

# Zolles Christian

## *Die symbolische Macht der Apokalypse. Eine kritisch-materialistische Kulturgeschichte moderner Zeiten*

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### **Abstract (English)**

In Humanities, the last years have seen many different ways of engaging with various topics associated with the 'apocalypse' or eschatology in general. Many of these approaches also addressed the problem of defining these terms reflecting on the one hand the ongoing controversies within the fields of Religious Studies, Theology or History since the 19th century and on the other hand their polyvalent meanings. Questions were raised how a synthesis could be created between more general concepts of the End Times, including the end of the world and the Final Judgment, and individual perspectives on revelation and salvation. To what extent are early modern and modern perceptions of the End connected to each other? How have the developments, which emerged in the Age of Enlightenment, the general belief in progress and secularisation changed the use and understanding of biblical prophetic visions and of an afterlife? This dissertation examines in three main chapters the dynamics and discursive strategies of modern 'apocalyptic' thinking and its perception. Its methodological approaches comprise cultural and discourse criticism. Chapter 1 outlines the epistemological field of 'apocalypse', which has been highly influenced by historical research. In confronting traditional uses of 'apocalypse', Michel Foucault's theory of 'pastoral power', Jacob Taubes' 'political eschatology' and Giorgio Agamben's concept of 'operative messianic time' play a vital role. In order to come to a more differentiated understanding of modern apocalyptic discourse these three theoretical, cultural concepts offer valuable insights. The following two chapters analyse the historical uses and formation of apocalypticism from the mid 17th/18th centuries onwards. In Chapter 2 it is shown how in the 17th century the Western European religious controversies and wars changed the way of apocalyptic representations. State reasoning ('Staatsräson') and new ways of biopolitical government, as argued in the works of Michel Foucault, were fundamental to the socio-political changes in general and religious visions in specific. The dynamic, also revolutionary potential of apocalyptic ideas and imagery was integrated into new ways of visual representation, which can be found in the allegoric and panoramatic images of Symbolism and in the first cinematic productions. In this context a state of what can be termed as 'apocalypse-blindness' can be perceived to characterise modern identity on an individual as well as on a collective level. The last chapter (3) analyses works of Edgar Allan Poe and Lars von Trier that can be considered to be paradigmatic for the limits of apocalyptic representation. It specifically focuses on the approaches of different forms of media like language and film to redefine pre-modern concepts of eschatological time and its endings. It highlights their transformation into an end of communication and consideration (which is specifically expressed in an experience of 'operative messianic' time). Living through fictitious scenarios of End Times may lead to new horizons of political and individual identity in art and media.