



EMERALD POINTS

EDUCATION AT THE END OF TIME

STEFAN BENGTTSSON
JONAS ANDREASEN LYSGAARD
DYLAN MCGARRY



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BY

STEFAN BENGTSSON

Uppsala University, Sweden

JONAS ANDREASEN LYSGAARD

Aarhus University, Denmark

And

DYLAN MCGARRY

Rhodes University, South Africa



United Kingdom – North America – Japan – India
Malaysia – China

Emerald Publishing Limited
Emerald Publishing, Floor 5, Northspring, 21-23 Wellington Street, Leeds LS1 4DL

First edition 2025

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-83753-289-6 (Print)

ISBN: 978-1-83753-288-9 (Online)

ISBN: 978-1-83753-290-2 (Epub)



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A lot of people have helped this book become a reality. Kimberly Chadwick was enthused from our initial meeting in Hamburg, and before her departure from the Emerald family, she helped to sharpen the project and highlight how writing should and can be fun. Michael Marzolla planted the seed of an idea of writing about *Ragnarök*. Danish horror artist John Kenn Mortensen was a great source of inspiration and opened our eyes to the deep insights that can be gained from Norse Mythology and also insisted that horror can be both heartwarming and joyous. Kirsty Woods from Emerald for all her inputs and patience. And a special thanks to the *Bergman Estate on Fårö Foundation* which made it possible to spend time at the wonderfully quirky and eerie Bergman residence, an experience that still haunts us and our work. And a great thank you to all of our wonderful colleagues who endured our obsession with notions of time, space and crisis while insisting that it all had educational relevance. And of course never ending thanks to our family and loved ones; without you, no fun and no work.

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EDUCATION AT THE END OF TIMES

And you may find yourself in a meeting where no one seems to be listening

And you may find yourself at a vacation resort that could be anywhere

And you may find yourself paying off a debt for a thing that you no longer possess

And you may find yourself in front of your catastrophe-struck home

And you may ask yourself, "Well, how did I get here?"

A modified version of Talking Heads, "Once in a Lifetime", 1980

As our reinterpretation of the *Talking Heads* above suggests, we find ourselves in unexpected places, not only as individuals but also as societies. Global warming, climate change, the biodiversity crisis, the collapse of welfare states, liberal democracy under siege, capitalism struggling and even war mean that any chances of clinging to comfortable or familiar times or places are slipping away. We find ourselves in surprising and challenging times. Crisis, both personal and cosmological, is central to this book. How did we get here and what does this mean for me? We will raise the question of: What do we do when 'crisis' not only brings visions of ever-growing grandeur but pushes us over the edge of the comfortable and well-known and into something strange, yet not always 'new'? What do we do when our world, and its familiar time or timing, is in crisis or even might come to an end? The book acknowledges that, at the time of writing, we find ourselves existing in challenging times or rather

encounter different ‘timings’. By different timings, we will refer to the collapse of linear time as a form of continuity of the past. The question ‘Well, how did I get here?’ refers, in this sense, not to a place but rather to a form of timing, when we arrive at a moment or event that throws us out of place. This book is about what it means to live at the end of times, once we encounter this crisis of how things were and are supposed to be. It relates here to education, not primarily in the sense of formal education but rather to education as the process of orienting oneself towards a future. Education in the continental tradition relates to *Bildung* or the formation of the present and future self as different from the past. Hence, this book as a *Bildungsroman* aims not so much as to provide an educational framework for how to avoid or mitigate crises. Instead, it sees crisis as integral to this world and being a person. Acknowledging this, the book offers a tentative lifestyle of how to live crisis as a way of forming yourself in relation to crisis. To ease the concerns of readers who may pick up this book, glance at it, and quickly put it down out of fear that it is too dark, we assure you: we will approach the crisis with a sense of humour. Adapting to the contemporary idea of self-development or self-help, you might read the book as offering a lifestyle or motto that can be put on an organic cotton t-shirt or tote bag ‘*Ragnarök now!*’.

The premise of this book is that the shock of finding yourself ‘here’ in crisis as an individual or species is signalling to us that crisis as a form of end of time is *strange*. Crisis is strange in the sense that it is not only a crisis of the world or the things and creatures that inhabit it but also a crisis of self. Our time, referring here to our generation as well as human history since the beginning of the 20th century, has been marked by rapid change. As illustrated by the onset of industrialization or the smartphone, ways of being and living lives have changed dramatically also often entailing a crisis of how to relate to the world. People born into agricultural rural societies a hundred years ago are now dying in megalopolises, smartphones in hand. This transformation—and the ongoing crisis of direction and meaning it brings—has become our constant condition. Our time is a time of crisis. Yet it seems that even greater change and crisis are coming, and we can almost sense it in those moments when asking ourselves, in the context of general artificial intelligence or escalating climate change: ‘Well, how did I get here?’. Yet, strangely, this sense of dread as a forbearer of things to come does not indicate how things caused this moment, and we cannot discern a visible path where they will lead us.

Science fiction writer William Gibson uses here the suitable nominator of the *Jackpot* as a form of a cascade of global catastrophes that are not easy to put into a chain of causal relations that as such make up the causes of an

already predetermined event (Gibson, 2014). Like in a slot machine, the *Jackpot* is the seeming contingent, yet, systematic coming together of different layers (or spinning discs with symbols on them) of events. The end of time might, as Gibson suggests, in this sense not be the big event but more a multi-causal incident or accident of things or rather endings coming together.

By 'the end of time' in this book, we are not appealing to a notion of the apocalypse as a form of determinate singular future somewhere around the corner that we can relate to through either fear or strategic avoidance. Instead, we see the end of times as partially always already here. The end of times is always already at play, like the spinning discs of a slot machine. turning and turning again. As we will argue, the *Jackpot* is not the final bitter end as the end-point of time and ultimate crisis, but always already at play when we are in the world. Personal crisis is an everyday constant all around us even while there might be no global crisis as an end. Thus, to be alive in this world always implies the condition of crisis, big or small. No *Jackpot*, no need to play the slot machine. Yet, we, big or small, middle-aged and young alike find ourselves often unprepared to play the game, either blissfully ignorant of the waiting *Jackpot* or frozen by the fear of the possibility of it. To engage in this book with education at the end of times is to engage with the question of: How to live your life and to exist at and with the possibility of the end of times?

The, by us, modified 'Once in a lifetime' lyrics might trigger an uneasy acknowledgement of familiarity with the described situation of living at the end of times. While this recognition might have an uneasy or even frightening undertone to it, we would like to acknowledge that this condition of becoming aware of or finding yourself in crisis is crucial for the topic of this book. It is crucial as it opens up a space for rational and emotional engagement with the question: How to live your life and exist at and with the possibility of the end of times?

RAGNARÖK IS A METAPHOR FOR THINKING AND FEELING THE END OF TIMES

In this book, we will utilize the old Norse myth of Ragnarök to frame how to think, feel and engage with the end of times. We appeal to a Ragnarök with a sense of gallows humour, as a way of animating that this is not the first time we find ourselves at the end of time and that it means a multitude of things to exist and live in such periods. We prefer this framing of the end of times to the notion of the Apocalypse as it breaks with the notion of a determinable point in time.

Through this book, we argue that Ragnarök can act as a good way to currently think of the end of times as it challenges contemporary thinking in terms of the universality and finality of time.

The Ragnarök myth, the central myth, in Norse mythology differs from the linear arrival of collective judgement day that has been foundational to the Christian framing of the ultimate future of Western civilization. *Ragnarök* consists of two words, ‘*ragna*’ and ‘*rök*’. *Ragna* translates into something close to ‘to summon’ (*frammana* in Swedish) or ‘to magically conjure’ (*trolla* in Swedish). *Rök* is something close to ‘origin, destiny, development, connection, effect’. As it becomes apparent, due to the openness of the meaning of these words, different meanings can be associated, such as ‘the downfall of the powers’ (*makternas undergång*), ‘the final fate of the gods’ (*gudarnas sista öde*), but also ‘origins of the gods’ (*gudernas ursprung*). Similarly, the timing of Ragnarök is unspecified in Norse mythology, as it is not accounted for coherently, and if it has happened, if it is happening, or if it will happen at a future point. Similarly, Ragnarök is interpreted as not being the day of judgement according to an external referee as well as the point in time when time comes to an end. Instead, Ragnarök as the final battle is an origin story (the origin of the gods) as well as characterized by a diversity of immanent agency. It is a struggle between gods, humans and other supra-human entities that sees the death of gods and other mythical entities, yet, entails the survival of at least one man and a woman that creates a new population. What we see Ragnarök to offer as a metaphor for the end of time is a way of living and relating to a non-universal end, where that end is caught up with the open struggle of diverse entities. Further, as we will account in this book, it is an end that is not only an end but also a beginning.

Ragnarök is, in this sense, not the linear end of time nor the judgement day at which the good and bad receive final judgement. In a sense, it is beyond morals and ethics, where morals and ethics are made in the telling of the story of that struggle. Further, it is in the past, the future and the present at the same time and can be seen as putting time into loops. It is the destruction of the world and time as we know it, but at the same time, it does not offer an escape or transcendence into a perfect heavenly world, nor the destruction of everything. Life is transformed, and the world is re-populated both by the new and surprising and by the old and well-known. In this book, we draw on the myth of Ragnarök to open alternative paths beyond our stranglehold on a seemingly doomed love affair with perpetual, industrialized linear growth—toward an open landscape strewn with the pulsing remains of past and future collapse, and the traces of ongoing exploration. Ragnarök is non-linear, contingent and weird, just as the times we are on the brink of entering.

EDUCATION AND RAGNARÖK

We introduce Ragnarök as a lifestyle or way to exist and relate to the world at the end of times, at the time of crisis. Ragnarök, we argue, opens up modern framings of crisis as relating to external crises such as climatological, economic or ecologic crises as seen to be solved by solutions. Instead of turning to technological or political solutions, we see Ragnarök to be preeminently an *educational* crisis. Our point is that the current emphasis on the apocalyptic crises towards which humanity entails the risk of erasing the question of the end of time as a fundamental educational question and as a site of powerful educational thinking and practice. Apocalypticism heralds the idea that we face a determinable point of time where my and all other existence ends. Education, however, relates to a time after this doomsday scenario, as education in the broader sense of the word, and our Enlightenment framing of it, insists that education and its promise always relate to and reach into unknown futures. Education is for us in this book relating to the engagement with multiple viable futures that are non-determinable but intertwined. Education, we argue, relates to an end of time in the sense of crisis, where that crisis entails a collapse of the linearity of time. Even in Apocalypticism, there is often the idea of an after-the-apocalypse where that after is radically different than the before. Hence, there is a collapse of the temporality of the before in the face of that apocalypse. Accordingly, we argue that doing, thinking and living education cannot be limited to a story of the ceasing of all existence at a determinable near point in the future, as this would make education both pointless and unjustified. Why engage in an activity that will soon be part of the end of everything?

Apocalyptic visions of the end of times are thus impossible in educational terms, but that does not mean that the end of time should not be the focus of education. In contrast, we argue that this blind spot of education is important to approach to engage with education's premises. As impossible apocalyptic visions are, so too are the end of the times that we live in. Modern thought has successfully erased this end of time from thinking of education and being in the world as it appeals to an unlimited promise of growth, development and maturation of humanity. The apocalypse is in this sense the disruption of modernity's imagination that the promise of heaven is on this worldly side and not that of heaven in our afterlife. Instead of disrupting this imagination and the effects it has on thinking of education by appealing to the apocalypse, we target the very universality and linearity of time at the core of modern thought, insisting on Ragnarök as a form of end-of-time that is not congruent with that time. Relating to and engaging with the end of time as an educative project as

we will do in this book is not positioning oneself before or after that end of time but aims to lose oneself in it. We introduce Ragnarök as an invitation to think of the end of time as an event that disrupts the everyday conception of our life in a before, in the middle of and after that something, the *Jackpot*. The end of time we are witnessing on a local and global scale is an event in the sense that it, as an event, pulls us out of our everydayness and disrupts our ambition to ascribe linear causality to things happening.

Ragnarök, to translate it into contemporary thinking, involves both the book of Genesis and Revelation and their accounts of the beginning and end of time and is not to be located in a before or an after. As a prosthesis for our thinking of education, we appeal to Ragnarök as an end of the everydayness of the before and the beginning of something. Ragnarök is educational in the sense that it opens up the space for the writing of an origin and destiny story, a story that twists the before and after. The writing of our origin and destiny story is, however, not an *autopoiesis* to use the terminology from biology to define life as the autonomous, self-producing and structural coupling of a living system to its environment as a form of agency that maintains its boundaries and homeostasis. The writing of one's origin story is in our Norse appropriation entailing an event that is both death and life, a collapse or rather a conflation of the auto (self) in the poetical act of writing of the self that is dependent on the connection to something that is not-self.

Ragnarök as the final battle and cosmological end/beginning is in this sense more 'personal' than a struggle between two distinct entities. Accordingly, to engage with Ragnarök is not to engage with one's nemesis, as the goddess of Nemesis suggests final justice following what was deserved. Ragnarök has not so much to do with justice or 'assessment' of self, as modern education thought might always aim at the final referent for the process that it entails. What instead is fascinating in the conception of Ragnarök is how the playing field between gods, humans and other mythical creatures of the Norse is somewhat levelled, where there can be seen something as the death of gods and the beginning of some new powers. We might say that Ragnarök is the story of Prometheus on steroids, where the powers of gods are not only deceived but powers are remade in the mayhem of crisis. Accordingly, given that the personal involvement in that final battle is not related to a divine referent for assessment of one's deeds, Ragnarök allows for a sense of education as an engagement with one's final destiny where that engagement is neither to be judged by divine standard nor according to the self-imposed standard of the autopoietic individual. Referents for education as a process of formation of self, such as referents for moral judgement, are concerning Ragnarök polycentric. This means that when engaging with Ragnarök as both personal/

cosmological end and beginning that engagement cannot be judged to a singular standard as different entities are still intervening on that end and beginning. The final battle is not over, but its outcome is still in the making.

Accordingly, Ragnarök opens up an alternative understanding of education as a form of formation of the self that entails *weird loops of temporality*. To repeat, we see, in line with the *Jackpot*, Ragnarök as a multi-causal incidence or accident of things, or rather endings coming together, where this coming together is a mutual shaping of agencies or powers. This coming together is weird in the sense of both ‘strange’ but also the old Anglo-Saxon word of *Wyrð* as denoting ‘fate’ or ‘to become’. To throw another Norse symbol into the play, the *Valknut*, a symbol consisting of three interlocked triangles, is interpreted to illustrate the weird looping effect of this intertwined causality once things come together, fate shaping and twisting fate. Education, according to the lifestyle to be introduced as ‘Ragnarök now!’, is simply the embracing of shaping fate and twisting fate.

What we then offer is an alternative to the two standard responses in the fate of the current crisis, including educational responses. On the one hand, this crisis is interpreted as a linear necessity to double down on modernity and to accelerate ourselves out of this current crisis and into a more modern, technologically advanced future that will hold the key to solving that crisis. On the other hand, there is the appeal to a circular return to a past and life following the planet as a system and its boundaries. Education, in the first, is to build and develop further the products of modernity, while in the latter it needs to abandon modernity and return to a ‘natural’ or ‘original’ way of being (often ironically making this argument based on logic and epistemology imbued with modern thinking). We make an interpretation of Ragnarök that aims to break with both responses to crisis and to maximize the weirdness that such an engagement with crisis and end of time might entail for our becoming as an educational project. We use ‘weird’ here as in the weirdness of loops of temporal entanglements of becoming but also in a political manner.

We embrace weirdness as a form of queering of education at the end of times that breaks intentionally with the racist-nationalist appropriation of Norse mythology. Weirdness undermines, in our conception, the appeals to origin and purity and highlights the non-binary constitutions of identity and fate that entail witchcraft-men, humans transformed into bears (Bjarke) and hermaphrodite giants (Ymir) in Norse mythology. Even the often embraced notion of place as a source of origin becomes, as we will see in our account of our journey, undermined by the weirdness of the cosmology of the Norse, where the world of humans (Midgard) is only one of nine worlds and, while often being invisible, the other eight worlds can sporadically overlap or blend into the world of humans.

To engage with Ragnarök is, hence, an invitation to challenge notions of non-binary constitutions of identity, linear causality, temporality and spatiality when conceiving of how one should position oneself to crisis and end of times one might find oneself thrown into. Ragnarök is accordingly conceived as an opening with the help of which we can reconsider how to become oneself or what our fate might hold and how we together with other entities can engage in shaping the end of times and at the same time allow for new beginnings. While not fully in line with the common association of education with formal education and higher education, we make here the argument that this focus on crisis and becoming-as-fate resonates with a deeper non-institutionalized notion of education that we tend to forget about. Education denotes here for us this deeper, more existential engagement with the formation of oneself in relation to the world, that still sometimes resonates or surfaces in ideas about formal education. This notion of education as an existential project is a conception that is well embodied in the German notion of *Bildung* as a form of self-cultivation or formation and transformation of self. In the following, we will outline the educative approach of this book and how it relates to the issue of how to exist at the end of times.

HOW TO EXIST AT THE END OF TIMES?

Learning From This Book as a *Bildungsroman*

This book is written in the form of Norse *Bildungsroman*. During the German Enlightenment, the *Bildungsroman* was introduced as a genre that explored and promoted the ideals of the Enlightenment movement, such as the importance of education, self-cultivation and the belief in progress and improvement. The *Bildungsroman* was often used as a means of critiquing the society of the time and fostering *Bildung* as self-cultivation and formation of the reader by encouraging the reader to think about important philosophical and moral questions. Classical pieces of its genre are Goethe's 'The Sorrows of Young Werther' (1774) and 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship' (1795). In the case of Goethe's 'Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship', the book starts with an account of the protagonist living an empty life as a businessman who sets upon a journey of self-realization and to find happiness. As it becomes apparent, the book is educational in a double sense, as it is an account of an educational process of self-formation of the protagonist (*Bildung*) as well as to make a