

## Editorial:

### 'End'

[Jason Ensor & Felicity Meakins](#) | [Respond To This Article](#)

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<sup>1</sup> In the public domain of end, what is the real impact of endism on our cultural and political lives? Are the proponents of apocalypse and armageddon correct to assume that there is an impending divine climax to the system of human affairs on this planet? Researching in the world of endism, it is usually the extreme, often dangerous forms of endist belief which the media popularly exploit to define 'other' forms of 'endist' fundamentalism. Reading about the apocacidal (suicides for the apocalypse) tendencies of various cults and sects horrifies us in their acts of forcible manipulation. Yet apocaholicism (a mental state of intoxication on the endtimes) can not be limited to the extra-societal gathering in the outer suburbs that awaits an end with grim but enthusiastic anticipation and which makes the occasional evening news headline or Sixty Minutes exposure. Nor can a keen sense of apocalypse be situated as being primarily a characteristic of religious fundamentalism. Secular society itself, as suggested by this collection of essays, is drunk on different meditations of the 'end'. In film alone, from Deep Impact through Armageddon to The End of Days, a mainstream space exists for courting the end in public forms of spectacularisation and profit-making. In this use, the end creates revenue. But there are other senses of the end too in secular society.

<sup>2</sup> Within the broader scope of the public exist those individuals who comprise this mass, and who also experience an ultimate more personal end, death. Yet death is only regarded literally by the physical professions. In the more social sphere, this phenomenon is as highly constructed as any other cultural entity. For instance, death functions as closure to the individual narrative of life. In this place, it is greeted with wails of sorrow and remorse for the deceased, and it is for this reason that death is also constructed as a beginning for a transformed body and other world in some belief systems. This latter view of death minimises the importance of death by subscribing to a perspective, which postulates life as an ongoing series of endings - of childhood, education, career, hearing and physical existence. However, death manifests itself in many other forms, as this issue of M/C demonstrates.

<sup>3</sup> In this collection, twelve authors wrestle with the question of 'end' and interrogate the links between the character of 'end' and the crisis of definition in what exactly is an 'end'? Refusing to offer superficial solutions to defining 'end', participants from America, Australia, New Zealand and England maintain that the 'end' is never neutral, but that the totality of a given time, of individual personalities reading 'signs of the endtimes', and the question of narrative -- not just the benefits of charting an 'end' from a supposed 'beginning' -- must be taken into account.

<sup>4</sup> The two streams of public and private senses of the end have directed the flow and organisation of content within this issue of M/C. How we engage with private, often personal treatments of 'end' is as important as how we deal with 'endism' in the public domain. Yet, as became apparent in shaping this engagement for publication, these two spheres of interrogation are not similar and sometimes mutually inconsistent. In order to not favour public over private, we decided to arrange the collection into two sections: 'critiques' and 'perspectives', with the addition of two guided internet tours by the editors.

<sup>5</sup> Six writers examine the domain of end as public narrative:

The critiques section [feature article](#) asks, 'the end of the world is near, or is it?' It can be suggested that endtime expectants are tied to doctrines of theology that define the 'end' in very specialised terms. The terms can be contradictory across theologica -- one religious organisation may understand Sunday worship to mark a sign of the end whereas another perceives something more immediate and apocalyptic in the ascendancy of smart cards -- but for endtimes believers their interpretative home resides along a single intellectual path: the 'end' is theological. With the layperson in mind, David Bennett marks out this theological landscape used to represent and define the apocalypse in Australia. He

introduces us to an often hidden character of the armageddon script, the Endtimer, and reminds us that prophecy popularisation in Australia, if less visible than in our western counterparts, remains alive and well in 1999.

6 How well received is the Endtimer within society? Nick Caldwell takes on another type of Endtimer, the ['spoilers and cheaters'](#) -- those democratisers of access and evaluation to the 'end' of a film or game. He argues that since we cannot have an 'end' without narrative, we need to think about the textual strategies used when we try to locate the 'end' in a particular textual place and the reading strategies used to avoid this 'end' until its appointed time of authorial revelation. Nick re-evaluates the place of the spoiler or cheater in contemporary reading practices, though not without a strategically placed spoiler of his own...

7 Extending narrative to medium, 'Bandwidth' is clearly a term whose time is here. But what would the reconceptualisation of 'bandwidth' suggest for its future? Axel Bruns interrogates the ways in which 'bandwidth' is created and defined by its users and interrollers. In ['The End of Bandwidth'](#), he considers the tactical implications of 'non-bandwidth' activity upon the media environment and suggests the migration of the term 'bandwidth' to the periphery in favour of a less commercially framed interpretation -- the intersubjective 'infinite' -- is more suited to a contemporary and workable understanding of the Net.

8 ['Apocacides, Apocaholics and Apocalists'](#) takes a selective tour through the landscape of endism that permeates the Internet. One must ask, 'why contemporary apocalypticism'? Certainly not because visions of extinction dominate private, popular and scientific imaginations today? Nor because the apocalypse is an interesting anecdote from scriptures past, a tale of postponed divine re-creation to be told from generation to generation of what might have been had Friedrich Nietzsche not spoken up? Too many expect an imminent literal end to the world as we know it for the detractors of endism to dismiss it so easily. The reasons for apocalypticism are often hidden, slippery in definition -- sometimes for the complex history of the endtimes narrative, other times for the less than enthusiastic responses it evokes in the non-Christianised world. Geoff Hoyte offers one explanation regarding the endurance of endism: hope. In [a common-sense approach to the 'end'](#), he relates a humble perspective of dignified courtship with apocalypticism and suggests a key to an even greater 'beginning'.

9 Can there be a context for intellectual legitimacy of the apocalypse? Henry Lawton [outlines a variety of approaches to endism](#) and in the process positions as a central concern questions to do with representations of the 'end' in popular and intellectual work. From the discipline of psychohistory, Henry argues that it is possible to chart the development of endist perspectives.

10 From a listener's perspective, Alex Burns examines the cycles of alien discontinuity, fragmentation and post-millennium foreboding within a gritty meditation on 'end', the album *The Fragile*. As a reflexive index of social-political realities, Alex argues that certain styles of music can be embraced within a space for Sadeian aesthetics and that the 'dynamic synthesis' Nine Inch Nails embodies within its music has wider implications for the nature and direction of contemporary global cultural shift. A unique subjectivity, ['The Machine is Obsolete'](#) invokes a rarely-used, if sometimes impossible language of review: the description of musical form, an aural projection, via written text, the visual projection.

11 Six writers examine the domain of death as a private narrative:

The perspectives section's [feature article](#) comes from a New Zealand Funeral Director, Michael Wolfram. From this profession, he examines the manner in which the bereaved construct death through religious and secular belief systems. According to Wolfram, these views on death actually affirm notions of beginnings rather than the presumed endings -- religious frameworks discuss death in terms of an afterlife whilst secular paradigms present the advent of an altered state of life after death via the impact of the deceased's works in a community. However, Wolfram believes that the focus of death has shifted from the community to the individual more recently, with society marginalising the experience of dying by discarding traditional systems of support. He suggests that contemporary society has yet to produce a new system of support, which has, perhaps positively, empowered the individual to choose and own a framework of death -- be it already existing, individually patented or indeed non-existent.

12 [Philip Nitschke's article](#) continues this theme of the individual's empowerment of death. Nitschke is an Australian medical doctor best known for his strong advocacy of euthanasia and its legalisation. He begins with a story of an encounter with an 85-year-old German woman who had survived a Nazi concentration camp. She was in good health, but was requesting the power to end her life. This is a common situation, along with the

requests received from terminally-ill patients, according to Nitschke, and he further claims that statistics are beginning to indicate that individuals who are empowered with their own deaths achieve an improved quality of life -- be they terminally ill or well in health. He provides these statistics as continuing evidence in his crusade to encourage medical doctors to relinquish their potential sovereignty over the timing of death in these cases and empower the individual in this matter.

13 Pain and suffering are relative -- or so Donna Lee Brien suggests in [an excerpt from her fictionalised biography of Edith and John Power](#). As standards of life deteriorate under war conditions, Edith Power becomes aware of the value of life itself rather than life values, by which she once judged her existence. But as she begins to appreciate living, she learns of the immanent death of her husband, John. [Once again what is held dear and valued in her life shifts when all she is left with is memories.](#)

14 "[The virtual is dead! Long live online!](#)" cries Lelia Green in her manifesto-like article, which calls for the end of the phrase "virtual community". Green revisits some of the negative criticism of online communication and communities, addressing these by presenting some negative attributes of 'real' life and the benefits of online. As we move into the next millennium, Green believes that the notion of 'virtual' with respect to online activity should die its rightful death, and that the term "online community", in its better reflection of the its environment, should be adopted.

15 Philosophy has long held that one cannot experience death directly or first hand, but can only hope to gain a semblance of understanding through representation. Using Levinas and Heidegger, Laurie Johnson challenges this premise, proposing that personal death can be 'experienced' through Other's death. [Johnson recounts his own dream of death](#) to explore the narrative and character of death within this dream. The character of death is identified as himself and the death dream is equated with personal experience. The author leaves the reader with the question of the extent to which dreams can potentially be related to experience.

16 Physical, individual end can be discussed as 'death', or less obviously as the rear-end, as Simon Astley-Scholfield has done in [his article on Allen Ginsberg's 1986 poem, "Sphincter"](#). Scholfield suggests that Ginsberg's poem indicates a significant point in his writing by marking a transition in this poet's construction of sexual pleasure. As Scholfield notes, "Sphincter" incorporates an awareness of wider social issues, for instance AIDS and age, and transforms anal-erotic joy from an act involving flesh contact to that of "safe sex". This transition and maturing of the poet is observed by Scholfield in the context of his larger body of work.

17 Endism is in a constant state of creation and intense negotiation. The 'end' derives its power from the contestation over its senses and uses: Is the 'end' as understood within an apocalyptic framework imminent? What are the signs of its approach? Is the death of self ultimate and final? What experience, if any, lies beyond that final curtain each of us will one day face? Within public and private domains, the competition for meaning over 'end' is diverse and complex but one thing is certain: the 'end' is never here nor there -- it is always nigh!

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-- 'End' Issue Editors

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