

University of Cologne | 30 November 2021 | 14:00-19:00 CET

Crisis, Apocalypse and Millenarianism in the Contemporary World

A Workshop on Ernesto de Martino

Organized by Martin Zillinger & Dorothy Zinn

Zoom-Link:

<https://uni-koeln.zoom.us/j/94368966625?pwd=SDJ6OGVYUVFwb2U4dElkQXVPTlhRUT09>

Meeting ID: 943 6896 6625 | Password: 294622 | Contact: Fabian Lüke flueke1@uni-koeln.de

This workshop has been inspired by the work of Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino, whose posthumous book *La fine del mondo* (2019[1977]) draws on a wide range of scholarship to reflect on the nature of apocalyptic thought. In the parts of the book most concerned with the actuality of the period of his writing in the mid-1960s, de Martino addresses apocalypse in terms of critical recent events in modern humanity: the Holocaust, the threat of nuclear annihilation in the Cold War, and the then-ongoing processes of decolonization.

With de Martino's interest in comparativism in mind, the workshop will bring together scholars working on issues of crisis, apocalypse and millenarianism today. It invites contributions that bring the work of De Martino into focus and that share ongoing research on the mobilizing force of end of time imaginaries and forms of millenarian resistance in the Mediterranean and beyond.

14:00 Martin Zillinger (University of Cologne) & **Dorothy Zinn** (University of Bozen-Bolzano)

Welcome and Introduction

14:30 Roberto Dainotto (Duke University)

Awakenings: Literary and Decolonial Apocalypses

Having concluded the so-called »southern trilogy« with the publication of the *Land of Remorse* in 1961, Ernesto de Martino begun focusing his attention on the theme of the apocalypse – that is to say, »the end of the existing world order.« Within this general theme, a particular notion – that of »awakening« – starts assuming theoretical significance: it distinguishes, on the one hand, what de Martino's review of *The Wretched of the Earth* calls »The awakening of the third world«; and, on the other, a Western apocalypse without eschaton – the awakening, that is to say, of Gregor Samsa (In Kafka's *Metamorphoses*) or Marcel (In Proust's *Research*) in a world »already given.«

14:55 Flavio Geisshuesler (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)

Ernesto de Martino and the Eschatological Turn in Continental Philosophy

It is well known that Ernesto de Martino's posthumous book *La fine del mondo* (1977) is his most philosophical work, offering a sustained discussion of apocalyptic thought in a wide range of cultural contexts, such as the Holocaust, the threat of nuclear annihilation in the Cold War, the Southern Question, decolonization, or the beginnings of the postmodern turn. In this paper, I will look at a series of key episodes of de Martino's oeuvre in order to demonstrate that the idea of the end of the world was a constant theme in his work that he developed very early in his career. In so doing, I not only explore how de Martino forms part of a larger »eschatological turn« in continental

philosophy, but I also show how his work differs from other movements participating therein, such as historicism, existentialism, or political religions.

15:20 Ehler Voss (University of Siegen)

Apocalyptic Imaginations in Times of Corona

The proclamation of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has created a kind of asymmetrical duel situation internationally between supporters and critics of the various state-imposed measures to contain the virus. In Germany, too, a vivid and continually changing protest movement has emerged that is mainly perceived by the public as a diffuse mixture of right-wing and esoteric groups, but seems actually to be much more heterogenous. Both proponents and critics of the measures have numerous apocalyptic imaginations and differing views on how the apocalypse should be countered and both sides accuse each other of religious thinking and behavior. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among these camps in Germany I will present their points of view in regard to their oscillation between different utopias and dystopias and analyze their key concepts from an anthropological and historical point of view.

15:45 Lene Faust (University of Bern)

Dealing with Historical Experiences and Crisis: A Fresh Look with De Martino at Italian Neo-Fascist Memory Culture

In this contribution I will focus on neo-fascist memory culture in Italy. Drawing on the ideas of Ernesto De Martino who highlighted the function of (mourning) rituals as cultural reserve for a community, I will explore its function as a cultural technique to ritually process crisis-like (apocalyptic) historical experiences within the political subculture.

The focus is on the so-called *presente*-ritual as one key element of neo-fascist memory culture, which refers to historical experiences as the Italian (civil) war and the loss of the World II War that are perceived as crisis-like and/or as end-time apocalyptic by the fascists. The ritual roots in the martyr cult of dead soldiers - one of the basic elements of fascist propaganda. It has been a crucial part of the neo-fascist cult of the dead, following a certain military choreography since the end of World War II. Zooming in neo-fascist rituals from De Martinos perspective offers new insights into the significance of memory culture for the neo-fascist subculture in Italy.

16:10 COFFEE BREAK

16:20 Anja Kublitz (Aalborg University)

The Miracle of the Arab Spring: Optimism among Danish Jihadists

Among my Danish Muslim interlocutors, the Arab Spring was received as a miracle – a divine intervention that called upon them to radically change their lives. From one day to the next, they turned towards God and decided to travel to the Middle East to take up arms. According to the interlocutors, the miracle of the Arab Spring made them wake up to find themselves as part of the Muslim *umma* – the community of the last prophet Mohammed – that is, the prophet of the time of the end – but also to find that maybe the end of time had arrived and that they could choose to join the Great Battle. Based on long-term fieldwork, this article investigates my interlocutors' optimistic practices of struggling in the way of Allah. Arguing against Roy's central thesis that European jihadists are violent nihilists who adopt Islam, rather than religious fundamentalists who turn to

violence, I contend that we need to reinstate God and the relation between divine determination and my interlocutors' agency in order to explain why jihadists do as they do. To understand this relation, I draw on Agamben's distinction between messianism (the time of the end) and apocalypse (the end of time). My interlocutors believe that they live in End-times: they know that the world is about to end but they do not know when, and I suggest that it is exactly this gap that their jihadists' practices strive to bridge.

16:45 Ulrich Van Loyen (University of Siegen)

Trance and Tradition. Millenaristic movements between 1930 and 1970

This talk will present millenaristic movements between 1930 and 1970, and how they helped to change patron-client-relationships in Southern and Central Italy. A question would be why de Martino paid little attention to that shift and how these cults can fit in his concept of the »End of the world«.

17:10 Jasmine Pisapia (Columbia University)

»Air at the End of the World«: Reading Taranto's Environmental Crisis with de Martino

Using the lens of Ernesto de Martino's thinking, this talk will share some of the insights that have emerged from recent research conducted in the area of Taranto (Southern Italy), where an environmental crisis has developed from one of the largest steelworks in Europe.

17:35 Jonathan DeVore (University of Cologne)

Insurrection of the Earth: Lessons from Euclides da Cunha's Os Sertões on the Anthropocene as Apocalypse

In his book, *Os Sertões*, Euclides da Cunha provided a famous first-hand account of the Brazilian state's military efforts to crush a multi-racial millenarian movement centered on the rural town of Canudos at the end of the 19th century. The state's first several campaigns to reestablish mastery over Canudos were decisive and notorious failures. One key combatant in da Cunha's account is the harsh sertão landscape of the Brazilian Northeast. Historians such as Fernand Braudel have often remarked on how people marginalized by the dominant social order would escape to mountains, forests, deserts, and other regions of refuge. Yet, most scholars typically view such landscapes as mere backdrops to social struggles. This paper considers environments such as the sertao as active and sublime powers, drawing lessons for a critique of the Anthropocene concept. While highlighting human geological agency, the import of the Anthropocene concept is drawn into relief by the powers of nature that humanity unleashes against itself, threatening the end of the world as we know it.

17:55 Closing Discussion

Further Discussants: **Anja Dreschke** (University of Düsseldorf), **Dieter Haller** (Ruhr University Bochum), **Thomas Hauschild** (University of Halle-Wittenberg), **Michaela Schäuble** (University of Bern) & **Erhard Schüttzel** (University of Siegen)