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BOUNCING FORWARD:

Future Narratives, Scenarios, and Transformations in
the Study of Culture

ESSCS and TransHumanities Joint Summer School

June 19-23, 2023

GCSC | Room 001 (MFR)
Otto-Behaghel-Straße 12
35394 Gießen

GCSC

Monday, 19 June

Panel 1) Challenging Futuristic Tech-Discourses

Chair: Mike Toggweiler (University of Bern)

Retro-futuristic Fantasy, Obsolete Machines and Eschatological Time.

Bo Wang (ASCA, University of Amsterdam)

This paper explores the socio-technical imaginaries of speculative fiction Morning Star of Lingao. By contextualizing the affective dimension of machines in Chinese nationalist discourse, I examine the fiction through the tension between human and machine and argue that machines function as mediators of the desire to recuperate from the sense of victimhood that has been historically constructed in the Chinese national identity. By putting in comparison to eschatological time, I demonstrate that the techno-temporality induced by the logic of deterministic linear progressive view of technology can lead to imaginations of an anti-progressive conservative social order.

Bo Wang is an artist, filmmaker and researcher based in Amsterdam. As an artist and filmmaker, he has exhibited internationally, including venues like Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Arts, Int'l Film Festival Rotterdam, CPH:DOX, LUX, Para Site among many others. He recently guest edited Non-fiction Journal Issue 5, titled “The Obsolete and the Resurrected: Archaeological Cinema in Asia”, together with Pan Lu. He is currently a PhD candidate at Amsterdam School of Culture Analysis, University of Amsterdam. His PhD dissertation is on socio-technical imaginaries in Chinese nationalism.

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Constructing ‘the Future of Humanity’ in the Business of Algorithmic Video Surveillance.

Lucien Schönenberg (University of Bern)

How are future imaginaries performed in the field of algorithmic video surveillance (AVS) in policing? A recurrent rhetoric surrounding computer vision analytics in CCTV control rooms sketches a deficient human operator in contrast to the all-seeing ‘intelligent’ software, which promises flawless surveillance. The testing and implementation of AVS in policing within the framework of public-private partnerships raise questions about present and future forms of policing.

In this paper, I ask how imaginaries about the future in the business of AVS influence policing practices and how corporations, with their solutionist ethic (Nachtwey and Seidl 2020), design futures. To research the sociotechnical imaginaries (Jasanoff and Kim 2015) surrounding computer vision software in policing in France, I look at the business of algorithmic video surveillance (AVS) in security tech fairs and at the ideology of tech-solutionism. I argue that performing future imaginaries in tech fairs is a way of stabilizing futures and empowering private actors in their profit-seeking activities.

Lucien Schönenberg completed his bachelor's degree in Anthropology, Philosophy, and Central Asian Studies at the University of Neuchâtel and his master's degree in Anthropology at the University of Bern. In his master's thesis, he focused on issues of surveillance, security, and control in the context of remand custody in Switzerland. Lucien Schönenberg is now a doctoral student at the University of Bern (Switzerland) researching the socio-material emergence and testing of algorithmic video surveillance in policing in France. He uses ethnographic methods to understand how algorithmic systems reconfigure the work of watching in CCTV control rooms.

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Tackling the Future Challenges of Memory, Technology Ethics, and Grieving: Trajectories from Akil Kumarasamy's *Meet Us by the Roaring Sea* (2022).

Marco Presago (GCSC, Justus Liebig University)

In her debut novel *Meet Us by the Roaring Sea* (2022), Akil Kumarasamy provides a compelling perspective on the intertwinement of memory and technology in a near-distant future marked by AI, climate change, and grieving nostalgia. Kumarasamy's speculative novel places the reader of the present in front of future ethical challenges related to the widespread presence of technologies through a second-person narration, expecting, to some extent, the active participation of the reader. Through the concept of 'embodied simulation' (Gallese, 2019) from the neurosciences, and Catherine Z. Elgin's study of fiction as a "Laboratory of the Mind" (2007), this paper examines how the second-person narration of Kumarasamy's novel enables the reader's processes of 'forward thinking' (Loloum 2020) in regards to issues related to the future of memory, technology ethics, and grieving. Considering the worldmaking aspects of fictions (Herman, 2009; Goodman, 1978; Nünning, 2010) and the direct involvement of the reader in Kumarasamy's 'perspective-taking' narration, we could argue that fictions like *Meet Us by the Roaring Sea* serve as valid instruments for cultivating future competencies and knowledge (Locatelli, 2003; Nussbaum, 1995) that could potentially be applicable to the present world, re-shaping or outlining better alternative futures.

Marco Presago is a PhD Candidate and Research Assistant at the Graduate Center for the Study of Culture (GCSC) for the International PhD Programme "Literary and Cultural Studies" (IPP) at Justus Liebig University in Giessen, Germany. He is currently researching the Booker Prize, focusing on the major controversies in its history. Marco holds a master's degree in Euro-American Languages, Literatures and Philologies from the University of Pisa and a bachelor's degree in Modern Languages and Cultures from the University of Bari.

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Panel 2) Shifting Cultures and Implications of Societies

Chair: Jan Rupp (GCSC, Justus Liebig University)

Foggy Pasts, Shifting Presents, Uncertain Futures: Wilhelm Raabe's *Pfisters Mühle: Ein Sommerferienheft*.

Matthew Childs (University of Washington)

In his 1884 novel *Pfisters Mühle: Ein Sommerferienheft*, the German author Wilhelm Raabe presents a world that is always already in a state of change. That change is represented through a catastrophic event of pollution when a sugar factory poisons the waterway that runs through the town where Pfister's mill is located. Rather than approach the event through any one viewpoint, Raabe instead creates a cast of characters all of whom engage with the ramifications of the event in their own way. Ebert Pfister, the protagonist, views matters through the lens of memory from his childhood. For him, the pollution signaled an end to childhood and the beginning of adulthood. Adam Asche, his tutor, considers the event in the ambivalent terms of a scientist who has also embraced the lucrative potential of industry. Ebert's father, on the other hand, drifts into melancholy at the fading away of tradition and legacy.

Together the story's characters represent the full implications of what it means to become a society in modernity. That transformative process is not merely displayed in Raabe's work, but also exemplified by it. The story introduces an innovative narrative structure in the tradition of German realism. It consists of an inner and outer narrative that intersects in Ebert Pfister, who is both the writer of the inner narrative and the Ich-subject of the outer narrative. The contents of the narrative frames belong to his past and present, respectively. The complex narrative strategy shows how authors, like Raabe, were experiencing difficulties in their attempts to write a novel that belonged to a world in a near constant state of change. How can one even hope to entertain thoughts of a future when the present still eludes them? How does one represent change when present literary conventions are already outdated or soon to drift into obsolescence? Raabe's novel, in all that it fails to successfully capture the future as it was envisioned "im letzten Viertel [des] neunzehnten Jahrhunderts" (Raabe 5), can teach us about

how literary culture can address the demands of the present for the purpose of understanding the future.

Matthew Childs is a PhD Candidate in the Department of German Studies teaching at the University of Münster. His dissertation, titled *Era of Uncertainty: Catastrophe in Nineteenth-Century German Literature*, provides an analysis of four texts published in the nineteenth century by Heinrich von Kleist, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Wilhelm Raabe, and Theodor Storm. The project investigates the functions and aesthetic qualities of literary catastrophes, and seeks to answer the questions: what are the motivations for the authors' choices to include catastrophes in their novels? What can tell us about the time in which they were writing? What can be learnt from the cultural response to uncertainty in the nineteenth century that can be put into practice today in an age of climate change?

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New Ways of Representing Love on Social Media. Is the Future of Love Letter Writing really at Stake?

Piera Mazzaglia (GCSC, Justus Liebig University)

In this paper I will shed light on the changing dynamics of some important cultural communicative practices within the panorama of future scenarios and narratives. With the development of modern communication technologies we have experienced the formation of new communicative practices. According to recent research studies the use of letter writing, for instance, seems to have been partly substituted by the use of SMS or Mails or in many cases just by emoji (Simonis, Wyss). In my paper I will discuss questions on the future and/or survival of many important cultural practices (such as letter and diary writing) whose future seems to be at stake. My contribution to the field would be given through the analysis and comparison of specific examples of these cultural practices extrapolated from 19th century and contemporary collections.

What are the individual, cultural and/or societal motivations and necessities that justify short and instant messaging on social media (which are meant to be deleted within a few hours) instead of extensive writing choices which have a more permanent material nature? But then, if we are creating ephemeral texts and implicitly ephemeral practices, what will we leave to the future generations as proof of our existences? And to conclude how do we imagine the future narrations and representations of our intimate feelings and thoughts?

Piera Mazzaglia is a Phd Student in Comparative Literature at the GCSC and IPP programmes at the Justus Liebig Universität in Gießen. She is currently working on her Phd project titled

„Languages of Love in the Nineteenth Century England and Germany, more than Verbal Expressions“. Her main focus is given to the comparative analysis of authentic and unpublished correspondences and private diaries from the nineteenth century and on the materialization of emotions. Furthermore her project addresses how feelings are materialized and get a tangible nature/expression through specific Languages in this period.

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Which Culture for the Future? A Debate about Eastern and Western Cultures around May Fourth Era in China.

Ziling Song (GCSC, Justus Liebig University)

Around the May Fourth Movement in 1919 (an anti-imperialist and patriotic student movement in China), Chinese intellectuals engaged in a famous Eastern and Western Cultures Debate regarding the future of Chinese culture in the face of the national crisis in China and the crisis of rationalism in the western world. During the debate, the Westernizers saw Western Cultures as the future of Chinese culture, but selectively ignored the moral drawbacks of the rationalism-dominated Western Cultures that became apparent after the First World War. The Conservatives saw those drawbacks and regarded the reconciliation of the two cultures as the right solution to the crisis. Both schools offered their views on the future of Chinese culture, but they also placed East and West in a binary position. Only a few intellectuals represented by Chang Naide (a historian and centrist of the two schools of cultural debate) and Liang Shuming (a pioneer of the New Confucianism), considered this dualism and proposed their own concepts as alternative approaches. In this paper, I will look at those Chinese intellectuals' different opinions on the question of Chinese culture's future.

Ziling Song is a PhD candidate at GCSC. In her research project *Shanghai Plurality: Construction of the Modern World Metropolis in Illustrated Magazines in the First Half of the 20th Century*, she explores the imagined city-image of Shanghai with a complex historical background in the first half of the 20th century. By analyzing illustrated magazines together with Shanghai city history in the context of colonization and modernization, the project attempts to dig out the interrelationship between the depicted Shanghai in magazines and its social changes.

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Tuesday, June 20

Panel 3) Alternative Epistemologies and Bio-Futures

Chair: Jens Kugele (GCSC, Justus Liebig University)

A Flash of Silver Green: Machine, Rainforest, and Tropical Futurism.

Jueling Hu (ASCA, University of Amsterdam)

In speculative fiction and art practices in Southeast Asia, tropical rainforests are often used to represent and imagine possible regional futures. The technological "textures" of these works - images on screens, sound in recorders, and fluorescent lights in dark exhibition spaces - condition not only the audience's aesthetic experience of local ecologies, but also the possible formats for imagining Southeast Asian futures. In this paper, I focus on the works of Southeast Asian artists who engage with the theme of speculation and (rain)forests, paying particular attention to the entanglement between technological materiality and ecological futures. Specifically, I cross-read a series of audio-visual and installation works from the Asian Film Archive and Singapore Art Weeks that have been tagged as "futuristic". By reading audio-visual archives and text-based promotional materials, I argue that this case particularly illustrates that digital technology, by providing certain sensory experiences, can orient the embodied imagination of distant Southeast Asian future(s); and that the depoliticized, contextualized utopian implications in techno-culture can be used to design regional solidarity beyond certain geographical borders. By understanding the process of integrating the digital sensation of rainforests into larger geopolitical futures, I not only discuss the ways in which the symbiotic elements of soils, plants, ecosystems, and humans are reassembled under the aesthetics of digital technology, but also question the ownership and inclusivity of technology-infused futures.

Jueling Hu is a PhD fellow in Media Studies at the University of Amsterdam and in Human Geography at the University of Fribourg (CH). Her dissertation project *Machine, Rainforest, and Tropical Futurism: On the ecological roots of technological imaginaries* (provisionally titled) explores the aesthetics and politics of digitalized imagery of rainforests scattered in Southeast Asian urban space, with a particular attention on the role of technical objects. Her writing is rooted in environmental media, new materialism, Deleuze & Guattari studies, and cultural histories. Besides her doctoral research, she is also interested in robots, multispecies, and geomancy.

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Colonial Epistemologies and Ecological Violence: Amitav Ghosh's Call for Planetary Solidarity.

Payel Pal (*The LNM Institute of Information Technology*)

In his recent non-fiction writing, Amitav Ghosh provides an insightful and perspicacious analysis of the discursive formations of colonialism and its corollaries in the form of the Anthropocene and capitalism. Ghosh investigates the role of colonial modernity in establishing West-oriented epistemologies that have systematically curtailed cognitive abilities to recognize capitalist disruptions on humans and the ecological world in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (2016). Continuing his epistemic investigations, Ghosh in *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021) reiterates his interrogation of the hegemonic constructions conceiving the present-day climate and environmental crises as fallouts of Western colonialist thinking and its manifestations in dominant epistemic and ethical frameworks. The present article investigates this non-fiction work as evincing an incisive critique of West-centric discourses for perpetuating totalitarian binaries of human and non-human in which the 'human' has always been whites and the 'non-human' has always been non-whites, indigenous people, nature, and ecology. This article focuses on how Ghosh uncovers this dualistic thinking by showing that attributing agency and signifying authority to the white capitalist has subtly objectified and commodified the 'others.' Through these writings, Ghosh underscores the immediate necessity to unravel the colonial and capitalist entanglements, acknowledge the primacy of nature, and envisage ecology outside the colonial or anthropogenic matrices. The article also argues that Ghosh's attempt is to offer new epistemological, ethical, and cognitive dimensions for comprehending the unrepresented voices/entities and dismantling the hierarchical patterns of knowledge production, as this would aid in conceptualizing modes of sustainable collective survival and facilitating ways of accomplishing planetary solidarity.

Dr. Payel Pal is an Assistant Professor of English at the Humanities and Social Sciences, LNM Institute of Information Technology, Jaipur, India. Her research areas include South Asian Literature, Postcolonial Studies, Ecology, and Film and Cultural Studies. Besides participating in several international conferences and seminars, she has published her articles in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Media Asia*, *Visual Anthropology*, *Journal of International Women Studies*, and *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*. She is also the Series Editor of the UK Routledge Series 'South Asian Literature in Focus.'

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Consuming Ecological Food: Permeable Imaginations of Rural Authenticity under the Ecological Crisis.

Chen Zhou (ASCA, University of Amsterdam)

Ecological produce from rural farms shows a possible future out of the ecological crises caused by the extractive trap of the modern paradigm, as introduced by the Beijing Farmers' Market, one of the most significant ecological food markets in China. Beyond a rigid rural-urban dichotomy, both the farmers living in the rural and urban consumers in this case are suffering from the climate change at different levels around food. To (re)build the resilience towards the unpredictable future, the rural farmers and urban consumers pin their hopes on the rural authenticity, imagining country as the space where authenticity takes root and where resilience can be cultivated.

Focusing on the ecological food, this paper examines how the rural authenticity is imagined and functions around the Market under the ecological crisis while problematizing the rural imaginations constrained to a country geography. Through unfolding how rural nonhumans become mobilized and co-constituted, this paper argues that the more-than-human entanglements based on care, what are deprived of in the industrialized food system, contribute to constituting the imagination of rural authenticity, which enhances Ingoldian 'meshwork' relations within and among actants and which penetrates the becoming of a rural-urban hybrid that inter/intra-builds resilience towards the future precarity.

Chen Zhou is a PhD Candidate at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA), University of Amsterdam. Her research interests particularly concern the inter/intra-weaving relations between rural and urban spaces, humans and nonhumans, the real and the imaginary. Based on the methodology of ethnography and visual/narrative analysis, her doctoral research traces the circulation of ecological food between rural and urban China, and examines what and how rural imaginations are constructed in the process. By acknowledging the animate force of objects and their materiality, she tries to unfold further-blurred boundaries with permeable happenings in the encounter of different domains, and explores ways to contribute to an ecological future through visualizing the co-constitution relations. Before the PhD programme, Chen Zhou completed her MA in anthropology at University College London (UCL).

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Panel 4) (Post-) Human Futures & the Anthropocene

Chair: Susie O'Brian (Department of English and Cultural Studies, McMaster University)

Time Paradoxes in Contemporary Speculative Fiction: How to Make Sense of (Post)Human Futurities.

Lidia Cuadrado Payeras (University of Salamanca)

Margaret Atwood has maintained that “writers worry about what worries them” (*Writing* 286). One such salient worry concerns imagining livable futures amidst an increasingly uncertain present. Speculative fiction narratives, especially, hypothesize how such futures might look, and thus, serve as “strategic tools” (Atwood *Burning* 207) to help readers navigate what are predicted to be, and often already are, dire scenarios. Fredric Jameson argued that humans might find it easier to envision the end of the world than of those structures responsible for its demise (*Seeds* xii), and later surmised that “[t]he problem to be solved is that of ... [going] back into real historical time, and a history made by human beings” (“Future” n.p.). Speculative fiction writers, too, have taken up a similar notion of going “back,” equating anti-chronological movement with a historical and temporal regression that, paradoxically, proves future-oriented as it produces countervailing temporalities that curtail the detriments of historical progress.

That these scenarios of return characteristic of post-apocalyptic speculative fiction are necessarily projected into the future while commenting on the present, constitutes a time paradox fundamental to the genre. While the common ‘last man narrative’ has allowed for the particular rewriting of history “made by human beings” that Jameson suggests, contemporary speculative fiction is increasingly centering the ‘posthuman’ (i.e., new conceptions of ‘humanity’ vis-a-vis material and/or ontological hybridity). This paper, then, surveys the contemporary state of the genre in an attempt to unveil what new time paradoxes surface from these posthuman iterations of futurity, and how these might be representative of shifts in humanity’s present relationship with time, which are brought about by our questioning of what ‘human history’ and even ‘human’ mean if, as many of these texts seem to suggest, we have never been anything other than posthuman.

Lidia María Cuadrado Payeras is a researcher at the Universidad de Salamanca, where she holds a National Competitive Scholarship for the completion of a doctoral project on the intersection of contemporary Canadian speculative fiction and posthumanist philosophies. She is a researcher at the Centro Studi Filosofia Postumanista led by Prof. Roberto Marchesini, member of the editor’s board of *Animal Studies. Rivista italiana di zooantropologia* and Spanish co-representative for the Science Fiction Research Association (SFRA). She has been visiting researcher at the Università di Milano La Statale, Università degli Studi di Bergamo, and GCSC (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen). Her latest publications include the co-edited volume *Abbecedario del postumanismo* [Alphabet of Posthumanism] (Mimesis, 2021) and “On

Sight, Technology, and Science Fiction: Transhumanist Visions in Contemporary Canadian Dystopia” (DOI 10.1344/452f.2022.27.12).

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‘Bouncing forward’ in the Apocalypse: Valerie Fritsch’s *Winters Garten* (2006) and Mats Strandberg’s *The End* (2019).

Matteo Gallo Stampino (University of Bergamo)

From the earliest stages of science fiction, catastrophic imagery has played an ambivalent. Wilhelm Bölsche, in his treatise *Wenn der Komet kommt* (1900), tries to dampen fears of an imminent collision of Halley's comet with the Earth; at the same time however, he shows enthusiasm for a doomsday mood that breaks through the "hideous boredom of the time". In psychology, the idea that the end of the world may be interpreted as a solace for people living a monotonous life, is widespread. Their death will be final and irrevocable. The gray existence they perform does not give them much joy; they have little to lose by death. But if death occurred immediately and for all people, then the life of all other people would also be meaningless. Thus, nothing in the world would have any meaning: This would mean that such people are not worse than the others, but even better, because they have not wasted their time on insignificant undertakings. For these people, apocalypse thus means a ‘bouncing back’ to a comfortable status quo. This view is challenged by two nowadays novels, *Winters Garten* (2016) by Valerie Fritsch and *The End (Slutet)*, (2019) by Mats Strandberg. Drawing on these texts, the aim of this paper is to show how another perspective tries to fight back a sense of constant change and uncertainty that marks our time. The importance of this article lies in the comparison and exploration of these texts whose protagonists attempt to escape a condition of passivity in face of possible catastrophes. As this paper will show, passivity – even facing dystopic scenarios – can be defeated by cultivating one’s moral values.

Matteo Gallo Stampino is a PhD Candidate in “Transcultural Studies in Humanities” at the University of Bergamo, Italy, in cotutelle with Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, Germany, where he is an affiliate member of the European doctoral Program *PhdNet* “Literary and Cultural Studies”. He has graduated in European and Extra-European Languages and Literatures (master’s degree, 2019) with a thesis on contrastive translation applied to Goethe’s *Faust*. His doctoral research project aims to analyse Alfred Döblin’s novel *Berge Meere und Giganten* (1924) focusing on the relationship between human beings, nature, and technology and trying to conduct a study which final goal is to establish a connection between this work and the literary production in the Anthropocene era.

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Exploring the Future in ‘What-If’ Mode: Scenarios, future-making and Anthropocene.

Franciszek W. Korbanski (Lund University)

The figure of scenarios is frequently used in present-day climate science and plays a prominent role in the architecture of the IPCC Reports. In this work, I investigate the term’s supra-scientific origins, the history of its semantic alterations as well as its present-day applications across a variety of discourses — both scientific and non-scientific. I attempt to critically assess the term’s various definitions dispersed across a variety of discourses to argue that it is impossible to understand climate scenarios as unproblematically isolated, well delimited and independent scientific ‘tools’. Instead I show them to be a part of a larger ecosystem that seamlessly traverses the porous and fluid borders between the scientific (the IPCC), business (Shell) or legal (Private Securities Litigation Reform Act of 1995). Drawing on the work of Mark Fisher, I briefly introduce the notion of hauntology as a potential critical method to investigate the temporal dimensions of scenario thinking. Finally, engaging in dialogue with the work of Kathryn Yusoff and Martin Savransky, I question scenarios’ ‘innocence’ and the claims to their neutrality made by the IPCC.

Franciszek W. Korbanski holds a MA Philosophy from University of Copenhagen and MSc Human Ecology at Lund University (graduating June 2023). Publications: an essay on M. Fisher and A. Malm for *ROAR Magazine* (2022); an essay on slow violence for *Hinterlands Magazine* (2022). Speaker: on the political economy of carbon removals at *Academy of Margins* (Topolo 2022) and *AIAS Earth Sensations Conference* (Aarhus 2022); on the temporalities of climate scenarios at *Not This Time Conference* (Copenhagen 2023). Long time volunteer at an independent international bookstore ark books (2016-present); in the past co-organising Copenhagen’s Lyse Nætter Literature Festival (2017-2018); co-founder of a reading group Climate, Culture and Capitalism (2019-present). Lives in Copenhagen. Investigating environmental and climate collapse, climate temporalities and their relation to the intersection of culture, power and society.

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Panel 5) Explorations of Non-Human Entities and Paranature

Chair: Isabella Kalte (GCSC, Justus Liebig University)

Paranature Research Laboratory – An artistic-ethnographic exploration of ideas of future ›natures‹.

Gabriela Andrina Jörg (University of Bern)

The dissertation project "Paranature Research Laboratory – Insight processes for artistic-ethnographic research in dealing with consumer objects and environmental conditions" examines how future natures and societies can be questioned by creative means and newly conceived using social-anthropological, artistic and linguistic-philosophical-oriented research methods against the background of the global ecological situation. By means of artistic de- and re-contextualization, everyday plastic objects in a naturally connoted environment become organic-looking entities on the basis of perceptual processes and thus catalysts for developing and questioning imaginations of (im)possible (future) "natures" on a fictional level. In smaller, differently constellated research settings in cultural spaces, gardens, etc. exhibition visitors, passers-by, workshop participants or experts are invited to formulate their own images of a "paranature" in dialogical situations or in artistically oriented presentation formats. With my approach, I follow the hypothesis that by means of artistic strategies, ideas of a newly conceived nature in the context of culture and consumption can be catalysed and subsequently further processed, and that art is particularly suited to process the targeted theme beyond pure Western, rational logic. Fantasies, own mythologies, ideas captured in language and images regarding "natures" to be redefined, which emerge thanks to artistic effects in the empirical field on the projection surfaces of metaphors, analogies, fictions, new models of representation, narration, play, etc., could be looked at more closely with a method repertoire to be developed. These will be analysed and interpreted using ethnographic methods, and will be closely linked to theories of the current discourse around newly conceived ontological categories, networks of relationships, and ideas, as currently developed by Michel Serres, Bruno Latour, Philippe Descola, Donna Haraway, Anna Tsing, Rosi Braidotti. With reference to ethnographic research methods, but also oriented towards linguistic-philosophical understanding (e.g. Ludwig Wittgenstein or Jacques D errida) various formulations on "(para-)natures" will be conceptualized. The theory character of structure/assemblage is a key thinking and design approach on the artistic as well as the theoretical level.

Gabriela Andrina J org is an art researcher and mediator, who is active in various writing, curating, mediating and artistic undertakings. With the "Paranature Research Laboratory", she is active in various exhibition and mediation contexts. After completing a degree as an educator, she completed two Bachelor degrees (in visual arts at the School of Art and Design at Zurich University of the Arts with a focus on art, media and design practice theory) and a Master's

degree in Cultural Journalism and a Master's degree in Research in the Arts at Bern University of the Arts/University of Bern. Gabriela Andrina Jörg has been working at the Chair for Cultural Mediation and Theatre Education at the FHNW School of Education and is responsible for the cultural programme at the Brugg-Windisch campus and teach on the subject of cultural mediation.

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Of Monsters and Plants. An Analysis of Plant Narratives in the Context of Nonhuman Narration.

Caesy Stuck (University of Duisburg-Essen)

This paper explores the role of plants in nonhuman narration within the context of speculative fiction. Focusing on the short story "The World is Full of Monsters" (2017), which features a human/nonhuman hybrid narrator, the analysis delves into the unique characteristics of plants in speculative fiction narratives. By examining the dialectical relationship between defamiliarization and empathy in plant narrative instances, the paper argues that plants challenge the attribution of mental properties, as they combine aspects of both animal and object narrative instances. A particular focus is placed on embodiment and its relation to the plant's function as a narrative instance. The depiction of plants in fiction has often been dominated by anthropomorphization or poetization, but speculative fiction allows for the exploration of plants as narrative instances that disrupt conventional approaches. Drawing on concepts from nonhuman narration and unnatural narratology, the paper emphasizes the tensions between human experientiality and the otherness of plants, highlighting the need for readers to consider their own anthropocentric biases. The paper contributes to expanding our understanding of nonhuman narration and the complex role of plants in speculative fiction narratives.

Caesy Stuck studies German and English language and literature in the master's program at the University of Duisburg-Essen. From 2019 to 2022, she studied German Studies in a bachelor's program with a focus on "German-English Studies" at Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg. In Magdeburg, she was a student assistant at the Chair of Older German Literature. Stuck's research interests include postclassical narratology, gender and queer theory, posthumanism, and pop culture. Her most recent talk was "Die Pflanze als non-human narrator: Einordnung von Pflanzen in den Kontext von non-human narration in kognitiver Narratologie" at the conference *Flower Power – Florales zwischen Schönheit, Ordnung und Dominanz* hosted by the LMU München. Caesy is currently working on non-human narration and focalization concepts in the context of cognitive narratology, with a focus on the representation of plants.

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Contingency of Hope: Evaluating the Role of the Sub/Non-human in *MaddAddam* Trilogy and *The Tiger Flu*.

Sababa Monjur (Marburg University)

Speculative fictions and survival narratives have recently moved into the mainstream academic constellations largely because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Taking *MaddAddam* trilogy by Margaret Atwood and *The Tiger Flu* by Larissa Lai as the primary object of study, I seek to draw out the utopian potency lurking within the contemporary visions of pandemic. In the pandemic-ridden futures (re)imagined by Atwood and Lai, biotechnology occupies a shifting space imbued with potential for individual as well as planetary transformation and the paper examines the multifaceted transformations through an ecofeminist lens in order to foster discussion on how the authors initiate epistemological rethinking to reshape the future. Divided by boundaries and quarantine rings, the realm of North America is envisioned by the authors as a porous borderland: a sacrifice zone where the environment and the sub/non-human beings—be it naturally occurring or genetically engineered ones—are considered disposable. As disposable communities, the God’s Gardeners in *MaddAddam* trilogy and the Grist sisters in *The Tiger Flu* acknowledge how the human/nonhuman binary works as the foundation of injustice and critically interrogate these heteronormative, anthropocentric binaries to expose historical patterns of exclusion and exploitation that have always affected the marginalized ones. Following this line of thought, I argue that in response to calculated risks and plausible technological advancement Atwood and Lai not only challenge the Anthropocene discourse that normalize converting the sub/non-human into marketable biomaterials but also foreground means of navigating a world of uncertainty by upholding sub/non-human agency. By placing the disposability of the sub/non-human at the centre of attention, my close reading scrutinizes how these speculative fictions offer ways of moving towards alternative future(s) by reconfiguring and reassigning agency to the marginalized communities.

Sababa Monjur is currently enrolled as a doctoral student at Philipps University, Marburg. She earned her MA in North American Studies from the same institute. Her research interest includes science fiction, utopian studies, gender studies, environmental studies and ecofeminism. The latter area is the focus of her dissertation. She is a member of Nachwuchsforum der Gesellschaft für Kanada-Studien and SFRA (Science Fiction Research Association). She was a visiting graduate student at University of Toronto, Canada as the recipient of ICCS Graduate Scholarship 2022.

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Panel 6) Artistic Transformations and Compositions of Time

Chair: Bojana Kunst (Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, Justus Liebig University)

“F*ck my Life” and a Performance of *Sinvergüencería*: Xandra Ibarra Bouncing Forward from Shame.

Amaru Ibarra Olguín (University of Copenhagen)

In “Fuck my Life”, queer Latinx artist Xandra Ibarra bounces forward from the failure of the attempt in her earlier burlesque performances known as “spictacles” to challenge notions of Latinidad. Instead of undermining racist stereotypes, the colonial gaze of her audience trapped her in a shameful racialized position. In “F*ck my Life” Ibarra renounces to her burlesque persona “La Chica Boom” and transforms into a cockroach, to later shift her career to the photographic medium. By delving on this shift in her aesthetics and focusing on the figure of the cockroach, I examine the complex dynamics of shame in relation to the Latinx body to suggest that Ibarra disidentifies with shame by propounding it as an ambivalent and yet generative site from which one might imagine an ontological and ethical otherwise. Therefore, I position her performance as representative of what I conceptualized as *sinvergüencería*, which is a disidentificatory aesthetic strategy in relation to shame, anchored in antiassimilationist impulses to glimpse possibilities of belonging in difference.

Brenda Amaru Ibarra Olguin is a PhD fellow at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies of the University of Copenhagen with the research project entitled *Sinvergüencería: A Decolonial Aesthetic Strategy in Feminist Queer Latinx Disidentificatory Performance* that addresses the intersection between sexuality and racialization as articulated in contemporary feminist queer Latinx performance. She holds a MA in Theatre and Performance Studies from Stockholm University and a BA in Acting from La Casa de Teatro in México.

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From the Past to the Future: Exploring the Role of Images in Shaping Ahead Worldmaking through the Portraits of Frederick Douglass.

Rodrigo de Souza Marcondes (the Catholic University of Portugal)

Frederick Douglass has been the subject of numerous narratives. As a central figure in the 19th century debates surrounding abolitionism in the United States, he continues to serve as a powerful symbol for human rights advocates all around the world. His inspiring story has been

captured in various forms of media such as books, essays, films, and photographs, depicting his journey from enslavement to becoming a prominent figure in American history.

The curatorial team of the 34th São Paulo Bienal of Arts exhibited a powerful photo series in 2021, entitled “Retratos de Frederick Douglass”. This single-panel installation comprised 36 portraits of the legendary abolitionist, causing a stir among both the public and art critics. One could say that Frederick Douglass was aware of the impact that visual media could have on shaping public opinion, as evidenced by his willingness to pose for portraits. He understood that his own image as a successful figure could inspire others to challenge the status quo in 19th-century American society.

This paper explores the use of visual narrativization as a resource for shaping future imaginations and imaginings of futures. Drawing on the powerful imagery created from-by Frederick Douglass, who lived in a time before the concept of the 'selfie', I will reflect on the role that visual media plays in prompting agency in rethinking the process of “worldmaking” (Goodman 1978). I argue that certain forms of narrativization have the potential to bring about change, and that visual narratives can do more than just challenge reality; they can actually drive transformation (e.g., denouncing disrespect to human rights, promoting awareness about hidden facts) (Fuller and Weizman 2021). Furthermore, by re-contextualizing events and memories through narrative, I suggest that those who create narratives — artists, investigators, or storytellers — endures the power to “re-shape the future”, in response to ever-growing devices of violence and domination.

Rodrigo Marcondes is currently a candidate of the *PhD in Culture Studies* at the Universidade Católica Portuguesa holding the FCT Scholarship. He holds a *BA in Journalism* and an *MA in Documentary Photography* from AKV St. Joost, in The Netherlands (2012), as well as an *MA in Scientific Dissemination* from Universidade de Campinas, in Brazil (2018). As a visual artist, Marcondes is part of Coletivo Garapa, a duo that investigates the intersections between documentary and visual arts fields. Marcondes had his work showed at Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo (MAM), Bienal de Fotografia MASP of São Paulo, among others, as well as awarded with Bolsa ZUM de Fotografia of Instituto Moreira Salles (IMS) amongst other relevant prizes and grants.

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Panel 7) Re-Imagining Past and Present Alternative Realities through Narrative

Chair: Andreas Langenohl (Department of Sociology, Justus Liebig University)

Journey through the Fury Road: Grasping Historical Images and Radical Potentials in Dystopian Imagination.

Parvez Alam (ASCA, University of Amsterdam)

In contemporary popular culture, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic crises are often represented as allegories of our present. Contemporary dystopian movies belonging to the cyberpunk or dieselpunk genre such as the Mad Max franchise (1979-1015) are the most prominent examples of this; they often depict current crises of capitalism as persisting in a futuristic world. According to Mark Fisher, contemporary dystopian movies generally fail to imagine a future world in which capitalism no longer exists. In his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, Fisher named such reification of capitalist reality in our imagination and cultural productions as “capitalist realism”. In this paper, I will argue that the representation of crises, law, and subjectivity in the world of Mad Max are symptomatic of capitalist realism. However, in the latest installment of the franchise, *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), spectral and dispossessed subjects play pivotal roles in negating a spectral figure of law and in performing profanation of a political-theology of martyrdom, which can also be read as attempts of circumventing the threshold of capitalist realism.

According to Giorgio Agamben, the narrative of perpetual crisis works in tandem with the spectral figure of law that dispossess subjects. In *Capitalist Realism*, Fisher claims: “the normalization of crisis produces a situation in which the repealing of measures brought in to deal with an emergency becomes unimaginable” (1). *Mad Max: Fury Road*, as a privileged example, will be the main object of analysis of this paper. However, the main goal of my article is to pinpoint certain strategies and plays through which contemporary popular culture attempts to negate the spectral figure of law and salvage meaning from the ruin of political-theology, which are also attempts of imagining redemption in a world in which capitalist reality has become reified at the level of post-apocalyptic/dystopian representations.

Parvez Alam is a PhD candidate at the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis, University of Amsterdam. He obtained a research master’s degree in Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam with Cum Laude. His PhD research involves the excavation of a Sufi and Islamicate philosophical genealogy of Walter Benjamin’s conception of “now-time” (Jetztzeit), and an investigation on the relevance of this non-linear conception of messianic time in the study of contemporary culture.

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Modernism's Epistemological Futures in Kafka's *The Castle*

Anna Dijkstra (the Huygens Institute)

Franz Kafka's final novel *The Castle* is exemplary of the modernist subject's epistemological crisis: the subject has been thrown into a world that is meaningless for them. The novel explores this impasse by letting it play out on a spatial level: it proposes a utopian village organised in accordance with a heterogeneous divide of sacred space, against which the homogeneous Enlightenment subject stands at odds. The village functions as a utopia that heterotopically mirrors the developments which leave subjects in the early twentieth century feeling alienated. In an attempt to create a world that is simultaneously modern and that allows its subjects to create meaning within and in relation to it, the village is sacralised and mythologised, becoming locked away on a more fundamental level. As such, *The Castle*'s utopia provides a failing attempt towards establishing an epistemological future for the modernist subject through a sublime treatment of space. This paper contextualises the way in which Kafka's novel problematises the modernist subject's epistemological position as implicitly advocating for the radical epistemological redirection that moved away from Man as the centre of knowledge entirely, exploring the potential of finding posthuman knowledge in a classical modernist text.

Anna Dijkstra is a literary researcher at the Huygens Institute, where she works as coordinator in the EU-funded CLS INFRA project. She graduated from the research MA in Literary Studies at the University of Amsterdam in 2022, and works as editor-in-chief of *Soapbox Journal of Cultural Analysis*. Her research primarily focuses on modernist studies, epistemology, and literary form

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Slow Violence and Epistemic (Dis)obedience: Arguing for Sustainable Planetaryity in Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were*.

Goutam Karmakar (University of Western Cape)

Imbolo Mbue's *How Beautiful We Were* (2021), set in the fictional African village of Kosawa, is an insightful deliberation on the issues of extractivism, environmental injustices, and structural racism that are ongoing under the mask of capitalist progress and development. Mbue, a Cameroonian-American novelist, recounts Kosawa's decade-long struggle against the American oil company Pexton, which has wreaked havoc by endangering indigenous ecological systems and acquiescing in the native land. The narrative centralizes the local population's reiterating their protest against the hazards wrought by the oil pipelines, drilling sites, and crude extraction and seeking redress for the ecological losses incurred for years. The present article

analyzes how Mbue's novel exemplifies the occurrence and ramifications of what Rob Nixon (2011) calls "slow violence" in the community of Kosawa vis-à-vis the American oil company's pervasive economic and ecological control. The novel reveals how the company agents and state political authorities under Kosawa undermine public demands for environmental justice. Importantly, it is not only the American company but also the state that is instrumental in perpetrating an invisible "slow violence" on the ecology and the indigenous people. The article shows that the indigenous community of Kosawa becomes victims of "epistemic injustice" (Fricker, 2007), as their leaders denigrate their agency and knowledge and comply with the Western episteme of profitability and commodification. Against such a backdrop, Mbue foregrounds the necessity of indulging in what Mignolo (2009) terms "epistemic disobedience," demonstrated in the novel through the madman's intervention and Thulu's sustained resistance to the exploitative agendas. In so doing, the article emphasizes that Mbue's novel assumes its critical significance in endorsing the "decolonial turn" (Grosfoguel, 2007) to counter the covert mechanisms of oppression on human and non-human worlds—as that alone can foster a sustainable form of collective planetary living.

Goutam Karmakar is an NRF Postdoctoral Fellow in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. His research interests are South Asian Literature and Culture, Women and Gender Studies, Postcolonial Literature and Ecological Studies. He is one of the editors of the Routledge book series on South Asian literature.

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Panel 8) Experimental Futures

Chair: Frederik Tygstrup (Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen)

"Growing Sideways" and Moving Forward: Some Notes on *Aditya 369*, India's First Time Travel Film.

Anupama Surendranath (Indian Institute of Technology Bombay)

This paper discusses *Aditya 369* (1991), India's first time-travel film. The paper contextualises the film to the revivalism of the Hindu golden past and changing consumption regime in the early 1990s in the cultural domain of India. The paper identifies two kinds of movements through time in the film: "growing sideways" and "moving forward". It attempts to show how the figuration of the child as an explorer facilitates moments of "sideways growth" and a network of *nova* that will open the rational adult world to irrational realms to make time travel

possible. It traces such moments of “sideways growths” through the unrealistic relationships the child figure establishes with people and objects. The paper also discusses how the larger narrative of the film, when imagining a forward-moving India, relegates “sideways growth/movements” to margins and envisions the future of India through the triad “scientist-nation state-citizen” without conflicting it with the golden Hindu past and the triad “king-sovereign-people”.

Anupama Surendranath is a PhD research student in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay. Her ongoing PhD project studies spectatorship in Malayalam language cinema through the figure of the child in Malayalam films. Her research interests include film studies, cultural studies, and literary studies. She completed her Masters in Comparative Literature from the University of Hyderabad.

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Invasive Futures and Eco-Anxiety in Ben Lerner's *10:04*.

Jonas Müller (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz)

Future climate risk manifests in the present through the affect of eco- or climate anxiety. Such worry over futures defined by ecological collapse is often accompanied by feelings of a more general ontological confusion and helplessness, as the Anthropocene requires us to recalibrate the position of humans in the biosphere. Narratives are of critical importance for a productive engagement with climate futures, as they function as emotional test sites that allow us to recalibrate our perspective on everyday life in the Anthropocene.

As an example of one such narrative, my paper explores the treatment of future risk and climate anxiety in Ben Lerner's novel *10:04*. The novel offers a non-pathologizing outlook on environmental distress that frames climate anxiety as an awareness for the palimpsestic chronotopes and enmeshment that define the Anthropocene. I will demonstrate how the novel's stylistic and formal strategies highlight spatiotemporal indeterminacy, reintroducing historical contingency and making *10:04* an “actual present alive with multiple futures” (Lerner 194).

Jonas Müller received his M.A. in American Studies from the University of Mainz in 2019 and is currently a PhD fellow of the DFG-research training group “Life Sciences – Life Writing,” where he is writing his dissertation on climate anxiety narratives. Exploring the ways in which negative emotions towards global warming can be traced in the American novel and popular media, his research is situated at the intersection of psychology and cultural studies. Other research interests include food studies, the philosophy of science and political economy.

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(Dis)appearing Landscape: The Nevada Test Site as the Archive of Nuclear History and Planetary Memory.

Taisuke Wakabayashi (University of Illinois)

The Nevada Test Site (NTS) was one major site of nuclear weapons experiments in the US, where the total of 1,021 nuclear tests were conducted between 1951 and 1992. The NTS is, however, not a thing of the past, but that of the present and the future because its radioactivity forces management of the resulted nuclear wastes until decontamination completes. To describe the nature of human-nonhuman entanglement, I refer to Ian Hodder's concept of *entrapment* to recognize the power of nonhuman to create a system of dependence on human. Addressing this agentic capacity, this paper argues the NTS is an archival landscape of our entrapped/entrapping history of nuclear matters, the record which carries its radioactive memories into the planetary scale of temporality and spatiality. Yet, the very materiality of radioactivity allows an inquiry of retrospective calculation of the half-lives, an act of discovering the present by counting backward from the decontaminated future. The NTS, therefore, is rendered not only as a record of Anthropocene that outruns the history of humanity and our memorializing capacity, but also an object as well as a subject of memory, a site that is always already in the state of "forgetting" its nuclear past.

Taisuke Wakabayashi is a first-year doctoral student in the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC). He holds a bachelor's degree in English and a master's degree in Architecture. Currently, at UIUC, he also works at the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory as a research assistant. Drawing upon the critical theories, particularly Post-structuralism and New Materialism on the subject of environmental memory and wastes, his research looks at how (built, non-built, and unbuilt) nuclear architectures and landscapes, inherited from the military experiments and/or resulted from natural disasters, create temporal as well as spatial (dis-)junctions in the way the human societies interact with the toxicity of radioactivity.

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Panel 9) Feminist and Queer Ways of Imagining Futurity

Chair: Anna Tabouratzidis (Department of English and American Literature and Culture, Justus Liebig University)

‘Bouncing Back’ – on the Difficult History and Uncertain Future of Exhibiting Queer Art in Central-Eastern Europe.

Kacper Radny (GCSC, Justus Liebig University)

My paper’s aim will be to explore the possible futures, or the lack thereof, of the queer and feminist art narratives in Central-Eastern Europe. Exploring the successes and failings of the contemporary attempts in exhibiting queer and feminist art in Central European and post-Soviet territories, I will present and analyse their uncertain prospects in the age of democratic crisis.

When several Eastern-European countries, many of them post-members of the Soviet bloc, joined the European Union in 2004, the LGBTQ+ and feminist communities of those states were hopefully looking towards more free and liberal social transformations. In many cases, nearly two decades later, those transformations never occurred.

For my paper, I would like to research the situation of curating queer art in the context of national and institutionalised museology. One of my case studies would be the 2010 exhibition in the National Museum in Warsaw ‘Ars Homo Erotica’. The provocative and first of its kind in Poland exhibition focused on queer narrative, openly commissioned by the liberal director of the museum in the years 2009-2010 Piotr Piotrowski and curated by the university professor and queer activist Pawel Leszkowicz, came into fruition bravely and unexpectedly during the short period when the far-right ruling party in Poland *Law and Justice* lost its grasp on the political scene. Unfortunately, following Piotrowski’s resignation in the same year, it was the last time the queer art was given space on such a scale in this part of Europe to date.

With my paper I would aim to raise questions about the insecure queer and feminist futures, particularly queer and feminist art, and explore the opportunities and responsibilities that we, in the field of research, have in protecting and cultivating them. I would particularly like to include Central Europe within the scope as my paper to indicate that, as the history had shown, the queer and feminist art should never take its freedoms for granted and is continuously forced to gaze towards its future with vigilance.

Kacper Radny is an art historian and a PhD candidate at the Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture in Gießen. Before relocating to Germany, he has completed his degrees in architecture and art history in Glasgow, Scotland. His scholarly focus lies on the Central and Eastern European art. The current title of Kacper's dissertation is the ‘Orientalisation of the XIX century

Eastern-European art', which explores exactly the phenomenon of orientalisation or exotisation of the XIX century Eastern-European art by the Western public of that time.

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Islands of Transition. Reimagining Caribbean Futures through Trans-Ecofeminist Narratives.

Ysabel Munoz (Trondheim University)

Like with so many other resources, the West has also monopolized the narratives of the future. However, the rise of Afro, African, Indigenous, and Queer Futurisms clearly evidence that other aesthetics of futurity are possible and necessary. Especially when geographies like small islands are discursively erased from future's imaginaries due to climate change vulnerability, asserting existence and survival through storytelling becomes a clear imperative for Caribbean authors.

This presentation addresses how literary projects produced by Caribbean women, trans, and nonbinary authors subvert the trope of island disappearance and, in some cases, the world by extension. I focus on texts by Ada M. Patterson and Rita Indiana, where the depictions of environmental collapse are entangled with gender inequalities, heteronormativity, and sexual discrimination. I furthermore consider the contours of Caribbean Futurism as a distinguishable movement that simultaneously intersects with and enriches a growing corpus of nonwestern speculative fiction.

I employ a framework informed by contributions from ecofeminism and affect theory, and embedded in a context of postcolonial studies, to analyze representations of care, kinship, response-ability, and belonging. These elements enable to reflect on practices of worlding, building sustainable futures, and the promise of decolonization.

Ysabel Munoz is a PhD candidate in Literary Studies at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, where she works with the transdisciplinary project Narrating Sustainability. She is an Environmental Humanities scholar whose research interests include Caribbean climate fiction, nonwestern futurisms, environmental justice, ecofeminism, and sustainability. Munoz has completed studies at the University of Havana (2017) and the University of Glasgow (2021). She has published several articles and participated in numerous events working towards sustainability in postcolonial contexts.

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