



Call for papers for an *ephemera* special issue on:

Organizing for apocalypse

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One central lesson of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is that societal institutions and social norms that appear both immutable and indestructible – such as the right to peaceful assembly, unrestricted access to schools and hospitals, or the professional handshake – may come tumbling down surprisingly fast. This realization has, in combination with a seemingly escalating number of earth-shattering crises (the financial crisis, the refugee crisis, the climate crisis, and, most recently, the war in Ukraine), given rise to a new kind of public awareness centered on questions like: What happens if the laws and customs of contemporary society cease to function? What might we do if critical infrastructures (e.g., power grid, medical supplies, and supermarkets) erode? What if the state cannot guarantee our safety and protect us from disaster?

While such questions have long been matters of everyday survival in many parts of the world, their resurgence in the Western context have brought about a heightened awareness of immanent disaster among people who used to – and, arguably, still do – enjoy the privileges of relative material and

emotional safety. Such awareness has fueled anti-establishment social movements from anti-vaxxers through conspiracy theorists to self-described 'survivalists' or 'preppers'. Particularly the latter movement address the question of how best to prepare for the impending and inevitable apocalypse directly, sharing tips and tricks via designated websites, and have proliferated at an unprecedented speed since the beginning of the coronavirus outbreak (Smith & Thomas, 2021). Experts now estimate that more than 20 million people worldwide identify as preppers, and that more than half of these are Americans (Foroudi, 2020). Hence, as the BBC recently reported, prepping should no longer be considered a fringe phenomenon, enacted solely by geeks and lunatics, but is a mainstream activity for 'serious and rational' people (Saragosa, 2020). As such, it seems fair to conclude that people are increasingly organizing for apocalypse, even if TEOTWAWKI¹ may appear to take different forms (Bounds, 2020) and be rationalized in different ways (Campbell et al., 2019).

Doomsday preppers, however, are not the only ones to organize around and for global disaster. For instance, the notion of 'collapsology', first coined by Servigne and Stevens (2015), refers to the transdisciplinary study of the imminent collapse of industrial civilization. Using shock tactics and provocative videos designed to go viral, collapsologists aim to open people's eyes to the negative effects of human (economic) activity on climate change and biodiversity. While this focus might seem pessimistic, proponents of collapsology (like some preppers) firmly believe that an opportunity to reset and reinvent society will emerge from the destruction caused by the impending apocalypse.

Further, the apocalypse is engaged in conceptual as well as practical terms. For instance, Davidson and da Silva (2021) understand the apocalypse as a multi-faceted and cyclical phenomenon that needs to be endured or escaped repeatedly. Building on critical race theory, these authors advocate a rethinking of the apocalypse that invites us to 'stake out a path of development that is partially autonomous from the cycle of apocalyptic

¹ An oft-used abbreviation for 'the end of the world as we know it'.

endings' (*ibid*: 12). Thus, the future-oriented understanding of the apocalypse as a singular event is criticized for its denial of the experience of presently lived apocalypses in areas where climate change, or other disasters, are already altering the lives of millions. Or, as Yuen (2012: 43) notes in a paraphrase of William Gibson, 'the catastrophe is already here, it's just not evenly distributed'.

The acceptance of the apocalypse as already happening is the point of departure for so-called 'post-apocalyptic environmentalism' (Cassegård and Thörn, 2018). While imagining the apocalypse in the present tense might appear to constitute a practice entirely devoid of hope, post-apocalyptic environmentalism actually displays what is often described as the *paradox of hope*: 'that giving up hope may be a way to gain hope' (*ibid*: 574). Or, as *ephemera's* editorial collective recently put it in relation to the growing dominance of commercial publishing: 'hoping is animating, energetic and optimistic yet it emerges, inevitably, from diminishing possibilities' (The *ephemera* collective, 2021: 3). Whether placed in the present or future, then, the end of the world often turns out to be an opportunity to imagine the world anew (though potentially without politics, see Swyngedouw, 2010).

While many of the aforementioned movements do not develop a very clear vision of 'the day after tomorrow', it is striking that most do, indeed, believe that such a day will come. Thus, the end of the world may neither be as final nor as threatening as one would think. And it could even be a source of hope – whether in the form of a religious or a secular eschatology (Waddell, 2014). Ultimately, the apocalypse might become more of a leitmotif, an idea to organize around, than a specific event to organize for (Brummett, 1992).

For this special issue, we invite contributions that consider organizing for apocalypse in all of its possible senses, as a specific event, present or future, as well as an organizing principle, literally or metaphorically speaking. Topics of concern might include, but should not be restricted to:

- The political character of apocalyptic organizing
- Apocalyptic organizing as a mode of activism

- The collective and individual components of organized/organizing disaster
- The implications of organizing for dystopic futures
- The spatio-temporalities of apocalyptic thinking
- Histories of the apocalypse and of apocalyptic organizing
- The power relations and privileges of organizing for future (as opposed to lived) disaster
- The role of (digital) media in organizing dystopian imaginaries
- The affective and/or material dimensions of immanent disaster
- Feminist and queer perspectives on the end of the world
- Norms and values inherent to apocalyptic communities

The list is far from exhaustive, and we encourage diverse contributions, just as we invite anyone who would like to discuss an idea to reach out to the issue editors (see contact information below).

Deadline for submission of contributions: September 15, 2022.

All contributions should be submitted as anonymized PDF files to the issue editors: Sine N. Just (sinenjust@ruc.dk), Emil Husted (eh.ioa@cbs.dk), Erik Mygind du Plessis (epl@sam.sdu.dk), and Sara Dahlman (dahlman@ruc.dk). Please note that three categories of contributions are invited for the special issue: articles, notes, and reviews. However, we are also open for discussing the potential publication of other types of submissions such as interviews, interventions, or documentations. Information about the different types of contributions can be found at: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit>. Contributions will undergo a double-blind review process. All submissions should follow ephemera's submissions guidelines. These can also be found at: <http://www.ephemerajournal.org/how-submit>. For further information, please email the issue editors.

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