



TRANSITIONS

MAY 7-11, 2024
University of Tartu

Annual conference
of Science Fiction
Research Association

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Panel 1: SFRA Early-Career Scholar Event: Application Anecdotes and Alternative Career Paths in SF/F

(EC sponsored professional-development session for Early Career Researchers)

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Moderator: **Sarah Lohmann**

Participants: **Stefanie K. Dunning, Sarah Hamblin, Sang-Keun Yoo, Sarah Lohmann**

What is the trajectory of a career in SF/F? How have scholars navigated the journey from graduate school to academia and beyond? What are the current appointment and/or collaborative options within academia? How might we bridge the journey into other adjacent careers? How might we imagine and carve out opportunities for SF/F research within traditional programs and departments? Join us as we unpack this journey with several scholars who have recently secured positions in—and adjacent to—academia.



Panel 2 Keynote Speech – Bogi Takács Perelmutter

Room: Jakobi 2 - 226

In this keynote talk I examine early and overlooked queer and trans speculative narratives in Hungary and the US to argue that locating and studying such texts yields insights into the formation of queer and trans literary canons. Authors' positionality, political affinities, and reputation might all contribute to their works being excluded from canons and scholarship. I will use theories of censorship and canon-building to account for why we might or might not read—or even know about—specific works.

I will begin by discussing *A kétneműek* (The Two-Sexed, 1922) by Nándor Ujhelyi (1888-1933), a speculative body swap novel with erotic elements. This novel is one of the first works of fiction to engage with transgender themes in Hungarian. I will take a look at how it relates to Ujhelyi's other speculative explorations of body and identity, like the pacifist alternate-history novel *Jack Fun császársága* (The Imperial Reign of Jack Fun, 1920). I will talk about how studying the science fiction novels of Zsuzsa Kántor (1916-2011) for young audiences—in particular her Space Pioneers trilogy (1973-1980), which highlights political conflict but does not overtly focus on gender—has led me to discover her coterminous non-speculative work with a gender-nonconforming protagonist, *Szerelmem, Csikó* (My Beloved, Csikó, 1973). The themes shared by both have enabled me to reevaluate Kántor's relationship to the Communist regime. I will also investigate why both Ujhelyi's and Kántor's works have received less discussion than *Triszex* (Trisex, 1974) by Gyula Fekete, a speculative novella notable for presenting nonbinary gender concepts in an anti-feminist context.

I will also discuss American English-language works to compare the dynamics and to build a broader theorization of the identified phenomena. I will take a look at American author William Sleator's (1945-2011) young adult novel *House of Stairs* (1974), a richly allusive work depicting same-sex attraction without naming it. I will likewise explore "Winter's King" (1969) by Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-2018) which the author revised after publication to add content about gender nonconformity. I will conclude with James Tiptree Jr. (1915-1987)'s *Up the Walls of the World* (1978), whose pronoun exploration went largely unnoticed by critics.

Using these examples, I investigate factors that can lead to a work dropping out of a canon or not entering it, often as a result of author identity and positionality. The queerness and transness of earlier authors is often not possible to determine, but we do know that many of them belonged also to other marginalized groups. Ujhelyi, Kántor and Sleator had Jewish backgrounds; Ujhelyi and Tiptree Jr. were people with disabilities. Authors' controversial actions might also result in erasure, like Tiptree Jr.'s murder-suicide, Kántor's defense of the Soviet occupation of Hungary, or Ujhelyi being best known in his era as a controversial erotic author. I will conclude by suggesting directions for future research in other languages and in areas of speculative fiction stereotyped as less prestigious, like children's literature.

Parts of this research were funded by the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute Jewish Gender Studies Research Award.



Panel 3 Environmental SF: Animal Agencies

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: **Karoline Huber****Conrad Scott**

University of Alberta

Online

“Imagining Future Changes to Cascadian Biota in Christie’s *Greenwood* and VanderMeer’s *Hummingbird Salamander*”

During the 2021 “heat dome” event on the North American West Coast, with temperatures into the 40s (Crawford et al.), biologists estimate that over a billion marine animals perished by July (Cecco; Einhorn). Reports also suggest that “at least 651,000 [farm] animals died” (Ryan 2021), as well as “an untold number” of wildlife (Labbé). Towards the end of July 2021, more than 250 wildfires burned across British Columbia (Ball and Jung), decimating biomes while disrupting human activities. Scientists argue that “ecosystems are recovering, but could be transformed forever if such events become more frequent” (Charlebois). These occurrences shocked climate specialists, who imagined “something like that in the middle” or “latter part of the century” (Golden). As these events in 2021 and beyond demonstrate, it is important to understand how plants and animals are affected by ecological changes and speculate about the future—as well as to imagine how human intersections with biodiversity will affect the socio-cultural future of our species.

Through an examination of forests succumbing to “the Great Withering” in Michael Christie’s *Greenwood* (2020), where verdant refuge is also found off the coast of British Columbia, and a search for a hummingbird presumed extinct in the Pacific Northwest of Jeff VanderMeer’s *Hummingbird Salamander* (2021), this paper argues that the specific biotic systems in these narratives are central to a hope for the future despite what are often dire circumstances for plants, animals, and humans alike. In switching the focus of narratives about the future to non-human agency, I address the limitations of anthropocentric literature in addressing environmental issues and explore other possible perspectives. This paper strives to expand our understanding of the sociocultural dimensions of biota living alongside humans in an urgent moment marked by intersecting social and ecological crises.

Anna Maria Grzybowska

University of Warsaw

Online

“Becoming-feline: Transgressing the Human–Nonhuman Boundary in *Stray* (2022)”

By inviting its audience to become more than human, SF narratives contribute to disrupting, exceeding and subtending the modes of human experience. To represent the liminality of human/animal interface, Gordon (2008, 191) introduces the term “amborg”, which encompasses becoming and “suggests in ‘ambi’ an organism that can be both human and animal, an ambiguous organism; an organism about which we feel ambivalent; and perhaps an ambitious organism, spanning nature and culture; a new way of organizing the world, an amborganization”. Certain aspects of this amborganization can be explored through temporary speculative “becoming-animal” in SF narratives, which express our longing for understanding other animals and ourselves through them, epitomizing the ineluctable interdependence.

Games’ technological mediation creates a potentially constructive space for decentering the human perspective, spurring the process of amborganization. In video games, this process occurs on two elemental levels: performative and interactive. For example, *Stray* (BlueTwelve/Annapurna 2022) follows the story of an unfortunate cat who falls down a hole leading to a forgotten underground city inhabited by humanoid robots. Separated from her cat-friends who stayed above the ground, the eponymous stray needs to find her way around and out of the sunken city, navigating a dystopian cyberpunk world with the help of a buzzing insectoid robot, a carrier for the consciousness of a long-gone human scientist who once lived there. In this arrangement, the player performs the cat, enacting pre-programmed actions and their consequences, both following and building her story. Confronted with the strangeness of the posthuman city, the cat’s behavioral familiarity is the main anchoring point, fusing the player and the cat in a quest to explore the unknown. The player is simultaneously looking as the cat and at the cat, interacting with her at all times. In my presentation, I’m going to reflect upon the intricacies of “becoming-animal” in *Stray*, to consider its narrative possibilities and limitations in fulfilling the process of amborganization.

Amy Cutler

Central St Martin’s, London

In person

An Animal Has No Standstill: Species Projections in De-Extinction

‘What we are making is not a mammoth, but rather the waking dream of a fictionalized animal: a process comprised of concreteness and indetermination, producing a new totem made out of mud, proteins, bits, electricity, embryos, and blank cheques...’

This presentation will take a creative audiovisual approach, augmenting a traditional paper with video and sound to explore the transitional media and technologies of de-extinction. Between the fossil bone, the coded information, and the resurrected individual: where does the animal stand in this configuration? Drawing on my work with both palaeontologists and with de-extinction biologists, I will explore the “transitional” nature of species revival in both rhetoric and technology, drawing on new novels (*The Last Animal* and *Ghost Species*) as well as canonical specimens of resurrected and hybridized species in Shelley, Wells, and others. Drawing from a constellation of thinkers—including David Jaclin’s “Becoming Mammoth”, Jackie Stacey’s *The Cinematic Life of the Gene*, and Jody Berland’s study of animals as mediators in network cultures—this work will explore the nature of the animal as itself a form of transitional media: suspended between the past and the future, an equal harbinger and heirloom. From algorithms to necrofauna, the paper will consider the predicaments of the animal as a “premonition” or speculative asset within biocapitalist entanglements, while also giving the first public account of the research behind my own project SPECIES PIRACY. This is a live cinema ensemble work created with the support of the Leverhulme Centre for Anthropocene Biodiversity which had its world premiere in a one-off performance in London in December 2023. This will be the first analytical presentation of the work, itself a pioneering intervention in the production processes of both moving image and animal storytelling between archival data and AI.



Panel 4 Co-Futurisms: Indigenous & Latinx futurisms

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: **Patrick Brock****Ida Yoshinaga & Kenrick Kamiya-Yoshida**

Georgia Institute of Technology, independent scholar

Online

**Translating Kinjō Tetsuo: Indigenous Uchinanchū
Screenwriter-Producer of Postwar Japanese SF TV**

Kinjō Tetsuo, an Indigenous Okinawan visionary screenwriter-producer, was the co-creator of the “Ultra” *tokusatsu* storyworld and superhero family so popular in postwar Japan. Kinjō embedded a distinct Uchinanchū (Native Okinawan) aesthetic in his scripting and story development work for Japanese SF television, including veiled references to his own wartime experiences and an anti-colonial politics surreptitiously challenging the Japanese empire via SF allegory. Also, as a minority Indigenous storyteller in a majority-Japanese writers’ room during the relatively progressive 1960s and 1970s, Kinjō had to navigate the many levels of censorship involved in the process of television production and editing as well as in the distribution of the many resulting “Ultra” series that were translated into English and other languages to be broadcast and sold via physical media throughout the world.

This presentation takes recent English translations from the Japanese-language biography, *The Man Who Gave Birth to Ultraman*, by Yamada Teruko, as well as from some of Kinjō’s Nihongo scripts in three of the Ultra series (*Ultra Q*, *Ultraman*, *Ultra Seven*), to re-examine the U.S. release of the *Ultraman* and *Ultra Seven* shows, translated into their English versions, by mass-media DVD/Blu-Ray companies. These contrasting translations can be used to trace the kinds of colonial challenges which Kinjō must have encountered on the way to getting his vision through the gauntlet of censorship, from the first level of pre-production and script development, to the intermediate stage of new television broadcast in Japan’s network system, and finally to the global distribution phase. We will discuss both aesthetic findings such as the subtlety of Kinjō’s use of the Japanese language and the unique deployment of untranslatable elements in his scripts such as onomatopoeia, as well as cultural biases of the larger system of television production, broadcast network, and media distribution companies. Finally, we will take recent conversations on Indigenous Futurism and global capitalism and ask questions about what it means to be a diasporic Native television or film auteur in such a hostile yet productive environment.

Aylin Walder

University of Cologne

In person

Introducing the Notion of Situated Magic(al) Realism: Hearing the Indigenous Voice in Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022)

In this paper, I argue that my notion of situated magic(al) realism, based on Haraway’s situated knowledges, Attebery’s realized fantastic, and Bower’s magic(al) realism, enables novel readings of postcolonial SF. Acknowledging the conflicting worldviews of colonized indigenes and colonizing West, my notion validates those concepts of the universe opposing the over-rationalized West by drawing on situated knowledges. Following Jameson’s (302) assessment of magic(al) realism providing an “alternative to the corrective logic of contemporary postmodernism”, I apply the category of situated magic(al) realism to Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (2022) and thereby argue against the notion of situated fantastic. In the particular case of the Na’vi, hesitations regarding the “magical” abilities of these alien people—essential for a situated fantastic—is missing, so the Na’vi are better approached through a magic(al) realist lens that considers their abilities mundane. However, the aspect of magic becomes contradictory since it is only magic(al) realism for a Western and not for an indigenous audience. Here, situated magic(al) realism highlights how the experience of magic(al) realism depends on one’s location in the world: what one may regard as magic, somebody else may see as part of material reality. Thus, the Na’vi become advanced extrapolations of indigenous reality. While both SF productions retell colonial history and are hence in danger of being “a neo-colonial reworking of primitivism” (Taussig 172), situated magic(al) realism helps to overcome this by establishing the Na’vi as a futuristic society based on indigenous knowledge. Considering magic(al) realism as unhinged from the present and anchored in a SF future, thus stretching realism “to its limits” (Bowers 21), as is typical for both genres, situated magic(al) realism leads to a transition of reading SF by which “the marginalized of our own dominating systems can again find voice” (Slemon 21).

Taryne Jade Taylor

Florida Atlantic University

Online

Dystopian Transitions: Towards a Decolonial Latinx Future

Authors, editors, and literary scholars have pointed to the tendency of the publishing industry to overfocus on trauma narratives when it comes to the representation of Latinx literature in the marketplace. Similar arguments have been made about U.S. ethnic literatures more broadly—that the literary establishment champions texts by authors of color that focus on the histories of oppression and trauma. In fact, this trend in the U.S. literary establishment is what many Latinx science fiction and fantasy authors attribute to the difficulty publishing genre fiction. The literary establishment’s focus on Latinx trauma is particularly troubling in the context of Latinx Futurisms as the two most prominent texts in the *sf/f* field are dystopias that address the trauma of being Latinx in the U.S.: Alex Rivera’s *Sleep Dealer* and Sabrina Vourvoulias’ *Ink*.

Sleep Dealer and *Ink* certainly bear witness to the legacies of colonization and the discrimination against Latinxs in the U.S., but despite their dystopian nature, both texts also offer strong messages of hope: they present dystopia as a transitional state that will lead to a decolonial future. Similarly, E.G. Condé’s Latinx Futurist novella “Sordidez” presents a deeply disturbing dystopia that imagines a future in which colonization and informal empire devastate the globe. However, the novella ends with the suggestion of a decolonial future. Thus, this paper argues, dystopian Latinx Futurist works draw on the expectations of trauma narrative to explode them, presenting a futurity grounded in hope and survivance. All three works use dystopia to emphasize the importance of bearing witness to oppression and inequality, show that the first step to a decolonial future is to recognize attempts to destroy knowledge of the past as a means of control and then use personal and collective memory to combat historical erasure.

Rubén R. Mendoza

East Los Angeles College

In person

Mestiz@ Rhetoric and Critical Dialectics of Ambivalence, Precarity, and Transition in Alberto Yáñez’ “Burn the Ships” and Yuri Herrera’s *Signs Preceding the End of the World*

This paper examines how two contemporary works of Latinx critical dystopian fiction center Indigenous-based aesthetic-rhetorical mechanisms that use hybridity, ambivalence, and the ontological uncertainty and in-betweenness of process-oriented transitional flux and radical change to interrogate and challenge Eurocentric settler-colonialist domination. The analysis focuses first on the speculative apocalyptic/dystopian Mestiz@ Rhetoric of sixteenth century Nahua/Mestiz@ codices to understand how the profoundly disorienting traumatic experience of post-Conquest change, precarity, and hybridity ambivalence, served as a locus for resistance to colonization through aesthetic-rhetorical incorporation of these experiences into the codices. This initial framework is then applied to the examination of two recent works that similarly develop complex interplays of hybridity, ambivalent flux, and precarious transition, in resisting colonization: Alberto Yáñez’ 2019 postcolonial zombie narrative, “Burn the Ships” and Yuri Herrera’s dystopian 2015 novel, *Signs Preceding the End of the World*. Both works center on strong female protagonists grappling with mestizaje hybridity with their positionality within colonialism’s unequal power differentials and precarity of ambivalence and transitional flux.

In addition to utopian/dystopian studies and postcolonial SF studies, this analysis draws from Chicana/o/x Studies theorizations, primarily Damián Baca’s Mestiz@ rhetoric and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *mestiza consciousness*. With this framework, “Burn the Ships” and *Signs Preceding the End of the World* are examined as prime examples of what Baca defines as a “powerful Mestiz@ rhetorical strategy” (16) of nepantlism “in-betweenness.” This is “a strategy of thinking from a marginal border space through dual expressions and symbolic oppositions” (ibid 25) that operates in a hybrid mode of “in-betweenness” which Anzaldúa similarly theorizes through her concept of *mestiza consciousness* hybridity. As Yáñez and Herrera demonstrate, such aesthetic-rhetorical strategies cannily manipulate the power differentials of transitional ambivalence and precarious flux between unequal epistemological and ontological fields to generate “discursive manifestations of continuity and adaptation” (Baca 4) that form the bases of modes of resistance. Yáñez’s story focuses on the charged flux of a precarious “in-between” nepantla of conceptual borderlands as the devastating process of colonization unfolds in tandem with a difficult process of working through how to effectively resist it. This struggle pits patriarchal religious leader, Quinelto, against his own wife, Citlal, and her insistence on using the necromancy of her unauthorized “women’s magic” to fight the colonizers with aesthetic-rhetorical practices of Indigenous literacies. In the dystopia of Herrera’s *Signs*, the migration of a young Mexican woman, Makina, across the literal United States/Mexico borderlands, and her consequent radical identity transformation as she grapples with responding to her new precarious position between worlds, emphasizes the use of Mestiz@ rhetoric involving nepantla literacies that enable savvy deconstructions of signs from “in-between” with an understanding of hybridity through a nepantla lens. As the paper demonstrates, both works engage Mestiz@ rhetoric self-reflexively, incorporating diegetic narrative elements that involve its use. In both cases, Indigenous literacies of Mestiz@ aesthetic-rhetorical practices structured by the difficult process-oriented ambivalences of precarity within radical transition and flux between ontological and epistemological systems under colonialist domination are demonstrated as potential mechanisms for resistance precisely through this ambivalence, precarity, and transition.

Tuesday, May 7, 15.30-17.00



Panel 5 SF General: Roundtable “I am a changingable feast, as are all of we”: Transformations and Fantastic Experiments in Yorgos Lanthimos’s *Poor Things*

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: **Francesca Arnavas**

Participants: **Francesca Arnavas** (In person), **Marzia Beltrami** (online), **Silvia Kurr** (In person), **Mattia Bellini** (In person)

Yorgos Lanthimos’s movie *Poor Things* (2023) has received a lot of critical and audience attention, due to its extravagant visuals, bizarre characters, and treatment of sexuality. In this roundtable, we are going to address and discuss these and other topics through the lenses of the idea of “fantastic experiments”. By fantastic experiments we mean peculiar cognitive processes instigated and triggered by speculative and fantasy fiction. The fantastic dimensions, unusual objects, and unexpected combinations of elements represented in speculative fictional scenarios make it possible to envision novel realities and foster counterfactual reasoning. In *Poor Things* the fantastic initiates counterfactual thinking in relation to multiple thematic clusters. Like Alice in Wonderland, Bella Baxter’s path towards self-discovery goes through the meanders of fantastic realities and whimsical creatures. Not unlike Lewis Carroll’s books (and also in another, more obvious, Victorian inspiration for the film, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*) in the movie fantastic experiments relate also to the scientific world and to how science can productively and ingeniously employ fantasy as a powerful tool for initiating new creative paths leading to unexpected discoveries. Bodily transitions, modifications, metamorphoses—the animal, human, and posthuman body—are present in the movie as key topics and they can also be interpreted as experimentations with fantastic possibilities. One important leitmotif for Bella’s individual development is her relationship with sexuality. Sex involves a fantastic experiment in *Poor Things*: as a way to imaginatively experiment with oneself and one’s body, and with others’ bodies. Fantastic experiments in *Poor Things* are not detectable only at the level of the plot, but also at a formal and stylistic level, for example in the peculiar cinematic language employed. In this sense, the use of colors, the costumes, and the construction of landscapes (that seem almost AI generated, sometimes even with hallucinations typical of generative algorithms) are extremely original, experimenting with fantastic possibilities and matching the movie’s content. Bella Baxter herself is a fantastic experiment, both in the sense that her body-mind connection is the result of a weird, impossible, and yet somehow wonderful scientific experiment, and in how she represents the universal potential for human creativity and self-invention, in her own words “I am a changingable feast, as are all of we”.

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Panel 6 SF General: Loops & Parallels

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: Ildiko Limpár

Jasmin della Guardia & Koji Tachibana

Chiba University

Online

Rick and Morty's Parallel Identities on Interdimensional adventures. How Infinity Affects the Concept of Identity

The animated sci-fi sitcom *Rick and Morty* (2013-) pictures the interdimensional adventures of the scientist Rick and his grandson Morty. In parallel universes they encounter parallel versions of themselves, strangers and extraterrestrials. The parallel versions range from evil, western or alien versions. The splattering of the characters as copies in infinite universes poses the question of how these parallel existences affect identity, behavior and morals. Can the infinite versions of Rick and Morty be seen as different masks a Žižekian approach to identity? Who are we when there are infinite versions of ourselves? Does our behavior matter when confronted with parallel universes? Do we become evil if infinity erases any virtue, cause and responsibility? We want to discuss these questions on the example of *Rick and Morty* that shows morally questionable and violent behavior during the characters' interdimensional journeys. How can our virtues transform to the universe or even parallel universes? Although in *Rick and Morty* the violence and chaos seem inevitable, could parallel universes and identities make us better? We also ask how parallel universes affect the viewer. The SF lens offers blueprints and hyperboles of earthly development and possible future scenarios. Lastly, we want to look at what we can learn from the animation about life on earth, for example whether parallel identities are a metaphor for psychological personality disorders, different masks or completely different individuals.

Megan Stephens

University of Sheffield

In person

Breaking the Loop: Transitioning Between Death Types in *Palm Springs*

Death is an ultimate point of transition, the awareness of which haunts every mortal life. Todd May (2009) argues that a defining aspect of death is that it is both inevitable and uncertain—we always know that it will happen, but never when. Science fiction worlds, however, offer an opportunity to adapt the nature of the life-death transition and thus approach it from a different angle. This paper will focus on the treatment of death in the 2020 time-loop romantic comedy *Palm Springs*, which features three characters trapped in a time loop on the day of a wedding. Death is quickly established as a way of resetting the loop, leading to the characters frequently experiencing the moment of death and yet not dying. These deaths are often played as moments of comedy, despite (or perhaps because of) their often-violent nature. In contrast, at the climax of the film, two of the characters willingly face a potentially final death in an attempt to escape the time loop. I will compare this emotional facing-death scene to the multiple irreverent moment-of-death scenes earlier in the film, analyzing in particular the effect of bodily integrity and the visibility of violence on the tone of a death scene. In addition to considering the transitional nature of death, I will explore how the particular world of *Palm Springs* allows death itself to transition from a frivolous to a significant event, as well as briefly reflecting on the insights this film can offer regarding how comedic or dismissive portrayals of death operate more widely.

Panel 7 Gendered & Queer SF: Reproductive Rights

Room: Lossi 3-326

Chair: R. B. Lemberg Perelmutter

Mel Kennard

University of New England

In person

Gender and Genre in Reproductive Dystopias: *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-) and *Creamerie* (2021-)

The reproductive dystopia has recently enjoyed a transition from page to screen, exemplified through the television adaptation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The series premiered in 2017, a time of great political upheaval in the United States when many feared what the election of a regressive, right-wing government would mean for women's rights. *The Handmaid's Tale* and its imagery quickly became synonymous with the fight to protect women's rights across the world.

The Handmaid's Tale shows the role of SF in reflecting and amplifying moments of social turmoil. The television adaptation presents a world where fertile women are conscripted as reproductive slaves, drawing upon its source text while also extending it in response to the context of its production. In the transposition from page to screen, the series does not present a far-off world, but rather one that seems an extrapolation of our present. Through its use of horror tropes, *The Handmaid's Tale* TV series reflects both times of social upheaval and the changes that occur throughout the adaptive process.

A second reproductive dystopia, *Creamerie* (2021-) from New Zealand, presents a world where the majority of people with Y chromosomes have perished as the result of a deadly virus—a situation that recalls Covid-19. *Creamerie* is, superficially, a feminist utopia, in which women live freely and equally. However, by combining its SF narrative with moments of comedy and presenting its female leads as unruly heroines, *Creamerie* reveals its dystopic realities, namely the reproductive enslavement of the few surviving men. Critically positioned as the inverse of *The Handmaid's Tale*'s, *Creamerie* demonstrates the ongoing metamorphosis of the reproductive dystopia. Together, the horrific *The Handmaid's Tale* and the darkly comedic serve as pertinent social barometers that demonstrate SF's ability to respond to contemporary social anxieties and its continued generic growth.

Sarah Nolan-Brueck

University of Southern California

In person

Bending Gender and Genre in Yume Kitasei's *The Deep Sky*

In *Speculative Epistemologies* (2021), John Rieder examines "eccentric" texts, arguing that writers who "construct [generic] boundary objects...also always challenge practices of inclusion and exclusion already in place; working at the edges of genre produces ripple effects felt by those presumed to occupy its center" (3). While Rieder does not assume that "innovation [is] the key to artistic value," he recognizes that flexing the boundaries of genre can often challenge the kind of colonial, patriarchal, and heteronormative assumptions held by devotees of a conservative vision of SF. In this conference paper, I will read Yume Kitasei's *The Deep Sky: A Novel* (2023), as a text which uses a conjunction of deep space thriller, detective novel, and coming-of-age story to explore the simultaneous breakdown of gender and genre. The reader follows a cosmopolitan crew on an international space mission, fleeing a dying Earth for the newly identified Planet X. *The Deep Sky* is unique for its expansive engagement with reproductive justice, from depicting pregnant gender expansive characters aboard the ship, to scrutinizing the place of race (and racism) in the reproductive scheme, to probing the painful reality of parenting in a world of increasing instability. In the end, Kitasei breaks down the generic expectations of her overlapping forms to posit a future with less boundaries—gendered, hierarchical, and racial. Kitasei's novel manages to trade in our worst visions of the future—environmental collapse, artificial intelligence gone awry, and loss of control over one's body—while still holding onto a humanistic belief in our ability to be better.

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Panel 8: Curator tour to the exhibition *Transforming Literary Places*

Room: University of Tartu Museum (Ülikooli 18)

This exhibition seeks to explore imaginative connections between literature and other artistic forms, highlighting the way in which different media can shape, inspire, and transform physical spaces. Geographical locations born in literary works are re-interpreted, migrating into the form of expression of another medium. With paintings, videos, music, interactive experiences, virtual and augmented reality, and mixed-media installations, international artists from different backgrounds creatively adapt a chosen literary place.

Curators and Guides:

Francesca Arnavas and Mattia Bellini (University of Tartu)



Panel 9 Environmental SF: SF's Environmental Affordances

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: Amy Cutler

Karoline Huber

University of Stuttgart

In person

Generational Transitions in Climate Fiction

Cli-fi imagines worlds in transition from the reality we know to futures we can hardly imagine. Generations in cli-fi can serve as a means of scale to project ecological transitions in the storyworld. For my analysis, I frame generations according to their place in the family structure such as grandparent-parent-child. Multigenerational stories can trace ecological and narrative developments over long periods of time while maintaining a connection through personal links. James Bradley's *Clade*, for instance, starts out with the climate scientist Adam in 2010, noting the vanishing of arctic glaciers with growing concern. It concludes with his goddaughter surrounded by flooded skyscrapers receiving a call about Adam's passing, approximately in 2050. Thereby, the novel can show the beginning of an ecological change as well as its eventual outcome. Transitions between generations occur as members of the older generation die or disappear, and a new generation takes their place in the family or in society. With their pace, these transitions can follow dynamics of climate disturbance such as slow violence or quick and unexpected disruptions. Narratives which focus on one generation visualize the devastating effects of the climate crisis within a single lifetime. This is the case in *The Light Pirate* by Lily Brooks-Dalton which encompasses the birth, life, and death of the protagonist while the storyworld undergoes a complete transition from increasing weather extremes to a landscape entirely transformed by a sudden disastrous flood. The novel depicts transitions between generations as equally violent and unpredictable as the different stages of extreme weather conditions alongside which they occur. While following the narratives of different generations is a common feature in historical fiction, it can be viewed as a narrative scaffold in cli-fi to project the consequences of our present actions into the future.

Mark Bould

University of the West of England

In person

In Short, Climate Catastrophe

As the already unfolding climate catastrophe has entered public consciousness, so SF and so-called climate fiction have attempted to address the key failing Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016, 63) identifies with the "serious literary novel": its constitutive refusal/inability to engage with "nonhuman agency" and those "forces of unthinkable magnitude that create unbearably intimate connections over vast gaps in time and space". But, as Ghosh acknowledges, genre fiction possesses some of the affordances necessary to do so—hence the emergence since the 1980s of SF that grapples with climate change. As scale and complexity are two of the issues with which such fiction must come to terms, it seems best dealt with at novel length or longer. However, the last decade has seen numerous short fiction anthologies concerned with climate change—including *I'm with the Bears: Short Stories from a Damaged Planet* (2011), *Welcome to the Greenhouse: New Science Fiction on Climate Change: Short Stories About Our Climate* (2011), *Beacons: Stories For Our Not So Distant Future* (2013), *Loosed Upon the World: The Saga Anthology of Climate Fiction* (2015), *Winds of Change* (2015), *Drowned Worlds* (2016), *An Invite to Eternity: Tales of Nature Disrupted* (2019), *Tales of Two Planets: Stories of Climate Change and Inequality in a Divided World* (2020), *Watch Your Head: Writers and Artists Respond to the Climate Crisis* (2020), *No More Fairy Tales: Stories to Save Our Planet* (2022), *Terraform: Watch/Worlds/Burn* (2022)—from major publishers and small presses, as well as magazine special issues (e.g., www.guernicamag.com) and short story competitions (e.g., grist.org, news.asu.edu).

This paper outlines preliminary findings from the examination of a corpus of 200 stories drawn from the above sources, mapping how climate change has been narrated at shorter lengths, what the short story form enables in terms of representing the unthinkable and hyperobjectal, and how prose SF might be differently theorized by focusing on short fiction rather than the novel.

Susanne Roesner

Swansea University

In person

Transitioning Into the Future: Using Speculative Fiction to Frame Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in an Inclusive and Hopeful Path Forward

The ongoing anthropogenic climate crisis and correlative biodiversity loss show a direct link between humanity's treatment of our planet and our collective, and planetary, well-being. According to the latest IPCC synthesis report, "Rapid and far-reaching transitions across all sectors and systems are necessary to achieve deep and sustained emissions reductions and secure a liveable and sustainable future for all" (2023, 28). As Margaret Atwood so aptly coined it, "It's Not Climate Change – It's Everything Change" (2015). Atwood's phrase summarizes the urgent need for change, but also the inherent potential of all-encompassing transitions. Ecocritical examinations of human-nature relationships have a long tradition in speculative fiction, where complex issues can be re-framed, re-examined, and ultimately transformed into more accessible narratives. This paper focuses on speculative fiction as a medium to explore human, as well as more-than-human, life in the current anthropogenic climate crisis. As part of my research, I am writing a novel, following the mitigation and adaptation endeavors of my main character, a biologist, and a multitude of more-than-human narrators in her proximity. By incorporating these narrators, a more inclusive vision of the present and future can be constructed. This paper will discuss excerpts from my creative work, combined with the critical approach behind choices of craft, and underlying narrative strategies.



Panel 10 Social Change: Posthuman Entanglements

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: Aidan Diamond

David J. Cross

University of Stuttgart

In person

Escaping the Posthuman/Transhuman Labyrinth: Networks of Evolution in Utopian and Anti-Utopian Science Fiction

"I'd like to be a desert plant... that could see the sun all day. I want to be growing. Perhaps a cactus on some warm world... to be asleep but still aware of the sun and myself."

- Philip K. Dick, *The Maze of Death*

"Emotions always screw everything up... Maybe androids aren't as different from us as we thought."

- *Detroit: Become Human*, 2018

In 1977 Ihab Hassan stated, "humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism." His intention was to redefine a cultural and philosophical framework that had for too long been centered on Western, anthropocentric/androcentric neoliberal ideals. Subsequently, in the 1980s, the posthuman focus shifted towards the "not so clear-cut boundaries between human and machine" (Heise 454).

While posthumanism, on the one hand, can be considered as a schema that works against humanism to redefine the human, on the other, it is an ontological condition in which humans will live with "chemically, surgically, and technologically modified bodies and or in close conjunction with (networked) machines and other organic forms" (Nayar 28). This latter, ontological posthumanism, or critical posthumanism, has often become synonymous with transhumanism. Yet, transhumanist thought suggests that humans are not yet posthuman while retaining humanist anthropocentric views alongside technology as the key to unlocking human potential.

Consequently, the entanglement of posthumanism and transhumanism reveals the difficult task of realigning personal and sociocultural values that are more adequately attuned to a world increasingly influenced by human technocultures where questions around nature and the environment also play a pivotal role. Thus, this paper aims to explore how concepts of posthuman and transhuman can (re)shape culture and the collective imagination and how this can become a point of departure for redefining post- and transhuman futures from an ecological perspective.

Acknowledging the fact that post- and transhuman imaginaries also open up potential spaces to explore politics of otherness and identity, this paper asks how they can become new critical possibilities for resistance and empowerment on a planetary scale by reorienting the human alongside nonhuman entities/species. As such, a reading of utopian and anti-utopian fictions offers the potential to explore the political and emotional dimensions of the past, present, and future through the science fiction logic of "what-if"—exploring the possibility of progress and interrelationality between the human, technological, and natural world, or, committing to an interrogation of networks of evolution.

Benjamin Horn

University of Birmingham

In person

Vicissitudes of the Posthuman in Three Novels by Philip K. Dick

This paper situates the fiction of Philip K. Dick within contemporary debates about posthumanity as both a discursive entity and an ontological state. As Matthew Flisfeder (2022, 196, 197) has pointed out, critical theories of posthumanism often contain two aspects: post-*human*-ism, referring to "tethering humans to machines as a material assemblage of technological objects" and post-*humanism*, where such theories seek to "escape the contradictions and deficiencies" of various humanisms, in their sometimes unwitting complicity with domination. Braidotti rightly criticizes these humanisms as defining Otherness as the "negative and specular counterpart", advocating an "ethics of becoming (Braidotti 2013, 15, 49) based on material interconnectedness. However, Claire Colebrook and Kathryn Yusoff have respectively highlighted that such forms of materiality relegate racialized subjects to a morbid form of the posthuman. Yusoff highlights the "traffic between the *inhuman as matter* and the *inhuman as race*" as well as how the logics of racial capitalism inscribe a distinction within matter itself, as "active and inert" (Yusoff, 2018). This material distinction likewise affects relations to the future. In a racialized twist on Cary Wolfe's (2010, xv) definition of posthumanism as coming "before and after humanism," white subjects may experience a future beyond the human. Non-white subjects, however, are denied a future because they were never deemed human. This paper argues that Dick negotiates the vicissitudes of the posthuman Flisfeder, Braidotti and Yusoff describe as both method of power, and an alternative ethics of flourishing. In *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1964), *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and *Flow My Tears, The Policeman Said* (1974), Dick undermines the ideological valences of posthumanism, while his racialized and non-human characters are able to create alternative futures, based on a counter-hegemonic ethics of flourishing based on dialectical humanism (Flisfeder 2022).

Heather McKnight

Magnetic Ideals Collective

In person

Exploring the Commons of Consciousness of *Sense8* and *Falling Water*: Speculative Spiritualities of Resistance in Far-from-Equilibrium Times

In *Falling Water* (2016) characters can enter the dreams of others and bleed their dreams into the waking world, dissolving the barriers between human minds, exploring the potentiality of sharing "cortex to cortex". *Sense8* (2016) sees a group of eight radically different individuals, from different parts of the world, form a bond where they consciously enter each other's minds and possess the skills and knowledge of the others in their collective. These SFTV shows explore an evolution, or rediscovery, of a human spirituality which can be interpreted as a form of transformative resistance (Bender & McRoberts 2012). *Sense8* explores liminal spaces of self, the limits of existing, and its utopian possibilities through exploring trans-narratives, sexuality, identity, birth, death, and memory (Mincheva 2018). Both explore the blurring between the self and other, escape, self-discovery, empathy and love (Mincheva 2018). They also expose darker opportunities for disciplinary technologies and exploitable vulnerability. These narratives are important in our chaotic far-from-equilibrium times which lead to new forms of order, utopian or otherwise (Prigogine & Stengers 1984; McKnight 2020). Through these shows we enter a speculative future of the Blochian pre-consciousness, where the new occurs through the multiple contradictions of connected individuals with the status quo (Bloch 1995). Despite the utopian impulse of both shows, the representation and critique of violence are embedded in the seemingly inevitable presence of murder and war (Butler 2020). The shows show structural violence and bodily violence emergent from repeating and inherited cycles of trauma. The shared spiritual commons of consciousness and the mutual vulnerability therein reveal both a horizon of possibility and disaster. While we may all be "dreaming the same dream", the meaning of this dream to each person depends on their experiences of their lived "now" when they find themselves transitioning in a world of multiple and intersecting oppressions (Bloch 2009). These shows speculate that we could be more unified than separated, that to feel another's pain may prevent us from inflicting it. This paper positions these shows in a space of resistance, trying to extract hope from the horror.



Panel 11 SF General: Neurodivergent Insights

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: Rachel Anderson

Anna Kurowicka

University of Warsaw

In person

Embracing Asexuality, Neurodivergence, and Non-Humanity in Martha Wells's *The Murderbot Diaries*

Non-human characters populating science fiction, such as aliens, robots, or cyborgs, are often used as metaphors for difference along the lines of neurodiversity on the one hand and sexuality on the other. Such figures straddle the line between human and non-human, encouraging readers to question the importance and stability of such boundaries. They are typically depicted as unhappy, striving to not only be recognized as morally and legally equal to humans, but also to *become* more human, which can be achieved through expressing emotions in a neurotypical way and experiencing romantic and sexual love. These tropes are understandably considered problematic in neurodivergent and asexual communities, as they contribute to the dehumanization of the actual autistic and asexual populations by implying that they have more in common with robots than people and need to be fixed in order to fit the norm (Sinwell 2014; Brandley and Dehnert 2023).

This paper will focus on the award-winning *The Murderbot Diaries* series by Martha Wells (2017-), which reworks the trope of autistic and asexual non-humans in SF by questioning the connection between neurotypicality and allosexuality with humanity. The series features a "Security Unit," a part-machine, part-organic construct working to become independent in a world dominated by ruthless corporate entities. The character is commonly read as autistic (Reid 2023) as it has trouble connecting emotionally to the humans around it. Murderbot has no sexual characteristics, no gender, and experiences no sexual attraction; it was designed to be agender and asexual and intends to stay this way. While the protagonist changes over the course of the novels, particularly by establishing relationships with humans and non-humans alike, it feels no need to become neurotypical or allosexual to fit the "human norm." This innovative approach to the trope of the non-human autistic and asexual provides an opportunity to critically engage with the conference theme; the transition initiated and experienced by Murderbot does not take it from being less to more human, but rather forces questions about how humanity is constructed and who/what is excluded from the category.

Emily Aguilar

California State University

Online

Neurodivergent Heroism in Rivers Solomon's Novels

This presentation explores neurodivergence in River Solomon's Black speculative fiction novels *An Unkindness of Ghosts*, *the Deep*, and *Sorrowland*. Their respective protagonists Aster, Yetu, and Vern are neurodivergent heroes who demonstrate that social fairness is not achieved through accommodation or pity, but rather by countering and dismantling systems that do not acknowledge any marginalized person's needs at all. Although none of the protagonists are outwardly labeled as autistic, they each mirror traits within autistic people: they each have a strict adherence to rules, enhanced intelligence, problem-solving logic, but above all else, Aster, Yetu, and Vern are overly empathetic. Naturally, they each take on a caretaker leadership role among their equally vulnerable, disabled, and marginalized friends and family members. Their social role, alongside their difficulties navigating their neurodivergence, is challenged and exaggerated as they combat worlds fraught with racism, misogyny, and various forms of systemic abuse.

Because Aster, Yetu, and Vern do not want to carry their pain or the pain of their friends, manifested physical pain in each novel, any longer, they do not fret on questions about justice, right or wrong or negotiation. Instead, they counteract inhumane logic and law with direct action, transitioning society toward practices and behaviors that work in accordance with fairness and empathy, even if it means destroying those societies altogether. I argue that River Solomon's depiction of neurodivergence is a mode of resistance that advocates the necessity of disobedience, especially when it is done under the guise of radical empathy, accommodation, and survival. To craft my argument I will closely read various passages from the aforementioned novels. I will define subject/subjugation, resistance, and disability justice by utilizing texts from theorist Louis Althusser, therapist and political activist Devon Price, and disability studies scholar Sami Schalk.

Terra Mae Gasque

Georgia Institute of Technology

Online

From Living Sickness to Alien Abductions: Neuroqueer Demi-Rhetoricity and Lyrical Mimesis

In this paper I show why science fiction has an inherent connection with the exploration of neurodivergent storytelling. The "neuroqueer" framework of Remi Yergeau creates a new framing of aesthetics for autistic and neurodivergent representation in culture. In this presentation I join Yergeau's "demi-rhetorical" framework of neurodivergent expertise in their conditions with Seo-Young Chu's concept of lyrical mimesis within science fiction to provide metaphorical understanding of traumatic and cultural conditions. I argue that neurodivergent individuals can use speculative fiction to craft metaphorical visions, from a position of authority, on their lived reality from a unique culture, as a site of trauma, and personalized experiences. Kurt Vonnagut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* shows the author's unique manifestations of PTSD and gives non-traumatized individuals a vision of life with the condition in a narrative form they can better engage with. This research opens the doors for historical investigations into neurodivergent individuals who, like women and queer/trans, turned to science fiction as an escape and safe harbor to share their knowledge, expertise, and experiences.

In the first part of this paper, I discuss the term neuroqueerness as defined by Remi Yergeau's *Authoring Autism* (2022). I then connect her research to Sameul Delaney's discussions of science fiction's lyrical language use, as described in his 1977 book of essays, *The Jewel-hinged Jaw*. I finish by investigating Seo-Young Chu's *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?* (2011) that expands Delaney's vision of lyrical science fiction. I argue that Chu's research provides a frame by which the "lived expertise" of neurodivergents, as described by Yergeau, can utilize science fictional storytelling to metaphorically translate their lived reality to non-neurodivergents who do not or cannot understand living with these conditions.



Panel 12 Co-Futurisms: CoFuturisms & Economic Critiques

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: **Samuel Chirtel****Michelle Louise Clarke**

Bayreuth University

In person

Transitions in Life and Deathscapes: Evolutions in Nigerian Petro-Science-Fictions and Necro-activisms

In 2006, Wenzel published her seminal essay "Petro-magic-realism: toward a political ecology of Nigerian literature." The article analysed texts from magical realist writers including Ben Okri and Amos Tutuola as works which traced the ways in which commodities of Nigeria's oil industries are circulated in the world ecology, and as ways into understanding the diverse historicities, tensions and pressures of global economics. Since Wenzel's article, a wealth of Science Fiction and African Futurist texts have been published from authors such as Nnedi Okorafor, T.J. Benson and Tade Thompson. In our geologic present such texts explore exposure to forms of toxicity which are an unavoidable reality of everyday life, and examine how geographies of extraction and pollution are unevenly distributed along neocolonial lines. Mbembé terms this as being subjected to the 'power of death' (2003: 39) via a necropolitics which determines which people must live (more) precariously than others in the Anthropocene. This paper is interested in how the evolutions and histories of speculative genres from Nigeria can map developing material and epistemic processes of petrocapi-talism. Furthermore, it is important to pay attention to shifts in genre from the 1950s onwards; from realism to magic-realism, and to futuristic genres, which subvert deathscapes of necropolitics through 'necroactivism'. I argue that the authors actively participate in textual strategies of resistance by challenging and rewriting tropes of death and dying.

Regina Kanyu Wang

University of Oslo

Online

Growth, Resource, Population - GRP Triangle in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction

Both in our reality and in science fiction (SF) stories, growth is an eternal goal pursued by humanity. Regardless of its specific form, growth and development is always upward, outward, and progressive, leading the human species towards a better future. However, growth is deeply dependent on resource and population. Meanwhile, the population is both the fuel for growth, just like resource, and also the consumer of resource. Thus, the desire for growth becomes a constant mediation between resource and population. Science and technology, on the side, help to accelerate or improve the growth in different ways. In this paper, I argue that the dynamics between growth, resource, and population, or what I call GRP Triangle, is highly relevant for understanding contemporary Chinese SF, both the socioeconomical context that it is situated in and the texts that are produced in mainland China with the SF genre label. I will first map out the GRP Triangle within the context of China and Chinese SF to reason my choice of data, and then focus on the chosen group of data: SF stories with the setting in extreme environments and written by Chinese women writers who have grown up in a unique period of time – late 1970s to early 2010s – the four decades of China's economic boom and implementation of one-child policy. These stories challenge the simple masculine pursuit towards growth, add in more nuances or find alternatives to the growth-or-collapse dilemma, pay more attention towards the balance between population and resource, and have concerns for how individual bodies, especially women bodies, are exploited for the sake of growth.

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Panel 13 SF General: Human-machine InterfaceRoom: Lossi 3-326
Chair: **Eero Suoranta****Paul Pragash & Prasanth Arokia Samy**St. Joseph's College
Online**AI-Generated Narratives and Transhumanism: Intersecting Paths in Human Storytelling Traditions**

Hollywood writers' strike against the usage of ChatGPT may seem like a farce but literary writers are not far away for taking action against the situation that artificial intelligence has created. Through the prism of books produced by artificial intelligence, this paper tries to explore the dramatic shift of human narrative heritage which may happen in the near future while examining the complex interaction between technology and creativity. The development of sophisticated AI systems that are capable of writing intricate literary works calls into question long-held beliefs about authorship, creativity, and human brilliance. This study looks at the transhumanist dynamics that are part of this paradigm shift which blurs the borders between human and machine authorship and opens up conventional literary bounds. The nexus of AI and narrative, which extends from code to prose, cultivates a transhumanist environment that welcomes readers, writers, and academics to explore the evolving frontier of the creative human-machine symbiosis. The idea of a shared literary consciousness emerges in an era where identity is fluid. It reframes stories as a collaborative mosaic created by both human and artificial brains. This paper also navigates the ethical, philosophical, and creative issues that emerge at the interface of code and prose by exploring the development of AI-generated novels and their influence on the human storytelling tradition. It also encourages reflection on how this blending of artificial intelligence-generated stories and human interaction can redefine storytelling and alter our perception of what it means to be a creator in a quickly changing technology environment.

Ruiying ZhangUniversity of British Columbia
Online**The Broken Human-Machine Continuum: Technological-advanced Future and Its Crises in *Fantasia of the Ming Tombs Reservoir***

The third section of the 1958 artistic documentary *Fantasia of the Ming Tombs Reservoir*, (Shisanling shuiku changxiangqu 十三陵水库畅想曲)—the first film that includes science-fictional elements in Maoist China—envisions a high-technological future set in 1978. However, though the portrayal of the advanced equipment, including long-distance video communication devices, water management control centers, and automation delivery systems, seems to be in accordance with the aim to industrialize China during the Great Leap Forward period, such imagination attracted criticism. Instead of putting this controversy in the framework of revolutionary romanticism as previous scholarship did, this paper argues that the broken human-machine continuum allows us to revisit the controversial future imagination. The fusion of laborer with machines in the film's second section which depicts the 1958 construction scene is transformed into a fractured relationship between humans and machines in the third part. This divergence reveals internal crises produced within the socialist system itself. First, the improvement of tools is meant to reduce the burden of manual labor, but advanced machines might separate humans from machines and extinguish labor. Second, the display of high-tech equipment may have been justified by the improvement of living conditions, but issues of the visual stimulation of desire were never wiped out. Third, the result of the technological revolution was supposed to be that a few people could handle complex machines and thus relieve them of burdens. However, this might lead to the formation of a technocratic class that reduces the democratic involvement in technological exploration.

Han XiaoChongqing University
Online**The Transitional Mechanism by Cyber-Specters and the Repressed Revolutionary: A Case Study of *Cyberpunk 2077***

In the world of *Cyberpunk 2077*, the author assumes a cultural expectation of "no future." If the timeline is allowed to develop linearly, it will never approach the "future" which the players anticipate. Therefore, the author has implemented a transition mechanism by cyber-specters to disrupt linear time. Cyber-specters, which are not physical entities and have the ability to intervene in the real world through technology, are exceptions in the world of *Cyberpunk 2077*. The narrative structure of *Cyberpunk 2077* sets up two types of cyber-specters. The first type is visible, such as Johnny Silverhand, who exists in the world of *Cyberpunk 2077* but has obtained powers beyond the existing order due to his physical death. His narratives as a cyber-specter contain the potential for change that the existing order cannot control. The second type is invisible, the player themselves, possessing knowledge beyond the world of *Cyberpunk 2077* and a perspective that transcends linear time. They are the only way to prevent the disappointing future depicted in *Cyberpunk 2077* from occurring. However, the visible cyber-specters, represented by Johnny Silverhand, carefully turn the disruption of linear time into event but not change, thus repressing players' imagination of revolution in the world of *Cyberpunk 2077*. Based on the dialogue corpus of "Johnny Silverhand" and "V", this paper explores how the transition mechanism avoids describing "changes" and retells them as factors of violence or instability, thereby repressing the possibility of a revolution.

Panel 14 Co-Futurisms: What's in a Name: From Afrofuturism to Prietopunk

Room Jakobi 2-226
Chair: **Patrick Brock**

Naming decisions in speculative genres can reflect a deeper understanding of the system's mechanics. Being critical about such boundaries may even be an emancipatory practice, as Jacques Derrida proposed in his 1980 essay "Law of Genre," and also constitute an example of what Frelik (2011) deemed "boundary discourse." Taking this idea as a starting point, this panel aims to problematize the transition between Afrofuturism and Prietopunk in the boundary discourse practices of writers, readers, and editors from Latin America and the Caribbean. Bringing together for the first time at the SFRA conference some of the leading names of Afro-Latinx speculative fiction in Brazil, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, this panel aims to generate a discussion about genre politics, the transnational power of Black and Latinx culture, and the role played by Afrofuturism and Prietopunk in the emerging political practices of our time. Each panelist will offer their contribution about the different expressions of the movement in their respective national contexts, before engaging in a comparative debate about differences and similarities, and their motivations to engage with the genre and its boundary discourse.

Erick J. Mota
Cuban SF writer
In person

Yoruba Abstractions in Caribbean Science Fiction: Similarities between *Brown Girl in the Ring*, *Tentacle*, and *Habana Underguater*

Caribbean science fiction does not rely as much on hard sciences as on folklore. In the Caribbean, the influence of Afro-Caribbean religions is fundamental to the imagination of contemporary science fiction. Within the Caribbean Afrofuturist movement, the Yoruba religion is a common feature in most works, reflecting the Yoruba presence among the Afro-descendant Antillean population. The use of Yoruba tradition and folklore in three different novels from three different regions of the Caribbean is not random. This contribution aims to demonstrate that the choice of Yoruba culture is not solely caused by its popularity in the region but also that it possesses a certain number of abstractions that are very convenient for use in science fiction plots.

Aníbal Hernández Medina
Dominican SF editor and writer
Online

About *Monstro*, *Tentacle*, and *Prietopunk*: Notes about Dominican Afrofuturism

The presentation seeks to outline the panorama of contemporary Dominican Afro science fiction through the key works of its still growing bibliography: *Monstro* (2012), by Junot Díaz, as the debut piece of the genre, in Dominican diaspora terms; *Tentacle* (La mucama de Omicunlé, 2015), by Rita Indiana, as the Dominican Afrofuturist novel, and *Prietopunk. Antología de afrofuturismo caribeño* (2022), a selection that includes a large part of the national Afrofuturist production, from both newcomers and veteran writers. From these three, I will establish the essential characteristics of Dominican Afrofuturism and its differences, if any, from the Anglo variant.

Yasmín Portales-Machado
Northwestern University
In person

Erick Mota Writes About the Future After Your World Has Ended

This paper discusses the strategies used by Erick Mota in his *Habana Underguater* (2010) to process the economic and political effects of the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) on the collective Cuban psyche, positing that this crisis affected the idea of national unity and expectations of collective progress, and its association with European ideals of modernity and implicit social whitening. Mota's *Underguater* reflects the post-crisis Cuban atmosphere of political uncertainty, climate collapse, and survival mentality through a postapocalyptic world where the national state project has completely fallen apart and the hegemony of European cultural supremacy with it. In the middle of this, he imagines the emergence of more diverse familiar and community structures that reknit the social fabric by recognizing Cuba's African cultural roots and its impact on the population's cultural, political, and sentimental practices. Mota inscribes his work within the Prietopunk movement, a Spanish-Caribbean version of Afrofuturism. In this Cuban-African Pride revival, narrative and rhetorical strategies introduce a critical perspective to the notions of family and identity defended in Cuban Western government discourse. In *Habana Underguater*, acceptance of queerness is not a modern trait but a part of the repressed African legacy that can finally shape Cuban society.

Lu Ain-Zail
Brazilian Afrofuturist writer and educator
Online

A Brazilian Perspective on Afrofutures

Can these Black faces from the margins of Brazilian cities become ancestral deities touching a new generation? Can Afro-Brazilian culture be about a fantastic or technological world to the sound of funk, rap, and atabaques? Yes. Lu Ain-Zaila will discuss efforts to imagine and materialize literary Afrofutures that enter into dialogue with Black life and especially with Brazilian educational law 10.639/03, which guarantees the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history and culture as part of the educational curriculum. Zaila argues that Afrofuturism is a self-generating movement for the restitution of Black centrality, a catalyst for the possibilities of imaginaries that include the entire history of Black humanity from the perspective of the Afro-Brazilian Afrodiaspora. The work of decentralizing mass cultural genres also involves reshaping them to include elements of African culture, as shown by their efforts to create new narratives.



Panel 15 SF General: World Building

Room: Lossi 2-328

Chair: Ciarán Kavanagh

Simon Spiegel

University of Zurich

In person

Worldbuilding and Reality Effect

Coherent worldbuilding, i.e., the design of a coherent fictional world, has been considered a defining feature of successful fantasy at least since the success of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. With the expensive series and mega-franchises that have come to dominate SF and fantasy cinema during the last two decades, this aspect has also become increasingly important to films. Today, it seems to be commonly accepted that the creation of a successful fantastic world first and foremost requires elaborate construction work—from fictitious religions and languages to economic systems, music and eating habits.

In my paper I ask the hopefully heretical question whether successful worldbuilding is not a question of actual construction but an *aesthetic effect*. I am interested in whether it does, in other words, rely much less on the actual inner coherence of the fictional world than on the *appearance* of such a coherence. The fact that the worlds of *Blade Runner*, *Avatar* or *Snowpiercer*—to name three rather different examples—captivate us so much is less due to the fact that the respective films do actually present coherent worlds than to the fact that they present these worlds in a convincing way. I would therefore suggest that worldbuilding is mainly a question of correctly placed details and in this respect not dissimilar to Roland Barthes' reality effect.

Veera Mäkelä

University of Helsinki

In person

The Moving Genre

Sarah MacLean, one of the most influential voices in current historical romance, wrote in the afterword of her novel *Knockout* (2023) that "[h]istorical romance gives us the gift of fantasy ... of allowing us to show the past as we wish the future to be." In my presentation, I propose that historical romance, and particularly Regency romance, is a genre of speculative fiction. Traditionally, it has been assessed through the idea of historical accuracy, and writers and readers alike still take pride in this feature, citing it as a defense of their reading preferences. The importance of the accuracy in historical romance stems from the works of Georgette Heyer (1902-1974), whose extremely popular novels are seen as originators of this genre and its popularity. However, historical accuracy is a more elusive concept than generally thought. Features we are quick to take as factual may not be so, as noted recently by, for example, Laura Vivanco (2022). I argue in my presentation that features that give off an aura of historical accuracy in fact function similarly to worldbuilding elements in SF.

My analysis shows that Regency romance has transitioned from a historical genre into a speculative one. While many of its motifs have morphed into tropes, others persist as worldbuilding details, such as certain rules of etiquette and intricacies of dress. But as these details have become generic standards, they have lost their original educational function and become symbols and shorthand for building fantastic worlds in romance. In language that draws from the past, Regency romance paints pictures of how the world could be and as such it is high time the genre is recognized as speculative and analyzed in SF studies.

Llew Watkins

University of Sheffield

In person

Viriconium's Uncanny Transitions: Embodied Narratology and the Felt Sense of Rupture

The immensely strange and metaphysically transgressive Viriconium sequence of novels and short stories by M. John Harrison (1971-84) rely on incoherence and disjointed transitions to exhume a reality that is unsettling, unpredictable, and yet resonates at a deep existential level. This paper examines how embodied narratology and related models of cognition can provide new insight into the emotional affect of Harrison's unstable worlding. Kukkonen and Caracciolo's embodied narratology emphasizes the significance of embodied cognition in the enactive process of engaging with fiction. Refuting the concept of a storyworld as a singular and independently existent creation of the reader, they instead propose that through the process of reading, a stream of situation models, motor resonance, and embodied simulations are made experientially rich or thick, thus evoking the illusion of worldlikeness. Reappraising worlding in this way can shed light on Ekman and Taylor's concept of "dynamic interplay" in the field of critical worldbuilding, and help us make sense of worlds, such as those created through the Viriconium sequence, that are inconsistent and unpredictable. Enactivist cognitive science claims that the mind enacts or "brings forth" the world. It is this process of seeking coherence that enables the evocation of an illusion of worldlikeness, even faced with a shifting reality such as Viriconium. In enactivism it is considered that the mind arises from the affective tonality that is embedded in the body, and therefore the creation of situation models is an intrinsically emotional process. The unexpected ruptures in the metaphysics of Viriconium challenge existing situation models and force the reader to adopt a stance of negative capability (à la Keats). I argue that when continuity cannot be found in cause and effect, it may instead be discovered in the repetition of deep mythic themes, most notably the edifice of Viriconium itself.

Panel 16 SF General: SF and Science

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: **Hugh C. O'Connell****Simona Bartolotta**

University of Oxford

In person

The Heresy of Disenchantment: Disciplinary and Generic Boundaries in Speculative Fiction Studies

This paper returns to the vexed question of the status and meaning of “science” for science fiction (SF) and its criticism, looking critically at the widespread tendency to downplay the role that science and scientific rationality play in defining SF. Prominent theorists have argued that SF “has no essence” (Rieder, “On Defining SF”) and that “sf will include more and more assemblages involving incongruous ontologies.... as naturalized alternative rationalities” (Csicsery-Ronay, “Global SF”). While this embracing of hybridity, often accompanied by claims regarding the perceived emancipatory potential of developing a notion of “alternative sciences,” responds to a progressive sociopolitical desire to foster inclusion and combat technoscientific hegemony, I argue that its full implementation would bring about more mystification than clarity, both in terms of literary history and criticism and concerning SF’s potential progressivism. One problem is that by viewing science as inherently tied to exploitation and similar negatively-connotated social phenomena, the humanities, and literary studies in particular, have long perpetuated a fallacy in fact-value distinction. Furthermore, thinkers such as Indian cultural critic Meera Nanda or Syrian philosopher Sadiq Jalal Al-Azm have shown that the secularization of consciousness promoted by the transition from mythic to scientific rationality often acts as the truly emancipatory force able to oppose certain “local” and “traditional” practices and beliefs that enable the oppression of women and cultural minorities, thus problematizing any association of science or rationality per se with either emancipatory or oppressive social mores. Finally, I suggest that erasing the distinction between the science of SF and other worldviews and ontologies (“folkloric, mythological, supernatural” are some of those mentioned by Csicsery-Ronay) as expressed in other fictional genres also erases the historical and cognitive/existential specificity of SF (historian David Wootton, philosopher Michael Strevens, and physicist Carlo Rovelli are among the most brilliant explainers of the various aspects of such specificity regarding science). Rather than expanding our definition of science fiction to the point of unrecognizability, we should instead rely on the ample spectrum of possibilities afforded by the umbrella-label speculative fiction, actually able to encompass ontologies other than science’s naturalism.

Sheryl N. Hamilton

Carleton University

In person

Navigating Genetic Transitions: Regulating Genetic Engineering in the Speculative Mode

Since the “discovery” of the double helix, science fiction (SF) has been a prominent cultural site for the expression of social anxieties associated with genetic science’s capacity for vital manipulation (Parker 1977; Schmeink 2017; Vint 2007; Squier 2004; Gill 2020). Scholarly treatments of this intersection often focus on the representation of futurist science in SF.

I seek to reverse the polarity, analyzing how SF shapes genetic science, specifically through the regulation of genetic engineering. I explore three *transitional events* in the history of genetic science: 1) the 1975 International Congress on Recombinant DNA Molecules in California, USA (the Asilomar Conference); 2) the 1997 cloning of Dolly the Sheep by a research team at the Roslin Institute at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland; and 3) the 2018 announcement of the successful use of the CRISPR-Cas9 process on humans by Dr. He Jiankui then of Southern University of Science and Technology in Shenzhen, China at the Second International Summit on Human Genome Editing. While all three events were premised on scientific advances, their more enduring impacts were the regulatory panics they engendered when states around the world realized that genetic science was operating autonomously from their authority.

The examination of the ensuing discussions, reports, moratoria, contracts, and legislation reveals them to be replete with SF. Three distinct *speculative modes of regulation* can be discerned. First, the express recognition of science fiction as a source of knowledge; second, the deployment of futurist discourse; and third, and most interestingly, speculation as legal epistemology.

I situate my project in the field of law and SF (Rockwood 2000; Tranter 2018; Stewart 2020). “By highlighting possible futures, science fiction enables law to consider different strategies for dealing with new events and scenarios” (Travis 2011: 248). In each event, regulators are not merely attempting to future-proof their rules and regulations. The regulatory apparatus operates in the speculative mode to officially suture the desires and troubles of the present to imaginary technologies and future possibilities. Regulators seek to discipline the unruliness of genetic science through law’s genetic imaginary, rather than its letter.

Danielle Spencer

Columbia University

Online

Metagnosis: From Tomatoes in the Mirror to ADHD

As a narrative medicine scholar, I have named the phenomenon of metagnosis: the experience of newly learning in adulthood of a long-standing condition. It can occur when the condition has remained undetected, and/or when the diagnostic categories themselves have shifted (e.g., ADHD, autism spectrum “disorders”). Such revelations are frequently significant and bewildering, subverting customary categories such as normalcy, disease, disability—hence meta-gnosis, for changed-knowledge.

In this paper I explore connections between metagnostic healthcare experiences and speculative fiction. For example, when Philip K. Dick’s Garson Poole awakens to see that a wound has revealed hidden circuitry beneath his flesh in “The Electric Ant,” the Kafkaesque revelation that he is an organic robot fundamentally changes his conception of knowledge, determinism, and identity. With roots in Aristotelian anagnorisis, such “tomato in the mirror” plot twists occur frequently in the genre—from *Blade Runner* to *Westworld*—subverting our expectations for ontological stability.

Drawing upon these examples, I suggest that science fiction can fruitfully inform metagnostic healthcare experiences, which themselves will become increasingly ubiquitous as our genomic and biomedical knowledge continues to expand rapidly and we learn that aspects of our identities can be pathologized and plotted on spectra as-yet-unimagined. As we sail into the unknown unknowns of our cyborg selves in this era of radical change and as speculative fictions quickly become our multiple realities, we must practice clinical ontology, asking not just how we are being but how we are becoming, individually and collectively. Metagnosis, as a change in knowledge, offers us the opportunity to explore this freedom. We may not have been aware, but it was there all along.



Panel 17 SF General: Past Imaginaries

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: **Oliver Rowe****Alari Allik**

Tallinn University

In person

Sense of Future in Kōbō Abe's *Inter Ice Age 4* and Its Influence on Arkady Strugatsky

Kōbō Abe's *Inter Ice Age 4* (*Daiyon kanpyōki* 第四間氷期) first published in the magazine *Sekai* (1958-59) depicts a race between Soviet and Japanese scientist in constructing a prediction machine. The device tells them that there will be a drastic rise in the level of the oceans due to steam issuing from undersea volcanic eruptions. Mankind will transition to living in underwater societies which in time will completely transform how aquatic humans interact with their environment and interpret their roots as land-dwelling species.

Arkady Strugatsky's translation of *Fourth Ice Age* was published in 1965 under the pseudonym Berezkhov and the subsequent Estonian, Latvian and Armenian translations from Russian made it available in the Soviet Union years before E. Dale Saunders' English translation published in 1970. Strugatsky was trained in Japanese philology and clearly chose the text because of his personal preferences. In a letter to his brother Boris he places Abe next to Stanislav Lem as one of the best SF authors of the time. He writes: "One clear message shines through in the *Fourth Ice Age*: contemporaries, you should not pass judgment on the future! Even if you don't like it, do not dare to kill it. There's no place for your preferences in the future."

Both Abe and Strugatsky were interested in the large transformative shifts that might occur in the future. Abe talks about the "abyss" separating us from the future. Writers are unable to predict how their work will be received by the readers and, similarly, humans in general are unable to understand which developments in technology or art will be meaningful for the subsequent generations. Maybe most of our efforts will seem pointless for those posthumans who have transitioned to living in the ocean?

Marta Korbelt

University of Salamanca

Online

Posthuman Soviet Gothic: The Androids of Ariadna Gromova's *A Duel against Oneself*

The figure of the android, a humanoid "software-entity with a human personality and more than human intelligence" (Jones 167), has long been one of the staples of science-fiction imagery. Its roots may be traced back to Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* and its prominence within the literary tradition has been strengthened by such acclaimed texts as Alfred Bester's 1954 short story "Fondly Fahrenheit" and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). This paper will examine a work which continues the legacy of Shelley's novel and examines both the utopian and the destructive potentialities of posthuman creation, yet was not written in the West and presently remains almost completely unknown: the Russian writer Ariadna Gromova's *A Duel against Oneself* (1962). While Russian sci-fi, including the production of the Soviet period, is nowadays recognized as a distinct and accomplished tradition, relatively few of its texts are familiar to the Western reader. This is particularly remarkable in the case of Gromova, who was once considered a central figure in the Russian sci-fi community of the 1960s (Lukhin 125). *Duel*, her third novel, describes the efforts of Professor Laurent to artificially construct humanoid, yet better than human, beings. In the analysis of the book, Elana Gomel's analysis of the concept of the Soviet New Man will be employed along utopian and posthumanist theory developed by such critics as Colleen McQuillen, Julia Vaingurt and Donna Haraway. Additionally, the Gothic elements of the novel will be brought into focus. The paper's purpose is drawing attention to a highly exceptional, yet at present obscure work of fiction, and highlighting its uniqueness among the body of sci-fi devoted to posthuman beings. It also aims to recover the story of a now-forgotten author in order to accentuate the importance of female writers in the USSR.

Huang Yafei

Chongqing University

Online

The Historical Evolution of the Responsibilities of Robotic Maids from *Iliad* and *Real Humans*

In ancient Greece, two contrasting imaginings of female robots, Galatea and the Golden Maid, emerged. The former can be seen as an early exploration of human-machine romance, while the latter encapsulates the multifaceted expectations of human creators regarding the functions of female robots. The term "female" in the context of "robotic maids" not only denotes differences in physiology and gender identity but also signifies changes in gender roles influenced by societal and cultural factors. The Golden Maid in *Iliad* and the household steward in *Real Humans* individually serve as archetypal cases of "robotic maids" in the pre-modern and contemporary literary imagination. From these instances, one can trace the historical evolution of the image of "robotic maids" and the intertwined narratives of female participation in labor force. The transition of "robotic maids" from mythical imagination to industrial conception, and their involvement in various household tasks such as chores, entertainment, companionship, and childcare, central to family responsibilities, raises questions not only in the realm of philosophical inquiry but also delves into issues of robot gendering, technological prowess, design, application, as well as the emotional, ethical, and human-robot relationship aspects of the cultural discourse. This paper, using *Iliad* and *Real Humans* as focal points for examining the origins in pre-modernity and contemporary applications, seeks to explore the historical evolution of the responsibilities of robotic maids in literary imagination and their societal underpinnings.



Panel 18 SF General: Challenging Realities

Room: Lossi 3-326

Chair: **Noah Terrell****Alan N. Shapiro**

University of the Arts Bremen, Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts

In person

Decoding Digital Culture with Science Fiction: Hyper-Modernism, Hyperreality, and Posthumanism

How do digital media technologies affect society and our lives? Through the cultural theory hypotheses of hyper-modernism, hyperreality, and posthumanism, my work investigates the social impact of VR/AR, AI, social media platforms, robots, and the Brain-Computer Interface. An examination of concepts of Jean Baudrillard and Katherine Hayles, as well as films such as *Blade Runner 2049*, *Ghost in the Shell*, *Ex Machina*, and the TV series *Black Mirror* suggests that the boundary between science fiction narratives and the “real world” has become indistinct. Science fictional thinking should be advanced as a principal mode of knowledge for grasping the world and digitalization. With his 1979 work *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, Darko Suvin established SFS as a legitimate academic field. His book gave the new sub-discipline a decidedly Marxist framing. By assimilating science fiction to Marxism, Suvin limits the power of SF, which becomes another expression of Marxism. SF’s potential as a worldview and an epistemology is short-circuited. *Blade Runner 2049* is a brilliant sequel to the original *Blade Runner*. The police discover evidence of the secret that Rachael, who was a replicant, became pregnant and gave birth to a child in a “natural” fertility process. There are three different groups in the film, each with a different perspective on the knowledge of how replicants can reproduce “biologically.” Android procreation is a metaphor for General AI. The first perspective is that of the police. Joshi explains that the stability of society is maintained by the wall that exists between humans and replicants, between those who have the right to self-determination and those who are slaves, servants, or workers. The second perspective is that of the Replicant Freedom Movement. The third perspective is that of the Wallace Corporation. Wallace laments that he has only been able to colonize nine planets. He wants more.

Essi Varis

University of Helsinki

In person

Thinking Like A Trickster: Towards Speculative Research Methodologies

As the 21st century stretches on, research is facing many difficult questions that the arts in general, and speculative fiction in particular, have already been asking for a long time: questions about the limits, possibilities, and alterities of human minds, bodies, and lifeworlds. Cognitive researchers and philosophers have come to understand that human brains are not like computers—without fully understanding what they are like, then. Meanwhile, humanism is evolving towards posthumanism, which sees people not at the top of the Great Chain of Being, but in the midst of constantly changing spectrums, entanglements, and complexities that cannot be fully controlled by any one agent. Question remains: how do we grapple with, understand, and ultimately live in this reality of constant transitions? In the face of such global challenges and hyperobjects as the climate change or cyberspace, the exact measurements and orderly taxonomies of past centuries’ positivist paradigm appear as naive optimism. So, how can we, as researchers, even keep on researching? When the rulers and sages of folktales are stumped, the one who finds the loophole, the answer to the riddle, and the way forward, is usually a trickster figure. Where the wise and the powerful can be set in their ways, the trickster, as described by Lewis Hyde, is a boundary-crosser, a shapeshifter, and a rule breaker, the very personification of transitions. In my presentation, I suggest that speculative thinking—a kind of rational imagination—might function as the methodological equivalent of a trickster spirit. Being a key ingredient in fiction and research alike, speculation allows constant changing of perspectives and, consequently, making methods to fit the research questions, rather than the other way round. Mindfully applied, speculative understanding could thus become an open-ended, flexible, processual, explorative, and creative ally to positivist knowing—indeed, a valuable ally for venturing into the unknown.

Lyu Guangzhao

Fudan University

In person

Dawning of the Changelingocene: Political Economy and Ontological Transition of Speed in Ken Liu’s *Maddie* Trilogy

From 2014 to 2015, Ken Liu published a series of interconnected short stories forming a trilogy— “The Gods Will Not be Chained,” “The Gods Will Not be Slain,” and “The Gods Have Not Died in Vain”—which revolves around the central character, Maddie, and her family. These stories introduce a cutting-edge technology called “uploaded intelligence,” enabling the scanning and transfer of human minds into virtual spaces, culminating in the creation of cyber “gods” or changelings possessing unparalleled intelligence and capabilities.

Drawing on Paul Virilio’s concepts of dromology, pure war, and the political economy of speed, this paper dissects the political-economic significance of the digital transcendence portrayed in the stories. From Virilio’s perspective, the ideas concerning the impact of speed on society become particularly relevant as the “gods” disrupt conventional paradigms, reshaping the boundaries of time and space and giving rise to a perpetual state of conflict akin to Virilio’s perception of pure war. Additionally, the political economy of speed emerges as a focal point, mirroring Virilio’s apprehensions regarding issues of control, access, and exploitation within this emerging digital society.

This politics of dromology further expands Zygmunt Bauman’s notion of “human waste,” which finds poignant expression in those who cannot adapt to the digital transformation and face exclusion or potential extinction. Ken Liu’s stories vividly illustrates the existential or even ontological challenges faced by individuals who become marginalized in the relentless pursuit of technological advancement and efficiency, raising profound questions about the value and worth of human lives in an increasingly algorithmic world—a world of dromology, Capitalocene, and, in my own term, “Changelingocene.” Through the lenses of Virilio and Bauman, this paper provides a critical examination of Ken Liu’s perception of uploaded intelligence, offering insights into the implications of technological acceleration on society, power dynamics, and the haunting specter of “human waste” in the digital age.



Panel 19 Social Change: (Post)capitalist Realism

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: *Francis Gene-Rowe*

Jo Lindsay Walton
University of Sussex
Online

The Hyphen and the Heretic: Between Capitalism and Post-Capitalism

Is another world possible? Is “post-capitalism” a living political project? Does post-capitalism have its own distinctive features, beyond conveying dissent from the existing global economic system? Or is “post-capitalism” merely a euphemistic repackaging of earlier projects of liberation, which have become contaminated by decades or centuries of false promises? If there is something historically fresh in contemporary post-capitalist thought, might it partly be articulated within science fiction, solarpunk, Africanfuturism and Indigenous futurisms—within the many science fiction narratives that purport to represent non-capitalist social and economic forms, or to challenge the centrality of capitalist subjectivities and ontologies? To engage with these questions, thriving at the transition point between capitalism and post-capitalism, this paper explores a selection of contemporary SF texts: Cory Doctorow’s *Lost Cause* (2023), Rachel Swirsky’s *January Fifteenth* (2022), Savitri Putu Horrigan’s “The Case of the Turned Tide” (2023), Vandana Singh’s “Indra’s Web” (2011) and Stefani Cox’s “Fyrewall” (2018). It draws upon wide range of theoretical perspectives, but focuses primarily on Mark Fisher’s notion of capitalist realism. Within science fiction studies, Fisher’s polemical remarks on the unimaginability of post-capitalism are often quoted, yet would benefit from being more clearly located within Fisher’s philosophical and political contexts, including his implied comparisons with 1960s counterculture, and the influence of figures such as Donna Haraway, Nancy Hartsock, and György Lukács. By applying a more richly contextualized notion of capitalist realism to these recent science fiction texts, this paper hopes to open up new theoretical angles on the relationship of science fiction with post-capitalist desire, imagination, and action.

Sarah Hamblin
University of Massachusetts
In person

Infrastructural Politics: World-building as Radical Cinema in *Lapsis*

This paper takes up the near-future SF film, *Lapsis* (Hutton 2020), to examine the limits of classical labor activism in light of the transition to finance capital and the gig economy. *Lapsis* tells the story of an under-employed baggage delivery man, Ray, who is struggling to make enough money to cover his brother’s medical bills. Seduced by the promise of a large payout, Ray quits his job to start working as an independent contractor for Cablr, a global finance company hiring people to trek through miles of deep forest to connect quantum cables to large, metal cubes that will link together the new quantum trading market. As Ray starts laying cable, he finds himself forced to compete not only with fitter and more experienced human cablers for the best routes, but also with robots that shadow the human cabler on each route and attempt to beat them to the cube. Combining issues related to precarious employment, the gamification of labor, robotics, surveillance, and speculative finance, *Lapsis* dramatizes the new systems of exploitation that underscore finance capitalism and articulates the desperate need for a revitalized labor movement to challenge the corrosive forces of neoliberalism.

This presentation focuses on a particular tension in the film’s engagement with these issues that is exposed by the contrast between its narrative and world-building. At the level of narrative, *Lapsis* explicitly engages with labor politics: on one of his hikes, Ray meets Anna, a labor activist trying to unionize Cablr workers. It is a moment of political awakening, as Hutton uses Ray’s lack of experience as a prompt for Anna to didactically lecture him and the audience on the importance of resisting corporate greed. While the narrative seems to resolve in a victory for labor as the human cablers successfully disable their robot competitors, which causes chaos at the company’s headquarters, a focus on the film’s world-building reveals the inadequacy of Anna’s activism: it is at once reformist, short-term, and predicated on an idea of the liberal individual that has become utterly coopted by the logics of neoliberalism. As such, this paper shifts its focus away from narrative and its attendant protagonists to the film’s world-building. In particular, it focuses on infrastructure as the concrete, material organization of worlds, and uses this to seek out the contours of both a new radical politics and cinema.

Tiff Graham
Otis College of Art and Design
Online

Office Work of the Future: How Science Fiction Re-envisions Workplace Technology for Maximum Productivity, Invasiveness, and Intrusiveness

Should white collar workers worry about advanced technologies such as AI and robotics leading to job displacement, or rather, should they be excited that mechanical collaborators are on the forefront ready to bring improvements to jobs? Depending on the perspective, one might envision a more efficient, productive, and profitable workplace with humans sharing the workload with machines. In contrast, one may refer to labor history where automated processes enabled employers to eliminate jobs, and at times, employ workers with less skill and knowledge for less money. While there is no certainty about the future of work, we can still look to science fiction stories to help us imagine a workplace of the future and what consequences may ensue. In this paper, I will discuss workplaces in which drones, biosensors, neural implants, bioengineered bodies, and robots shape the office workplace of the future leading one to raise questions about ethical liability, surveillance intrusiveness, and human behavior adaptation. Some of the science fiction stories to be discussed include: “Nuke My Jobbot” (Emma Ross Munro), “Dead Space for the Unexpected” (Geoff Ryman), “Stable Strategies for Middle Management” (Eileen Gunn), *Severance* streaming series (Dan Erickson), and various office robot stories.



Panel 20 Gendered & Queer SF: Filmic Genders

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: Olga Gajek

Carolina de Oliveira Silva

State University of Campinas

Online

The Faces of Motherhood in Brazilian Science Fiction Cinema

This paper focuses on facets of motherhood in three Brazilian films in a dialog with the SF genre: *Fruto do Amor* (1980) by Milton Alencar Jr., *Kenoma* (1998) by Eliane Caffé and *Divino Amor* (2019) by Gabriel Mascaro. The three stories feature female characters: the Black scientist, Dr. Elza (Ruth de Souza), who is developing an antidote to love; Tira (Mariana Lima), a young teacher who, while dealing with her mother's absence, helps the town's "crazy" scientist put his invention into practice and, at the same time, wants to leave her hometown; and Joana (Dira Paes), a deeply religious clerk who dreams of being a mother and, because she believes in marriage, bureaucratizes the separations that come to her; she gets pregnant and does not know who the father is. I will use the methodology developed by Mariana Souto (2020) as a way of bringing together such apparently disparate films connected by the issue of motherhood (its denial, absence or desire) to show that the maternal figure is beyond the female dichotomies already identified by Elizabeth Ginway (2005) with regard to Brazilian dystopian literature. This model is also useful for thinking about cinematography. The hypothesis is that the idea of motherhood in these films can go beyond biological determinism and can be viewed, as Lucila Scavone (2001) points out, from a feminist perspective that is centered on women as subjects, thus denying that motherhood is something natural. Thus, in addition to promoting the articulation between race and class for the complexification of these characters, the paper also aims to point to other possibilities than that of female characters in science fiction as immanent symbols of nature, in counterpoint to the masculine, technological and rational.

Luiza Lusvarghi

State University of Campinas

In person

The Deconstruction of the Global City: Female Protagonism in *Dry Ground Burning* (Brazil, 2023)

In science fiction, fantasy and adventure literature, the source of most film adaptations of utopias and dystopias, the woman has almost always been the good girl or the victim, possibly a femme fatale. The hero and the conqueror was always the male character. In recent dystopian Brazilian cinema productions, women are the protagonists and lead movements of revolutionary and anarchic resistance against an oppressive and inefficient state. This paper aims to analyze the construction of female protagonists in Brazilian science fiction cinema based on the film *Dry Ground Burning* (*Mato Seco em Chamas*, 2022) by Adirley Queirós and Joana Pimenta, which revolves around a group of women who find oil and start producing their own gasoline on a plot of land in Sol Nascente, Ceilândia, on the suburbs of Brasília, the country's capital. The film exemplifies an ongoing trend in Brazilian cinema to produce aesthetically dirty films, in which fiction and documentary merge and to use the elements of the so-called Gambiarra aesthetic, personified in the past by plastic artists such as Hélio Oiticica and his banners (*parangolés*) with the inscription *Be an outcast, Be a hero*. The first Brazilian film that corresponds to this trend is *Brasil 2000 Year* (1969), by Walter Lima Junior, which tells of a dystopian country that has become a power after a nuclear war and reverses migratory flows (SUPPIA 2013, 67). Female characters are analyzed from the historical perspective of Dean Conrad (2018) and Marianne Kac-Verne (2018), while utopias, dystopias and heterotopias in Brazilian cinema are problematized by Lucia Nagib (2006) and Angela Phryston (2014), and the history of Brazilian science fiction cinema and its literary tradition are addressed by Alfredo Suppia (2013) and Elizabeth Ginway (2005).

Jędrzej Burszta

University of Warsaw

In person

Queer Punks, Retro Fashion and Flying Saucers: *Liquid Sky* (1982) and the Politics of Transgressive Science Fiction

Directed by Soviet-born immigrant director Slava Tsukerman and co-written with the film's main star, American model-turned-actress Anne Carlisle, *Liquid Sky* is an independent film released in the US in 1982. Regarded today as a "cult" classic, it is a self-consciously "bad" movie that presents downtown New York City as a bizarre alienworld by critically de-mythologizing many elements of the city's 1970s New Wave punk subculture. In the film, the fashionable club scene is twisted into a narcotic queer dystopia, a dark and brutal underground scene inhabited by junkies and sexual outlaws who are unknowingly preyed on by mysterious opioid- and endorphin-hunting aliens in flying saucers. The paper will examine this forgotten piece of SF ephemera as a transitional text for queer science-fictional engagements with past and future, as its politics are equally forward- and backward oriented in terms of the film's critique of gendered sexual violence, gender essentialism, exploitation of androgyny, and the capitalist commercialization of queer bodies and lives. It will argue that the film's depiction of the unrealized promise of a queer utopia that is haunted by extraterrestrials feeding on non-normative desires offers a striking vision of past politics of "no future." A provocative and transgressive film as much today as when it was first released, *Liquid Sky* revels in portraying negative pleasures and desires, mixing trash(y) costumes, cheap effects, ugly sex and nihilism with musings on art, self-identification, and cultural shifts happening in American society since the 1960s.

UP

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Panel 21 SF General: Science & Religion

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: *Tiina-Erika Friedenthal***Tara B. M. Smith**

Harvard Divinity School

In person

The Religion of Venus: A Science Fictional Argument for A New Religion on Mars

This paper explores the conceptualization and implementation of a novel religious framework tailored for astronauts undertaking interplanetary journeys, particularly those destined for Mars. Combining insights from both scientific perspectives and fictional narratives, the argument posits the necessity of establishing a cohesive belief system for the psychological and emotional well-being of space travelers. Drawing upon prominent science fiction works, including Kim Stanley Robinson's *Mars* series, Frank Herbert's *Dune*, and Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the analysis critically examines the portrayal of new religions within these contexts. A central tenet of the proposed religion involves the incorporation of rituals, meditative practices, and a strong sense of community, mirroring themes found in the examined literary works. Drawing on astronaut reports, academic papers, and personal journal entries from space programs, the documented positive effects of communal activities such as shared meals, meditation, and other rituals are explored. Additionally, established studies highlighting the psychological benefits of community engagement within religious contexts are referenced to underscore the potential advantages of a unified belief system. The Mars series serves as a backdrop, illustrating the challenges arising from astronauts' diverse religious affiliations and national ties during the establishment of a new world, proposing a universal religion as a potential solution to mitigate such conflicts. Despite the inherently fictional nature of the proposed religion, the paper argues that its efficacy should not be dismissed, drawing parallels with real-world instances of science fiction-inspired religions like the Church of All Worlds and The Jedi Temple. By demonstrating the appeal and functionality of such belief systems to participants, this paper contends that the deliberate design and propagation of a new religion could play a constructive role in NASA's ambitious mission to Mars in 2030.

Arshiya Chahal & Simran Gindwani

Western Sydney University

Online

Zombies in Indian SF: A Metaphorical Approach towards Religion and Science

Fictional zombies are a metaphor for "medical maladies, mob rule, and Marxist dialectics" (Drezner 2015). However, Indian science fiction produces culturally rich futurisms associated with zombies. The zombies in Indian SF have been deployed to understand space and time across scales within India. The first section of the paper will explore three different primary sources of Indian science fiction, *Go Goa Gone* (Hindi Bollywood movie, 2013), *Zombiestan* (novel written by Mainak Dhar), and *Zombie Reddy* (Telugu Movie, 2021) using the scale of difference. *Go Goa Gone* shows a very urbanized culture of Goa where Russian zombies are formed due to foreign drug abuse. *Zombiestan* portrays the spread of infection across the world due to forced religious conversion, whereas *Zombie Reddy* finds the solution of the zombie virus in a temple. The paper will engage critically with the above-mentioned primary sources using religious beliefs in India with the help of a combination of indigenous powers of the land in the dystopian world. It will deploy posthumanism and transnationalism to address critical questions about whether India already had a zombie tradition before colonization or if and how the zombies breed within the hyper-national Hindu nationalist view by using critiques offered by Sami Ahmad Khan and Suparno Banerjee.

Cat Ashton

Universität Siegen

In person

Besieged from Every Quarter: Ted Dekker's Circle Tetralogy and the Construction of Evangelical Identity

In an attempt to appeal to secular readers, Ted Dekker's conservative evangelical fantastic fiction refrains from mentioning God, Jesus, or the Bible, but it nevertheless tells stories through an unmistakably evangelical lens that transforms his construction of both the present and the future. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his Circle tetralogy (2004-2009), wherein Thomas Hunter shuttles back and forth between the (waking) present and a (dreaming) distant future, using his knowledge of a coming deadly plague in order to save humanity in the present, while he uses his knowledge of present-day technology to protect humanity in the future.

Dekker's understanding of science in the novel's present—the apocalypse is the result of an airborne vaccine mutating into a deadly virus—sheds light on how evangelical culture views and responds to scientific expertise, as a kind of obscurantist discourse rather than a way of describing real processes in the world. His portrait of Earth's future is equally illuminating: it purports to recapitulate humanity's history, as understood by American evangelicalism, in a mere twenty-six years. At the same time, even the utopian community Dekker imagines is both surrounded on all sides by enemies, and subject to a continuous internal process of winnowing in response to divinely shifting goalposts. I argue that all of this works to both reflect and cultivate a radical anxiety that speaks to a sense of embattlement in the present, and a projected vindication in the future.

Panel 22 Environmental SF: SF Framings of the Anthropocene

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: Christopher Leslie

The contributions from this panel came from an open call for papers that sought analyses of how well SF prompts effective responses to climate change, species extinction, ecosystem destruction, and other challenges posed by the Anthropocene. The responses to the call have created a panel rich in diversity with regards to nationality, disciplines, and stages of careers.

We are living in a time when the planet is witnessing a dangerous transition due to the impact of human activity. The concept of the Anthropocene has prompted a variety of responses in the short time it has been applied to humanities. Many science fiction authors have engaged with environmental issues in their fiction, making the genre a valuable starting point for research and teaching. These papers add to an already rich array of scholarship on science fiction's interest in ecocriticism, such as: Gerry Caravan and Kim Stanley Robinson's anthology *Green Planets: Ecology and Science Fiction* (2014), Susan M. Bernardo's anthology *Environments in Science Fiction: Essays on Alternate Spaces* (2014), Tania Lafontaine's *Science Fiction Theory and Ecocriticism: Environments and Nature in Eco-dystopian and Post-apocalyptic Novels* (2016), and Chris Pak's *Terraforming: Ecopolitical Transformations and Environmentalism in Science Fiction* (2016).

From this starting point, we consider the implications of Anthropocene scholars, such as Amitav Ghosh (in *The Great Derangement*, 2016) and Dinesh Chakrabarty (*The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, 2021), who have suggested that historical analyses and cultural production in the modern era do not pave the way for collective action. More specifically, Ghosh, Chakrabarty, and others suggest the fields of the humanities have framed definitions of humanity in a way that precludes the collective action needed to fight climate change. Modernity's insistence on individuality and mastery of nature, Ghosh suggests, are not good ways to muster support for generations-long action. Provocatively, Ghosh suggests that scholars looking back at our time will be astonished to find that so little attention was paid to climate change in contemporary cultural productions, although he suggests that there are some science fiction authors who work in this vein. Chakrabarty notes that not just the thesis of individuality but also modern forms of area studies and critical theory occlude the unity of the globe and the human species, unities that are precursors to efforts to mitigate the challenges of the Anthropocene. Asking us to remember that just a handful of the world's nations are responsible for the greenhouse gasses that threaten the planet, Chakrabarty links the Anthropocene to the development of global capitalism. This panel consider the ways sf has challenged (or failed to challenge) the problems they outline.

Daniel Matallana

Victoria University of Wellington

In person

Humanism, Law, Technology, Science and the Future: SF's Jurisprudential Explorations

The Western legal system has been built upon cultural and philosophical foundations of humanism, reflected in normative, legislative, judicial, and interpretative decisions. This anthropocentric philosophy forms the basis of multiple legal paradigms—personhood, legal reasoning, decision-making, intellectual property—exerting a profound impact on the planet and human relations with other species. Nevertheless, the emergence of new worldviews propelled by science and technology, including artificial intelligence and evolving notions of intelligence and consciousness, presents substantial challenges to Western legal scholarship. Alvin Toffler claimed that science fiction (SF) was a “kind of sociology of the future” with “immense value as a mind-stretching force for the creation of the habit of anticipation.” Others, as Ursula K. Le Guin and Darko Suvin, considered SF an intellectual work of imaginative experimentation instead of a prophetic genre. Whether predictive, descriptive, or experimental, SF has earned a place in cultural, political, and legal realms. Recognizing SF's impact, this paper aims to bridge legal scholarship and these dynamic landscapes shaped by science and technology. Focusing more precisely on what I term SF's jurisprudential imaginaries, this study intends to speculate about more creative discussions at the intersection of law, technology, and science.

Christopher Leslie

Prince of Songkla University

In person

Facing the Masculinity Problem in/with Clifi

Science fiction authors who were among the first to consider the future of the environment also shared a theme common with the genre's early success: at their core is the promotion of or the concern for the loss of an individualized man of science. This interest in a fragile masculinity that must face challenges from the environment is evident in progenitors of clifi: J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962; republished in 2013 in a 50th anniversary volume), Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965, with several live-action adaptations) and George Turner's *The Sea and Summer* (1987; also republished in 2013 as an SF Masterwork). This starting point presents something of a challenge for modern authors; critics like Dinesh Chakrabarty have made it clear that climate change is occasioned by the rise of modern notions of humanity and Enlightenment notions of individuality. Adding gender theory to Chakrabarty's analysis provides a useful vantage point for the analysis of science fiction. From SF's early imaginings of climate, more recent novels have perpetuated the theory that the danger of climate change is the loss of manly agency, like Jim Laughter's *Polar City Red* (2019), Nathaniel Rich's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (2014), and Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (2020). Although these novels have gained a broad audience because of their gripping stories and engagement with crucial issues of the time, this paper shows how other fiction better faces the criteria needed for effective literature about climate change: Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2013), Rita Indiana's *Tentacle* (2015), and Anthony Doerr's *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (2021).



Wednesday, May 8, 15.30-17.00

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Panel 23 SFRA Business Meeting

Room: Jakobi 2-226



Panel 24 Social Change: Speculation & the Crisis of the Present

Room: Jakobi 2-226
Chair: Jerry Määttä

Gabriel Burrow

University of London
In person

Crisis, Counter-speculation, Change: The 2008 Financial Crisis as False Antecedent in Yanis Varoufakis's *Another Now*

This paper will consider how *Another Now* (2021), the only work of fiction by former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis, presents the 2008 financial crisis as a turning point that produces a counterfactual Other Now. The crisis is a “false antecedent”, which reimagines an event to “produce an outcome or consequent contrary to reality” (Dannenberg 2008, 111). Rather than writing another work of non-fiction, Varoufakis chose the science fiction genre of alternate history to “Imagine if Occupy and Extinction Rebellion actually won”. The novel explores this scenario through a series of dispatches, which are transmitted between parallel worlds through a fold in spacetime. In *Our Now*, banks are recapitalized after the crisis and financialization continues. But in the *Other Now*, the world rejects financialization in favor of a socialist system with closely regulated markets. This change is brought about by the “OC [Ossify Capitalism] revolution”, a global movement with the goal of not only “wrecking an already-collapsing Wall Street”, but also “ossifying capitalism” itself (Varoufakis 2021, 76). The paper will argue that the OC movement practices what sociologist Aris Komporozos-Athanasίου (2022) terms “counter-speculation”—using finance capital’s speculative imagination and technologies “to give speculators a taste of their own medicine” (Komporozos-Athanasίου 2022, 147). For example, so-called Crowdshorters target the individual loans bundled within collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) through targeted payment strikes. This makes the derivatives impossible to refloat on the market and compels governments to take ownership of private banks. In approaching the 2008 crash as an opportunity to radically reform the financial system, the OC movement treats crisis in its etymological sense—as “a signifier for a critical, decisive moment” (Roitman 2014, 2; Castoriadis 2003, 115). Varoufakis uses his alternate history to present a compelling theory of change: the potentialities of technologically-enabled communities are catalyzed by the 2008 crisis and give rise to a new society.

Lauren Crawford

Michigan State University
Online

Speculative Factions: Reactionary Imaginaries and Conspiracist Narratives

On January 6, 2021, there appeared a gallows outside of the United States Capitol. Though crudely built with pre-cut lumber and exposed fasteners, an orange noose nonetheless hung from its crossbeam, menacing. As the gallows stood, thousands around it attempted an insurrection: This was a white supremacist fantasy, torn from the pages of *The Turner Diaries*, made reality.

The insurrection serves as a sobering example of what can result from “speculative factions,” what I term the weaponizing of speculative narratology, via conspiracism, to recast and rewrite reality. Often, these speculative factions evolve from hagiographic declension narratives resounding with racist and sexist overtures—a kind of reactionary imaginary that denudes historical fact—while simultaneously planning for a future fantastic. In this paper, I intend to analyze how the speculative-fictional (sf) became entangled with far-right ontology and conspiracism, and what can be learned from the unraveling thereof. For example: how does cognitive estrangement function in David Icke’s configuration of “reptoids”? is QAnon’s adrenochrome a kind of novum? are tactical discursive movements, such as those regarding DEI and critical race theory, a kind of censoring newspeak? More importantly, and especially in the case of the gallows, can these themes exist outside of a *speculative* world? Are new modes of reading and thinking through sf needed because of the blurring of conspiracism, narrative, and reality? When irreality animates a modern insurrection, what then?

January 6 was a continuation of an occlusive and dangerous narrative that inverts, subverts, and, almost three years on, still deceives many. But I hope such deception may begin to be laid bare, or at least better understood, as a function of speculative factions animated by reactionary and conspiracist imaginaries.

John Rieder

University of Hawai‘i
In person

The Function of Speculation at the Present Time

Academic scholarship on SF has long argued that sf thrives on challenging hegemonic assumptions about what is socially and politically possible. But what happens to those challenges in the face of the contemporary deterioration of consensus about reality itself? When scientific consensus is so widely contested or denied, and blatant lies are advanced and accepted on a massive scale as truth? Perhaps this situation makes the critical potential of sf all the more important. If large communities are walling themselves off in irrational, counter-factual narratives about reality, and if reason itself seems disarmed as a response to those dangerous and damaging narratives, perhaps speculation can step into the breach by imagining possibilities that try to shake us all loose—help us “escape”—from the suffocating effects of normalizing the unconscionable and the disastrous that are bulwarks of the status quo itself.

This talk will elaborate a hypothesis concerning the structural changes that have produced the contemporary crisis in public discourse, followed by a suggestion of how professional literary criticism and scholarship can make use of sf in responding to it. The second part of the analysis will focus on the Trump administration’s President’s Advisory 1776 Commission report, prepared in 2020 in response to the *New York Times*’s re-examination of the history of race in the United States, the *1619 Project*. One of the most daunting challenges facing any attempt to contest the toxic disinformation infesting the contemporary public sphere is to find avenues of entry into the media cocoons of the right’s true believers. Therefore, I use *The 1776 Report* to tackle the difficult problem of understanding the strange shapes that can be taken by belief, and to show how subversive speculation finds its way into even this piece of propaganda.



Panel 25 CoFuturisms: Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: **Rubén R. Mendoza****Andrew Erickson**

University of Flensburg

In person

Postapocalyptic SF: the End of the Antiblack World?

Transitions, transformations, and transfers characterize postapocalyptic fiction, with world-ending violence also bringing about the potential for radical change. Philip Butler reminds us that “the end of the world should be something less than anxiety inducing” because of the potential for transformation that the incomplete world-ending makes possible amid its cycle of destruction and rebirth. The end of the world, thus configured, “is not the end of earth and life itself, but the end of one particular mode of existence/way of life over others. The end of the world in this case would be the end of an anti-Black world, leading into as many Black worlds that could possibly ever exist/be” (Butler “On Demon Time” 17). The emergence of Black-centered and racially integrated worlds in the aftermath of world-destruction foregrounds anti-Black violence and simultaneously also recognizes Black resistance and resurgence in the aftermath.

W. E. B. Du Bois exemplifies this approach to postapocalyptic speculative fiction in his 1920 short story “The Comet.” Viewed through an Afrofuturist lens (Lavender III; Hopkinson) and projecting Black posthumanism (Jackson; Butler), the text centers blackness as a space of radical reconfiguration. Jim and Julia are saved from the titular comet’s passing because they exist at the apocalyptic moment in darkness, and it is through Julia’s proximity to Jim, a Black man, that she is transformed. This evidences the inherent potential of Black posthumanism’s thinking from a different point of origin and beyond Enlightenment humanism’s conceptions of personhood to examine the possibility of otherwise modes of being. While the story is ultimately pessimistic about the outcomes—the outer world of other survivors returns, and Jim and Julia are reverted to their preapocalyptic societal roles—it nevertheless serves as an important intervention into potential future world-building. Transformation, it argues, would be possible, but only if the world of antiblackness can truly be undone.

Julia Gatermann

Technical University of Dresden

In person

Painful Transformations: Embodied Knowledge, Collective Trauma and Reclamation of Voice in Rivers Solomon’s *The Deep*

Occupying liminal spaces such as those between land and water, shallow and deep, human and Other, to name but a few, mermaids are mutable, polyvalent figures with immense posthuman potential. African goddesses, Scandinavian fairy tales, Disney princesses: mermaids carry a multitude of meanings and have complex ancestries. Especially in Western pop culture, their ambiguous bodies have come to be associated with painful (female) transformation and a romanticized, if not fetishized, disempowerment.

Rivers Solomon’s *The Deep* also deals with most visceral pain, albeit with a distinctly different ideological inflection, and it breaks up all gendered connotations. A product of a series of interesting remediations, the novella is the latest Afrofuturistic step of what Navah Wolfe has described as “a game of artistic Telephone” across the Black Atlantic that started out with a song by the Detroit-based electronic duo Drexciya and continued with an album by the LA experimental hip hop group clipping. The story of the *wajinru*, the merfolk descendent of the pregnant enslaved women who had been thrown in the ocean from the slave ships and, in death, birthed their still water-breathing embryos, therefore is collective re-storying of survival, a re-inscription of life. Rivers Solomon’s protagonist Yetu is her people’s historian, sole holder of their collective memory, speaker for the dead—a traumatic past that would overwhelm the individual to remember. But it also does overwhelm Yetu who breaks free from her duties—accidentally unleashing the pain of the past on her community and abandoning them to their downfall into catatonic madness. Pain is the catalyst for transformation, and a loss of identity is the result. But in Solomon’s *The Deep* pain and identity are complexly layered and stand in a complicated relationship: pain is an inherent part of the *wajinru*’s existence and it needs to be experienced and shared to become productive. Yetu’s story is about the shedding of an overwhelming traumatic heritage, followed by a more intentional reclamation of the past, one that is shared with one’s community and therefore can bring about healing - and a reclamation of a more authentic voice.

David Shackleton

Cardiff University

Online

Imagining Global Energy Transitions: Lessons from Africanfuturism.

This paper argues that Nnedi Okorafor’s *The Book of Phoenix* (2015) and *Noor* (2021) provide counter-visions to the future scenarios devised by the multinational corporation Royal Dutch Shell. Based on earlier experiments conducted at the RAND Corporation in the 1950s, Shell pioneered the use of global scenarios as a tool for corporations to adapt to future challenges. For example, in the 1990s it launched a series of scenarios called TINA (‘There is No Alternative’) which projected different possible ways that the world might adapt to dwindling fossil fuel resources and the purportedly unstoppable liberalization of markets until the year 2030. Initially, it might seem that Okorafor’s fiction simply replicates such corporate scenarios, and thus contributes to the circulation of what Mark Fisher has called “SF capital.” Certainly, both use narrative to imagine climate-changed futures. However, in *The Book of Phoenix*, Okorafor portrays a future in which Shell and other oil companies build androids to indiscriminately kill anyone who tries to siphon oil from their pipelines in the Niger delta, in a manner that draws attention to Shell’s actual pollution of the Niger delta and the brutal suppression of the resistance of the Ogoni people. In *Noor*, she imagines a scenario in which “Ultimate Corp” exploits the possibilities of solar power in Northern Nigeria, thereby warning about continued forms of neo-colonial development. A transition beyond oil to renewable forms of energy such as solar and wind is urgently required to mitigate climate change and achieve what Achille Mbembe calls ‘planetary habitability’. Yet Okorafor’s Africanfuturist novels warn how such an energy transition in African countries promises to enrich foreign investors at the expense of incurring debilitating national debt, and exacerbating social inequality by creating unequal access to energy.



Panel 26 Gendered & Queer SF: Gender in Cold War Fiction

Lossi 3-319

Chair: Raili Marling

Judith Rauscher

University of Cologne

In person

Governing the Gender Apocalypse: Institutional Change in Early Cold War American Speculative Fiction

After the end of the Second World War, American society experienced massive economic, social, political, and cultural upheaval, leading to a far-ranging counter-movement of re-stabilization. While a nation-wide economic boost produced an affluent middle-class centered on heterofamilial values whose members were promised a future designed around their needs and desires, both outside and inside forces continued to challenge normative ideas about the good life and hegemonic notions about which social and political conditions would be necessary to secure it. At different ends of a spectrum of political life encompassing both the domestic and the public sphere, women's sexual emancipation and nuclear war emerged as increasingly realistic dangers to social and political stability, if not to the nation as such. In popular culture, too, fears about possible ends to American pre-eminence on the world stage, American prosperity, and American (read: white, middle-class) ways of life circulated across different media, fueled by the prospect that women might turn away from their traditional duties of biological and social reproduction or that some form of (human-induced) catastrophe might end humankind or at least destroy human civilization. In my talk, I will investigate works of speculative fiction published between 1946 and 1960 that combine these cultural fears by imagining scenarios of gender apocalypse. Specifically, I will draw from political, social, and cultural theories of institutions to discuss how early-Cold-War sf texts by men—texts such as Pat Frank's *Mr. Adam* (1946), Philip Wylie's *The Disappearance* (1951), and Day Keene and Leonard Pryn's *World Without Women* (1960)—present not only the societal developments brought on by a “catastrophic” collapse of the traditional gender/sex-system, but also the institutional changes introduced by the survivors in order to govern that gender apocalypse. As I will show, these texts are less interested in social and political institutions as a means to facilitate societal processes of transition and adaptation and more so in institutions as a means to maintain the status quo or reconstitute the hegemonic order even in the face of crisis.

Chiara Viceconti

Sapienza University of Rome

In person

Women and Transitions in East German Science Fiction

Dreams and utopias can serve as mechanisms of transitions, since dreams are, as Freud stated, a form of “wish fulfillment”. The manifestation of this concept in science fiction literature is evident in Angela and Karlheinz Steinmüller's work from the East German *wissenschaftliche Phantastik* *The Dream Master* (1990), in which the dream is not only an instrument of power (carrying a negative connotation) but also a means for the authors to stimulate the readers' reflection, allowing them to build their own ideal society. The absence of alternative social constructions allows space for personal perspectives, as A. & K. Steinmüller asserted not only in relation to their novel but also regarding utopias from the GDR in general. Sonja Fritzsche defined their text for this reason as a “static utopia”. It is interesting that the criticism of the GDR regime and the socialist feminism, unable to “cross boundaries” as necessary according to Donna Haraway, is instead dynamic. The main character and narrator Glauke personify this. She is driven by the desire to succeed in dreaming a better society to make it real, in a city where the inhabitants cannot dream anymore. Her evolution and awareness of her “right to be Glauke” are the mirror of women's perspective development both in science fiction literature and in the society of that time. The period during which the novel was written is in fact a time of transition between the second and third feminist waves and moreover of the German Wende. The study of Glauke's evolution, leading her to dream independently, shows that science fiction is a powerful representation of transitions and an instrument for creating awareness of various societal problems, such as the gender gap.

R.B. Lemberg Perelmutter

University of Kansas

In person

Two Alien Forests: Translating gender and SFF between two Cold War superpowers

At the height of the New Cold War in 1980, two important works of science fiction were translated, one from Russian to English, and the other from English to Russian: *The Snail on the Slope* by the Strugatsky brothers, and *The Word for World is Forest* by Ursula K. Le Guin. In both works, multiple models of gender are presented by juxtaposing Earth-origin colonizers and indigenous, forest-dwelling inhabitants of an alien planet. In both books, considerations of gender, ecology, and empire are tightly connected: the alien forest is associated with women and gender-nonconforming people, who are subjected to violence. The two translations are political projects that are part and parcel of the so-called cultural Cold War, in which the two superpowers competed for the hearts and minds of people on both sides of the Iron Curtain (Lygo 2018; Saunders 2013). Haddadian-Moghaddam and Scott-Smith (2020) suggest that “without translation, the cultural Cold War would have been almost impossible” (326). Yet, investigations into the role of translations during the Cold War are just beginning.

My research examines how gendered concepts informed Cold War-era speculative storytelling about colonization and hegemony, and how these themes were (mis)translated and reframed when they crossed the language barrier between the two superpowers. Using approaches from science fiction studies, translation theory, and gender studies, I discuss how the technical work of translators influenced the representation of gender in both novels. Both translators engaged in systemic altering and even erasure of gendered meanings from the texts – arguably to align with both Western market considerations and Soviet censorship pressures. I also draw on archival research to highlight a number of missed connections between Le Guin and the Strugatsky brothers, shedding light on how both cutting-edge works of science fiction and their translations crossed or failed to cross the Iron Curtain.



Panel 27 SF General: Time & Temporality

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: **Hugh C. O'Connell****Daniel Koechlin**

Le Mans University

In person

Transitioning from Space to Time in *In Time*

In Time (2011) presents a dystopian world where time is the ultimate currency, a matter of life and death (for the have-nots) that can be accumulated and spent, thus illustrating the reification of time-consciousness in line with Lukács' claim that capitalism "reduces space and time to a common denominator and degrades time to the dimension of space." In such a scheme, the theme of transition in *In Time* is integral to its narrative, character arcs, social commentary, and thematic depth. It provides a framework through which the film explores complex and interlinked issues of economic inequality and the human experience. The transition from time-rich to time-poor zones highlights the stark disparities in society, acting as a critique of real-world economic inequalities and the widening gap between the rich and the poor. This is emphasized by the protagonist, Will Salas' significant transition from a poor worker to a time-rich individual, a transformation that is not just in his time wealth but also in his understanding of the corrupt nature of the system. The constant ticking clock serves as a source of narrative tension as characters transition from moments of safety to peril as their time runs low. The film's pacing and visual style leverages the constant transcoding of time into space and vice-versa, enabling the gradual transitioning from a simple action-thriller to a deeper philosophical debate about reification and commodification. The final political outcome acts as the final and defining transition in this series, from abstract quantity into quality, setting time flowing again, as the actions of the protagonists lead to a redistribution of time that shatters the existing social order. This is in keeping with the broader themes of revolution and change that infused Occupy-era dystopias.

Lidia María Cuadrado Payeras

University of the Balearic Islands

Online

Narratology in Transition: A SFF Approach to the Poetics of Time

SFF (science fiction, speculative fiction, and related narrative genres) has long been held to be the "narrative of change," including among some of its better-known subgenres the narratives of innovation, anticipatory narratives, progress manifestos, etcetera. However reductive or misguided some of these claims might be, their ubiquity reflects the fact that, among all changes with which SFF narratives notably engage with, temporal ones have taken up the most critical and literary attention. Comparatively, however, the scholarly focus has centered on the ways in which SFF makes temporality one of its key motifs or, in for more experimental pieces, in the ways in which SFF manipulates narrative temporality to tell stories which also often revolve thematically around time.

In contrast, this paper would like to set forth some premises towards an initial exploration of how the strong thematic focus of SFF narratives on time can be used to develop narratological approaches towards the poetics of time. For instance, if post- and transhumanism emerge as major themes in contemporary SFF, SFF might be used to contest the centrality of man as a central narratological figure, as posited by classical narratology, towards a post-human, post classical account of the narrative fact. Keeping to the conference's theme of "transitions," an SFF poetics of time might also tie representations of change in SFF to a restructuring of narratological time as an experience based on the perception of change. Finally, an SFF narratological approach might also benefit from interdisciplinary insights such as those offered by literary sociology, which can contextualize sociohistorical perceptions of time in relation to the situated production of SFF literature that, explicitly or implicitly, reflects on the genre and textual production at large.

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Panel 28 Keynote speech – Meelis Friedenthal

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: Jaak Tomberg

Nebulous narration

The presentation focuses on the themes of speculative fiction and religion. The objective is not solely to demonstrate how speculative fiction and religion employ very similar narrative methods, but also to explore how speculative fiction is increasingly assuming the social and existential functions of religion. What does this situation, where they pursue the same ends, mean for speculative fiction and what does it mean for religion? Can speculative fiction be considered mythic creation, and how does the perception of contemporary speculative fiction readers differ from how the Greeks perceived their myths, or how miracles of the saints were perceived during the medieval period?



Panel 29 CoFuturisms: Roundtable: CoFuturisms & Science Fiction Studies

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Moderators: Taryne Jade Taylor, Grace L. Dillon (all online)

Participants: Sheetala Bhat (online), Patrick Brock (in person), Gina Cole (online), Dustin Crowley (online), Jalondra A. Davis (online), Matthew David Goodwin (online), Regina Kanyu Wang (online), Blaire Morseau (online), Graham J. Murphy (online), Kenrick Kamiya-Yoshida (online), Catherine S. Ramirez (online)

This roundtable will include some of the editors and contributors of *The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms* and will focus on the ways in which CoFuturisms both as diverse social-political movements and an academic area of study is (re)shaping science fiction studies scholarship and pedagogy. The panel will cover the 2024 transitions theme by addressing the following questions:

- How do CoFuturisms reflect cultural shifts in the way mainstream SF views genre?
- How might the inclusion of BIPOC and Global South SF in the canon reflect a transition in the way the Anglophone SF canon has defined SF/F?
- How do scholars and teachers incorporate this transition in their research and teaching? What epistemological and pedagogical frameworks/strategies are useful?
- How do CoFuturisms change and/or challenge the conversation around SF and science and technology studies, particularly the incorporation of conversations about Indigenous science and decolonial science?
- How do scholars incorporate these shifts in their scholarship and teaching?
- Are there or should there be changes in the way scholars perceive SF genres that reflect broader cultural and social inclusion?
- How should these changes be implemented when teaching SF?



Panel 30 Gendered & Queer SF: Alternative Forms of Gendered Power

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: Agnieszka Urbańczyk

Jeana DelRosso

Notre Dame of Maryland University

Online

“The Voice Always Did Have a Biblical Way with It”: The Voice of God in Naomi Alderman’s *The Power*

Naomi Alderman’s science fiction novel *The Power* demonstrates how biological change can create epistemological change, as the emergence of the skein in women completely flips the gender dynamics of the future. However, Allie, also known as Mother Eve, shows how such cultural shifts are rooted in an historical past. Allie becomes the religious messiah of a new world order by following in the footsteps of a long line of Judeo-Christian religious women who gained their authority by claiming to follow the voice of god. From medieval mystics like Julian of Norwich and anchoresses, to female saints and martyrs like Joan of Arc, to the Shakers’ Mother Ann, history is replete with examples of God speaking to women—and women answering the call. The novel demonstrates that Allie, like these women, clearly hears the voice of God, not metaphorically but literally. This paper argues not only that the voice is a separate, sentient entity from Allie, but also that Allie’s experience renders her a direct descendent of women in the Judeo-Christian tradition, from mystics to martyrs, anchoresses to saints, who hear and heed God’s word. Thus Mother Eve initiates a transition to a women-focused, though not necessarily more inclusive or utopian, future.

Joanna Kaniewska

University of Warsaw

In person

Re-Enchanting the Future: Witches in American Speculative Fiction

The consensus among feminist critics and theorists is that patriarchy disempowers women through either sublimation or demonization (Creed 2015; Cohen 1996; Doyle 2019). Within the latter category, the witch has been one of the principal archetypes that have historically served to control women’s freedom (Federici 2014). However, the 21st-century Euro-American popular culture has reclaimed the figure of the witch and reshaped her into an inspiring, if not often straightforwardly positive, model for girls and women. The witch is now a rebel (Doyle 2019), a feminist (Chollet 2018), and a figure connected with nature in times of ecological crisis (Duggan 2019; Starhawk 1997).

This presentation will focus on the representation of witches and witchcraft in fiction, particularly the feminist speculative fiction from the 1960s and 1970s (Buck 2018; Duchamp 2015), the Pagan science fiction novels from the turn of the century (Butler 2016; Starhawk 2011), and the contemporary short stories in the emerging climate fiction subgenre, solarpunk (Brightflame (2022); Bui (20219; Townsend nd). Even though some analyzed authors refrain from calling their protagonists “witches,” their characters and representation of magic are consistent with the image of witchcraft prevalent in activist-oriented speculative fiction. This image is rooted in the beliefs and practices of 20th century witches and Pagans, significantly different from the menacing figure created by the children’s literature and movies. The paper aims to explore how the phantasm of the witch, seemingly heavily rooted in history, works in future-oriented literature. Is the memory of past persecutions an asset in creating new futures, or is it a burden? Could a fantasy of a witch become a figure of radical change, or is it too entangled in the patriarchal, colonial systems of oppression? Preliminary research and analysis of selected texts suggest that witch figures in speculative fiction often—although not always—become a signifier of revolution and new futures, undermining the hegemony of capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial regimes.

Tanya Clark

Clark Atlanta University

Online

Visualizing Dystopia: An Intersectional Analysis of Gender, Leadership, and Community Building in *Parable of the Sower: a Graphic Novel Adaptation*

I will explore the critical processes involved in adapting Octavia Butler’s seminal dystopian novel, *Parable of the Sower*, into the graphic novel format, with particular focus on the representation of the protagonist, Lauren Olamina, and the thematic nuances of leadership and community building within the context of intertextuality. The transition from the written word to the visual medium involves a complex negotiation of narrative elements, and this study aims to dissect the impact of this adaptation on the portrayal of a dystopian future and the communal dynamics that arise.

The original narrative of *Parable of the Sower* serves as a lens through which the graphic novel adaptation is analyzed, emphasizing the visual storytelling choices that enhance or modify original narrative strategies (genre) and thematic elements. The dystopian future envisioned by Butler, marked by societal collapse, environmental degradation, and the rise of hyper-individualism, is examined in both textual and visual dimensions to discern the synergies and divergences between the two mediums that ultimately reveal an American society in transition yet still largely unhealed from its past.

A central focus of the study is the character of Lauren and the application of intersectionality in understanding her experiences within the dystopian landscape. Lauren’s identity as a young, Black woman with hyperempathy syndrome intersects with various social categories, influencing her agency, relationships, and survival strategies. Through an intersectional lens, this research investigates how the graphic novel adaptation navigates and visually represents these intersections, contributing to a nuanced understanding of identity and power dynamics.

Furthermore, this study delves into the thematic exploration of community building as facilitated by Lauren in the face of societal collapse. By reading Lauren’s body and identity as intersectional and transitional, the study aims to uncover how her leadership transcends conventional boundaries and fosters a diverse and resilient community. This analysis extends to the graphic novel’s visualization of communal spaces, relationships, and conflicts, examining how the adaptation reinforces or challenges the original narrative’s exploration of interconnectedness and cooperation.

Through the convergence of textual and visual elements, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of the complexities inherent in transforming a dystopian narrative into a visual medium while highlighting the relevance of intersectionality in envisioning and constructing resilient communities in times of crisis.



Panel 31 Social Change: Interventions in Reality

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: Moritz Ingwersen

Filip Hauer & Gabriela Štvrtňová

Academy of Fine Arts in Prague

In person

Distributing Power and Players' Agency in Tackling Climate Crisis: On Missing Democratic Decision-Making in Digital Games

Doubts about democracies' abilities to address climate crises have recently led to support for nondemocratic political power distributions, not just in digital games. Some advocate authoritarian or technocratic solutions to tackle the climate crisis better than democratic systems' multi-actor decision-making. Digital games often do not represent democratic systems and strategies (Torres-Toukourmidis et al. 2023). Non-democratic political systems are prevalent (Pfister et al. 2020), which is particularly concerning in the context of climate crisis, where democratic solutions and values, such as equality and justice, are critical. This study examines the absence of democratic solutions to the climate crisis and nature catastrophes in recent digital games by introducing a new conceptualization of democracy that integrates insights from both game theory and democratic theory. As the selected games do not work with the systemic characteristics essential for classifying democracy, such as the constitutional separation of powers, citizens' rights, and participation, we will focus on a concept of power distribution and the power of non-domination (cf. Petit 1999), in games represented by the player's agency (cf. Bódi 2023; Sicart 2023). The agency can either be shared or remain independent of interference from game mechanics and entities that play a role in game narrative; this ultimately affects the distribution of power. *Civilization VI: Gathering Storm* (2019) and *Frostpunk: The Last Autumn* (2020) focus on the player's agency to prepare for a global crisis but don't account for non-player characters' agency. *Beecarbonize* (2023) and *Green New Deal Simulator* (2023) allow players to test sustainability pathways from the outlook of more technocratic solutions. In contrast, *Social Democratic Simulator* (2020) and *Death Stranding* (2019) incorporate shared discussions with non-playable actors to simulate democratic decision-making. We will discuss the shortcomings of authoritarian decision-making in these digital games to promote post-anthropocentric imagination, game simulations, speculative narratives, and futures that are democratic, just, and inclusive.

Neil Gerlach

Carleton University

In person

Mediating Anticipation: The Work of "Science Fiction" in the Contemporary Robot Imaginary

Robots, as machines that sense, think, and act (Berkey, 2017) are part of a robot imaginary stretching back to the automata of the 18th century (Jordan, 2016, Yusoff and Gabrys, 2011). Recent developments in science and engineering demonstrate both the vitality of that imaginary and the fact that we are in a moment of transition and urgency in how we imagine and live with robots. Both Tesla Corporation and the Chinese government announced their goals of manufacturing viable humanoid robots by the mid-2020s; in 2021, the United Nations convened a conference to address the issue of lethal autonomous weapons; and in 2022, OpenAI released ChatGPT, holding out the promise of artificial general intelligence. These technological developments are often framed as "science fictional" in media discussions, yet rarely with any reference to specific texts or genres. In this paper I examine and theorize what work the general trope of "science fiction" is doing in the contemporary robot imaginary.

To this end, I examine a selection of public science articles published over the past two years (a volatile and transitional period in robotics) from the most widely circulated English popular science magazines, including *Scientific American*, *Discover*, *Popular Science*, *Popular Mechanics*, *New Scientist*, and *WIRED*. I will ask: when these texts deploy "science fiction" in relation to robotic technology, what is the affect generated; how is the "fictional" sutured to the "real;" and what future visions are imagined?

Working at the intersection of cultural studies of science fiction and the sociology of anticipation (Vondereau 2017), I argue that the trope of "science fiction" works as an interpretive construct to *mediate anticipation* of robot futures. Exceeding the predictive mode, "science fiction" guides our anticipation by mapping a future that is always, almost here. It offers cautionary tales for living in a transitioning, fragile social order, and it structures expectations about reconfiguring bodies, materials, and imaginative entities. Further, it tells us how to anticipate the future affectively, in a heady and complex admixture of concern for species displacement, cautious skepticism, and techno-scientific-induced wonder and excitement. More than ever, the contemporary robotic imaginary is constituted in relation to the language, imagery, and affect of science fiction as an epistemology for transitional times.

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Panel 32 SF General: Speculation and/in History

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: **Jacob Emery****Giulia Iannuzzi**Independent scholar, Honorary fellow - University of Trieste
Online**Transitioning to a Secular Future: Futuristic Fiction, Utopia, and Satire in the Age of the Enlightenment**

This paper explores the future as a secularized imaginary space and the emergence of uchronia in eighteenth-century European culture through the case study of *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century*. Published anonymously in 1733, *Memoirs* is a work of speculative fiction in the form of an epistolary novel, written by the Irish writer Samuel Madden, an Anglican clergyman and philanthropist with pro-Hanoverian and Whig sympathies.

The novel consists of a collection of diplomatic letters written in the 1990s, sent to the Lord High Treasurer in London from British ambassadors from a number of countries, which the narrator claims to have received from the future. Through these letters, twentieth-century world scenarios are spread out before the reader, in which British naval power rules the waves and international commerce, while the transnational scheming of the Jesuits threatens the independence of weaker European courts. In the narrator's opinion, the quickening pace of scientific and geographical discoveries has speeded up historical processes, and has shed new light on how these processes are influenced by human actions.

The *Memoirs* reflect recursively on the rise and fall of past empires, looking both at the history known to the author, such as that of Rome, and to the future past of the fiction, exploiting speculative scenarios as thought experiments, enabling to understand how can the British Empire of the future avoid what seems to be the fate of all great empires, namely to decline, and how its fall can be prevented.

Madden's novel is a fine example of the dawn of a new secularized future, pliable through human action, during the Age of Enlightenment. This pair, using *Memoirs* as a case study, places new emphasis on the role played by new forms of imperial and global interconnectedness in shaping and accelerating complex processes of time secularization. In so doing, it dwells on the emergence, during the eighteenth century, of uchronias and fictional settings dislocated in time, which went to enrich the use of fantastic settings and utopias placed in remote imaginary lands.

Anastasia KlimchynskayaUniversity of Pennsylvania
In person**Landscapes of Anticipation: Nineteenth-Century Speculative Thinking**

Due to factors such as industrialization, a sense of rupture with the past, and, above all, the rise of disciplines—from geology and evolution to historiography—that considered their pre-eminent concern to be the processes of *change*, in the nineteenth century, the future opened up as a newly blank space, and anticipation of alternate ways of being *in time* displaced speculation about alternative ways of being *in space*. The advent of mass print culture, meanwhile, created a permeability between literary works, news reporting, and science popularization, producing numerous forms and “genres” of anticipation that existed in a liminal space between fictional imaginings and non-fictional prediction: manifestos, caricatures, vignettes, hoaxes, op-eds, and essays. Thus, in the collective spaces of a new mass print culture, these works mobilized a rich array of narratives, imagery, and modes of speculation that had yet to be designated as the unique territory of science fiction, for it had yet to be designated as a genre or a literary category. Drawing from research I am currently conducting in the Jules Verne Collection in Amiens, made possible by *Science Fiction Studies*' Mullen Fellowship, my paper demonstrates how the second half of the nineteenth century offers an illuminating—though imperfect—model of the way anticipatory, “science fictional” thinking can permeate a culture and its techno-social imagination, unbounded by modern genre partitions and assumptions about form and narrative. This historical moment, I suggest, is one we can learn from as we advocate for and strive to use science fiction—or rather, what we have designated “science fictional” *thinking*—as a tool for envisioning solutions to our current crises and confronting the potential social and ethical consequences of new technologies before they come into being.

Noah TerrellUniversity of Wisconsin
In person**Change Happens in the Past: Excavating the Future with Bruce Sterling and William Gibson**

William Gibson suggests that rapid change results in a feeling of groundlessness, where “you don't have any place to stand from which to imagine a very elaborate future”. This apparent crisis of the imagination reared its head in the wake of the heyday of cyberpunk literature, a subgenre which built its visions of the future from the new media cyberculture and globalized neoliberalism that shaped the 1980's and 1990's. Yet cyberpunk's close tie to its own moment of techno-historical transition has overshadowed a different approach to techno-historical transition developed by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling, paradoxically the two authors most directly associated with the consolidation of cyberpunk as a subgenre, within the same period. Their coauthored 1990 novel *The Difference Engine*, when read alongside Sterling's 1995 “Dead Media Project”, reveals a variation in the SF genre's relationship to techno-historical transition – a mutation perhaps occasioned by the rapid exhaustion of cyberpunk's thematic concerns—which suggests a different vision of the future by way of the past. That is, Gibson and Sterling's turn from their present moment toward past moments of techno-historical transition indexes an alternative vision of SF's relationship to futurity, one SF scholar Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. has pithily formulated in a different context: “a past that is not yet known is a form of the future” itself. Within this logic, I argue that Gibson and Sterling offer an alternative archaeological view of SF's relationship to techno-historical transition which challenges the homogenizing and teleological view of techno-historical development that characterizes many discussions of new media cyberculture. This archaeological view of SF places the affordances of the SF genre in an active conversation with moments of technological transition rather than merely viewing SF as revealing in its thematic capacity to passively reflect elements of its historical context.



Panel 33 Social Change: Ludic specualtions

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: Chris Pak

Erica Masserano & Francis Gene-Rowe

University of Surrey, University of Southampton

In person

A Violent and Irrepressible Miracle: Historical Consciousness and the Non-Human in *Disco Elysium*

You are an amnesiac detective botching your investigation amidst the ruins of a failed revolution. You have already lost. Unraveling the mystery of yourself, your murder victim, and the history of your world are one and the same thing. But for hope beyond knowledge, you will have to turn to the unliving and the non-human.

Disco Elysium is a no-combat RPG videogame known for its deep worldbuilding, a creation by members of Estonian former counter-cultural movement ZA/UM, the monumental amount of text that frames its gameplay, and the quality of its writing, which situates it as part of a long lineage of speculative fiction concerned with the world, the self, and history. We will draw out the relationship between *Disco Elysium* and Philip K. Dick's works, specifically *Radio Free Albemuth* and *Valis*, in terms of anamnesis and acedia (Benjamin, "On the Concept of History").

Like ours, Elysium is a world where history is a project of colonial capitalism, and attempts to attain the consciousness that would enable us to think beyond it have to contend with a regime of organized forgetting (Le Guin, "A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be"). As in Dick's work, glimpses of a subjecthood beyond the dystopia of hegemonic history are revealed through transformative encounters between the main character and forgotten objects and small lives beyond human existence: the shivers of the city, the voice of the phasmid.

Games are especially suited to exploring questions of agency versus complicity, often in historical settings (Romero, "The Mechanic is the Message"; Pope, *Papers, Please*), via interactivity and immersion. As a text that maximizes readerly activation, *Disco Elysium* allows the player to unravel the player character's subject position and offers possibilities for embracing selfhood beyond white protagonism (Jayanth, "White Protagonism and Imperial Pleasures in Game Design"), a necessity if we are to survive in the ruins of capitalism (Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*).

David Shipko

Johns Hopkins University

In person

Endless (de)Growth in *Terra Nil* (2023)

My presentation analyzes *Terra Nil* (2023), a computer game that has been hailed as the first "reverse city-builder," investigating the generative tension produced by the diverging vectors of its mechanics and structuring narrative, specifically its ending, which significantly recontextualizes the player's interventions. I argue that *Terra Nil* strives to envision and embody degrowth economics while remaining trapped within the ideological coordinates of endless growth. City-builder computer games have long aligned with—and valorized the structuring logics of—late capitalist ideology. In most city-builders, one must build a capitalist city, and one's success depends upon capitalist aims, namely growth. Such games perpetuate Mark Fisher's capitalist realism. However, confronting climate crisis and biosphere collapse, an emerging computer game genre revises city-builder conditions of play to enable player actions and incite critical reflections on infrastructure, economy, and the ends of industrial labor. One such game, *Terra Nil* challenges players to revitalize wastelands by building green infrastructure to stabilize climate, reintroduce and nurture ecosystems, and then self-recycle, erasing from each revived land any trace of human agency or intervention. To succeed, the player must learn, think, and embody degrowth like that theorized by Kohei Saito in *Marx and the Anthropocene*. And yet, the game's ludonarrative conclusion requires the player to construct an ark spaceship to spread the planet's biosphere to the stars, uncritically participating in an sf trope deeply determined by capitalist desires. What begins as a game of nurturing one's own world ends with a gesture of biospheric settler colonialism. Exploring this internal contradiction with reference to Saito and Benjamin Abraham's *Digital Games After Climate Change*, I will demonstrate what *Terra Nil* teaches us about the difficulties of imagining and undertaking the transition out of capital's endless growth regime.

Paweł Frelik

University of Warsaw

In person

Planetary and Environmental Realism in *No Man's Sky* (2016)

No Man's Sky (2016) comes across, in some ways, as one of the most perplexing games released in a long while. Hosting a procedurally-generated universe of 18 quintillion planets and moon, the game was initially perceived as having failed on its pre-release promises. It has since not only methodically fixed its glitches and shortcomings but, over a series of almost two dozen major updates, has also methodically developed a range of exciting features. While the title of this size offers both an engaging narrative and plenty of varied gameplay, most positive assessments of *No Man's Sky* have focused on the unique experience it offers (cf. Starkey; Suderman; Tucker; Webber). Many reviewers and players have also appreciated the diversity of worlds and their reliance on scientific principles. This presentation will take a closer look at *No Man's Sky's* climate and environmental modeling. While the game offers an exceptionally wide range of biomes, I would like to examine the degree to which they simulate planetary physics, as opposed to serving as gorgeously surreal alien worlds with little consistency. Given the size of the game, the analysis will, necessarily, focus on selected examples.



Panel 34 CoFuturisms: Out of Frame: The Global South in SF Comic

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: Marco Petrelli, Umberto Rossi

The long-lasting relationship between comics and science-fiction literature seems to be characterized by a symmetry, a continuous exchange of modes, tropes, and themes so that e.g., in the years of the Golden Age of SF we had Flash Gordon, while the postmodernist SF of the 1960s and 1970s led to Alan Moore's *V for Vendetta* and *Watchmen*. Today we are witnessing a rising wave of what could be generically defined as “ethnofuturism” (non to be confused with the eponymous far-right philosophy), a cultural aesthetic that also made its way into graphic narratives. Literary movements such as Afrofuturism, Techno-Orientalism, and Indigenous Futurism are mirrored by graphic narratives originating from the countries of the so-called Global South or focusing on those territories. The aim of this panel is to inventory SF comics written and/or drawn by authors based outside the Global North, or coming from the outside, or interested in setting their stories there—not just to provide an exotic setting to their fictions, but rather as a way to engage with, and eventually disrupt, Eurocentric conceptions of SF, as those conceptions' original sin is the betrayal of one of the missions of SF itself, that is, imagining/projecting/extrapolating other, different worlds. Because of this, ethnofuturist comics are also a space of discussion and reflection on non-Euroamerican graphic narratives and the reasons why they have adopted the protocols, tropes, icons, and devices of Western science-fiction to talk back to this tradition.

Mattia Arioli

University of Bologna

In person

Two Different Modes of Inhabiting the Past and the Future: Lineage vs. Kinship

This presentation wishes to explore and compare the way in which Tim Fielder's *Infinitum*, Chelsea Vowel' *Kitaskinaw 2350* and Cole Paul's *Dakwākāda Warriors* imagine what the future looks like for Black and Indigenous people, respectively. One of the common elements of these ethnic futurist graphic narratives is the way in which the (colonial) past influences and shapes the future determining its trajectory and path. Interestingly, the future imagined by Afrofuturist Fielder does not seem able to escape from a colonial framework, embodied by the expansion of the Frontier to outer space, the discovery of presumed void planets to colonize, and the violent encounter with alien species. Similarly, the narrative focuses on the protagonist's attempts to redeem himself. This choice often positions the immortal King Aja Oba (the protagonist) as the “lone ranger” who takes upon himself the responsibility to save the day. In contrast, Indigenous graphic narratives consciously avoid recurring to the Frontier myth to frame the future (well aware of how that mythology endangered their survival). They oppose the settler colonial way of inhabiting time (a straight line that leads to progress) by contra-posing the idea of lineage to the idea of kinship. There is no longer an individual in charge of the survival of the community, but an active network of people connected by mutual care and accountability, a sense of responsibility that encompasses both the human and more-than-human world.

Patrick Brock

University of Oslo

In person

The Contested Visuality of Sertãopunk: An Archaeology of Genre Genesis

Sertãopunk is a speculative fiction (SF) subgenre inspired by the geography and culture of the Northeast of Brazil, a drought-prone and impoverished region that sends its migrants to work as an underclass in the more affluent cities of Southeast Brazil. These elements have turned it into a signifier of poverty and backwardness, raising issues of internal colonialism. Nevertheless, once the subgenre emerged and gained popularity, Northeast readers and creators (Diniz et al. 2020) sought to reject stereotyping and lay claim to this vision, proposing to imagine it as a place of potential, technology, and culture where multiple temporalities are coeval, in an example of futuring (Chattopadhyay 2022) and of broader transition in a cultural practice and its visual representation. In this sense, I argue based on the concepts of genre genesis and genre infrastructure (Brock 2022, 2023), that the debate over the subgenre and its visual representation, and how different comic book artists actually developed its visual vocabulary, particularly Vitor Wiedegrün and Zé Wellington, is a dialogical process between organic cultural practices and market pressures.

Marco Petrelli

University of Pisa

In person

Black Sci-Fi According to Nnedi Okorafor: *Black Panther* from Afrofuturism to Africanfuturism

Naijamerican author Nnedi Okorafor describes her sci-fi works as belonging to the Africanfuturist genre rather than to Afrofuturism writ large. In her opinion, Afrofuturism is characterized by a strong focus on African American culture, while Africanfuturism needs to be rooted “first and foremost in Africa,” privileging the continent and the black diaspora as its subject matter. Okorafor is vocal in supporting this distinction, but she shies away from giving a thorough definition of the genre, briefly hinting at the differences between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism through Ryan Coogler's film *Black Panther* (2018). Comparing Okorafor's contribution to the *Black Panther* Marvel comic with Coogler's cinematic adaptation and Ta-Nehisi Coates's critically acclaimed installment of the superhero's adventures, this paper will provide a closer inspection of the relationship between Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism in relation to the narrative universe of Wakanda, trying to pinpoint the crucial differences between these aesthetic forms—with special attention given to Africanfuturism and its implications in the representation of the African Diaspora and the Black Global South.

Umberto Rossi

Sapienza University of Rome

In person

Haunted Continent: Dysart and Ponticelli's *Unknown Soldier*

Created by Joe Kubert, Robert Kanigher, and Irv Novick in 1966, the *Unknown Soldier* is not one of the most famous characters in the DC Comics pantheon, but it has had an uncommon destiny: born as a white American intelligence agent active in W.W.II, he was reborn as an African-American black man born in Uganda and emigrated to the USA at seven, who returns to Africa to be brutally involved in the 21st-century Ugandan civil war. Metamorphoses of superheroes are well known—one may remember the transformation of Nick Fury in his cinematic adaptation—but this is a special case as the plot of the 24 episodes is tightly interwoven with the recent history of Uganda, a country writer Joshua Dysart visited to research his graphic novel (though published in instalments, the series has a strong internal consistency, so that we can use this overworked definition). Impressively drawn by Italian comics artist Alberto Ponticelli, *Unknown Soldier* focuses on the tormented personality of Dr Moses Lwanga, a humanitarian hero kidnapped by child soldiers, who suddenly turns into a deadly fighter, nonetheless striving to save lives in a time and place where and when human lives are worthless. Issues of identity and neo-colonialism loom large on this comic novel, which radically changes the figure of the superhero by moving it to the global south, and struggling to present readers with a non-stereotyped image of Uganda.



Panel 35 Environmental SF: Political Alternatives

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: **Agnieszka Kotwasińska****Charlie Toogood**

Newcastle University

In person

The Fifth Transition: (De)Constructing Civilisation in Victorian Eco-Utopia

In their book *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*, Simon L. Lewis and Mark A. Maslin identify four moments of transition across the history of humankind that have culminated in our current geological moment of environmental crisis, the Anthropocene. They also lay down a challenge, writing, “a fifth transition to a new mode of living is a daunting prospect” (Lewis and Maslin 2018). In this paper I argue that a small body of Victorian environmental utopianism rises to this challenge by reimagining civilization in ways that disrupt the destructive ontological mechanisms of modernity and open doors to new ways of thinking about the future of human and nonhumankind.

I contend that William Morris’ *News From Nowhere* (1890) and Richard Jefferies’ *After London* (1885) provide two contrasting accounts of what the fifth transition could bring about. Morris’ future sees the ontological boundaries between human and nonhumankind broken down as part of the formation of a post-capitalist civilization that retains some familiar structures, whilst decentralizing humankind from the biosphere. In a more extreme future, Jefferies’ text imagines the abolition of structure in a chaotic nonhuman landscape. He uses the parallel histories of strictly ordered human settlements with the green mass of “Wild England” to ask what we want civilization to mean.

This paper aims to widen the frame of Anthropocene scholarship to recognize the value of narratives written in response to earlier stages of our current environmental crisis. It is a particularly fruitful period for narratives that challenge pre-existing ideas of civilization. These texts violently push against the Victorian civilizing mission as well as the same forces of modernity—extractivism, consumption and unsustainable growth—that inspire climate activism today. It is an invaluable site for imagining what human and nonhuman life could look like after the Fifth Transition.

Klaudia Paola Zalewska

University of Warsaw

In person

“We Roll. We Hack. Knuckle Down and Change.”: Political Systems of the Anthropocene in *Snowpiercer* (2020-2023)

Within the ever-shifting panorama of contemporary existence, the series *Snowpiercer* (2020- 2023) emerges as an apt exploration of humanity facing the specter of anthropogenic climate change—a horseman of the Apocalypse of our own making. The narrative unfolds on board of a gargantuan train circling the frozen Earth in a perpetual motion propelled by the “Engine Eternal.” Originating from Bong Joon-ho’s 2013 cinematic adaptation of the French comics *Le Transperceneige* (1982), *Snowpiercer* becomes a deeply political text which seems to hint at the idea that, facing the indisputable change, human beings seek consistency and familiarity—even for the price of freedom.

In my presentation I will aim to interpret *Snowpiercer* as a narrative that explores the possibility of different political systems in the face of a planetary climate catastrophe. These systems include authoritarianism and democracy achieved through the means of social revolution. I will analyze how the series refers to the aforementioned political systems and how it situates them in the context of limited resources of a closed ecosystem operating under a permanent “state of exception”: the suspension of law and preservation of order through the means separate from juridical context (Agamben 2005, 33).

I will also consider the series’ stance towards capitalism which indeed, in the series, outlasts the human world as we know it (Fisher 2009, 2). *Snowpiercer* confronts its audience with a vision of a post-apocalyptic world which, in spite of profound environmental changes that have caused a global extinction event, allows for the preservation of the ideologies and power structures that had led to the disaster in the first place. Finally, I will read three main characters of the series: Melanie Cavill, Joseph Wilford, and Andre Layton through the lens of Max Weber’s (1978) three types of authority: legal, traditional, and charismatic respectively. I will argue that, despite the show’s sympathies, *Snowpiercer* ultimately suggest that centralized power and strong, authoritative leadership are the most efficient modes of governance in the face of the environmental crisis, perhaps resisting change where it is needed the most.

Sarah Lohmann

Federal Institute of Technology Zurich

In person

Knowledge vs. Reality: Tracing the Development of Climate Realism Between John Brunner’s *The Sheep Look Up* and Darcie Little Badger’s *A Snake Falls to Earth*

I will utilize an epistemological approach to examine the transition in climate fiction from anxiety surrounding nascent environmentalism of the 1970s, represented by John Brunner’s *The Sheep Look Up* (1972), to contemporary futurism from marginalized perspectives, represented by Darcie Little Badger’s *A Snake Falls to Earth* (2021). I will examine the role of reason and knowledge in *The Sheep Look Up* as a science-fictional realist novel, engaging particularly with Michael Stern’s understanding of Brunner as “the inheritor as well as the renovator of the bourgeois realist tradition” and Alvin Gouldner’s interpretation of the “dialectical-hermeneutic tradition of humanistic knowledge” as defining “knowledge not as neutral information about social reality, but rather [as what is] relevant to man’s own changing interests, hopes, and values and ... would enhance men’s awareness of their *place* in the social world rather than simply facilitating their control over it.” I will use this epistemological analysis as a starting point for a reading of *The Sheep Look Up* in which Austin Train’s heroified yet ultimately impotent role in the narrative is central to Brunner’s fundamental critique of capitalism at the heart of the environmental apocalypse. Moreover, I will directly contrast this approach with Little Badger’s interestingly evolved anti-capitalist approach in which climate reason is not exemplified entirely through human responsibility and influence, but through diversification into non-human realities and experiences. I will show how the novel thus both re-frames the basic ontology and related ethical applications of knowledge as well as employing science-fictionality in fascinating new ways to extrapolate from and literalize the impact of climate change on multiple interconnected realities. Ultimately, I will thus demonstrate how futurisms from marginalized perspectives both challenge and fruitfully diversify the epistemological toolkits of previous climate fiction, providing both even deeper critique and much-needed hope in entirely new forms.



Panel 36 Gendered & Queer SF: Negotiating Trauma

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: R.B. Lemberg Perelmutter

Beatriz Hermida Ramos

University of Salamanca

In person

Spatial and Narrative Distortion in Carmen María Machado's Speculative Memoir *In the Dream House*

In the last few years, Carmen María Machado has been publicly praised and recognized for her speculative short stories, where she uses non-realism to denounce the struggles of queer women in 21st century America, and to comment on different “aspects of being a woman that can be surreal or somehow liminal” (Machado 2017), such as the ubiquity of physical, psychological, and sexual violence. This denouncement of systemic misogyny and queer-phobia is also present in *In the Dream House* (2019), a speculative memoir that draws from the Gothic tradition, queer theory, and fairytale folklore to narrate Machado's history of domestic abuse while in a sapphic relationship. The text focuses on the difficulties she experienced recognizing and naming what happened to her as abuse, relying on different strategies of narrative and spatial distortion to navigate her traumatic experience—strategies such as narrative fragmentation, intertextuality, and spatial shifts.

The text is composed of several short stories and short essays, all of them built around the figure of a “dream house.” This dream home is initially described as the physical space where Machado lives with her partner, but it soon becomes both a speculative embodiment of the violence she endures, and a larger allegory of the symbolic spaces Machado is (not) able to claim and occupy as a racialized queer woman. Given this context, I argue that Machado's hybrid memoir, with its innovative structure and its complex treatment of space, allows us to problematize the ways we can think of trauma, belonging, and abuse through speculation. To do so, I will be drawing from different scholarly fields, such as autobiographical studies (Smith and Watson 2010), space studies (Manzanas Calvo and Benito 2014, Barba Guerrero 2019), and science fiction studies (Lothian 2019).

Olga Gajec

University of Warsaw

In person

Demon Babies, Other-Than-Human Reproduction: Monstrous Pregnancies in Film

Pregnancy and reproduction on-screen have been a prevalent, and variously interpreted topic. Due to its straining effect on the body, pregnancy is often depicted in a disturbing way, with aesthetically gory, terror-evoking imagery.

Horror genre has produced incredibly varied and provoking texts that use the pregnant belly to scare and to exploit human anxieties connected to conception, reproduction and birth. Such anxieties have been tied to monstrous femininity, and cultural construction of women's bodies (Creed 1993). Moreover, these depictions closely examine concepts such as species purity, and ethics behind modern genetics (Cohen 1996). Films in this subgenre that this paper will discuss include: *Alien: Resurrection* (Jeunet 1997), *Splice* (Natali 2009). Demonic and vampire pregnancies have a long history in the genre as well (Fischer 1992). From *Rosemary's Baby* (Polański 1968) to *Devil's Due* (Bettinelli-Olpin, Gillett 2014) and *Twilight: Breaking Dawn. Part 1* (Condon 2011), devilish fetuses destroy their mothers' bodies, and often cause mayhem after birth. These texts can be read as metaphors of the ordeal of pregnancy, and the toll it takes on women's bodies and minds (Pisters 2012). This turns the discussion towards disability studies and mad studies on motherhood. Films such as *Barbarian* (Cregger 2022), *Bed Rest* (Evans Taylor 2022) and *Clock* (Jacknow 2023), initiated a new way of analyzing pregnancies on-screen. They define the process of having a baby as a traumatic phenomenon that is not only scary, but also has the physical and mental impact on the female body, impact whose origins could be analyzed in a broader political context.

This paper will compare older and newer texts, identify constructs of womanhood, motherhood, humanness, and how they relate to their times and political contexts. Finally, this paper will present a new subgenre of horror that delves into the intersectionality of film and disability studies, body studies, and last but not least, mad studies (Schillmeier 2012; Packer 2017).

UP

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Panel 37 SF General: Artificial Intelligencies

Room: Lossi 3-326

Chair: Alan Shapiro

Curtis Runstedler

University of Stuttgart

In person

Confronting the “Whiteness of AI” in Alexander Weinstein’s “Saying Goodbye to Yang”

The “whiteness of AI” (Cave and Dihal 2020) is an enduring problem in AI research. Alexander Weinstein’s short story “Saying Goodbye to Yang” is a reaction to these concerns, depicting a white, American, middle-class couple who adopt a Chinese daughter as well as Yang, her robotic Chinese “older brother.” After Yang malfunctions, the narrator/father brings him to an android mechanic (Russ Goodman), who expresses racist remarks about Yang’s physical appearance and is shown to support eugenics.

The “death” of Yang, I argue, heralds an interrogation as well as a reflection upon the “whiteness of AI.” Weinstein uses Yang’s malfunction to subvert and confront the enduring problem of the “whiteness of AI” by presenting a Chinese robot who is subjected to racism, bigotry, and a lack of repair because of his ethnicity and appearance. Yet despite their seemingly progressiveness, the protagonist and his wife are also racist, albeit to a much lesser degree, showing an ignorance of Chinese culture and adopting a Chinese daughter because they see her as exotic. By drawing attention to white privilege and Yang’s mistreatment, Weinstein points out that even seemingly liberal individuals can be complicitly racist. The transition between Yang’s functionality and his “death” unknowingly marks a revelation from racial ignorance to a gradual sense of humility and self-awareness that ultimately results in the narrator admitting “how little I truly know about this world” (Weinstein 2016, 22).

This paper draws upon critical race theory and literary analysis to show the latent and explicit racism that continues to affect contemporary depictions and understandings of AI. Consequently, it prompts solutions such as reflecting upon one’s privilege and encouraging more racially diverse representations of robots and AI.

Mengxing Fu

Shanghai International Studies University

Online

Exploiting Death: Speculations about Digital Immortality in Ken Liu’s and Yang Wanqing’s Uploaded Intelligence Stories

Ken Liu’s short story “Staying Behind”, a piece in a sequence of connected stories exploring the emergence and consequences of Uploaded Intelligence in his short story collection *The Hidden Girl and Other Stories* (2020), begins with the enigmatic “After the Singularity, most people chose to die.” While the concept of “mind uploading” is not a new one in science fiction, imaginaries about digital immortality made possible by human mind uploading as a possible way to cope with environmental disasters and a depleted earth speaks particularly to our contemporary crisis-ridden age. It is clear that the current exploitation of earth’s resources under neoliberal logic is leading humanity into an abyss, yet would abandoning the body and moving human civilization into the cloud offer a techno-solution to this existential crisis and what are the hidden costs of exploiting death? In this paper I examine Chinese American writer Ken Liu and Chinese writer Yang Wanqing’s explorations of uploading intelligence as a way to exploit “death” for the building of a post-environmental-apocalypse utopia. Liu’s connected story sequence (“The God Will Not Be Chained”, “The God Will not Be Slain”, “The God Have Not Died in Vain”, “Staying Behind”, “Altogether Elsewhere, Vast Herd of Reindeer”) traces how corporate and national competitions inevitably lead to the end of human civilization as we know it and the rise of digital immortals that returns the earth to other critters, while Yang’s story “Tombstone” (2021) picks up where Liu’s stories leave off: the political, social and human costs to maintain this digital immortality utopia if the prevailing ideology of scientism is not to change.

Tong Boxuan

Chongqing University

Online

Creative Exploration of Imagining the “Near Future” of Artificial Intelligence: The Writing Potential of Internet Science Fiction from *The Age of God-Making*

As the most impactful technological event in 2023, ChatGPT is rapidly sweeping through various fields of society due to its natural language interaction mode and deep imitation of human language. Prior to this, *The Age of God-Making*, a full-length internet science fiction, based on the development of artificial intelligence in the near future, predicted this technological reality with the acumen of science fiction. In front of the reality of technological development, *The Age of God-Making* not only discussed in depth the possibility of super artificial intelligence dominating the future world and the specific way with keen perception of the times and solid technical reserves, but also provided new perspectives and methods for “near future” science fiction writing. At the same time, it also provided new perspectives and methods for “near-future” science fiction writing, and possessed a rich sense of reality and underlying experience due to its quality as a medium of internet science fiction.

Friday, May 10, 8.00-8.50

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Panel 38: Coffee with Cory Doctorow

Room: Lossi 3 Lobby

Moderator: **Hugh C. O'Connell**

Cory Doctorow

AI, copyright and creative worker's labor rights



Panel 39 Social Change: Is Another Economy Possible? Speculating on the End of Capitalism

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: **Edward Larkin**

Speculative fiction and speculative finance, As Elizabeth Carolyn Miller notes in *Extraction Ecologies*, share strong historical links to the rise of the industrial energy economy in the early twentieth century. In the early twenty-first century, the costs of the assumptions that have underwritten capitalist economic systems have become increasingly obvious as global capitalism has established its hegemony. The papers in this panel explore the works of science fiction and fantasy that challenge readers to confront the effects of late capitalism on our world. This includes expectations about human productivity, nature's bounty, and the conceptualization of personhood. Sherryl Vint's paper turns to Vauhini Vara's *The Immortal King Rao* and its challenge to capitalism's assumption of limitless growth. Vint approaches Vara's novel through the lens of economic theories of degrowth to expose how the temptation of US style capitalist accumulation inhibits people's interest in pursuing other, less destructive, economic models. Focusing on the formal narrative strategies of William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, Ali Riza Taşkale's paper explores how the technologies of modern capitalism distort human subjectivity. Gibson, Taşkale argues, offers strategies for counteracting those effects through narrative techniques that constitute the subject differently. Edward Larkin's paper invites us to attend to the fantasy genre's longstanding interest in extractivist economies, particularly as expressed through the medium of magic. Larkin considers how recent fantasy series by Robin Hobb, N. K.

Jemisin, and Andrea Stewart, respectively, imagine the dissolution of an extractive regime to reveal the violence at the core of that system, while also struggling to imagine an alternative beyond it. In each of these papers questions of the modern subject, the category of the human, and the form of the novel inform interpretations that are invested in exposing and challenging the violence of late capitalism.

Sherryl Vint

University of California

Online

After Unicorns: Degrowth Economics after the "Long Boom"

Concepts of degrowth return to an earlier notion of economics as political economy, before the abstractions of econometrics created a discipline more interested in mathematical models of efficiency than in the world of human productive activity. In essence, then, degrowth seeks to re embed economics within social institutions, conceiving of the economy as something more than the capitalist market, a view that mirrors Marx's structural critique of capitalism and his demand for less exploitative ways of organizing the production process. Yet the question remains, how can we transition to a post-capitalist economy? Focusing on Vauhini Vara's *The Immortal King Rao*, I show how an understanding of the history of racial capitalism is necessary to contend with the entrenched institutions of what the novel calls "shareholder governance." The novel reminds us that another economy is possible, but only if we recognize our own complicity in perpetuating capitalist growth by embracing fantasies of a better future through the capitalist accumulation that defines Silicon Valley and the so-called New Economy of growth without limits via information capitalism.

Ali Riza Taşkale

University of Roskilde

In person

***Pattern Recognition*: Navigating the Speculative Landscape of Financial Capitalism**

Set in 2002, William Gibson's novel *Pattern Recognition* unfolds in a future-present on the brink of an apocalypse. Protagonist Cayce Pollard's encounter with "invasive weirdness" blurs the line between realism and speculative fiction, mirroring our current existence. The novel explores technology's impact on global markets, delving into subjectivity within the evolving techno-culture. Post-9/11, it scrutinizes the impact of information decoding on behavior, drawing parallels between financial markets and information decoding. It resonates with how technology has reshaped modern financial transactions and systems. Notably, its depiction of footage amplifies the speculative core of capitalism, akin to derivatives in finance. The novel thus serves as a lens to understand the evolving dynamics between technology, finance, and human behavior in the ever-changing landscape of the future-present.

Aligned with Fredric Jameson's concept of "cognitive mapping," this paper proposal explores the contradictions and exploitative nature of contemporary financial capitalism. Using the novel as a foundation, it establishes a framework to understand and challenge the prevailing financial logic while uncovering latent possibilities within the ever-shifting present. The central argument posits that the novel's narrative intervention counters the violence of financial speculation, offering a crucial counterbalance to the toxicity of the dominant financial narrative.

Edward Larkin

University of Delaware

In person

Reimagining the Magic of Extractivist Empires in Contemporary Fantasy

This paper takes up popular series by Robin Hobb, N.K. Jemisin and Andrea Stewart to explore how in recent decades fantasy writers have turned to extractivist magics to address ecological concerns and foreground the entanglement between the environment and the economy of their worlds and ours. All three series stage apocalyptic crises that are eventually traced to the ecological damage created by the extraction of a magical resource that the characters (and readers) later discover is living matter. That magical resource fuels the protagonist's and their allies' powers, plays a vital role in the imperial economies that organize their worlds, and generates an alternative posthuman species that underwrites a vision of a collaborative relationship with the planet. Unlike Jemisin's *Broken Earth*, however, Hobb's and Stewart's respective series forestall the apocalyptic devastation of their worlds and enshrine the posthuman figures as avatars of a new dispensation built on interspecies collaboration. What are we to make of the economic implications of such outcomes? How do Hobb and Stewart, respectively, attend to the end of extractivist economic regimes and what replaces them? What are the implications of a post-extractivist magic for both their worlds and the genre of the fantasy novel?



Panel 40 Gendered & Queer SF: Transcorporeality & Posthumanism

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: Miasol Eguíbar-Holgado

Faeze Rezaii

University of Turku

In person

The Transcorporeal Embodiments of Water in Greg Egan's "Oceanic"

My presentation offers a hydrofeminist reading of Greg Egan's novella "Oceanic" (1998), focusing on transformations. The narrative hinges upon one of the overarching themes of science fiction, the battle of science and religion, and my reading problematizes the story's exotification of religion with the use of maternal and feminine imaginaries. Untangling the oceanic experience in the story, I infer that the human bodies are permeable and porous bodies in contact with the ocean, maintaining a transcorporeal cycle. "Oceanic" tries to make sense of and emphasize fluidity, ambiguity, and elusiveness in a way that directs our attention to many possibilities for water to make meaning and engage with human bodies. While the text didactically endorses science, it portrays maternal, feminine figurations and fluid language as delusions to be allowed to reside in the peripheral underwater realm and ultimately dispelled. I argue that this bildungsroman's portrayal of the oceanic experience juxtaposes a collection of qualities such as maternal, feminine, and disorienting that are not necessarily in opposition to one another, yet they transcend the dualistic representations of the oceanic encounter as either an amorphous metaphysical fabrication of religion and spirituality or only a material entity.

Siqi Li

University of California

Online

More-Than-Human Transcorporealities and Queer Ecologies: Reframing Science Fiction in Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*

In her 2018 novel *The Tiger Flu*, the Chinese-Canadian LGBT writer Larissa Lai presents a groundbreaking reinvention of the science fiction genre through a critical queer feminist lens that centralizes the resilience and complex interrelations of Asian-American women. This paper delves into the novel's portrayal of a near-future, post-apocalyptic world, illustrating the critical intersections of transcorporeal and ecological transitions within its bio-cyberpunk narrative. Lai delineates a dichotomized world split through the lives of two female protagonists. Kirilow Groundsel, a member of the parthenogenic, lesbian community of Grist Village, confronts the intersection of bodily regeneration and invasive technologies which poses existential threats to her community. In parallel, Kora Ko's fight in the decaying, patriarchal Saltwater City during the male-targeted pandemic of tiger flu mirrors a broader societal struggle against both literal and metaphorical epidemics. These intertwined stories transcend the conventional narratives of science fiction by immersing into gender, biotechnological, and environmental crises.

Drawing on posthuman and new materialist scholarship, this paper illuminates *The Tiger Flu's* nuanced portrayal of the complex interplay between bodies and their environments. I regard the more-than-human queer bodies as allegorical sites for nature's simultaneous resilience and vulnerability, which renders a social and ecological critique of neoliberal capitalist ideologies and biopolitical dynamics. The transformed notion of the body opens new formal and aesthetic registers in an bio-cyberpunk imaginary that revisits nature, identity, relationality, and "the world" as both real and alternative. *The Tiger Flu* thus transcends its dystopian narrative to emerge as a powerful critique of contemporary societal and ecological challenges. This work not only expands traditional science fiction storytelling, but also proposes a reevaluation of the more-than-human corporealities, which in turn offers a unique lens to view our world and its potential futures.

Tânia Cerqueira

University of Porto

Online

"36.28 percent not human": Exploring Posthuman Heroines in YA Dystopian Fiction

In young adult (YA) dystopian fiction, the female adolescent body is represented as a threat to the totalitarian authorities. These teenage protagonists inhabit liminal bodies: they are in a state of transition between childhood and adulthood while also possessing a female body that is not confined to binary oppositional boundaries, standing in an in-between—after all, the female body grows, breaks, bleeds, and changes (Phillips 2023). In these not-so-far-away futures, the liminality of the teenage female body is intensified through technology, which offers new bodily possibilities. Technological advances can create bodies defined as posthuman; that is, they can generate bodies that threaten social norms by being different from the rule, might this difference be perceived externally and/or internally. As a result of the bodily changes technology imprints on their bodies, YA female protagonists such as Cinder, from Marissa Meyer's *The Lunar Chronicles* (2012-2015), a cyborg, and Kyra from Dan Wells's *Partials Sequence* (2012-2014), a Partial, find themselves questioning their existence and struggling to understand their identity. By exploring YA dystopian fiction heroines whose bodies can be defined as posthuman, this paper discusses how their bodies, which stand on the threshold of human/machine – as well as human/monster – construct shifting multiple identities and offer new models of girlhood. The analysis draws from studies that explore the relationship between YA fiction and ontological issues (Trites 2018) and reflections on posthumanism and its representation in YA fiction (Flanagan 2014; Tarr and White 2018; Harrison 2019).



Panel 41 Environmental SF: Vegetal Metamorphoses

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: **Silver Rattasepp****Agnieszka Kotwasińska**

University of Warsaw

In person

Anthropo-Forests? New Directionalities in Eco-horror

A recent slate of anglophone eco-horror movies (e.g., *Apostle* (2018), *In the Earth* (2021), *Annihilation* (2018 and *Gaia* (2021)) posit imagined forests as sites of pure/innocent or unfathomable nature that is first roused from its trance-like state and then it radically transforms the morally corrupt human territory and/or human beings. These eco-fables of re-enchantment and ecophobia (Parker 2000) often see their human protagonists' forced into non-human transformations, which are coded as painful but necessary steps in a world ravaged by ecological disasters and necrotic expansion of neoliberalism. While such narratives serve to effectively problematize *bios*-centric definitions of dying and living, they often imagine the natureculture continuum as having just one directionality: it is nature that moves, absorbs or reconstructs culture, a gesture which ultimately erases other bio-cultural entanglements, other potential directionalities. However, in the Polish imaginarium, forests are always-more-than-one; they are coded not only as sites of pure or dangerous nature but also as important, if contested, sites of national memory and power distribution (cf. unmarked mass graves, mass executions, pogroms, concentration camps, guerilla warfare, state forestry etc.). Jagoda Szalc's *Tower. A Bright Day* (2017) will serve as a contrasting example of an eco-horror text that avoids the obvious imageries of becoming-forest and instead opts for a more nuanced approach both to ecological extinction and memory politics that accompanies the fantasies of anthropocentric apocalypse. The forest in Szalc's movie is not a site of quasi-personified forces of nature taking revenge on hubristic humans, but rather a deeply politicized space which is enmeshed with the human world in ways that oftentimes defy easily distinguishable directionality. In contrast to anglophone eco-horror narratives, transformations of the human bodies (individual, communal and institutional) are subtly suggested rather than shown, and the forest does not act as an agent of nature's retribution but rather becomes a curious witness to the changes—a witness whose apparent inaction remains nevertheless agential.

Maxine Gee

Bournemouth University

In person

Transforming Trees into People: A Creative Research Exploration of the Relationship Between Humans and the Environment

In the creative research screenplay, *A Part, A Whole*, the female-presenting character Ava, is seen from three distinct perspectives that shift and challenge the audience's understanding of Ava's role. To her partner Mark, Ava is the innocent victim of a ritualistic crime; to Hayley, a social worker investigating the disappearance of homeless people, Ava is the monstrous other; and Ava, the personification of an Aspen tree, cares deeply about the preservation of her non-human community. As each perception transitions, the screenplay explores the tensions between humanity and nature.

In the paper, I will examine my creative choices in developing this speculative horror screenplay, where genre conventions concurrently provoke progressive and conservative readings of humanity's complex relationship with nature. Through exploring how my creative practice aims to give a voice and agency to the non-human communities with which we share our world, I will situate the screenplay within a creative tradition that sees trees transformed into human form with tragic as well as hopeful consequences. Finally, I will discuss this project in relation to my previous work adapting *Standing Woman*, a Japanese short story by Yasutaka Tsutsui. In that piece a near future society plants criminals in the ground, turning them into trees, instead of imprisonment. The short film drew attention to mankind's unsettled relationship with nature, opening a debate around the line where utopian policy becomes a punitive and horrific measure of control.

Panel 42 SF General: SF and/in Transition

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: Chiara Viceconti

Eero Suoranta

University of Helsinki

In person

“To My Foes, Who Never Existed”: The Collapsed Illusions of Transition-Stage China in Chen Qiufan’s “Year of the Rat”

“Contemporary China is a society in the transition stage when old illusions have collapsed but new illusions have not taken their place,” observed Chinese SF writer Chen Qiufan (b. 1981) nearly a decade ago. After the death of Mao Zedong, the People’s Republic of China has transformed from a closed-off planned economy into “the world’s factory,” where market forces and profit-seeking are now seen as an integral part of the social fabric. To fill the ideological void left by this abandonment of Mao-era principles, the Communist Party of China has attempted to develop new propaganda tools that would reinforce nationalistic sentiments especially among young Chinese, yet it remains unclear whether such methods can counter the alienation and dissatisfaction caused by capitalist exploitation.

In my presentation, I will examine how this transitional stage is portrayed in Chen’s 2009 short story “Year of the Rat” (鼠年 *Shunian*), where a cynical college student is enlisted to hunt genetically engineered rats against a backdrop of trade negotiations between China and the West. By focusing on the parallels that the story draws between the protagonist and the rats, I analyze how “Year of the Rat” comments on alienation, propaganda, and economic competition between both individuals and states in the context of China’s integration into global capitalism. Moreover, I show how the story draws from the tradition of realist and speculative anti-war fiction to offer a counter-narrative to official nationalism. Lastly, I consider the specific relevance of “Year of the Rat” in the 2020s, when both China’s society and its relationship with the rest of the world may have already reached a new stage.

Andrus Org

University of Tartu

In person

Sources of influence on Estonian science fiction

The development of Estonian science fiction from its first manifestations at the beginning of the 20th century to the present day could be viewed using two background systems: either against the background of mainstream Estonian literature or against the trends and influences of science fiction from the rest of the world. Surprisingly, neither approach yields very good results as the developments are so different. Although since the 1990s Estonian science fiction has tended to mimic the numerous directions taken by English-language science fiction, mapping the genre’s shifts is no easy task, as the influences are random and hectic, varying from writer to writer.

If we look at the development of Estonian science fiction as a marginal subculture during the 20th century, we can speak of three main sources of influence. The first of these, related to elements of Estonian folklore and mythology, and more broadly to the specificities of the Finno-Ugric worldview, forms the basis for fantasy and horror fiction, which includes various slipstream genres such as tales of ghosts, elves, witches and werewolves. Another source of influence that inspired Estonian science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s under the Soviet occupation was the work of Eastern European science fiction writers (Lem, Strugatsky brothers), but more broadly these influences are associated with the scientific and technological revolution, plans for space conquest and cybernetic ideas. The third sphere of influence is Anglo-American science fiction, whose historical genre conventions have been entering Estonian science fiction since the early 1990s, when a large number of writers gathered around magazines (e.g., *Mardus*, *Algernon*).

Estonian science fiction at the turn of the century (1999–2004), which has also been called the Golden Age, can be seen as a domesticated alien, although it is extremely problematic to see any meaningful and noticeable development in this period. The transplantation of sub-genres imitating all sorts of fantastic elements, basic themes and story-schemes into Estonian literature has now given rise to a booming cultural phenomenon that can be described as modern genre fiction, which operates according to certain genre rules. There is a special word “ulme” in the Estonian language for various fictions of a speculative nature, which stands for wonder, horror and science fiction.

In this presentation, I will discuss what have been the main sources of influence on Estonian science fiction, and what transitions and shifts in genre have occurred as a result of these sources. More broadly, I will explore the dynamics of the genre, its shifts and transitions (see Todorov 1973, Tõnjanov 1977, Suvin 1979, Derrida 1981, Wovler 1997, Frow 2006).

Ciarán Kavanagh

Gent University

In person

Circumscribing Science Fiction: The Rigours of Respectability and the Shifting Sands of Seriousness

“Respected authors have written science fiction,” declares the genre’s *Wikipedia* page, a statement backed up by a list of names that include Mary Shelley, Aldous Huxley, Kurt Vonnegut, and Cormac McCarthy. Harold Bloom is also cited in support of this claim for his inclusion of three science fiction texts in *The Western Canon*, marking them out as “culturally and aesthetically significant works of literature.”

This information rounds out the “Science fiction” page’s “Science fiction studies” topic, specifically appearing in a short subtopic entitled “As serious literature.” There is no corresponding topic on the “Fantasy” page, nor on the “Crime fiction” or “Romance novel” pages. None of these pages likewise mention the words “serious” or “respected” in such contexts, if at all. However, a version of the “As serious literature” topic has existed on the *Science fiction* page since November 2010. Through the lens of science fiction’s concerns with seriousness, this paper examines SF’s changing relationship with mainstream literature, and the idea that, for good or for ill, the genre is somehow always on the cusp of entering, becoming or being absorbed by the mainstream. Sometimes imagined as death, other time as apotheosis, the discursive culture imagining this permanent limbo reveals diverging opinions not only on the genre’s *raison d’être*, but that of wider literature.

This paper thus focuses on the discursive culture around SF’s generic identity. On the mainstream side, it looks at representations in its *Wikipedia* entry, and how this multi-authored entry has evolved over the years. In inter-generic representations, it looks at a number of well-known genre manifestoes, for example, Ellison’s introduction to *Dangerous Visions* or Sterling’s preface to *Mirrorshades*, focusing on the patterns visible in diverse arguments about the genre’s present(s), its potentials, and the path to these potentials.



**Panel 43 Gendered & Queer SF: Gender Transitions & Solidarities**

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: Jędrzej Burszta

David M. Higgins

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Worldwide

In person

“Your Genes Aren’t Your Destiny”: Gender and Transition in Ann Leckie’s *Translation State*

In *Ancillary Justice* and its sequels, Ann Leckie imagines an agender society (the Imperial Radch) where reproductive biology has no bearing on categories of social identity. Unfortunately, Radchall agender norm is imposed on other cultures with staggering imperial arrogance: even well-intentioned Radchall characters (like the protagonist Breg) consistently misgender people from other cultures, secure in their comfort that such errors will be largely inconsequential.

The most recent novel in the Imperial Radch series, *Translation State* (2023), clarifies Leckie’s argument that misgendering others—refusing to honor their pronouns and their gender identities—is *always* an act of violence. The novel drives home how Radchall characters who disregard others’ pronouns embody what Maria Lugones calls “the coloniality of gender,” or the way that imperial societies impose their own gender norms on other cultures in the service of hierarchical domination.

Translation State argues that individuals should have indisputable rights to self-determination and legal recognition around key categories of identity—such as species, ethnicity, and gender—but these categories are very often imposed by others through legal and political means. Throughout the novel, one protagonist’s resistance to being misgendered expresses their demand to be recognized on their own terms, not only in relation to gender, but also in regard to citizenship, ethnicity, and even species. The narrative illuminates how the question of who counts as “human,” in other words, is always entangled with the state’s power to determine the legibility of multiple categories of identity (such as gender and ethnicity) through the application of imperial violence.

Leckie shows that although some regard pronouns as a minor affair, there are few considerations more deeply consequential than using pronouns correctly, because acknowledging pronouns is fundamentally connected with acknowledging a person’s right to determine their own identity. Further, the *refusal* to acknowledge someone’s gender identity is always a deeper disavowal of personhood, often with larger legal and juridical consequences. Leckie thus ultimately argues that refusing to acknowledge others on their own terms is fundamentally a question of power and social control. In this light, *Translation State* offers vital critical commentary addressing a contemporary cultural moment heavy with anti-trans legislation and backlash.

Agnieszka Urbańczyk

Pedagogical University of Kraków

In person

“I Will Not Be Shackled by the Failures of Your God”: Queer Readings of the *Re-Animator* Films and the Inherent Transness of the Frankensteinian Mad Scientist

H.P. Lovecraft’s *Herbert West – Re-Animator* is sometimes described as the first zombie narrative, predating *I Am Legend* by decades. Thus, it is quite surprising that Stuart Gordon’s 1985 adaptation of Lovecraft’s short stories and the following 1990 sequel by Brian Yuzna do not focus on the living dead aspect of the source material, leaning towards the *Frankenstein* narrative instead. Moreover, the directors opted not for Mary Shelley’s novel, but for the queer-coded classic adaptations by James Whale.

While Lovecraft’s *body* of work, focusing on the liminal, the monstrous, and the corporeal, is quite popular in queer spaces, and while there are some possible homoerotic readings of his *Re-Animator* short stories, the queer subtext is much more prominent in the films. Given the cult status of Gordon’s *Re-Animator*, and the fact that shipping is one of the most common fan practices, it is no wonder that thousands of fanworks portray the relationship between the two male protagonists as romantic or sexual. These readings stem both from the queer potential of Lovecraft’s works, and the fact that the films are almost openly homoerotic retellings of Whale’s pictures. What I find most interesting, however, is Herbert West’s status as a horror fandom’s icon of transmasculinity.

Despite there being no indication of West’s transness in either the short stories or their movie adaptations, his character resonated strongly with transgender horror fans. In my paper, I wish to discuss the fan readings of Herbert West as either a trans man or a metaphor for a trans person who, instead of changing themselves, sets out to change the world. I argue that the popularity of this specific interpretation of West should not be attributed to his portrayal, but rather to the *Frankensteinian* notion of an individual defying the laws of God and men; a scientist treating the body merely as a work in progress.

Miasol Eguíbar-Holgado

University of Oviedo

In person

Transfeminist Solidarity in Janelle Monáe’s “Dirty Computer” Universe

In 2018, Janelle Monáe put out her third studio album, *Dirty Computer*, accompanied by a homonymous emotion picture (a 45-minute film) released on YouTube. The emotion picture comprised video clips to the album songs, as well as connecting sequences between tracks which reinforced the album’s narrative coherence. In 2022, Monáe, in collaboration with several writers, published *The Memory Librarian*, a collection of short stories based and further expanding on the storylines sparked by the *Dirty Computer* album and film. The stories that unfold in these three interconnected formats take place in a future dystopia, what I call the “Dirty Computer” universe. Here, those who deviate from the norms imposed by the totalitarian government of New Dawn are branded as “dirty computers”, their memories erased so as to make them “clean”, i.e., compliant with New Dawn’s homogenizing principles.

The urgency to resist and transform oppressive societies seeps through all the stories contained in this multiplatform assemblage. This paper focuses on the song/video “Pynk” and the related short story “Nevermind”. The song and video playfully reflect on what it means to be a woman, especially at its intersection with Black and queer identities. In “Nevermind”, the Pynk Hotel is a safe space for women who resist New Dawn. Again, the boundaries of womanhood are questioned, this time in a more sombre tone, when attacks from New Dawn reach the hotel, provoking a conflict between the women who occupy it. I argue that both the song/video and the short story point to a notion of feminism that is intersectional and trans-inclusive. Transfeminist solidarity, although only partially successful, fuels the Pynk as a collectivist, sustainable and abolitionist society. Through transfeminist solidarity, Monáe narrates queer and trans-inclusive feminist futures, which are crucial to transform present discriminatory practices.



Panel 44 SF General: Breaking Print Form BoundariesRoom: Lossi 3-328
Chair: **Keren Omry****Oskari Rantala**University of Jyväskylä
In person**Comics within Comics in Alan Moore's Comics: Superheroes and Medial Transition**

A major transition in the mainstream Anglo-American popular comics narratives during the last decades has been the increasing reflexive use of genre history and the mediality of comics. In superhero comics, specifically, a subcultural literacy connected to the genre has been developing since the 1960s, but it became increasingly prominent closer to the end of the millennium. One comics creator whose works are habitually brought to the fore as examples of these developments is Alan Moore, best known for revisionist superhero narratives such as *Watchmen* (1986-87, illustrated by Dave Gibbons).

In several comics by Moore published around the turn of the millennium, mediality and materiality are foregrounded in ways that can be understood as medium-specific and medially self-aware. In these works, for example, memories and flashbacks can be represented as separate comics segments imitating the materiality of historical comics styles and employing a recognizable retro aesthetic. In various cases, these nested comics segments are represented as imaginary comic book artefacts in the storyworld, explicitly playing with the temporal and representational logic of the narrative.

I study the use and effects of these narrative strategies in later works by Moore, such as *1963* (1993, illustrated by Steve Bissette & Rick Veitch), *Supreme* (1996-2000, 2012, illustrated by Joe Bennett, Rick Veitch et al), *Tom Strong* (1999-2006, illustrated by Chris Sprouse et al) and *The Spirit: New Adventures* (1998, illustrated by Dave Gibbons). The discussion of these works sheds light on the ways in which the medial dimensions of comics and the historically shaped genre-specific readerly practices make comics a responsive medium for this kind of experimentation and medial play.

Bar LeshemBen-Gurion University of the Negev
Online**Breaking Boundaries: Charting the Transition of Female Presence and Fourth-Wall Dynamics in Comic Books**

This paper investigates the narrative strategy of fourth-wall breaking in comic book narratives, focusing on its use by female superheroes—a device that serves both as a storytelling technique and a metaphor for disrupting traditional gender roles. The primary figures of this exploration are She-Hulk, who introduced this method in *The Sensational She-Hulk*, and Gwenpool, who continues its evolution. This technique not only challenges the linear narrative but also the visual dynamics of the medium, representing a symbolic shattering of the “glass ceiling.”

The thematic analysis contrasts the visual and narrative applications of fourth-wall breaking by She-Hulk and Gwenpool. She-Hulk's engagement transcends narrative dialogue, allowing her to step out of the comic's physical layout, thereby asserting female agency and altering the reader's experience. This departure from the conventional portrayal of female characters is juxtaposed with Gwenpool's more recent narratives, which present a sophisticated interplay between character awareness and the manipulation of comic book structure. Gwenpool's self-referential commentary and visual interactions with the comic book's elements further dissolve the boundary between art and audience.

Both characters employ fourth-wall breaking to redefine their roles within the superhero narrative, transitioning from secondary to central figures. The paper argues that this narrative and visual device is not simply a quirk but a significant innovation in comic book artistry, reflecting broader societal shifts in gender perception and the role of women in media.

Ultimately, the paper presents fourth-wall breaking by female superheroes as a revolutionary strategy, symbolizing the evolving landscape of comic book storytelling and the ascent of female characters in redefining the genre's boundaries. The analysis demonstrates how visual artistry and narrative innovation coalesce to shape the cultural significance of female superheroes in the contemporary comic book narrative.

Sabina FazliUniversity of Mainz
In person**(Post)human Interest: Magazines as Science Fiction**

The close relationship between SF and magazines is well researched and has recently been highlighted again by Mike Ashley's multivolume *History of the Science-Fiction Magazine*. Both the term science fiction itself, generic developments, and early fan cultures originate in magazines and are intertwined with the pulps. With the advent of the internet and the emancipation of the genre from the pulps, the significance of magazines for SF has waned. Periodicals of all kinds have lost readers to online outlets. Beginning around the 2010s, however, independently published, often short-lived magazines have rekindled a small-scale revival of periodical print. Among them are new sf magazines, like *Kapsel*, publishing contemporary Chinese sf in translation (Berlin, since 2017) or *Visions* (London, 2019), which evokes the history of the pulps.

In my paper I will consider a different kind of contemporary little magazine, namely those projects that take a more experimental approach to magazinality verging on conceptual art. I will look at magazines that stage themselves as futuristic objects and as being from the future. These highly fictionalized magazine identities create objects that are time capsules from the future and pose as fragments of future media landscapes. Specifically, I propose to read issue 3 of *Momma Tried* (New Orleans 2018), *Playbot* (London, 2022), and zinester John Dishwasher's *Zine from the Future* (USA, 2021). All three publications capitalize on the versatility of the magazine object to project new strategies of representing sf in magazine form. They constitute instances in which sf sensibilities travel between media and platforms. In the postdigital constellation of print and digital media, the print and paper magazine and its digital paratexts create new possibilities of expressing sf concerns in original ways.



Panel 45 Environmental SF: Communities & Connections

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: Charlie Toogood

Ewa Wisniewska

Academy in Piotrkow Trybunalski

Online

Environmental Propheying in N.K. Jemisin's *The Broken Earth Trilogy*.

In *The Broken Earth Trilogy*, a medley of science fiction and fantasy, consisting of *The Fifth Season* (2015), *The Obelisk Gate* (2016) and *The Stone Sky* (2017), N. K. Jemisin offers inventive world-building and explorations of the theme of transformation. The transition within the tales is inextricably linked with the environmental aspects of the world presented, which is called "Stillness." It is manifested in the occasional periods of seismic instability and natural disasters known by the inhabitants of "Stillness" as "Fifth Seasons." The very name marks a cyclical nature of the events, highlighting the inevitability of the catastrophes that the inhabitants of the land must endure. The perpetual nature of the environmental transitions alludes to the cultural and traditional modes of living on "Stillness". As the story unfolds, a predictable pattern contributing to the collective memory that shapes the understanding of the world, is revealed. The characters grapple with existential questions regarding the meaning and purpose of their lives, as well as the (im)possibility of breaking off the cyclical pattern that dooms their lives to failure.

The cultural practices as well as societal structures within the tales are predominantly marked by the ability to adapt to regular transitions. Social adaptations are the collective response to the ever-present seismic upheaval. The transitions in Jemisin's trilogy encompass environmental, philosophical and personal fields. They serve as a means of exploring the blurred lines of interplay between the elements existing in the world.

Yuezhou Tan

Chongqing University

Online

From Mosquitoes to Computers: The Multispecies Living Community in *The Calcutta Chromosome*

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* encapsulates a transformative journey of existential transference from the natural world, epitomized by the mosquito, to the realms of advanced computer technologies. This science fiction novel serves as a fertile ground for exploring identity-fluid dynamics through the lens of speculative narration. Ghosh's tale is intricate, weaving the soul's search for transcendence through various incarnations, thereby navigating the uncertain domain of selfhood. Through an array of transference mediums, including the biological (mosquito and pigeon) and the technological (computer), Ghosh traverses the shifting landscapes of identity. In the process, the cyborg Ava acts as a catalyst for Mangala's bodily transfers, as does the mosquito that possesses the ability to direct and recombine the malaria virus. This narrative intricately entwines the threads of evolutionary biology with the nascent realm of technology, proposing an ontology wherein organic life merges with technological modalities.

The evolution from living carriers to technological constructs implies an ontological sea-change, an acknowledgment of the increasing entanglement of our corporeal existence with our creations. This confluence challenges the stark dystopian outlook of rampant technologization and suggests a reinvigoration of the organic through the technological. Within this interface of flesh and machinery emerges a redefined corporeality that resonates with postmodern vestiges of Cartesian dualism. Engaging with this theoretical underpinning, the essay delves into the disruptions of identity and cognition anticipated in an era characterized by rapid technological change. It interrogates human-machine-organism relationships, proposing an ethical scaffold for a diverse multispecies consortium.

The proposed multispecies communion delineates a paradigm shift from anthropocentrism, recognizing a gamut of life forms subsisting in complex interdependence. This discourse is nuanced by contemporary debates in posthumanism and biotechnology, considering speculative fiction as a harbinger for impending intersections between technology and life. The paper distills this narrative, postulating the societal and bioethical transformations spurred by interspecies synergies. *The Calcutta Chromosome* thus emerges not only as a literary artifact but also as an academic impetus suggesting a radical recontextualization of existence amidst the woven tapestry of biology and technology. By dissecting Ghosh's vision, this study advocates a reframing of life, arguing for a future wherein biotechnological amalgamations redefine the socio-political and ecological intellect.

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Panel 46 SF General: Posthuman Cyborgs

Room: Lossi 2-328

Chair: Pawel Frelik

Rachel Anderson

Grand Valley State University

In person

Faulty parts: The (mal)functioning cyborg in *After Yang* and *The Murderbot Diaries*

In this paper, I examine the “malfunctioning” cyborg figure in two recent texts: Kogonada’s 2021 film *After Yang* and Martha Wells’ novella series collectively known as *The Murderbot Diaries* (2017-2023). *After Yang* is based on a short story by Andrew Weinstein that depicts the response of a near-future family to the fatal shut-down of Yang, a cyborg child/companion for their adopted human child. *The Murderbot Diaries* similarly centers a cyborg who has hacked a malfunctioning part of itself. While *After Yang* is a haunting meditation on loss, grief, and memory within the novum of cyborg consciousness, I argue that Wells’ approach to “faulty parts” maps onto a neurodivergent experience that centers difference rather than deficiency. *The Murderbot* series has been openly praised by autistic readers as representative of their experience; this is, I argue, due in no small part to Wells’ approach that challenges the deficient model seen in texts like *After Yang*.

While films like *After Yang* showcase the human perspective, Wells’ *Murderbot* series is narrated from the point of view of a cyborg “SecUnit” who has hacked its “governor module” which kept it enslaved to a nameless corporation that installed the cheapest possible parts it could. Its exploitation of the cheapness of its parts enables it to paradoxically have more, rather than less, agency. In this way, Wells challenges one of the core robot/AI narratives in much of SF. By having her central character not only reject the idea of being human, not because of an innate dislike or hate for humans, but because it views the idea as “the dumbest thing [it] ever heard,” Wells indicates that *Murderbot* views itself as distinct from human, but not less than human. The key to this freedom is the “faulty part”—the hacked governor module, or personal autonomy distinct from human and corporate/capitalist stricture.

Kinga Földvály

Pázmány Péter Catholic University

In person

Our Posthuman Companions: Contemporary British Fiction Embracing SF

Although the presence of robots, cyborgs, humanoid AIs and other artificial but increasingly (and more and more deceptively) human-looking creatures has long been a common feature in SF, the majority of these narratives has been created by authors whose oeuvre is relegated to the fields of popular culture. However, in recent years several authors who belong to the realm of literary fiction, who have been labelled as contemporary classics, and granted the accolades of highest prestige, have begun to employ elements of SF in their work, in order to investigate moral and philosophical questions associated with a potentially post-human future. In my paper I will examine Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Klara and the Sun* (2021), and Ian McEwan’s *Machines like Me* (2019), looking at the thematic and stylistic antecedents of the concern with the post-human (and potentially dehumanized) world within the authors’ previous oeuvre, while also reflecting on the ways the same issues are examined by contemporary SF narratives and authors.

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Panel 47 SF General: Aesthetic Engagements

Room: Lossi 3-326

Chair: Alan Shapiro

Jacob Emery

Indiana University

In person

Transcription Technologies and Interesting Art

“Every original individual...is *interesting*,” writes Romantic theorist Friedrich Schlegel, who proposes a method of reading the various texts in the oeuvre of a single author as a series of self-expressions. Through this comparative reading, the critic can begin to outline the underlying creative personality that each constituent text expresses in part.

In this talk, drawn from a larger project on romantic aesthetics and transcription technologies, I treat science fiction as a discourse of speculative aesthetics that reassesses and revises the Romantic underpinnings of our philosophy of art. Posthuman scenarios of a personality that is converted into information and transposed into a non-biological medium—Stanislaw Lem’s electroencephalogram, Gene Wolfe’s Mr. Million, or Volodymyr Savchenko’s radio consciousness, to name a few—represent examples of an ideal self-expression, more or less explicitly compared to a work of art. The aesthetic category Schlegel called “the interesting,” however, becomes activated only when such expressions of the self form part of a larger series whose members can be meaningfully compared to one another.

Inspired largely by the mathematician and utopian thinker Marquis de Condorcet, Schlegel assumed that information is encoded in computational media—paradigmatically, the recombinable letters of the alphabet, which can produce an infinite number of statements using a finite number of symbols. Authors of modern science fiction including David Brin and John Varley stage the interesting in a speculative context by imagining cloning and scanning technologies that produce multiple variant versions of an originary self; the interactions between these versions of a single consciousness produce the plot. In these texts, their authors test the assumptions of human individuality that underlie received conceptions of the aesthetic and speculate as to how art might evolve under technological conditions of cheap and lossless transcription of personalities in a range of media.

Jan Topolski

Nicolaus Copernicus University

In person

Transitional Sounds in Sci-Fi Films from 1980s

Transition is one of the core topics in science fiction and literature, especially regarding human and post-human, android or alien bodies, as can be seen in the iconic scenes of birth in *Alien* (dir. Ridley Scott, USA 1979) or death in *Terminator* (dir. James Cameron, USA 1982). However, one aspect is usually omitted. It is the sound design that is crucial in successful rendering of such transitions, by blending real recordings, studio effects and musical compositions. Michel Chion in his *Audio-vision* wrote of rendering as the tool “to convey the feelings or effects associated with the situation on screen—often in opposition to faithful reproduction of the sounds that might be heard in the situation in reality. Rendering frequently translates an agglomerate of sensations.”

I will examine those sound effects in field of canonical sf movies of 1980s., that often deal with topic of androids and aliens, just to mention *Fly* (dir. David Cronenberg, USA/Canada 1986) or *Blade Runner* (dir. Ridley Scott, USA 1982). I would expand this area to Eastern Europe though, with such titles as *Pilot Pírx's Inquest* (dir. Marek Piestrak, Poland/Estonian SR 1979), *Dead Mountaineer's Hotel* (dir. Grigori Kromanov, Estonian SR 1979) or *Grandmothers Get Boosted* (dir. Ladislav Rychman, Czechoslovakia 1983). Ignition sounds of android grandmother in the latter one, or the dissemination of humanoid in the first one belong to these transitional effects I am looking after. The methodological frame for my paper is affect theory, introduced by Brian Massumi and Gilles Deleuze and henceforth developed by many researchers. They usually highlight the importance of immediate sensations and blurring the border between bodies (human or non-human/post-human). The sound as most direct and subliminal factor seems to me the perfect medium for affective power of films.

Christina Lord

University of North Carolina Wilmington

In person

La French Touch: Denis Villeneuve’s Cinematic Vision of Frank Herbert’s *Dune*

French-Canadian filmmaker Denis Villeneuve has quickly become a francophone auteur who has infiltrated Hollywood to make artful science fiction films, joining the ranks of contemporary anglophone filmmakers who have delivered space-sweeping, estranging epics that investigate contact with the ineffable. Part of the “nouvelle génération” of filmmakers from Québec, Villeneuve began his career with films shot in French. His transition into English-language Hollywood cinema in 2013 has brought him more attention on the international stage. His films from his current science fiction “era”—*Arrival* (2016), *Blade Runner 2049* (2017), *Dune: Part One* (2021), *Dune: Part Two* (2024)—are all adaptations of American SF texts in English that engage with questions of humanness. Villeneuve’s SF films thus raise several questions: What is Villeneuve’s filmic style (and how might it be set apart from anglophone directors of cerebral SF)? How does Villeneuve’s filmic style develop or depart from the themes of the original source texts?

In this presentation, I will argue that Villeneuve’s synesthetic exploration of otherworldly visuals, sounds, silence, and touch amplifies the fuzzy, uncanny boundaries between human and nonhuman through a selection of close readings from Villeneuve’s *Dune: Part One* and its source text, *Dune* (1965), by American author Frank Herbert. A transmedial analysis will demonstrate how the film works with epistemological alterity via what Laura Marks (2000) calls “the skin of the film,” that is, the ways in which cinema can appeal to the senses that it can’t technically represent; this shows how SF cinema might express the inexpressible. Such evocations of the senses—a signature feature of contemporary French-from-France SF *literature*—add a distinctly francophone element to a film based on American science fiction and shot in English. My hope is that these reflections on Villeneuve’s filmic style can bridge the francophone world and American SF, thus giving us further insight into the ongoing transnationalization and transmedialization of science fiction.



48

Panel 48: SFRA DEI roundtable: Transitions and Transformations

Jakobi 2-226

Moderator: **Bogi Takács Perelmutter**

Participants: **Terra Mae Gasque** (online), **Ildikó Limpár** (in person), **Ida Yoshinaga** (online), **Ibtisam Ahmed** (online)

This is SFRA 2024's panel discussion on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) – everyone is welcome to attend. Together with our panelists, we intend to engage with topics that go beyond the usual introductory-level DEI discussion. As this year's theme is Transitions, we plan to explore changes in DEI over time. The following topics are just some of the points we aim to touch on: if equity increases or decreases, how can and should structural DEI supports change to adjust better to new situations? How does this apply to organizations like SFRA, conferences, the field in general? How can we cope with changes for the better – or for the worse? As definitions of DEI have been shifting – including attempts to extend the acronym – who might not still be included in them, and who are only nominally included? How can we strategize to work across differences both in our immediate environment and more broadly over the internet, and how can the global nature of our field aid or hinder us in this? Many marginalized people feel a skepticism toward DEI, and this has extended to conference panels and convention events focusing on the topic. We plan to discuss what specific actions can such panels facilitate, and how they can enrich the lives of audiences and participants rather than focusing on providing basic education to outsiders, or an item on the agenda to complete.



Panel 49 CoFuturisms: Roundtable: Putting Critical Definitions of World Science Fiction into Everyday Practice

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Moderator: **Ida Yoshinaga** (online)

Participants: **Sonja Fritzsche** (in person), **Allanah Hunt** (online), **Guangzhao Lyu** (in person), **Reem Mansour** (online), **Blaire Morseau** (online), **Cynthia Shin** (in person)

What do we mean by “global SF,” “world SF,” “SF from the margins” or “the periphery,” “SF from the Global North” or “the Global South”? This roundtable unpacks multiple terms used often in general ways that obscure practices of explicit and implicit racism, colonialism and imperialism embedded in the political and social hierarchies and structures, as well as the cultural assumptions and practices that govern their use. The wide-ranging scholarly locations and expertise of the panel members provide unique and intersecting perspectives on ways to describe this dynamic and exciting reckoning in the study of the genre by focusing on what SFRA Estonia keynote speaker Anindita Banerjee (et al.) refers to as “SF circuits” other than those emanating from the US and UK outward. Speculative works from other countries are not mere cheap imitations of the West but rather critical and original contributions that engage complex local and regional discourses to participate in an increasingly cosmopolitan generic culture. Yet herein lies the challenge. How do we take the learnings from such contributions and create everyday values-enacted science fiction spaces and conditions in academic workplaces and beyond?

Importantly, the panel will address the practicalities of critical transformation: How do we negotiate the popular use of these terms and definitions as they differ from country to country, and how does this impact the respective academic definitions and related research or production methodologies? How does what Isis Settles and her colleagues term “epistemic exclusion” operate in this context? How does this then determine the real-life structures, policies, and practices of the spaces that authors, scholars, and publishers/editors actually inhabit? What are the theoretical contributions and original characteristics of *critical world science fictions* that build on and challenge established conceptualizations and assumptions of SF, and how may these be applied to creating culturally ethical, just, respectful SF spaces rather than just theoretical constructions? How do we decenter defining practices and organizational policies, so that they do not perpetuate center and periphery perspectives?

The roundtable panelists represent a variety of science fiction traditions and practices, including Indigenous Futures Australia and North America, US American, African cultural diasporas, China, Central Europe, Japan/Indigenous Okinawa, Korea, and Latin America. We have asked them to speak for 5-7 minutes and then we will open up the room for discussion.



Panel 50 SF General: Screen Forms

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: **Luiza Lusvarghi****Ildiko Limpár**

Pázmány Péter Catholic University

In person

Algorithmic Misinterpretation and Narrative Strategy in *Mrs. Davis*

Peacock's science fiction limited series *Mrs. Davis* (2023), created by Tara Hernandez and Damon Lindelof, seems to position the fight against AI-technology as a crusade for the Holy Grail and at the same time subverts or deconstructs major topoi and myths in its presentation of the heroic mission, the fight between good and evil, and the conflict between faith/religion and technology. This show centers around the mission of ending the reign of a deified master algorithm that stems from a consumerist, client-satisfying purpose, (con)fusing, in the end, the commercial with the spiritual. Symptomatic and symbolic of the cultural context defined by consumerism, this confusion is expressed by the complexly presented theme of magicians' work, understood as analogous with how a super-algorithm may take charge of humanity's fate in this future world. The present paper aims to examine the relationship between this thematic interest and the narrative strategy the show applies, making use of the idea of deception, confusion, and misinterpretation as its main storytelling strategy. Within this framework, the method of weaving storylines that are specifically revealing concerning the relationship between the spiritual and the material/consumerist will be examined. Therefore, the paper seeks to highlight and analyze the following strategies: variations of deceptive narration that aims to destabilize knowledge concerning the world and thus creating an information-labyrinth whose main goal is entrapment as well as entertainment (imitating magicians' works); the palimpsest method, which aims to create a curious links between recognizable (Biblical) story patterns; and the use of AI technology in generating titles and promoting the show, which also demonstrates the central problem that the TV-series accentuates concerning how an algorithm uses the information it is at its disposal.

Sang-Keun Yoo

Marist College

In person

Does Korean SF Dream of a Decolonized Sheep?: The South Korean Mediascape of Science Fiction and Fantasy

Over the past decade, science fiction and fantasy have experienced a remarkable surge in popularity within the South Korean mediascape. This shift is noteworthy, given that these genres have historically been regarded as non-serious and degraded forms of literature in South Korea, often associated with children's science education rather than serious fiction. With the proliferation of global streaming platforms, webtoons, and web-novels, science fiction and fantasy have now come to occupy a prominent position in the country's cultural landscape.

This paper examines three key characteristics of South Korean science fiction and fantasy films and television dramas, focusing on three notable absences that have shaped the evolution of these genres: (1) the absence of science fiction due to past genre categorization issues and techno-nationalistic policies; (2) the absence of imagined futures within science fiction and fantasy narratives; and (3) the absence of decolonized future visions. The analysis reveals that South Korean SFF often employs time-travel narratives that return to the past rather than envisioning the future. Moreover, when future scenarios are imagined, they frequently depict South Korea as remaining under the control of Western or other neo-imperial powers. In this regard, this paper argues for the importance of fostering a decolonized and non-techno-nationalistic vision of the future within South Korean science fiction and fantasy. By reimagining the future, these genres can contribute to the ongoing cultural and political discourse in South Korea and offer new perspectives on the nation's history and identity.

Jane Topping

The Glasgow School of Art

Online

How Many Electric Sheep?: Yet Another Adaptation of *Blade Runner*

As for my own role in the BLADE RUNNER project, I can only say that I did not know that a work of mine or a set of ideas of mine could be escalated into such stunning dimensions. (Dick, 1981).

In 2018 I joined a long list of practitioners who have adapted *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Dick 1968) such as *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982). This presentation considers *Blade Runner* as a transitional object—an artefact which is not a single thing but a matrix of ideas developed by a number of authors over a number of platforms. One result of this is that adaptations of either Dick's *ur-text* or Scott's "first" adaptation come into being in a process which is multiple. The works that make up *Blade Runner* the transitional object are an entanglement of narrative threads which do not begin or end but are instead informed and enriched by their coalescence. As a result, any adaptation can be easily thought of as being a part of *Blade Runner's* complex cultural whole and that any notions that a viewer may have concerning linear time in relation to that coalescence are quickly rendered redundant. This paper will argue that my version, a double-sided flick-book titled *A 35mm 208-ish Frame Version of Blade Runner* (Topping 2018), is both adaptation and novel narrative thread which enriches and complicates the transitional cultural object known as *Blade Runner*.

Panel 51 SF General: Speculation, Intervention, Renegotiation: SF & its Means of Imagination

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: Esko Suoranta

For SFRA 2024: Transitions, we propose this four paper panel that examines a variety of SF texts to discuss dimensions of imagination that both draw from and engender transition and transformation. Against the backdrop of Anthropocene speculations, climate change, and crises of democracy, the panel discusses the different ways in which SF is used to think toward potential transformation, while it also latches onto ongoing transition and change.

The panel focuses on a variety of SF texts, from TV blockbusters to contemporary novels in English and short fiction in Finnish, shedding light onto both mainstream and more peripheral spheres of SF culture. Dr Elise Kraatila analyzes three novels to argue for gnomic moments, statements of conviction standing out from the habitual ambiguities of speculative narratives. Dr Hanna-Riikka Roine analyzes a broad spectrum of Finnish SF to argue for their transformative potential vis-a-vis questions of democracy and its constant renegotiation. Dr Esko Suoranta focuses on a satirical Finnish SF short story to show that in approaching historical transitions in a dystopian setting, salient differences emerge against mainstream SF fiction. Mr Markus Laukkanen analyzes online discourses around *Game of Thrones* to show how its allegorical interpretation as a climate-change narrative remains suspended in the co-imagination practiced among the audience.

As a result, SF emerges as a means of imagination that cannot be reduced only to its future-oriented or extrapolative dimension. Instead, it is equally able to speculate about, intervene in, and renegotiate pasts, presents, and futures in equal measure. It evokes conviction in contrast to playful, speculative ambiguities, overcomes stagnated democratic imaginations, and opens up to suspended, co-imagined interpretation in online communities. SF thus emerges as a multipurpose tool, a veritable engine of imagination, uncovering, and discovery.

Elise Kraatila

Tampere Institute for Advanced Study

In person

“Earth Was Ever Our Only Home”: Moments of Truth amid Imaginative Play in 21st-century Space Exploration SF

When SF is regarded as a means for imagining futures, its epistemic practice is usually described in terms of thought experiments, “what if?” scenarios, or estranging perspective-taking. It is thus conceptualized as freeform, playful exploration of far-flung visions about as-yet imaginary, deeply speculative futures. As imagining tools, these visions are potentially useful but ultimately ambiguous ways of narrativizing present concerns about the future—especially in these transitory times of “permacrisis”, when any future imaginary feels profoundly uncertain.

In her presentation, Elise Kraatila amends this picture of freeform, playful science-fictional imagination with an observation that SF works also frequently contain gnomic statements: explicit, thematically pregnant evocations of deep conviction. Set amidst far-reaching speculative envisioning, such narrative moments express ideas that, among all the uncertainty and contingency, come across as nonnegotiable truths. To analyze the grounding effect these moments have on speculative imagination, Kraatila compares three recent novels—Kim Stanley Robinson’s *Aurora* (2015), Anthony Doerr’s *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (2021), and Emmi Itäranta’s *Moonday Letters* (2022)—which all contain within their highly speculative space exploration narratives a conviction that Earth will always be humanity’s only home.

Esko Suoranta

Tampere University

In person

From Raatteentie to the Suicide Tower: Imagining Dystopian Democracy with Teemu Kivi’s SF

Dystopian fiction customarily presents democracy as a thing of its fictional past. In the mainstream anglophone tradition, the motif of the authoritarian coup remains dominant: democracy and its institutions are abolished which motivates the resistance of a group of ragtag misfits, who become the focus of the plot. In recent Finnish SF, however, examples are emerging of dystopian SF in which many of the central markers of democracy—representational government, welfare state institutions—remain even as atrocities abound. In these stories, the threats to democracy appear to come from within as the process of democratization is subjected to ideals of national unity, continuity, and productivity, rather than the other way around.

In his presentation, Esko Suoranta analyzes Teemu Kivi’s 2023 short story “Heillä oli Raatteentie, meillä on itsemurhatorni” (“They had the Raatteentie Battle, we have the Suicide Tower”) to argue that in the semi-peripheral context of Finnish SF short fiction affords particular possibilities for democratic imagination that sidestep some of limits of mainstream dystopian and didactic utopian SF. In particular, the affordances for imagining democracy come across in the ways in which Kivi’s SF activates re-interpretations of transitions between history, present, and future.

Markus Laukkanen

Tampere University

In person

Co-Imagining Climate Change: Mediated Negotiation of the meaning of *Game of Thrones*

Is HBO’s popular fantasy TV-series *Game of Thrones*, on a thematic level, about anthropogenic climate change, or is it not? In the context of internet-age media culture, the question cannot be easily answered. The generally agreed upon answer is changeable, open to negotiation. Markus Laukkanen’s presentation explores the features and means of online discourse about *Game of Thrones* as a framework for co-imagining climate change. Participatory audiences attempt to negotiate a shared understanding of the difficult topic by engaging in communal interpretation of a popular SF narrative.

In the negotiation about the meaning of the series, alternative narratives are in contest, and the authors of the most compelling ones are crowned as winners. These narratives are embedded in the mesh of online discourse at large and take on many characteristics of that context. They are recruited to be a part of the so-called online culture war: in this case the debate over the validity of the climate-fiction interpretation of *Thrones* is approached as a hegemonic struggle between climate activism and denial.



Panel 52 Social Change: Challenging Expansionism

Room: Lossi 3-325
Chair: Raili Marling

Kristin Noone

Irvine Valley College
In person

The Tie-In Novels of History: Adaptation, Expansion, and American Exceptionalism in Diane Carey's *Star Trek* Fiction

Sherryl Vint observes that *Star Trek* returns to the past in order to comment on the future. This engagement with the past extends beyond the shows and films, a persistent narrative thread across *Star Trek*'s transmedia landscape. M. Keith Booker briefly examines tie-in novels as one aspect of the cultural phenomenon of *Star Trek*, emphasizing the interconnected nature of transmedia storytelling. Booker observes the deep entwining of *Star Trek* with history, though he focuses on the films and television series; this entwining carries over into the tie-in novels, inviting the questions: whose histories are being told, and how might these choices impact our ability to imagine the future?

Diane Carey's novels, while not officially "canon," have had an extensive impact on the *Star Trek* universe, and therefore offer a valuable example of mythologized history in action. Both John Rieder and Istvan Cicsery-Ronay Jr. note science fiction's roots in colonial adventure narratives; in Rieder's terms, science fiction reflects and contributes to ideological productions about the shape of history, and humanity's ability to reshape it. As Stephen Rabitsch suggests, *Star Trek*'s performance of history constructs and reinforces a specific form of shared cultural identity: an Anglocentric teleology of progress, valorizing ideals of invention, curiosity, and hope while relying on colonial structures and concerned with empire-maintenance. The tie-in novels continue this teleology. Three of Diane Carey's works—*Ancient Blood*, *The Great Starship Race*, and "The Veil at Valcour"—serve as a case study, emphasizing a communal mythology of constructed history centered upon neocolonial ideals of the frontier, discovery, and compassion. However, these values are only learned through interaction with a specifically Anglophone past, exemplified by the American Revolution and the American Civil War, which become foundational myths for *Star Trek*'s idealized future.

Stephen Bruce

Defense Language Institute
Online

Imperial Dreams and Utopian Transitions in Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be Done?*

Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel *What Is to Be Done?* (1863) is often acknowledged for its pioneering socialist, individualist, and feminist content. However, its intricate engagement with imperial transformation merits deeper exploration. My presentation unravels the complex imperial underpinnings of a future utopian narrative included in the novel, focusing on how these visions align with and diverge from historical imperial practices in Russia.

The journey of the novel's heroine Vera Pavlovna from subjugation to independence is punctuated by dreams, in one of which she sees visions of women's evolving status from pre-historic times to the present, before entering a future socialist utopia marked by gender equality. The setting for this utopia is "New Russia," which the author explicitly links to the region of the same name on the shores of the Black Sea in present-day Ukraine—a site, in the author's time, of intensive Russian colonization. The novel portrays the future transition of Crimea and neighboring regions into a zone of egalitarian prosperity and technological advancement—but this transition is fraught with a colonial and assimilationist discourse. The fertile agricultural landscapes of this futuristic New Russia reflect an idealized imperial narrative of converting barren lands into profitable utopias. This vision is exclusively populated by ethnic Russians, mirroring the Russification policies of the Russian Empire, thereby excluding non-Russian ethnicities from this utopian narrative.

Yet, Chernyshevsky's work is not a straightforward imperial endorsement. It weaves imperial and colonial themes into a peaceful socialist future setting, creating an interplay between harsh historical realities and aspirational utopian visions. My presentation will explain how Chernyshevsky uses this futuristic setting to advance but also reimagine the imperialist structures of his time. His novel provides valuable insights into the broader interaction between science fiction and imperial ideologies in Russia and elsewhere.

Frank I. Mueller & Anke Schwarz

University of Amsterdam, Heidelberg University
Online

Decentering Spatial Imaginations Through Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*

Embracing critical future thinking has the potential to stimulate creative visions of different and more just futures in social, political, and ecological terms. Exploring the realm of SF as a genre capable of fostering such critical future thinking raises questions about its application in teaching and learning within Political Geography. Tackling the intersection of space, knowledge, and power, this discipline has traditionally equipped scholars with tools to map socio-spatial processes and phenomena. Within Political Geography's history, cartography has been accounted for as condition of possibility of "modern" statehood, establishing administrative and territorial boundaries while often naturalizing these along geo-morphological elements such as rivers, mountains, or coastlines. More recently, Political Geography has evolved to encompass collective, participatory, and activist mapping techniques aimed at fostering social change. However, current mapping practices have encountered limitations, confined within the boundaries of a Western philosophical worldview that emphasizes isolated and pre-established subjectivities. In this paradigm, mapping is seldom perceived as a dynamic practice capable of nurturing new forms of collectivity—whether they be transgenerational, multispecies, or multilocal. Considering SF as a catalyst for stimulating novel forms of collectivity, we wish to shed light on narrated instances and situations that provoke decentered spatial experiences, imaginations, and representations.

We demonstrate how such an analysis provides incentives to imagine transitions of established geographical concepts, drawing on Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* (2013). We highlight how the novel's ancillary hive mind, which is distributed and yet assembled across multiple bodies, allows for an estranged reflection on two basic geographical concepts, namely, territoriality and void. Both are cornerstones of colonialist spatial appropriation, informing the imagination of vast lands available for absolute control (territory) or absolute ahistorical emptiness, devoid of life (void). Rethinking these concepts through SF, we argue, allows us to expand on Political Geography's potential role in moving away from the monism of human, cis-male, and ultimately colonialist, imaginations and mapping practices of (outer) space.



Panel 53 SF General: Franchise Affordances

Room: Lossi 3-326

Chair: **Simon Spiegel****Jari Käkälä**

University of Helsinki

In person

Transitions from Talking Heads to Inclusive Action: Representation of Heroism in the Second Season of the Apple TV+ “Remix” of Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation*

This presentation examines the way Isaac Asimov’s *Foundation* series (1942–1993) has been adapted—or remixed as the show-runners David S. Goyer and Josh Friedman call it—into a cinematic-scale television series in *Foundation* (Apple TV+, 2021–). As the show has now concluded its second season, further complexities to this process of remixing start to emerge. While the show’s transition toward inclusion and representation is prominent even in the second season, it also seems to accelerate some of the issues present in Asimov’s original. This presentation discusses how the approach to “remix” the original, instead of something that could more traditionally be called an adaptation, affects how the TV version introduces new tensions into the themes of Asimov’s original.

Even as the TV version is careful to take into account cultural shifts that have taken place since the publication of Asimov’s novels—emphasizing inclusivity in terms of race, gender and sexuality—it seems to continuously fall back on very traditional modes of heroism. This is apparent in how the series modernizes Asimov’s characters and their relationships but at the same time leans heavily on action-oriented story structures where solutions imply the reign of individual genius and sudden dramatic reversals of fortunes. The tendency toward such narratives seems further amplified by the commercial necessities of a big-budget TV production and the current entertainment market preference for superhero narratives. Although this type of heroic narrative has acquired darker tones and further depth in various recent superhero franchises, I argue that when the TV remix of *Foundation* makes use of similar dynamics, it seems to deflate some of the story’s potential to counteract heroic-messianic action-adventure stories.

Justice Hagan

Marquette University

In person

Expanding the Franchise: *Monarch* and the Monsterverse Formula

Late in 2023 we saw the premier of the *Monarch: Legacy of Monsters* streaming series. Part of the Monsterverse franchise, this series expands upon stories told in all of the *Godzilla* films of the past decade as well as *Kong: Skull Island*. While each of these films was commercially successful, the *Monarch* series has met with critical acclaim in addition to commercial success. This is due in part to the deeper character development and more refined writing of the series but also because of its efforts to transition the franchise to a lore-building narrative. In all of the films leading up to 2021’s *Godzilla Vs. Kong*, there was a story formula in place that was the franchise’s main holdover from the *Godzilla* and *Kong* films that preceded them throughout the second half of the 20th century: a monster is awakened or provoked because of either human or monster action, that monster arrives to combat humans or another monster in a human space (usually a large city), and after the combat a human/monster equilibrium is reestablished. This formula is adhered to in nearly every incarnation of the films and has been a source of commercial success for decades. *Godzilla Vs. Kong*, while also employing this formula, introduces new narrative stakes to the franchise with the hollow earth story and the revelation that the kong species were also civilization-builders. This change mattered little to audiences, as the core formula was still present and resulted in commercial success for the film. *Monarch* does feature monster combat, but the primary purpose of the series is the expansion of the history and lore of the franchise. I argue that the choice to do this as a streaming series allows for the films to maintain near-exclusive dedication to spectacle while the series creates a larger storyworld for those interested in the spaces and events surrounding the films.

Sylvia Wrigley

Speculative fiction author and an independent researcher

In person

Navigating the Final Frontier: The Journey into Old Age in *Star Trek: Picard*

This paper explores themes of leadership, legacy, and the human aging process in *Star Trek: Picard*. Traditionally, *Star Trek* has suffered from persistent ageist tropes, most blatantly celebrating old age in alien races while depicting human elders as frail, emotionally unstable and unfit for leadership. *Star Trek: Picard* explores human old age through the character of Jean-Luc Picard, who is forced to confront the challenges of aging: loss, regret and the need for reinvention. As he reunites with the crew of *The Next Generation*, the series has the opportunity to explore many facets of old age and aging across a range of personalities. This analysis focuses on the first series and whether *Star Trek: Picard* promises a more nuanced view of old age or reinforces those very stereotypes that have dogged the *Star Trek* universe from the beginning. The author seeks to contribute a deeper understanding of how popular science fiction influences and reflects societal attitudes towards aging. *Star Trek: Picard* may not have broken the barriers of ageist stereotypes, but the first series undeniably sets a course for new discussions.

Friday, May 10, 19.00-23.00

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Panel 54: SFRA Conference Banquet

Room: Lossi 25

SFRA Conference Banquet (University of Tartu Museum)

Awards

Socializing

Posthumanist Hangover



Panel 55 Social Change: Dealing with Destruction

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: **David Shipko****Zea Miller**

University of Florida

In person

The Societies of Destruction

Science fiction narratives featuring destruction have found increasing commercial success. Across several popular genres, in fact, when the entire societal structure of a narrative pivots on structural power and its exercise against destruction, an anatomy of power establishes technologies and teams that preserve, protect, defend, establish, or reclaim control from devastation and annihilation. Destruction, whether inspiring threat thereof or in service thereto, forces all issues aside. Thus, destruction is at once the ultimate threat to control and its absolute tool. While action, disaster, fantasy, horror, and superhero narratives can center on existential threats, the irrational, impossible, mythical, paranormal, and magical do not reflect societal possibilities in the same way science fiction can. By allowing us to imagine the future of the future, when the solutions and the consequences issuing therefrom rest alongside the destructive challenges of today, we see forecasts of the societal transitions that either begin or relapse in the face of destruction. Just as Foucault suggests that society transitioned to discipline from sovereignty and Deleuze suggests we are entering control from discipline, I suggest that control is already facing destructive challenges, which we can see in popular science fiction. Accordingly, this talk will explore the deployment, seizure, reclamation, and loss of power as supervening functions of destruction across popular science fiction texts while advancing and interrogating the societal implications through theory, ultimately revealing how futuristic narratives productively mirror our society in which destructive forces now shape our experience and how the solutions thereto are equally reflected in the genre.

Jerry Määttä

Stockholm University

In person

Utopia at War: Armed Conflict in Contemporary Swedish Mainstream Dystopias

In the last two decades, an increasing number of Swedish mainstream authors have turned to dystopias and science fiction to discuss impending future threats and challenges against Swedish society. As Sweden and the other Nordic countries have often been seen as almost utopian model societies, with a strong belief in progress and social justice, these pessimistic depictions of a future Sweden are perhaps especially intriguing.

While the topics and scenarios in contemporary Swedish mainstream dystopias range from climate change and pandemics to artificial intelligence, surveillance, immigration, xenophobia, and radically changed gender roles, the aim of this paper is to discuss some of the dystopias dealing with armed conflict – either civil war in Sweden or Sweden being invaded by other countries. Focusing primarily on the works of Jerker Virdborg, such as *Svart krabba* (Black Crab, 2002), *Skyddsrummet Luxgatan* (The Bomb Shelter on Luxgatan, 2015), and *Sommaren, syster* (The Summer, Sister, 2017), but also David Norlin's *Dagar utan ljus, nätter utan mörker* (Days Without Light, Nights Without Darkness, 2016) and some popular fiction novels by Lars Wilderäng, the paper explores how a nation that hasn't experienced war for more than two centuries is increasingly imagined as a future battleground. Some of the aspects investigated are the various war and civil war scenarios depicted in the novels and short stories, the ways in which armed conflict is represented, and especially the differences in style between literary and popular fiction narratives of war.

Building on Tom Moylan's *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (2000) and the notion of the critical dystopia, this paper will not only focus on the novels' dystopian depictions of armed conflict, but also explore the ways in which they can be said to obliquely promote utopian impulses or possibilities for hope and change.

Keren Omry

University of Haifa

In person

States of Transition: Alternate Histories of Israel

This paper seeks to explore the ethical stakes of imagining alternate histories and of aestheticizing the moral and territorial transitions that this this imagining requires. Focusing specifically on *Other Covenants: Alternate Histories of the Jewish People* (2022), an anthology of allohistorical stories from 2022 that imagine an array of different Israels. I write this abstract while still reeling from the unconscionable terrorist attacks in early October 2023 in Israel. This paper will look at stories which offer critical interventions into the narratives of nationhood, security, responsibility, and justice. Reading these stories today means reading through layers of emotional attachment which have become part of the critical exercise. Rita Felski writes that “[t]aking attachment seriously—which does not mean denying ambivalence, friction, or discomfort— means grappling with the issue of what carries weight. It has both affective and ethical force.” (Felski 2020, 4) This paper proposes to grapple with this force in order to see what kinds of imaginative shifts, transitions, and transformations these stories offer and in turn demand. How do the narratives of nationhood change in the face of lived history and how do the structures of science fiction and alternate history offer a language that can contain these changes?

Panel 56 CoFuturisms: Afrofuturism's Global Connections

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: **Andrew Erickson****Samuel Chirtel**

Indiana University Bloomington

In person

The Edge of Cognition: Asymptotic Re-enchantment in Neo-Lovecraftian Weird Fiction by Black Authors

Why is the famously racist and reactionary H.P. Lovecraft still so influential in contemporary speculative fiction, including the work of progressive Black authors such as Victor LaValle, N.K. Jemisin, and Nnedi Okorafor? My close reading and computational text analysis (primarily topic modeling using the program MALLET) of several of Lovecraft's key stories alongside revisions of the Lovecraftian by contemporary Black authors provide two answers to this question. The first is that racism itself shares many similarities with Lovecraft's Old Ones; it is an undying and baffling force by which the distant past exerts horrific and often clandestine influence on the present. Jemisin's *Great Cities* novels make this parallel most apparent by making Cthulhu's city of R'lyeh the ally of gentrifiers and alt-right trolls in contemporary New York City. The second answer is that Lovecraft's work illustrates a philosophy of "asymptotic reenchantment." Asymptotic re-enchantment is a term of my own coinage and refers to texts which begin firmly immersed in the modern episteme of science and technology but which then progressively approach the border between this episteme and systems of knowledge based on magic, religion, and/or the occult, which are often explicitly associated with BIPOC people, without permanently transitioning into these non-scientific worldviews and becoming unrealizable fantasy. This concept draws on Max Weber's famous work on "disenchantment" and a robust series of proposed re-enchantments by scholars such as Sylvia Federici, Emily Alder, and Timothy Morton. Lovecraft thus provides contemporary BIPOC and/or progressive authors a method to promote Utopian alternatives to the racialized scientism and secularism of neoliberalism without abandoning science wholesale. The emotional and political response of the bulk of popular SF writers to this transition has slowly shifted over the last hundred years from one of abject and apocalyptic horror in Lovecraft's work to one of revolutionary exuberance today.

Sumeyra Buran

University of Tampa

Online

Afro-Turkish Transitions: From Historical Diaspora to Afrotolian Futurism

The narrative of Afro-Turks reflects a rich tapestry of cultural transitions, paralleling the experiences of Afropeans in Europe as they navigate the waters of identity, belonging, and future-making. This presentation explores the concept of Afrotolian Futurism, a term I coin to articulate the unique transitions of Afro-Turks and their diaspora into a posthuman future. Delving into representations in Turkish cinema and the TV film series *Fairy Mom* (2003), we see an Afrofuturist vision of harmonious coexistence among diverse beings—humans, nonhumans, animal humans, and fairy-humans—each with their unique colors and stories.

Drawing from Donna Haraway's ideas on living in response-ability and Karen Barad's notion of intra-action, Afrotolian Futurism reimagines the posthuman condition, offering a space where Afro-Turks, or "Afrotolians," intersect with global Afropean narratives. This investigation reveals the role of posthumanism in empowering these communities, enabling them to construct narratives of resilience amidst ongoing societal transitions. It reflects on the potential for posthumanism to interrogate the essence of being in an entangled world, where identity and affiliation are in constant flux.

The concept of Afrotolian Futurism also serves as a bridge, connecting the historical diaspora of Afro-Turks to the broader discourse of Afrofuturism. It opens a dialogue on how the transition from historical displacement to futuristic imaginings can be a powerful means of addressing contemporary challenges faced by Afropeans and the global diaspora. This presentation posits Afrotolian Futurism as a transformative narrative framework that not only envisions a utopian coexistence but also redefines the contours of identity and cultural affiliation in an ever-evolving global society.

Li Guangy

Chongqing University

Online

Africa, Third World, Global South: Rethinking the Possibility of Science Fiction Realism

As a controversial view of literary creation, "science fiction realism" does not necessarily fetter the imagination of sci-fi literature. On the contrary, if realism, as a tradition of human literature, fully nourishes science fiction with its rich connotations and diverse forms, this genre will enable people to explore the laws governing the real world and satisfy their need for self-expression in an era conducive to the development of science fiction. In this regard, African science fiction, emergent along with the rise of "Afrofuturism," has inherited the realist tradition of African literature's critical search for totality in its unique path, and is therefore worth learning for contemporary Chinese sci-fi literature. For the latter, African science fiction exemplifies how to draw nutrients from local knowledge, imagination and practice, and more importantly, it constitutes a revelation towards the future. In the historical memory of the Third World, the common reality of the Global South, and the "great changes unseen in a century," China and Africa are each other's significant source of experience and imagination. This is a major opportunity for Chinese sci-fi literature and culture to liberate its imagination, to be creative, to confront the world's totality, and to envision a new world.

Panel 57 Environmental SF: Imagination, Storytelling & Responsibility

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: **Beatriz Hermida Ramos****Jaime Babb**

York University

Online

Becoming Otherwise: Imagining Nonhuman Embodiment Through Science Fiction

Science fiction has taken on a new theoretical importance during the Anthropocene, with various scholars arguing that its status as a “hybrid” genre between literature and science, the human and the nonhuman, makes it uniquely well-suited to conceptualizing the present. One underexplored aspect of this positionality is SF’s potential to imagine nonhuman entities on their own terms, with embodiments, interiorities, agencies, and minds of their own. This theme has very deep roots in the history of the genre and should be given a greater urgency as our interactions with nonhuman entities take on an increasingly (self-)destructive character. To this end, the present paper traces attempts to imagine nonhuman embodiment and mentality throughout the history of SF, paying especial attention to the works of Camille Flammarion, Olaf Stapledon, and KA Applegate. It shall be argued that such works unavoidably employ a sort of literary ‘synaesthesia’ in an effort to convey nonhuman sensory worlds in terms of human sense experience, and that attempts to imagine other mentalities tend likewise to refer to the author’s own human (and culturally mediated) baseline; therefore, the authors’ imaginations must be regarded as being constrained by their own biology, as well as by the reigning epistemic considerations at their time and place of writing. Nevertheless, such experiments in imagination can help to fulfill philosopher Baptiste Morizot’s exhortation to “[try] out practices, types of language, processes, devices, and experiences that can make us *feel and live* from the point of view of interdependences” with other species, in hopes of forming a “multispecies *ubuntu*.” The potential for more immersive imaginative experiments using visual media or virtual reality will also be briefly discussed.

Aidan Diamond

University of Southern California

In person

Storytelling as Counter-Apocalyptic Practice

Apocalypse theorists generally concur that apocalypse represents or enacts a “clean break with history” (Gomel 2010; Jones 2020, 35; Kojève 1969; Paik 2010; Pitetti 2017). Apocalypse is thus an end to the burden of history—an end to the archive—and its record of sins. However, apocalypse narratives frequently challenge this immolation of the archive within their diegeses by having their characters engage in the practice of storytelling: characters in these narratives tell stories to themselves, each other, or the audience about the world that existed before the moment of the apocalyptic break, how or why apocalypse has transformed their world, and what comes next. The practice of storytelling thus reconstitutes—though it cannot replicate—the archive and renders it in a form that can be preserved with accessible technologies for a future yet to arrive.

This paper examines the diegetic practice of storytelling as a counter-apocalyptic practice in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam* trilogy, wherein the practice of storytelling is deployed as a means of writing against apocalypse, and thereby writing a future into existence—storytelling as the process of transition. Each volume of Atwood’s trilogy is narrated as a story being told to other characters or to the teller themselves, but storytelling really takes on world-shaping abilities in *MaddAddam*, when Toby takes over telling stories to the genetically-engineered Crakers, teaching them how to tell their own stories of their existence, their past, and what they hope for in the future. *MaddAddam*’s story of apocalypse concludes only when the Crakers take ownership of storytelling practice, suggesting that the apocalypse itself concludes, and the future beyond it begins, once those who survive it are able to reconstitute the archive and build it anew. In this way, the *MaddAddam* trilogy invests the practice of storytelling with power enough to counter apocalypse, to end it and write a future beyond its horrors.

Essi Vatiolo

Tampere University

In person

Towards Future-oriented Responsibility in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*

In Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, Crake saves the planet at the expense of humanity and Jimmy thinks he should have saved humanity—at the expense of the planet. Like their game of Blood and Roses where humanity’s greatest achievements and atrocities are pitted against one another, so is humanity and the rest of the planet with all its lifeforms pitted impossibly against one another with collateral damage taken to the extreme. The deterioration of ethics to cost-benefit analysis turns out to be one of the driving forces of all the problems the society is facing. This is compounded by the focus on the individual, with Jimmy and Crake endowed with exceptional agency over the fate of humanity, with the mundane complicity of the masses, corporations and societies in failing to stop climate change and harmful genetic engineering lurking just at the corner of the eye.

In my presentation I will explore transitions of responsibility in *Oryx and Crake*’s both in the narrative past, how that fails the narrative present and the demands that suggests for future-oriented responsibility. The failure to stop the extinction of humans highlights not only the problems of responsibility in the face of long-term threats like climate change, but also suggests directions into which responsibility should evolve to prevent future threats. I will discuss how the dramatic setting of Crake’s plague and hinging it on the success or failure of two individual characters, highlights and obscures the less tangible effects of climate change and the more complex web of causes, temporalities, complicities and responsibilities of multitudes of people, corporate entities and social structures. I will consider how all these juxtapositions showcase the absurdity of individual responsibility, personal culpability, or cost-benefit analysis as a foundation for future-oriented responsibility, and what kinds of alternatives they point to.



Panel 58 SF General: Stylistic Investigations

Room: Lossi 3-325

Chair: Kinga Földvary

Elizabeth Oakes

University of Helsinki

In person

Environmental Change and Vocabularies of Transition in Japanese and American Science Fiction of the 1970s and 2010s

Since the latter half of the 20th century, rising awareness of and knowledge about environmental issues such as pollution and climate change have prompted science fictional speculation on their potential to instigate social and personal transitions. Time and culture deeply influence how such transitions are understood and depicted at the levels of language and theme. This study argues that shifting vocabularies of transition reflect discrete thematizations of environmental change that entail different possibilities for reacting to and interacting with such change. While these vocabularies of transition differ across time, they show similarity between Japanese and American science fiction.

This stylistic study proceeds from the research questions: 1. How do the words used to describe environmental change differ across cultures and over time? and 2. How does thematization of environmental change differ on these axes? It compares the language in passages of environmental upheaval and change in Komatsu Sakyo's *Japan Sinks* (日本沈没) (1973), Shinkai Makoto's novelization of *Weathering With You* (天気の子) (2019), Richard A. Lupoff's *The Crack in the Sky* (1976), and Jeff VanderMeer's *Borne* (2017). All texts are studied in their original language to describe how differences at the lexical level reflect differences in thematic concern.

The novels published in the 1970s focus on what abrupt and violent environmental change reveals about shifting social conditions through the lens of characters affected by, but distinct from, their environments. In contrast, the novels published in the 2010s evidence a shift to depicting embodied changes in characters as contiguous with or embedded in their environment to reflect concerns about incremental but profound environmental change. Distinct vocabularies of transition connect these thematizations to characters' agential possibilities in changing social and environmental conditions.

Yuheng Ko

University of California-Riverside

Online

Lexical Invention versus Plot Innovation: Two Stylistic Strategies of Transitioning Indigenous Chinese Sciences in Ken Liu's *Dandelion Dynasty* series and Weiyu's *Great Fable* Tetralogy

Recent scholarship has underscored the significance of indigenous SF in diversifying the genre of science fiction and contesting the predominance of modern scientific discourse. However, one pivotal question remains relatively unexplored as to what changes are made to the techno-scientific motifs during their transition from premodern origins to contemporary texts. To what extent could a subject matter persist when adapted to different stylistic conditionings, including the generic framework of modern SF and the reception of 21st century readership? Through the lens of stylistics, this essay seeks to explore the dialectics of subject and style in two contrasting strategies of transitioning premodern scientific tropes from ancient Chinese texts in the *Dandelion Dynasty* series by Ken Liu and the *Great Fable* tetralogy written Chinese by Weiyu (尾鱼), a contracted writer on a major Chinese internet literature platform.

Emphasizing the integration of the natural and the artificial grounded on biomimicry, organic materials, and renewable energies, Ken Liu's silkpunk aesthetic aims to create a fresh technological vocabulary in envisioning a non-Western modernity. Despite its severance of the techno-scientific motifs from their native contexts, Liu's approach adeptly fuses alternative history and Western-fantasy world-building in plot construction, thereby lending substantial narrative weight to an invented lexicon that might otherwise lack grounding. Unlike Liu, who undertakes a threefold transition (linguistic, cultural, and temporal) as an American writer addressing American readers, Weiyu cannily taps into the linguistic and cultural repository shared by her Sinophone readers, taking a narrative strategy that stresses plot innovation in rationalizing supernatural accounts in prehistoric myths as historical feats accomplished by lost indigenous sciences. In contrast to Liu's lexical invention, Weiyu's linguistic originality is expressed through the elevation of the contemporary spoken language, incorporating internet slangs and popular memes into skillfully crafted dialogues to achieve vivid characterization. Coupled with Liu's new vocabulary invented for alternative history, Weiyu's choice of contemporary language to reconnect the contemporary China to its classical past holds profound implications for SF poetics: not only has "cognition" been refashioned to accommodate different styles of inquiry in premodern scientific traditions, but "estrangement" has also transcended beyond futuristic visions to encompass alternative historicity and contemporary folktales as well.

Xia Zijian

Zhejiang University

In person

The New Path of World Building with Chinese Characteristic: The Transitions of Taiwan Science Fiction with the example of *The City Trilogy* by Chang His-kuo

The emergence of science fiction literature in Taiwan in the 1960s raised the problem of organically combining the exogenous "science fiction" with literary traditions. In the 1980s, science fiction writers in Taiwan put forward the creative methodology of integrating Chinese cultural tradition with science fiction literature. The most prominent example of this practice is *The City Trilogy* (《城》科幻三部曲) of Chang Hsi-kuo (張系國), the "Father of Taiwan Science Fiction." Chang's works are characterized by "Chinese national characteristics" and "romantic feelings of history," and they are the forerunners of Chinese-cultural sci-fi in Taiwan science fiction. In response to his initiative of building sci-fi literary theories based on traditional Chinese culture, they became the most prominent works of Taiwan's science fiction literature in the 1980s and the 1990s. Chang's "Chinese flavor" is most intuitively embodied in the fictional world constructed by his masterpiece, *The City Trilogy*. The alienated "Huhui World" ("呼回世界") in the trilogy is characterized by the use of the "national characteristics" and theoretical claims. The historical language, the author's narrative intervention from an omniscient perspective, and the filling of the world's details with classical Chinese culture are examples of its Chinese national characteristics. Thus, Chang's trilogy has become a milestone in the shift from Westernization to Sinicization in Taiwan science fiction literature.

Saturday, May 11, 9.00-10.30



Panel 59 SF General: Weird Black Studies

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Chair: **Alison Sperling**

A Conversation with Alison Sperling (in person), **Stefanie Dunning** (in person), & **andré carrington** (online)

Though perhaps too early to say, Weird studies may be an emergent field of study that is at once adjacent to other genre studies fields like science fiction and the fantastic, as well as an increasingly theoretical mode operating across disciplines like geography, philosophy, gender studies, and the environmental humanities. In this conversational format, which will be written in the form of an exchange over the coming months in preparation for the conference, these three will examine how the study of the Weird is (or is not fully yet) in dialogue with Black studies. Beginning from a foundational claim that the Weird is a category both literary and more broadly in culture bound up with the problem of otherness and especially race (thinking of course of the most infamous and problematic progenitor of the Weird, H.P. Lovecraft), they will ask of one another how they see weirdness both Old and New as emerging out of Black geographies and repertoires as well as by anti-Blackness, citing contemporary Black studies scholarship like that of Christina Sharpe, Fred Moten, Kara Keeling, Saidiya Hartman, and following Dunning's recent work in her book *Black to Nature*, thinkers of afropessimism like Jared Sexton and Frank Wilderson III, as well as speculative writers like Frank Yerby, George Schuyler, Misha Green, and Octavia E. Butler. Asking about the role of race and of Blackness in contemporary formulations of the Weird and of literary criticism of Weird fiction, this (largely scripted and edited) conversation will attempt to think more deeply than has yet been done about Blackness and weirdness and the relation of this to genre and to contemporary weird cultural production.



Panel 60 Social Change: Activist Interventions

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: Sang-Keun Yoo

Camilla Brudin Borg

University of Gothenburg

Online

Utopian Futures: Metaphors of Change in Swedish Visionary Utopian Good Futures

Can speculative utopian fiction, be of any use for societal change? Luke Godhe and Michael Goode, from Critical Futures Studies, argue that utopias can, and should “be deployed in the service of opening up the field of imagined futures” as they can “expand our horizons.” However, others have questioned the utopian imaginations to have the potential to create something new, as Frederic Jameson in *Archaeology of the Future* (2005) when he states that “even our wildest imaginings are all collages of experience, constructs made up of bits and pieces of the here and now,” and that “at best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment.” Extended horizons, something completely new, or “just bits and pieces of the here and now”: what are the limits and possibilities inherent in the genre of utopian fictive story?

In the interdisciplinary citizen science project *Utopian Stories*, we have collected a large number of utopian stories, starting 2021 through an open website and a short story competition. The instruction was that the utopia should be a fictive story about a future life that is good of *both* humans and the planet. In this presentation, the utopian stories material will be analysed and presented. The core question will be if visionary utopian stories can help to create new perspectives on transition, or open different possibilities to understand alternative sustainable path’ to alternative futures? To investigate this I will follow the utopias use of metaphors of change

Pavla Veselá

Charles University Prague

Online

“O Danbury, To What Shall I Compare Thee?”: Daniel Berrigan’s Prison Poems

“Prison time,” Michael Hardt (1997) wrote, “is the obvious form of punishment in our world” (64). Empty and homogeneous, it lacks utopian events of historical time. Although there is a difference between being in and out of prison, rather than another space governed by its own laws, the prison—as Hardt also noted—signifies the greatest concentration of our society’s power dynamics and “its most realized form” (66). The time of the prison exposes the deadness of the historical continuum: “A prisoner’s days run, / the weeks a slow drawn pain, / the years standing like a stone” (Berrigan, “Patience, Hard Virtue”). Still, mechanical time breaks down. While this and other poems by Daniel Berrigan such as “Tulips in the Prison Yard” or “A Typical 6:00 P.M. in the Fun House” parallel survival in prison with living in the “methodical rampage” (“In Prison, As Out, Time Is of the Essence”) of the outside world where everyone “carries the war around with him” (“You Could Make a Song of It, A Dirge of It, a Heartbreaker of It”), there are events, encounters that break through the walls of the fated clock time into historical, heterogeneous time. Natural phenomena from stars to skunks and jail-yard blooms, memories of relatives and anti-war activists, deaths and visions of children rising from the My Lai ditch—all arrest, transfigure and transmogryfy prison time, and illustrate how Berrigan’s poetry—like the prose of critical science fiction - enables counter-hegemonic cognition and estrangement.

Moritz Ingwersen

Dresden University of Technology

In person

Mundane Transitions: SF and Emancipatory Worldmaking in the Now and Near

This contribution will begin by revisiting the Mundane Manifesto put forward by Geoff Ryman and others in 2004 as a stepping stone towards examining the resurgence of slow, mundane, pragmatic, realist, and activist modalities in contemporary critical futurisms—from Afro- and Indigenous Futurisms to Crip Futurities and Solarpunk. While there is much to be said about the need for and the power of wild imagination and shifting the stakes of the impossible in sf confrontations with the climate catastrophe and systemic injustices, critical futurisms also proceed from a skepticism towards generic tropes of techno-magical exuberance, far-future worldbuilding, and fast-paced progress narratives. Anchoring the urgent transition towards more ecologically sustainable and equitable worlds in the immediate conditions of the now and near can be regarded as an invitation for participatory, situated, and emancipatory worldmaking that directly links up with the crucial ongoing work of local activisms, communities, and knowledges. This does not entail a rejection of the creative and critical power of estrangement but, quite to the contrary, a call to denormalize the taken-for-granted modes by which sf shapes dominant techno- and eco-social imaginaries and to shift the boundaries of what counts as sf thinking in the first place. This argument resonates in critical interventions such as Martine Syms’ *Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto* (2013), Neema Githere’s theory of “afropresentism” (2017), Isabelle Stengers’ *Manifesto for Slow Science* (2018), Chelsea Vowel’s description of her work as “Métis/nêhijaw pragmatism” (2022), or Commando Jugendstil’s celebration of solarpunk as a counterhegemonic movement with narratives based “in near futures in which humanity fights against the climate crisis and reshapes and revolutionizes the system” (2022). Drawing on examples that include Tochi Onyebuchi’s *How to Pay Reparations: A Documentary* (2020), Chelsea Vowel’s *niskôhâcikan* (2022), and Petra Kuppers’ *Science Fiction and Disability: Engage!* (2022), I will conclude by illustrating how mundane, slow, and pragmatic approaches to sf raise models of activisms that also play themselves out on the level of literary form.



Panel 61 Gendered & Queer SF: Questioning Gender Roles

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: **Judith Rauscher****James H. Thrall**

Knox College

Online

What to Do About the Boys: Mystical Aspects of Gender Segregation in Pamela Sargent, Sherri Tepper, and Joan Slonczewski

A common trope of feminist science fiction dating back at least to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* and Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* in the early twentieth century, and reoccurring as recently as Naomi Alderman's 2016 *The Power*, female-generated gender segregation or separation poses a particular imaginative challenge to authors: what should they do with the gender identified as male? Understood to be a troublesome force and yet often also seen as necessary for propagation of the species, males—and the need to safely corral, control, or dispense with them—present a central problem of plotting and execution. This paper focuses on three novels from the 1980s that explore transitions into and out of situations of gender division and separation, with particular attention to their incorporation of forms of (especially female) spirituality or mysticism as means of distinguishing females from males, and of establishing female prominence. Sherri Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988) restricts males to militarized towns modeled on Roman camps, while women reside in their own separated towns. In *The Shore of Women* (1986), Pamela Sargent places females in high-tech enclaves while males roam in hunter-gatherer bands outside. *A Door into Ocean* (1986) by Joan Slonczewski imagines a water-covered moon inhabited by environmentally attuned female Sharers threatened by the patriarchal military forces of another planet. In all three novels, key characters engage questions of violence, sexuality, gender-identity, and human definition as they experience personal transitions to new states of understanding and possibility that, in turn, help drive societal change. This paper examines preoccupations and concerns of feminism's Second Wave, with particular attention to the perspective of theologian Mary Daly (1928-2010), while also interrogating the binary assumptions of this earlier period from the more complicated terrain of contemporary gender theory.

Ibtisam Ahmed

University of Nottingham

Online

Moving on from Masculinity – Exploring Change in Patrick Ness's *Chaos Walking* trilogy and *More Than This*.

As an author who has written in multiple genres, Patrick Ness has a diverse bibliography, but even within this diversity, he has often returned to similar themes. Masculinity is a topic that he has thoughtfully engaged with in many of his works. In this presentation, I look at how two of his SF texts grapple with masculinity as a transitional space.

In the *Chaos Walking* trilogy, Todd Hewitt is about to reach adulthood on a planet that he has been told is only inhabited by male human colonists. Over the course of the story, he learns the truth of the colony and its relationship with the planet's omnipresent telepathic phenomenon of Noise. Through his journey, he grapples with, and ultimately rejects, the expectations of militant colonial masculinity on which his society is built, instead transitioning towards a radical and revolutionary politic informed by eco-sustainable feminist decoloniality. His relationship with his masculinity, which starts as a seemingly apolitical and individual dynamic, changes into a socio-political one.

In *More Than This*, Seth supposedly drowns in the USA only to awaken alone on an abandoned post-apocalyptic English street which he takes to be hell. He gradually learns the grim truth about his surroundings, including the explanation of his society's collapse. At the same time, he reflects on how his loved one's discomfort with his queerness led to his initial "death". He too ultimately rejects the expectations of masculinity imposed on him, albeit through a journey that is more intimate and personal than Todd's planetwide revolution.

Ultimately, the two characters moving away from rigid norms of masculinity—Todd via a wider social upheaval, Seth via an individual journey of growth—are emancipatory, radical, and aspirational.

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Panel 62 SF General: Beyond Prediction: a Roundtable on Speculative Divination

Room: Jakobi 2-226

Amy Cutler, Francis Gene-Rowe, David M. Higgins, Rebekah Sheldon, Llew Watkins, Samuel Chirtel (all in person)

What is the relationship between sf and divination? In what ways do speculative divinatory practices challenge, expand, and transform our thinking?

In "Further Consideration on Afrofuturism," Kwodwo Eshun notes that, in addition to its circumscription of history, Capital's power "functions through the envisioning, management, and delivery of reliable futures." Fisher/Eshun's notion of SF capital tells us that neoliberalism thrives off its positive feedback with future-oriented media, using it to fuel its schematic of causality. No wonder, then, at the contemporary turn to (decolonial, feminist, queer, etc.) knowledge practices as alternatives to capitalist causality and prognostication.

Of course, not all sf plays into this feedback loop. We propose to use the space and time of this session to think with, about, and toward sf that challenges/escapes/undoes capitalist prediction. We are interested in exploring the confluences between sf and divination as dual sites of interest in causality within complex systems, the forms of knowledge, scientific literacy (Dillon, "Imagining Indigenous Futurisms"), and being in the world that accrue around divinatory thinking and practice.

Topics discussed will include: uncovering the historical and contemporary presence of speculative divination in sf texts; divination in/as sf practice (Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, Carrack's *Rook & Rose* series); science fiction theory's founding fantasy phobia and its challenge in contemporary writers (e.g., Larissa Lai); comparing the "quest for certainty" in climate modelling & prediction technologies with different temporal explorations of climate soothsaying; oracle texts as speculative databases (Delany's *Nova*, Dick's *A Maze of Death*) or vectors of experimental game design; patternings of change in Buddhist and Daoist thought; speculative divination and/as counterculture; and more.



Panel 63 Social Change: Alternative Histories & Materialities

Room: Lossi 3-328

Chair: **Gabriel Burrow****Kenneth Hanshew**

University of Regensburg

In person

Alternative Facts in Czech and Polish Social Science Fiction

Unlike Isaac Asimov's broad conception of social science fiction (1953), the Polish and Czech equivalents of social science fiction, *Fantastyka socjologiczna* and *SF sociální*, are more restrictive in their definition of the subgenre. Two of the most prominent Polish SF scholars maintain Polish social SF originated in the writings of several authors in the 1970s and 1980s as a study of the mechanisms of control in contemporary society as a type of "political writing hiding itself in the clothes of SF" (Smuszkiewicz/Niewiadowski 1990). It comes as no surprise then that the work of the most famous of these authors, Janusz Zajdel, has been considered as a specific parody of Geirek's socialist rule before the rise of Solidarity (Parowski 2004) and Zajdel's fictional societies viewed as a metonym for Poland (Szczerbakiewicz 2016). A similar tendency to showcase the national specificity may be observed in Czech responses to Ivan Kmínek's and other Czech writers' SF, even though there is no formal rigid Czech definition of social SF. This paper argues that the social SF of these "small literatures" is much more than allusions to contemporaneous political events and socialism in Poland and Czechoslovakia – it is a thought laboratory for examining the universal mechanisms of building a society, transitioning from individuals to become a collective. The study revisits Zajdel's, Kmínek's and others works to examine the role of foundational myths and alternative facts in creating social cohesion in their alternative societies and means of resisting them. In so doing, it will be seen that literatures on the periphery also have "universally significant, intellectual, aesthetic and social value" (Remenyi 1953), value underestimated both nationally and internationally.

Oliver Rowe

University of Tartu

In person

**"Things happen fast, during the time of transition":
"Historicity" and Political Transitions in Philip K. Dick's
*The Man in the High Castle***

In Philip K. Dick's alternate history novel *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), in which the Axis Powers were victorious in the Second World War and now possess global hegemony, elite political transitions are pushed to the sidelines of the book's plot. This presentation argues that this can be seen as intentional, reinforcing Dick's suggestions, both in *High Castle* and his other works, that transitions of such magnitude, whilst doubtlessly significant, are the result of historical and circumstantial accident.

The key to Dick's understanding of political-historic transitions arguably comes in the form of his characters' musings on "historicity"—the value awarded to an object based on its usage in significant (in the historical meaning of the word) events. An ordinary gun, for example, has no historicity, until it is wielded successfully in an assassination attempt of a president, at which point it becomes an item of intrigue, representing a clear point of divergence from the previous universe it was a part of. For most people, in Dick's eyes, the resultant connotation between the object and the incident of its use is itself a vehicle for thinking about a different reality than the current one. This is power of a different form than the political kind represented in *High Castle*, because it pertains to the psyche of individuals (and individual "ordinary" people), over formal state-governmental structures. The result in the novel is that these non-political-elite people are depicted as having a fascination with *objects* associated with (genuine) events of historical significance alongside a fascination with a *world* or universe that does not exist but then speculate upon how it might. This, not formal political transitions, seem to therefore be the ultimate motivator in wider societal change, an interesting message made more profound considering the novel's own wider historical context.

Alan Lovegreen

Orange Coast College

In person

**Future Debris: The Residual Material Cultures in William
Gibson's Jackpot novels.**

In the penultimate chapter of William Gibson's *The Peripheral* (2014), a circle of excavators—antiquated earthmovers relocated on the nanomolecular scale from their subterranean tombs—are frozen in *rigor vitae* with scoops raised skyward. Their recovery by autonomous "assemblers," which seem all too human in choosing to raise up nostalgia engines of material culture, are situated amidst hundreds of other referenced pieces of the past (a 2009 quarter, lace evoking a Victorian rail station, opera cosplay). And thus, Gibson's new futurism becomes a curatorial exercise – both a loving study of nineteenth and twentieth objects as well as a roadmap for science fiction criticism's role in excavating the future.

This, I argue, is a departure from his last trilogy's present-day settings and psychosocial pressures. Gibson's so-called Blue Ant Trilogy (2003-2010) shows distinctly Baudrillardian concerns for the loss of cultural originals and their copies, a late-stage order of simulacra where the threat is finding only the selfsame, globalist, globalized products no matter where one lands.

That anxiety regarding the erasure of bespoke, regionally-based original "things" undergoes a notable transition for Gibson's first two installments of the *Jackpot* trilogy. A broader social obsession with distinct and often arcane physical objects becomes a complex conversion interface, a fastidious coping mechanism grounded in antiquated material cultures that characters relentlessly memorialize and reanimate.

These tangibles and their histories are especially instructive. The late Mark Fisher warned that the study of SF must increasingly explore stories of its own history instead of acting as a bellwether or protean space for radical breaches of mind and culture, and Gibson's *Jackpot* and its associated flotsam mediate between the failures of the genre and civilization itself, all through the haptics of past object permanence.



Panel 64 Environmental SF: Utopian (Eco)technologies

Room: Lossi 3-319

Chair: **Sheryl N. Hamilton****Timothy S. Miller**

Florida Atlantic University,

Online

Plant Consciousness: Recognizing Plants in Botanical Fiction

Fictions that strive to write the unwritable plant mind imagine different modes of consciousness and being, or hope that we might communicate more meaningfully with plants. Whether or not plants can be understood as themselves “conscious” in any capacity, our own consciousness of plants can be enhanced by imagining them so: I argue that the more agentive plants that we find across the long history of speculative fiction can provoke new and increasingly urgent considerations of the intertwining of human and plant life. Contemporary speculative genres such as science fiction, fantasy, and horror have generated an uncountable number of non-realist plants that, as frivolous and bizarre as some may seem, can provide new ways of re-enchanting—and returning us to—the real plants with which we inhabit the planet. Freed from the constraints of both realism and the limited range of behaviors and chemical structures belonging to existing terrestrial species, plants in SF might possess the capacity to speak human language; locomote as they please; terrify and threaten us with violence; build their own technological civilizations; travel the stars; and much more.

Part of a larger project on “plant consciousness,” this paper considers how secondary world fantasy might invite a re-enchantment of reality and a rewilding of the imagination, in conjunction with the no less imaginative worldbuilding of Richard Powers’s more realist plant epic *The Overstory* (2018), and guided by Robin Wall Kimmerer’s fusion of botanical science and Indigenous ways of knowing in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013). “Stories,” Kimmerer writes, “are among our most potent tools for restoring the land as well as our relationship to land” (341), and the unusual plants to be found in botanical speculative fiction may cultivate ecological and other-species consciousness in unconventional ways, as we see in texts from authors as different as mid-20th-century epic fantasies and more contemporary climate change novels.

Chris Pak

Swansea University

In person

Geoengineering and Solar Radiation Management in Science Fiction

This paper examines SF’s engagement with geoengineering as an emergency measure to mitigate the most severe effects of climate change. Bill McGuire’s *Skyseed* (2020), Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) and Andy Weir’s *Project Hail Mary* (2021) portray the uncertainties and challenges to international governance that attend a highly controversial mode of geoengineering, namely solar radiation management (SRM). These works position SRM as an emergency solution that is undertaken in the absence of appropriate strategies for addressing climate change. Uncertainty about the possible unintended consequences of implementing SRM and the political, economic and social repercussions that such an endeavor could generate texture the presentation of climate change politics in these three novels. Multiple perspectives on SRM are narrated: it is framed as a necessary technological fix, but one that threatens to reinforce systems and practices that cause and intensify climate change. It is also positioned as a solution that obviates the need to develop appropriate forms of international co-ordination and public deliberation. Thus, SRM enables actors to circumvent the impasses encountered in international negotiation about climate change solutions. This paper will dialogize contemporary debate about geoengineering with these narratives of SRM to investigate how sf narrates the cultural and material value of geoengineering, as well as its risks. It will also consider how SRM is framed in relation to other geoengineering strategies.

Camille Byrne

University of Colorado

Online

Changing Urban Space in Chinese SF and the Ecological City

In response to the climate crisis, eco-cities constructed in China and across the world offer promising alternatives, visualizing futures populated with green parks, absorbent roofs, and state-of-the-art AI. Nevertheless, in science fiction, a genre meant to take up such questions of futurity, the same dream cities often manifest as dystopias. How do promises of ecological utopias become dystopian fears in popular imagination? Hao Jingfang’s (郝景芳) Hugo Award-winning novella *Folding Beijing* (*Beijing zhedi* 北京折叠, 2012) offers one such depiction of a city constructed to provide new life in the face of the climate crisis. The story follows its main character, an impoverished waste collector, across three spaces separated not only by class but by access to nature and its resources, even daylight. The apparent ecological utopia to which the protagonist is denied entry provides a visceral portrait of how such technology, meant to actualize dreams of a more sustainable world, fits (or does not fit) into the imaginations and lives of city-dwellers, including the workers on whose labor the city is built and sustained. How does *Folding Beijing*, insofar as it depicts futures at once utopian and dystopian, reflect a specific experience of environmental rhetoric and policy? What happens here to “promises” made by such experimental infrastructure, and can it shed light on the ways state ideas of progress and climate innovation interact with conceptions of urban futures on the ground? By analyzing the discourse between science-fictional media like *Folding Beijing* and specific language and imagery around eco-cities and environmental policy in China, this project explores how ideas implicit in such spaces evoke dystopian imaginaries where fears of inequity, surveillance and emptiness prevail, as well as the ways in which the medium of science fiction gives voice to such experiences of urban change.



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Saturday, May 11, 15.30-17.00

Panel 65: Special Guests Session: Revolutions and Revolutionary Factions in Video Games: A Conversation Between Olga Moskvina and George Ziets

Room: Lossi 3 lobby

Popular media, including video games, often present simplistic views of revolution and political change more broadly. One side is good, the other evil—and who does not love the occasional mustache-twirling villain? However, our present-day political discourse requires a subtler understanding of the world, and we believe that video games can help players to think more critically about moments of transition. In this talk, we will discuss ways in which games—especially role-playing games—can offer a more nuanced view of revolutions and revolutionary movements, opposing factions, and the stakes of political upheaval. We will draw examples from our own games and from games that have inspired us as creators, and examine the unique contributions that only video games can make in this area.

