

WE'RE IN THE ENDCORE NOW

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"What if there's no tomorrow?"

I overheard the young man ask the woman.

"Say more," she replied.

"Well, it feels like all *this*," and he pointed across the 21st century city, full of skyscrapers and sand dunes, "all this could just end."

"Just like that?" she wondered.

"Yep. No warning." He looked at her without smiling. "All gone."

A crowd of us had gathered on the viewing platform of the world's tallest building, waiting for total solar eclipse. The countdown had begun.

THE END

Is this the end? Has the end finally come? We did not know what the end would be like. Could it be here, now?

<Endcore>

The era after the end of eras. Marked by a shared sense of a final, historical ending in sight; while simultaneously noting that such an end never actually arrives.

All around us are crises that come to us as collapsed narratives: is democracy dying? Is it hotter each year? Does technology make us less human? Will wars last forever? There's a widespread feeling that things we once held onto as unchangeable, fundamental facts are now ending. The totality of this collective sentiment is what I call "Endcore." We feel like The End is approaching, like an astroid is hurtling towards us; but it also strangely never seems to reach us. So we keep waiting. Endcore, thus, is a verb, a predicament, a texture of the time we call the present. It's an unnerving, queasy contemplation we have entered an "after" era – but it's not after one thing (like "modernity"), it's *after everything*.

END OF THE END OF HISTORY

How did we get to Endcore? What if this is "the End of the End of History"? For those of you not familiar with the original version of this phrase – "the End of History" – it was coined by an American political theorist named Francis Fukuyama, first in an essay in 1989, and then in a celebrated book from 1992. Its core thesis argued that with the ascendancy of Western liberal democracy – which occurred after the Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 – humanity reached "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." Thirty plus years later, this confident prophecy has not come to fruition. We have seen the rise of the non-Western world – Russia, China, Saudi Arabia – with their own social and political visions of the future. Endcore is when all these visions compete with one another, and with it, "The End of History" ends. And while endings may offer the promise of salvation, redemption, even liberty... they are also exhausting.

END OF THE FUTURE

When Endcore began, I was reading Mark Fisher's *Ghosts of My Life* (2014), where he said, "The slow cancellation of the future has been accompanied by a deflation of expectations." What if all there is now, is the present? An "Extreme Present"? The future was once hard to predict. This uncertainty now belongs to the present. Every morning, we wake up and the world has changed yet again, from when we went to sleep a few hours before, in ways we couldn't have imagined.

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live," wrote Joan Didion in 1979, the same year that Deng Xiaoping began China's economic liberalization, and set it on a course to the future we call "now." But, in the first half of the 2020s, we have been living through what writer Venkatesh Rao called "global narrative collapse," where "everybody is tracking the rawest information they have access to, rather than the narrative that most efficiently sustains their reality. During narrative collapse, everyone temporarily abandons attempts to reach narrative consensus." It's a disorienting sensation where change keeps changing. This gives rise to what I call:

<Change Vertigo>

Disorientation brought on by change changing faster than one's ability to comprehend it on a daily basis.

But are we built for so much change so quickly? Technology has outrun our ability to absorb it. You know the present is happening when you start feeling scared.

CHAOSMAXXING

Art movements used to last decades. Now internet memes barely last days. Memories are from either ten minutes or ten years ago. Against this "Proceleration" (the acceleration of acceleration) is the desire to label every micro-cultural moment on the internet (especially on TikTok). Everything is rendered as a "___core." If it isn't a ___core, it didn't happen. Cores are like screenshots as trends. And once the core is indexed, archived – you simply move onto the next one, which will come along later on the same day, probably.

Perhaps you've noticed how super young people increasingly wear several items each from a different decade or historical style? The model-activist Bella Hadid is a prime example of this "Chaoscore," in which the present seems only to be grasped and articulated via a clash of fashion references all unmoored from their provenance. Moreso, these looks are collaged with items inherited from a grandmother, *and* a thrift-store find, *and* the latest Miu Miu viral item. Taste is not purist anymore. It's driven by conscious and unconscious concerns, as well as the way in which information online loses historical anchoring. Taste exists in the Extreme Present and is an expression of it. Chaoscore is Endcore's style *du jour*.

END OF REALITY

Endcore is also a feature of a reality that feels less and less real. When change keeps changing, and narratives keep collapsing, it leads to:

<Reality Lag>

The gnawing and exhausting impression that our understanding of what is real lags behind where actual reality is heading.

Because of the Copernican shifts taking place through large language model artificial intelligence (which gives us tech like ChatGPT) and extremely convincing generative AI deepfakes (where we can't tell the difference between synthetic beings and actual humans anymore), we have now entered the "Philip K. Dick Era," named after the great science fiction author who wrote vividly about reality, simulation, truth, and lies in our increasingly paranoid lives. During Endcore, it feels like reality is the greatest conspiracy theory, which casts the present into:

<Sci-Fi Realism>

When everyday life is sufficiently indistinguishable from science fiction that it becomes the dominant tool to decode and narrativize our disturbing present.

During Endcore, we don't recognize reality anymore; other than as a streaming TV show that's too implausible to be believed.

END OF PROGRESS

What happened to progress, you may ask. I can't tell whether things are getting better but *feel* worse. Or, whether things are getting worse, but *I* feel better about them. It also gives me the misplaced compulsion to believe that Endcore has never happened to anyone else in human history. It's why "unprecedented" has become one of the most overused words in the last few years.

Endcore is also a result of feeling less safe. Floods, wildfires, droughts, storms: the 21st century, climatically speaking, is increasingly Old Testament in nature. Extreme weather is no longer limited to "the developing world." For too long, the privilege of the Western mindset had been to conceptually locate extreme weather events in the "Third World." Today, extreme weather is everywhere: Europe, the Middle East, the Americas. Is there a way to escape Endcore?

Endcore renders optimism as one of the scarcest resources on the planet. And, if optimism is impossible in our storyline, the one we seem to share with each other, why can't we travel to a multiverse where there's no Endcore? Where there are no microplastics in the Antarctic snow and in our bodies? Where there's decency for every living being on Earth? Multiverses have invaded popular culture today precisely because only multiverses seem to offer alternatives to Endcore.

It's also why, whereas tragedy is often imposed on us, comedy is something we can generate ourselves. That's why memes are Endcore's native language. "I'm at rock bottom but the rocks here are so pretty :D"

END CREDITS

Back to that couple I overheard during the total solar eclipse. "What if we survived?" the woman asked her partner. "Just us?" He replied, "Like Adam and Eve at the end of the world?" "Then," she said, smiling, "we'd be the last."

At that moment, the temperature dropped. A powerful chill took hold and wrapped itself around us. Peak eclipse. As if the lights went out on Earth. At which point, the couple kissed.

Was this the end? It is soon.