

Fall 2017
Th 11-1:50 (CAC 333)

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COMM 363: Topics in Film: Cinema and the End of the World

Course Description

Some say the world will end in fire, some say in ice. No matter which one you prefer, though, there's no denying that the apocalypse is hot these days. Contemporary American popular culture is teeming with images of anticipation for the end of the world, the apocalypse itself, and its grisly, desolate aftermath, but apocalyptic narratives have been around for much longer, and have a lot to tell us about a given society's greatest hopes and worst fears for the future. This class will trace the history of images of the apocalypse and post-apocalypse in television and film, from zombies, nuclear war, and the rise of the machines to the destruction of the planet through over-consumption and waste, with a focus on American popular culture. Along the way, we'll look at a variety of other familiar apocalyptic tropes and themes, exploring cultural fascination with catastrophe, the end of the world as we know it, and the prospect of a fresh start.

Requirements (total of 100 points)

Participation/attendance	15 points
Weekly journals (total of 6, 5 points each)	30 points
Midterm paper (due 10/19) scale of 100)	25 points (25%; graded on a
Final paper (due 12/14) 100)	30 points (30%; graded on a scale of

Grading Scale

A: 94-100	B-: 80-83	D+: 67-69
A-: 90-93	C+: 77-79	D: 64-66
B+: 87-89	C: 74-76	F: 0-63
B: 84-86	C-: 70-73	

Readings and Weekly Journal Assignments

All required readings will be posted on Desire2Learn. All readings should be completed by Thursday on the week that they're listed. Each week, a question for your journal assignment will be available on D2L; this question might address the readings, the screenings, or something we've discussed in class. During the semester, you are expected to turn in **SIX** journal responses of 300-400 words each.

Midterm & Final papers

Guidelines for the midterm paper will be handed out and discussed in more detail on week 4. Your final research paper, which will be on the cultural significance of an apocalyptic film/TV series of your choice, will be due Wednesday, 12/14 (our last day of class). More details on the final paper will be provided after the midterm.

Requirements for Written Assignments:

Papers must be typed, in 12-point font, double-spaced, page-numbered, and stapled, UNLESS the assignment indicates that they should be turned in via Dropbox on D2L. I reserve the right to penalize papers for violations of any of the above.

Late papers drop by 10% for each 24 hours it's late, whether it's the weekend or a weekday (i.e., a 100-point paper one day late will be penalized 10 points before I grade it). Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis for personal emergencies, but ONLY if you ask me IN ADVANCE of the actual due date. This goes for the weekly journal assignments, as well.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory for the days we meet, and will be taken at the beginning of every class. If you are late, it is your responsibility to make sure I've marked you down as present. If you need to miss class for an emergency, let me know in advance. Absences will be excused on a case-by-case basis. You are allowed one unexcused absence, then after that each unexcused absence reduces your attendance/participation grade by one half-point.

Class Environment

Students are expected to contribute to a respectful, productive learning environment. This includes being on time, being attentive, completing in-class assignments (we will occasionally have short brainstorming and writing assignments in class), participating in class discussions, and being nice to everyone, regardless of their views. Technology is a big issue these days, but rest assured that it's pretty easy to tell whether a student is actually taking notes on a laptop or checking the internet. If you're going to use a laptop, please use it for class purposes only, and please keep your phone in your bag unless we're actively using them in class for some reason. Also, no texting in front of me, please. Any violation of the above will impact your attendance/participation grade.

Guidelines for Assessing Participation Grades

- Tardiness; degree and frequency
- Not just frequency, but quality of comments. Is it evident that the student has done the readings and engaged with the material?
- Consideration for other students and their points of view
- Assessment of in-class assignments
- Technology use: disrespectful or reasonable?

Disability Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal law requiring educational institutions to provide reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. For more information about UWSP's policies, check here:

<http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/ADA/rightsADAPolicyInfo.pdf>

If you have a disability and require classroom and/or exam accommodations, please register with the Disability and Assistive Technology Center and then contact me at the

beginning of the course. I am happy to help in any way that I can. For more information, please visit the Disability and Assistive Technology Center, located on the 6th floor of the Learning Resource Center (the Library). You can also find more information here: <http://www4.uwsp.edu/special/disability/>

Statement of Academic Integrity

UW-Stevens Point values a safe, honest, respectful, and inviting learning environment. In order to ensure that each student has the opportunity to succeed, we have developed a set of expectations for all students and instructors. This set of expectations is known as the Rights and Responsibilities document, and it is intended to help establish a positive living and learning environment at UWSP. Click here for more information: <http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Pages/rightsandresponsibilities.aspx>

Academic integrity is central to the mission of higher education in general and UWSP in particular. Academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) is taken very seriously. Don't do it! The minimum penalty for a violation of academic integrity is a failure (zero) for the assignment. For more information, see the UWSP "Student Academic Standards and Disciplinary Procedures" section of the Rights and Responsibilities document, Chapter 14, which can be accessed here: <http://www.uwsp.edu/stuaffairs/Documents/RightsRespons/SRR-2010/rightsChap14.pdf>

I should add that if you use Wikipedia, or anything online, you have to CITE IT. I don't care whether you use MLA or Chicago style citations, but please be consistent. When in doubt, CITE THE SOURCE. I cannot stress this enough. Consequences for plagiarism are severe: the first time a student is caught, they receive an F on the assignment, and the second time results in failure of the entire course.

Terms of Enrollment

This syllabus is a contract. By taking this class, you agree to the policies listed here. I reserve the right to change the syllabus (especially to add interesting readings that I come across), but only within reason, and with notification to students.

Course Schedule

Week 1: Apocalypse: The Big Reveal

Thursday, 9/7 Intro; *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* (Scafaria, 2012, 101 min)

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Week 2: Cosmic Collisions, Divine Intervention, and Spectacles of Destruction

Thursday, 9/14 Discuss *Seeking a Friend*; defining the disaster genre; cosmic impotence and colliding worlds

Readings: Newman, "You Are One Day Closer to the End of the World"

Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster"
Boyett, "The Apocalyptionary"

Week 3: Invasions, Alien and Otherwise

Thursday, 9/21 Invasions in popular culture; *War of the Worlds* (Haskin, 1953, 85 min)

Readings: Yacowar, "The Bug in the Rug: Notes on the Disaster Genre"
Bartholomew, "The Martian Invasion Panic"
Reiss, "Imagining the Worst"
Gilbert, "Wars of the Worlds"

Week 4: The Cold War and the Specter/Spectacle of Mutually Assured Destruction

Thursday, 9/28 Discuss *War of the Worlds*; our "friend" the atom and the Cold War; *The War Game* (Watkins, 1965, 48 min)

Readings: Newman, "The World Went...Crazy"
Evans, "Hollywood and the Atomic Bomb"
Perrine, "The Day After Midnight" (optional)

Week 5: The Last Man on Earth and Revelations of Alienation

Thursday, 10/5 Discuss *The War Game*; *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (MacDougall, 1959, 95 min)

Readings: Gallardo, "Aliens, Cyborgs, and Other Invisible Men"
Subramanian, "Alienating Identification"
Larrieux, "The World, the Flesh, and the Devil"

Week 6: Prepping (and Secretly Hoping) for the Worst: Community vs. the Individual in the After-scape

Thursday, 10/12 Discuss *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*; Doomsday prepping and moral decisions; *Take Shelter* (Nichols, 2011, 121 min)

Readings: Broderick, "Surviving Armageddon"

Roy, "Atomic Anxiety," "You Can Survive," "Better Homes & Bunkers,"
"Plastic Sheeting and Duct Tape"
Nitzke, "Is There an End to it?"
"Hurricane Sandy and the Disaster-Preparedness Economy" (optional)
"After the Mayor's 'Go-Bag' List" (optional)

Week 7: Millennialism, Tribulation, and the Rapture

Thursday, 10/19 (**MIDTERM PAPER DUE**) Discuss *Take Shelter*; a short history of apocalyptic thought in religion; what it means to be "left behind"; Millennialism and the year 2000

Readings: Wright, "Every Eye Shall See Him"
Gross and Gilles, "The Apocalyptic Decade"
Hendershot, "Waiting for the End of the World" (optional)
Feil, "From Camp to Kitsch" (optional)
Bible, Revelation (optional)

Week 8: Humanity Shoots Itself in the Foot Yet Again: Ecological, Environmental, and Evolutionary Disasters

Thursday, 10/26 Soylent Green is made of what?: disaster films of the late 60s/early 70s; Waste allocating robots and humanity's mistakes

Readings: Murray and Heumann, "WALL-E"
Towson, "Rehabilitating Daddy"
Hammond and Breton, "Eco-Apocalypse"
Buell, "A Short History of Environmental Apocalypse" (optional)

Week 9: The Robot Revolution

Thursday, 11/2 How much technology is too much?; *The Animatrix* (2003); Skynets and intelligent machines

Readings: Perkowitz, "The Computers Take Over"
Rosen, "Apocalypse Reloaded: The Matrix Trilogy"
Paik, "Between Trauma and Tragedy" (optional)

Week 10: Walkers, the Infected, the Z-word: All Just Polite Ways to Say "Zombie"

Thursday, 11/9 Zombies part one; *Night of the Living Dead* (Romero, 1968, 95 min) (Recommended screening: *Birth of the Living Dead* [Kuhns, 2013, 76 min, ON NETFLIX])

Readings: Wilentz, "A Zombie is a Slave Forever"
 Wetmore, excerpt from *Back from the Dead*

Week 11: Zombie Revisionism I: Plagues, Capitalism, and Globalization

Thursday, 11/16 Zombies part two: from *Dawn* to *Shaun of the Dead*

Readings: Pifer, "Slacker Bites Back"
 Boluk and Lenz, "Infection, Media, and Capitalism"
 Lauro and Embry, "A Zombie Manifesto" (optional)

Week 12: (Thanksgiving Break)

Thursday, 11/23 NO CLASS

Week 13: Zombie Revisionism, Part II: Walking Dread

Thursday, 11/30 Zombies part three: notions of dread and anxiety; the TV apocalypse; *The Walking Dead*: "TS-19," S01E06 (Dec. 5, 2010)

Readings: Moyse, "When All Is Lost, Gather 'Round"
 Lockett, "Zombie Gentrification"
 Canavan, "We Are the Walking Dead" (optional)
 Cameron, "Zombie Media" (optional)

Week 14: Pessimism and Postmodernism

Thursday, 12/7 *Children of Men* (Cuarón, 2006, 109 min)

Readings: Boyle, "Children of Men and I Am Legend"
 Chaudhary, "Humanity Adrift"

Week 15: Poetic Endings, Time Travel, and the Satisfaction of Narrative Closure

Thursday, 12/14 Endings and cycles; the TV apocalypse part 2; elegies for the world; *Melancholia*, finality, and glimmers of hope, we hope; **final papers due**

Readings: Legatt, "Melancholic and Hungry Games"
Matts and Tynan, "The Melancholy of Extinction"
Benjamin, "The Storyteller" (optional)
Thompson, "Apocalyptic Dread" (optional)



Week 16: Eulogizing the Late, Great Planet Earth; Final Exam Week

Thursday, 12/21 10:15-12:15 Extra credit presentations