



**CURRENT RESEARCH IN
SPECULATIVE FICTION
CONFERENCE 2023
CONFERENCE PACK.**

ABSTRACTS AND BIO'S

WELCOME TO CRSF 2023!

CRSF is back! After the success of our hybrid conference last year, we will continue with this format, hosting CRSF2023 as hybrid – with online and in-person events and participation.

This is going to be our biggest and most exciting conference yet, taking place online and in-person on the 29th and 30th of June

First held in 2011, CRSF is an annual conference hosted by the University of Liverpool designed to promote the research of speculative fictions, media and technologies (including but not limited to science fiction, fantasy and horror).

CRSF 2023 will span across two days and aims to shine the spotlight on the research of postgraduates and early career researchers working at the interdisciplinary boundaries of speculative fictions, theories and cultures.

CRSF2024 theme and call for papers (CFP) will be released early 2024, so keep your eyes on our website and socials.

A Note on Structure...

Whilst this is our second attempt at a hybrid conference – so please be patient if we encounter technical hiccups!

There will be three types of participation from speakers: Online presentation (live, on Zoom), in-person presentation (on site at UoL– but hosted in-person & on Zoom for online attendees to watch), and Pre-recorded videos (which will be available on our YouTube channel 2 weeks before the day).

One of our amazing Keynotes will be hosted in-person, the other LIVE on Zoom.

Our Roundtables will be hybrid - hosted LIVE on Zoom with participants online and in-person (a first for us!).

Our Workshop will be hosted IN- PERSON, but can be watched via Zoom!

For more information about in-person attendance or if have any general questions please email us: crsf.team@gmail.com or DM us on Twitter: @CRSF.team

We recommend that all attendees:

(online attendees) create a Zoom account, and become familiar with it. You will be sent Zoom links nearer the time.

(everyone) Follow our YouTube page ready to pre-watch pre-recorded papers:

www.youtube.com/channel/UCF75hWuWOaqvsTkPMT4OORw

Create a Discord account, a link to join our server will be sent to you soon. This is a great opportunity to network, chat to all attendees and ask questions!

DAY 1

9.30am -10.45am Panel 1A: 'Gothic Echo'

Hybrid Panel, Room G09, Chair: Alex Carabine

'What a Change in a Fortnight!': The Subversively Transformative Power of the Ghostly In Margaret Oliphant's 'The Open Door'

Elena Clayton-Harding (she/her), *University of Liverpool* (in-person)

Twitter: @EllieMaiaCH **Instagram:** @ellieclaytonharding

In Carol Margaret Davison's 2009 work on Gothic literature, she writes "most Victorian Gothic works chronicle the invasion of pasts upon presents".¹ This paper will present on the ways in which Margaret Oliphant's 1991 ghost story 'The Open Door' subverts the conventions of the genre by depicting the past not as a shameful and threatening burden, but as a force for change which is both positive and necessary.

To Oliphant's male characters, who are armed with 'modern' military bravery and scientific scepticism, the paranormal represents an unfightable and unexplainable horror. Having been reduced to a childlike state by his fear and impotence upon encountering a ghost, Colonel Mortimer, a grown man and father, is –as a result of this experience- able to grow into a manhood which is defined by emotional liberty and acceptance of uncertainty, and thereby become capable of protecting, guiding and respecting his young son.

This reconsideration of Gothic convention offers a perspective on masculinity and its place which was both unusual and unfashionable at the time, advocating for a version of manliness which reclaimed traits the era had characterised as feminine or childlike. Here, too, the past is established as being more enlightened than the present: Mortimer's key guide in the resolution of the haunting is an elderly and traditional church minister. This image of a present which has degenerated being enlightened by the past prompts a re-evaluation of Victorian narratives of adulthood, progress, and the acceptability of the unknown.

Bio:

Ellie is a second year PhD student at the University of Liverpool and a host and creator of The Bibliography Podcast. Her thesis considers depictions of masculinity in relation to the home and the family in Victorian women's ghost stories within the context of Victorian culture and pre-Victorian Gothic.

9.30am -10.45am Panel 1A: 'Gothic Echo'

Hybrid Panel, Room G09, Chair: Alex Carabine

Metamorphosis as a schizorevolutionary process—the case of Jekyll's desire

Erdogan Sima, University of Lapland (Online, Pre-recorded) Twitter:
@erdoganhs

Abstract

How to tell the Self from the Other? This positivist anxiety was effectively displaced by the nineteenth-century criminology when it promised to capture the elusive subject of crime in a morphology of otherness but only to admit of its speculative open-endedness. The Other's monstrosity stands to be captured, seemingly forever, as the narrative counterpart of the Self's metamorphic potential. Notably, in *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (R.L. Stevenson, 1886), the respectable doctor's entanglement with the monstrous Hyde reminds us what we already remember: the subversive potential of metamorphosis does not admit of any stable otherness. What does Jekyll desire if not the Jekyll-within, precisely where his respectable self is framed by the Victorian anxiety of the 'dark secrets within respectability'? At hand, the proposed paper suggests, is a productive desire that takes the narrative form of metamorphosis. The personas Hyde and Jekyll are inextricable from each other not just narratively but also as the two poles of a process in which one goes on to invent one's own, reversible 'other.' Drawing from Deleuze & Guattari's concept of schizorevolutionary process, it is argued that we could be thriving on the open secrets within, as a narrative failure that suggests political success—a metamorphic estrangement to the inescapable morphology of otherness. Just as D&G uproots the 'schizo' from its clinical illness, Stevenson extracts Hyde from its criminological otherness to re-imagine him as a personification of the metamorphic destiny we might be strangely familiar with.

Biographical note

Erdogan Sima is a Ph.D. researcher at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Lapland. The focus of his research is on the emergent subjectivities that challenge the ontological coherence of the neoliberal conception of security. His research has been published in journals such as *New Political Science*, *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* and *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory*. He is currently completing a dissertation titled "'Placeless" defense: The normative turn in military technology.'

9.30am -10.45am Panel 1A: 'Gothic Echo'

Hybrid Panel, Room G09, Chair: Alex Carabine

Some things never change, but are always changing us: Deep Time and Gothic Residues

Dr R. M. Francis, University of Wolverhampton

Twitter: @RMfrancis

Deep time experiences are akin to the sublime expressed in great Gothic and Horror fiction. It's no wonder that these traditions are drawn from Romanticism, which shared such vital intellectual space with early geological thinking. This was my experience as Poet in Residence for the Black Country Geological Society. In geological observations, one goes below the everyday grounds and into a space-time interested in eons, millennia, and slow, monumental shifts of the earth. This subterranean realm – familiar and unfamiliar – is on the edge of our everdays. When we witness this in fieldwork or in reading, we are overcome with feelings of profound interconnections between human and more-than-human, alongside feelings of intense irrelevance in the grand scheme of earth's 4.5 billion years.

Horror, Gothic, and weird fiction are preoccupied with similarly sublime experiences. The beings that spring forth from this are too marginal - connected to both a primal-terrestrial arena and a cosmic or supernatural one. Manuel Aguirre calls this a 'second space' and describes it as a 'zone of heterotopian features, simultaneously partaking of and opposing the ordinary reality, and accordingly many expressions of it in Gothic exhibit ambiguity, paradox or contradiction' (Aguirre, 2017). This, he says, 'opens up latitudes of dissent.'

These off-kilter meeting points find their zenith in geologically informed speculative fictions. In our post-industrial and anthropocentric landscapes – these strange grounds find new tractions to shift, and new audiences to haunt.

In this paper, I'll trace these geological patterns through Robert E Howard's *Worms of the Earth* (1932), Lissa Tuttle's *Stone Circle* (1976) Joel Lane's *Slow Burn* (2014) and Margaret Atwood's *Stone Mattress* (2011), and, considering my experiences as Poet in Residence for the Black Country Geological Society, draw out a GeoGothic poetics for new speculative fictions.

BIO

R. M. Francis is a lecturer in Creative and Professional Writing at the University of Wolverhampton. His novels, *Bella* and *The Wrenna*, were published by Wild Pressed Books and his poetry collection, *Subsidence*, came out with Smokestack Books. Playdead Press published, *The Chain Coral Chorus* – a collection of poems, essays and fieldnotes that track his time as poet in residence for the Black Country Geological society. His collection of horror fiction, *Ameles / Currents of Unmindfulness* is due with Poe Girl Publishing. He is reviews editor for the *Journal of Class and Culture*

9.30am -10.45am Panel 1B: 'Monsters and History'

Hybrid Panel, Room G01, Chair: Eamon Reid

The Haunted Frontiers of Cowboy Bebop and Trigun

Alex Veregan (he/him), University of Liverpool (in-person)

This paper will undertake a hauntological analysis of two of the most significant anime of the 1990s: Cowboy Bebop and Trigun. While the aesthetic influences of the American Western on these texts is obvious, it will be instructive to analyse how they rearticulate the Western at the level of narrative structure, and in doing so, formulate respective critiques of the genre's values and historical effects.

The Western was, from its inception, a form of American mythmaking which sought to construct the frontier space as the crucible for America's national character. Modelled on Frederick Jackson Turner's 'Frontier Thesis', the frontier of the Classical Western was always already past, constructed retroactively as an explanation and justification of contemporary American ideas about democracy and progress.

Space Westerns, or 'Space Opera', have typically built upon the Classical Western by conceiving of outer space as a new frontier on which the spirit of the Wild West might be revived by a new generation of frontiersmen. In both popular media and politics, space was frequently represented as a site promising renewed, and theoretically infinite, American progress.

The frontiers of Cowboy Bebop and Trigun, however, complicate this depiction. Their frontiers are the result of technological and ecological disasters brought about by humanity's drive for progress. These frontiers are sites of regression; frontier space becomes haunted space in which characters struggle to forge a new way of living amid the wreckage of the old life which had been promised by the space frontier.

By examining frontier space in Cowboy Bebop and Trigun as haunted space, this paper will aim to reveal how these texts' engagement with the Western's narrative structure, shaped by Japanese history, engendered a novel approach which critiques the ideas and values traditionally championed by American Space Westerns.

Bio

Alex Veregan is a PhD student in the Department of English Literature at the University of Liverpool, working on his thesis, *The Final Frontier: Space and the Rearticulation of the Wild West in Science Fiction*. His research interests include the historical myth of the Old West, cyberpunk fiction, space operas, frontiers in SF, and the intersection between SF and the genre Western.

9.30am -10.45am Panel 1B: 'Monsters and History'

Hybrid Panel, Room G01, Chair: Eamon Reid

**History, Aliens, and Writing: The Morphing Monstrosity in Liu Cixin's
Remembrance of the Earth's Past Trilogy**

Yuheng Ko, *University of California-Riverside* (Online)

Sometimes substantial, sometimes idealistic, and yet perennially elusive, monstrosity in Liu Cixin's *Remembrance of the Past* trilogy is primarily characterized by its polymorphosity. Monsters infesting the trilogy take shape, shift shape, and shed shape, demonstrating their capabilities to engage in both Chinese and Western monster discourses as well as to stretch across several topics including political demonization, intellectual disillusion, and writerly transgression. The first section focuses on the first volume, *The Three-Body Problem*, and pays particular attention to the background of the Cultural Revolution as "monstrous history" in associating the Revolution with the taowu (橐杓) discourse in modern Chinese literature. I further argue that Liu Cixin engages in the taowu discourse by addressing a specific aspect of political persecution staged during the Revolution—that is, the monsterization of science and the victimization of scientists. Taking the second volume *The Dark Forest* as its central text, the second section then turns to a type of monster commonly found in SF texts, extraterrestrial aliens. With incorporeality being its greatest departure from other SF aliens in the genre, the Trisolarans haunt by serving as the harbinger of the dark forest revelation, which announces the demise of humanist ethics. Moreover, I contend that Trisolarans, in whose culture thought is transparent and deceptive speech absent, offer an alternate perspective for us to contemplate our own monstrosity, our monstrous language. In the third section, drawing on Barbara Freeman's classic formulation of "monstrous theory," I examine how the sublime operates closely with the monstrous in the droplet scene and the "dark forest" setting, as the encasing capability of reason collapses. Furthermore, I propose the term "hard-SF realism," a literary style which strongly characterizes the third volume, *Death's End*, to describe Liu Cixin's approach to a new discursive monster in opposition to the co-opted Derridean monstrous writing based on difference and the play of signs.

bio:

Yuheng Ko is a PhD student in Comparative Literature at University of California-Riverside, with Designated Emphasis in Speculative Fictions and Cultures of Science. He completed his MA in Foreign Literatures and Languages at National Taiwan University. His research interests include Sino-Western comparative science fiction, the history of science, posthumanism, and philosophy of technology. He is working on reading SF works through the lens of the history of science in exploring the possibilities of ancient or indigenous scientific models. His current project aims to formulate a tentative discourse that conjoins divination, prediction, and speculative fiction by examining ancient Greek and Chinese divination traditions.

9.30am -10.45am Panel 1C: 'Decentralising the Human Voice'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

Talking Animals and Silent Humans—Reshaping the Human-Animal Boundary

David Tierney (he/him), University of Liverpool (In Person)

Twitter: @ WriteDavidWrite

The human-animal boundary is classically posited as an upward trajectory towards the pinnacle that is humans and with clear-cut impermeable markers. However, hybrid and metamorphized characters can be used to reconstruct it as something gradient, porous, uncertain, and riddled with intersections. The following paper draws on the research of David Herman on the nonhuman to examine the metamorphizing of characters in my thesis's novel *Ark* in which the boundaries in the perspectives of NHAs, robot animals, and humans are frequently crossed and blended together, and *Tender is the Flesh* by Augustina Baztericca in which certain humans are stripped of human language and are therefore treated as NHAs but at times slip into humanity.

In *Tender is the Flesh* all NHAs have become inedible, their flesh poisoned, but instead of giving up meat, humans without human language are bred to be used for food. Similar to the animalized humans in *Planet of the Apes*, this transformation shows how thin and illegitimate the boundary is between humans and NHAs. *Ark* in comparison through its first-person non-human narration explores how its human-created robot animals' *umwelts* are taken up both by the human and the non-human with preference often being given to the non-human sensory and mental world. A level of uncertainty is created through the use of fragmentation, hinting at the perceptual worlds and mental processes outside of human reach.

Both novels show the different strategies that Herman outlines for presenting nonhuman experiences, both allowing us to question the human-animal boundary in different ways. Through examining both novels, I plan to show how metamorphosis leads us to question the human-animal boundary and what new form it could take.

Bio

David Tierney is a second year Creative Writing PhD student at the University of Liverpool and has an MA in Writing from the University of Galway. His research involves writing a novel and a critical thesis both of which examine non-human animal communication in speculative fiction. He has had poetry and prose published in several places including the *Stinging Fly* and is a regular contributor to the ASLE publication *Green Letters*.

9.30am -10.45am Panel 1C: 'Decentralising the Human Voice'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

Paper title: Making kin with a dingo named Sue: the trouble with the Chthulucene in McKay's The Animals in That Country (2020)

Dr Laura-Jane Devanny, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Northampton. **Twitter:** @ LJDevanny **Instagram:** @ Lauratheexplorer.uk

Abstract:

"Tell me she doesn't know something about the world that you and me haven't ever thought of." The repercussions of rising levels of ecological devastation are manifesting in an increasingly catastrophic manner worldwide, and are proving to be of grave consequence for the future of humankind; paradoxically, humankind's destructive tendency has been expedited by an anthropocentric ideology that has shaped the characteristics of our current epoch. In an attempt to conceive new and better ways of being, Donna J. Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) presents the inextricable links between the human and nonhuman, proposing that embracing a model of sym-poiesis (making with) is necessary for building a more enduring future. In this paper, Haraway's concept of the Chthulucene will inform a close reading of the novel *The Animals in That Country* (2020) by Laura Jean McKay, which uses an apocalyptic vision of the future to question the boundaries between humans and the natural world. Through inhabiting the consciousness of both animals and humans, McKay's fictional experimentation changes existing understandings of current forms of communication and explores the nature of cross-species exchanges. The complexity of the minds of animals is revealed, along with the human speciesism that has proliferated throughout the era of the Anthropocene. Finally being able to understand what the animals have to say exposes the flaws of an anthropocentric ideology, which proves a cataclysmic shock to the Anthropocene as the subsequent entanglement of human and animal experience results in societal collapse. The novel promotes empathy for the animal kingdom and a heightened consideration of the role that different species play on this earth, but ultimately humankind is shown to lack the resilience needed to participate in life outside of the Anthropocene. The failure of society to imagine alternative modes of being culminates in a rejection of the Chthulucene, as humans instead seek a return to old and familiar habits.

Biography:

I currently hold a position as a Senior Lecturer in Education with the University of Northampton. I earned my PhD through a fully-funded AHRC award at De Montfort University (UK) in 2017, with a thesis entitled *Speculative Fiction by Twenty-First Century Women Writers*. Following this, I returned to a previous successful career in international secondary English teaching (Thailand and Bali) before coming back to the UK. My research interest lies within contemporary feminisms and literary representations of the future female, with a particular focus on speculative fiction and the female body as the locus of choice.

9.30am -10.45am Panel 1C: 'Decentralising the Human Voice' Hybrid

Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

Rowena Murphy: A Pound A Week

Rowena is a third year undergraduate student at the University of Wolverhampton, studying Creative & Professional Writing.

Rowena has written a short horror story (723 words) which serves as a vehicle of political critique (anti-landlordism)

Rowena will perform her story as part of this panel.

11am 'Getting your Academic Work Published' Roundtable

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Alex Carabine

Paul March-Russell

Dr Paul March-Russell joined Cardiff Metropolitan University in August 2021, having previously taught at the University of Kent, Canterbury Christ Church University and the University of Westminster. Paul has been a judge for the Arthur C. Clarke Award and the Edge Hill Short Story Prize. He has co-organised conferences and events on Charles Olson, Arthur C. Clarke, Victorian women's theatre and Russell Hoban. He is on the editorial board for SF Foundation, and a return speaker at CRSF!

Andrew M Butler

Dr Andrew M Butler is the author of *Solar Flares: Science Fiction in the 1970s*, as well as books on Philip K. Dick, cyberpunk, Terry Pratchett, postmodernism, film studies and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. He has published chapters on filmed cyberpunk before 1999, *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and screen adaptations of William Gibson. He is managing editor of *Extrapolation* and the Chair of Judges for the Arthur C. Clarke Award. In his spare time, he collects shiny trousers.

Charul Palmer-Patel

Charul ("Chuckie") Palmer-Patel is Co-Head-Editor of *Fantastika Journal*, an international, open-access, peer-reviewed journal she founded in 2016. Her major publications include a monograph on contemporary epic fantasy, *The Shape of Fantasy* (Routledge, 2020), and a co-edited collection on alternate history, *Sideways in Time* (Liverpool UP, 2019), which were shortlisted for the Mythopoeic Award and BSFA Non-Fiction Award, respectively. She is currently working on her next monograph, *Negotiating Motherhood and Maternity in American Fantasy Fiction* (Edinburgh University Press) and a new co-edited collection, *Fantasy Literature: A Companion* (Peter Lang). Palmer-Patel is currently a trustee of Science Fiction Foundation and will also be taking up a position on the editorial board of *Gold SF*, an imprint of Goldsmith's Press focusing on intersectional feminist science fiction.

Jonathan Thornton

Jonathan Thornton is in his third year studying for a PhD in Science Fiction literature at the University of Liverpool. He is interested in the portrayal of insects in speculative fiction and fantastika. He has an MA in Science Fiction literature and an MSc in Medical Entomology, and works as a technician at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. He is the book reviews editor for *Foundation* magazine. He also writes criticism and reviews and conducts interviews for internet publications *Tor dot com*, *Fantasy Faction*, *The Fantasy Hive* and *Gingernuts of Horror*.

12.45pm Panel 2A: 'Posthumanism'

Hybrid Panel, G09 Chair: Lucy Nield

Full name: María Abizanda-Cardona (she/her) (in-person)

Academic affiliation: University of Zaragoza (Spain)

Twitter: @ Mariaabizanda **Instagram:** @m_abizanda

**Paper title: Becoming Machine: Toward a Posthuman Meta(l)morphosis in S.B. Divya's
Machinehood (2021).**

Abstract:

Prosthetic-bearing Olympic athletes, designer children, human-machine weapons systems: under the Fourth Industrial Revolution, cyborgs have stepped out of the pages of speculative fiction and become a household reality, ushering in a paradigm shift toward the posthuman state. Our widespread meta(l)morphoses have triggered both technoutopic phantasies of transcendence and panic-stricken appeals to an essentialist human nature. Conversely, critical posthumanism thinkers such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti or Stacy Alaimo have found in this intimate interdependence with machines an opportunity to subvert the hierarchical dualisms of the Humanist subject. Resting on this perspective, this paper will focus on the shift toward posthuman subjectivity in *Machinehood* (2021), a speculative fiction novel by the American-Indian writer S.B. Divya. Set in 2095, *Machinehood* extrapolates ongoing social ailments: technology permeates every aspect of daily life, surveillance is ubiquitous, and the global proletariat is forced to take performance-enhancing drugs to compete with automation in the precarious gig economy. Olga, an ex-Raider gone bodyguard for Big Pharma tycoons, is enlisted by the American intelligence to investigate The Machinehood, a terrorist group that demands the extension of sentient intelligence to machines and denounces workers' oppression by the megacorps oligarchy, deploying human-AI hybrid soldiers called daikini. After discovering that her mysterious epileptic illness is caused by the untested pills produced by profit-minded biotech companies, Olga sides with the Machinehood's demands and is altered into a daikini, entering their web of expanded, technomediated consciousness. The outward-bound, collective identity of the daikini, this paper will argue, spells a post-anthropocentric view of the subject as embedded and embodied in an ecosophy of nature-culture assemblages with human, natural and technological others, fully aligned with the tenets of critical posthumanism. This zoecentred, egalitarian becoming-machine paves the way toward ethical and political alternatives to the neoliberal, exploitative commodification of Life under biocapitalism.

Bionote:

María Abizanda-Cardona is a Ph.D. student at the University of Zaragoza (Spain). She holds a four-year Research Fellowship (FPU) by the Spanish Ministry of Education to carry out her doctoral research in the group "Contemporary North American Fiction and the 4th Industrial Revolution." Her present work concentrates on the representation of the posthuman in 21st - century U.S. fiction, with a focus on works that combine generic elements of speculative fiction and crime fiction across different media. Other research interests include critical posthumanism, feminist criticism and trauma studies.

12.45pm Panel 2A: 'Posthumanism' Hybrid

Panel, G09 Chair: Lucy Nield

Sakshi Tyagi (she/her), University of Manitoba (in-person)

Twitter: @tyagi.sakshi

Speculating Bodies: A Critical Study of Bodies in Larissa Lai's Salt Fish Girl

Speculative fiction as a genre has a long history of engagement with bodies in various forms. From anxieties around post-human technologically augmented bodies to extra-terrestrial bodies as an exposition of the possibilities of alternate modes of being, the speculative fiction genre offers multiple ways of thinking about bodies and their social existence. Over the past decade, one of the key engagement areas in speculative fiction works by African and Asian writers has been around the discourse of bodies and their metamorphoses. Precisely, the socio-cultural critique of racialized bodies and their migration as labour power in the neo-liberal modern world has been one of the major areas of concern in Asian-American speculative fiction.

Decentering the normative category of the "human body", Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* formulates the possibility of the futuristic form(s) of bodies through the representation of genetically modified, queer bodies of the protagonists Miranda and Evie. The conscious interrelationship between queer bodies of the future and the present reality of capitalism-led exploitation of Asian bodies in North America is illustrated through a narrative technique that Aime Bahng defines as "fabrication and fabulation" (151). Reading these bodies through the lens of Luciano and Chen's concept of "Queer inhumanisms", this study invites the readers of the speculative fiction genre to look at the potential of alternate forms of bodily kinship through queer desire. The aim of this presentation thus is to critically examine the representation of the genetically modified bodies of Evie and Miranda in the novel as a tool to both amplify the possibilities of queer desire and to also explicate the problematic history of the capitalist exploitation of racialized bodies in North America.

Proposed Bibliography

Bahng, Aimee. "SALT FISH FUTURES: The Irradiated Transpacific and the Financialization of the Human Genome Project." *Migrant Futures*, Duke University Press, 2018, pp. 146–67, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822373018-008>. Lai, Larissa. *Salt Fish Girl*. Thomas Allen Publishers, 2022. Luciano, Dana, and Mel Y. Chen. "Has the Queer Ever Been Human?" *GLQ*, vol. 21, no. 2-3, 2015, pp. 183–207, <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2843215>. Olsen, Cassandra Y. "Descent of the Human: Racialized Animality, Queer Intimacy, and Evolutionary Theory in Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl*." *Studies in Canadian Literature*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2022, pp. 145–65, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086614ar>.

12.45pm Panel 2A: 'Posthumanism' Hybrid

Panel, G09 Chair: Lucy Nield

Redefinitions of the (Post)Human through Cognitive Assemblages in Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun (2021)

María Torres-Romero (she/her), University of Málaga (Spain) – (presenting online) **Twitter:**
@ maria_torres Instagram: @ nmt.romero

Anthropocentric and humanistic models have always placed the human as superior in the epistemic hierarchy, as we possess something the rest of beings do not: consciousness. Through this capacity, we experience reflexive thinking and command symbolic and associative reasoning as well as abstract thoughts. But consciousness, in recent years, has been demonstrated to occupy a minimal part of the human mind. Cognition, on the other hand, has become a central concept in cognitive and neuroscience, as it refers to a broader capacity that “extends far beyond consciousness into other neurological brain processes” which the consciously aware self cannot reach (Hayles 9). More importantly, cognition, defined by critic N. Katherine Hayles as a capacity that enables choice-making and adaptation to contexts, among other functions, exists in and extends to all other nonhuman biological beings and, surprisingly, to complex technical systems. The paradigm of the cognitive nonconscious allows an updated perception of the human in relation to the rest of cognizants (ecosystems, plants, animals, and computational media), which in the social sciences and the humanities has translated into a new turn in posthuman critical studies. The main aim of this paper is the analysis of the speculative novel *Klara and the Sun* (2021) by Kazuo Ishiguro considering how the redefinition of concepts like consciousness and cognition has motivated a subsequent redefinition of the (post)human. Klara, an Artificial Friend with technical emotions and consciousness, interacts and influences the humans in the novel creating together with them what Hayles calls a ‘cognitive assemblage’. On the other hand, some children of this Ishigurian world are “lifted” by means of biotechnological advances to expand, even at the risk of death, their cognitive capacities. The novel reflects about a possible post anthropocentric future in which cognitive assemblages bring together and blur the differences between the human and the artificial, while it questions whether we are willing to accept as our kin a conscious ‘other’ that mirrors or even exceeds our deeper ‘human’ traits.

Biographical note:

María Torres-Romero holds a BA in English Studies (2018) and a MA in English Studies and Multilingual and Intercultural Communication (2021) both by the University of Málaga, where she presented her MA dissertation ‘Beyond Human’: A Critical Approach to Posthumanism and Transhumanism in Contemporary British Literature. She started doing research on contemporary English literature focusing on ethics, artificial intelligence and posthumanism in speculative fiction under the supervision of Professor Rosario Arias Doblaz in the year 2018. She is currently a fully funded PhD candidate at the University of Málaga, where she is also working as a lecturer in English literature. María is also an active member of the research group LITCAE.

12.45pm Panel 2B: 'Gamification'

In-person panel, G01 Chair: Alex Veregan

Infinite Genre Fiction in Chinese Internet Literature

Xinyue ZHANG, University of Hong Kong (in-person presentation)

By the end of 2021, the number of Internet literature users was approximately 502 million, 48.6% of all Chinese Internet users. While Internet fiction was once viewed as a minor and vulgar subculture, it has evolved into the source of popular media and the content industry in China. However, one category has not yet been adapted into audiovisual form is "Infinite genre fiction (无限流小说 Wuxian liu xiaoshuo)". It is one of the most recognised genres in recent years; for instance, Jinjiang (Chinese largest female-oriented Internet literature platform) currently holds over 20 thousand novels tagged with "Infinite genre". A possible reason for the lack of adaptation is that the contents of Infinite fiction are too extensive; as the name itself indicates, a novel can continue endlessly as the framework is essentially a deliberate compilation of many short stories. Infinite fiction blends time and space travel, web-game fiction, science fiction, fantasy, horror, and thriller elements (Inwood 2017). The characters enter a mystery space and travel to different storyworlds to accomplish the assigned missions; they may gain extraordinary powers along the journey; nonetheless, they must unceasingly venture and transmigrate through storyworlds (Shao & Wang 2018).

Gamification in Infinite fiction is worth investigating because while the game and its rules are enforced on characters and almost always cause harm and death, they also paradoxically emphasise fairness. It inspires us to reexamine the concept of game when the characters persistently explore and challenge the gaming system.

In addition, Infinite fiction writers often actively engage with serious social issues in their works, such as gender inequality, economic gap, money worship, fandom culture, environmental protection, and colonialism. Moreover, perhaps not surprisingly, these plots are dramatised and become an experimental lens to reflect on our real world.

Biography

Xinyue ZHANG is a PhD student at the School of Chinese, University of Hong Kong. The subject of Xinyue's research is the latest evolution of Chinese web novels, particularly female-oriented literature. Her current thesis focuses on gamification in Infinite Fiction, a literary subgenre that mixes elements of time and space travel, science fiction and/or fantasy, and horror and/or thriller.

Xinyue received her MSc in Social and Cultural Anthropology from University College London, where she acquired ethnographic methods and investigated African migrant women's experiences in China. Prior to this, Xinyue studied Philosophy and Psychology at the University of Edinburgh.

12.45pm Panel 2B: 'Gamification'

In-person panel, G01 Chair: Alex Veregan

Real-time Strategy and the Politics of Resource Extraction in Space Opera and post-Space Opera SF: Playful Extractivism in Dune II and Command & Conquer

Eamon Reid (he/him), Faculty of Creative Arts, Edge Hill University eamonreidprof@gmail.com

Abstract

One dynamic underlying the ontogenesis of science fictional space opera sub-genre is the growing awareness of 'where' resources come from and how they are obtained. In the early years of space opera, minimal if any time was dedicated to discussing how large spaceships move, how they are built, and so on. All that mattered was the battle, the action extravaganza. As space opera became a more respectable form of science fiction, a shift towards critical reflection can be detected. *Dune* (1965) by Frank Herbert can perhaps be seen as indicative of this shift, where one of the central actors in the world is not necessarily humankind and its conflicts but a natural resource: spice itself. This energetic resource would be fought over by different factions, but spice itself (perhaps an oil allegory, perhaps an allegory for consumption more broadly following Tim Morton's reading) is the motor (literally) fuelling conflict. *Dune* can also be seen as significant for a different media tradition: real-time strategy videogames. Westwood Studio's *Dune II* (1992), itself an adaptation of David Lynch's problematic 1984 film adaptation of *Dune*, set the standard for what this genre of videogame could do. The player would 'extract' natural resources, build armies, and defeat AI or human opponents. Westwood Studio's would go on to develop their own and perhaps more influential intellectual property: *Command & Conquer* (C&C). In this paper, I partially chart the trajectory of SF realtime strategy games from *Dune II*, emphasizing how this sub-genre of videogames render explicit the extractivist themes in space operatic SF. I argue that there is less an 'extractivist unconsciousness' at work in such games than there is a procedural rhetoric that naturalizes the logistics of military industrialism, predicated on the translation of tangible resources into 'units' through processes of extraction.

Keywords: Extractivism, space opera, real-time strategy games, procedural rhetoric, ontogenesis.

Eamon Reid is a PhD Candidate at Edge Hill University. His work focuses on the intersections between contemporary philosophy, political theory, science fiction studies and media studies. His PhD thesis focuses on the politics of the *Mass Effect* space opera story-world.

12.45pm Panel 2C: 'Dreams, Surveillance and Change'
In-person panel, SoTa Chair: Jonathan Thornton

Schizovampiric Thermodynamics of the Cybergothic Age:

A Sermon on Navigating the Shrieking Spiral at the Heart of Theoryfiction

Jordan Casstles (he/him), University of Liverpool (in-person)

Sphinx slots K-war into the anthropomorphic reality system, connecting you to Anti-Oedipus (the AI)... The future connects. New drugs and music arrive. War envelops everything. – Nick Land, 'Meat'

The blackster rarely manages to master both faculties of the black beast... staring into the anti-cosmic void or the fantasised splendours of bygone eras. However, to become chrono-warriors, we must strive to acquire both magical eyes. – Gruppo di Nun, 'Cybergothic Insurrection'

Between 1997 and 2003, the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccpu) – under the de facto leadership of Nick Land – synthesised a dark and Lovecraftian 'theoryfiction', drawing on disparate disciplines in order to produce a twisted yet prescient 'cybergothic' reality within academic text.

Between 2016 and 2020, these dark fictions found a home with the Alt-Right, with Steve Bannon championing Nick Land's cyber-fascistic screeds and grim references to the hallucinatory eldritch figures of Ccpu literature being found within a number of extremist manifestos.

Between 2019 and 2023, Gruppo di Nun – "a collective of psycho-activists aimed at organizing forms of occult resistance to the hetero-patriarchal dogma" – produced Revolutionary Demonology, an arguable counter-text to the Ccpu's writings which sought to combat the established right-wing 'cybergothic' reality with their own before disbanding in alignment with their multiplicitous draconic totem mother, Tiamat-Ishtar-Babalon. This paper will attempt to navigate the unsettling and warped theoretical/fictional landscape that this conceptual conflict has left in its wake: from Voodoo deities making cultural shifts in the wake of anti-Oedipal sphinx impacts and the paranoid progression from our Level 1 "anthropomorphically scaled, predominantly vision-configured, massively multi slotted reality system" into something decidedly more inhuman and aligned with Land's 'swarmachines' to warrior-shaman barbarians, alien catastrophes suspended in time, active resistance to 'tragic temporality', and a direct attack aimed at the thermodynamic abomination that is consensus reality, this piece will seek to chart a functional path by which an individual may survive the ever-shifting and highly corrosive theoryfictions that influence our modern socio-political landscape.

Bio:

Jordan Casstles is a PhD student at the University of Liverpool. His doctoral thesis focuses on investigating depictions of surveillance culture within post-9/11 speculative fiction. His research interests include modern and postmodern receptions of classical mythology, the interplay between occult studies and cultural theory, aleatoric literature, and unusual new strains of theoryfiction. Beyond the realm of academia, he has experience working as a bookbinder, printing assistant, documentary scriptwriter, corporate proofreader, columnist, and sixth form lecturer.

12.45pm Panel 2C: 'Dreams, Surveillance and Change' In-person
panel, SoTa Chair: Jonathan Thornton

**The Stuttering Alchemist: transformational disfluency in the novels of B. Catling by
Victor Rees**

Victor Rees (he/him), UCL, (in-person presenting)

In 2018, the sculptor, performance artist and novelist Brian Catling, best known for his monumental Vorrh trilogy (2012-18), was asked whether he thought his experience of speaking with a stutter had resulted in an increased form of "linguistic creativity." Catling, in response, distanced himself from the hypothesis by suggesting that the stutter "just produces an alternative."

My paper will take this distinction between "creativity" and "alternative" as its starting point, exploring the multifarious influence of speech disfluency on Catling's speculative fiction. Catling will be framed as a kind of alchemist, albeit one disinterested in any notion of a final, desired outcome, preferring instead to push beyond binary definitions that frame speech disorders as either a pure blockage or as an empowering tool for provoking creative invention.

By foregrounding the idea of continual transformation, whereby the image of disfluency emerges in differing, often contradictory, aspects, my study will first look at instances in the novels where the stutter is depicted as an interruption that is caused by either a dearth or a surplus of language. I will then explore instances where disfluency provokes epiphanic revelation for Catling's characters, especially those who are able to navigate a speech pattern that foregrounds synonymous or "alternative" words. I will show where this pattern of verbal substitution, a tactic frequently employed by stutterers, elicits both meaninglessness as well as new meaning.

The aim of this paper is to question what new possibilities arise when the study of speculative fiction is framed around "alternatives" as opposed to teleologically motivated creativity. I will position the "alternative" as a different kind of transformative urge, one which is not overloaded with qualitative terminology and does not treat topics such as disability as monolithic, but which focuses instead on the opportunities afforded by diverse experimentation.

Victor Rees is a first year PhD student at UCL, researching the novels and performance art of Brian Catling. His other interests include nineteenth and early twentieth century Decadence, fairy art and literature, transdisciplinarity, the process of cinematic adaptation and the treatment of environment on film. Some of his work can be found at victorreese.com.

2pm-3pm 'Workshop Kate Heffner & Cait Coker

SoTa Library, Chair: Jonathan Thornton

SFF Curation: What, Why and How?

Every Wondered how large SFF fan collections get into libraries, or how people use such collections? Do you ever think about what it means to collect SFF and how to take care of it? Have we got a panel for you! Two specialist librarians are here to talk about topics in the field, answer your questions, and have a short workshop on how you yourself may act as curator of your fandom.

Cait Coker is Associate Professor and Curator of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is a senior Bibliographer for the Science Fiction and Fantasy Research Database (sffrd.library.tamu.edu) and much of her work is located at the intersections of gender, genre, and print history.

Kate Heffner is a postgraduate researcher at the University of Kent completing her thesis on women fans in the post-war era. She serves as a judge for the Arthur C Clarke Award.

3pm Panel 3A: 'Does the City Sleep?'
In-person panel, G09 Chair: Jordan Castles

Stranger Than Fiction: Jeff VanderMeer's Supernatural Cities and Amazon's Smart Cities

Natalie Wall (she/her), *University of Liverpool*, (n person presenting)

Twitter: @scaredofcustard **Instagram:** @thelionsroar_

Jeff VanderMeer's 'New Weird' novels are consistently in dialogue with the changing face of the Anthropocene and his city novels, *City of Saints and Madmen* (2004), *Borne* (2017), and *Dead Astronauts* (2019), explore how cities can develop into supernatural entities. These novels explore the colonisation of urban spaces as they are irrevocably changed by aggressive agents of what Anna Tsing has called the 'plantationocene', a term for 'capitalist colonialism's conversion of indigenous peoples and ecosystems into bio-resources' (Tsing et al 2017: G3). VanderMeer pushes developments and catastrophes in technology and ecology to their extremes to create supernatural metropolises that are rooted in our familiar world. Indeed, the hostile bioengineering corporation in *Borne* and *Dead Astronauts* mirrors the current corporate movement towards so-called 'Smart Cities', which aim to 'both uncover and enhance an immanent urban intelligence, and [...] generate circumstances beneficial to ecological stability' through 'ubiquitous digital infrastructure' (Coley 2021: 148). Amazon Web Services promises the 'ultimate upgrade' to the public sector through developments in transport and mobility, security, healthcare, entertainment, public institutions like education and justice, and even quality of life through their Smart City approach' (Idu 2021) in return for seemingly unlimited access to the population of these cities. Mo Katibeh, Senior Vice President of AT&T Network Infrastructure and Build, stated that he would 'love to see this become a living lab of innovation' regarding Amazon's proposed second headquarters (HQ2) and surrounding neighbourhood in Arlington, Virginia (Poon 2021). By drawing parallels between Amazon's proposed Smart Cities and VanderMeer's supernatural cities this paper will explore how the urban is set to metamorphose into a supernatural space through its corporate and technological augmentation.

Bio

Natalie is an English Literature PhD candidate from University of Liverpool UK. Her research looks at contemporary trauma literature and theory, particularly the representation of the traumatised body in fiction and popular engagement with trauma fiction in online spaces. Currently her research is focusing on trauma fiction's engagement with genre and realism as well as the limits of traditional academic criticism for understanding and addressing these emotional responses, using post-critical theory. She is also a freelance writer and has had previous work published in *The Independent*, *Refinery29*, *iPaper* and *VICE UK*.

3pm Panel 3A: 'Does the City Sleep?'

In-person panel, G09 Chair: Jordan Castles

"Mind the Gap": The invisible city in the cracks of Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*

Olivia Ho, *University College London* (in-person)

Twitter: @ what_ho_olivia **Instagram:** @ ohomatopoeia

One of the most oppressive cities of Italo Calvino's 1972 text *Invisible Cities* is the underground Argia, which has earth instead of air and appears from the surface to be entombed in stasis. Yet, despite these stifling conditions, cracks of space do exist in the city: "At night, putting your ear to the ground, you can sometimes hear a door slam." This paper will delve into interstitial space in Neil Gaiman's 1996 urban fantasy novel *Neverwhere* through the lens of *Invisible Cities*. *Neverwhere*'s London contains in its interstices another city, London Below, buried literally out of sight and figuratively out of mind. It is inhabited by those who "fell through the cracks in the world", who are literally unseen by the rest of society. As with Argia, London Below is invisible from "up here"; existence within it seems impossible, yet its inhabitants make space for themselves somehow, turning dead zones into a protean labyrinth which interrogates and troubles the vertical binary between upper and lower, surface and subterranean, entitled and dispossessed. The space of London Below is heterochronic, fraught with the eruption of the urban uncanny and the proliferation of signs. It echoes the spaces of representation in Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974), which he links to the "the clandestine or underground side of social life". *Neverwhere* opens up spaces of literally underground resistance which contest the reality of the city we think we know. It gestures towards an interstitial way of inhabiting the city without forcing the segregation of surface and depth, or of the real and imagined. It presents the notion of being confronted with something oppressive and impassable – the stasis of Argia, the inferno of urban life – and finding in it a crack, opening a door.

Bio: Olivia Ho is an MPhil/DPhil candidate in the English Language & Literature department of University College London. She holds a BA in English literature from UCL, where she received the 2013 Morley Prize and John Oliver Hobbes Memorial Prize, and an MSc in Literature and Modernity from the University of Edinburgh. Her thesis considers the interstitial city in postmodern urban speculative fiction, with a core focus on *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino. She was formerly the Books & Arts Editor of Singapore's national English-language newspaper, The Straits Times.

3pm Panel 3A: 'Does the City Sleep?'

In-person panel, G09 Chair: Jordan Castles

Weird Homemaking: Wondering about Waste in the Metamorphic Homes of Contemporary British Fiction

Lily Taylor (she/her), *Birkbeck College, University of London* (in-person presenting) **Twitter:**
@ lilyfreeahleoma

The contemporary urban home is inherently metamorphic; existing somewhere between public and private, material and imaginary, clean and contaminated, home is 'both a place/physical location and a set of feelings' (Blunt and Dowling, 2022: 22), and a 'nowhere', a 'place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference' (hooks, 1991: 148). Yet since many studies of home acknowledge its changeability and, at times, unknowability, predominantly within disciplinary boundaries – as a subsection within human geography or a setting within a novel – its speculative potential as a bridge between genres, disciplines, and ecologies has been relatively underexplored. This is particularly true of the dirty home, a space whose edges and affective atmospheres are constantly called into question by waste, mould, and earthy interactions (Douglas, 1966; Kristeva, 1980; Ahmed, 2004). To reach for a deeper understanding of home's unique position in our contemporary moment, we must therefore acknowledge and interrogate the 'weird' ruptures that are blooming, mould-like, in the homes of British literary fiction, especially in texts not generally regarded as speculative (VanderMeer and VanderMeer, 2012). Taking a comparative approach, this paper will analyse the moments of weird homemaking that puncture the narratives of Maggie Gee's *My Cleaner* (2005), Zadie Smith's *NW* (2012), and Jo Hamya's *Three Rooms* (2021). Unpacking their descriptions of waste, dirt, and mould, which are at once unsettlingly compelling and repulsive, beautiful and horrifying, this paper argues that even the most apparently 'realist' home is an inherently metamorphic and uniquely generative space for speculation. This paper suggests that thinking weirdly at home, where the bins are overflowing and the walls are damply growing, may open up productively interdisciplinary pathways for conceptualising practices of living in crisis, imagining future ecologies, and grappling with the sensory ramifications of human and nonhuman coexistence.

Biographical Note

Lily Taylor is an MPhil/PhD candidate in English and Geography at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her thesis looks at weird homemaking in contemporary British fiction and non-fiction, focusing on the elemental intersections between the places and practices of human and nonhuman homemaking.

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3pm Panel 3B: 'Destabilizing Climate Fiction'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library Chair: David Tierney

"Something's coming. Something hungry for blood": The Upside-Down as an Environmental Reality

Rusha Chowdry (She/They), Jadavpur University, India (online presentation) **Instagram:** @ ru_ination

Srijano Naskar (she/her), Jadavpur University (online presentation)

Twitter: @@Dreamerofdream5 **instagram:** @toasterinabathtub_

With the all-pervasive presence of online streaming platforms, the youth of the post-network era are exposed to a variety of content that touch upon and influence every aspect of their lives at both the personal and political levels. These shows impact the worldviews and ideologies of their audiences, shaping their attitudes towards their external environment. The alternative world-building of speculative fiction, which often follows as a consequence of socio-economic, political and environmental crises, pushes its audience to envision a similar outcome in their own apparently stable world. In the light of this argument, this paper aims to read *Stranger Things* as a commentary upon the climate crisis, which is invariably furthered by the invasive activities of a militant, capitalist state policy.

In the show, a National Laboratory is established in Hawkins, USA for the purpose of nurturing weaponized bodies by developing mind-control weapons to utilise against enemy countries in the Cold War. These intrusive scientific endeavours lead to a cataclysmic rupture in the spatial fabric of the world, opening up a parallel realm called the Upside-Down. This becomes the defining moment which exposes the supposedly stable ecology of the regular world to the apocalyptic elements of the Upside-Down. Townsfolk begin to disappear, crops start getting destroyed, and eventually, it may be observed that the onslaught is no longer limited to the physical, but begins to severely affect the mental constitution of the town's inhabitants. It is also interesting to note that while the attacks were initially confined to the fringes, they slowly creep into the heart of the town, attempting at a complete takeover. This paper seeks to examine the apocalyptic outcome in *Stranger Things* as an allegorical envisionment of a world inflicted with the destabilisation of the natural order. Looking at the supernatural beings as representations of diseases and other man-made catastrophes, the paper shall interrogate *Stranger Things* through an ecocritical framework, correlating it with how the grotesque world of the show suggests the possibility of similar catastrophic consequences of climate and ecological change in our own world. This will be accompanied by a study of the socio-economic and political agents that instigate climate change, and its effect on the physical and mental health of people. Finally, a conclusion shall be drawn with a discussion on the resistance of the show's youth to such horrific destructive forces, and how we can wean those lessons for ourselves to make our own world a better, more livable place.

Rusha Chowdhury (she/they) is a student from Jadavpur University, India, currently pursuing her postgraduate degree in English Literature and Language. Her areas of interest are feminism, disability studies, ecocriticism, diasporic literature, queer studies and psychoanalysis. She has presented papers at Jadavpur University Literary Society and Vivekananda College, Delhi University. She has interned with DAG Museums as a guide at an art exhibition commemorating the 75th anniversary of the independence of India. Her experience in the field of environmental studies include a term paper on an ecocritical reading of *Beowulf* and the guidance-works under DAG that entailed the discussion of colonisation and war in terms of its impact on the environment.

Srijani Naskar (she/her) is a student from Jadavpur University, India, currently pursuing her postgraduate degree in English Literature. Her areas of interest include feminism, eco-criticism, queer studies, Dalit studies, and South-Asian and African literature. She has been actively involved in campaigns to introduce proper sex education as well as caste and gender sensitisation in Indian schools. As someone who spends most of her spare time binge-watching Netflix shows, she is thrilled to be working on this paper with an eco-critical framework of *Stranger Things*.

3pm Panel 3B: 'Destabilizing Climate Fiction'
Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library Chair: David Tierney
Making Kin: Princess Mononoke as Cli-fi Fantasy

Cynthia Zhang (she/they), University of Southern California (online presentation)

Twitter: @ cz_writes

In recent years, the field of New Materialism has arisen as a particularly influential framework for rethinking nonhuman agency in the wake of the crisis of the Anthropocene. Although the term encompasses a varied array of thinkers and traditions, New Materialism's approach to thinking matter itself as agential offers a mode of thinking human-nonhuman relationships in a manner beyond anthropomorphic bias. At the same time, New Materialism has been critiqued for its claim to newness, with many scholars noting out that for many nonWestern cultures, an awareness of the non-human world as agential is hardly new. Against a fetishization of novelty, such critiques urge for theory to modes of thinking that have been historically neglected or maligned as the provenance of primitive cultures.

In this paper, I turn to animism as one such neglected framework for thinking ecological relations. Taking Miyazaki Hayao's *Princess Mononoke* as a case study, I draw on work by writers such as Mel Chen, Eduardo Kohn, and Shoko Yoneyama to argue that Miyazaki deploys animism in *Princess Mononoke* to illustrate the ways in which human wellness is entangled with multispecies flourishing. Through an attendance to the effects of wonder and fear produced by Miyazaki's depictions of nonhuman agency, this paper further argues that animism can offer powerful affective tools for cultivating respectful ecological relations. In doing so, my research pushes against a tendency in climate fiction to value science fiction ("cli-fi," "sci-fi") over fantasy. Without dismissing the contributions of modern science, this paper calls for a consideration of how modes of thought and aesthetic representation that have traditionally fallen outside the purview of the scientific can offer resources for imagining human-nonhuman relations.

Bio:

Cynthia Zhang is a graduate of the University of Chicago, where she earned a BA in Comparative Literature and an MA in the Humanities. Currently a fifth-year in the department for Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture, she works primarily on speculative fiction, with a particular emphasis on work by marginalized authors. In addition to her academic writing, she writes creatively. In 2021, she published her first novel, *After the Dragons*, with Stelliform Press.

3pm Panel 3B: 'Destabilizing Climate Fiction'
Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library Chair: David Tierney

Climate Change Crime: Transforming perspectives on the climate crisis through guilt, anger and mystery.

Matthew Munro, Queen's University Belfast (in-person presenting)

Twitter: @ TOMunro **Instagram:** @ t.o.munro

While the start date for the Anthropocene epoch is still in question, the overwhelming scientific consensus is that human activity is transforming the planet. The emerging climate emergency presents challenges for politicians, society and literature. Ghosh, Trexler and Johns-Putra have discussed how far literature has been transformed in response to the Anthropocene. Climate change fiction (cli-fi) has developed from a sub-genre into a genre-transcending theme. As Goodbody and Admussen separately set out, an accurate depiction of the climate presents challenges which require adaptation within each genre's conventions.

Cli-fi authors – such as Robinson, Kingsolver, and Bacigalupi - pursue climate activism through their writing, hoping to help transform attitudes. However, Schneider-Mayerson has shown the limited or even counter-productive impact cli-fi can have on attitudes towards the 'wicked' problem of climate change. In particular, climate fiction needs to take account of the socio-psychological barriers Marshall identified which can embed resistance to transformation.

Oreskes and Conway highlighted corporate malfeasance in obstructing action, suppressing evidence and manipulating the debate over climate action. Mann identifies how resistance is now shifting from 'climate denialism' towards 'climate inactivism' exemplified by Clark's *The Denial* (2020). Within cli-fi there is a progressively increasing emphasis on interrogating the criminality underpinning the climate crisis as seen in, Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth* (2001), Tuomainen's *The Healer* (2013), and Raymond's *Denial* (2022).

This research analyses these works as examples of 'climate fiction' - a term coined by King for novels that use crime fiction conventions to interrogate culpability and victimhood within the climate crisis. The research also examines the novels' depiction of a continuum of climate guilt as suggested by Dimick. The research considers how future climate fiction can contribute to transforming attitudes as the climate crisis demands.

Author Bio

MATTHEW MUNRO is a final year Creative Writing PhD student at Queen's University Belfast. He has an Engineering Degree, an MSc in Satellite Communications and Spacecraft Technology from UCL with a project that examined icecap data from the ERS-1 remote sensing satellite and a thirty-year career in education – including senior adviser roles and two principalships. Building on this and an MA in creative writing, he is exploring the convergence of these themes in a PhD project examining the pedagogical effectiveness of climate change fiction and how this can be enhanced through the narrative conventions of crime fiction.

4.15pm Keynote

Roz Kaveney

SoTa Library, Chair: Jonathan Thornton

**Against Intention - Random and aleatoric elements in the creation
of RHAPSODY OF BLOOD**

Setting out to write long-form fantasy committed me to a long journey of discovery, improvisation and happy accident parallel - over a period of decades - to the vastly briefer and less obviously rational processes that I go through when writing poems. To talk of author intention in either case - let alone to bind any reading to that intention - is fundamentally problematic.

DAY 2

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1A: 'Bodies'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Thameena Alam

Dr James Gillham, Wiltshire, UK

Twitter: @ james_M_gillham **Instagram:** @ ilium_works

Proposal:

Stapledon's Humpty: a nasty piece of work

Olaf Stapledon in *Last and First Men* (1930) presents to us a succession of the human form, culminating with our eighteenth rendition in the very far future. Each version of the human type is a reaction to a variety of conditions: climatic, geological, social, genetic, disease – this process is mirrored in *Star Maker* (1937). During *Last and First Men* Stapledon proposes alternate humans that emerge spontaneously among our iteration of the species, induced by eruptions of life-force to produce new incarnations of humans. 'Odd' John Wainwright from the 1935 book *Odd John* is another example, as is Humpty from *Last Men in London* (1932). These connected texts propose metamorphosis as a spontaneous emergence, separate to Darwinian evolution. Humpty, '... one of Nature's blundering attempts to improve upon her first, experimental, humanity' is a close study of a Stapledonian superhuman, the impact of human metamorphosis in society – and tells us much about ourselves but in grotesque form.

I propose:

An exhibition of up to 6 recent paintings, each painting is 71x71cm. A selection is included overleaf.

To include or not include (depending on conference organiser preference):

A paper examining Humpty as a Stapledonian superhuman, including a study of Humpty's links with other characters from Stapledon's texts; and why Humpty in particular is such a compelling protagonist. Although present in only one chapter of *LMIL*, Humpty - an aborted transformation to a new human type - holds a mirror to us all; he provides a static presence bound up in the flux of metamorphosis. Humpty embodies the tension between the change heralded by metamorphoses present in Stapledon's texts and his situation – he is knowingly out of joint, yet ignorant to the reasons.

Biographical note:

James Gillham completed a practice led PhD in Fine Art at University of Reading in 2014. Researching capability through the intersection of institutional demands and intersubj active expectation James immersed himself in the research by attending the gym for the duration of the PhD, while writing and making artwork. More recently James makes paintings about the Humpty character from Olaf Stapledon's *Last Men in London*. James lives and works in Wiltshire.

Info about James' current artwork is here: <https://iliumworks.wordpress.com/> Instagram portfolio here: https://www.instagram.com/ilium_works

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1A: 'Bodies'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Thameena Alam

Speculative Flesh Ecologies: An Indistinct Approach to (Non)Human Futures

Dr Samantha Hind, University of Sheffield (in-person presenting)

Twitter: @ samjhind **Instagram:** @ samjhindbooks

Imagine a world where humans eat humans, plants eat people, pigs eat garbage, and meat is machine-grown; these are some of the fleshy interactions imagined by speculative fiction writers. These fleshy interactions ask us what it means to consider ourselves – humans, animals, plants, things, and semi-living – as flesh and what kinds of ontological and ethical possibilities emerge when we reconsider what it means to both be and eat flesh.

These ontological and ethical possibilities of flesh, I suggest, operate within speculative flesh ecologies; a space for humans to explore and rethink the distinctions drawn between themselves and other nonhumans. The speculative flesh ecologies presented in twenty-first century speculative fiction engage with contemporary issues such as animal agriculture, deforestation, plastic pollution, and “techno-fixes,” in order to explore new ways of living with one another in times of heightened ecological uncertainty. Might the solution to anthropogenic problems come from embracing the posthuman position of indistinction between humans and nonhumans?

Building on Matthew Calarco’s indistinction approach, I bring together other approaches concerned with indistinction – Michael Marder’s grafts, Jane Bennett’s vital materialism, and Jean Baudrillard’s simulacra – in order to push indistinction into new directions. I conclude that each of these approaches, when used as a framework to explore speculative fiction, creates a cohesive argument for the indistinct possibilities of speculative flesh ecologies.

In this presentation, I will argue that the speculative flesh ecologies I explore in twenty-first century speculative fiction encourage us to adopt an indistinct approach to (non)human futures.

Bio:

Dr Samantha Hind has recently been awarded a PhD from the University of Sheffield. Her thesis, *Speculative Flesh Ecologies: The Indistinction of Flesh in 21st Century Speculative Fiction*, explores the construction of flesh as a facilitator for human and nonhuman indistinction in twenty-first century speculative fiction. She has had a chapter published in the edited collection *Interrogating the Boundaries of the Nonhuman: Literature, Climate Change, and Environmental Crises* (Lexington, 2022) and is currently co-editing the book *Creaturely Fear: Animality and Horror Cinema* (forthcoming) and working on turning her doctoral thesis into a monograph.

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1A: 'Bodies'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Thameena Alam

Building a Somatic Utopia: Body Modifications and Neo-Eugenics as Bio-Medical Cultural Capital in Twenty-First Century Dystopian Fiction

Leah Collins, University of Liverpool (in-person_ Twitter:
@LeahAnneCollins

Whilst conceptually, body modification has always been a part of our collective history, recent Western concepts are increasingly focused on its decoration rather than communication. Ranging across (traditionally) subversive subcultures, such as varied queer sadism and masochism communities, tattoo subcultures and sexually-liberated feminism, those that embrace such modifications are now increasingly implicated in the reciprocity of feedback that connects margins to mainstream. Bodies have become territories for technological innovation and are fought over by social movements as well as medical, cosmetic, fashion and culture industries; exciting ideas of a liberal, post-human radicalism. 2 Just as the boundary between margins and mainstream is blurred, so too is the distinction between cultural representations versus contemporary social practice. Dystopian fiction plays a critical role in the erasure of borders, hailing the modified body as a transformational harbinger for individual freedoms and a subversion of oligarchic control. This thesis closely considers these converging forms of commercial appropriation as they conspire to posit the figure of a simultaneously modified and commodified body indentured to the scientific, biotechnological and economic power structures that produce it under the false pretence of autonomy. The corporate colonisation of body modifications and neo-eugenics explores exploitative industrial 'corpocracy' economies that dismember bodies and communities, allowing for an introspective perspective into biomedical aspects of our current technology. At the same time, the following research also considers the technologies of body projects as forms of 'cultural capital' – employed as an individualising vehicle for liberating the self from the social as part of a capitalist-driven ideology of consumption.

From Kazuo Ishiguro's bio-political speculative novel, *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Margaret Atwood's somatic bio-dystopia *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and the John Fawcett's seminal television series; *Orphan Black* (2013), the question of body modifications gives face to a latent anxiety regarding non-human vitality vis-à-vis subjective alienation and transgressed boundaries. Bodies throughout the respective works are not ever fully authored as individual subjects, but rather as exploited sites for profiteering within a self-perpetuating bio-capitalist industry; a biological vessel that can only be truly understood through the historical forces by which it is shaped. By individually analysing each work, I will investigate the aesthetics sub-culture aspect of biohacking versus corporate body ownership. I intend to suggest that such pedagogical narratives shed light on inherently medically 'marginalized bodies' specifically those who are viewed as 'disposable', commodified and dehumanised by bio-somatic dystopian regime under the ruse of improving the genetic basis for future generations. Thus, I conclude that the novels speculate into the consequences of a 'corpocracy' economic system manipulated by an elite social stratum whom prioritise shallow wants over needs. Rather than pure fantasy, the novels pose a distinct and latent possibility. Yet, it is within such landscapes that marginalised bodies are transformed into active agents of social change by resisting and subverting hegemonic power structures.

By using Anna Teriwell's definition of somatic capitalism as 'the intervention into and monetization of life itself', I intend to suggest that body modifications work to create dystopic 'docile bodies' to obscure what is really a kind of normalisation. Because the utilisation of body modifications, specifically cosmetic surgery, primarily come from individuals who are eager to express themselves outwardly; the

possibilities that such practices can be weaponised as mechanisms of homogenisation are unsuspected and under-researched. I intend to present body modifications throughout the genre as a subversive response to the corporate colonization of the high-tech body, interrogating crucial ideas about who owns and controls it, as well as interrogating the radical forms of body alteration and the subversive promises this entails. The aim of this presentation, therefore, is to shed light on creating conditions allowing us to use technologies in ways that multiply our existential possibilities rather than further stratify us culturally, socially and economically.

Biography:

A prospective PhD researcher, due to begin at the University of Liverpool in 2023 with interests currently spanning biopolitical and medical speculative fiction throughout the twenty-first century novel. Leah's work closely examines the interactions of post-humanism under bio-capitalist regimes, specifically considering the literary representations of medicine, disease, plague narratives in conjunction with marginalized communities. Having recently completed her MA thesis on the significance of medical praxis within contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives, she hopes to use the PhD thesis as a gateway to explore the constraints of subjectivity as a lived reality, specifically within under-represented and stigmatised communities.

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Thameena Alam

Nikita Pinto, Independent Researcher

Please do not mention Nikita on any social media posts, thank you.

Uncanny Bodies: Posthuman Metamorphosis and Monstrosity in Doom Patrol

Since its emergence in the 1930s, the superhero genre has largely been preoccupied with visions of the ideal body as seen in the hypermasculine, immortal, hyper-powered and healthy body of the archetypal superhero, Superman. Such figures resonate with (trans)humanist discourse in the desire for a perfect body that transcends death, disability and illness while confirming Eurocentric conceptions of the human as white, able-bodied and male. Often, the bodies that do not fit this norm of Vitruvian perfection are villainized as monsters and fetishized as freaks.

Finding that the superhero genre often privileges the “healthy, hyper-powered and immortal body over the diseased, debilitated and defunct body,” Jose Alaniz argues that the superhero enacts the “erasure of the normal, mortal flesh in favour of a quasi-fascist physical ideal” (6). While this “erasure” is true of most superhero figures, DC Comics’s television adaptation of Doom Patrol (2019/2023) subverts this humanist narrative by rendering those deemed undesirable and deviant as heroic and agentic. Led by Dr Niles Caulder, the immortal paraplegic, the team members such as Robotman/Cliff Steele, a disembodied human brain in a mechanical body, Elasti-Girl/Rita Farr, a woman unable to control her metamorphic and malleable body, and Crazy Jane, a woman with 64 superpowers for each persona of her Dissociative Identity Disorder —defy the ordinary and counter the “human impulse to textualize, to contain, to explain” the Other (Garland-Thomson 2). Despite being ostracized for their abject and liminal bodies, the team adheres to the prosocial mission central to the superhero mythos by protecting the very public that alienates them.

This paper draws on disability and monstrosity studies to examine how the grotesque posthuman bodies present in Doom Patrol counter the hegemonic image of a bounded, fixed and stable human and “expose the fiction of normality” (Graham 54). In doing so, they operate as icons of Critical Posthumanities which seeks to include variant and non-normative bodies as part of the cultural discourse on the human. This chapter argues that by focusing on the “outcast,” the “cripple,” the “freak” and the “monster,” Doom Patrol treats difference as something to be accepted, celebrated, and even idealized.

Bio-note

Nikita Gloria Pinto is an Independent Researcher and CELTA trainee based in the U.A.E. She has previously worked as an Assistant Professor of English at St Agnes College, Karnataka. She holds an M. Phil in English from Stella Maris College, Chennai and an M.A. in English from the University of Delhi (India). Her research interests include Science Fiction, Posthumanism, Freak Studies, Graphic novels, Crime Fiction and Diasporic Writing.

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1B: ‘Who We Are, Where We Are’

Hybrid Panel, G01, Chair: Eamon Reid

Elizabeth Aherne, University College Cork (in-person)
Twitter: @ bethaahern

“Far from their original homeland”: Survivance, metamorphosis, and family in Waubgeshig Rice’s Moon of the Crusted Snow (2018)

Abstract:

Waubgeshig Rice’s 2018 novel *Moon of the Crusted Snow* has been studied as a narrative of survivance. According to Gerald Vizenor, survivance for Indigenous communities is “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name” (2008). However, survivance and its connection to the metamorphic community-as-family in Rice’s text have yet to be studied in scholarly literature. I argue that the Anishinaabe community in the text’s experience of apocalypse is a transformative one and that through a narrative of apocalyptic survivance, Rice decolonizes the Indigenous family.

In late Autumn, the novel’s Anishinaabe protagonist, Evan Whitskey and his community, located in the far North of Canada, are cut off from all electricity and outside communication. Rice’s portrayal of a First Nations community as a family transforms the apocalypse into an opportunity for growth. When they are infiltrated by people from the South the community-as-family does not merely survive but uses their “active presence” and storytelling to thrive. Indigenous scholars argue that the colonization of First Nations lands and the subsequent genocide of Indigenous communities in Canada is apocalyptic. And so Indigenous futurisms, such as Rice’s novel, and their portrayal of Indigenous communities strengths in apocalyptic circumstances illuminate the continued “active presence” that Indigenous communities must repeatedly secure through storytelling and culture. This presence is made visible in Rice’s novel through the transformations that occur within and through community-as-family. In my paper, I employ theories of Indigenous futurism, postcolonialism, and the family to explore how Rice decolonizes the family via the transformative portrayal of an Anishinaabe community and how this depiction situates the text firmly in the Indigenous futurist canon.

Bio:

Beth Aherne is a PhD candidate in the Department of English at University College Cork funded by the College of Arts, Celtic Studies, and Social Sciences Excellence Scholarship. Her research focuses on representations of the family in North American science fiction. In particular, she is concerned with how authors appropriate generic conventions to reject and reimagine the normative family in feminist, Afrofuturist, and Indigenous futurist texts.

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1B: ‘Who We Are, Where We Are’

Hybrid Panel, G01, Chair: Eamon Reid

Temastrah pra Skribeh: Using speculative fiction to support creole/indigenous cultural reclamation and revitalisation in Singapore

Kevin Martens Wong (he/him), speculative fiction writer, independent scholar and linguist.
Instagram: @zeekyang

Kristang (iso 639-3: mcm) is both a critically endangered language spoken natively in Melaka and Singapore by around 1,000 people, including the author, and one of the main endonyms of the community who speaks it, the Jenti Kristang or Portuguese-Eurasians; both language and community have their genesis in the 1511 conquest of Melaka by the Portuguese and their subsequent coercive intermarriages with local Malay residents, and were further marginalised and traumatically impacted by the Lee Kuan Yew administration (1965-1990) in Singapore, to the extent that by 2015, most younger Kristang, including the author, had almost no idea their culture and language even existed. However, both have experienced a dramatic, unprecedented revitalisation since 2016 thanks to revitalisation efforts led by the author, the great-grandson of one of the leaders of the counterinstitutional grassroots movement under the Lee administration, and also known publicly and internationally as a speculative fiction author and the first openly gay and non-binary civil servant and educator in a government school in Singapore.

Previously conditioned into compartmentalising the above facets of his identity, and divested from his own personal family history and relationship with his culture until a traumatic experience with the state following the COVID-19 pandemic, this presentation explores how the author unified all of the above into a powerful new approach to his own speculative fiction writing that seeks to not only provide a reinvigorated sense of pride and belonging to Singapore for both Kristang and non-Kristang Singaporean readers, but which deliberately and consciously encodes strong positive mental health outcomes derived from both Kristang approaches to psychoemotional health and Western contemporary understandings of the human psyche, in autoethnographic dialogue with what previous academic scholarship into the author's earlier writing has already noted about his unique positionality as an 'Other of Others' (Fischer 2020, 2023; Holden 2019).

Bio

Kevin Martens Wong is a gay, non-binary Kristang / Portuguese-Eurasian speculative fiction writer, independent scholar and linguist. He leads the internationally-recognised grassroots movement to revitalise the critically endangered Kristang language in Singapore, Kodrah Kristang, and was the 2017 recipient of both the President's Volunteer and Philanthropy Award (Individual—Youth) and the Lee Hsien Loong Award for Outstanding All-Round Achievement. His first novel, *Altered Straits*, was longlisted for the 2015 Epigram Books Fiction Prize, and his work has also appeared in *Transect*, entitled and the Light to Night Festival. He currently runs his own freelance coaching and consulting initiative, Merlionsman (merlionsman.com).

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1B: 'Who We Are, Where We Are'

Hybrid Panel, G01, Chair: Eamon Reid

Mimesis, Poiesis, and the Aesthetics of Speculative Fiction in Vandana Singh

Ankit Prasad (he/him), Hyderabad, India (online presenting),

Twitter: @ onkeet

Mimesis, as a foundational principle of the work of art, had for some time been carefully formulated as the justificatory principle for the movement/mode/genre called realism. Seo-Young Chu's challenge to this premise – where science fiction (SF) “generate[s] mimetic accounts of cognitively estranging referents” – is only a recent and more sophisticated account of the idea that SF's operative mode is actually “realist”. This battle over the claim to “mimesis”, however, masks a deeper question, one that is addressed in the work of Vandana Singh.

I propose to show that the contestations over “mimesis” as a concept are inadequate to a full explanation of the nature of fiction, which is captured in another Aristotelian term, “poiesis”. It is poiesis that represents a lasting resistance to Plato's idea of poetry/literature. Through an analysis of Singh's “A Speculative Manifesto” and her story, “Somadeva: A Sky River Sutra”, I will argue that a fundamental enquiry into the category of “speculative fiction” would necessarily need to critically evaluate SF theory, associate with broader aesthetic categories (like “myth” or “poetry”) and construct its aesthetic claims around the concept of “poiesis”. I will show that the “Somadeva” story reflects on “myth” and the nature of myth-making, which substitutes for a reflection on stories as “made” entities. Further, I will argue that Singh's chosen metaphor for “poiesis” is the act of weaving/threading, an apt image for a mode whose major function in Singh's oeuvre is to bridge boundaries and make connections.

Ankit Prasad is a Senior Research Fellow at the department of English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, India. He is currently pursuing a PhD on the role of speculation as a principle in the Speculative Fiction of Vandana Singh.

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1C: ‘Gestation & Gender’

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

Becoming zoomorphic: Exploring Han Song's Red Ocean from a post-humanistic Perspective

Ms. Yue ZHOU, Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (online presenting)

Instagram: @yoluvsoraya

Abstract:

Han Song is one of contemporary China's "big three" science fiction writers. His style is often compared to Kafka's. In the *Red Ocean*, he imagines a group of grotesque metamorphoses of human beings into deep-sea aquatic beings. Resemble Kafka's metamorphosis of a human into an insect, they are non-human but also somewhat non-animal; instead, a life-form that is hybrid or, to say, a kind of posthuman. Posthuman aquatic beings are portrayed as numb to suffering, forgetful of the past, cannibalistic, and incestuous. Moreover, the writer especially represents the dual suffering of non-white, female aquatic beings, who are reduced to a "food-making machine" (the food is their baby). From a post-humanistic perspective, the subjugation of women is interlocking with the human domination of nature by structural injustice.

At the end of the novel, posthuman aquatic beings reincarnate as a puddle of water. The sound of the water changes from a lion to a guy, to a lady to a cicada. The reincarnation is wise in Daoism - it is the One, and the One is many. The oneness or wholeness, though nihilistic, transcends the binary hierarchy between male-female, strong-weak, poor-rich, young-old, healthy-disabled, humannonhuman, active-passive, observer-observed, and subject-object, shifting to post-humanistic ethics. It resonates with the post-anthropocentric thinking that humans are no longer a significant geological force to the Earth's ecosystem but decentered in a relational, more-than-human world.

As the writer himself inherited the Chinese Avant-garde spirit in the 1980s, it is argued that Han Song comments on the ecologically self-destructive, exploitative, misogynistic, and patriarchal reality in China and worldwide through a deformed, defamiliarized way. His science fictional writing is fused with supernatural elements, the dissolution of time, and symbolisms, expanding what science fiction has long been accepted as "cognitive estrangement."

Ms. Yue ZHOU (MA Liverpool) is a Ph.D. student at the Dept. of China Studies, Xi'an JiaotongLiverpool University. Her research interest focuses on contemporary Chinese science fiction, Anthropocene fiction, ecocriticism, and posthumanism. One of her articles appeared in *Ecocriticism and Chinese Literature: Imaged Landscapes and Real Lived Spaces*, published by Routledge. Another article, "The Representation of the Anthropocene in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction," is under review. Her coauthored paper with Adeline Johns-Putra, Xi Liu, Loredana Cesarino, and Guohong Mai, "Whose world? Whose World Literature? Looking for Anthropocene fiction in China," is forthcoming by De Gruyter.

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1C: 'Gestation & Gender'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

Sarah Michelle Wagona (she/her), University of Wyoming. (in-person)

Abstract

The subgenre of pregnancy horror, particularly in its cinematic manifestations, has undergone distinct changes as women creatives enter the field in larger numbers and as the notion of pregnancy goes beyond the cisheterosexual lens. Under the patriarchal lens, pregnancy has been seen as the ultimate manifestation of womanhood as it is connected with the heterosexual social contract that necessitates man as the dominant breadwinner and woman as the submissive housewife. Speculative, science-

fiction, pregnancy horror such as Julia Ducournau's *Titane* and Donald Cammell's *Demon Seed* implore us to consider how the social contract influences the gender and lived experience of the impregnated person.

Both of these films explore the queered body of the pregnant person through the inanimate status of the "father". In *Titane*, a truck impregnates a woman before she must hide her own gender in an attempt to evade the law. In *Demon Seed*, an Artificially Intelligent robot impregnates a woman after holding her hostage. Throughout the film, she is forced to reenact the life of a housewife in order to survive.

I will examine the contrast between both films to show that the queer body can experience pregnancy to the same degree as the cisheterosexual body. I will show how the circumstances of consent, or the lack thereof, colors our views of true womanhood and complicates views on transgenderism. I will demonstrate the generational shift of transhumanist storytelling; from a fear of the transhuman destroying humankind to a mode of exploration of feared bodies. As we invite more queer and woman storytellers into the science-fiction and horror genre, the manifestation of their stories across subgenres should be studied, as should their contrast to the genres foundations.

Biographical Note

Sarah Wagoner is working towards her MA in English Literature and Minor in Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Wyoming. She obtained her BA in English Literature and Minor in Creative Writing from Chadron State College. Her research interests lie with gender, sexual trauma, queer sexuality, and the horror and exploitation film genre. Her current thesis is on the cultural manifestations of the pregnancy horror genre, specifically in how they relate to the heterosexual social construct.

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1C: 'Gestation & Gender'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

Dr Sue Dawes, Essex University (in-person)

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Metamorphosis—from human to host.

Birth without the agency of women is the premise of many science-fiction stories, beginning with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: a child-like monster born out of death. *Frankenstein's* monster was created outside the womb, but other fictional children are imagined as cuckoos looking to nest in the

human body. This paper will look specifically at the use of the human body as a vessel for this metamorphosis, and the transformative effects on the human as incubator.

Using three sources – the Alien Trilogy, Octavia Butler’s ‘Bloodchild’ and Ira Levin’s Rosemary’s Baby, I will consider how alien gestation alters our perception of hosts from parents to something ‘other’ and how the ‘child’ within transforms the body.

In Alien, when Kane is impregnated by a facehugger, he becomes little more than a hatchery; in ‘Bloodchild’ Gan, coerced into carrying T’Gatoi’s grub, despite the known risk to his health, becomes both food and vessel; and in Rosemary’s Baby, when Rosemary is tricked into a satanic pregnancy, her body is contaminated by the horror developing inside.

As well as exploring the metamorphic dehumanisation of the characters ‘chosen’ to host, this paper will also consider whether this type of transformation—from human to vessel— is an effective reflection of elements of pregnancy not generally discussed: the long-term physical consequences of childbirth, the psychological metamorphosis of individual to parent, restrictive cultural practices used to control health during gestation and the concept of ‘pregnant women as foetal containers’(Annas).

Bio

Dr Sue Dawes has a PhD in Creative Writing from Essex University. She’s a writer, teacher, and structural editor, with a preference for the speculative. This will be her third year attending the CRSF conference.

9.15am -10.45am Panel 1C: ‘Gestation & Gender’

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

‘Egg’ by Ravenna Christie

Ravenna Christie, *University of Liverpool* (in-person)

Critical Engagement

Egg is a short story which explores the concept of male pregnancy within science fiction. Through the re-gendering and de-gendering of the pregnant body, I examine the relationship between pregnancy, gender and identity.

While desensitisation and conditioning can function to socialise the presentation of the pregnant body as beautiful, natural and inevitable, the reality can be an unwelcome and traumatising prognosis. For some, it can feel like pregnancy hijacks the physical self and alters the individual's identity, not the least through the physical and emotional changes but through the psychological weight of the body no longer being one's own. Instead, the person becomes a body within a body. Parallel to this internal experience of pregnancy, there is an external shift in politics towards pregnant bodies. Loud political discourse concerning pregnant people's rights hurtles the individual into a social, scientific and political maelstrom. This discourse often finds itself in the hands of those separated from the issue, for example, majority groups like cisgendered, heterosexual men. As such, Egg aims to explore the structural integrity of this discourse when the majority group's stance is challenged by forcing them to exist within pregnant bodies.

Creative Work

A planet, the undisturbed final product of perfected evolution, an ecosystem held in balance with absolute natural precision, exists quietly in the corner of the universe. Four men and a non-binary person discover the planet, unaware that the planet's ecosystem impregnates any visitor via an airborne fertiliser. The planet's true nature is revealed to not be a planet at all but a gigantic egg in space. The egg cracks and an enormous, godlike creature is born. The story dissects the concept of a cyclic state of bodies within bodies: the character, the foetus, the body of a 'planet', the creature inside the egg and the body of space itself.

Biography

Ravenna Christie completed her BA in English and Creative Writing at Birmingham City University and is currently completing her postgraduate degree in Creative and Critical Writing at University of Liverpool. In September, Ravenna will begin her PhD where her research will examine female bodies, feminine technologies and pregnancy in science fiction with a particular emphasis on artificial intelligence. She has successfully published both short stories and poetry and is an editor within the School of the Arts. Ravenna's creative writing typically engages with feminist narratives, queerness and body politics.

11am -12.15pm Panel 2A: 'Octavia Butler and Restructured Bodies'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Jonathan Thornton & David Tierney

The Post-Apocalyptic Bureaucrat: Disability in Kafka and Octavia Butler

Saul Leslie, University of Liverpool (in-person)

Abstract

A figure wakes from nightmarish sleep in an enclosed room, discovering that their body has changed. This is how Kafka famously begins *The Metamorphosis*. It is also how Octavia Butler begins her trilogy *Lilith's Brood*. After 250 years Lilith is 'Awoken' to a post-apocalyptic world and the change to her body is a scar on her abdomen, a result of a 'talent for cancer'. Butler's narrative framing invites comparison with Kafka, and both writers engage in a similar interrogation of various kinds of impairment which comes with bodily impairment, disease, and injury. More broadly, Butler's preoccupation with themes

of 'catastrophe, survival, and metamorphosis' (p. 226, Harraway) draws a direct line back to the early 1900s, when modernity was developing its bureaucratic and industrial capacities, when Kafka's professional role in Accident Insurance involved the daily drudgery of filing reports for disabilities and injuries sustained from catastrophes in the workplace. Taking up these modernist concerns in the age of Reagan's proposed 'Star Wars', Butler casts Lilith as a kind of post-apocalyptic bureaucrat tasked with repopulating planet Earth, who must also negotiate her own non-normative embodiment in the weary, fatiguing process.

This paper sets out the case for considering Kafka as a foundational writer of disability experience while demonstrating how Butler develops those themes from *The Metamorphosis* and elsewhere, putting them in an overtly science fiction context to explore how the demands placed on the body by modernity have metamorphosed towards the end of the 20th century.

Themes: disability, labour, employment, bodily fatigue, Crip Time.

BIO

Saul's research concerns portrayals of disability in post-1900 culture. He has worked with Liverpool Hope's Centre for Culture and Disability Studies, and teaches Disability Literature on the undergraduate module Socially Engaged Creative Writing at the University of Liverpool. Recently he helped to pass the British Sign Language Bill into law, providing the academic research for Rosie Cooper MP's remarks in the House of Commons. His work on American literature has been published by peer-reviewed journal ORBIT, he has published fiction through Liverpool University Press and Bloomsbury and his remarks on disability have been printed in the TLS.

11am -12.15pm Panel 2A: 'Octavia Butler and Restructured Bodies'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Jonathan Thornton & David Tierney

Dana's body as a as a vehicle of political critique and social transformation

Marietta Kosma (she/her), University of Oxford (online presenting)

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Throughout Octavia Butler's *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, the author raises numerous tensions around the notions of accessibility, disability, equality, and inclusion, exposing the crisis of black futures. My analysis focuses on the way that disability informs the protagonist Dana's experiences in the context of slavery, her positioning in the contemporary discourse of neoliberalism, and her positioning in the prospective future. Very few scholars perceive Dana's subjectivity as an actual state of being that carries value both materially as well as metaphorically. The materiality of disability has

not constituted part of the larger discourse of the American slave system. By examining how Butler renders disability both figuratively and materially, I establish a connection between the past, the present, and the future. The different figurations of space and time exposed through Dana's time-traveling help conceptualize her accessibility in different structures. Previous scholarship has focused exclusively on the origin and legacy of trauma, inflicted on the black female body of the twentieth century; however there has been too little criticism in relation to the active construction of black female subjectivity, located at the level of the body. I wish to explore how spectacles of violence against black female bodies function in the wider political imagery of the twenty-first century. The physical and psychological displacement of Dana, as a black female body, exposes her trauma and the difficulties she faces in order to reclaim her subjectivity in a society burdened by a history of violence and exploitation. Even though *Kindred* was written before the Black Lives Matter movement emerged, it can be analyzed in a way that asserts the continuity of African-American trauma, the perpetuation of systematic racism in the United States, and the crisis of blackness in the future. Systematic violence threatens black women's wholeness and renders their bodies at risk.

Marietta Kosma is a third year DPhil student in English at the University of Oxford at Lady Margaret Hall. Her academic background includes a master in English from JSU and a master in Ancient Greek Theatre from the University of the Aegean. Her research interests lie in twentieth-century American literature, post colonialism and gender studies.

11am -12.15pm Panel 2A: 'Octavia Butler and Restructured Bodies'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Jonathan Thornton & David Tierney

Holley Taylor, Graduate Student (online presenting)
Department of English, Western Michigan University
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Title: Radically Imagined: The role of Liminal Space in Parable of the Sower's Earthseed
Keywords: radical imagination; climate justice; liminal spaces; Octavia Butler; ecocriticism; speculative fiction; cli-fi

Abstract:

In keeping with the conference themes of transformations, I argue that Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* encourages readers to reexamine what it means to be "radical." Butler embraces both the

etymological definition of radical – of or belonging to roots, or rooted – and the modern environmental movement’s definition, which emphasizes its newness and departure from established norms as well as its connection to nature. By bringing together the work of recent scholars like Marlene Allen, Sylvia Mayer, and Jennifer Terry with the work of Amitav Ghosh on the Anthropocene, Gloria Anzaldua on the nepantla, and botanist Stefano Mancuso on the genius of plants, I offer an examination of Earthseed’s origin and tenets to explain the role of liminal space and breaking down of traditional binaries in survival in a post-apocalyptic America. This form of survival is uniquely radical in its ability to learn from the lessons of the past and imagine a future where mestizas thrive.

Critics of the novel have aptly noted the presence of both dystopian and utopian themes within the novel, proving Butler’s ability to both accept and privilege seemingly opposing ideologies. My work takes the exploration of dualities within the text further by examining how Earthseed upends humans’ tendency toward polarization, and instead, emerges from a liminal space. I posit that Earthseed, like its namesake of seed and plants, seeks to demonstrate the ways that liminality is critical for long-term human survival, both on Earth and any other planets we might seed. It is through Earthseed that Butler allows us to imagine an aspirational future in the face of climate change in a way that empowers those most vulnerable to its effects. Ultimately, I conclude that Earthseed. serves as an embodiment of the term “radical,” holding equally important what is new and what is rooted.

Bio: Holley Taylor is a Master’s student at Western Michigan University, where she teaches First Year Writing and is studying American Literature, specializing in Science Fiction and Environmental literature.

11am -12.15pm Panel 2B: ‘Mass Produced World’ Hybrid

Panel, G01, Chair: Alex Veregan

Fazil Akin (he/him), University of Liverpool (in-person)

Tiwtter: @ Fazilakin Instagram: @ fazilakin

Material Mediators as Speculations: An intersection of Product Design and Speculative Fictions

Product Design provides solutions for everyday problems by developing objects by considering their use, production, disposal, and economic and sociological impact. Through industrialisation, many everyday problems were solved through technological developments and through mass production; these solutions were affordable for many people. The environmental impact of these solutions, on the other hand, began to be a problem itself, as Victor Papanek (1973) states. At the

same time as Papanek's book, the term wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973) appeared to address such problems that produced objects cause. As wicked problems are not as easy to solve as everyday problems, designers need to find new ways to think about them. Alternative ways of designing include fields such as critical design, design for debate, speculative design, and design fiction. One of the prominent designers and theoreticians in this field, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby (2013), compare affirmative design with critical design, where critical design proposes 'functional fictions' instead of 'fictional functions.' The paper aims to review the alternative design practices while comparing the material outcomes from each practice to discuss the 'functional fiction' properties of these, relating them to the medium of speculative fiction books.

Fazil Akin is a lecturer in the division of Industrial Design at the University of Liverpool. He has a BA and MSc in Industrial Design, an MA in Product Design and Management, and a CAS in Interaction Design. Currently, he is a Ph.D. student at Hessen State University of Art and Design, working in the field of philosophy of technology and animism. He teaches about critical design, design for experiences, materializing and visualising design and does research on the fields of humantechnology relations and future scenarios.

11am -12.15pm Panel 2B: 'Mass Produced World'
Hybrid Panel, G01, Chair: Alex Veregan

**Pushing the Borders of Reality: Posthumanism, Disability and
Transcorporeality in Richard Powers' The Overstory**

Lucía Bennett, uni of grenada (in-person)

Twitter: @ LuciaBennett Instagram: @ luciabennett

Abstract

The Fourth Industrial Revolution describes the new era we are currently immersed in, where the surge of new technologies is merging the biological, physical, and digital spheres, and which in turn, is affecting all levels of society, including the identity of individuals (Schwab 2016). The concern with the conceptualization of the human is taken up by critical posthumanism, recently engaged with the reconfiguration of the human in the new contexts of globalization, climate change, technoscience and

late capitalism (Herbrechter 2018). This article focuses on two short stories that are included in *The Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers. 'Douglas Pavlicek' is about a disabled Air Force Vet who is devastated by the clear-cutting in Oregon and 'Neelay Mehta' centers on a young computer genius who is paralyzed from the waist down due to an accident. Both stories engage the reader in a reflection on the fine line between reality and simulation. In this paper, I contend that pushing the boundaries of reality, both at the ideological and textual levels, allows for a reconfiguration of the posthuman in terms of natural, technological, and disabled entanglements. For this reason, taking critical posthumanism as the main theoretical framework, I carry out a close reading of both texts with two main objectives. Firstly, I aim to analyze the depiction of reality, especially in relation to ideas of the Capitalocene (Hartley 2016) and the Transparency Society (Han 2020). Secondly, I aim to examine the figure of the posthuman with a special emphasis on the portrayal of disability and normalcy (Davis 2017). In essence, I seek to explore the role of literature and its narrative resources to create a posthuman discourse that brings trans-corporeality (Alaimo 2016) and disability to the fore within cultural and political debates about contemporary subjectivities.

Biographical note

Lucía Bennett is a Ph.D. candidate in North American literature at the University of Granada, Spain. She holds a B.A. degree in English Studies and an M.A. degree in English Literature and Linguistics from the same university. In 2021 she received a Spanish Competitive Ph.D. grant (FPU) by the Spanish Ministry of Education to join the English Department at the University of Granada and carry out her doctoral research on Richard Powers' fiction. Presently, Lucía is a member of the Research Project "Contemporary North American Fiction and the 4th Industrial Revolution: From Posthumanity to Privation and Social Change".

11am -12.15pm Panel 2B: 'Mass Produced World'

Hybrid Panel, G01, Chair: Alex Veregan

Ethics Through Science Fiction [working title]

Dr Rachel Handley (she/they), University of Dublin (in-person presenting)

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Science fiction breathes life into ethics. It allows us to see, in dazzling imaginative colour, how our choices could play out in worlds far removed from us. It challenges us and makes real our assumptions about ourselves and what it is to be good. My aim in this paper is to show how we can use science fiction as a resource for both learning from and thinking about ethics. I'll focus Isaac Asimov's Foundation Series. Spanning seven books and 1000 years, this series is rich with ethical dilemmas and pressing questions.

I'll explore two key themes from Asimov's work: the importance of society and the ethical consequences of its collapse, and the ethics of individual versus collective choice. At the start of the

series, we are warned that the Galactic Empire, a model of the Roman empire, is set to destroy itself. The warning comes from Hari Seldon, a scientist who, by turning sociology into mathematics, can predict the ebb and flow of power, culture, and society. Seldon's sociology – called Psychohistory – rests on the assumption that only collective actions can shape the world in a meaningful way; individual choices are neither here nor there. Later, Asimov undercuts this claim and goes on to show that individuals not only matter, but they matter enormously. I'll argue that we can learn much from Asimov's science fiction. When we read his work in the context of our society, a world which is on the brink of climate change engendered collapse, our need to understand the ethics of consequences and individual action is urgent. Asimov's Foundation Series can help bring our current ethical dilemmas to life, and by doing so, help us to make the right choices.

Bio

I am a philosopher at Trinity College Dublin, specialising in ethics. I'm also a science fiction writer and poet. My short stories have been published widely and my debut philosophical short story collection, *Possible Worlds and Other Stories*, was published in December 2022 by Ellipsis Imprints. My story, *The Man of the Sand*, was recently nominated for the Pushcart Prize, and my story, *The Sound*, was longlisted for the BSFA best short fiction award.

11am -12.15pm Panel 2C: 'Death Positivity'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Alex Carabine

The Last (Wo)Man Standing: Mary Shelley, Mourning, and Productive Grief

Scarlette-Electra LeBlanc, University of Hull (Online Presenting)

This paper examines Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826) as a productive expression of grief following the losses of her husband, Percy Shelley, and three of her children. Much of the existing scholarship interprets the novel's multiple depictions of Percy as an attempt to memorialise him. However, the novel's many stagings of the death of a loved one also allow Mary to productively expunge and process her own grief.

Although set in the 21st century as a plague devastates humanity, death is never treated as mundane. Instead, the vignettes of death shown display an individual respect and empathy, particularly in relation to the responses of those the dead have left behind. I suggest that each of these stagings allows Mary to explore a particular response to loss, as well as to engage with alternate narratives to that of reality. Even the most obvious comparison to Percy's death, when Adrian dies in a shipwreck, sees Mary

experimenting with counternarratives; she places her own narrative counterpart, Verney, on the ship with him.

Similar alternate realities are entertained through Merrival, another Percy figure, going mad after losing his wife and children, and Perdita drowning herself in the sea after losing her husband, which ties this novel to the genre of speculative fiction. Rather than self-indulgent, each repetition of loss allows Mary to re-examine and reinterpret her individual experience, working through her grief; the novel ends with Verney as the eponymous 'Last Man,' but he is still hopeful that he may not always be.

Bio:

Scarlette-Electra LeBlanc recently graduated from a Master's degree in Romantic and Victorian Studies from the University of St Andrews. Before that, she read English at Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Her current research interests are eighteenth- and nineteenth-century representations of fairy tales, folklore and the supernatural; self-construction, author status, and identity formation in Victorian fiction; and the relationship between motherhood and death. Her dissertation explored the fallen woman's survival through motherhood in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh*. She will shortly be starting a PhD at the University of Hull.

11am -12.15pm Panel 2C: 'Death Positivity'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Alex Carabine

Hollie Willis (she/her), University of Glasgow (in-person)

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Unpacking the Physical Transformation of the Corpse in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth

When first reading Tolkien's assertion that death is the key theme of *The Lord of the Rings*, the examples of death that immediately spring to mind include Boromir, Gandalf and Denethor. However, there are lesser-explored instances that shed light on both Tolkien's approaches to representing death and the unique ways in which one can die in Middle-earth. These fantastical demises result in unusual, yet fascinating physical transformations of the corpse that give us an insight into the relationship between the body and soul in Tolkien's depictions of death and the physical body's role in memorialisation rites. This paper will examine three key examples of postdeath transformation: the preserved bodies in the Dead Marshes, the self-cremation of Fëanor, and the post-death mutilation of Celebrimbor. I will contextualise these transformations by considering the role of the corpse in

Catholicism, anthropological theories of post-death corpse rituals reflecting societal values of the living, and the wider sociological implications of encountering the corpse as interpreted through theorisations of abjection. My analysis will conclude with an emphasis on the role of the physical corpse in Tolkien's work as a liminal site of ever-evolving value systems, rather than a passive object. (205)

Bionote:

Hollie Willis is a first-year PhD student at the University of Glasgow, specifically working in the Centre for Fantasy and the Fantastic. Her thesis focuses on representations of funerary rites in post-1990 fantasy literature. Her wider research goal is to explore the potential beneficial role of fantasy literature as a tool against death denial within the Death Awareness and Death Positivity Movements.

11am -12.15pm Panel 2C: 'Death Positivity'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Alex Carabine

Mind uploading, death denial, and revaluing death in science fiction

Julia A. Empey (she/her), University of Cambridge (online presenting)

This paper examines how science fiction narratives become a tool to renegotiate and revalue death. Specifically, this paper is part of a larger project examining the ethics, possibilities, and limitations of mind uploading – replicating human consciousness through artificial intelligence (AI) – as mediated through science fiction and the anticipatory assumptions made about future technologies. I am interested in how mind uploading as a technological concept does not offer an alternative vision for the future or human immortality and currently only reaffirms death denial.

As Teresa Heffernan argues, while science and scientific progress ostensibly offer new visions for the future, it is still entangled with the politics of death: eugenics, the atomic bomb, and the existential threat of intelligent robots and AI, to name some. Here, science fiction “disrupts the linear, instrumental thrust of these fields” (Heffernan 67) and turns science towards an ethical impulse. Utilizing the 2018 Netflix series *Altered Carbon*, Arkady Martine's 2019 novel *A Memory Called Empire*,

Neil Stephenson's 2019 novel *Fall; or, Dodge in Hell* as case studies, I am interested in how these texts formal elements delineate how mind uploading functions as a type of Cartesian dualism and how this split between the mind/body upholds not only uncritical politics pertaining to class, race, colonialism, etc. but also death and dying. Instead of simply asking if we can and should make these life extending technologies, I think it is critical to understand the anti-death impulse behind these imaginings. Drawing from Nina Lykke's concept of "vibrant death," where death is "not in opposition to life, but existing in a flat continuum intertwined with it," I argue that mind uploading suggests a need to radically revalue death and embrace it as life affirming.

Bio:

Julia A. Empey received her PhD in English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University. Dr Empey is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Faculty of English at the University of Cambridge and a Research Associate at Cambridge Digital Humanities and Corpus Christi College. She is the co-editor of *Feminist Posthumanism in Contemporary Science Fiction Film and Media: From Annihilation to High Life and Beyond* (Bloomsbury, September 2023). Her research and publication interests focus on contemporary literature and film, feminist and posthumanist theory, and science fiction literature, film, and media. Her other interests include eco-criticism, cosmopolitan studies, and political theory.

12.45am -2.00pm Panel 3A: 'Make it Weird'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

Consume Plants for Better Futures: Contemporary Scandinavian New Weird Realities, and Spatialities in the Novels of Leena Krohn, Johanna Sinisalo, and Karin Tidbeck

Name: András Fodor, Independent scholar

Bio:

András Fodor is a weird author and an independent scholar. He obtained his PhD at University of Szeged, Faculty of Arts, Doctoral School of Literature in Hungary. He has been publishing reviews and short stories since 2010 mainly in his native tongue, Hungarian. In 2016 he won the JAKKendő Award for his manuscript collection of short stories, *The Smiling Juggler*, which was published later in the same year. His recent publication is "Amongst You, We Are the Witnesses of Withering: Hungarian New Weird Spatial Formations in the Short Fictions of Lilla Erdei, Balázs Farkas, and Attila Veres" (in *SFRA Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1, *On the Edge: The Fantastic in Hungarian Literature and Culture*). His research interests are spatiality, cities, the New Weird, and China Miéville.

Abstract:

Leena Krohn, Johanna Sinisalo, and Karin Tidbeck are three representatives of contemporary Scandinavian literature whose texts fall into the strange, difficult-to-define category, both in the domestic and international context. Important features of their writings are the strong social critique, the questioning boundaries of contemporary perceptions of reality and spatiality in a utopian-dystopian setting. Particularly in this framework, reality and spatiality are problematic as they are more noticeably subjected to power relations. The result is a constant struggle among the participants in a form of negotiations, whose outcome determines the framework in which they live. Moreover, in this setting participants tend to seek extraordinary measures to influence the negotiations. The power of made-up scenarios and dreams provides perspective and hope for those, who practice them. Enhancing the power of possibilities and having them become realisations, people who live in a utopian-dystopian setting, turn to substances that induce these processes. Consuming plants turn into a major factor in influencing reality and spatiality in frameworks where the power relations are asymmetrical. Utilising a combined toolkit of spatial theory and critical plant studies, the analysis focuses on Leena Krohn's *Datura*, or a Figment Seen by Everyone (2001), Karin Tidbeck's *Amatka* (2012), and Johanna Sinisalo's *The Core of the Sun* (2013), Scandinavian New Weird novels with a utopian-dystopian setting. The *Datura*, the mushroom, and the chili have the ability to reconstruct reality and spatiality for those who consume them. The creation becomes a monstrous reality and space reminiscent of Kafka, where questions are not answered in a reassuring way, the monstrousness rooted in the unspeakable, elusive, and disembodied. However, these experiences only touch the surface of the novels and reveal the entanglement of possibilities and then realisations of a better tomorrow. On this line, the paper argues that these plants play a crucial part in broadening the horizon with which they produce their own more-than-human reality and spatiality – rooted quite literally in the interdependence of species.

12.45am -2.00pm Panel 3A: 'Make it Weird'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

Hive Minds in SFF

Jonathan Thornton, University of Liverpool Twitter: @JonathanThornt2

Explorations of insects in speculative fiction frequently use hives. These aspects of insect behaviour have been known for thousands of years, and it is a markedly different form of social organisation from that observed by humans and other mammals whilst still being recognisable as one. In this talk, I will look at the different ways in which speculative fiction conceptualises the hive. During the Cold War, the hive is a metaphor for communism, contrasted against the rugged individualism of the white, American, male heterosexual protagonist. The hive acts as a site of identity formation for humanity, by symbolising what it is not. As such it is a key aspect of how the insect is able to metaphorically stand for a gendered, racialised, sexualised Other. The hive is a physical space that allows the metaphorical "insect world" to become a place the human characters can enter and interact with. The organic hive in the technofuturological context of science fiction represents the repressed nature/woman/other in the humanist binary oppositions of man and civilisation, and by acting as a space where man is forced to confront these repressed elements, erodes the boundaries between the binaries that allow these identities to be formed.

Keywords: science fiction, insects, hives, animal studies, posthumanism, speculative

Bio: Jonathan Thornton is in his third year studying for a PhD in Science Fiction literature at the University of Liverpool. He is interested in the portrayal of insects in speculative fiction and fantastika. He has an MA in Science Fiction literature and an MSc in Medical Entomology, and works as a technician at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine. He is the book reviews editor for Foundation magazine. He also writes criticism and reviews and conducts interviews for internet publications Tor dot com, Fantasy Faction, The Fantasy Hive and Gingernuts of Horror.

12.45am -2.00pm Panel 3A: 'Make it Weird'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Lucy Nield

**'Weird, Wet and Obscene':
sea creature imaginaries and the transgender body**

H Frances Hallam (they/them), University of Surrey (in-person attendance) Twitter:

@cephalopodlit

In this paper, I explore the way sea creature imaginaries facilitate queer bodily transformations through genderqueer bodies in two works of science fiction. For this analysis, I explore Rita Indiana's *Tentacle* (2016) and the film by Lucile Hadžihalilović entitled *Evolution* (2016). Both pieces of media imagine a speculative exploration of male surgical transformation and pregnancy, evoking seahorse surrogacy and the regenerative bodies of starfish. These generate posthuman cuts into gendered boundary limits of the human, via its inversions of essentialised motherhood. Drawing abjection, monstrosity and desire, depictions of oceanic nonhuman bodies as queer takes the transgender exclusion from categories of 'the human' as a starting point for the transformative power of nonhuman embodiments in de-essentialising gendered categories, through a posthuman analysis. Reading kinship between the queer animal of sea creatures and the transformative body of transmasculinity, there emerges a transgressive possibility of nonhuman sea creatures in imagining transgender and genderqueer futurity.

This oceanic fantastique bio-horror of *Évolution* and *Tentacle* also evokes alternative modes of species proliferation, through the non-normative reproductions of bioengineering and humannonhuman hybridity. The interplay of technology and marine-life genetics, whilst evoking generative potentials for human advancement, are muddled with bodily-based anxieties for hybridisation. Here, the individual metamorphosis of transgender bodies and their contact zones with ocean creatures comes to represent both fears at the rupturing of the category 'human' at a corporeal level, but also desire for radical transformation, and the alterity of nonhuman embodiments.

Bionote

H Frances Hallam (they/them) is a fourth year PhD researcher at The University of Surrey. Their thesis, entitled *The Blue Posthuman: new oceanic imaginaries in 21st century SF*, explores intersections of ocean ecocriticism, queer ecologies and feminist new materialism in contemporary science fiction. They are a member of the Haunted Shores network of coastal Gothic scholars, exploring horror and weird in the undersea of film and video games.

12.45am -2.00pm Panel 3B: 'Dystopian Memories'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Alex Carabine

Maddie Sinclair, University of Warwick (in-person) Twitter:

@ maddiesinclair_

"Memory mine": Speculative Folklore and Data Extraction in Rana Dasgupta's "The Memory Editor"

In the folktale, "The Memory Editor", collected in the short-story cycle *Tokyo Cancelled* (2005), Rana Dasgupta describes the extractive operations of a clandestine company operating under the codename "Memory Mine," whose business model relies on an impending crisis of memory scarcity. As memory stakeholders in an era of mnemonic crisis, the company produce a vast digital database, "repackaging" lost biological memories, before selling them back to afflicted individuals in order to alleviate the "debilitating anxiety" derived from "shrinking memory horizons" (Dasgupta 2005, 35). Dasgupta describes how "memory mine" extracts memories via the tools of surveillance capitalism, installing cameras "absolutely everywhere", developing "technologies that recognize an individual's voice, face, handwriting", so that the "minimum human intervention was required to link one person's memories to each other in a single narrative" (35). While the "product" (commodified memories collected on a CD-ROM) is an "instant hit", the short-sighted commodification of memory by the "Memory Mine" company ultimately "worsens the psychiatric condition" of those afflicted, presenting a dual critique of financialization and the processes of neoliberal subjectification (45).

Analysing the irrealist registration of data extractivism and mnemonic crisis in Dasgupta's twenty-first century folktale, this paper consists of three central strands. Firstly, it considers how the epidemic of "mass amnesia" and accelerating "memory scarcity" mediates anxieties surrounding the impact of neoliberal "contemporaneity" on subjectivity. The paper then considers how Dasgupta's speculative folktale allegorises the ways in which neoliberal financialization intersects with the processes of datafication and forms of "algorithmic governmentality" (Rouvroy). Finally, the paper underlines how Dasgupta's emphasis on the technologies of surveillance capitalism intersects with contemporary debates surrounding the extractivist violence of data capitalism.

Bio

Maddie Sinclair is a Comparative Literature PhD student and Wolfson Scholar in the Humanities at University of Warwick, UK. Entitled "World-Literature and the Short Form", her thesis examines the interconnections between aesthetics, ecology, and politics in the twenty-first century short story. Her research interests include: short fiction poetics, world literature and the environmental humanities.

12.45am -2.00pm Panel 3B: 'Dystopian Memories'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Alex Carabine

Disturbing Memory and Metamorphosing the Mind: Investigating Political Critique in South Asian Speculative Fiction and Visions of Real-World Social Transformation

Thameena Alam, University of Manchester (in-person)

This paper explores the connection between memory in South Asian speculative dystopias and visions of social transformation across the region and the wider globe. There is an absence of an indepth critical analysis into South Asian dystopian fiction in literary studies, and its relationship with social transformation in real-world contexts. Research into dystopian fiction has largely positioned the genre through a passive lens as writing that 'attempt[s] to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world' (Frederick Jameson, 1989). Equally, more current research has elected to emphasise the imaginative properties of South Asian dystopias as creating 'disillusion and nightmares' (Barnita Bagchi, 2012), whilst neglecting its fundamental position as literature constructed as a critical response to the real-world present condition in which it is produced.

Thus, this paper offers a counter-narrative to disrupt these hegemonic perspectives on dystopian studies. This paper highlights the importance of history and literature in giving 'shape' to time in South Asian dystopian writing. The resultant shape may be understood as 'memory', produced through a

process of selection, omission, and imaginative craft. Memory thereby becomes a site of interaction between historical events and socio-cultural and political interpretations, creating avenues for symbolic and literal conflicts as well as transformative resolutions. Utilising interdisciplinary research methods and primary text analysis, this paper argues that presentations of memory in South Asian dystopian fiction, function to allow people and cultures to investigate new ways of defining themselves and explore alternatives to the social and political status quo. This paper finds that South Asian speculative dystopias have the potential to inform strategies for social transformation and thereby engineer connections between the imagination and real-world social movements.

Bio:

Thameena Alam is a PhD Researcher at the University of Manchester and recipient of the President's Doctoral Scholar Award for her world leading research. Her project focuses on postcolonial dystopian writing from Britain, South Asia, and its diaspora. She was recently awarded the Margaret Johnson (Yates) Prizes for highest dissertation mark and best overall mark in MA English Literature, American Studies and Creative Writing. Thameena also has a strong background in decolonising activities in the art sector and education and has recently been promoted into the Directorate for the Student Experience, Education Development team at the University of Manchester.

12.45am -2.00pm Panel 3B: 'Dystopian Memories'

Hybrid Panel, G09, Chair: Alex Carabine

**Images of the Future and Memories of the Past:
Recent approaches to posthuman portrayal in SF.**

Dylan Phelan, University College Cork. (online)

Twitter: @ dylanpjp92

Since the earliest days of SF cinema, the posthuman subject has been a staple of the genre, most frequently appearing as the female-coded android, cyborg or AI. Indeed, from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) to Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), influential portrayals of posthuman subjects have left an indelible mark on the genre. In posthuman theory, such subject's possess an inherent threat to the means of hierarchical categorisation, as they exist between the anthropocentric binaries of human and machine. Consequently, the posthuman can provide a means of liberation from cultural oppression for marginalised groups. However, the traditional filmic treatment of the posthuman tends to reinstate these regressive categories through objectification and sexualisation. These framing devices evoke a distinctly psychoanalytic reading of the posthuman, which posthuman theorist, Rosi Braidotti, sees as detrimental to the subject's transgressive liminality. Recently however, cultural attitudes towards gender essentialism and blatant objectification have become far more critical. As a result, contemporary SF has attempted to portray the posthuman in ways which align with this cultural shift. Indeed, both *Her* (Jonze 2013) and *Ex Machina* (Garland 2014) feature portrayals of female-coded posthumans which significantly diverge from the static characterisation of their predecessors.

However, due to the conventions of genre fiction, which necessitate engagement with the genre's most influential works, as well as a pre-established cultural awareness of the posthuman in cinema, these more recent portrayals appear to require some engagement with the stereotypical mechanisms of filmic Othering. As such, by analysing Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014) and Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) this paper will examine to what degree these portrayals can accurately represent the liberatory potential of the posthuman while also adhering to the expectations of posthuman filmic portrayal.

Author Bio

Dylan Phelan is a PhD student in University College Cork. His current research focuses on science fiction and critical theory, and examines the influences and processes of literary Othering. Specifically, his PhD thesis examines the portrayal of the posthuman subject in contemporary science fiction, as well as the effects of capitalist co-option on said portrayal. Dylan has recently been published in *The Movable Type* journal. His paper, *I Feel, Therefore I am: Trauma, Memory, and Posthuman Liberation in Blade Runner (1982) and West World (2016)*, deals with the construction of collective trauma as a route towards consciousness in posthuman subjects

2.15pm 'Author Roundtable: Speculative Transformations'

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: Jonathan Thornton

Paul McAuley

McAuley has published 24 novels and more than a hundred short stories, co-edited an anthology, and published a *Doctor Who* novella and BFI Film Classic. Currently McAuley is working on his 25th novel, *Beyond the Burn Line*. He lives in North London, surrounded by books and occasionally haunted by a cat. <http://www.unlikelyworlds.myzen.co.uk/>

Courtia Newland

Courtia Newland's first novel, *the Scholar*, was published in 1997. Further critically acclaimed work includes *the society within* and *snakeskin*, *The Dying wish*, *music for the ff key* and *A Book of Blies*. He is the co-editor of *IC3: The Penguin Book of New Black Writing in Britain (2000)* and has short stories featured in many anthologies. His career has encompassed both screen and playwriting; plays include *B is for Black*, and an adaptation of Euripedes *Women of Troy*. He was nominated for the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, the CWA Dagger in the Library Award, the Alfred Fagon Award, the Frank O' Conner Award and The Edge Hill Prize 2012. His latest anthology, co-edited with Monique Roffey, is *Tell Tales 4: The Global Village (2009)*. A forthcoming novel, *The Gospel According to Cane*, was published by Akashic Books (US) and Telegram (UK) in February 2013.

<https://courtianewland.com/about/>

Tlotlo Tsamaase (xe/xem/xer or she/her)

Plotlo Tsamaase is a Motswana author (xe/xem/xer or she/her pronouns). Plotlo's debut adult novel, *Womb City*, comes out in January 2024 from Erewhon Books. Xer novella, *The Silence of the Wilting Skin*, is a 2021 Lambda Literary Award finalist and was shortlisted for a 2021 Nommo Award. Plotlo has received support from the Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative, and xer story "Behind Our Irises" is the joint winner of the Nommo Award for Best Short Story (2021).

Plotlo's short fiction has appeared in *Africa Risen*, *The Best of World SF Volume 1*, *Clarkesworld*, *Terraform*, *Africanfuturism Anthology*, and is forthcoming in *Chiral Mad 5* and other publications. Xe is a 2017 Rhysling Award nominee and a 2011 Bessie Head Short Story Award winner. Xe obtained a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Botswana and won an award for design architecture. Tsamaase is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at Chapman University.

You can find xem on Instagram and Twitter at [@tlotlotsamaase](https://www.instagram.com/tlotlotsamaase).
<https://www.tlotlotsamaase.com/>

E J Swift

Swifts latest novel, *THE CORAL BONES*, is a work of eco-fiction connecting three women across the centuries by their love of the ocean, and is published by *Unsung Stories*. *THE CORAL BONES* was shortlisted for the BSFA Award for Best Novel and is currently shortlisted for *The Kitschies Red Tentacle* and the *Arthur C. Clarke Award*. When not writing, Swift enjoys pole and aerial fitness, gardens and gardening.

<https://ejswift.co.uk/>

Ryka Aoki

Ryka Aoki is a poet, composer, teacher and novelist. Her latest novel, *Light from uncommon stars*, was an Alex, SCKA, and Otherwise Award winner. She is a two-time Lambda Award finalist, and winner of the Eli Coppola Chapbook Contest, the Corson-Bishop Poetry Prize, and a University Award from the Academy of American Poets. She is also a professor of English at Santa Monica College, a half-decent pianist, and is starting to learn to play the violin.

<https://rykaryka.com/bio/>

3.15pm Key Note, Dr Chris Pak

Hybrid Panel, SoTa Library, Chair: David Tierney

'Terraforming, Geoengineering and Experiments in Policy and Governance

Sf's key contribution to debates about terraforming centre on its ability to narrate the contexts within which national and international approaches to framing terraforming and the uses of space are conceived. This talk uses sf stories of terraforming to think through issues of policy and governance related to the scientific, social and cultural value of the solar system, as well as its commercial exploitation. It focusses on terraforming and ideas about identity and the organisation, management and governance of communities on Earth and other worlds.

Bio:

Chris Pak specialises in the study of Science Fiction and was an Arthur C. Clarke award judge from 2018-2020. He obtained a BA in English Language and Literature, an MA in Science Fiction Studies and a PhD at The University of Liverpool's Department of English. His first postdoctoral appointment was as a researcher on the Leverhulme-funded Corpus Linguistics project, "'People', 'Products', 'Pests' and 'Pets: The Discursive Representation of Animals'" (Lancaster University), his second on the Volkswagen-funded Digital Humanities project, "Modelling Between Digital and Humanities: Thinking in Practice" (King's Digital Lab). He is the author of *Terraforming: Ecopolitical Transformations and Environmentalism in Science Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2016), a contribution to the Environmental Humanities, Utopian Studies and Postcolonialism that analyses how transformations to environments in science fiction interrogate the global politics of climate change and the Anthropocene.

Chris was also involved in the original CRSF conference!