

## Clinic 2

### Apocalyptic Narratives and the Frightening Future

GONZALO SOLTERO

Sede: SOMA

1. All narrative is a representation and all of our representations of reality have always been inspired by conflict more than by calm. Considering the past, Hegel said that our periods of peace are like blank pages in history. Considering the present, reporters blithely claim: “No news is good news.” Or, oppositely, “If it bleeds it leads.” That is, the bloodier the act the better chance it has on the front page, which is a well proven point in Mexico during this past presidency, when headlines have been continuously filled with the headless. And so we go on trumpeting the same old story, that of the “failed state,” putting serious doubt on the viability of the future.

2. Whether we’re talking about one of Shakespeare’s plays, a television series or a soap opera, the same rule applies to fiction: to get interested in the lives of the characters, something bad needs to happen to them. Aristotle explained in his *Poetics* that tragedy succeeds in showing us the disgrace of people that are just like us. Denis de Rougemont claimed that a happy love is no story at all: Romeo and Juliet embracing at the beginning of the play without obstacles before them would be a terrible play. When the future is part of the plot, as in the best works of suspense, it better be a dystopic, an apocalyptic or simply an inexistent future. This is proven by literary masters such as Huxley, Orwell, Zamiatin and McCarthy. In film, dystopia is practically a requirement for any science fiction flick; think: *Soylent Green*, *Terminator*, *The Matrix*, *Wall-e*, etc.

3. Perhaps the best example of how we use narrative to explain reality is catastrophe itself. In the aftermath of an event there flows a stream of contradictory stories. Let’s look at the epidemic of influenza (H1N1), which hit Mexico in 2009. During the height of the epidemic, fear made us willing to believe the farfetched stories that ran through the gossip channels: that it was a conspiracy from the IMF or giant pharma; that it had to do with Barack Obama’s recent visit; or even that it came from outer space.

From a distance, it’s unsettling to see how wildly different each new version of reality is from the last. Look at the story that appeared in the national newspaper *El Universal* (available here: [bit.ly/influniv-1](http://bit.ly/influniv-1) y [bit.ly/influniv-2](http://bit.ly/influniv-2)). At first they tried to disprove some of the unfounded rumors about the epidemic. And yet, only two days later, they rejected what they had considered a real possibility: that the virus had come from outer space. If you don’t believe it, there’s an article from the BBC that poses the same theory nine years earlier ([bit.ly/influalien](http://bit.ly/influalien)). As if that weren’t enough, in 2010 the *British Medical Journal* supported the *Big Pharma conspiracy: they published a story revealing that the same officials who recommended that the World Health Organization raise the alert level had ties to some of the large pharmaceutical companies that benefited from the crisis* ([bit.ly/who-flu](http://bit.ly/who-flu)). As you can see, sometimes the most outlandish conspiracy theories and objective explanations can be one and the same.

4. It’s possible that our fixation on conflict, in either the real world or in fiction, has a biological base: in our long evolutionary past, understanding conflicts and their causes would have had a considerable impact on our survival. Evading death and reproducing are the most intense human instincts. We depend on these instincts to pass along our genes to the next generations. According to the Bible, the human journey on Earth began in the Garden of Eden and will end with the Apocalypse, which shows once again our tendency to idealize the past and fear the frightening future. Perhaps this is a reminder of the obvious, that the individual and collective catastrophes that await us, the same primordial issue that inspired *Gilgamesh* (mankind’s oldest narrative) is quite simple: in the end we are all going to die.

#### Participants

María Amaro, Eusebio Bañuelos, Carmen Cebreros, José Luis Contreras, Cecilia Delgado, Beatriz Ezban, Edgardo Gambo Partida, Julio García Murillo, Fabiola Iza, Dafne Jiménez, Alejandra Labastida, Dany Lieja, Angélica Martínez, Víctor Martínez Díaz, Gabriel Mestre, Gibrán Morales Carranza, Begoña Morales, Evelyn Moreno, Agustín Peña, Carmen Razo, Naomi Rincon Gallardo, Rodrigo Sastre, Miguel Rodríguez Sepúlveda, Violeta Solís Horcasitas, Nahum Torres Rivera, Edgar Yopez.