Fellow at Ulster University's Centre for Communication, Media and Cultural Studies, and was recently a Visiting Researcher at the University of Franche-Comté in France. His work explores the intersections of culture and politics across diverse global contexts—including Indonesia, Kosovo, and Western Europe—utilising participatory and creative methodologies.

An expert on punk and radical politics, Jim's research engages with themes such as post-conflict legacies, contested spaces, cultural repression, and transnational activism. His work has been published in multiple languages, and he has taught across a wide range of humanities disciplines at institutions including Ulster, Queen's University Belfast, Loughborough, and Oxford. His work has been translated and published in Indonesian, French, Dutch, German, Portuguese, and Polish.

Jim is widely connected in international scholarly networks and has been invited to speak at universities across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. He serves on the editorial boards of *Anarchist Studies* and *Punk & Post-Punk*, and is web editor of *AnarchistStudies. Blog*. ●

Ana Honnacker's work is centred around the current challenges of pluralist societies. Her research interests encompass environmental philosophy (the Anthropocene, ecological transformation), political philosophy (theories of democracy, science, and politics), as well as the philosophy of religion (humanism, religious pluralism).

From 2023 to 2025, she was Romano Guardini guest professor of philosophy of religion at the LMU Munich (2023–2025). She also held positions at the Hochschule für Philosophie München, the Forschungsinstitut für Philosophie Hannover, the Technical University of Darmstadt and the University of Münster. She is also a member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Religionsphilosophie and a founding member as well as part of the executive board of the German Pragmatism Network. Since 2008, she has been teaching regularly at German Universities (e.g. Münster, Hildesheim, Düsseldorf and Munich). Drawing mainly on the tradition of philosophical pragmatism, Ana Honnacker understands philosophy not only as an academic discipline but also as a critical tool for everyday life. Consequently, she is interested in and engaged in different forms of Public Philosophy. ●

ANA HONNACKER

SUZY KIM

Suzy Kim is a historian and author of *Among Women across Worlds: North Korea in the Global Cold War* (Cornell University Press, 2023) and *Everyday Life in the North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950* (Cornell University Press, 2013), which received the James Palais Book Prize from the Association for Asian Studies.

Her work has appeared in *positions: asia critique*, *Asia-Pacific Journal, Cross-Currents, Comparative Studies in Society and History, Gender & History, and the Journal of Korean Studies.*

She holds a PhD in History from the University of Chicago and teaches at Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick, USA, in the Department of Asian Languages and Cultures. She is a senior editor of the award-winning journal *positions: asia critique* and serves on the editorial boards of *Journal of Korean Studies* and *Yŏsŏng kwa yŏksa* (Women and History), the journal of the Korean Association of Women's History. As a public scholar, she has been an advocate for social justice with several advocacy organisations, including Amnesty International, the Truth Foundation, and Women Cross DMZ. ●

Wendy Larson is Professor Emerita of East Asian Languages and Literature at the University of Oregon. She earned her PhD in Oriental Languages from the University of California, Berkeley. Her research explores how Chinese writers and filmmakers engage with modernity, post-modernity, socialism, post-socialism, and globalisation.

Her recent publications include *Zhang Yimou: Globalization and the Subject of Culture* (Cambria Press, 2017) and *From Ah Q to Lei Feng: Freud and Revolutionary Spirit in 20th Century China* (Stanford UP, 2009). She has also translated Wang Meng's *Bolshevik Salute* (Washington UP, 1991) and co-edited *Gender in Motion: Divisions of Labor and Cultural Change in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2005). Her forthcoming monograph, *Cultural Optimism in Chinese Socialism and American Capitalism: Global Good Cheer*, will be published by Oxford University Press.

Prof. Larson has studied at Beijing University and Taiwan National University, and has held fellowships at prestigious institutions, including the University of Sydney, the National University of Singapore, East China Normal University, and the University of Aarhus, where she was a Fulbright Scholar. ●

WENDY LARSON

ROGER LUCKHURST

Roger Luckhurst specialises in the study of science fiction and the Gothic. He has published 10 monographs, including a study of J. G. Ballard (1998), *Cultural Histories of Telepathy* (2002), *Science Fiction* (2005), *Trauma* (2008), *The Mummy's Curse* (2011), book length studies of *The Shining* (2013) & *Alien* (2014), *Zombies* (2015), *Corridors* (2019) and an illustrated history of the Gothic (2021).

He was appointed professor in modern and contemporary literature in the Department of English, Theatre, and Creative Writing at Birkbeck, University of London, in 2008 and was distinguished visiting professor at Columbia University in 2016.

His future works include *A History of the Graveyard* (2025) and an edition of the minutes of the *Ghost Club* (2026). He has edited several Gothic classics for Oxford, including works by Stevenson, H. G. Wells, Stoker, Henry James and Rider Haggard. He has had an enduring interest in the representations of the apocalypse and dystopian fiction since his earliest published work on J. G. Ballard. ●

Alexander Prishchepov received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he focused on Land-Use Modelling and Remote Sensing of the Environment. He also completed the GIS Certificate and International Studies graduate programs at Oklahoma State University, as well as a postdoctoral position on land use modelling in Germany at IAMO.

His integrative research investigates the patterns, drivers, and consequences of land-cover change, with a focus on climate vulnerability, resilience, and adaptation. Emphasising agricultural dynamics, rural-urban transitions, and human impacts, he explores how environmental systems evolve under pressure. His work reveals the complex interlinkages between land-use change, climate shifts, and broader social and environmental processes.

His research is guided by key questions such as what factors contribute to the formation and transformation of landscapes under climate change, what the consequences of landscape and land-use transitions are for both the environment and society, what solutions exist to guide sustainable land-use development pathways, and which methods are most effective for monitoring and modelling landscapes across temporal scales. ●

ALEXANDER PRISHCHEPOV

JULIAN REID

Julian Reid is a political theorist, philosopher, and professor of International Relations, known for his advancement of the theory of biopolitics, contributions to postcolonial and post-structural thought, critique of liberalism, and deconstruction of resilience.

Educated in London, Amsterdam, and Lancaster, he has taught International Politics and International Relations at the Universities of London (SOAS and King's College), Sussex, and Lapland, where he has occupied the Chair in International Relations since 2010 and established the world's first Master's program in Global Biopolitics.

His recent publications include two monographs with David Chandler: *The Neoliberal Subject: Resilience, Adaptation, and Vulnerability* (2016) and *Becoming Indigenous: Governing Imaginaries in the Anthropocene* (2019). He has edited collections on *The Biopolitics of Development* (with Sandro Mezzadra and Ranabir Samaddar, 2013) and *Deleuze & Fascism* (with Brad Evans, 2013), in addition to the journal *Resilience: Policies, Practices and Discourses* (co-edited with David Chandler, Melinda Cooper, and Bruce Braun). ●

Lars de Wildt is an assistant professor in media and cultural industries at the Centre for Media and Journalism Studies, University of Groningen. He studies how videogames produce worldviews.

Examples are how media industries construct 'global' culture and how local audiences consume it; how Western game developers sold religion to secular audiences; how online platforms birth conspiracy theories; and how Western videogames adapt to Chinese players and policies.

His first book, *The Pop Theology of Videogames*, studied how Western game developers sold religion to secular audiences. His upcoming NWO Veni-funded project, *Reorienting Global Gaming*, examines how Western games are adapting to Chinese worldviews.

Lars was part of the AHRC-funded project *Everything Is Connected: Conspiracy Theories in the Age of the Internet*. He was previously a (visiting) researcher at the universities of Leuven, Heidelberg, Bremen, Tampere, Jyväskylä, Montréal, and Deakin. ●

LARS DE WILDT

Alina Straub is a research assistant at CAPAS.

Opening Workshop with CAPAS Fellows and Team, May 2025.

MEDIA SHELF

Each year, we invite our fellows to share cultural recommendations inspired by apocalyptic themes. Here's the 2025-cohort selection.

ALEXANDER

Drama/Documentary (Italy)
The Last Shepherd

Documentary (NorthMacedonia)
Honeyland

Film (Kazakhstan)
The Needle

ANA

Film
Wall·e

Novel
Milchzähne – Helene Bukowski

Music
K.I.Z – Hurra, diese Welt geht unter

JULIAN

Film
Melancholia – Lars von Trier

JIM

Film Series
Mad Max Universe

ROGER

Book
Private Rites – Julia Armfield

Novel
The End We Start From – Megan Hunter

TV Series (Season 1)
The Last of Us

LARS

Video Game
NieR: Automata

Video Game
Stray

Video Game
Tokyo Jungle

SAHEED

Music
Burna Boy – Another Story

WENDY

Film (China)
Red Sorghum

Film (China)
Happy Times

FIELD NOTES

REFLECTIONS FROM CAPAS' "SUSTAINABILITY & APOCALYPSE" ALUMNI CONFERENCE

by Luis Pesce

Participants of the Alumni Conference, January 2026.

From January 29 to 31, 2025, CAPAS hosted its first Alumni Conference, titled "Sustainability and Apocalypse." The event brought together former fellows, collaborators, and affiliated researchers from a wide range of disciplines to critically explore the intersection of sustainability discourses and end-of-the-world scenarios as part of the growing field of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies.

Prof. Dr. Christine Hentschel (Hamburg University) delivered the keynote lecture "Sustainability and Apocalypse: An Orientation." During her time at CAPAS, her research focused on building a transdisciplinary inventory of critical devices for reading apocalyptic imaginaries and the collectivities that engage with them.

The first panel, "Un/Sustainability," set the tone for the conference with wide-ranging insights from panellists Dr. Daniel Barber (Eindhoven University of Technology), Dr. Thomas Lynch (University of Chichester), and Dr. Elke Schwarz (Queen Mary University of London).

Shifting to a planetary scale, the second panel, "Beyond Habitability," featured Dr. Florian Mussgnug (University College London), who presented the paper "Scaling Up Sustainability—Troubling Apocalyptic Narcissism."

The first day of the CAPAS Alumni Conference concluded with an interactive

workshop titled “Mapping your Apocalypse,” facilitated by Dr. Paolo Vignolo (National University of Colombia).

Day two began with the second keynote lecture, titled “The Anthropocene as a Slow Catastrophe: on the Aesthetics and Politics of Estrangement Today,” delivered by Dr. Mathias Thaler (University of Edinburgh). Thaler’s contribution invited reflection on the protracted temporality of catastrophe and the political potential of estrangement.

The panel “(Un)Sustainability of Social Contracts” followed. Panellists included CAPAS team members Dr. Bruna Della Torre and Dr. Eduardo Altheman, as well as Dr. Nina Boy, an honorary fellow at the University of Warwick.

In the afternoon, Dr. Altheman also chaired the panel titled “The Art of Coping.” The conversation included contributions from Prof. Dr. Timo Storck (Berlin Psychological University), Dr. Juliet Simpson (Coventry University), Dr. Luis Alberto Pérez Amezcua (University of Guadalajara), and Dr. Richard Wilman (Durham University).

The day concluded with the workshop “Annihilation and Sustainability,” organised and facilitated by Dr. Adolfo Mantilla (Academy of Arts in Mexico) and artists Dr. Nadia Osornio and Federico Cuatlacuatl.

The third and final day began with the panel “Sustaining the Unsustainable,” chaired by Emilian Ortega (Heidelberg University / CAPAS). Panellists included Dr. Amin Samman (City St. George’s, University of London), Dr. Teresa Heffernan (St. Mary’s University, Canada), and Dr. Stephen Shapiro (Warwick University).

The conference concluded with the workshop “Sustainable Degradation,” co-facilitated by Dr. Emily Ray (Sonoma State University), CAPAS team member Laura Mendoza, and Dr. Robert Kirsch (Arizona State University).

By bringing together former and current fellows from CAPAS’s first four years, the Conference stood as a compelling testament to the Centre’s deeply internationalised and interdisciplinary ethos. Drawing participants from ten countries across Europe, the Americas, and Asia—including Germany, England, Scotland, the United States, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, Thailand, and Canada—the event reflected CAPAS’s commitment to fostering global dialogue and critical exchange. This diverse constellation of scholars and institutions underscored the Centre’s unique role as a global hub for apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies, where regional perspectives are brought into productive dialogue around shared existential challenges and planetary futures.

Robert Folger and Eduardo Altheman are currently editing a volume that will feature the key takeaways and core discussions from the Sustainability & Apocalypse conference. As in the conference itself—and, of course, we could hardly expect otherwise when gathering four generations of CAPAS fellows—the tone of the volume will be marked by critical inquiry and problematisation rather than unreflective endorsement or celebration.

Luis Pesce is a research assistant at CAPAS.

Exhibition
“Poéticas de futuros: anticipaciones, especulaciones, temporalidades”
Courtesy of Galería Metropolitana y Coordinación General de Difusión UAM.
Photos:
Ángel Sánchez.

FIELD NOTES

EXPERIENCE, EXPECTATION, AND ANACHRONISM— AN EXHIBITION AT GALERIA METROPOLITANA IN MEXICO CITY

by Adolfo F. Mantilla

In Kantian thought, imagination is defined as the faculty of producing representations of something beyond its immediate existence. Its productive dimension is thus assumed: being unable to create an image entirely unrelated to prior perception, imagination always relies on previously encountered material to recreate it internally. From this perspective, one of the functions of productive imagination is to internally modulate phenomena by drawing analogies with externally perceived entities. In order to produce a coherent experience—interweaving past and future while in the present—imagination helps entangle perceptions across time. It thus makes it possible to implicate, within the same space, what is no longer and what is not yet, by means of what is in the present moment. [1]

To explore how figurations of the future are embedded within poetic dimensions of an anticipatory and political nature, the Galería Metropolitana, in collaboration with the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies at Heidelberg University and the UNESCO Chair in Future Studies at UAM Cuajimalpa, presented the exhibition "Poetics of Futures: anticipations, speculations and temporalities," held from January 17 to May 1st 2025. Adopting a perspective that examines how artistic practices can function as systems of anticipation, the exhibition sought to identify various modes of "using the future" and to highlight their poetic and chronopolitical implications.

By tracing connections between modes of representation shaped by diverse motifs and methods for engaging with the future, the exhibition was conceived as a space for reflecting on key questions: What is the future? And what mechanisms does art employ to imagine it? Through the investigation of artistic practices that articulate figurations beyond the present, the exhibition became a platform for exploring poetic mechanisms that link multiple temporal dimensions. Focusing on a particular trait of artistic production—where imagination and the experience of distinct temporalities intertwine—the project was envisioned as a laboratory to uncover different forms of anticipation and identify the kinds of futures imagined within a trans-historical framework.

Exhibition "Poéticas de futuros: anticipaciones, especulaciones, temporalidades."

Already in the early 21st century, cultural activity increasingly revolved around a specific transformation in the role of the image. This shift reflected the growing dominance of visual culture within human experience, prompting the emergence of a distinct epistemological field shaped by visually mediated cultural practices. Within this context, *virtuality* emerged as an experience that, while not real, feels real—bridging immediate perception and imagination. This condition is intensified by the rise of new technologies and mass visual media. [2] Another perspective on imagery posits that we understand the world through images, which, due to their incorporeal quality, require a medium in which to be embodied. In this view, media act as carriers or hosts that render images visible—they are media of the image. [3]

By identifying various mechanisms for figuration and knowledge of the futures, the exhibition revealed how artists refer to imagined futures by constructing frameworks and models that help formulate the content of the fictions that underlie conscious human anticipation. In this way, the artworks demonstrated how employing the future can offer new perspectives for interpreting the emerging present drawing on what is unknowable at the moment it begins to become knowable. Hence, the task of distinguishing different ways of "using the future" served as a conceptual tool to explore how deliberate mechanisms enable the integration of the "after-now."

One notable mode in which the exhibition's themes took shape was through artistic strategies that established an entropic relationship between time, re-

Exhibition “Poéticas de futuros: anticipaciones, especulaciones, temporalidades.”

ality, and image. This approach generated a superposition of heterogeneous and discontinuous temporalities that, nonetheless, remained interconnected. This anachronistic quality of artistic production reveals a distinctive dimension of temporality—placing the image once again at the centre of inquiries into time. [4] This was exemplified in the juxtaposition of works by Minerva Cuevas, Estrella Carmona, Federico Cuatlacuatl, Nadia Osornio, Jonathon Keats, and Arturo Miranda Videgaray, alongside selected graphic works from the Academia de Artes de México.

Taken together, the exhibition examined relationships between modes of figuration shaped by diverse motives and methods of envisioning and employing the future. In doing so, it opened a space for reflection on questions that also inform a forthcoming collection of essays, to be published in English by the Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies.

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[1] Immanuel Kant, *Antropología en sentido pragmático* (1.ª Edición bilingüe alemán–español México) (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica/UAM/UNAM, 2014), pp. 57-78.
[2] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Una introducción a la cultura visual*, trad. Paula García Segura (Barcelona: Paidós, 2003).
[3] Hans Belting, *Antropología de la imag*en, trad. Gonzalo María Vélez Espinoza (Buenos Aires: Katz Editores, 2010).
[4] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ante el tiempo. Historia del arte y anacronismo de las imágenes* (Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo, 2005).

CRITICAL IMAGINARIES

SHALL WE DANCE? TOMORROW AND I: A SPECTRAL/ SPECULATIVE REVIEW

by Verita Sriratana

Donald K. Emmerson characterises the very idea of "Southeast Asia" as "a kind of science fiction," capable of both representing and imaginatively constructing reality. After having watched the four episodes of the Thai Netflix series *Tomorrow and I*, [1] released on December 4th 2024, I propose that Emmerson's description may be applied to the present and future of Thailand.

The country's (sur)reality is not only "simultaneously described and (re) invented," but also perpetually speculated, by and through real repetitive coups and White-Lotusesque" exoticisation, as well as under the Kafkaesque non-fictional world's harshest *Lèse-majesté* laws. Such "fabulatedness" and "speculativeness" of Thailand are depicted by Kong Rithdee, a respected critic, translator, and screenwriter, as a dystopian country which exceeds even the bleakness of Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) in their criticism of the 20-year national strategy bill, enacted by the military government after its 2014 coup and codified into law in 2018. This 20-year plan, far exceeding Stalin's, is protected by the undemocratic Article 65 of the 2017 Constitution, rendering deviation from the strategy potentially illegal, with legal consequences for officials who fail to comply.

When a country par science fiction creates science fiction in the form of a sci-fi Netflix series, can it even avoid cloning or reproducing its mundane self? Imagine the pressure of producing a plot that is more sci-fi than sci-fi itself and more apocalyptic than the apocalyptic: a sci-fi apocalypse on steroids, if you will. The answer lies in an interview statement made by Paween Purijitpanya, the director: "Thai sci-fi probably won't feature laser guns or world-saving heroics. We don't go down that path because, frankly, Thai people are already battling the realities of everyday life or struggles that don't quite fit with those grand, futuristic narratives. Honestly, given the state of our current living conditions, where the heck would we even find the clarity of mind or the strength to fight aliens or AI bent on world domination?"

The four self-contained episodes of Tomorrow and I are ***นิราศแกะดำ*** (Black Sheep), ***เทคโนโยนี*** (Paradistopia), ***ศาสดาต้า*** (Buddha Data), and ***เด็กหญิงปลาหมึก*** (Octopus Girl). In this article, I will focus on the first and the last episodes.

In *Black Sheep*, Noon (Waruntorn Paonil), an astronaut at the end of her three-year mission at a NASA-inspired ISA space station, has finally perfected her 3D-printed artificial heart, which could only be created in space's weightlessness, and is ready to travel back to Earth to her cloned pet dog and her husband Nont. However, while on the shuttle back to Earth, Noon is killed in an accident. Her body is cryogenically preserved during her family's 100 days of mourning prior to cremation as per Thai Buddhist tradition. Nont, bereaved, wants to clone Noon and so turns to Vee, his wife's best friend, who clones family pets. Vee outright refuses because, while animal cloning is legal, human cloning is not. However, having stolen Noon's brain (literally speaking) from her family, Nont manages to persuade Vee by arguing that restoring Noon's life will be for the greater good and is therefore supposedly justified (though Noon would have probably disagreed). During the cloning process, where Nont is suddenly given full authority to select which memories and identity of his wife to keep or discard, Vee and Nont are met with surprise when it dawns on them that Noon has always wished to live her life as a (trans)man. The viewers are invited to think back to the scene where Nont is arguing with Noon's parents, who appear to firmly uphold the Buddhist notion that death means an end to their daughter's

misery and therefore refuse to give up her body for cloning: a choice made not due to Buddhism but, rather, the heteronormative values which they firmly uphold, as they believe that it is better for their daughter to be a dead cisgender, heterosexual female, than a living transman. Nont decides to choose male afterlife for Noon out of unconditional love (and because transgender and/or intersex afterlife is not even an option) before being arrested by the police. The whole drama revolves around their romance and a husband's self-effacing love, which is problematic. We are now back to the rigid gender binary as Nont is faced with two options: to have his wife back (along with her usual closet—literal and epistemological) or to let go of his wife so she can live life as a stranger, assigned "male at rebirth." Despite casting Thailand's renowned transgender woman in the role of Vee (who utters perhaps the most memorable lines on behalf of transgender persons in Thailand and beyond: "Not liking your own body is torture: it's like being homeless, you know"), *Tomorrow and I* producers unfortunately erase and reduce diverse spectrum of gender and sexuality to genotypical sex, selectively curated to fit the desires of a cisgender, heterosexual male character presented as a loving husband who, even in a futuristic setting, continues to hold all the power. Thai science fiction thus succeeds only in reproducing its fundamentally patriarchal nature.

Necropolitics (Mbembe 2019) is a poignant theme in *Octopus Girl*, where the poor suffer and perish from natural disasters brought about by climate change to a far greater extent than the rich.

In this cyberpunk version of Bangkok, which has endured two years of global nonstop rain, the capital city of Thailand remains as stratified and segregated as ever.

The wealthy live in elevated districts, while the poor barely survive in flooded and cockroach-infested slums, one of which is called "Neo Khlong Toei." A sci-fi version of the real and existing Khlong Toei slum, this undercity is infected with disease and despair, receiving little government support and attention. The protagonists are two schoolgirls, the extrovert "Mook" (Thai for pearl) and the more reserved "Kalapangha" (Thai for Gorgoniidae), or Pang in short, who remain besties come rain or shine. Trapped in their half-submerged ghetto due to "rainpocalypse," a global disaster where rain has not stopped for two long years straight, ushering in deadly malaria pandemic as a bonus, Mook, Pang, and their fellow Neo Khlong Toei slumdwellers can only curse at their indifferent government and its Leader, (again, an unwelcome spectral resurgence of Thailand's recent Junta leader, which is evident in the actor's deliberate mime and im/personation). The only salvation from the malaria pandemic is a vaccine called AquaVac, derived and formulated from compounds found in octopuses and tardigrades. But here is the absurd rub. As a side effect of AquaVac, recipients develop octopus-like tentacles beneath the chin. The leader, in his strongman address, ridicules such absurdity and declares that AquaVac will never be distributed to heal his people, only to reveal, in the end, that underneath his facemask lie the tiny tentacles. The plot is reminiscent of the Covid-19

pandemic corruption and necropolitical indifference in Thailand, where all the elites had access to the vaccines while the poor were left to suffer and perish in grotesque silence.

In the imagined futurity where sensational media content still moves mountains, it is only after Pang, a talented singer, manages to win the hearts of the judges and the audience gathered at a widely broadcast *The Voice*-like reality show called "Singing in the Heavy Rain," [2] that her voice comes to matter. The clips of her performance become viral, causing public sensation. The leader, wishing to gain popularity, makes the effort of coming to see Pang at the evacuation centre (by that time the slums are fully submerged). It is at the evacuation centre that his true colours—and tentacles—are exposed in front of cameras and an angry mob. As a result, the Leader is later forced to resign. AquaVac is finally distributed to save people's lives. This coming-of-age tale seems to veer towards a happy ending, where girls are turned into unseemly "octopus girls" but—looking on the bright side of life, Monty Python style—will potentially outlive the flood and malaria. The rain eventually stops, and octopus children can once again run to the playground and bask in the much-yearned sun. However, as they are enjoying this sunny turn of fate, fire suddenly breaks out, consuming everything in its path. Recalling the image of grilled octopus on a street vendor's tray in one of the early scenes, the episode's ending leaves us with the memory of burnt tentacles on human chins and the more explicit visual presentation of two small, charred hands clutching each other expectant of besties through life and death. Pang's memorable lines: "Why do they use up the world, damn, and leave nothing for us?" hauntingly echoing into the abyss after the world has finally ended for everyone—both girls or gentiles alike.

This dance of sci-fi and speculative fiction has just been led by the Siamese (if you please—or don't please—a nod to "The Siamese Cat Song" in Disney's 1955 *Lady and the Tramp*). The tables have turned. If one should subscribe to Sarah E. Truman's observation that mainstream speculative fiction, and science fiction in particular, has historically inclined towards whiteness and ethnically homogeneous narratives, frequently reproducing imperialist ideologies and the figure of the solitary white male saviour, *Tomorrow and I* refreshingly offers a different picture which not only subverts the extreme poles of the simplified and reductive binary opposition of coloniser vs colonised other. It invites viewers not only to defamiliarise the genre of science fiction, but also to take part in "speculative fabulation," which Donna Haraway defines in *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) as a way of thinking about history, a way of imagining worlds, and a way of paying attention. If speculative fabulation works by unsettling familiar ideas, shifting perception, and challenging dominant ways of knowing, *Tomorrow and I* offers an excellent speculative platform through which we take active part in "worldings," part of a tactic to imagine and enact alternative realities that resist dominant narratives—even if we are talking about a Thai sci-fi Netflix series which presents itself as *already* resisting dominant narratives.

Tomorrow and I can be seen as an opening (mis)step, mirroring the moment when King Mongkut in *The King and I* issues a firm request at the end of the iconic dance number: "Come! We do it again!" ●

[1] The series title can be read as the spectral return of the 1951 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *The King and I*, and, particularly, its popular 1956 film version, where Victorian governess Anna Leonowens (Deborah Kerr) dances and sings "shall we dance?" with the exotic(ised) Siamese King Mongkut (Yul Brynner) in perhaps the most famous sequence where Anna teaches the benighted King to polka.
[2] A spectral return of the happier tune set by Gene Kelly's iconic performance in the 1952 musical romantic comedy.

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CROSS-ROADS

THE WORLD IN A BUNKER: A CONVERSATION WITH EMILY RAY AND ROBERT KIRSCH ON PREPPING, (POST-)APOCALYPSE, AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

by Laura Mendoza

EMILY RAY

ROBERT KIRSCH

LAURA MENDOZA

Emily Ray and Robert Kirsch, former CAPAS fellows, sat down with Laura Mendoza to discuss their 2024 book, *Be Prepared: Doomsday Prepping in the United States*. In their conversation, they explore the book's central themes, including the phenomenon of "bunkering," on a larger global scale. They also reflect on their time as CAPAS fellows and how their research stay impacted their work.

LM: Your book helped me understand prepping as a way of life in the United States. Without giving too much away, what are some general features of U.S. American apocalypticism that shape what it means to "be American" in modern history?

RK: One of our starting points is that the United States has always been, in a sense, an apocalyptic society. In U.S. history, there has always been a strong eschatological undercurrent of people and groups convinced that the end times would occur in their lifetime. Through epochal shifts—industrialization, mass migration, westward expansion, the Cold War, and then even into contemporary developments like the new space race—these stories that Americans tell themselves persist around the idea that there is something singular, that there is some rupture on the horizon that we have to get past, and America has to persist beyond whatever rupture that is. Within our project, what it means to be American is connected with activating this old mythology of the self-sufficient, yeoman farmers who work the land,

A sand-filled room.

tame the wilderness, make what they need, and carry the nation in themselves and their bunkers into whatever is on the other side of catastrophe.

ER: There is a sense that living in apocalyptic times is not at odds with identifying as an American. Living through end times often reinforces the idea: "I am the exemplar of the person who should survive" or "I am the one destined to receive God's glory at the end of this." We wrote about the 1950s atomic era, when the federal government pushed the idea that the only thing scarier than the bomb is becoming a communist, and the only thing worse than death is losing your Americanness in the process. That logic persists today. And that is part of the important connection between Americanness and bunker—it is this affirmation of empire that you are supposed to take with you.

LM: This seems to reveal a "longing for collapse." Is this apocalypticism embedded in the American ethos? And if so, what is its productivity?

ER: Part of what drives this is ideological. Americans are fed the story that human nature is inherently competitive and self-interested. They tend to be anti-communist and anti-socialist because these philosophies are perceived as opposed to human nature. There are even theories of democracy built on the premise that democracy only works when everyone acts in their own self-interest, and we have aggregates of self-interested groups that make decisions. Part of this is what drives the American qualities of the bunkerized subject.

RK: It is embedded for several reasons. Number one is that Americans want to win.

Apocalyptic preparation then becomes a contest, a test of resilience, with the embedded idea that you can win the apocalypse.

There is this idea that not only can I make it through a calamity, catastrophe, or apocalypse, but I will be vindicated by the fact that other people won't. A prevalent attitude among many people who engage in this behaviour is the idea that if they just make wise consumer decisions, they will win the catastrophe, so to speak.

LM: Your book also explores the relationship between prepping and the construction of white nationalist, white supremacist identity—particularly among white American men, who seem to be grieving a "better past" they believe has been lost. Yet, nothing catastrophic has necessarily happened to them directly. So, what exactly are they afraid of losing? How do prepping and white supremacy function in relation to one another?

ER: The way you pose the question is fascinating because while nothing catastrophic has happened to white nationalists, they deeply believe otherwise. They believe they are actually losing their majority status and their associated power. Their fantasy of white supremacy as a feature of the world is under threat, and that feeds into their prepping behaviour. They tend to be accelerationists wanting to hasten the demise of the system, which they believe oppresses them and prevents them from reproducing and restoring America to its "right place."Prepping then becomes part of white supremacy through anticipating and preparing for race wars. Civil unrest around *Black Lives Matter* protests gets interpreted as "aha, the race war is accelerating, we're getting there."

Fallout Shelter, U.S.A., 1950s

U.S. Invasion of Panama, 1989 (Operation Just Cause).

LM: What about the post-apocalyptic fantasy that fuels prepping culture in general? What happens after the catastrophe? What does this tell us about bunkerization as an ideological fantasy of the future?

ER: In a way, it is a future that is always the same—one that may have to be rebuilt to resemble the present prior to the apocalyptic, but it is that present that we want to return to. There is an inherent conservatism that runs through this, where everything must remain as it was, because change is not what we seek. This future is often a very typical, in some ways, American fantasy: the small farm and the nuclear family, and traditional gender and racial roles. Even their future—which is supposed to be dramatically different and a huge relief from our current context—is one that resembles old fantasies.

Bunkerization also stunts the ability to imagine a future.

As long as you remain in hukered-down mode—protecting, accumulating, waiting, reading the signs—it prevents you from imagining a different future. In that sense, bunkerization is also an attempt to pretend that the present can extend indefinitely in all directions.

RK: This reveals the lack of the American prepper's imagination. From what I can tell, the future looks like today. That idea is built into this fantasy that you can preserve a particular identity, a particular way of life, a particular set of social and economic relations, and you craft those in miniature within your domicile with a hard-enough shell. When catastrophe happens, you emerge on the other side of it, and things resume as they were. The idea,

then, is a kind of non-future future that many people are envisioning.

LM: You describe "opting out" as a defining feature of the bunkerized subject—a kind of egotistical, individualist withdrawal from collective responsibility, especially in the face of crisis. Do you see this same logic underlying the prepping practices of the ultra-wealthy—especially Silicon Valley elites and others operating on an entirely different scale? Have they long opted out of this world?

RK: Absolutely. When I wrote about this six years ago, it felt somewhat clandestine—seasteading, New Zealand citizenship, and similar practices. What is striking about our present moment is that Silicon Valley elites are now explicitly articulating how and why they are opting out, why they are leaving us all behind.

This extends to civic life and civic responsibility. Whether it is Bezos, Thiel, or others in that constellation, they argue that democracy does not work and we need to abandon this planet.

ER: There is an interesting aspect to opting out and opting in simultaneously among the tech elites. They are opting out in the sense that they are doing the same things as the people storing cans of food, but the scale is entirely different because they live in an economy that is different from that of the everyday person. They can simply purchase a helicopter and acquire all the means of their survival to maintain their class status, while also attempting to retain the power structure that keeps them in their current position. In some ways, opting out is not only what they are doing. They are also opting in in a way that most of us could never do. These are also startups and start-up culture producing "the next prepping bag" and "here's what you can do." There are many things the elites can accomplish through bunkerization that reaffirm the subject: property acquisition, maintaining power, and reinforcing class.

LM: You have made the case that bunkerization is rooted in American history and culture. But in my reading—as a Latina and from a non-U.S. perspective,—many things felt uncomfortably familiar: consumer culture, neoliberal politics, and traits of white supremacy that right-wing politicians in my region exhibit. You note that these things may travel and are adaptable. Is this something you see happening more broadly or internationally—and if so, how?

RK: I would highlight two tendencies. The first is the direct export of bunkerization. We have spoken with colleagues in the UK and Australia, where people adopt these same behaviours. Even in Germany—search YouTube for "prepping" and you will find enterprising young men digging holes in the Black Forest, installing metal cubes, and declaring "Look, I made a shelter." This is part of a broader Americanization. That is one trajectory for how bunkerization gets exported.

The second is a general kind of spatial reordering—this idea of bunkerized subjects or bunkered societies. In another project we are developing, we refer to it as "Fortress America." That kind of fortification requires a spatial reordering of the Earth, raising fundamental questions: Where will people be? Where are the resources? How do we establish distribution channels for essential supplies? And this spatial re-

ordering easily travels, because it raises fundamental questions: Where will humans thrive? Who is important? How will they be provisioned? And conversely, who gets sacrificed? Who does not merit consideration?

ER: And spatial reordering is not new. What is significant now is the way the U.S., as a hegemonic power, forces itself into defining what spatial reordering means. It is concerned with who is savable. Christian missionary efforts enter here: "We can make you a savable population if you accept this belief system." Then you are included in what it means for the U.S. to "care" about you.

LM: Another striking insight from your book is how bunkerization reaches beyond the physical bunker. Could you discuss the everyday practices of bunkering and control that shape the mentality of the American prepper? And could those same mentalities help us understand the anxieties and ideologies taking root in unequal societies such as those in Latin America?

RK: In some ways, this redirects the arrow—or maybe boomerangs—where the U.S. is learning aspects of domestic life from Latin America. Where I live, half the houses on the market are in gated communities. They vary in their levels of security, but the underlying idea is that you are behind walls. Gated communities have become incredibly common in the U.S.

So, in some ways, as is typical of imperial adventures, the logic comes home. The inequalities produced by imperialism return to the core, so to speak.

This ties in with some of our work around "Fortress America," where we argue that Americans are increasingly encouraged to think of their domicile as a miniature nation-state. Their role becomes securing that plot of land and taking on a quasi-sovereign responsibility for ensuring it persists—against environmental, social, or economic threats. If we examine how people respond to growing inequality in other parts of the world, including Latin America, I believe we see a similar pattern: hardening the carapace of the home, retreating behind gates, and weaponising the domicile. The "bunker-as-a-way-of-life" model becomes a coping mechanism for instability over which individuals feel they have no control.

LM: Finally, going back to your time as CAPAS fellows—the discussions, the working groups with other fellows and the CAPAS team. Were there any recurring themes or conversations from your time as fellows that influenced or helped shape your book?

ER: Certainly, the time at CAPAS was formative for the book. The interdisciplinary dialogue was very important, because political science and political theory do not typically engage with bunkers or apocalypse as explicitly as some of the humanities fields do. Drawing especially from Jenny Stümer's work, we explored the concept of apocalypse as a way to describe our current moment—a time and place we are already living in—rather than something we are preparing for. Since 'bunkering' means something different depending on whom you are talking to, hearing diverse and international perspectives on what preparation means in different contexts was also helpful in strengthening our central theory.

Detail from Koen Taselaar's "End, And" (2024), Jacquard woven tapestry, 350 × 1900 cm.

RK: The time at CAPAS made us more careful thinkers ultimately. Its structure allowed us to have time to sit with really smart people from various disciplines and think intentionally and deeply about the projects we were all pursuing. ●

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FIELD NOTES

TOWARDS A POLITICS OF THE THRESHOLD: CRITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS FROM THE 2ND SEMINAR ON "POETICS AND POLITICS OF THE END"

by Rejane de Souza Ferreira
and Alejandra Bottinelli Wollete

On June 30th, July 1st, and July 2nd, 2025, researchers from Brazil and Chile gathered to reflect on a key question: *What comes after the end?* This was the central theme of the 2nd Seminar on the topic of Poetics and Politics of the End in Contemporary Latin America, held at the Federal University of Tocantins in the city of Porto Nacional, and hosted by Dr. Rejane de Souza Ferreira. The event was a continuation of the project of the same name, supported by the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), Brazil's main research funding agency.

Conference poster.

Structured around the aforementioned question, the seminar constituted a space for interrogating the multiple crises—ecological, political, social, and epistemological—that define our contemporary moment. Far from a catastrophist exercise, the event proposed a critical cartography in which the notion of the *end* operates as a discursive and aesthetic device to examine the collapses of Western modernity and their reverberations in Latin America while seeking the seeds of what may yet emerge in critical and aesthetic discourses and practices.

One of the seminar's most significant contributions was the critical displacement of the universalising notion of the *Anthropocene*. As Alejandra Bottinelli

Detail from Koen Taselaar's "End, And" (2024), Jacquard woven tapestry, 350 × 1900 cm.

proposed, it is necessary to examine the forms that the 'end' takes, which, simultaneously, redefine the boundaries between the human and the planetary, specifically from the situated perspective of the Southern Cone. In her keynote lecture, "Modalisations of the Apocalypse: Commonality and the Counter-Vanity of the End," Bottinelli argued for the destabilisation of the universal apocalyptic narrative by framing it as a situated discourse. A crucial shift, she proposed, lies in valuing the apocalypse not as a singular event, but as a process that exposes our radical vulnerability and, thus, our constitutive interdependence.

In this counter-vanity, catastrophe ceases to be a tale of individual heroes and instead becomes a threshold that compels the emergence of relational subjectivities grounded in shared fragility.

Its revelatory power does not proclaim a single truth, but rather exposes the fictions of modern autonomy, demanding the imagination of new forms of community amidst the ruins of unrealised (or not-yet-realised) worlds, in Mark Fisher's formulation.

These ideas resonated across various presentations, including Rejane de Souza Ferreira's exploration of Amerindian perspectives (based on authors such as Davi Kopenawa and Ailton Krenak), which challenge the notion of a singular, absolute end. Within these frameworks, apocalypse is not a future event but a cyclical experience and a call to "learn to live with the trouble" (following Donna Haraway), integrating traditional knowledges as viable solutions for inhabiting catastrophe. This ecology of knowledges was further illustrated in concrete case studies: Natalia López analysed the water crisis in Chile not as a natural phenomenon, but as a consequence of the neoliberal model of dispossession, in which aesthetic practices document the crisis and construct a watery memory demanding ecological justice. Similarly, Fernando Pelicice and his team presented the degradation of the Ribeirão São João in Porto Nacional as a metaphor for a stagnant spirit, linking environmental breakdown with cultural and identity ruptures. These studies underscore that Latin America's polycrisis has a specific genealogy: extractivism, coloniality, and ecological violence.

In another of the seminar's lines of inquiry—focused on the aesthetics that emerge from the rubble—Horst Nitschack argued that art installations made from discarded materials such as plastic and scrap do not merely signal the end of an aesthetic, but actively challenge the capitalist logic of surplus value. These ephemeral works, by relinquishing permanence, celebrate singularity and open up possibilities for the new in what has been marginalised. The notion of the archive was central to questioning what is preserved and what is forgotten. Viviane Oliveira explored archives as crossroads of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges, as sites of tension where absences and erasures become visible. Mónica González García, meanwhile, analysed in Machado de Assis the image of books consumed by worms as a post-apocalyptic allegory of the vanity of civilisational projects and their material legacies.

Detail from Koen Taselaar's "End, And" (2024), Jacquard woven tapestry, 350 × 1900 cm.


Dorian Lynskey
THE DAY AFTER
5G
24HOUR
FOLLOWING
PEOPLE
THE MEDIA
APOCALYPS
IRON MAIDEN
ELEVEN

These analyses show that the 'end' is also a crisis of memory and narrative, in which the archon must be constantly interrogated.

The seminar's guiding question—"what comes after the end?"—received cautiously optimistic responses through the notion of 're-existence.' André Cardoso identified in the works of Ramiro Sanchiz and Daniel Galera a re-enchantment of the world, an alternative to Weberian disenchantment, emerging from the ruins of modernity.

He argued that, by reducing the world to its raw and elemental state, narratives of the end lift the veil of instrumental rationality that had distanced us from the marvellous. Celia Pedrosa and Prisca Agustoni (analysed by Maria Joscilane) proposed a poetics of rivers and an *ecosophy* in which the poetic dimension engages with traumatic memories and promotes interspecies alliances, resonating with Haraway's notion of "Chthulucene."

Finally, the community and collective dimension proved central. Maria da Piedade Dias examined resilience experiences in Zapatista and Guarani Kaiowá communities, where traditional knowledges and autonomous social technologies weave alternatives to the modern-colonial paradigm. Narubia Werrera, speaking from her position as an Indigenous *artivist*, embodied this resistance, affirming the Indigenous woman as the first and last line of defence for the Earth.

These projects are not escapist; rather, as Damião Boucher suggested, they constitute radical responses to hegemonic projects of destruction, where the end may recursively mark a beginning.

The 2nd Seminar on Poetics and Politics of the End demonstrates that contemporary Latin American thought is producing some of the most lucid and urgent reflections for navigating the global polycrisis.

Far from surrender or nostalgia, its critical contributions articulate a politics of the threshold.

Inhabiting the end as a space of radical inquiry, mourning for lost futures, but, above all, as fertile ground for worlds yet to come, a counter-archive of possible futures rooted in ecological justice, cognitive sovereignty, and communal reinvention. ●

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Detail from Koen Taselaar's "End, And" (2024), Jacquard woven tapestry, 350 × 1900 cm.

CRITICAL IMAGINARIES

GAME OVER: SLOW APOCALYPSE AND POPULAR CULTURE

by Robert Folger

Toxic Acidic Rain in the City, Cyberpunk.

For decades, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic imagery has been a staple of popular culture. From atomic-age science fiction to zombie-infested dystopias, our cultural imagination has persistently circled around visions of collapse, annihilation, and survival. But today, something has shifted. Rather than fading, the fascination with apocalypse has intensified—and increasingly, it takes the form of serial storytelling. Recent series such as *The Last of Us, Silo, Fallout, 3-Body Problem, The Rain, Sweet Tooth*, or the new adaptation of *El Eternauta* stretch catastrophe over multiple seasons, transforming the apocalypse from a singular event into something protracted and ongoing—a kind of slow apocalypse.

Unlike the disaster movies of the 1980s and 1990s, which offered explosive spectacles of quick destruction, today's serial apocalypses unfold gradually—chronicling slow decay

This shift raises pressing questions: Why does the end of the world—played in slow motion—fascinate us more than ever? Why does it saturate our cultural imagination? And what does this lingering fixation reveal about our capacity—or incapacity—to envision the future?

One explanation lies in the workings of the culture industry itself: as Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer famously argued, culture under capitalism becomes a product like any other—designed to soothe, distract, and depoliticise. The serialised apocalypse, with its appalling horrors and the uneasy pleasure it offers—the fantasy of living in a world freed from the constraints of civilisation and morality—thus becomes a commodity of despair: something to consume while the real world burns.

But this view is only part of the story. In light of the unravelling of what, until recently, we considered the economic, political, and ethical foundations of our "Western world"—the historical point of departure for much apocalyptic thought and, through cultural imperialism, a globally projected norm—the theme of apocalypse no longer seems suited merely for escapism. And yet, paradoxically, apocalyptic narratives and imagery resonate more strongly than ever. Perhaps it is precisely because they seem to mirror our world. Climate breakdown, AI anxiety, authoritarian drift, pandemics, nuclear threats—all contribute to a cultural atmosphere thick with dread. Apocalyptic rhetoric has migrated from fiction into politics and public discourse, becoming a recognisable mood, a *Zeitgeist*. Watching *Silo* or *The Last of Us* is not just escapism—it's recognition.

Yet these stories also function as coping mechanisms. The scale and abstraction of current crises can feel overwhelming, making it impossible for individuals to grasp and assess the threat and its consequences. An apocalyptic narrative with a beginning and an end—even if catastrophic—offers a form of comfort. It's easier, as the saying goes, to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism—or endless uncertainty. Apocalypse tells us *something* is coming, that chaos has a narrative logic, that there is somebody to blame, and that some will be saved. In that sense, these stories restore a lost sense of meaning.

Still, the post-apocalyptic imaginary often fails to provide closure. We are stuck in narrative loops and the recycling of stale images of decay and horror: endless seasons, circular video games, reboots of destruction. The apocalypse no longer marks an end, but a stasis—*Groundhog Day* with ruins.

These stories don't resolve; they simply stop, leaving us suspended in a state of resignation—yet also with the deceptive reassurance that the "real" world continues as usual.

This also helps explain the particular appeal of post-apocalyptic settings in video games, which allow players to begin the disaster anew, again and again. Games replay collapse in infinite loops; shows like *Squid Game* trap us in cycles of horror disguised as entertainment.

Detail from Koen Taselaar's "End, And" (2024), Jacquard woven tapestry, 350 × 1900 cm.

Paradoxically, however, the ubiquity of apocalypse in culture may carry a latent promise.

Might these narratives also serve as a call to action?

As Maurice Blanchot proposed in the 1960s, the apocalypse—precisely through its negation—can open the possibility of imagining humanity as the subject of history. More recently, Slavoj Žižek and Alenka Zupančič have emphasised that the apocalypse should not be seen as a literal end, but as a moment of radical unveiling (*apokalypsis*)—a rupture that forces confrontation with the real conditions of existence. Rather than signalling final destruction, it becomes a critical threshold: the point at which we can no longer look away and are, perhaps, finally compelled to act.

In the best of cases, cultural apocalypses might still awaken critical imagination, foster unexpected solidarities, and open a space for envisioning futures that are open. Yet for now, under the shadow of "Game Over," we remain suspended: caught between anticipation and aftermath, waiting for an end that refuses to arrive, and haunted by the creeping realisation that it may already have happened. ●

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IMPRINT

Publisher
Käte Hamburger Centre for Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Studies

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Photos
Aurélien Mole (tapestries), David Geng, CAPAS, Ángel Sánchez, Luigi Russolo (Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons), Francesco Ungaro (via Unsplash), U.S. Defense Civil Preparedness Agency (Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons), U.S. Department of Defense photo by PH1(SW) J. Elliott (Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons), Prototyperspective (CC0, via Wikimedia Commons).

Web Version
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CAPAS Magazine is available online here: https://www.capas.uni-heidelberg.de/en/outreach/capas-magazine

With funding from the:

Federal Ministry of Research, Technology and Space