

THE ENDS OF THE WORLD: ANTHROPOCENE & APOCALYPSE



*“Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.”—Robert Frost*

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Days, Hours
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The end of the world may not be as distant as it once seemed. Some have gone so far as to claim that the apocalypse has already happened—we just haven’t noticed it yet. These apocalyptic anxieties are nothing new, yet they have assumed a newfound urgency in recent years. For scholars, critics, artists, and practitioners working across the arts and humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences—including literary and critical theory, theology, cultural and environmental history, climate science, geology, biology, and cosmology, among others—the future is, astoundingly, now. This renewed interest in the end time raises several questions: Just how much future is there? What is the nature of the apocalypse to come? Has it already happened? How has the apocalypse been imagined in the past? What comes after the Anthropocene? What can we learn from survivors of apocalypse? Are there normative ways of imagining the end of the world? Are certain imaginations better (or worse)? This course takes an interdisciplinary approach to these questions of ecocriticism, ethics, apocalypse and Anthropocene, exploring the ideas of a wide range of theorists, authors, scholars, and artists currently grappling with the ever more imminent end-to-things.

Required Books:

1. Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*, (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2015). Book.
2. Peter Brannen, *The Ends of the World: Volcanic Apocalypses, Lethal Oceans, and Our Quest to Understand Earth’s Past Mass Extinctions*, First edition. (New York, NY: Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2017).
3. Naomi Oreskes, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

WEEK 1: INTRODUCING THE END OF THE WORLD

- *No assigned readings.*

WEEK 2: ESCHATOLOGY

- Book of Revelation, [online](#).
- *The Rapture Index*, [online](#).
- Ted Chiang, “Hell is the Absence of God,” [PDF](#).

WEEK 3: SLOW APOCALYPSE

- “A Quake in Being,” & “The End of the World,” in Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013). PDF.
- “Beginning After the End,” in Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, Wellesley Library Lecture Series at the University of California, Irvine (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). PDF.
- “Slow Violence, Neoliberalism, and the Environmental Picaresque,” in Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). PDF.

WEEK 4: IMAGINING APOCALYPSE

- Langdon Jones, ‘The Great Clock’, *New Worlds Quarterly*, 160 (1966). PDF.
- “The Machine Stops” by E.M. Forster, *The Oxford and Cambridge Review*. (London: Archibald Constable & Co, 1909). [Online](#).
- Ron Currie, *Everything Matters!* (New York: Viking, 2009).

WEEK 5: PREDICTING APOCALYPSE

- Naomi Oreskes, *The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
- David Wallace-Wells, ‘When Will the Planet Be Too Hot for Humans? Much, Much Sooner Than You Imagine.’, *Daily Intelligencer*, 2017. [Online](#).

WEEK 6: APOCALYPSE AGAIN

- Nnedi Okorafor, *Binti*, (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2015). Book.
- Rebecca Roanhorse, “Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience,” *Apex Magazine*, August 8, 2017. [Online](#).
- Have a look at Huma Bhabha’s [postapocalyptic sculpture](#).

WEEK 7: EXTINCTION

- Peter Brannen, *The Ends of the World: Volcanic Apocalypses, Lethal Oceans, and Our Quest to Understand Earth’s Past Mass Extinctions*, First edition. (New York, NY: Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2017). (selected chapters).
- “Prologue” and “The Sixth Extinction,” in Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, First edition. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2014).

WEEK 8: END IN FIRE

- P. R. Ehrlich and others, *The Cold and the Dark: The World after Nuclear War* (WW Norton and Co, New York, NY, 1984). PDF.

- Mark A. Harwell *Nuclear Winter; The Human and Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War*. New York: Springer-Verlag, 1984. (selections).
- *The Doomsday Clock* ([Online](#)).
- Keiji Nakazawa, *Ore Wa Mita, (I Saw It: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima: A Survivor's True Story*. 1972/1982. [Online](#).

WEEK 9: END IN ICE

- Pamela Zoline, “The Heat Death of the Universe,” *New Worlds*, July 1967. PDF.
- Clock of the Long Now.
- Lee Vinsel, ‘The Lack-of-Positive-Futures Hypothesis’, *Lee Vinsel*, 2018. [Online](#).
- Geoff Ryman, et al., “The Mundane Manifesto’, *SFGenics: Notes on Science, Fiction, and Science Fiction*, 2013. [Online](#).
- Have a look at Rachel Sussman’s [Cosmic Microwave Mandala](#). ([Video](#)).

WEEK 10: ESCAPING APOCALYPSE

- Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1994). (Selections, PDF).
- Have a look at [Starman](#).
- Selections on terraforming Mars, and The Golden Record.

WEEK 11: PREPPING FOR APOCALYPSE

- Evan Osnos, "Doomsday Prep for the Super-Rich," *New Yorker* (January 30, 2017). [Online](#).
- Watch one episode of *Doomsday Preppers*. Online. Come to class prepared to provide a discuss the episode you’ve watched.
- Have a look at [Survival Condos](#).
- Bonus: *The Simpsons*, “Bart’s Comet,” 1995. [Online](#).

WEEK 12: AVERTING APOCALYPSE

- “A Manifesto for a Good Anthropocene,” *An Ecomodernist Manifesto*. [Online](#).
- “Scale, Scope, Stakes, Speed,” and “Planet Craft” in Stewart Brand, *Whole Earth Discipline: An Ecopragmatist Manifesto* (New York: Viking, 2009).

WEEK 13: UNDOING APOCALYPSE – DE-EXTINCTION

- See assignment description for “De-Extinction.”
- "Introduction, Bringin' It Back" in Helen Pilcher, *Bring Back the King: The New Science of De-Extinction* (Bloomsbury Sigma, 2017). PDF.

WEEK 14: ACCEPTING APOCALYPSE

- Roy Scranton, “Coming Home,” in *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene: Reflections on the End of a Civilization* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 2015), 13-27. PDF.
- *Hagakure*, selections. PDF.
- Lauren Gail Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Introduction.

De-Extinction Debate

On 15 March 2013, Ryan Phelan and her husband Stewart Brand hosted TEDx “Revive & Restore,” a conference which explored the ethical dimensions of “de-extinction,” that is, genetically cloning lost species and reintroducing them into the wild: “Can it be done responsibly? Should it be done at all?” For this assignment, the challenge is to apply the critical tools we’ve learned so far this semester to analyze the following arguable proposition:

De-extinction is a useful and necessary technology for conservation efforts.

There are X students in this class, so:

Pro: X of you will argue *for* the proposition.

Con: X of you will argue *against* the proposition.

X of you will serve as questioners and judges.

Preparation

- 1) **Read:** Carefully go over the assigned readings for this week.
- 2) **Watch:** Stewart Brand’s [video](#).
And watch at least one, no more than two, videos from the TEDx “Revive & Restore” conference. <http://tedxdeextinction.org/>
- 3) **Coordinate:** Fill out on the following spreadsheet (insert link) which video(s) you watched, and what position you’d like to take for the debate (pro, con, or judge). Use the spreadsheet to coordinate with other members of your group ahead of time, so you have an idea of how each of you are approaching this debate.
- 4) **Prepare:**
 - Take notes. You want to use the videos to help you construct arguments for/against the proposition that make sense.
 - Think about what other philosophers / thinkers might inform your argument. Channel them.
 - Feel free to bring a notecard to class for guidance if it is helpful to you.

Debate

The prosecution and defense will sit on opposite sides of the room. The defense (pro) will make an argument in favor of de-extinction (1-2 minutes). The prosecution will then make a brief argument against (1-2 minutes max). The pro and con teams will then switch back and forth, offering counter arguments to one another in whatever order the respective teams feel is most logical. This process will repeat until both sides have exhausted their arguments, at which point each of the judges will be allowed to ask a further question of the pro or con side of the room. Judgements will then be conferred, with closing explanations of majority and minority opinions from the judges. Each student should speak at least once.