



“It’s the End of the World as we Know It:”

Technology, Science, and the Filmic Politics of Disaster

This Freshman Seminar will examine disaster and post-apocalyptic media from *The Incredible Shrinking Man* to *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Independence Day*, and *Wall-E*. Each week, we will use a different film or reading to tackle how disaster is narrated with special attention to how anxieties about the intersections of technology--i.e. like the atomic bomb--and politics are articulated on-screen. My hope for this class is to discuss, analyze, and argue about how films depict disaster and to what end.

Dr. Phoebe Bronstein

Winter Office Hours: Thurs 11-1pm

E-mail (best way to contact me): pbronstein@ucsd.edu

Course Policies

Participation & Attendance:

- We will meet every Wednesday from 11-12pm in the Pepper Canyon Hall SmartClassroom. Because this is a discussion-based course, attendance is crucial to learning and creating community in the classroom. With this in mind, the attendance policy is as follows: 1 allowed absence. Excessive tardiness may be marked as an absence. After 2 absence, you may fail the course.
- I ask that you have no electronics in discussion. This includes phones, computers, tablets, etc. There is no penalty and I won't police you, however, it helps keep the class focused and engaged for us all to turn off our electronics. If you have a good reason that you need your electronic device, please talk to me. I am definitely happy to make exceptions! See [here](#), for more on the benefits of no-tech note-taking.

A Note on Attendance, Participation, and Class Citizenship

This course functions best only through your consistent attendance and participation in both lecture and discussion section. This means you need to consistently show up to class prepared--having done the week's readings and screenings--and ready to engage in open and constructive dialogue.

A note on class/college citizenship: Please note that in this class, we will discuss the politics of race and gender, among other intersections of identity, such as class and sexuality. These conversations can be difficult, thus, I expect you to practice respect, listening, patience, and kindness with and towards each other. This includes how you speak to both me and your fellow classmates. In this course, your ideas may be challenged and I ask that you are open to that challenge, meeting it with intellectual curiosity, respect

for others' ideas and experiences, and empathy. I believe that ethical argumentation is imperative to a civil and just society and that is a value that I hope we form, instill, and engage with in this course. This is all to say, disagree with each other, with me, with your TA, but do so in a way that respectfully engages the other person's ideas.

If you are anxious about speaking in class, please let me know ASAP. My goal is to get everyone talking and engaged because that is how we will all learn best! My hope in this course, is that you learn something cool, while asking big questions and practicing critical thinking and analysis skills.

Discrimination and Harassment

UCSD does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, or status as a U.S. veteran. This class adheres to those guidelines.

Alternative viewpoints are welcome in this classroom. *However, statements that are deemed racist, sexist, classist, ableist, homophobic, or otherwise discriminatory toward others in the class will not be tolerated and students will be asked to leave.* Students come from a wide variety of backgrounds and possess a diverse array of values and beliefs and the classroom must be a safe space to discuss opinions and ideas. As such, I will not tolerate harassment of any kind in my classroom.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

UCSD complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Any student who may require an accommodation under such provisions should contact me and your TA as soon as possible and no later than the end of the first week of classes or as soon as you become aware. No retroactive accommodations will be provided in this class.

Assignments:

*All assignments will be graded Pass/No Pass

Participation: 30%

Discussion Questions: 30%

Post/Bring 2 Weekly Discussion Questions about the readings and screenings to our course

TritonEd Site. Please post by noon on Tuesdays. (Only for Weeks 2-9)

[Final Project](#): 40%

Course Calendar:

*Please note that I reserve the right to change readings and screenings (i.e. I may swap out a reading or a screening but I will never add more work than is already on the syllabus!) And, let me know if you have suggestions!

For all screenings, click [HERE](#) (log in with your e-mail/active directory name and password).

Week 1: Disaster Contexts: How do we imagine and articulate disaster?

Introduction, Course Policies & Goals, etc.

Week 2: Imagining Disaster

Read: [Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster"](#)

And “[Why are dystopian films on the rise again?](#)”

Week 3: Nuclear Monsters

Watch: *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957)

Possible Clips: *The Blob*; *Godzilla*; *King Kong*

Read: “[The Rise of Nuclear Fear: How We Learned to Fear the Radiation](#)”

Week 4: “Natural” Disasters

Watch: *The Day After Tomorrow*

Read: [Global Warming 101](#) and “[Winter Storm Pounds Northeast](#)”

Recommended: [Can't Stop the Water](#) (short documentary film)
& “[Losing Louisiana](#)”

Week 5: Toxic Disasters (and Global Politics)

Watch: *The Host* (2006)

Read: [EPA Report on Flint Water](#)

Recommended: “[Flint is Family](#)”

Week 6: Viral Disasters

Watch: *Contagion* (2011) OR

Read: “[Can Ebola's Deadly Rampage in Africa be Stopped in 2015?](#)”

Recommended: “[My struggle to report on Ebola Without Provoking Panic or Complacency](#)”

Week 7: Alien Invasion

Watch: *Independence Day* (1996)

Read: “[How to Predict a Hostile Alien Invasion](#)”

Week 8: Some Fun in Disaster: Zombies & Humor

Watch: *Shaun of the Dead* (2004)

Possible clips: *Night of the Living Dead*

Read: “[The American Fascination with Zombies](#)”

Week 9: Sparks of Hope: A Plant Grows in the Post-Apocalypse

Watch: *Wall-E* (2008)

Optional: Bring a draft of your final project

Week 10: Final Thoughts: The Politics of Disaster

Wrapping It Up & Final Project Due in Class