



University  
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

**RUSSELL ELLIOTT**

BA (University of Calgary, 2015)

**“Aesthetics of Absence:  
An Exploration of the Apocalypse of the Anthropocene”**

Department of Sociology

Thursday, December 14, 2017

9:30 A.M.

Cornett Building

Room A317

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Steve Garlick, Department of Sociology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. James Rowe, School of Environmental Studies, UVic (Outside Member)

Dr. Emile Fromet de Rosnay, Department of French, UVic (Additional Member)

External Examiner:

Dr. Elena Pnevmonidou, Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:

Dr. Helen Kurki, Department of Anthropology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

## Abstract

The tension inherent in the Anthropocene is the tension between what is rendered (in)visible, and what attempts to be made visible. It is, in this sense, a conflict of ontology and aesthetics: ghosts flutter around us, in and out of our dimension (Bourriaud, 2016; Morton, 2013), and, as Poe would say, “man” is being driven mad by the heartbeats heard through the floorboards. This study addresses two main ideas: (a) that it is the modern subject that is the anthropos of the Anthropocene, and (b) that we must further conceptualise claims about the ‘end of the world’ (Morton, 2013). Ultimately, however, both these claims are intimately linked: the ‘subject’ and the ‘world’ in modernity cannot be separated from each other, and are indeed part of the same process (Mbembe, 2003). Thus, the central argument herein is that the Anthropocene should be viewed as a threshold (Clark, 2016; Haraway, 2015) to an epoch (namely, modernity) rather than the start of a new one. To this end, what is at its ‘end’ or threshold then, is the modern subject, and the ‘world’ that it inhabited. We are faced with the utter abyss of the negative (Sinnerbrink, 2016). The sixth extinction is imminent, and a whole host of morbid repercussions of making-world (Mbembe, 2003) are creeping towards us (Morton, 2013). Ultimately, we must reckon with absence. But what does this mean? How are we to perceive and think about this lack? This study aims to address this problem, arguing that we now face the presence of absence, rather than the absence of presence. Indeed, we must seek a new aesthetics of absence.