



KÄTE HAMBURGER CENTRE  
FOR APOCALYPTIC AND  
POST-APOCALYPTIC STUDIES



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ZUKUNFT  
SEIT 1386

APOCALYPSE  
QUARTERLY

2/23



SPECTRE  
OF  
CATASTROPHE



# DEAR READERS,

“Ruptures: Approaches from/about Latin America” was the theme of this year’s Annual Conference from CAPAS. The conference addressed “rupture” as a way of conceiving radical forms of discontinuity and their potentialities. One of the keynote speakers was Gastón Gordillo, professor of anthropology at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. In this issue’s lead article, he addresses the spectrum of different and contradictory specters that the future holds for us: the fear of climate catastrophe on the one hand, and the fear of radical change on the other. (pp. 3-6).

Also in this issue, CAPAS fellows Emily Ray and Robert Kirsch explore why the phenomenon of prepping has become a mainstream activity in the United States and the *de facto* response to myriad problems – apocalyptic or otherwise. They argue that preparing for doomsday is not simply a matter of attempting survival through a trial, but it is a matter of world-making (pp. 7-9).

The CAPAS team wishes you an interesting and inspiring read on these and the other topics in this issue!!

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



## SPECTERS OF CATASTROPHE AND REVOLUTION

by Gastón Gordillo

**As the devastation created by global warming worsens, it is increasingly difficult to separate the idea of the future from the specter of a climate catastrophe. This specter has a material presence today in the vast fields of debris created by ever more destructive heat waves, droughts, forest fires, floods, and storms that are wreaking havoc all over the world.**

Images of ruined homes, bridges, roads, factories, or towns devastated by atmospheric turbulences and rising sea levels are part of the daily media coverage of the climate crisis. These ruins have ghostly evocations because

they anticipate the even greater scale of the rubble to come if the extraction of fossil fuels is not radically and rapidly reduced. In other words, these are ruins of a global catastrophe that does not exist yet but whose *future scale* can



The effects of the climate crisis in Germany: Floods in Altenahr Altenburg

be inferred through the rubble created by the climate crisis in the present. But this inference is certainly not automatic. One can only become aware of this

catastrophic spectrality through an attunement to this rubble as the material evidence of the even more devastating heat waves, droughts, and wildfires to come. For this reason, the fossil fuel industry and the mainstream media try to sabotage the possibility of such an attunement by encouraging us to look away from the rubble and appreciate instead what is created by fossil fuels: jobs, buildings, infrastructures, growth, an interconnected metropolis. Many people dismiss the climate crisis precisely because of their inability to attune to the ruination of the present. This emotional disconnect from signs of distress is part of the affective infrastructure that has turned capitalism into a zombie train speeding toward the abyss.

### Gastón Gordillo

is a Professor of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. He has conducted ethnographic research in several places in the Gran Chaco of northern Argentina (a region that also includes western Paraguay and southeast Bolivia) on spatial perceptions, memory, violence, and ruins. More recently his work focuses on the deforestation created by the expansion of agribusiness in the Gran Chaco, as well as the impact of the climate crisis and the peasant-indigenous movements that confront them in their territories. He is a Guggenheim Fellow and his most recent book is *Rubble: The Afterlife of Destruction* (2014, Duke University Press), which won an Honorable Mention for the Victor Turner Prize in Ethnographic Writing. He is also the author of *Landscapes of Devils: Tensions of Place and Memory in the Argentinean Chaco* (2004, Duke University Press), which won the American Ethnological Society Sharon Stephens Book Prize.



But at the same time more and more people around the world do attune to the ruins created by environmental turmoil and interpret them as a sign of the seriousness of the climate crisis, which creates dense and often overwhelming affective atmospheres. Millions of people around the world experience what many call “climate grief,” an emotional state that often leads to



Photo: Twitter/@ScientistRebel1

Despite the devastating effects of today's climate turmoil, the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure continues unabated.

paralysis and pessimism about the future of the planet. But the rubble generated by the climate crisis also has the capacity to affect, move, and radicalize. To many people, these ruins and the social suffering associated with them are the evidence of the need for radical change to avert a

future climate collapse. There are growing debates about the type of transformations we would need to create a livable future, such as calls to implement a Green New Deal, an energy transition, or models based on climate and racial justice, decolonization, degrowth, and agroecology. And while these concepts point to different facets of the changes required to decarbonize the world, a growing number of activists insist that the transformations we need are such that they would only be achievable through a true climate revolution that breaks with the hegemony of fossil capitalism, for only the old concept of "revolution" evokes the type of break that is today necessary to address the climate emergency.



This revolutionary rupture is certainly not on the horizon and seems utopian and impossible. Even many progressives dismiss the idea of a revolution today as laughable and absurd. But the destructiveness of today's climate turmoil and the fact that after more than three decades of Climate Summits and multiple alarming reports from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructures continues unabated forces us to rethink what counts as absurd on a world on fire.

Fredrik Jameson famously said that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. Or put differently, many people find the specter of a climate revolution committed to moving away from fossil capitalism more terrifying than the specter of a climate apocalypse. And, indeed, the denial of global warming by far-right parties worldwide is inseparable from their invocation of the specter of a coming revolution by “the woke left” that would “destroy” the world.

In short, we live in a world where the future evokes very different and contradictory types of specters, increasingly polarized between the fear of a climate catastrophe and the fear of the radical changes needed to avert it. The future of life on Earth will be largely decided by the coming struggles over which of these specters will prompt more people into action: that of a climate collapse or that of the social movements rising up to stop it. ●

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF CAPAS

The 2023 Annual Conference of CAPAS in collaboration with the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities at the University of Chile took place in Santiago de Chile at the end of March. Under the topic ‘Ruptures: Approaches from/about Latin America’ the conference sought to address ‘rupture’ as a way of conceiving radical forms of discontinuity and their potentialities. Addressing real and imagined systemic change in the context of pressing social, political and ecological challenges, the contributions investigated the immense diversity of ruptures in time and space in order to assess and act upon the radical transformative effects they provoke.

We understand rupture as a form of apocalyptic disintegration (as a revelation at/of an end), which unfolds after crossing a ‘threshold’ or a ‘boundary’, and which harbours both destructive and transformative potential, opening the way for new forms of world-making.

Thanks to former CAPAS fellow Alejandra Bottinelli, we had the most heartfelt exchange at the

University of Chile. For the inauguration of the conference, we had the honour of being welcomed by Rosa Devés, rector of the University of Chile, Raúl Villarroel, dean of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities, Alicia Salomone, Director of International Relations, and Bárbara Velasco, director of Plataforma Cultural.

Find the videos of the three keynotes from Bruna Della Torra, Eduardo Russo and Gaston Gordillo here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNtFPUE-i64dIXya81jJz6DFZLb6lBich>

TV Humanidades of the Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities of the University of Chile interviewed Robert Folger and Eduardo Russo. Watch it here [es]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P08lGeM-NUlo&list=PLNtFPUE-i64dIXya81jJz6DFZLb6lBich&index=4>

‘Voices - 2023 CAPAS Annual Conference’ is a video capturing the main issues of the conference. It contains interviews with the keynote speakers and more participants. The video will soon be published on the [Youtube channel of CAPAS](#).



#SCIENCE  
APOCALYPSE

## GETTING READY FOR DOOMSDAY

by Emily Ray & Robert Kirsch

Prepping has become a mainstream activity in the United States. One does not need to look very far to see the increasing market for prepping materials, such as shelf-stable food at wholesalers, Silicon Valley startups with bug-out bags, or the steady stream of reality television shows designed around prepping, going off-grid, or extreme survivalism. This mainstream version of prepping could easily be dismissed as the peculiar behaviors of social outliers. However, this kind of gawking does little to explain why prepping has become increasingly mainstream, nor does it explain how prepping becomes the *de facto* response to myriad problems – apocalyptic or otherwise.

We take prepping as a manifestation of consumer society that, against the backdrop of skepticism of the state to provide meaningful social support, and its attendant anxiety about disintegrating social life, compels individuals to accumulate, hoard, and stockpile consumer goods in such quantities and in such places as to “ride out” events that disrupt, destroy, or derail the status quo of their everyday lives. In any doomsday

scenario, the approach is similar: the social fabric is frayed and any number of things can degrade it to the point of absolute dysfunction. Prepper culture is a uniquely American phenomenon, and has little to do with the collective action and planning problems of social preparedness to deal with global climate change, mass migration patterns or military hostilities. We argue that prepping is an institutional behavior that

emerges from the rapid industrialization process in the United States during the early twentieth century and we look at what kinds of Americanness get mythologized, such as self-reliance, frontiersmanship, and cunning exploit. We then look at how these conceptions are part of the reordering of a responsabilized American life via a consumer society made possible by mass production. We tie these behaviors into enduring myths of national character: self-reliance and the need to take personal responsibility, even during upheavals at a more social scale. The American imaginary of responding to crises by bunkering, as well as assuming the responsibility for preparedness, dovetails with the broader thrusts of responsabilized Americanness, and becomes amplified in the neoliberal era. This institutional development also helps explain the space race, outer space resource extraction, and off-world colonization efforts.

We also look at the class dimensions of prepping in the marketplace and in the

expectations of a post-doomsday world. Regardless of the reasons why different people prep, they all assume that it is better to survive a crisis or world-ending event than to die in it. Under this assumption, there must be something worth living for on the other side of catastrophe. Just as there are a range of preppers, there are a range of post-apocalyptic visions that animate prepper movements. Yet prepping takes place in the context of socio-economic class.

### **Prepping takes place in the context of socio-economic class.**

Billionaires like the German-American Peter Thiel, who is one of the many well-known super-rich preppers, do not prep with a modest bug-out bag and a used shipping container retrofitted as a bunker. Members of the political and economic elite anticipate entering the new world outside of the bunker carrying their same power and status as when they entered the bunker, even as the new world is expected to have been radically transformed in the meantime. Even those who live south of elite status still imagine a world in which their class status is legible on the other side.

This paradox between the end of a world and the inability to imagine the world as anything other than the status quo is part of our broad argument that prepping extends beyond a set of behaviors and is an institutionalized way of life. Preparing does not happen outside of our given mode of life as somehow apart from neoliberalism and a society that pins its members to a class hierarchy. Prepping is embedded in everyday life, and therefore, activity related to prep-



The authors **Emily Ray & Robert Kirsch** are currently conducting research as fellows at CAPAS. Emily Ray is Associate Professor in the Political Science department at Sonoma State University. Her research lies in the area of political environmental theory. Robert Kirsch is a political theorist with an interdisciplinary lens. His work focuses on multiple vectors of citizenship in advanced industrial democracies.



Luxury in the post-apocalyptic world: Members of the political and economic elite anticipate entering the new world outside of the bunker carrying their same power and status as when they entered the bunker, even as the new world is expected to have been radically transformed in the meantime.

pping is constrained by the ways in which prepping itself has become an institution. In the fantasies of a post-disaster world as a blighted, unrecognizable wasteland, the survivors will still emerge with canned foods, monogrammed kits, or in heavily armed security convoys. Even a wasteland will provide an adequate context for reanimating the social order of the old world. While accelerationists of all political stripes hope for the opportunity to remake the world, preserved in their fantasies are hierarchies of race, sex, gender, and class. Prepping brings with it not just tools for survival but ideological stability. Some preppers anticipate religious salvation if they are able to hold out during turbulent times, but they may be just as interested in salvaging key ideological features of the old world to shape the new. An evangelical prepper may wish to see a world wiped clean

of the sins and crimes that make the secular world unlivable, but they do not wish to see certain traditions overhauled for a radically new way of life, like a patriarchal social organization. The super-rich are not likely eager for a new world to be egalitarian and for class status to be eliminated as a social stratification.

This paradox, preparing for a new world while insisting on a continuation of the old, makes the imperative to shape the current world we live in as a humane, democratic one all the more pressing. Whether we like it or not, preparing for doomsday is not simply a matter of attempting survival through a trial, but it is a matter of world-making. How we prep, how we anticipate disasters and experience crises, also shapes what it looks like to live on the other side of these disasters. ●





#SCIENCE  
APOCALYPSE

## DAYDREAMING OF APOCALYPSE

# WHY DO WE CRAVE DYSTOPIA?

by Florian Mussgnug

**Despite claims that readers would turn away from post-apocalyptic fiction during the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, the genre has continued to thrive. The popularity of post-apocalyptic narratives raises questions about why people are fascinated by fictional narratives of doom in times of trouble, and whether it is a form of escapism or a desire to come to terms with an unpredictable, dangerous world. The current climate crisis has made it difficult to imagine that our familiar world will continue, and the universal relevance of apocalypse creates the conditions for two antithetical forms of cultural engagement: utopian impulse and fantasy-as-wish-fulfillment.**

With daily news of war, atrocity, earthquakes, cyclones, and record-breaking temperatures, who needs fictional narratives of apocalypse? During the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic, a version of this question enjoyed unexpected popularity. Cultural pundits claimed that readers were fed up with dystopia and post-apocalypse and predicted that speculative fiction would go out of fashion for at least

a decade. Lock-down and fear, so the argument went, left people craving for stability and familiarity. Experiences of loss and feelings of disorientation were too widespread and, for many, too raw to find expression in genre literature. Instead of fantasising about zombies, it was said, readers would turn their attention to the intimate details of everyday life,

or engage with the great classics, from *Middlemarch* to *War and Peace*. Surely, the last thing that anybody needed, in the midst of a global pandemic, were fantastical versions of their own, unsettling experiences, cast in the fictional language of post-apocalypse.

In June 2020, Penguin published a survey of more than one thousand readers, which appeared to confirm this idea. Sixty percent of participants declared that they had no interest in stories about the pandemic, while a quarter announced that they would never again pick up a dystopian novel. Commentators leapt on the news: the collective experience of real planetary emergency, they declared, had made literary fantasies of global catastrophe irrelevant.

**The apocalyptic imagination is no longer limited to any given worldview or set of values.**

This was, of course, nonsense. Post-apocalyptic narratives did not die out in



**Florian Mussgnug** is Professor of Comparative Literature and Italian Studies and Vice Dean International for Arts and Humanities at University College London and former fellow, now affiliated researcher of CAPAS. He has published widely on Twentieth and Twenty-First Century literature in Italian, English and German, with a particular focus on the environmental humanities, creative critical practice, and narratives of risk, crisis, and care.



The Last of Us – remastered by John Luterma on flickr. Attribution 2.0 Generic (CC BY 2.0)

the early 2020s. Zombies remain popular, across media and languages, and continue to delight those in search of hackneyed, predictable plots, while also providing rich inspiration for more original, creative forms of storytelling. Some of the world’s most popular writers – including Isabel Allende, Louise Erdrich, and Emily St John Mandel – have written fictional narratives of the pandemic, drawing from the traditions of fantasy, the gothic, and science fiction. In brief, the unstoppable rise of the post-apocalyptic – in literature, film, television, videogames, scholarship, artwork, and music – has disproven the claim that audiences, in times of real emergency, turn away from fictional narratives of doom. The opposite turns out to be true and continues to be the case, as can be seen, for instance, from the recent suc-

cess of HBO’s serial television drama, *The Last of Us*.

So why, in times of trouble, are we fascinated by post-apocalypse? Is the genre inherently escapist, as some have argued? Or should we treat its popularity as the expression of a deep-seated desire to come to terms with life on an unpredictable, dangerous, and heating planet? Is apocalypse literature a form of “new ecological realism”, ideally suited for a world that bears a troubling resemblance to the dystopian fantasies of earlier generations?

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<https://iai.tv/articles>

First published in [iai news](#).



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# MIA BENNETT

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

**Mia Bennett:** To me, apocalypse simply means the end of *a* world rather than *the* world. There is thus almost always an apocalypse going on somewhere on Earth. In my discipline of geography, scale enters into discussions of apocalypse, too. Worlds can terminate anywhere from the scale of a commu-

nity to the scale of the planet, or even off-world. One contemporary example of a place arguably facing apocalypse is the Arctic, a region I have researched for over a decade. Anthropogenic climate change is threatening many ice-dependent ways of life. At the same time, one thing often overlooked in elegi-

ac discussions about the Arctic is the incredible adaptability and resilience demonstrated by the many communities and species facing the end of their world.

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

In recent years, I have been working to develop the subfield of critical remote sensing. The subdiscipline scrutinizes the study of Earth from afar, namely with the use of satellites. At CAPAS, I am advancing this research by examining how satellite data affects the way

that scientists, the government, and the public each imagine, respond to, and predict catastrophes at a range of scales – from local disasters to planetary climate change. In this work, I also seek to situate satellite imagery within apocalyptic art histories while considering what it means when the doomsday messenger can also directly bring death in the form of [satellites](#) (or drones) that can kill. I am carrying out this work by examining satellite imagery, scientific papers, and reports, as well as interviewing scientists and public officials.

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

My fellowship project offers an opportunity to bring together my longstanding work on the Arctic with my increasing turn towards satellites. CAPAS provides space for me to think about an area that is supposedly experiencing an ending while reflecting upon the spaceborne instruments responsible for delivering the data behind this message. As a geographer, I also strive for interdisciplinarity, drawing inspiration from both positivist methods (such as geospatial analysis of satellite imagery) and interpretivist methods (which understand the world to be socially constructed). By bringing together humanities scholars, social scientists, and natural scientists, CAPAS builds upon my training in geography by continuing to offer exposure to new and diverse ways of understanding the world, this time through the lens of the apocalypse.



**Mia Bennett** is an assistant professor in the Department of Geography at the University of Washington. As a political geographer with geospatial skills, she traces, maps, and critiques processes of Arctic frontier-making from the edges of settler colonial states and orbits of space powers like China to the depths of Indigenous lands.

#FELLOW  
APOCALYPSE

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT PAOLO VIGNOLO

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

**Paolo Vignolo:** It was love at first sight. Wow, a bunch of weird fellows committed to explore apocalyptic stuff. I definitely want to be in that number! That was my first reaction. Later I realized how much the idea of “apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic studies” generates strong feelings. Some people seem enthusias-



tic, some look skeptical, a few just horrified. But nobody is indifferent. I take it as a good sign. It means that it raises questions. It shakes beliefs and disbeliefs. After telling my mother about the fellowship, she confessed to me that the first thing she did was google the name of the center. She was sure

that I was teasing her.

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

In my view, to explore the history of apocalypse is a privileged way to explore the relation of Western civilization with time and with space. The biblical narrative from Genesis to Revelation, from Eden to End of the World, goes far beyond theology and Christian thought. It orients practically any field of our society: cultural practices, scientific theories, poetic and political representations, everyday behaviors... These religious structures inhabit us, often at a subconscious level. And, you know, it is always worth having

a look at the beasts we have inside. I believe that exploring these apocalyptic depths can help us better understand ourselves and the world we live in.

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

I would like to think we already live in a post-apocalyptic world. Just not to be misunderstood: I do not mean it in a catastrophic sense. I am not very keen on indulging in dystopic scenarios and Mad Max's landscapes. What I mean is that we are now in condition to imagine a world beyond the apocalyptic narrative. We live in a world overwhelmed by millenarian resonances, but at the same time it is possible, here and now, to calm the anxieties of Revelation, the fears of the Anti-Christ, the doom of a Last Judgment. It implies a huge cultural work, and still I consider it an ineludible task. To me, trying to study and better understand apocalypse is a way to historicize it, to grasp its ghostly ubiquity and to find a place for it. A way to exorcise the beast, so to say. To go beyond apocalypse, we urgently need maps to orientate ourselves in the uncharted territories of a post-Euclidian space, with no contemporary Gog and Magogs nor technological redemptions. Moreover, we need different calendars, to assume complex temporalities beyond a linear time directed towards the end of history. And, last but not least, we need to reinvent rituals to play with death, instead of projecting it into some prophetic Doomsday.

**Paolo Vignolo** is an associate professor of history and humanities at the National University of Colombia, Bogota. His fields of research and creation deal with public history, cultural heritage and memory studies with a focus on geographic imaginaries, live arts and performance.

●●● **read more online**

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*APOCALYPTICA* ISSUE 2 PUBLISHED

# APOCALYPTIC SUBJECTIVITIES

by Jenny Stümer

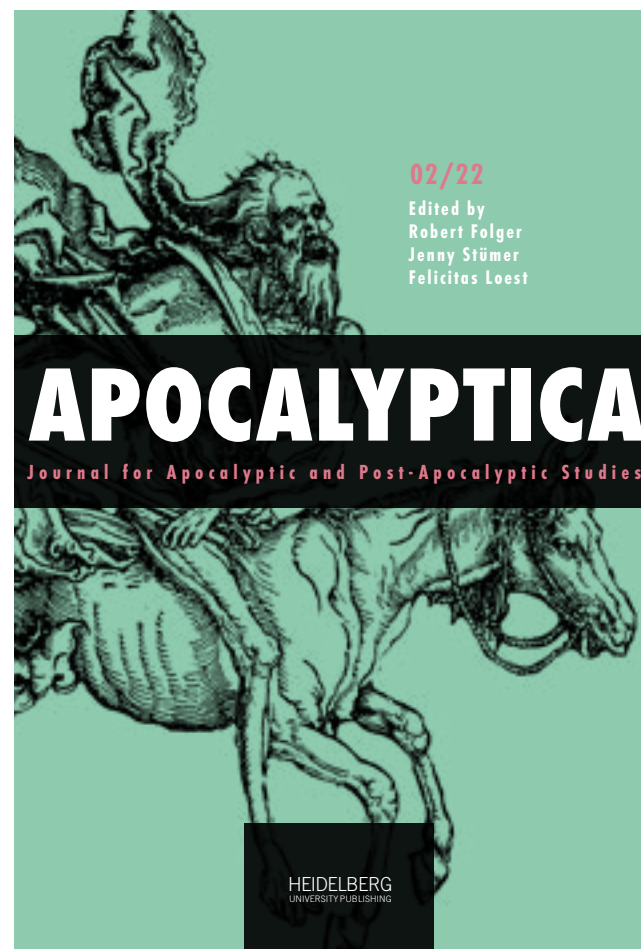
***Apocalyptica's* second issue advances our premise to explore apocalypses as imaginative practices and insightful speculations that tell us something about the state of past, present, and future worlds. More specifically, our latest issue explores the topic of "apocalyptic subjectivities" and their many entanglements with questions of complicity, confrontation, and coping with/at the end of the world. The notion of 'unfolding' runs like a thread through this issue, weaving the articles together and showcasing the apocalypse as a multi-layered force that is not static in meaning but constantly emerging – both conceptually and empirically.**

What we draw attention to in this issue then is the way apocalypses have been and are imagined, producing modes of engagement that are essential to the way we experience and shape our realities. We are interested in how the end of the/a world functions as a particular set of practices on the one hand and how apocalypses inform existing socialities on the other. We look at the ways in which these apocalyptic imaginaries are projected – through images, stories, architecture, music, style, performance, art, etc – and how they enable moments of pausing and reflecting or instants of critique and challenge.

The issue opens with Eliyahu Keller's article "The Scale of Apocalypse: Paolo Soleri's Nuclear Revelation," in which he examines the apocalyptic speculations of the late architect in their relation to imagining a nuclear future. Keller argues that architecture functions as a vehicle to visualise the magnitude of unfathomable destruction and simultaneously often aims to challenge future catastrophe.

In his contribution "The Chernobyl Herbarium, the Nuclear Sublime, and Progress After an End of the World" Daniel Spencer looks at the joint project between philosopher Michael Marder and visual artist Anaïs

Tondeur, which Spencer describes as "a hybrid of philosophy, memoir, and visual art, aestheticizing the event and place of Chernobyl as an object of sublime reflection." Continuing the engagement with nuclear culture, Spencer's analysis employs theories of the sublime in order to examine the apocalyptic taxonomy of the artwork as rendering the uncanny futurity of the disaster ongoing, rather than producing a point of finality or closure.





© The Fall of the Rebel Angels, Limbourg brothers, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain

Inês Vieira Rodrigues' article "From Techno Hope to Vertigo-Trip" discusses the disastrous legacy of imperial imaginaries around the globe and speculative survival through expansion into outer space.

Mariarosa Loddo's article "Towards a Contemporary Poetics of Nonfiction about Disasters," develops the notion of testimony and witnessing, discussing a contemporary subgenre of life writing dedicated to the social constitution of disaster. Loddo is interested in the expansion of the testimonial scope by means of an apocalyptic narrative that places emphasis on individual fates but nevertheless constructs a communal experience that is shared by many.

Returning to the question of representation and developing the social poetics of the apocalypse, Carlos Tkacz' article "Uncharted Territory: Apocalypse, Jeremiad, and Abjection in Anne Washburn's *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play*" unpacks the concept of the jeremiad in order to shed light on the ways in which apocalyptic narrative structures can bring past and future into close proximity with each other, repositioning the subject in relation to the resulting tension. His discussion demonstrates that rather than imagining productive futures, post-apocalypses may get stuck in the obsessive memorialisation and materialisation of previous culture(s), replacing subjectivity with a simulacrum of the mediated past.

Furthering the discussion of apocalypse as both a narrative structure and imaginative repetition, Bren Ram's contribution "Lucy's Apocalypse: Placing the End of the World in Narrative" sets out to examine the end of

the/a world as a temporal arrangement that is both strictly non-universal and unevenly distributed in order to consider the structure of colonialism and its manifold aftermaths as "a world-ending practice."

Coming full circle, both in terms of discussing the disastrous legacy of imperial imaginaries around the globe and speculative survival through expansion into outer space, Inês Vieira Rodrigues article "From Techno-Hope to Vertigo-Trip: An Airpocalypse Seen from An Island" explores the notion of the techno-hope complex, looking at recent plans to build a European Space Agency facility on the Santa-Maria Island in the Azorean archipelago.

Finally, Emma Blackett's highly original article "Peroxide Subjectivity and the Love of (Knowing) The End" takes iconic musician Phoebe Bridger's hair as a philosophical segue into discussing the apocalyptic politics of world ending systems of self-knowledge. Blackett, discerns an existential condition whereby the subject, rather than working to present a pristine version of the self, embraces her knowledge of death and doom, of worlds ending now and past, and her own culpability in these forms of ongoing destruction as a point of subject formation.

Complimentary to this discussion, we also include a creative essay that considers the practice of archiving as a means to confront a doomed world. Lena Schmidt's contribution "Pouring Lead, Melting Wax" is a highly personal contemplation of the German tradition of pouring lead into water on New Year's Eve in an effort to predict the future from the shapes created.

Finally, Alexander Burton provides a book review of *The Future is Degrowth* by Matthias Schmelzer, Andrea Vetter, and Aaron Vansintjan, while Michael Dunn offers an engaging account of Heather Davis's *Plastic Matters*. ●

**APOCALYPTICA  
ONLINE**

<https://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/apocalyptic/index>

# CAPAS EVENTS

TUESDAY

20  
06

🕒 4.15 PM – 5.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität, Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “APOCALYPTIC COSMIC THREATS AND OUR POST-APOCALYPTIC FUTURE IN SPACE”

Public Lecture by Richard Wilman (Durham University, UK).

Digital stream on [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgYL\\_WrOMs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgYL_WrOMs)

TUESDAY

27  
06

🕒 4.15 PM – 5.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität, Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “TIME BEYOND TIME: REVELATORY WORLDS – IMAGINING THE ESCHATON IN OBJECT, IMAGE & WORD, 1919-1933”

Public Lecture by Juliet Simpson (Coventry University, UK).

Digital stream on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HAIQihJA8Uc>

WED-THUR

29 01  
06–07

## ASTEROID WEEK

29.06. 🕒 7.00 PM 📍 Museum Geowissenschaften, Heidelberg

## METEORITE IMPACTS & SPACE RISK

Talks by Mario Trieloff & Richard Wilman



30.06. 🕒 6.00 PM 📍 Karlstorkino, Heidelberg  
**WEIN-TASTING AUS DER „DOMAINE  
DU MÉTÉORE“** [DE] Vortrag von Frank Brenker

30.06. 🕒 8.00 PM 📍 Karlstorkino, Heidelberg  
**FIREBALL: VISITORS FROM DARKER  
WORLDS**

Directed by: Werner Herzog & Clive Oppenheimer  
(2020 | OV English with German subtitles)

Scientific commentary:  
Clive Oppenheimer  
(Director, University of Cambridge), Duane Hamacher (CAPAS Fellow, University of Melbourne)



01.07. 🕒 11.00 AM 📍 Haus der Astronomie  
**KINDERPROGRAMM ASTEROIDEN &  
METEORITEN** [DE]

01.07. 🕒 6.00 PM 📍 Haus der Astronomie  
**SCHUTZ DES PLANETEN VOR ASTE-  
ROIDEN** [DE] Vortrag von Richard Moissl

FRIDAY

07  
07

🕒 6.00 PM 📍 Heidelberger Kunstverein

Talk & Discussion

**“ECO GAMES”**

Public Lecture by Dominik Rinnhofer (Hochschule Macromedia)

SATURDAY

08  
07

🕒 12.00 PM – 6.00 PM 📍 Fantasy Kolosseum  
Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Roleplaying- and Boardgame Day

## GAMES AND SCIENCE

Enjoy a day with talks on apocalyptic roleplaying- and boardgames, as well as the opportunity to try out some games for yourself. Also, you can join the workshop “Hacking the Apocalypse” beforehand.

TUESDAY

11  
07

🕒 4.15 PM – 5.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität, Lecture  
Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “THE VALLEY OF THE WOLF (DEVON, ENGLAND): DEVASTATING AND RE- IMAGINING SOMEWHERE ORDINARY”

Public Lecture by Sam Turner (Newcastle University, UK).

Digital stream on [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLI\\_3AzloCY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YLI_3AzloCY)

FRIDAY

14  
07

🕒 9.30 PM 📍 Mathematikon, Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Cinema

## BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD

Directed by: Benh Zeitlin (2012 | OV English with German subtitles)

Scientific commentary: Jenny Stümer (CAPAS Team, Heidelberg  
University)



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TUESDAY

18  
07

🕒 4.15 PM – 5.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität, Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## “WHAT APOCALYPSE CAN DO FOR YOU – A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE END OF WORLDS”

Public Lecture by Thomas Meier (CAPAS Heidelberg, Germany).

Digital stream on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLjWNwsacG4>

FRIDAY

21  
07

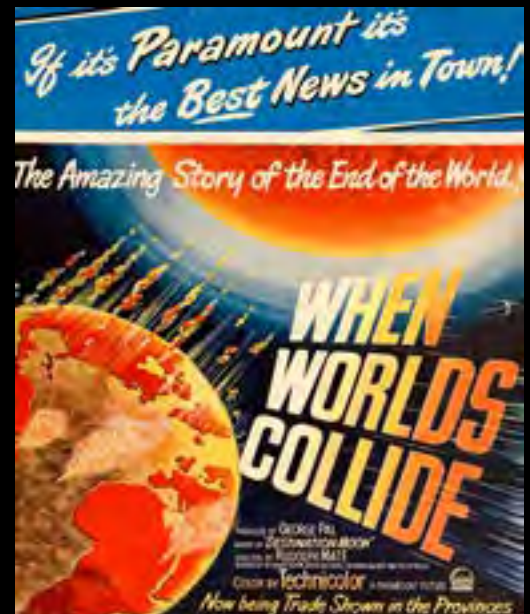
🕒 9.30 PM  
📍 Mathematikon,  
Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Cinema

## WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

Directed by: Rudolph Maté  
(1951 | OV English with German subtitles)

Scientific commentary:  
Richard Wilman (CAPAS Fellow, Durham University)



Part of the roadshow “Universe On Tour” BMBF Science Year 2023.

TUESDAY

25  
07

🕒 4.15 PM – 5.45 PM 📍 Neue Universität, Lecture Hall 14, Heidelberg

CAPAS Lecture Series

## TITLE tba

Public Lecture by Gabriele Schwab (University of California, Irvine).

Digital stream on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLjWNwsacG4>

WED-THUR

26-27  
07

📍 CAPAS  
Workshop

## NUCLEAR GHOSTS

The ghosts we seek in this workshop articulate the entanglements between ongoing atomic violence and experiences of apocalyptic ontologies to conjure up a critical moment or point of creative anxiety that exposes the cracks in repressive power formations, troubles common understandings of temporality, space, or materiality and invokes the spectral domain of end time imaginaries in their various political scales and urgencies.

FRIDAY

28  
07

🕒 9.30 PM 📍 Mathematikon, Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Cinema

## EVA

Directed by: Kike Maíllo (2011 | OV with English subtitles)

Scientific commentary: Ullrich Köthe  
(Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science, Heidelberg University)



© LEONINE Studios

FRIDAY

04  
08

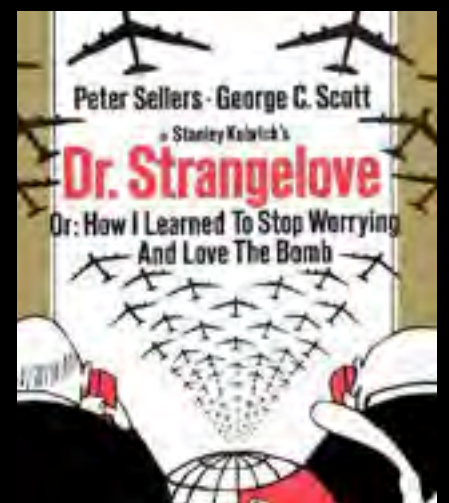
🕒 9.30 PM 📍 Mathematikon, Heidelberg

Apocalyptic Cinema

## DR. STRANGELOVE OR: HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE BOMB

Directed by: Stanley Kubrick (1964 | OV English with German subtitles)

Scientific commentary: Christoph Pistner (Öko-Institut Darmstadt)



All CAPAS events at [www.capas.uni-heidelberg.de/events.html](http://www.capas.uni-heidelberg.de/events.html)



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FOR APOCALYPTIC AND  
POST-APOCALYPTIC STUDIES

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**OPEN-AIR  
CINEMA**  
Summer 2023

**MATHE-  
MATIKON**  
Im Neuenheimer Feld 205  
Heidelberg

**FRIDAYS  
9.30 PM**

**FREE  
ENTRY**  
Limited Admission



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## SPECIAL ASTEROID DAY

**30 06 | 8 PM | KARLSTORKINO  
FIREBALL: VISITORS FROM  
DARKER WORLDS**

## OPEN-AIR MATHEMATIKON

**14 07 | BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD**

**21 07 | WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE**  
PART OF THE ROADSHOW 'UNIVERSE ON TOUR'  
BMBF SCIENCE YEAR 2023

**28 07 | EVA**

**04 08 | DR. STRANGELOVE OR: HOW  
I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING  
AND LOVE THE BOMB**

#PUBLIC  
APOCALYPSE

## KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER CAPAS AT IMPACT DAY

How can research be used relevantly for society, business and politics? How can impact be communicated from within the university? Knowledge and technology transfer were the key themes of the first IMPACT DAY at Heidelberg University in May 2023. As a meeting place, IMPACT DAY offered the opportunity to be inspired, make new contacts and exchange ideas. As a part of IMPACT DAY, CAPAS participated in the IMPACT FAIR, whose goal was to promote the transfer of knowledge and technologies in Heidelberg.



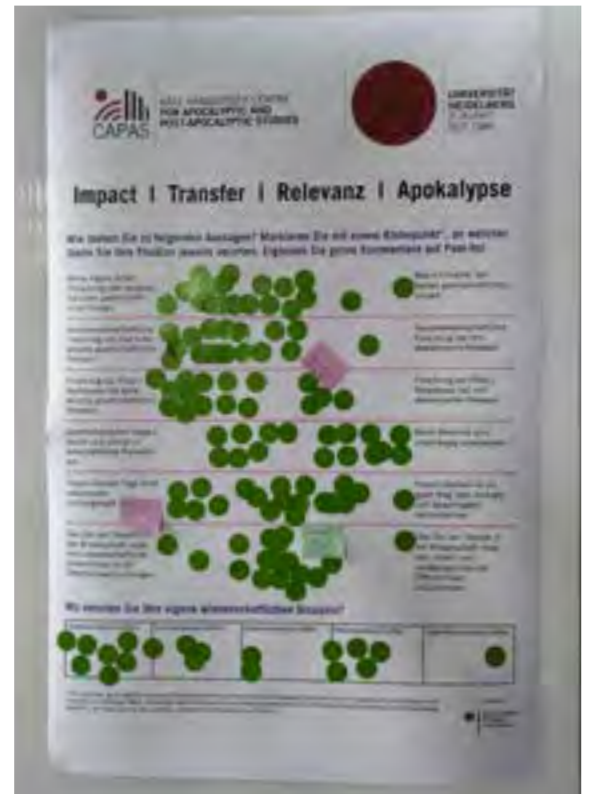
The CAPAS booth was ready just before the start of the fair, waiting for people to arrive. Thanks to the technical support by hei\_INNOVATION, visitors could listen to and watch videos documenting the art and science cooperation with DAGADA dance company and SANER.

The visitors emphasized how inspiring it was to learn about the transfer approach of a transdisciplinary centre – rooted in the humanities, while also including art and the public.





People could read through the first issue of *Apocalyptica* and all the printed issues of *Apocalyptic Quarterly*.



For our research, we asked the visitors to position themselves on certain statements about impact, transfer, relevance and apocalypse such as: “Humanities research has a high current social relevance.” vs. “Humanities research has academic relevance only.” Or: “The aim of transfer in science must be to bring scientific findings to the public.” vs. “The aim of transfer in science must be to take up ideas and suggestions from the public.”



We had many inspiring encounters with colleagues, students and the public. It was the perfect place for the CAPAS Transdisciplinary Science Communication Lab to exchange with others.



#ART  
APOCALYPSE

## PHOTO EXHIBITION ON THE NON-WORD OF 2022 CLIMATE TERRORISTS

The term *Climate Terrorists* is used in public political discourse to discredit activists and their protests. Activists such as *Last Generation*, who advocate for the implementation of climate protection measures and adherence to the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement. While some methods and approaches on climate activism might be debatable, the urgency to avoid a climate apocalypse is made clear by a continuous stream of new worrying studies.

In Germany, an independent jury made up of linguists and journalists each year since 1991 chooses the non-word of the previous year, based on suggestions everybody can submit. Non-words are, according to the official definition, “words and phrases from public language that are factually grossly inappropriate and possibly even violate human dignity. It’s not about sloppy language use, but about our society revealing itself through language.”

[The jury criticised the use of the term \*Climate Terrorists\*](#) because it equates climate activists with terrorists and thus criminalises and defames them. Terrorism is understood as the systematic use of violence and

spreading of fear and terror. In order to achieve their goals, terrorists accept destruction, death and murder. By equating climate activists protests with terrorism, non-violent forms of civil disobedience and democratic resistance are placed in the context of violence and hostility to the state. The use of the stigmatising term climate terrorists also shifts the focus of the debate from the justified substantive demands of the group to the treatment of protesters (e.g. preventive detention). The demands of the climate activists to overcome the climate crisis through effective political measures fade into the background in the public discourse, as does the global threat posed by climate change.



© Benjamin Stehl

A group of nine photographers from Darmstadt (Stefan Daub, Jan Nouki Ehlers, Julia Essl, Albrecht Haag, Jens Mangelsen, Sebastian Reimold, Jens Steingässer, Rahel Welsen, Andreas Zierhut) argues, that if the non-words unmask conditions, it must also be possible to visually represent them as well. Every year a new photo exhibition is created on the given theme. Each photographer presents two works with which he or she visualises and interprets the Non-Word of the Year in a very personal and subjective way. All photographic works are also accessible on the [website of the project](#) together with short video-statements (in German) by the photographers.



Stefan Daub: “It is not the protest actions of climate activists that worry me – what I find frightening are the reactions of some people who are hindered in their everyday lives by the protest actions. Who is closer to the armed struggle? Who is the danger coming from?”



© Stefan Daub



© Rahel Welsen

Rahel Welsen: “Only when one’s own garden is no longer allowed to be watered, when the car wash is endangered, when entire forests in Central Europe are dying in heat and drought, then astonishment and indignation arise. The forests around Darmstadt in particular are in a catastrophic state, everyone can see it. Nevertheless, the young family happily walks through the zombie-forest wearing breathing masks.”

The exhibition was shown at the Schader Stiftung in March 2023. As part of the vernissage, Philipp Schrögel from CAPAS presented the scientific ceremonial address on climate communication and the apocalypse. The well attended evening with more than 350 participants created many opportunities for dialogue between social sciences, the arts and the public. [Alexander Gemeinhardt, Director of the foundation](#), cited dramatist Heiner Müller on this space of possibility of art and the result of its potential for alienation: “The function of art is to make reality impossible”.



© Sebastian Reimold



© Stefan Daub

After the initial exhibition in Darmstadt, the photos can be viewed at Marburg University from 01.06. – 12.07.2023 (Monday through Friday 12pm – 10 pm, Lecture Building, Biegenstr. 14, Marburg) with an [accompanying programme](#).



#SCIENCE  
APOCALYPSE

# LIVING AFTER THE END

by Thomas Meier

**How do survivors return to life when their lifeworld has been devastated? How do societies cope with re-establishing an identity after their worlds have been deliberately destroyed? Questions like these were the focus of a workshop organised by CAPAS director Thomas Meier and his colleagues in Heidelberg, 11-15 April 2023.**

Concerns about climate change have led landscape researchers to explore the impact of major ‘natural’ (generally compounded by humans) catastrophe and change caused by wildfires, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic events or sea level rise. However, there has been much less research into the impact of human-caused, deliberate landscape devastation, and even less research on the re-shaping of landscapes and identities in the immediate aftermath of such apocalyptic experiences.

In the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and of other dystopian experiences of the late 20th and 21st centuries such as the genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar, the Syrian and Sudanese civil wars, and, most recently, the Russian attack on Ukraine, the damages caused to identity of (especially minor) societal groups by the devastation of heritage have started to receive attention. What is still lacking, however, is an awareness of

the importance of rootedness in an individually charged landscape, even though this is highlighted in the (post-) modern and globalised world as a key ingredient for mental and bodily well-being and positive identity formation. In order to address these under researched areas, the CAPAS project “Devastation, dislocation and (re-)settlement. Breaking/replacing the people-place connection in landscape”, co-directed by CAPAS director Thomas Meier and Sam Turner of Newcastle University, and jointly funded by the DFG and the AHRC is researching this hitherto unexplored field (<https://research.ncl.ac.uk/devastation/>).

The Heidelberg workshop brought together 17 colleagues from five countries in systematic, theoretically informed discussions around four key issues:

- Impact: What is the impact of devastation on communities beyond the economic and functional level,



especially in terms of their constructions of mental landscapes and sense of place?

- Dis-/Empowerment: Under what circumstances does sudden devastation or dislocation lead to disempowerment or (by contrast) offers options for empowerment of social groups, thus catalysing social change?
- Resilience: What factors affected the recovery and response, i.e., societal ‘resilience’? What landscape-related strategies were followed in the immediate aftermath of devastation or dislocation (in the response phase of the disaster cycle) to re-arrange and re-accommodate social structures and shared or individual identities?
- Aftermath: What kind of societies have emerged consequently? To what extent are factors such as social cohesion or agency the defining factors in the creation of new landscapes? To what degrees do coping with devastation and with dislocation produce similar practices and structures? Is the destruction of place and landscape more or less significant than forced migration?

In order to add the flesh of reality to these theoretical questions, discussions were grounded in a series of individual case studies. These include the devastation of the Palatinate in the 1690s, the several devastations from 20th/21st century Anatolia and the Near East (Asia Minor, Armenia, Syria, Iraq), 16th century Mexico, and today’s Netherlands. To top it off, there was a public keynote lecture by Marie Louise Stig Sørensen on “When reconstruction is not enough. Rebuilding society after violent conflict”.

In a nutshell, the workshop clearly revealed that the reformation of societies among the survivors of intentional landscape devastation and deliberate dislocation frequently prepares the ground for dooming future disasters. This is because it comes along with as much violence and oppression as the much more eye-catching catastrophe itself: The post-apocalyptic often looks as apocalyptic as the end of the world that preceded it.

An outline of the project’s framework can be found here: <https://www.aup-online.com/content/journals/10.5117/JEL2023.1.002.DUIJ>

#FELLOW  
APOCALYPSE

## IN THE SPOTLIGHT BRAD EVANS

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

**Brad Evans:** When I came across the call, I was initially intrigued and mindful of its timeliness to a world that seems to be ever teetering on the edge of an abyss. Now, more than ever, we need to have difficult

and challenging trans-disciplinary conversations on issues that force us to confront ruptures in the past and terrors ahead. The fellowship proposed to facilitate this, hence my reason for applying.

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

While I am always reticent to admit it, I do often find myself in agreement with the German constitutional lawyer Carl Schmitt when he noted that all modern concepts are secularised theological concepts. In terms of my discipline (politics), while the apocalyptic tends to be relegated to some discursive instrument, in my recent work I have come to see it as integral to the lived experiences of disaster and how such disasters necessarily have revelatory qualities. What happens when time stops, and the earth opens? What is revealed in such moments? And what can never be returned? Speaking of the apocalyptic then, to me, is more a set of questions that is inseparable to how we picture the world.

**What is your fellowship trying to achieve?**

During my fellowship I have been working on two chapters for a forthcoming book I am writing on life growing up in the former mining communities of South Wales. It is titled, “How Black was my Valley: Life & Fate in a Post-Industrial Heartland”, which will be published by Repeater/Penguin Random House next year. The valleys of South Wales have been notably haunted by a disaster – the Aberfan tragedy, when a spoil tip cascaded down a mountain and killed a generation of young children. I have been working through the revealing effects of this, how narratives describing the tragedy and wider place have been continually marked by biblical references, how micro-apocalyptic events can leave communities in a condition of stasis (what we might see as a purgatorio), along with the way it evokes a notable rupture that concentrates the death of a socialism and the birth of the Anthropocene.

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

I believe that all mediations on the apocalypse should begin with Andrei Tarkovskys *Stalker*, which is a truly masterful film that throws us all into the void. In terms of books, we should read over and over, Dantes *The Divine Comedy*. Though as I argued in my last book, *Ecce Humanitas*, maybe we should also read it backwards and confront a story where we move from salvation back through the affliction and end up left in a wilderness of doubt.



**Brad Evans** is a political philosopher, critical theorist, and writer, who's work focuses on the problem of violence. He is the founding director of the Centre for the Study of Violence (to be launched 2023) and holds a Chair in Political Violence & Aesthetics at the University of Bath, United Kingdom.



#PUBLIC  
APOCALYPSE

APOCALYPTIC  
WINE TASTING

## WINES, WORLDS, WASTELANDS

The weird and wonderful world of wine and apocalypse have a long and heady history, although it is often an unaware anchorage that combines them, wine has much more to do with world endings than one might, at first, assume. Considering the significance of viticulture, history, empire, politics, and apocalypse together in their altogether often unaware entanglements offers us new ways to think about the drink while still expecting quality and – that subjective sense – taste. To explore these topics, CAPAS hosted a first Apocalyptic Wine Tasting – Wine, Worlds, Wastelands in May 2023. Four very different wines presented a delicious taste adventure. But also intellectually the chosen topic proved to be fruitful. Moderated by Philipp Schrögel, the evening comprised three diverse inputs that shed light on different scientific perspectives on wine and apocalypse: CAPAS fellow Emily Ray spoke about “Aging Gracefully – Wine, Wellness, and the End of Worlds”, former editor with Spektrum der Wissenschaft and now owner of an online shop for natural wines Richard Zinken pondered about “No wine today – Viticultural Apocalypses” and Michael Dunn explored “[Wines, Worlds, Wastelands: Shifting Apocalyptic Temporalities.](#)”

●●● [read more online](#)

[capas.uni-heidelberg.de](http://capas.uni-heidelberg.de)

Apart from the wine, the four protagonists of the evening (from left to right): Emily Ray, Philipp Schrögel, Michael Dunn and Richard Zinken.



## IMPRINT

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CAPAS researcher Michael Dunn spoke about “Wines, Worlds, Wastelands: Shifting Apocalyptic Temporalities.”



