

Between Fiction and Society
Imagination and World Building in the Aftermath of a Global Pandemic

International Conference

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Iulm University
October 12-14, 2022

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Caroline EDWARDS (Birkbeck, University of London)

Arboreal Revelation at the World's Beginning

What can we learn from the weird woods? How might forests, trees, and the fungal and microbial worlds within which they are entangled, offer clues for surviving the ongoing ecocatastrophe? This keynote will consider the elemental aesthetics of literary and cultural texts that privilege the nonhuman perspectives of trees, and other arborescent and mycological partners. Drawing on anthropological studies into “how forests think” (Eduardo Kohn), I will consider what kind of “arboreal revelation” is suggested by the inescapably cultural processes that bind humans, trees, plants, and fungal and microbial partners together. I will discuss the fig tree narrator in Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021), arboreal point in view in Richard Powers’ *Overstory* (2018), the drag and visual artist Sasha Velour’s performance as a dogwood tree in her 2019 show “Smoke and Mirrors,” the sonic arrangement of trees, mycorrhizal electrical signals, and birdsong in Joe Acheson’s “Sonic Woodland” series (2018-2021), and Nalo Hopkinson’s animal-arboreal solidarity in the fantastical remediation of the baobab tree in *Midnight Robber* (2000). I argue that these literary, performative, and sonic texts offer explicitly utopian meditations upon arboreal interconnectedness that overturns an older sylvaphobia in Gothic and supernatural tales about haunted weird woods (John Miller). If we are to adapt and survive what Rob Nixon called the “slow violence” of ecocatastrophe, we need to attune our elemental understanding of woods, trees, and the fungal and microbial worlds within which they are entangled. These weird modalities of nonhuman temporality and representation help us rethink how the human might be continuous with the arboreal – not just at metaphorical, but insistently cellular and material, levels. Finally, I think they offer clues as to how the woody, parenchymatous *longue durée* of arboreal deep time gestures towards a sylvan realm of nonhuman futurity – that includes humans, reconstituted as inhuman agents within a post-anthropocentric ecosystem.

BIO

Dr Caroline Edwards is Senior Lecturer in Modern & Contemporary Literature at Birkbeck, University of London where she is Director of the Centre for Contemporary Literature and Director of Postgraduate Research in English, Theatre & Creative Writing. Her research focuses on utopian possibility as it intersects with questions of aesthetic form, genre, temporality, political subjectivity, and post/inhuman agency – in literary as well as popular, cultural, and performative texts. She is author of *Utopia and the Contemporary British Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), co-editor of *China Miéville: Critical Essays* (Gylphi, 2015) and *Maggie Gee: Critical Essays* (Gylphi, 2015) and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to British Utopian Literature and Culture, 1945-2020* (forthcoming). Caroline is currently writing her second monograph, *Hopeful Inhumanism: The Elemental Aesthetics of Ecocatastrophe*, which examines strangely hopeful moments of inhuman collaboration within the elemental contexts of the lithic, the mycological, the arboreal, and the hydrological. Caroline is co-editor of *C21: Journal of 21st-Century Writings* and Director of the Open Library of Humanities, which publishes 28 journals across the humanities disciplines. Her research has featured in a number of non-academic publications, broadcasts, and venues, including the *New Statesman*, the *Times Higher Education*, the *Guardian*, *SFX Magazine*, BBC Radio 4, BBC Radio 3, BBC One South East, the Barbican Centre, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Whitechapel Gallery, and the Museum of London.

Nicoletta VALLORANI (University of Milan)

Skins, Ghosts and Dreams. Unusual Bodies and Unacceptable Identities in Post-anthropocene Imaginations of the Future

“What happened to my skin?” shouts the terrified protagonist and I-narrator of one of the most original sci-fi stories issued in recent time. In the successful effort of empowering the subaltern voices of black and queer African women, Tlotlo Tsamaase, in her *The Silence of the Wilting Skin* (2020), poetically articulates a story that works on a metaphor and an identity-marker that have acquired complexity, particularly in recent times, in connection with two different discourses: race – and the anxiety of white, male and Western cultures – and the loss of stability of the biological body – faced with the apparently infinite possibility to modify it (Haraway 1991). My position is that some recent narratives, located in the field of utopian and dystopian fiction and mostly springing from what used to be the voices of once silenced people (Spivak 1988), explore the possibilities implied in the debate on post-anthropocene and post-imperialist world, suggesting ways to relocate the human and re-semanticize the notion of the body as traditionally intended (Brooks 1993). Shape-shifting aliens, technologically enhanced creatures, various kinds of monstified strangers appearing in Okorafor’s fantasies of invasion (2014), Miller’s visions of new organisms (Miller 2018) (Miller 2018), Fall’s contaminations between organic and inorganic beings (Fall 2020) seem to suggest several ways of reshaping the paradigmatic “model” identity of the patriarchal and anthropocentric thought, that is white, male and Western. Mostly working on science fictional and dystopian imaginations of the future, I want to show how this identity is to be reframed and reshaped in the light of a totally new epistemological condition that is stubbornly, though inane, resisted by the Westerners. This resistance is now proving untenable. Drawing on the postcolonial critical toolbox, from Said (2003) and Bhabha (1983) to Mignolo (2009) and Gilroy (2005), I hope to show that the very notion of a well-bounded, civilized and homogeneous human identity is to be discarded to give space to the multiple and diversified bodies that proudly diverge from our familiar “we”. Not only the aliens, but also the (assertive) women, the non-white persons, the disabled persons, the queers and the poor, and, in short, any marginal and diverging identity require a resolutely color-blind and gender-neutral new narrative of the future, rejecting the imagination of a world where race, gender, poverty, nationality and belonging are key factors in discriminating who gets to be saved and who is left behind (Giuliani 2021).

BIO

Nicoletta Vallorani is Professor of English Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Milan. She has published on formula fiction, Literature and migration (Nessun Kurtz. Cuore di tenebra e le parole dell’Occidente, 2017), urban geographies (Millennium London. Of Other Spaces and the Metropolis, 2012) and the intersections between crime fiction and migration studies (“Postcolonising crime fiction. Some reflections on good and evil in global times”, 2014). She contributed to The Routledge Companion to Crime Fiction (“Crime Fiction and the Future”, 2019). With Simona Bertacco, she recently authored a volume on translation and migration, prefaced by Homi K. Bhabha (The Relocation of Culture, Bloomsbury, May 2021). She coordinates the project Docucity. Documenting the Metropolis, on documentary filmmaking and urban geographies and the Research Centre CHAIN. She is the co-director (with Laura Scarabelli, of the online journal Altre Modernità).

PARTICIPANTS

Javier ÁLVAREZ (University of Salamanca, HISTOPIA)

From Modernity to Dystopia. The Society of Spectacle as a Result of Liquid Modernity in Margaret Atwood's Oryx & Crake

Through a post-apocalyptic narrative, Margaret Atwood's novel *Oryx & Crake* (2003) delves into complex issues concerning genetic engineering, environmentalism, social polarization, and violence. This paper focuses on how the Society of Spectacle as articulated by the French philosopher and Marxist theorist Guy Debord is a reflection of the Liquid Modernity that prevails in the reality depicted by the Canadian writer Margaret Atwood in her novel *Oryx & Crake*. As the Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman explains, Liquid Modernity represents a society which is in constant change. This Liquid Modernity coexists with which Debord calls "The Spectacle," which is depicted in *Oryx & Crake* as a critique of Western society, portrayed as ruled by the industry of leisure and consumption, turning even the most intimate aspects of people's lives into commodities. Atwood combines the representation of these two different realities in order to prove the existence of a strong link between the evolution of modern society and its unavoidable development towards that plausible, extravagantly consumerist and lacking intimacy world that the novel envisions and portrays. The novel reflects a plausible, impending future where the search for a false utopia has triggered a dystopian reality ruled by a ferocious capitalist attitude. *Oryx & Crake* is a novel that reflects both on the present of humanity and its future: it does not only act as a critique of Western capitalism and the problems deriving from the polarization of society, but also as a cautionary tale forewarning against a disastrous future for the human race.

BIO

Javier Álvarez is a PhD student, member of the group HISTOPIA, doing a research on the field of Ecocriticism in the works of Margaret Atwood in the University of Salamanca. He is interested in the fields of Posthumanism, Dystopias, and Eco-Anarchy. His research is based on the idea that Atwood's *MaddAddam* links Eco-anarchy with Posthumanism, stating that capitalism is the reason of the ecological problems the novels envision and portray. He has given many talks about these subjects worldwide.

Iren BOYARKINA (University of Rome La Sapienza, University of Viterbo)

Utopias and Dystopias of Olaf Stapledon

It is hardly possible to overestimate the significance of the genre of science fiction for the development of society, as well as its attempt to consider the ways of creating a utopian society. The present paper analyses utopias and dystopias in *Last and First Men* (1930) by Olaf Stapledon. Stapledon, who held a degree in philosophy, was convinced that intellectuals not only had a social duty to promote knowledge but also to act as political figures. Hence, all of Stapledon's works manifest his philosophical and political views, especially his allegorical anatomy *Last and First Men*, where he embodied his ideas about socialism and the evolution of society. *Last and First Men* describes the evolution of different human species from Homo sapiens (the First Men) to the Eighteenth Men (the Last Men) and humankind's striving for survival to make the best of itself. According to Stapledon, the necessary combination of human qualities indispensable for the construction of the ideal society (utopia) cannot be achieved quickly. Indeed, Stapledon offers a history not even of eighteen generations but of eighteen completely different human species. Stapledon narrates this history according to Marxist principles, where the previous socio-historical conditions form the sound material base for the next stage of development; he takes into consideration

all the possible conditions to the best of his knowledge, including the latest cosmological discoveries of his epoch.

BIO

Iren Boyarkina received her Ph.D. from the University of Rome “Tor Vergata”, studied at Cambridge University. Her PhD thesis focused on the narratives by British science fiction writer and philosopher Olaf Stapledon. She has done extensive research in English and American science fiction literature, English and American Literature of the XIX-XXth centuries, feminist literature, cognitive linguistics, Translation Studies, etc. She published a monograph on English and Russian science fiction and works dedicated to Stapledon, Lessing, H.G. Wells, Arthur Clarke, Orwell, Mary Shelley, Anne Tyler, Henry James, Joyce, Dickens, Wharton, Bulgakov, Tolstoi, Yefremov, Belyaev, Chekhov, etc. She also edited “Passages through Enclosures and the SpaceTime continuum in English and American Science Fiction Literature”. She teaches English language and literature at the university of Rome La Sapienza and University of Viterbo.

Tamiris BURA FROES (University of Évora)

The Patchwork of Human History in the Post-apocalyptic World of the Game Horizon Forbidden West

In *Horizon Forbidden West* (2022) a sequel to the post-apocalyptic adventure game *Horizon Zero Dawn* (2017) the protagonist Aloy is in a time sensitive quest to save the world (again) from a total environmental collapse caused by a mysterious plague. While on this quest, Aloy encounters and needs to establish an alliance with a tribe known as the Tenakth, fierce warriors who live for battle. What becomes evident the more Aloy interacts with them is their ability to build an entire mythology around fragments of information from the so-called Old Days, specifically, from a military unit called the JTF-10 which the tribe calls “The Ten” whose soldiers fell during an ancient battle against the machines responsible for the destruction of life on Earth. The work done by the Tenakth could be defined as a patchwork of human history, transforming an incomplete account of the lives and deaths of some soldiers into a receipt for the present and future. By making Aloy go searching for the black boxes of the airplanes carrying the ‘Ten’, *Horizon* places the player in the position of observer and quilter, observing how humanity’s loss of itself through the loss of its history while, by interacting with those fragments experiencing that loss and actively participating in the reconstruction of the past. As imperfect as the patchwork done by the Tenakth is, it still serves as a solution to the complete erasure of humanity’s accomplishments and defeats giving the in-game people and the player, a glimpse of what was and what could be again.

BIO

Tamiris Bura Froes is a doctoral student from the University of Évora who has been doing research in the speculative fiction genre since her Masters in Foreign Languages at the University of Perugia from which she graduated in 2020 with a dissertation called “The Strategies of Science Fiction in the Works of Octavia E. Butler”, receiving full marks with honour. She is currently working on the doctoral thesis on the cyborg goddess in the works of both Octavia E. Butler and N. K. Jemisin.

Manuela CERETTA (Turin University) and Corinne DORIA (Shenzhen University)

Ageing and Disability between Utopia and Dystopia

Through an investigation that confronts classical texts, films and comics belonging to the utopian-dystopian tradition, this paper aims to focus on the theme of the representation of old age and disability, dwelling in particular on the discourses that emerged during the Sars-cov2 pandemic. In

More's *Utopia* it is written that "senectus ipsa morbum est": at the heart of the utopian tradition, i.e. at the heart of the ideal society old age is portrayed as an illness and as a problem. If, as Frederic Jameson wrote, every utopia reveals the limits of our imagination, then at the heart of the utopian tradition lies a problematic relationship with old age that the dystopian tradition has only partially deconstructed. From Anthony Trollope to Aldous Huxley, from Mr. Nobody to Dylan Dog, dystopian tradition reflects critically on the relationship that modern societies have with old age. A relationship that Covid-19' emergency brought out, confirming that "perfect health" is the most widespread and persistent form of contemporary utopia (Sfez, 1999). Disability also figures in numerous utopian and dystopian narratives. Utopian representations of disabilities tend to depict societies where nobody is left behind, allowing universal access and equal opportunities for the physically different (*Crip Utopia*, 1995); dystopias, on the other hand, tend to depict disabled-ruled societies where the able-bodied is a victim of discrimination or face life-threatening menaces (*The Country of the Blind, Bird Box*). Discourses and representations of disability in fictional works changed through history. Their evolution went hand in hand with developing a cultural and social discourse celebrating the non-disabled individual as a normal, compulsory. These works voice the subsequent fear of becoming physically invalid and the awareness of the fragility of the human body, both conditions appearing particularly menacing in moments of sanitarian crisis. This paper proposes a reflection on otherness and it also invites us to discuss how those discourses and representations have changed through history, specifically in moments of crisis.

BIO

Manuela Ceretta is professor of History of political thought at Turin University. Her research interests focus on utopian/dystopian tradition and particularly on the relationship between power, resistance, memory and language, on the one hand, and on the nexus between domination and voluntary submission, on the other. She edited two collections of essays on George Orwell (2007) and Aldous Huxley (2019) and she published several peer-reviewed articles on different topics like: *Non è un paese per bambini? Cenni su alcune recenti trasformazioni della letteratura distopica* (2018); *Il "profumo" della servitù. Universi distopici e "servitù fai da te"* (2022).

Corinne Doria is a lecturer at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in Shenzhen. Her research interests focus on the social and cultural history of medicine and disability in the West in the 19th-21st century. She has published several peer-reviewed articles on the history of ophthalmology and visual impairment. She is currently working at a co-authored textbook on disability theories (M. Chottin, C. Doria, *Introduction aux études du handicap*, Lyon, Presses de l'École Normale Supérieure, forthcoming 2023).

Tânia CERQUEIRA (University of Porto)

May the Odds Be Ever in Everyone's Favour: Sparking Social Change in The Hunger Games Trilogy

Young adult (YA) dystopian books mirror pressing global issues that trouble our society, such as "liberty and self-determination, environmental boundaries and looming catastrophe, questions of identity, and the increasingly fragile boundaries between technology and the self" (Basu et al., 2013), becoming a platform for a public conversation about social-political issues. Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* (2008-2010) trilogy, whose worldwide popularity has caused a growth in the publication of YA literary dystopias, has inspired political resistance and activism. Stirred by Panem's fight, people worldwide adopted the revolution symbols of the novels and took them to the streets – especially across South-East Asia, as in Thailand and Myanmar, where the three-finger salute became a symbol of resistance and solidarity for democracy movements. Through the exploration of the novels' significant themes (per example, government control and exploitation), this paper discusses how Collins's *The Hunger Games* trilogy offers tools to resist and fight against totalitarian power and

develop critical thinking, encouraging apolitical readers to speak up and advocate for social change, to contribute to a better future. This analysis will draw from reflections in *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Fiction* (2014), edited by Sara K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, Amy L. Montz, and *Girls on Fire: Transformative Heroines in Young Adult Dystopian Literature* (2018) by Sarah Hentges, among others. I will also briefly look into real activist movements and political actions inspired by the trilogy.

BIO

Tânia Cerqueira holds a Master's degree in Anglo-American Studies from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto. She obtained it with a dissertation titled “‘Are you afraid of your own shadow?’: The Monster and the Construction of Identity in Monsters of Verity”. She is currently a PhD candidate at the same university and has been granted an FCT research studentship [Ref. 2021.04547.BD]. Her thesis's main focus is the relationship between the Gothic tradition and young adult dystopias. She is a collaborator at the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies and a Young Adult Studies Association member.

Priyanka DAS (Presidency University, India)

The Futuristic Dejection: Reinventing the Lunarpunk via South Korean Space Fantasy

The coronavirus pandemic may have altered human relationships, but human responsibility towards nature has, arguably, remained unchanged. If the countless deaths of family and strangers alike drove people insane with grief, the empty public spaces made the fabled Doomsday seem convincing. Films have always steered ahead of time in depicting and insinuating such dystopian possibilities. Speculative fictions have provided us with a plethora of metaphorical reimaginations of the end of the world. The underlying objective is, more or less, always to awaken the human soul and redirect its attention to what is still there and what needs to be preserved. This chapter proposes to unravel such machinations with particular focus on the latest South Korean television drama *The Silent Sea* (2021). This space fiction takes us to a dystopic South Korea where water, because of its severe scarcity, has become the most expensive item, and is rationed to the citizens according to strict hierarchy. When a group of space travellers were sent to retrieve unnamed samples from an abandoned research facility on the moon, mysterious deaths occur sending across a wave of panic. Reverberating with Coleridge's gothic romantic concern 'water water everywhere and not a drop to drink', this Lunarpunk is a fresh take on ecological harmony and compels us to introspect our actions by giving us a sneak peek into an alternative world that is on the verge of extinction because of water scarcity. Realistic depictions of a future world are often full of representational anxieties and moral instructions. Anarchy is one such familiar event that works as a prefatory background for the plot. This is perhaps an explicit way of warning the present generation of uncontrollable violence in the not-so-distant future if the present is not taken care of. Even depictions of death have been upgraded and involve complicated processes of life termination. *The Silent Sea* engages its viewers with many such labyrinthine questions which I propose to detangle in this paper.

BIO

Priyanka Das is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Presidency University, India. Her M. Phil is on the objectification of Male Body in Bollywood films and advertisements, and her PhD is on Game of Thrones. She specializes in Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and Popular Culture (television series, memes and videogames). She has published on American, Japanese and Korean television dramas in international peer-reviewed journals. She is currently working on Monsters in Asian dramas, and her forthcoming publication from Routledge is a co-edited volume on Holocaust and Popular Culture.

Lorenzo DI PAOLA (University of Messina), Giorgio BUSI RIZZI (Ghent University)

The Land of Apocalypse. The no-future future in Gipi's "La terra dei Figli"

Comics have always been an inexhaustible laboratory for the practices and imagination that feed the entire media system. The science-fiction comic, since its beginnings, has been able to stage desires for the future, hopes and social traumas that have marked the history of humanity. In this presentation we aim to analyse Gipi's *La terra dei figli* (2016). It is a graphic novel capable of staging the end of history and a desperate future in which the author's refined narration forces us to read the world in a de-anthropologised key and rethink our relationship with technology and the media sphere in which we are daily immersed. Through the analysis of the post-apocalyptic imaginary evoked by the work and the specificities of the comic machine, we will therefore try to understand what remains of men and what hopes are hidden in Italian dystopian comics science fiction.

BIO

Lorenzo Di Paola is research fellow at the Department of Ancient and Modern Civilisations, University of Messina. He is adjunct professor of "Teorie e sociologie del fumetto dalla stampa al digitale" at the University of Salerno. He works on the mediology of comics and literature and the sociology of digital cultures. He has written numerous articles for scientific journals and collective volumes and has participated in numerous national and international conferences. He is part of the international research group on Italian comics SNIF - Studying 'n' Investigating Fumetti and is a member of the "Centro Studi Media Culture Società" at the University of Salerno. He also co-edits the scientific series "L'Eternauta, Collana di studi su fumetti e media", together with Luigi Frezza and Mario Tirino. He has edited with Mario Tirino the volume *Poi piove dentro a l'alta fantasia. Dante e i fumetti* (Polidoro Editore 2022). His most recent publications include: *The dawn of the living communities: for a mediology of horror fandom in Dylan Dog* (H-ermes 2022); *From Virtual Reality to Augmented Reality: Devices, Bodies, Places and Relationships* (Ismar-adjunct 2021); He is the author of the book *L'inafferrabile medium. Una cartografia delle teorie del fumetto dagli anni venti a oggi* (Polidoro editore, 2019).

Giorgio Busi Rizzi is BOF post-doctoral fellow at Ghent University, with a project investigating experimental digital comics. He holds a PhD in Literary and Cultural Studies with joint supervision from the Universities of Bologna and Leuven; the PhD project analysed nostalgic aesthetics and practices concerning contemporary graphic novels, and is currently being submitted for publication. He has published in scientific journals and edited volumes, and presented at numerous international conferences. He is a founding member of the international research group on Italian comics SNIF - Studying 'n' Investigating Fumetti, and a member of several international research groups on comics (CSS, ComFor, La Brèche, ACME). He is interested in comics studies, narratology, digital humanities, humour theory and translation.

Gemma FANTACCI (Iulm University)

Representing Isolation. A Visual Journey Through Video Game Architectures, Live Simulations, and Video Game Characters

Over the past two years, our visual idea of the term isolation has profoundly changed with the covid 19 emergency. Such images of desolate cities, empty supermarket shelves, health care workers wearing head-to-toe personal protective devices, the rush to develop vaccines, and hospitals oversaturated with covid cases all permeated our everyday visual ecosystem that the association of the concept of isolation with that of the virus, curfew, lockdown, quarantine is now almost automatic. The recent pandemic state, however, shares similarities with a type of post-apocalyptic visual imagery that has been extensively described in numerous video games and digital worlds. Its fascination within the contemporary artistic and audiovisual production contributed to the development of a specific

aesthetic of isolation, which can be traced in the architectures used to describe urban spaces in many video games, in the investigations of the human condition in digital worlds, and in the characterization of technologically advanced civilizations portrayed in video game worlds. This intervention aims to examine the concept of isolation in each of these areas through three different visual ecosystems, using a transmedial perspective: the in-game photographic reportage, entitled *brute_pastiche* (2020 - ongoing), shared on Instagram by Leonhard Müllner (member of the Total Refusal collective) and focused on the recurrent use of modernist architecture in video game worlds as the setting for dystopian futures; the live simulation *when you are close to me I shiver* (2021) by Italian artist Martina Menegon, which reflects on the human condition between loneliness and despair, made with the game engine Unity; and lastly, the Zenith population in the video game *Horizon Forbidden West* (Guerrilla Games, 2022), whose desire for an advanced engineered body becomes an omen for extinction.

BIO

Gemma Fantacci is a PhD student in Visual and Media Studies at IULM University in Milan, with a research project focused on the relationship between counter-gaming practices and the Situationist International. In 2018, she participated in the conference *The Game is the Message*, with a paper on the relationship between subversive gameplay, DADA and the Situationist International. She contributed to the edited volume *Fasten Your Seatbelt. Art, Criticism And Contemporaneity* (Metronom, 2020), and curated the screening series *FILTRO* at Metronom Gallery (2021-2022). Gemma Fantacci is currently Communication Manager of the Milan Machinima Festival and co-curator of the online platform VRAL.

Adolfo FATTORI (Naples Academy of Fine Arts)

Visions from Apocalypse – Distopic imagination between postpandemic and science fiction imaginary

One of the best authors of the latest decades to propose dizzying images of Chaos in a possible and near future was surely Alan D. Altieri, creator of unique versions of the "imagination of disaster", to quote Susan Sontag. The apocalyptic visions he proposed in his novels are perfect anticipation of dystopic and catastrophic panoramas that in our years have developed, because of, too, covid-19 pandemic. I would like to verify if his works influenced visual imaginary of our age, too.

BIO

Adolfo Fattori teaches Media phenomenology at Naples Academy of Fine Arts, after teaching Sociology at Federico II of Naples. He wrote *Tex Willer. L'immaginario di un eroe popolare* (CentoAutori, Villaricca, 2020), *Flash Gordon fra l'immaginario coloniale e la metafantascienza*, in *Flash Gordon. L'avventurosa meraviglia*, a cura di Mario Tirino (NPE, Eboli, 2019). *Di cose oscure e inquietanti* (Krill, Lecce, 2018), *Sparire a se stessi. Interrogazioni sull'identità contemporanea*, (Ipermedium, S. Maria C. Vetere, 2013), *Cronache del tempo veloce. Immaginario e Novecento* (Ipermedium, Napoli, 2010), *Materia dei sogni. Elementi di sceneggiatura per le scienze sociali* (Ipermedium, Napoli, 2006), *Memorie dal futuro. Spazio tempo identità nella fantascienza* (Ipermedium, Napoli, 2001), *L'immaginazione tecnologica* (Liguori, Napoli, 1980). He edited: *Black Lodge. Fenomenologia di Twin Peaks* (con Mario Tirino, Avanguardia 21, Latina, 2021), *Traiettorie dell'immaginario. Percorsi della sociologia della narrazione e dell'immagine* (Krill, Lecce, 2020), *Design del neoseriale. Sociologia dell'immagine nella post-serialità digitale* (Krill, Lecce, 2019). He publishes in scientific and academic magazines.

Eleonora FEDERICI (University of Ferrara)

Pandemic Is Not for Women, or Is It? Feminist Narrations of a Global Pandemic

My paper intends to investigate the linguistic and narrative structures through which Feminist SF writers deal with the theme of pandemic before and after COVID19. My analysis will be diachronical and aims at outlining differences and similarities in the narration of pandemic from a feminist perspective before and after the real pandemic we are still struggling with. My corpus will be made of texts which explicitly highlight women's narration of the pandemic offering a perspective on social, political and cultural changes in gender roles and the consequences of the pandemic in women's lives. Methodologically I will refer to ecolinguistics and critical discourse analysis in order to outline how a feminist narration of the pandemic intersects with ecological issues and how language structures discourses of/about gender.

BIO

Eleonora Federici (M.A. e Ph.D University of Hull, UK) is Associate Professor of English Language and Translation Studies at the University of Ferrara. She is currently the President of the Equal Opportunities and Inclusion Committee at the University of Ferrara where she teaches course on translation, gender issues and inclusion. Her main research areas are: Translation Studies, LSP (languages for special purposes – specifically tourism and advertising), English language varieties, Gender Studies and Utopian and Science Fiction Studies. Among her publications: *Quando La fantascienza è donna. Dalle utopie del XIX secolo all'età contemporanea* (Carocci 2015), *Translating Gender* (Peter Lang 2011), *Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice in Translation and Gender Studies* (2013 con V. Leonardi, Cambridge Scholars), *Translation Theory and Practice Cultural Differences in Tourism and Advertising* (2018 Loffredo), *Gender issues. Translating and mediating languages, cultures and societies* (con S. Maci, Peter Lang 2021), *New Perspectives on Gender and Translation. New Voices for Transnational Dialogues* (con J. Santaemilia, Routledge 2021).

Alice GIULIANI (The University of West London)

Annihilation (Alex Garland, 2018), CGI, and the Possibility of a World Without Us

Alex Garland's *Annihilation* (2018) stands out as a relatively non-conforming kind of science-fiction film. In contrast to aggressive, technologically-armed alien invaders of the *War of the Worlds* (Steven Spielberg, 2005) kind, the so-called Shimmer is instead a sort of biological interference acting with no aim or goal. It appears to be something akin to radiation, contamination, or (environmental) infection, generating a liminal space where the world as we know it ceases to exist and is transformed into something else. In the affected area, the world is remade from a cellular level, and humans and nonhumans become molecularly intertwined. In order to picture this mutating environment, the film makes extensive use of computer-generated imagery, which complicates ontological distinctions between the human and its "others" on the level of the image. My paper will tackle two connected topics. With the help of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of becoming, I will analyse how CGI in the film materialises molecular, cellular, trans-species exchanges and, by referring to Deleuze's third synthesis of time, I will argue that it can be seen as capable of opening us up to uncanny, unknown, ungraspable futures. Secondly, I will reflect on the potentials of this argument and of the film: as an echo coming from the past, the environment created by the film, where human life and the world as we know it are put under threat while allowing other forms of life to flourish, resonate with popular images and (sometimes problematic) discourses from the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. I will argue that the cellular exchanges depicted through CGI raise serious and important questions: of open futures of apocalypse/non-apocalypse, or of the end of the world as we know it. It materialises a flat ontology, asking us to ponder it. It wants us to confront our fear in front of the possibility of a world without us.

BIO

Alice Giuliani is a PhD student at the University of West London, where she is a member of the Thinking the Image research group. She holds a BA in Literature from the Università degli Studi di Pavia, and an MSc in Film Studies from the University of Edinburgh. Her research project, provisionally titled *Picturing the Future: Weird Cinematic Fiction and the Posthuman*, revolves around Deleuzian film-philosophy, speculative fiction, post-cinema and posthumanism. With her research, she aims at investigating how contemporary cinematic images, in particular in the genre of the Weird, articulate and materialise posthuman worlds and temporalities.

David GRAY (Dalarna University)

Generations and Future Scenarios in John Lanchester's The Wall and Contemporary Climate Change Discourse

John Lanchester's speculative, dystopian cli-fi novel *The Wall* (2019) is set in a near-future Britain, where rising sea levels have led to a wall being built around the entire island. The wall is manned by Defenders to prevent those living outside the wall, the Others, from coming in. Britain of the novel has been transformed into a walled state within a climate changed Earth. Life inside the wall has been relatively little-affected by climate change, and the standard of living is somewhat similar to contemporary Britain. Beyond the wall remains largely unknown for much of the novel, since its focalisation on the protagonist Joseph Kavanagh means that as a reader we know as much as he knows: climate change has dramatically transformed whole parts of the planet and thus turned millions of people into climate refugees. Drawing on Adeline Johns-Putra's engagement with intergenerational ethics in the context of climate change and the contemporary novel, this paper will analyse the generational elements of *The Wall*, in particular Kavanagh's perspective from a near future, climate-changed earth, looking back (in anger). The paper will then make a comparative analysis between this fictional, future generation point-of-view and examples from contemporary speeches, documentary films and popular science publications, which have employed (no doubt genuinely) an imagined future generations trope, evidently designed to raise a sense of anxiety and alarm that leads to action on curbing global warming. James Hansen, Barack Obama, Al Gore, Leonardo DiCaprio and Greta Thunberg represent some of the key scientific, political and celebrity voices whose imaginative future scenarios are in many ways (fictionally) corroborated in Lanchester's novel. This paper argues that the novel and recent climate-change discourse that employs the children-and-climate-change trope sets up a generational division (old-young, present-future) that may ultimately risk obscuring societal attitudes to climate change.

BIO

David Gray is a senior lecturer in English at the School of Language, Literatures and Learning, at Dalarna University, Sweden. He has published on eighteenth and nineteenth century British and Irish literature, representations of the Nordic countries in twentieth-century life/travel writing, as well as ecocriticism and Shakespeare. He is also editor of the e-journal *Landscapes: The Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language*.

Deanna HOLROYD (The Ohio State University) and Holly PARKER (University of Lincoln)

You Reap What You Sow: Affect, "Playbour" and Creating Neoliberal Techno-Utopias through Planting and Community Building in Stardew Valley

In an age of neoliberal pressures and fast-paced living, the features commonly associated with slow country living (gardening, foraging, crafting, local festivals, etc.) have come to be idealised for their

therapeutic qualities and community building practices. This was particularly the case during the COVID-19 pandemic, when national lockdown periods restricted mobility, limited social interaction, and forced a widespread retreat into the domestic sphere. In this period, the desire to ‘return to simple pleasures’ was not just evident from the revived interest in sourdough starters and banana bread, but also from the recent upsurge in popularity of contemporary country life video games, such as *Animal Crossing*, *Stardew Valley*, *Apico*, and *Spirittea*. However, rather than offering an escape from the fast pace of ‘real-life’, as is often assumed to be the case, these contemporary country life video games subscribe to neoliberal ‘success narratives’, with players experiencing a sense of achievement-induced satisfaction when they are rewarded for the labour of studiously tending to flowerbeds, crops, and animals. With this in mind, this paper analyses the resource-based narratives within the role playing game (RPG) *Stardew Valley*, through the lens of affect theory and postmillennial game theory, to interrogate how the game employs farming as an embodiment of ‘playbour’ (play labour). We argue that the narratives embedded within *Stardew Valley* reflect the neoliberal focus of productivity, community and autonomy, and the commodification of play, to produce a techno-utopia informed by neoliberal ideologies. We then examine the affective dimensions of the discourse within *Stardew Valley*’s associated digital communities (YouTube, Reddit, Twitch) to assert that the online relationships surrounding the game are not only exemplary of relationship building practices in the digital age, but are also indicative of affective desires for connection that emerge in response to the neoliberal conditions experienced in both the ‘real-life’ peri-/post-COVID-19 context, and the in-game narrative.

BIO

This paper is co-authored by [Deanna Holroyd](#), a PhD researcher at The Ohio State University (USA), and [Holly Parker](#), a PhD researcher at the University of Lincoln (UK). Deanna’s research lies in the intersection between politics, communication, cultural studies, and the digital humanities, as she attempts to delineate the mechanisms through which cultural tendencies and discursive ‘truths’ become widely adopted, and why they occur at particular cultural moments. Holly’s current research focuses on affect and performance in twenty-first century fiction, forming an interdisciplinary study across affect theory and performance studies that rests on the cultural backdrop of neoliberalism and postmillennial digital culture.

Giulia IANNUZZI (University of Trieste)

Ruin Lust, Fantastic Archaeologies, Past Futures

This paper examines the ruin as a device of cognitive estrangement used in speculative fiction to thematise and problematise given conceptualisations of historical time and temporal linearity. Since the modern age, the ruin as a fragment of the past has engendered new imaginary colonisations of a secularised future. Drawing on the hypothesis that the fantastic ruin and archaeological methods applied to past futures matured in the European imagination during the late modern age, this research connects twentieth-century archaeological and clipeological science fiction to the long-standing history of the ruin within a fantastic imagination. Materialising heliotropic conceptions of civilisation, especially since the 18th century the ruin has aroused the interest of writers, historians and painters in connection to notions such as those of *development* and *decadence*, *modernity* and *crisis* applied to human societies as well as to imaginary alien civilisations. The idea of a history *magistra vitae* and of a cyclical course of civilisations became premises for the application to the future of history as a method and for the aesthetic appreciation and poetics of ruin, discussed by Denis Diderot and Edmund Burke, and epitomised in the ruined Louvre painted by Hubert Robert and in Joseph Michael Gandy’s pictorial work portraying the Bank of England in ruins. The temporal estrangement of the ruin took on futuristic connotations inspiring some of the earliest speculations about the time to come. The contemplation of the remains of the past synecdochically fostered the idea of a future observer

contemplating the ruins of the present in writers such as Thomas Lyttelton and Volney. Towards the end of the 18th and throughout the 19th century, the idea of radical changes foreseen in the future increasingly incorporated the possibility of disasters, catastrophes and extinctions (e.g., the Earth in ruin and the last men imagined by Bodin, Grainville, Shelley). This paper will outline the connection between these precedents and twentieth-century archaeological science fiction that hypothesised the existence of hyper-evolved terrestrial or alien civilisations located in a distant past.

BIO

Giulia Iannuzzi has worked on the cultural history of time, the history of publishing and translation processes, and on speculative imagination in a comparative perspective. She holds a MA with honours from the University of Milan, and a PhD in Italian Studies from the University of Trieste, where she currently is research fellow in early modern history. In 2022 she completed her second PhD in early modern history at the University of Florence and, in 2021-22, she was a visiting postgraduate student at Birkbeck - University of London. Her books include: *Geografie del Tempo* (Rome, Viella, 2022); *Un laboratorio di fantastici libri*, with Luca G. Manenti (Chieti, Solfanelli, 2019); *Distopie, viaggi spaziali e allucinazioni* (Milan, Mimesis, 2015), *Fantascienza italiana* (Milan, Mimesis, 2014).

Norbert KREK (University of Debrecen)

The Languages of Power and Dystopia in Obsidian Entertainment's Video Game Tyranny

The video game *Tyranny*, developed by Obsidian Entertainment, puts the player into an unusual moral position, as the main character in the game's narrative assumes the role of a servant of an imperialist tyrant, called Kyros the Overlord. Kyros claims to be the sole ruler of the known world, and only a peninsula, the Tiers has been able to present an obstacle to their ambition so far. In order to overcome this challenge, the Overlord sends their most powerful clerics and warlords, the Archons to the Tiers along with the player character, a Fatebinder. In this context, I argue that the different Archons embody various aspects of power utilizing diverse methods by which power can be projected. Using the method of close playing, my paper aims to provide an analysis of the quests called Final Judgement and A Trial of Archons with a special emphasis on two theoretical frameworks. First, I claim that the genre traditions of the isometric role-playing games play an essential role in understanding the layered representation of power in *Tyranny*, as it is fundamentally (but not exclusively!) textual in nature. Second, the dystopic narrative and setting of the game is also a key factor for the reason that it connects the represented aspects of power and the gameplay mechanics through which the player has to make meaningful choices with a morality system that makes the consequences of the player's decisions transparent. Within these contexts, I analyse how *Tyranny* discusses the philosophic aspects of power with means specific to the medium of video games.

BIO

Norbert Krek is a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Debrecen. He majored in Hungarian linguistics and literature and obtained his MA degree in 2019. His doctoral dissertation is focusing on the genre traditions and the revival of isometric role-playing games in the 2010s. His primary field of interests include game studies, cultural memory, nostalgia and popular culture.

Tingcong LIN (University of Hong Kong)

Imagination and building of a utopia enclave in a time of crises: “Performative geographies” of colonial Shameen, Guangzhou in the late nineteenth century

This paper examines contemporaneous literary and cultural imaginations and representations of the identified enclave as a utopian space and their relationship with the island’s spatial formation and evolution. Guangzhou in the second half of the nineteenth century experienced a series of chaos, including the Second Opium War and the Taiping Rebellion, and its consequence fires and pandemics. In this time of crises, it witnessed the establishment and development of Shameen Island as a colonial enclave and a “foreign shelter”. Simultaneously, literary and cultural—both fictional and descriptive—imaginings and narrations of the place produced a discourse of it as a utopian island: geographically insular and bounded, socially exclusive and harmonious, politically centralized and ordered, and technologically progressive and advantageous. These representations, while reflecting the spatial reality and imaginations, also promoted spatial practices leading to the reinforcement of the eidetic physical enclave, surrounded by a chaotic world. This process exemplifies the key argument of “performative geographies”, that a place’s spatial representations and reality are mutually constructed. Subscribing to this theoretical framework, based on a scrutiny of these literary and cultural texts and an analysis on their dynamic interplay with the spatial and historical reality, this article argues that cultural representations of Shameen (re)produced the colonial enclave as a utopian enclave, both metaphorically and practically.

BIO

Tingcong Lin is a PhD student at the School of English, the University of Hong Kong, awarded as HKU Presidential PhD Scholar, under the supervision of Professor Kendall Johnson. He completed his BA at the School of International Studies, Sun Yat-sen University, China, and MPhil at the School of English, the University of Hong Kong. His current research focus concerns literary and cultural representations of foreign communities in the modern and contemporary Guangzhou, China. His works on this topic has been published in *Island Studies Journal* and is under review in *Journal of Historical Geography*. Tingcong speaks Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, and Teochew), English, and Spanish.

Francisco José MARTINEZ MESA (Complutense University of Madrid - HISTOPIA)

When the Frame Becomes Hope: Lights, Shadows and Mirages in Dystopian Films in the Twenty-first Century

In recent years, the international film scene has experienced a revival of the dystopia, as evidenced by several films both in their orientation and their content. They present us with an indeterminate future in which usually young individuals are opposed to social systems that are fiercely centralized and defined by conformity, surveillance and repression, the goal being absolute control of people and their lives. This proposal seeks to demonstrate that, despite being coetaneous, many of these new productions differ considerably when it comes to addressing their respective subject matters as well as how they convey them to the audience. While one relevant set of films (*The Hunger Games*, *Divergent*, among others) leads us to outcomes that restore harmony and reconcile us with the dominant order, thereby soothing our anxieties, others (*Les combattants*, *How I Live Now*) move in a radically opposite direction, exhorting us to embark on projects of emancipation and self-realization that transcend the limits imposed by the system.

BIO

Francisco José Martínez Mesa is Ph D. History from the Autónoma University of Madrid. Associate Professor of Political Theory at The Faculty of Political Sciences (Complutense University of

Madrid). Recent works: Martínez Mesa and Urraco, *De Esclavos y robots y esclavas* (Madrid, La Catarata, 2019), “Dilemas y puntos ciegos en el discurso distópico actual: aproximación a una nueva tipología del género” in *Distopía y Sociedad*, 1 (2021).

Peter MELVILLE (University of Winnipeg)

Colonial Cartography in N.K. Jemisin’s Inheritance Trilogy

Epic fantasy is well known for supplying readers with maps of fantastic secondary-world settings. N. K. Jemisin’s Inheritance trilogy (2010-11) is an example of a fantasy series that might have benefited from a map, but its author specifically chose not to include one. Jemisin has publicly acknowledged her aversion to the fantasy map as little more than a cliché that oftentimes spoils the role that places on the map will have in a fantasy text. Critical descriptions of cartographic images in the Inheritance trilogy suggest there is more to the story, that the omission of a reader map adds compelling emphasis to the trilogy’s postcolonial critique of what map theorists call “the cartographic gaze.” Drawing on the work of Stefan Ekman and scholars of colonial cartography, I argue that the Inheritance trilogy associates the very idea of a world map with the arrogance of empire and colonial domination. More specifically, the trilogy characterizes the god’s eye view of colonial cartography as harmfully misguided, even blasphemous, in its attempt to capture the world from a single totalizing perspective. My paper demonstrates how Jemisin counters the objectifying worldview of colonial cartography with the more grounded subjective narrative perspective of the colonized other. She is by no means the only fantasy author to use first-person narration to promote postcolonial perspectives but doing so enables her to recapture a depth of experience that is lost when worlds (both imaginary and real) are framed by the colonial cartographic gaze.

BIO

Peter Melville is Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, where he specializes in fantasy fiction, Romanticism, and critical and cultural theory. He is author of *Romantic Hospitality and The Resistance to Accommodation* (WLUP 2007) and *Writing about Literature: An Introductory Guide* (Nelson 2011). He has published recent essays on the fantasy genre in edited volumes and academic journals including *Extrapolation*, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Studies in the Fantastic*, and *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*.

Zsófia OROSZ-RÉTI (University of Debrecen)

Playable Revolutions: Agency vs. Collective Action in Video Games

Revolutions are extraordinary historical moments in which the collective desire of rapid, radical, and most of the times bottom-up social changes takes shape. In this respect revolutionary periods offer the promise of deciding over one’s fate at a societal scale. It is not by chance then that video games, the very medium that is interested in giving the player less limited agency than in real life, indulges in the representations of various revolutions (e.g., *Assassin’s Creed III*, *Black Flag*, *Unity*, *Dishonored*, *Deus Ex*) in both history and in fantastic worlds. Many of these games, however, cannot account for the fundamentally collective nature of revolutions as the gameplay is based on the special skillset, insight, and role of the avatar. The present paper sets out to explore how the idea of individual agency is harmonized with, challenged or dynamized by representations of collective action in the medium. By looking at one AAA-example (*Watch Dogs: Legion*) and two independent games that tackle the topic (*Road 96*, *Inside*), the paper investigates the various gameplay features that are used by the three games to simulate the collective nature of social change. The paper argues that the synthesis of individual player agency and collective action-affected gameplay may generate

emancipatory potential and renders video games capable of exploring the most favourable options for future rapid social changes.

BIO

Zsófia Orosz-Réti is an assistant professor at the Department of British Studies of the Institute of English and American Studies, University of Debrecen. She teaches contemporary British literature and culture and video game theory. Her primary research areas include cultural memory, popular culture and new media, while she is also interested in science fiction film and literature, music videos and television series.

Diana Q PALARDY (Youngstown State University)

Isolating the Prophet: The Cassandra Curse in Spanish Environmental Apocalyptic Literature

The figure of Cassandra, cursed by Apollo to become a prophet of doom whose accurate warnings are ignored by all, looms large in environmental discourses. The “prophet” in contemporary Spanish environmental apocalyptic literature is often marginalized in a way that is evocative of the inclination to feminize ecological discourses for the purpose of dismissing them. Regardless of the actual biological gender, the figure of the prophet is subjected to a form of gaslighting by all those who oppose their environmental movement, thus mirroring the psychological phenomenon of the Cassandra Complex. These prophets are often disparaged by their antagonists as hysterical, histrionic, hyperbolic, and, on occasion, duplicitous. Cassandra’s predictions were ignored for several reasons: her prophecies were enigmatic, they required individuals to completely change their world view, the prophet was considered an outsider, and the predictions seemed distant and far off. The purpose of this investigation is to explore the degree to which these reasons factor into the reception of the prophet’s message in Spanish environmental apocalyptic literature. Furthermore, this presentation will examine the extent to which environmental discourses have been feminized in these texts, thus leading to the marginalization and isolation of the prophet.

BIO

Diana Q Palardy is a full professor of Spanish at Youngstown State University and author of the book *The Dystopian Imagination in Contemporary Spanish Literature and Film* (2018) with the Hispanic Urban Studies Series of Palgrave Macmillan. Her research interests include Spanish literature and film, dystopia/utopia, urban cultural studies, immigration, gender, and contemporary social movements. She created the website *Spanish Dystopias* to accompany her book and the website *España especulativa*, which is a digital mapping project that involves researchers from Spain and the US.

Vincenzo PERNICE (Fondazione 1563)

Shadows in the Shelter. Disturbing Variations on a Decadent Trope, between Literature and Cinema

Since J.K. Huysmans’s novel *À rebours* (*Against the Grain*) appeared in 1884, the retreat from the outside world became a trope in decadent literature, serving as a blueprint for fictionalized treatments of aestheticism, anti-bourgeoisie, pessimism. This proposal aims to explore the cultural and social implications of contaminating such trope with elements of fantastic and horror imagery (nightmares, visions, haunted houses, the devil). Two novels and two films will be taken into account. In Huysmans’s 1887 novel *En rade* (*Stranded*), a husband and a wife seek refuge from creditors in a chateau in rural France. Several dream sequences, highly regarded by Surrealism, interrupt the depiction of their miserable everyday life. Aldo Palazzeschi’s 1908 novel *:riflessi* (*:reflections*) tells

the story of a prince who retires in the manor where his mother committed suicide. In the second part of the book, the man disappears without a trace. In the 1916 silent film *Il fuoco* (*The Fire*), written and directed by Giovanni Pastrone, an owl-like poetess invites an unlucky painter in her gothic castle. The film epitomizes many features of Italian “cinema dannunziano”, inspired by Gabriele d’Annunzio. The relevance of this formula in contemporary cinema can be seen in 2009 *Antichrist*. The plot of the highly stylized film, written and directed by Lars von Trier, revolves around a couple’s own therapy in a cabin in the woods, after the death of their child, and explores the themes of sex, violence and satanism. While none of these cultural artifacts can be regarded as popular, they all borrow elements from fantastic and horror fiction. In doing so, decadent authors seem to look for more entertaining ways to develop their otherwise static plots. Yet their social and political ideology appears to remain untouched: accepting popular *clichés* does not translate into a more democratic literature or cinema.

BIO

Vincenzo Pernice is a research fellow at Fondazione 1563, as a member of a team devoted to the study of the reception of Baroque art in 20th century museums and collections. His main research interests deal with late 19th-early 20th century European art and literature, with a focus on avant-garde movements and decadent authors. He holds a PhD in Visual and Media Studies from IULM University, Milan. His papers appeared in Italian and international journals and conference proceedings. He is currently working on a monograph about the Baroque in Gabriele d’Annunzio’s writings and collections at the Vittoriale degli Italiani.

Ivan PINTOR (Pompeu Fabra University)

Dreaming future(s) through comics: rewriting the sequence of the world

In the history of anticipatory science fiction, comics have had a crucial importance since its emergence as a means of communication between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both for its ability to visualize any imaginable scenario, and for its common media emergence together with photography, cinema, printing, and serial fiction, in a key moment for the visual memory of humanity. Cowboys or aviators catapulted into spaceships of the future such as *John Carter of Mars* (1912) and *Buck Rogers* (1929), cities capable of staging biopolitical models as diverse as those of *Flash Gordon* (1934), near futures such as those that Hergé conceived for Tintin's lunar journey or future diversions based on divergent social and even spiritual models such as those that Moebius conceived through in *The Airtight Garage* (*Le Garage hermétique*, 1979) or *Edena's Gardens* (*Le Monde d'Edena*, 1988-2003) are the testimony of how comics have thought about the testimony of vulnerability, the imagery of catastrophe and the permanent possibility of the other that science fiction embodies. Contrary to the popular idea that the possible usually precedes the real and therefore gives it less substance, Henri Bergson in *The Possible and the Real* (1930) stressed that in the possible "there is more, and not less (...) Because the possible is nothing other than the real with, moreover, an act of the mind that projects its image into the past once it has been produced". What fascinates about the very experience of reading comics is that it allows you to view that continuous updating and adherence of the possible to the real, thanks to the condition of the page, its map or machine size for transforming time into space and space into time. Through Bergson's thought and an iconographic, historical and comparative approach, this intervention aims to show how the great difficulty that Bergson observes at the beginning of his text, namely that time is what prevents everything from happening immediately, that it is the delay and, consequently, the elaboration, the indeterminacy and the choice, vanishes in the comic reading experience. All times, in the *panopsis*, can be now, which allows us to think about time, history, future projection and virtual scenarios in a completely different way.

BIO

PhD in Communication Studies from Universidad Pompeu Fabra (UPF). Senior lecturer at UPF and member of the CINEMA Research Group. He currently teaches Contemporary Cinema in the bachelor's program in Audiovisual Communication at UPF, and Cinema, TV and Comic-book History in the UPF Master's in Contemporary Film program. With Jordi Balló, he is the Principal Investigator of the research project *Visual motifs in the public sphere*, and the Project Manager in Spain of the Erasmus + Project *Teseo – Arianna's strands in the digital age*. In recent years, he has published articles in journals and contributed to more than 50 books, including *Figure del fumetto* (2020), *Les Motifs au cinéma* (2019), *Flash Gordon* (2019), and *I riflessi di Black Mirror* (2018). He writes for the newspaper *La Vanguardia* and has curated exhibitions for different museums. His lines of research are: gestures in film, iconology, comparative media studies and transmedia.

Giuseppe PREVITALI (University of Bergamo)

When the World Collapse. Viruses, Urban Nightmares and the End of Mankind

The Covid-19 pandemic has produced an unprecedented proliferation of utopian/dystopian narratives that variously deal with issue of contagion, environmental emergency, civil rights limitations etc. In this imaginary, the role played by cinema is of course quintessential and many films, tv-series and documentaries on these topics are being released. Far more intriguing and less studied is the case in which films produced in a different geographical and historical context can nowadays be seen as an anticipation of the problems that we are currently facing. I am not referring to films such as *Contagion* (2011), in which the phases of the sanitary emergency are depicted in an extremely accurate manner, but rather to films that are able to foreshadow the devastating consequences that the spread of a more or less unknown virus can have both at an individual and social level. I am thinking, for instance, to Kurosawa's *Kairo* (2001), in which the city progressively becomes an uncanny and nightmarish field of nothingness populated just by isolated shadows; or to Tsai Min-Liang's *The Hole* (1998), where the unwholesome apartments of the protagonists become their only livable spaces. The aim of the paper, therefore, is to elaborate on films that were able to pre-imagine the condition of this pandemic not just in terms of a viral outbreak, but rather in the sense of a new geography of reclusion, solitude and empty spaces, where the survival of mankind both as a biological and social entity is at stake.

BIO

Giuseppe Previtali is Senior Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Bergamo (Italy), where he teaches Film Studies and Visual Culture. His main research interests are connected with the extreme forms of contemporary visual culture, the problem of media literacy and the epistemology of digital humanities. He is author of the books *Pikadon. Sopravvivenze di Hiroshima nella cultura visual giapponese* (Aracne 2017), *L'ultimo tabù. Filmare la morte fra spettacolarizzazione e politica dello sguardo* (Meltemi 2020) e *Educazione visuale* (McGraw-Hill 2021). He is also editor of the volume *L'altra metà del conflitto. La comunicazione jihadista da al-Qaeda allo Stato Islamico* (Meltemi 2022).

Riccardo RETEZ (Iulm University)

Transcodification and Synthesis of Social, Psychological and Cultural Isolation in Sci-fi Narratives: from Literature to Video Games

This study intends to observe and investigate the concept of isolation with a transmediality perspective, opening the analysis to multiple access points for the study of original forms of adaptation and an approach to phenomena of narrative synthesis and transcoding (Jenkins, 2016). Defined as 'exclusion, by desire or circumstance, from relationships or contact with the usual

environment' (Cacioppo et. al., 2011), isolation is a concept that has been absorbed by the science fiction genre and adapted within different media, through original narratives that revolve around humans – conceived as 'human beings'. The concept of isolation is declined in stories and media from multiple perspectives; this contribution focuses on three types of isolation and their interpretation and exposition within three different cultural products: social isolation, present within the novel *The Postman* (David Brin, 1985); psychological isolation, as proposed by the Japanese animation series *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (Hideaki Anno, 1995); and cultural isolation, and its exegesis in the video game *Death Stranding* (Sony Interactive Entertainment, 2019). The aim of the contribution is to provide a reconstruction and chronological mapping regarding the declination of the concept of isolation through the three texts, according to a Hegelian logic that sees in the third text the synthesis of the previous ones. From literature to video game, through transmediality approach, it will be possible to highlight how the narrative designed and implemented by each of the three texts is structured through multiple levels that configure different interpretative dimensions, ludic-performative realities and reading levels concerning the role and meaning of the human being in contemporary society. To read David Brin's novel, to watch Hideaki Anno's series or to play and experience *Death Stranding* is to understand altruism and face isolation, actions that are currently as necessary as ever in the reality of the contemporary world.

BIO

Riccardo Retez is a PhD student in Visual and Media Studies at the IULM University in Milan, focusing on Social and Game studies. His research investigates spectator behaviour on game live streaming platforms according to social and sexual consumption phenomena. He obtained his Master's degree in Television, Cinema and New Media at IULM University in 2019, recently published his first academic paper, *MACHINIMA VERNACOLARE* (Concrete Press 2020), he contributes to academic publications in journals and volumes (Ludica 2020; Eracle Journal 2021, IFM 2021, Mimesis 2022), and works as a curator of events and festivals interested in contemporary visual culture.

Valentina ROMANZI (Ca' Foscari University of Venice/University of Verona)

Staying Human in the Post-apocalypse: Individualism and Collectivism in The Last of Us and its sequel

Naughty Dog's video games *The Last of Us* (2013) and *The Last of Us Part II* (2020) are set in a post-pandemic world in which the few human survivors must fend off hordes of zombie mutants in order to restore civilization. The playable protagonists of the first instalment, Joel and Ellie, cross what used to be the United States of America hoping to reach the Fireflies, a rebel group that might be able to develop a vaccine using Ellie's natural immunity to the fungus that has exterminated humanity. Ellie features also in the sequel as she chases Abby, the other playable character, to avenge Joel's death. Both games stage a long and complex tale of human drama in a post-apocalyptic setting, investigating the strained link that binds an individual to a given community. In this talk, I wish to explore the tension that permeates the playable characters as they try to reconcile personal needs and desires with the greater communal good. Alongside the analysis of salient episodes of the diegesis, I will also focus on gameplay mechanics and the effect the shifts in focalization have on the players. As the game makes the player use different characters in different chapters, it forces them to mediate between their goals and the stated objectives of the different characters. Reflecting on the interplay between avatar and gamer, I will expand my reflection on individualism and collectivism to invest not only the narrative world, but the real one as well.

BIO

Valentina Romanzi is Adjunct Professor of English literature at Ca' Foscari University of Venice and of English at the University of Verona. She holds a PhD in Transcultural Studies in the Humanities from the University of Bergamo. She specializes in contemporary popular culture, focusing on utopia, dystopia, speculative fiction, and post-apocalyptic fiction. In 2021, she published *Contaminazioni. Un approccio interdisciplinare*, with Alessandro Secomandi and Danilo Serra. Her latest book, *American Nightmares: Dystopia in Twenty-first-century US Fiction*, is forthcoming for Peter Lang. She is an editor at *Iperstoria – Journal of American and English Studies*.

Tonguc SEZEN (Teesside University)

Survival in Half-Sunken Cities: Adaptations of coastal cities to climate catastrophe in speculative fiction

In his 2017 novel *New York 2140*, Kim Stanley Robinson envisions a post sea level rise aqua city consisting of man-made islands build around skyscrapers predating the climate catastrophe. Called “a super Venice” by Robinson, the New York city of the 2140s relies on technological interventions and constant human effort to exist. Detailed and scientifically plausible, this imagery of the flourishing half-sunken city of the future is not unique to Robinson’s novel. Such optimistic pessimist visions of urban futures adapting and thriving following the climate catastrophe are not uncommon in recent speculative fiction from various media. Steven Spielberg’s 2001 film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* envisions half-sunken cities as privatized corporate heavens. Blue Byte Studios’ real-time strategy video games *Anno 2070* and *Anno 2205* place players as administrators of post sea level rise urban development. *The Gathering Storm* expansion of *Civilization VI* provides players multiple ways to adapt to rising sea levels, including building flood barriers and seasteads. Other, more pessimistic approaches to life in half sunken cities can be found in George Turner’s 2013 novel *The Sea and Summer*, and Daniel Pecqueur’s 2016 comic book series *Golden City*, both depicting social conflicts between poorer half-sunken cities and their wealthier counterparts, surviving land-based habitats and newly constructed corporate floating cities respectively. *The Sea and Summer* also explores class conflicts within the towers. These works not only ask what can be done to save our coastal cities, but also question which aspect of contemporary urban live and culture should be preserved, and what benefits and challenges these new ways of living could bring. In this regard this paper proposes a comparative reading of media depicting visions of half-sunken cities of the future. How do they envision coastal urban survival in the post climate catastrophe age? What are common themes and strategies? How are these strategies related to real world proposals and designs to save coastal cities? And finally, what do these works of fiction say about our perception, hopes, and fears of the post climate catastrophe world?

BIO

Dr Tonguc Sezen is a Senior Lecturer in Transmedia Production at Teesside University. His academic research focuses on the intersections of new technologies, design, and storytelling, including transmedia worldbuilding, narrative design in games, and toy studies.

Bodil STELTER (University of Bremen)

“[...] That After a Restart of Society the Bug of Homophobia is Fixed” - Player Value-formations in the Apocalyptic World of The Last of Us

In summer of 2020 the Corona-Virus outbreak had by then become a new reality to almost all areas of the world, causing uncertainty and fears for the future in many people, including video game players. During that time, the highly anticipated video game title *The Last of Us 2* was released and

gave many players the opportunity to play in a zombie-virus-infested apocalyptic setting during their own quarantine. The coincidental overlap of these two events provides an interesting opportunity to investigate players' notion of the apocalypse in relation to their lived reality in a world in crisis. My research centers on the question of how video game players perceive aspects of apocalyptic fiction on the range between utopian, dystopian and "realistic", expressing thereby their own values of how the (real) world could, should and would be in case of an apocalyptic event. The investigated discourse units I analyzed for this question concerns topics such as but not limited to: depictions of minorities and discrimination, meanings and justifications of violence and the beauty of decaying landscapes of civilization. In my paper I will show exemplary findings of my research on the player and media discourse of *The Last of Us 2* with special regard for the apocalyptic setting in which it is set. For this, I will focus on debates concerning the lesbian- and transgender-representation in the game and compare instances of resistance, approval and moments of constructive debate on that topic. I will show how the discourse surrounding this game both reproduces and questions societal norms, indicating how video game players understand both the dangers and chances of a disrupted world through their experience in fiction.

BIO

Since September 2019, Bodil Stelter is a research associate at the Institute for the Study of Religions and Religion Education of the University of Bremen. Her dissertation project "Value formations in a video-game-franchise" is conducted within the ZeMKI (Center for Media, Communication and Information Research) doctoral program. From 2012 to 2015 she studied Asian Studies and Japanese language at University Bonn. From 2014 to 2015 she participated in a study abroad program at University of Tsukuba in Japan. She concluded the master-program for the Study of Religion at University Leipzig with her thesis on German Haka-practitioners.

Mario TIRINO (Università di Salerno) and Lorenzo DENICOLAI (Università di Torino)

The Virus Filter: Retro-mediation, Dystopia, and the Remediation of Audiovisual Imaginaries

The paper starts from a twofold observation. Firstly, as a "total social fact" (Mauss 2016), Covid-19 has redefined crucial moments of individual and collective life (birth, marriage, death, etc.) and every dimension of human activity (economy, politics, culture). Secondly, the pandemic imposed a new iconography based on identifiable objects and practices (masks, disinfectant gels, supermarket queues, vaccine syringes, etc.) (Mitchell 2017, Pintor Iranzo 2020). In some ways, a reversal of dystopian narratives, literary and audiovisual of previous decades seem to many. Therefore, we intend to reflect on 'retro-mediation' as a new logic of remediation of past (audio)visual cultures fuelled by the feeling of living in a dystopian present. This logic directly connects with Richard Grusin's 'radical mediation' (Grusin 2017) and 'pre-mediation' (Grusin 2004) processes. On the one hand, retro-mediation is shaped by the forces of pre-mediation, which, by simultaneously containing and fuelling anxiety about the pandemic management, foster emotional alertness and constant familiarity with the visual cultures of the virus. On the other hand, retro-media logics are defined by the virus' ability to affect our imagination since our bodies profoundly – authentic biological media – become the 'mediators' of contagion and, therefore, central factors in the re-imagination of the past. Thus, retro-mediation will be analysed as a media logic of re-imagining the past, which – in the wake of the reversal of dystopia in the present – takes the form of retroactive remediation through which users project symbols, icons, and dystopian elements, drawn from pandemic visual culture, onto the audiovisual images of the pre-Covid-19 years. The examples examined, taken from the TV series *The Big Bang Theory*, *Pose*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Pushing Daisies*, will highlight the sociocultural mechanisms brought into play by retro-mediation, capable of conditioning the forms of production, reproduction, and reconversion of social imaginaries (Marzo, Meo 2019).

BIO

Mario Tirino is a researcher at the University of Salerno, where he teaches Television and New Media, Digital Audiovisual Theories, and History of Sociological Thought. His fields of research include the sociology of digital cultures, the mediology of literature and comics, and the sociology of sports cultures. He is the author of *Postspettatorialità. L'esperienza del cinema nell'era digitale* [Postspectatorship. The Cinema Experience in the Digital Age] (2020) and of over one hundred articles published in national and international scientific journals and in numerous collected works. He directs the scientific series "L'Eternauta. Collana di studi su fumetti e media" [L'Eternauta. Studies on Comics and Media] (with G. Frezza and L. Di Paola) and "Binge Watchers. Media, sociologia e storia della serialità" [Binge Watchers. Media, sociology and history of seriality]. He is manager of the Erasmus+ research projects "Teseo – Arianna's Strands in the Digital Age" (2019-21) on media literacy and "Elephant - Elearning for Humanities" (2021-23).

Lorenzo Denicolai is a researcher at the University of Turin, where he teaches Media Anthropology and Applied Informatics in Multimedia Communication. He deals with audiovisual media, media literacy, human-technology relations and robotics. He is the author of scientific articles in national and international journals and of the monographs *Scritture mediali. Riflessioni, rappresentazioni ed esperienze mediaeducative* [Media Writings. Reflections, representations and media-educational experiences] (2017) and *Mediantropi. Introduzione alla quotidianità dell'uomo tecnologico* [Medianthropes. An Introduction to the Everyday Life of Technological Man] (2018). He is scientific coordinator of an audiovisual communication project with people with aphasia (in collaboration with the "Carlo Molo Onlus Foundation"). He is part of the interdepartmental research centre "Cinedumedia" and the "Luciano Gallino – Laboratory for Behavioural Simulation and Educational Robotics". He is currently working on an edited work on robotics and AI from the perspective of media studies (forthcoming from Meltemi).

Sam WEISS (Independent Researcher)

Disability and Animacy in Her Body and Other Parties

In this project, I explore disability and queerness in Carmen Maria Machado's short story collection, *Her Body and Other Parties*. In her collection, Machado uses elements of speculative fiction to explore the intersections between queerness, gender, disability, and trauma. I primarily focus on the story "Real Women Have Bodies." In "Real Women Have Bodies," women all over the world are "fading," their bodies losing materiality and becoming translucent. It is unclear how much of their consciousness they retain. Throughout the story, the women are shown taking up residence in inanimate objects. I investigate these "faded women" primarily through the theories of Mel Chen, David Mitchell & Sharon Snyder, and Sami Schalk. Firstly, I examine these "faded women" through Chen's theory of animacy (from Chen's book, *Animacies*), considering how they are both "animate" and "inanimate," as well as the significance of their inhabitation of objects. Additionally, I explore how "fading" functions as a disability in the narrative. I begin this observation with Sami Schalk's claim that disability must be read within the rules of the text (from her book, *Bodyminds Reimagined*). While "fading" is not a recognizable disability, Schalk's claim allows us to read "fading," as well as other speculative elements in *Her Body and Other Parties*, as disability. Schalk also takes issue with David Mitchell & Sharon Snyder's theory of narrative prosthesis (from their book, *Narrative Prosthesis*), claiming that metaphorization of disability can be an effective tool at representing the experiences of multiply marginalized people. Machado is a queer woman of color, and many of the characters in her text exist within multiply marginalized communities. In this project, I explore the ways in which Machado's speculative representations of disability utilize metaphorization, and how this metaphorization correlates with theories of animacy and inanimacy.

BIO

Sam Weiss (they/them) is a current high school teacher and Master graduate from Georgetown University. Their research focuses on disability studies, queer studies, trans studies, speculative fiction, accessible pedagogy, and education reform. They are particularly interested in intersections of gender, race, and/or disability in speculative fiction, as well as explorations of memory and time in accordance with technology, gender, race, and/or disability. Their scholarship aims to place creative works in direct conversation with theory, as they believe that creative works hold intellectual weight and value that contributes directly to learning, both among scholars and in the classroom.

Hongliang ZHOU (Zhejiang University)

Performing in Avatar: The Digimon's Metaverse and Transcultural Gamification of Anime

Digimon (デジモン), short for the digital monsters, is a Japanese media franchise encompassing anime, manga, and movies. It was translated into Chinese and aired on the Chinese national televisions in 2001. The Television version of Digimon became an instant commercial success and one of the favorites of the post-90s generation. In the October of 2021, a video games company bought the copyright and developed the story of Digimon into a phono game, named after the New Era of Digimon. Since social distance became the new normal, video games have become the spiritual escape that brings shallow relief for youngsters. This article uses the methodology of virtual ethnography and is based on my seven months of fieldwork in the video game. It will answer the following questions: Why do people choose video games as a tool of entertainment and expression? How do the gamers use avatars to create a cyber community and build a sense of belonging to virtual reality? How did the Digimon evolve from the production in the space to the production of the space? What are the narrative and metaphors inside the video games, and how do they reflect the desires of the younger generation of Chinese?

BIO

Hongliang ZHOU is a Ph.D. candidate at Zhejiang University. His research interests include Theater History, Performance Studies, and Comparative Dramas. Hongliang is also an award-winning writer, a performing artist, and a humorous friend.