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ESCHATOGRAPHY: ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE END OF THE WORLD

Introduction:

This is a reconstruction of a course I taught in the Fall of 2007, by the same name. My goal was to integrate ecological concerns into a course on comparative apocalypticism and to think about the ways that “sustainability” functions as a sort of counter-point to the eco-apocalypse. One challenge was to help student understand sustainability discourses and practices within the rhetorical conventions of millennial thought and, at the same time, invite them to inhabit those conventions in ways that might provoke more environmentally conscious ways of living among them. I did this by leading them through some of the radical literary forms of naturalism that developed in the late 18th century in response to then-emergent changes in industrial production, imperialism, and philosophies of progress, all of which resonate with similar global tendencies today. I also designed a narrated field trip or field tour through Atlanta neighborhoods that I’m hoping will bring home to them the human ecology of non-sustainable urban development. The trip is intended as a complement to our reading of the more prophetic sciences of global warming and the like, linking the human and environmental impacts of consumption, profit, and expansion into one tangible mise-en-scene. In the previous units of this course, students will have read narratives from people suffering through certain Ends that have been interpreted as apocalyptic moments—the words of those supposedly “left behind” by fertility adjustments, AIDS, deindustrialization, and so on. In this unit they are asked to produce their own narratives of the present, as ethnographic subjects living through the struggle between eco-devastation and sustainable futures. We will share these with the class on our final day as a way of figuring out some concrete strategies for making sustainable living into anti-apocalyptic practice. I think there are probably sharper writings on urban decay/ urban renewal etc. that I could use to flesh out this experience a little. Also, because one of the themes running through this course is temporal consciousness, I became fascinated with the different ways that nature’s own time and rhythms have been seized upon by strands of critical environmentalism for different purposes. To some, there seems to be a possible balancing of human time with that of the Earth (if only we would pay attention) while to others, apocalyptic critique is located in showing that the planet can and will endure even if humans don’t—where sustainability-as-future is really about a human future since the Earth has ways of taking care of itself. Poaching slightly from our shared list of environmental artists, this unit foregrounds the practice of ecological attentiveness as a way of rethinking both the anthropological necessity and non-anthro-centric mandate of struggles for sustainability.

ANT 385
ESCHATOGRAPHY: ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE END OF THE WORLD

Fall, 2009
Tues/ Thurs 1:00-2:15, Anthropology 105

Instructor:
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“What is required is a willingness to apocalyptically critique (for there is no other kind of critique than one that holds out the promise of a truer or better future) apocalyptic critique itself.” (Robbins 2004: 247)

It is perhaps one of the great global ironies that human history is replete with predictions, expectations, and even narrations of its own End. And yet, for now anyway, here we are. Apocalyptic thinking seems to become especially popular in (though never limited to) periods surrounding very real crises in political or natural orders—volcano eruptions, earthquakes, the fall of Rome in 410, the bubonic plague epidemic of the mid 1300s, the conquest of the Americas, the bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the Cold War decades, 9/ 11, Katrina, and so on. But even when immediate events are read as signs of the apocalypse, they are never the only signs drawn upon to give meaning to it—a whole assemblage of historically-contingent cultural and political knowledge goes into the making of an encounter with the End. Think, for instance, of the first image that comes to mind when you think about the end of the world (*Plague and pestilence? A mushroom cloud? Zombie attack? Bio-terrorism? Locusts filling the skies or cargo falling from planes?*) and how reliant it is on contemporary technologies, political discourses, scientific discoveries, constructions of internal and external enemies, and so on. How might your image compare with that of your grandparents, or that of friends raised in other countries, or those adhering to different faiths?

Rooted in such epistemic particularity, apocalypticisms are naturally suited for comparative anthropological research. Much of this course is organized around the attempt to contextualize apocalyptic engagements by delving into the social and historical conditions of their production around the world at different points in time. As we do this we will also be attempting to understand what might be called the social ‘uses’ of End Time narratives, approaching them as rhetorical devices linked to various political goals, moral projects, ideological constructions of identity, and boundary maintenance. It is in this vein that we will ask such questions as: is a secular apocalypse possible? Does Armageddon have a gender? A sexuality? What do AIDS, *Mad Max*, and a closed auto plant in Wisconsin have to do with one another? And *whose* world really ends with the End?

But if End Times are products of their times, they are also very specific engagements *with* time. Apocalyptic narratives and beliefs generally reveal very complex forms of

historical consciousness and ways of *being-in-time*. It is often unclear whether Ends are ends at all or if they are rather (or also) beginnings, lapses, regressions, returns, Seconds, or suspensions of time as we know it. Are they closer in form to mythical time or predestination than history proper? Such constructions present a number of problems for anthropology. How can anthropologists engage with the idea of life's end when our central concepts and themes—culture, structure, kinship, reproduction, economy to name a few—predispose us to emphasizing social endurance and systemic resilience? Does our discipline's origin in the Enlightenment lock us into forms of “continuity thinking” and, if so, how can we seriously understand lives oriented around notions of finitude? Is our claim to *anthro*-pology made facetious by our unwillingness to submit to the one temporal fact of human life—that it ends? And what would an ethnographer do at the apocalypse, anyway? Who, at the End, is taking notes?

We take up the challenge of exploring anthropology's problems with time and endings in Unit One, the first of seven that structure this class. Unit Two will have us engage with the Book of Revelation and submit it to a cultural and feminist reading, while Unit Three brings us into the study of millenarianism through cases of conquest and colonial encounter. The following three Units pose the question of Ends in relation to major anthropological themes—kinship and reproduction, health and the body, and economy. The final Unit submits current discourses of global warming and environmental destruction to an apocalyptic reading and contrasts these to the naturalistic millennialisms of eco-activists. Is “sustainability” the counter-point to the new End? How can such a reading help re-cast the

In sum, this course performs a double move, attempting to develop at once an anthropological critique of apocalypticism and an apocalyptic critique of anthropology, hoping, with Robbins (above), that it may inspire us to hold out and work toward a better future.

COURSE READINGS

Fassin, Didier. 2007. *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- **Available at the Emory bookstore**

LaHaye, Tim and Jerry B. Jenkins. 1995. *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days*. Wheaton: Tyndale House.

- **Free copies will be provided**

Pippin, Tina. 1992. *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John*. Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox.

- **Out of Print: Full copy will be on Reserves Direct**

All other readings will be accessible through Reserves Direct, accessible by going to the [Woodruff Library](#) homepage, selecting [Reserves Direct](#), then [ANT 385-001 Special Topics: Anthropology](#).

WEBSITE:

Whole genres of art, film, literature, and music have developed around the idea of the end of the world, producing some wonderful (and some pretty bad) work on this theme. We are setting up a Blackboard site for this class mainly for us to share media clips (songs, videos, links, articles, etc) dealing with this topic. You should be able to submit links on your own, but do send me (or bring to class) anything you want to add. I'll also post all class assignments, handouts, etc there.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

- 15% Participation
- 25% Unit Response Papers (5 x 5%, due on the last day of select Units, as below)
- 15% Mid-Term Exam (October 18)
- 10% Sustainability Report (due December 11)
- 35% Final Paper (due December 17)

Participation (15%): a) Regular attendance is mandatory and all students are expected to participate vocally in class. This means arriving *having read the assigned readings* and being *prepared to ask questions, discuss, and respond to questions* about them. It would be a good idea to arrive at class with some ideas and questions jotted down.

b) Starting in Week Three, we will ask one student per class to prepare three questions for discussion of the assigned readings. These must be sent to me by email by 5 pm the night before class—I will, in turn, send them around to everyone.

Unit Response Papers (5 x 5% =25%): On the final day of five of the first six Units (skip the one of your choice), students will submit 3-4 page response papers, analytically summarizing and critically engaging with the main ideas developed in that Unit, their relation to course themes and, as the course advances, previous readings. Do not think of these as formal essays, but do work to make them somewhat polished writings about the topics covered. We will be looking for you to show both a grasp of the material and creative thinking about it.

Mid-Term Exam (15%): In class exam. Please bring examination booklets.

Sustainability Report (10%): On November 29, we will be going on a field trip to a site or sites evocative of the themes of urban decay and environmental catastrophe. You are to think of yourselves as the ethnographic subjects of this Unit and write a short (4 page) reflection on the visit, in dialogue with the sources we are reading and viewing. What does this place do to conjure up the broader feeling of the present, its concerns, forecasts, and desires, and how do you position yourself in them?

Research Paper (35%): Students will submit a final analytical essay of 10 pages based upon original research on a topic of their choosing. You may pursue any of the units or subjects covered in class in greater detail or write on a related issue. In mid September we will circulate a list of possible essay topics, but you are encouraged to begin thinking immediately about what might be most interesting to you and relevant to your future studies. **Note that you must submit a one-page Essay Proposal (worth 2% of your final

essay grade), or topic overview, on Tuesday, October 30. This should include a one-paragraph description of your idea and a list of at least 5 of the major sources you will be using.

A note about plagiarism and cheating

Students are expected at all times to abide by the terms of the Honor Code of Emory College, a copy of which is available at:

http://www.college.emory.edu/current/standards/pdf/honor_code_print.pdf

Plagiarism, in particular, will not be tolerated and constitutes grounds for a failing grade. For further details on what constitutes plagiarism, please consult the following sites:

<http://www.writingcenter.emory.edu/laddplagiarism.html> and
<http://www.writingcenter.emory.edu/plagiarism.html>

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE

Thursday August 30: Introductions

No Readings

UNIT ONE: ANTHROPOLOGY & TEMPORALITY

WEEK TWO

Tuesday, September 4: Anthropology and its Problematic Locations of Temporality: Culture & Structure, Continuity & Change.

1. Kroeber, A.L. 1948. "The Nature of Culture". *Race—Language—Culture—Psychology—Prehistory*. Pp 252-256, 288-290.
2. Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1952. "On Social Structure". From *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (reprinted in *Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology*, Moore and Sanders eds.). Pp 122-127.
3. Emery, Amy Fass. 1996. "Sa(l)vage Ethnography: The Cannibalistic Imagination in Juan José Saer's *El entenado*". Ch. 6 of *The Anthropological Imagination in Latin American Literature*. Pp 109-125.

Thursday, September 6: The Anthropology of Time and the Time of Anthropology

1. Leach, Edmund R.. 1963 [1961] "Two Essays concerning the Symbolic Representation of Time". In *Rethinking Anthropology*. Pp 124-136
2. Fabian, Johannes. 1983. *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*, Chapter 1: Pp 1-35.

WEEK THREE

Tuesday, September 11: Death and Ritual

1. van Gennep, Arnold. 1908. "Conclusions" In *The Rites of Passage*, (reprinted in Hicks, *Ritual and Belief*). Pp 129-133.
2. Hicks, David. 1984. "Return to the Womb" in *A Maternal religion: The role of Women in Teturn Myth and Ritual* (reprinted in Hicks, *Ritual and Belief*). Pp 133-142.
3. Parry, Jonathan. 1982. Sacrificial Death and the Necrophagous Ascetic. In *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Bloch and Parry eds). Pp 74-101.

Thursday, September 13: Corpses

1. Metcalf, Peter A. 2005 [1978]. "Death Be Not Strange" (reprinted in Lehmann et. al.), *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion*). Pp 323-326.
2. Kilma, Alan. 2001. "The Telegraphic Abject: Buddhist Meditation and the Redemption of Mechanical Reproduction". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* . Pp. 552-580.

UNIT 2: CHRISTIAN APOCALYPTICISMS: THE BOOK OF REVELATION

WEEK FOUR

Tuesday, September 18: Revelation 1: Biblical Apocalypses

1. The Book of Revelation
2. Pippin, Tina. 1992. *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John*. Preface and Chapters 1-3. Pp 11-56.

Thursday, September 20: Revelation 2: Gendering the Apocalypse

1. Pippin, Tina. 1992. *Death and Desire: The Rhetoric of Gender in the Apocalypse of John*. Chapters 4-6. Pp 57-107.

WEEK FIVE

Tuesday, September 25: Apocalyptic Pulp Fiction

1. LaHaye & Jenkins. 1995 *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (first half)

Thursday, September 27: A Critical Appraisal of Left Behind

1. LaHaye & Jenkins. 1995 *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (finish)
2. Gorenberg, Gershom. 2002. "Intolerance: The Bestseller" (critical review of the *Left Behind* Series) http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=book_review
3. Forbes, Bruce David. 2004. "How Popular are the Left Behind Books...and Why?" and

4. Frykholm, Amy Johnson. 2004 "What Social and Political Messages Appear in the Left Behind Books?" from *Rapture, Revelation, and the End Times: Exploring the Left Behind Series* (Forbes and Kilde eds.)

UNIT 3: MILLENARIANISM IN CONQUEST AND COLONIALISM

WEEK SIX

Tuesday, October 2: Millenarianisms and Temporal Conflicts in/ of Conquest

1. McGinn, Bernard. 1979. "Christopher Columbus" In *Visions of the End: Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*. Pp 284-285.
2. Adorno, Rolena. 1982. "The Language of History in Guaman Poma's Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno". In *From Oral to Written Expression: Native Andean Chronicles of the Early Colonial Period* (Adorno ed.). Pp 109-133 (+ illustrations, Pp 139-173.
3. Fariss, Nancy M. "Remembering the Future, Anticipating the Past: History, Time, and Cosmology among the Maya of Yucatan". In *Time: Histories and Ethnologies* (Hughes and Trautman eds.). Pp 107-130.

Thursday, October 4: Cargo Cults and Melanesian Millenarianisms 1 (*The Double Critique*)

1. Worsley, Peter M. 1959. "Cargo Cults". *Scientific American* (reprint in *Ritual and Belief: Readings in the Anthropology of Religion*, Hicks ed.). Pp. 469-473.
2. Burridge, Kenelem. 1960. *Mambu: A Melanesian Millennium*. Preface, Prologue, and Chapter 1. Pp. xv-xxiii, 1-44.
 - a. Chapter 5, "The Myth-Dream," is included and must be at least skimmed
3. Lindstrom, Lamont. "Cargo Cult at the Third Millennium". In *Cargo, Cult, and Critique* (Jebens, ed.). Pp 15-35.

***BRUCE KNAUFT (Department of Anthropology, Emory University) guest lecture

WEEK SEVEN

Tuesday, October 9: NO CLASS, FALL BREAK

Thursday, October 11: Cargo Cults and Melanesian Millenarianisms 2 (*Conversions*)

1. Robbins, Joel. 1997. "666, or Why is the Millennium on the Skin? Morality, the State and the Epistemology of Apocalypticism among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea". In *Millennial Markers* (Stewart and Strathern eds.). Pp 35-54.
2. Robbins, Joel. 2007. "Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity". *Current Anthropology* 48 (1): 5-17.

WEEK EIGHT

Tuesday, October 16: MID TERM EXAM

UNIT 4: THE END OF KINSHIP AND REPRODUCTION

Thursday, October 18: Structures of Kinship and Gender: A Short Anthropological Primer

1. Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1969 [1949]. "The Principle of Reciprocity" in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Pp 52-68.
2. Rubin, Gayle. 1975. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex", In *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, New York, Monthly Review Press (Reiter, ed.)

WEEK NINE

Tuesday, October 23: Kinship and Fertility Problems in Europe

1. Swift, Jonathan. 1730. "A Modest Proposal...". 22 pages.
2. Selections from *Barren States: The Population "Implosion" in Europe* (Douglass ed., 2006)
 - a. Douglass, Carrie B. "Introduction" (edit.). Pp 1-19.
 - b. Paxson, Heather. "Underfertility's Challenge to Family and Gender Relations in Urban Greece". Pp 137-154.
 - c. Krause, Elizabeth L. "'Toys and Perfumes': Imploding Italy's Population Paradox and Motherly Myths". Pp. 159-176.
 - d. Kligman, Gail. "A Reflection on Barren States: The Demographic Paradoxes of Consumer Capitalism". Pp 249-155.

Thursday, October 25: The End of Reproduction

1. James, P.D. 2006 [1992]. *The Children of Men*, Chapter 1. Pp 3-12.
2. Edelman, Lee. 2004. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Chapter 1. Pp 1-31.

WEEK TEN

UNIT 5: EPIDEMICS AND THE BIO-APOCALYPSE

Tuesday, October 30: AIDS and the Cold War

1. Long, Thomas L. 2005. "Apocalyptus Interruptus: Christianity, Sodomy, and the End," Chapter 1 of *AIDS and American Apocalypticism: The Cultural Semiotics of an Epidemic*. Pp. 1-28.
2. Fassin, Didier. 2007. *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*. Begin

***KENT BRITNALL (Department of Religion, Emory University) guest lecture

*****ESSAY PROPOSALS DUE**

Thursday, November 1: AIDS in Post-Apartheid South Africa

1. Fassin, Didier. 2007. *When Bodies Remember: Experiences and Politics of AIDS in South Africa*. Continue

WEEK ELEVEN

Tuesday, November 6: Experiences of AIDS in South Africa and Haiti

1. Fassin, *When Bodies Remember*. Finish
2. Farmer, Paul. 1999 [1990]. "Sending Sickness: Sorcery, Politics, and Changing Concepts of AIDS in Rural Haiti". In *Infections and Inequalities: The Modern Plague*. Pp. 158-183.

UNIT 6: ECONOMIC HORRORS, LATE CAPITALIST AMBIVALENCES, AND THE POST-CAPITALIST IMAGINARY: COLD WAR DEINDUSTRIALIZATION

Thursday, November 8: The Cultural Politics of Late Capitalist Crisis

1. Winn, J. Emmett. *Mad Max, Reaganism, and The Road Warrior*. <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/winn972.htm>
2. Pask, Kevin. 1995. "Cyborg Economies: Desire and Labor in the Terminator Films". In *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End* (Dellamora ed.). Pp. 182- 196.
3. Rifkin, Jeremy. 1995. *The End of Work: The Decline of the Global Labor Force and the Dawn of the Post-Market Era*, Forward, Introduction, and Chapter 1. Pp xi-xvii, 3-14.

WEEK TWELVE

Tuesday, November 13: The End of Work: American Experiences of Deindustrialization

1. Dudley, Kathryn Marie. 1994. *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America*. Intro, Chapter 1, excerpt from Chapter 2 (pp 26-29), and Chapters 3-5.

Thursday, November 15: The End of Workers: Science, "Progress," and Triage

1. Forrester, Vivianne. 1999 [1996]. *The Economic Horror*, chapters 1, 2, and 12. Pp 1-28, 125-135.
2. Visvanathan, Shiv. 1997. "On the Annals of the Laboratory State". In *A Carnival for Science: Essays on Science, Technology and Development*. Pp. 15-47.

UNIT 7: ECO-APOCALYPSES vs. SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

WEEK THIRTEEN

Tuesday, November 20: Nature in the Romantic Apocalypse: Eco-Millennial Counterpoints to Industrialization, Empire, and the Enlightenment

1. Selections from Blake, Shelley, Milton, Coleridge
2. Fulford, Tom. 2002. "Millenarianism and the Study of Romanticism" in *Romanticism and Millenarianism* (T. Fulford, ed.): 1-22.

Thursday, November 22: THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASSES

WEEK FOURTEEN

Tuesday, November 27: Science, Climate Change, and the Eco-Prophets of Doom

1. McKibben, Bill. 1989. *The End of Nature*. Chapter 2: 47-91
2. Ascherson, Neal 2007. "Diary". *London Review of Books*. 18 October 2007: 34-5.
3. Lovelock, James. 2007. *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity*. Chapters 3 & 4: Pp 39-65.
4. Bailey, Ronald. 1993. *Eco-Scam: The False Prophets of Ecological Apocalypse*. Chapters 1 and 2.

Film Clips: Earth-as-vengeful-agent vs. helpless victim in *The Happening*, *Soilent Green*, *The Day After Tomorrow*, and *An Inconvenient Truth*

Thursday, November 29: Class, Community, and the Urban Wasteland: Places without People, People without Place (Field Trip)

1. Kolbert, Elizabeth. 2007. *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change* (selections)
2. Moll, Gary. 1996. "Atlanta's Changing Environment". *American Forests* (Spring):http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1016/is_n2_v102/ai_18333993/pg_1?tag=artBody:col1
3. Images of Urban Decay in Atlanta: <http://www.urbandecay.ca/ATLANTA.htm>

We will be visiting one or two (surprise) sites resonant with the themes of this unit. Take notes. You are the ethnographic subjects of this study and will be required to narrate your experience in a report due on December 6th (see above for project description).

WEEK FIFTEEN

Tuesday, December 4: Celebrating Nature's Temporality: The Arts and Sciences of a Post-Human Earth

1. Consult, explore, enjoy the work of nature artists (all on Blackboard):
 - a. Words:
 - i. Mary Oliver's poems:
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=5130>

- ii. Gary Snyder's poems: <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/archive/poet.html?id=6407>
- iii. Naturalistic reportage: http://www.milkweed.org/component/option,com_smartpages/Itemid,38/
- b. Vision:
 - i. Andy Goldsworthy's art: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/goldsworthy.html>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYPciDxKoyI&feature=related>
<http://www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk/browse/>
- c. Sound:
 - i. Clips from Emoto Masaru's "The Hidden Messages in Water," Messiaen's "Catalogue of the Birds 1957-8," and R. Murray Schafer's "Soundscape"
- 2. A Post-Human Nature (also on Blackboard):
 - a. Art:
 - i. Tokyo Genso: <http://www.pinktentacle.com/2008/08/tokyo-fantasy-images-of-the-apocalypse/>
 - b. Science: Weisman, Alan. 2007. *The World Without Us* (selections)
 - i. The World Without Us webpage: <http://www.worldwithoutus.com/index2.html>

Thursday, December 6: Millennialism against Apocalypse: Eco-Activism and the Counter-Discourses of Renewal and Sustainability

1. Lee, M. 1997. "The Millennial Ideology of 'Earth First!'". In *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements* (T. Robbins and S. Palmer, eds.): 119-138.
2. Mooallem, Jon. 2008. "Guerrilla Gardening". *New York Times Magazine* 8 June (Special Issue: "The Next City"). 76-82.
3. Pollan, Michael. 2007. "Our Decrepit Food Factories". *The New York Times*. December 16, 2007.

WEEK SIXTEEN

Tuesday, December 11: Bringing Sustainability Home: Place over Time?

***Discussion of student reports from our field trip (DUE TODAY). *Another world is possible?*

****The Instructor reserves the right to modify the class schedule and readings.**