

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Electricdreams – Between fiction and society IV

Visions of Control: Power and Technology in Speculative Fiction

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KEYNOTES

BODHISATTVA CHATTOPADHYAY

Speculating on Control: Gods and AIs in Surveillance Mode

While “religious futurisms” have always been part of speculative fiction, recent speculative fiction increasingly sees god-like (god-lite) powers as an attribute of Artificial Intelligence. This coming age in the development of AI, usually presented as unholy and dystopic, permeates the fabric of biopolitical control in these possible futures, extending current concerns about religion and its societal effects. In this keynote, I argue that if speculative fiction is “the myth of the modern age”, then the possibility of AI-AGI has always been its telos, where giving over control of oneself as data offers the only possibility of meaning in an otherwise meaningless existence.

Bio

I work on contemporary future fictions and science fiction from a science and technology perspective. I work on multiple media, including texts, graphic novels, films and tv, video games, and visual arts. My work **back in the day** has been on the connections between literature, science, and technology, especially in the colonial period. I spent a year (2014-15) post-PhD pursuing a bachelors degree in zoology, which I quit to pursue three years of postdoctoral research on modern medical databases, infrastructures, and classification systems. My plan is to finish that degree someday... I have led two EU (ERC Starting Grant and ERC Proof of Concept) and two Norwegian Research Council (NFR FRIPRO-YRT and NFR-FORSTERK) grants. I established and run the Holodeck (the Games Research Lab), which is the University of Oslo’s only lab dedicated to research on video games. I have written numerous essays and articles, as well as written, edited, and translated books on my core area of research. My work has been translated into ten languages. I am co-founder and former manager of Theory from the Margins, which has developed into a research collective with over 16,000 members and followers worldwide. I have produced the documentary film *Kalpavigyan: A Speculative Journey* (2021), which has been screened in 12 film festivals worldwide, won three best documentary awards, and received several other recognitions. Notable awards include grants

from the European Research Council (2020), one of the most prestigious research grants in the world, various prestigious grants from the Norwegian Research Council (2018, 2020, 2022), the World Fantasy Award (2020), a top award in the field of speculative fiction, the Inter CircleU Prize for inter and trans-disciplinary research (2024), the Johannes H Berg Prize (2019) for fandom activities and SF popularization, the Foundation Essay Prize (2017), and the Strange Horizons Readers' Poll Award (2014).

BARBARA HENRY

From Golem to cyborg. Posthuman Reconfigurations of an ancient monstrum

The aim of this presentation is to analyse and clarify the original acceptances of a symbol of Jewish identity – *the Golem* – and its successive translations into new, *mainly posthuman*, symbolic patterns. To reach this aim a specific hermeneutics endeavour is sketched. Across the centuries, the figuration of the *Golem* has been transferred by generations of pious rabbi from the semantic context of the interpretations of the Scriptural episodes to the prismatic, transcultural and multi- coloured imaginary of the contemporary age. In the past decades this has happened in most cases through the mediation of the term *cyborg*: a new kind of artificial humanoid, with posthuman traits. Cyborgs are, *according to one of the current definitions*, a type of anthropoid that is neither totally organic nor totally mechanical. This kind of humanoid could be labelled as 'monster' (*monstrum*) just as the *Golem* (a living 'being' made of clay), because they both awake fear, wonder, or 'uncanny' sensations for similar reasons. Not to be 'naturally' born of woman, neither dead nor alive. Differences according to a (latent and contemporary) posthuman spectrum are to be focused on at the end.

Bio

Barbara Henry (Lucca, 1959) is full Professor of Political Philosophy at the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies (SSSUP), Pisa/Italy. She did research work at the University of Bochum, Saarland, Erlangen-Nürnberg, Lucern, at the Humboldt University of Berlin and at the Peking University; she lectured at the University of Frankfurt am Main, of Munich, of Chongqing, of Peking. She collaborates with the Istituto Italiano di Studi Storici in Naples. The main issues of her inquiries are: German classical philosophy, neokantianism, political judgement and hermeneutics, German philosophy of technique and modern political myths, political and cultural identity, tolerance and interculturality, jewish studies on the artificial anthropoids, political and cultural globalisation, gender issues, qualitative empirical research, philosophy of technology, posthuman studies. She published books and articles on E. Cassirer, H. Arendt, M. Heidegger, E. Jünger. She translated the Eduard Gans' *Zusaetze to Hegels' Philosophy of Right*. Since 1994/95 she is taking the course in political philosophy at SSSUP. She lectured on *Cassirer's interpretations of Kant and Hegel* by G. Marini at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Pisa. Among other research activities she was also responsible of several local research units of national projects and of Jean Monnet projects. She participated to relevant European research programmes. She has been member of the scientific Board of "European Journal of Social Theory" and she is now member of the Scientific Committee of the A ranked reviews "Politica e società" and Iride, and of Rivista Italiana di Filosofia Politica. She has been the first italian Director of the Confucio Institute in Pisa. At the present moment she coordinates the PhD in Human Rights and Global Politics at the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna; she has also been in charge of the Laboratory in Global Security and Human Rights. She collaborates with the national channels Rai1 and Rai3.

PANELS

MEHDI ACOUCHE

Computers as Myth and Symbols: Technology and Metaphors of Power in 1960s and 1970s Cinema and Television

Speculative films that were released between 1965 and 1977 generally agreed in their critique and condemnation of the techno-utopian dreams that undergirded much of golden age science fiction. Recalling *Brave New World* or, especially, E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" (an adaptation of which was produced in 1966 for the TV anthology show *Out of the Unknown* and received the top prize at the Trieste SF Festival), these films (and sometimes TV series) would depict dehumanized underground cities run by and for technology, especially computers and artificial intelligence (the concept was just entering the mainstream). Run by logic and "cold reason", these enclosed cities were the caricature of the technocracy running Western societies as denounced by Theodore Roszak in his influential *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (1969). The technocratic society (also denounced by the likes of Jacques Ellul or Lewis Mumford at the time) and what Mumford called "the myth of the machine" thus crystallized much of the opposition prevalent at the time, coming both from the various countercultures as well as the mainstream of Western societies. For instance, these gleaming cities were sometimes shot in shopping malls, representing the world of the future as a hyper-consumerist "machine" in which the only remaining vegetation was of the plastic kind. However, beyond the relative consensus behind the criticism of "the machine" lay definite oppositions between conservative, liberal and countercultural sensibilities. These oppositions reveal computers to be symbols for "those in power" and whatever is taken to be wrong with them. *Logan's Run* (Michael Anderson, 1976) relies on a very conservative discourse to denounce the hedonistic world and leisure society created for young people who are pampered by the machines and live only for casual sex, orgies, drugs and consumption; "liberation" in this context consists in the rediscovery of Congress, the flag (the film was released for the bicentenary of the U.S.), elders, marriage and monogamy. Conversely, the counterculturally-inclined *THX 1138* (George Lucas, 1971) depicts its own technological society as inherently repressive, forcing citizens to take drugs to inhibit their sexual drives while depicting police brutality and techno-religious brainwashing. Finally, the liberal sensibility is best conveyed by the original *Star Trek* (CBS, 1966-1969), in which Captain Kirk (drawing, of all sources, from Jean-Luc Godard's *Alphaville*) would regularly defeat a sentient computer by simply 'reasoning it out of order', reassuring viewers at home that "man" was still firmly in control of technologies meant only to be instruments to be wielded by the enlightened members of Starfleet. My presentation would thus center on the figure of the (sentient) computer as the emblematic personification of Power (of the technological, political and social kind) to outline three concurrent depictions that are each, in their own way, representative of the late 1960s and 1970s – and, in many ways, of our current era as well.

Bio

My name is Mehdi Achouche, I am an associate professor in anglophone cinema and American studies at Sorbonne Paris Nord University. My research deals with depictions of techno-utopianism, transhumanism and the posthuman in cinema and television. I am currently completing a monograph on such depictions in the cinema and television of the 1965-1977 era.

SONALI AGARWAL

Medical Technology and Reproductive Control in the SF Story *Birthright*

Speculative fiction has often imagined future scenarios of authoritarian control over female bodies, and especially over procreation and reproduction. In the process, women are denied autonomy and

agency and are reduced to mere walking wombs, as in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. This paper will examine an Indian SF story with a similar premise – 'Birthright' by Shubhada Gogate (translated from Marathi), published in the anthology of Indian SF stories *It Happened Tomorrow*, ed. by Bal Phondke. 'Birthright' imagines a dystopian surveillance state in which reproduction is regulated by the state. All pregnant women have to register at a state-run medical centre which closely monitors them and conducts a sex determination test of the foetus. The women have to go to the Foetus Development Centre everyday for their physical and mental 'development.' But mysteriously all those women who were carrying female foetuses have miscarriages and it later transpires that they were administered drugs at the Centre to induce these. The women are also made to record messages for their foetuses, so that the baby is trained to develop 'proper mental habits' right from the womb. The protagonist Asavari is perturbed to find that she is made to record eulogies of the state and instructions to the unborn child to become a loyal, compliant and submissive citizen. Horrified by this attempt at mental enslavement and ideological indoctrination, Asavari tries to break away from the Centre. The narrative traces her resistance and the ensuing repercussions which show the power wielded by the state. Dystopian fiction is often about the suppression of individual freedom, or the denial of human rights, but it is also about the importance of dissent and rebellion. 'Birthright' celebrates its protagonist's rebellion against an oppressive state and show how she manages to subvert the system and reclaim agency. Neil Gaiman has remarked, "people wrongly think that speculative fiction is about predicting the future... what speculative fiction is really good at is not the future but the present – taking an aspect of it that troubles or is dangerous, and extending and extrapolating that aspect" into a cautionary tale. In the story 'Birthright' the parallels with the present are evident. Because of deeply engrained gender discrimination, instances of female foeticide and female infanticide do happen in India but they are illegal. However, the story imagines a dystopian future in which the state itself manipulates and misuses medical technology to exercise reproductive control. The story 'Birthright' is a feminist critique of patriarchal attitudes and practices prevalent in contemporary India, but these are defamiliarized as they are embodied and represented by a repressive state.

Bio

Sonali Agarwal is an Associate Professor in the Dept of English, Indraprastha College for Women, Delhi University, India. Her areas of interest are speculative fiction, film studies and environmental studies.

DARIO ALTOBELLI

Common People, Normal World. Or the Impossibility of Change and the Power of Technoscience

As has been observed (eg. Corvo 2025, Holland 2025), with the episode "Common people" (2025) of *Black Mirror* Season 7 the perfect inversion point between socio-cultural and material *reality* and social and fictional *imaginary* is reached. We are no longer faced with a fiction, but with a coherent and profound representation, sociologically pertinent and accurate, of contemporary global society. The story of Mike and Amanda, of their tragic and moving love story, appears to be the concrete metaphor of the great deception promoted by the technoscientific system oriented according to the capitalist logic. There are three fictional elements, in particular, that find a precise correspondence in social reality: the pervasive *socio-logic* of subscription and streaming services that, in this story, reaches as far as biomedical personal services; the dynamics of social platforms as sources of profit based on the sale of one's person as an *image-commodity*; the deep connection between humans and technology according to a transhumanist scenario fully realized and accepted. On a more general level of analysis, on the one hand, the unrestrained power of technoscience as the "armed wing" of capitalism emerges with great clarity; on the other, we see the impotence of *praxis* as an action endowed with purpose and meaning for every project of emancipation, liberation or even just

dignified survival is immediately compromised in its outcomes by the gears of a cynical and ruthless socio-economic system that prioritizes profit over human well-being. The paper focuses on these and other elements, through the use of sociological reflection and critical thinking, to advance a proposal for reflection and criticism centered on the *power* of technoscience and its real meaning not as a mere “means”, but as an authentically socio-political end now indistinguishable from the (bio)capitalist system of which it is at the same time an expression and an instrument.

Bio

Dario Altobelli is Associate Professor of General Sociology at the University “G. d’Annunzio” of Chieti-Pescara. He is author, among other things, of studies on the history of human and social sciences, on the tradition of utopian thought and on issues of sociology of deviance and politics, with specific attention to capitalism and technoscience. Among his publications: (2023) “*Society must be controlled*”. “*Green Pass*” and the experiment of a society of control in Italy, “Kybernetes” (<https://doi.org/10.1108/K-07-2022-1056>); (2024) *Capitalism, Form of Life, Utopia: Critical Paths in a “New Normal” World*, in: León Casero, J., Urabayan, J. (eds), *Rethinking Democracy for Post Utopian Worlds. Alternative Political Projects After the Sovereign State*, (https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-53491-1_13); (2025) *L’essere umano nell’epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnoscientifica* (Meltemi, Open access: <https://www.meltemieditore.it/catalogo/lartefatto-umano/>).

JAVIER ÁLVAREZ CABALLERO

Beyond Control: Posthuman Ethics, Technological Specters, and the Utopian Imagination

In an era defined by algorithmic governance, ecological collapse, and the pervasive myth of technosolutionism, speculative fiction emerges not merely as a mirror of our anxieties, but as a philosophical laboratory in which the very categories of life, agency, and ethics are being reimagined. This paper investigates how contemporary speculative narratives challenge the anthropocentric imperative of control and mastery, advancing a vision of ethical entanglement that resonates with philosophical posthumanism. Drawing on Francesca Ferrando’s redefinition of the posthuman as an ontological rupture with Western humanist exceptionalism, I examine how speculative fiction decenter the human in favor of complex interrelations among organic and synthetic lifeforms. These texts resist the trope of AI as threat or savior, instead portraying artificial intelligence, biotechnological hybrids, and other-than-human consciousnesses as participants in distributed networks of responsibility and care. By embracing ambiguity, they reject both dystopian fatalism and utopian technophilia, proposing a new ethical paradigm grounded in mutual vulnerability and interdependence. This shift is not thematic, but structural: these narratives enact the decentering they depict, dissolving stable points of view and disrupting linear teleologies. In doing so, they question the legitimacy of human sovereignty—not just over nature and technology, but over the future itself. The utopian impulse becomes a radical speculative gesture: the imagining of futures in which coexistence replaces conquest, and ethics is no longer confined to the human domain. Positioned at the intersection of posthuman theory, ecocriticism, and technological ethics, this paper argues that the most transformative visions of tomorrow do not lie in fantasies of total automation or bioengineered salvation, but in the quiet, subversive imaginaries that render control obsolete. In their refusal to separate the technological from the ecological, or the speculative from the ethical, these narratives offer us not escape, but the radical possibility of reinhabiting the world otherwise.

Bio

Javier Álvarez Caballero is a doctoral researcher at the University of Zaragoza, where he explores the intersections between posthumanism, and eco-anarchism. His work focuses on the utopian potential of non-anthropocentric imaginaries and the implications of biotechnological futures. He is a member of HISTOPÍA and The Posthuman Wound, dedicated to the exploration of utopias, decolonial thought, and posthumanist philosophy. His recent publications include “From Modernity to Dystopia:

Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* in Atwood's *Oryx & Crake* as an Outgrowth of Bauman's *Liquid Modernity*" and "From *Walden* to the Atlantic: Thoreau's Influence on the Configuration of Eco-Anarchism as a Contemporary Utopia."

CLARA BAFALUY AVENOZA

The Regulatory Practices of Melissa Scott's *Shadow Man*: A Bisexual Approach

This paper examines the proliferation of discourses of sex and its relation to technologies of the self through a critical reading of Melissa Scott's *Shadow Man* (1995) and its speculative exploration of a future where humanity is biologically split into five sexes. It analyses the novel's construction of two distinct, interrelated societies: planet Hara, which keeps a binary, two-gender system in spite of the undeniable biological reality, and the Concord worlds, which have produced five distinct, regulated genders to correspond to biological sex, along with numerous sexualities that regulate desire among them. By examining the two societies' different strategies for dealing with sexual difference and sexual desire through a proliferation of institutional and social discourses, this paper examines the different discursive, legal and social systems through which they constitute appropriate selfhood. Through Butler's theory on the conditions of legibility that constitute viable selves and bodies (1993) and Foucault's lecture on technologies of the self (1982), this paper examines the novel's literary representation and subversion of the relationship between selfhood, power, and legibility. It argues that Scott's novel deploys a parody of excess, through the multiplication of sexual identities and orientations, to critique contemporary discourses of sexuality and selfhood. It then turns to Mariam Fraser's study on the preclusion of bisexuality in discourses of selfhood (1999) to examine the discursive production of bisexuality in the language of science-fiction at large and to question the limitations of Scott's critique.

Bio

Clara Bafaluy Avenoz is a predoctoral researcher at ADHUC Theory, Gender and Sexuality Research Center. Graduated in English Studies at the University of Barcelona (2020), she completed the Master in Construction and Representation of Cultural Identities (2022). Her research focuses on the construction of bisexuality in queer North American literature and on "bisexual reading" as a tool for literary analysis. Her doctoral thesis, directed by Dr. Cristina Alsina Rísquez, revolves around New Wave science fiction and the work of Ursula K. Le Guin, and explores the relationship between the utopian imaginary, the construction of (bi)sexuality and the encounter with alterity.

ELIO BALDI

Artificial Narratives: AI in Benjamin Labatut's *The Maniac* and Richard Powers' *Playground*

Since the commercial introduction of Large Language Models, the hype around artificial intelligence has been remarkable. Promises of significant benefits of AI in health care, management and bureaucracy, (higher) education and many other realms live alongside more dark renderings of AI's present role in warfare, surveillance and the solidification and exacerbation of existing inequalities. In such a historic moment, it is increasingly important to consider not only how we write with AI or in times of AI but also how we write *about* AI: is the narrative of big tech uncritically spread and performatively confirmed, or is there space for more nuanced, complex and problematizing engagements with both abstract notions and concrete presences of AI in our present and future? This paper analyses two examples of recent fiction that present different engagements with AI: Chilean writer Benjamin Labatut's *The Maniac* (2023) and American writer Richard Powers' *Playground* (2024). Both books discuss AI in an oblique manner, foregrounding connected themes such as science, intelligence, labour, landscape, games, war and societal ideas on the future. The two novels are clearly meant to engage in contemporary debates around science and technology and their social, societal and ecological implications. Comparing the two books helps to reappraise their critique of

the worldviews behind artificial intelligence and to establish what is perhaps missing in those critiques. In order to discuss how the two texts converge and differ, the paper is divided into various parts. Intelligence is an important recurring theme in the paper, by pairing it to various competing notions on AI that are more materialist; the first part of the paper addresses the different notions of intelligence that are presented and interrogated in the two volumes, notions that are integral to conceptions of artificial intelligence as well. These range from the clear and recurring connection to games, to the more disturbing and even more controlling type of intelligence that is foregrounded especially in Labatut's narrative: military intelligence. In the next part of the talk, the rather abstract, inwardly directed and human-centered notions of intelligence are paired to landscape and environment, now rapidly reshaped by machines which were built with resources from those same environments. A similar dichotomy supports the third section, which pairs intelligence to labour, again aiming to look beyond the façade of artificial intelligence to recognize what really constitutes it. The last section moves the discussion on intelligence to how it is conceived and reproduced as 'artificial', and how it is invested with specific ideas about the future that are not predictive but rather (aim to be) productive of said future.

Bio

Elio Baldi is Assistant Professor in Transdisciplinary Literary Studies (Italian). He has published books (among which an edited volume) and several translations, mostly about Italo Calvino and the reception of his works in Italy and abroad. Other research interests include science and literature, female and feminist science fiction, translation and reception, and imaginaries of the future. His articles on writers such as Dante, Shakespeare, Pessoa, Boochani and Vallorani have appeared in five languages.

RICCARDO BOFFETTI

Defiant Monads. Severance and the Architecture of Corporate Isolation

Over the past decade, television series such as *Mr. Robot* (2015–2019) and *Devs* (2020) have offered critical explorations of the pervasive presence of large corporations in our daily lives, shedding new light on the interplay between technology, labour and control. Although situated in the same speculative genre, *Severance* (2022–) takes a unique approach to this subject by focusing on how two complementary technologies — architecture and the “severance” procedure — can create a radical form of alienation and control. This paper analyses *Severance* as a complex television text (Mittell, 2015) thanks to a transdisciplinary approach combining architectural studies, cognitive labour theory and critical studies of contemporary speculative narratives. The “severance” procedure, which aims to create a permanent division between employees' professional (“innies”) and personal (“outies”) identities vividly represents the dreams and nightmares of our cognitive labour era (Terranova, 2022). This cognitive fragmentation, made possible by this speculative technology, prevents workers from accessing their complete sense of self, thereby rendering them isolated and alienated from both their labour and their personal identity. However, this phenomenon is reinforced through certain realised technologies (as famously theorised by Winner, 1980), such as the peculiar architectural designs of corporate buildings. The study then builds upon the frameworks of “pastoral capitalism” (Mozingo, 2011) and the conceptualisation of open-plan offices as environments of surveillance and isolation (Kaufmann-Buhler, 2021), providing a succinct historical overview of the development of mid-century suburban corporate spaces and their lasting cultural and spatial impact. In *Severance*, these influences manifest through the juxtaposition of a retro-futuristic aesthetics in departmental interiors with the stark, sterile, maze-like corridors that have lost their purpose of connecting and instead have become another tool for fragmentation. Space thus becomes an active protagonist, not merely framing the story but participating in its unfolding by dictating movement, interaction, and psychological tension.

Bio

Riccardo Boffetti is a PhD student in *Letterature, arti, media: la transcodificazione* at the Università degli Studi dell'Aquila. He is a teaching assistant at the Università degli Studi di Bergamo. His research focuses on contemporary speculative fiction and its representations of future urban spaces as a means to interrogate present-day urban transformations. Adopting a transmedial and transcultural perspective, his research explores the dynamic interplay between real and imagined environments to critically assess how visions of planetary futures are shaped and mediated.

JAMES CARTLIDGE

Sons of the Panopticon: Discipline, Surveillance and Panopticism in the Metal Gear Solid Series

Foucault famously theorized Bentham's panopticon prison as a symbol of modern disciplinary power, arguing that we live in a panoptic society where visibility induces self-regulation. In this presentation, I read the *Metal Gear Solid* games through the lens of Foucault's reflections on panopticism and disciplinary power, showing how MGS reconfigures this model for a digital age, exposing how panoptic power is realized in militarized surveillance states, showing how panopticism evolves from institutional discipline to technological governance and speculates about its future, all the while staging embodied resistance as its revolutionary counterpoint. In MGS3, disciplinary power manifests in pre-digital social/institutional surveillance: the Cobra Unit's loyalty to The Boss and Snake's loyalty to his country. The Sorrow's river of the dead forces Snake to visibly confront his status as a tool of the state. The Shadow Moses facility of MGS1 functions as a literal panopticon where surveillance cameras, motion sensors, and patrols enforce a regime of visibility, and Solid Snake's stealth gameplay subverts and resists the panopticon's permanent observation. The game's iconic Psycho Mantis boss fight weaponizes player data to enact a confessional surveillance, extending the panoptic disciplinary logic inward, beyond the external visibility of the body into the human psyche. This extension of disciplinary power is developed further by MGS2's GW system: an AI network which an organization called 'the Patriots' uses to manipulate the political and economic systems of the USA in secret by censoring, controlling and weaponizing information to serve their interests. In MGS4, the SOP system fully internalizes the panopticon into the body by hooking up the soldiers of the world to the GW system through nanomachines. Yet Otacon's hacks and Snake's aging body become prominent as sites of resistance, echoing Foucault's insistence that power contains the possibility of its own subversion.

Bio

James Cartlidge is a post-doctoral researcher with a background in philosophy, specializing in phenomenology, existentialism, post-structuralism, and the philosophy of video games and virtual worlds. He has held fellowships at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Bratislava), the Institute for Human Sciences (IWM, Vienna), the Vita-Salute San-Rafaele University (Milan), and teaching positions at the Central European University (Vienna) and the Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE, Budapest). His publications have featured in *Games and Culture*, *Synthese*, *Philosophy and Technology*, *Game Studies* and elsewhere. He recently edited a volume about 'roguelite' video games which is forthcoming in March 2025 with CRC Press/Taylor and Francis.

FRANCESCO CATTANI

The System Knows Better than You: Escaping Surveillance in H(a)ppy by Nicola Barker and The Dream Hotel by Laila Lalami

This paper examines two works of contemporary speculative fiction, *H(a)ppy* by Nicola Barker (2017) and *The Dream Hotel* by Laila Lalami (2025), through the critical framework of Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019). Both texts immerse their readers in the reality of data mining, in which, as described by Zuboff herself, individuals are neither consumers nor

commodities, but rather raw material for extraction and behavioural manipulation: a world of exploitation, which disguises itself as a game (making us unaware) or a security measure (making us accomplices). But the two novels operate in opposite ways. Lalami imagines an extremely concrete dystopia where the U.S. government has established a Risk Assessment Administration, “committed to identifying public-safety risks and investigating suspicious individuals in order to prevent future crimes” by resorting to advanced data-analytics tools. These apparently suspicious individuals are detained in “retention centres”, where state-sanctioned re-education masks the logic of control and exploitation. By contrast, Barker constructs the supposed utopia of a post-apocalyptic world rebuilt by an unidentified System that “saved us from the Floods and the Fires and the Plagues”. This system has achieved a perfect society where a perfected population, the Young, can live free from any doubt (or desire) and from any suffering, because everything has been programmed for their happiness; everything, starting with language, is here in harmony and controlled (but there is no censorship). Despite these divergent narrative structures, both novels present us with heroines who, operating as glitch, expose the internal contradictions of their respective worlds and gesture toward the possibility of disruption. Mary Davidson’s last album *City of Clowns* (2025) will serve as an ambient soundtrack to the paper’s exploration of complicity and rupture under regimes of technological surveillance.

Bio

Francesco Cattani is a Researcher at the University of Bologna, where he teaches English postcolonial literature and feminist theories. He is member of UNA Europa Diversity Council and of the PRIN “Getting ready for the present: new global dystopian imaginaries and public engagement”. He also collaborates with the Master GEMMA, Women’s and Gender Studies and the EU project EUTERPE: European Literatures and Gender from a Transnational Perspective. His research blends postcolonial and decolonial studies, gender studies, science fiction, dystopia, and the posthuman to tackle repetitive patterns in the construction of the non-human. Another area of interest is black British literature and visual culture.

MATTEO CITRINI

The Technological Control over Human Memory: Three Informatic Metaphors for the Identity Crisis in Audiovisual Science Fiction

Among the various solutions through which sci-fi technology declines fears for a social exercise of absolute control over the human body and identity, that of access to memories turns out to be among the most disturbing because of the radical consequences that subsume third-party intrusion into such an intimate and seemingly protected place of the mind (Plate, Smelik 2009). This contribution aims to explore the ways in which science fiction in audiovisual media has fielded this neurosis for “mediated memories” (Van Dijck 2007) by dividing it into three categories that refer to three different, albeit overlapping, conceptions of human memory, not only in terms of external accessibility but also through specific metaphors that translate human thought into computing:

- memory as a support for volatile information, in which recollections are liable to be erased or made inaccessible, as seen in movies like *Total Recall* and the *Men in Black* trilogy or in TV series like *Dollhouse* and *Severance*;
- memory as open source software, in which recollections are manipulable, as shown in the *Blade Runner* saga, in the multimedia universe of *Ghost in the Shell*, and in the anime *Plastic Memories*;
- memory as cloud storage, in which recollections may freely circulate, as depicted in *Strange Days*, in the TV series *Altered Carbon*, or in the video game *Remember Me*.

These three metaphors, which touch on a truly wide range of the sci-fi audiovisual production, thus serve not only as a spy to capture modern obsession for forms of technological control capable of penetrating the intimate and innermost spheres of individuals, but subterraneously reinforce a representation and perception of the workings of the human mind as a machinic and computerized

process, aligning with a recurring comparison trend in the contemporary (Caronia 2020) that tends to eclipse their profound operational differences (Ernst 2016).

Bio

Matteo Citrini is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Udine, within the PRIN 2022 MOV.I.E. – Moving Image Exhibition. He's also lecturer of Cinema and Visual Culture and Semiotics of Audiovisual Media at the universities of Udine and Florence. He has published several essays and contributions for national and international scientific journals and the book *Lo sguardo panoramico. Tecnologia, media e cultura visuale (1870-1918)*. His research areas include visual culture between the 19th and 20th centuries, media archaeology, and the history of cinematographic industry and technologies.

VALENTINA COROSANITI and MONIKA RIEDMANN

Who Rules the Game? Ludic Aesthetics and Spectacularisation of Control in Contemporary Science Fiction

As Guy Debord argues in *La Société du Spectacle* (1967), we now live in a world in which society is no longer part of reality, but rather the reverse: reality has become part of the spectacle, play and storytelling universe. It is thus not uncommon for those in power, especially at a state level, to exploit such means to maintain control, particularly over minorities or disadvantaged social groups. In this context, technology and practices in the realm of play become powerful enablers. One such practice is 'gamification', defined by Deterding as «the use of game design elements in non-game contexts» (2011). Alongside spectacular representation, it generates situations that have shifted from the realm of the dystopian imagination to actuality - concepts as 'ludocapitalism' (Dibbell, 2007) and 'surveillance capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019) testify to this interconnection. These tensions find a powerful resonance in the speculative imaginaries of science fiction, particularly through its dystopian lens. By analysing the films *Gamer* (2009), *Ready Player One* (2018) and the series *Squid Game* (2021-2025), Elia Barceló's short story and its graphic version *Noche de sábado* (2008) as well as Anna Maria Villalonga's novel *Encara maten els cavalls* (2023), this interdisciplinary contribution aims to explore how the game device proliferates across dystopian media, as well as how its representation and its control integrate into a globally applied power strategy, becoming more extensive as technological innovation develops. Despite their diverse aesthetic approaches, a convergence of these works is ultimately evident in the exposure of the legitimisation of systemic violence when spectacularised. The dehumanisation exhibited in the ludic space challenges our understanding of what constitutes a 'grievable life' (Butler, 2004) and raises questions about who can be controlled and exploited for public entertainment.

Bio

Valentina Corosaniti graduated in Communication at IULM and in Cinema and Media at the University of Turin, where she is currently pursuing a doctorate in Literature. She holds positions on the editorial staff of «Sinestesia», «Sinestesiaonline» and «Ottocento, Novecento e oltre» and is a member of the Centro Studi "Gozzano-Pavese" and "Edoardo Sanguineti". Her interdisciplinary focus on the relationship between literature and other fields of study, such as the figurative arts, music, cinema and ludicity, to which several of her publications in «Comparatistica», «Testo e Senso» and «Sinestesia» are dedicated.

Monika Riedmann is currently pursuing her doctorate at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, within the Department of Romance Studies. As a member of the Doctoral College "DC Borders, Border Shifts, and Border Crossings in Language, Literature, and Media," she is writing her thesis on Catalan, Italian, and Spanish contemporary dystopian Science Fiction through the lens of Posthuman

Feminism. Her research primarily focuses on Gender Studies, Posthumanism, and Narrative Studies within the genres of Science Fiction and the Fantastic.

FLAVIA CRISCIONE

Flaming Dystopias. The Lesbian Subject as a Technology of Otherness

The following conference paper explores the image of the queer subject as alien through the case of austrian experimental film *Flaming Ears* (A. Hans Scheirl, Dietmar Schipek, Ursula Pürner, 1994). We will argue for the relevance of its dystopian visual tactics within the field of feminist fabulation (Barr, Haraway). Our analysis will frame the lesbian subject as a technological rupture inside systems of gender and control implicit in the film, by putting into dialogue the separatist utopias of 1970s–1980s feminist sci-fi (Russ, Tiptree, Piercy, Le Guin) with critical questions posed by queer theory on temporality, utopia, and futurity (Muñoz, Halberstam, Edelman). Set in the fictional city of Asche in the 2700s, *Flaming Ears* is a post-apocalyptic nocturnal cityscape seen through Super-8 clips and stop-motion animation. Its DIY production foregrounds questions of access, agency, and technological mediation, functioning not only as aesthetic mode but as critique of representational power. These images ask: Who gets to imagine the future? With which tools? Through its depiction of destruction, dissident sexual practices and post-human subjectivities the film - to paraphrase Ursula K. Le Guin - constructs an ambiguous dystopia: not simply a collapse of order, but a deliberate refusal of normative futurity, in which power becomes decentralized. Its re-inscription of gender-defiant embodiments and non-reproductive sexualities revises themes that have been fundamental to lesbian theory: trauma as foundational to lesbian subcultures (Cvetkovich) and the utopic marginality of lesbian subjectivity (Jagose). Outside of the infrastructures of social and cinematic control, we speculate on how these tactics become not just a technology of gender (De Lauretis) but a technology of otherness. Here, the alien rejects representational tropes common to mainstream sci-fi where alterity is coded as a threat, thus becoming both the product and the producer of dystopia - not alienated from the future, but that which makes the future alien.

Bio

Flavia Criscione (Ragusa, 1999) è dottoranda in Cultura visuale tra l'Università degli Studi di Milano e Roma Tre, con una ricerca su fantascienza e sottoculture lesbiche negli anni '90. È cofondatrice del workshop AVEC (Arts, Visuality and Electronic Culture, Bologna) e ha pubblicato piccoli contributi per NERO (Roma) e Les Presses du réel (Parigi).

PAOLA DALLA TORRE

Ethics, Surveillance and Totalitarianism in Andrew Niccol's Science-Fiction Dystopias

Andrew Niccol's science-fiction films function as a narrative and visual laboratory of applied ethics. From *Gattaca* (1997) to *Anon* (2018), his works construct near-future dystopias in which power is exerted not through overt repression but through digital surveillance, genetic coding and the automated management of life. Thanks to a stripped-down, essential visual style, these films avoid spectacularising their subjects and instead serve as interpretive devices for key concepts of our time: surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019), algorithmic totalitarianism and even "hypnocracy" (Han Xuan, 2024). The post-human utopia celebrated by much U.S. cultural production is recast here as a dystopia that invites us to imagine—before we engineer—the world's technology is making possible. Like many dystopian screen narratives, Niccol's cinema is an "ethical" cinema that sketches the new anthropology required for the post-human world ahead. The paper will underline this ethical-narrative laboratory aspect of Niccol's fictional universes, demonstrating how cinema, too, can be a tool for advancing an "ethics of artificial intelligence" (Floridi, 2022).

Bio

Paola Dalla Torre is Associate Professor of Cinema and Television at LUMSA University, Rome. Her research has long focused on science-fiction cinema and its ethical and bioethical implications. Her latest essay on the subject is *La condizione umana tra naturale e artificiale nelle rappresentazioni cinematografiche*, in AA. VV. , *L'uomo animale tecnologico. Itinerari riflessivi sulla condizione tecno-umana*, Salvatore Sciascia editore, Caltanissetta-Roma 2024.

CECILIA DE MARTINO

Bodies of Power: Gender, Control, and Biotechnology in Female-Centric Speculative Narratives

Speculative fiction has long used the female body as a battleground for technological, political, and symbolic power. In dystopian and posthuman imaginaries, biotechnology often becomes a tool for reprogramming not only biology but also identity, agency, and resistance. This paper explores how selected speculative texts—*The Power* by Naomi Alderman, *Tender Is the Flesh* by Agustina Bazterrica, and *The Book of Joan* by Lidia Yuknavitch—construct narratives of embodied control and emancipation. Each of these texts stages the female body as both a site of imposed transformation and a locus of insurgent power, questioning techno-patriarchal paradigms and reimagining the boundaries between nature, technology, and gender. This paper examines how mechanisms of systemic control—encompassing not only the physical body but also desire, reproduction, memory, and relationality—are revealed through speculative portrayals of altered, cloned, or technologically modified bodies, drawing on feminist theory, critical posthumanism, and biopolitical perspectives. Particular attention is paid to how biotechnology intersects with structures of oppression—be it institutional, corporate, or environmental—and how it can be reappropriated as a means of subversion or radical rewriting of the self. Rather than reproducing binary narratives of victimisation or simplistic empowerment, these works offer layered, often ambivalent visions of how control over the body can be both a form of domination and a space for transformation. Through speculative storytelling, they articulate new models of embodiment that challenge the essentialist readings of gender and interrogate the humanist legacy of bodily integrity and individuality. In doing so, these narratives expand the critical potential of feminist speculative fiction, positioning it as a privileged lens through which to reflect on the shifting relationships between power, technology, and corporeal identity in a rapidly evolving techno-cultural landscape.

Bio

Cecilia De Martino is a Digital Humanist and content editor with a background in literature, media studies, and digital storytelling. She collaborates with the University of Milan and with the science communication blog *IMMERSINSCENA*, focusing on virtual reality, speculative fiction, and cultural innovation. Her research explores the intersections of narrative, power, and emerging technologies through a transmedia and interdisciplinary lens. Her first academic publication is forthcoming in the volume *Oltre l'altrove. Cartografie simboliche, viaggi testuali e sconfinamenti*, edited by Anna Pasolini and Elena Ogliari. She has presented her work at international conferences on speculative fiction, digital culture, and immersive media.

MIASOL EGUÍBAR-HOLGADO

The Coloniality of Digital Technology in Edmundo Paz Soldán's *La mirada de las plantas*

La mirada de las plantas (2022), the latest novel by Bolivian writer Edmundo Paz Soldán, paints a harrowing landscape of some of the most devastating effects of “progress” in the digital technologies. The novel revolves around a laboratory situated in the Bolivia-Brazil border, in the middle of the Amazonian forest. Here, volunteers are tested on, administered doses of a local hallucinogenic plant,

the “*alita del cielo*” (heaven’s little wing); the effects are then recorded and fed onto a virtual reality simulator. The aim of these studies is to create a videogame that allows players to experience the psychotropic effects of a lysergic trip without actually having to take any substances, a project developed by a Brazilian company called Tupi VR. Probing at the limits of virtual reality and digital technologies, the novel points to the blurring of boundaries that are currently taking place with real techno-scientific advancements—the boundaries between the real and the digital, between nature and technology, between the public and the private. The story does hint at certain possibilities of this breaking of boundaries and also of engaging with an epistemology otherwise, of opening up to an “other” reality through the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges. However, these brief glimpses at utopian hope are still firmly embedded in oppressive capitalist practices. Moreover, located at the heart of Latin America, the text foregrounds the colonialist, racist, ecocidal, and patriarchal violences involved in the expansion of technological power. Thus, it transcends a limiting universalist reading of data colonialism, whereby all users are equally adversely affected by data extraction. In this paper, I explore the epistemic dimensions that this story brings together and how the complex and eerie technoscientific worlds that emerge are traversed by different forms of oppression that can be traced back to the colonial matrix of power.

Bio

Eguíbar-Holgado, Miasol is an Associate Professor in the English Department at the University of Oviedo in Spain. Her research interests include postcolonial/decolonial theory, diasporic writing, and decolonial speculative fiction, especially Afrofuturism and Indigenous futurism. She has published extensively in such prominent journals as *Canadian Literature*, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, or *Extrapolation*. She is part of the Research Group “Intersections: Contemporary Literatures, Cultures, and Theories” at the University of Oviedo.

NEIL GERLACH

Robot Visions: Corporate Vision Statements as Science Fiction

The robot has taken on new life in the 2020s due to advances in artificial intelligence and mechanical engineering. Robotics corporations around the world are racing to be the first to market general purpose, AI-driven, humanoid robots, or ‘humanoids,’ by the end of this decade. Marketing of these prospective robots is heavily influenced by science fiction in three ways: 1) signification – employing models and prototypes to signify future technologies; 2) financialization – appealing to venture capital and betting on future promises; and 3) narrativization – producing vision statements that promise a better future through technology. This paper focuses on narrativization, analyzing corporate vision statements as not only influenced by science fiction, but as social science fictions (Gerlach and Hamilton 2003). Science fiction long ago exceeded its generic boundaries and its terminology and logic have become part of public discourse (Landon 1997). Consequently, there are many convergences between business writing and science fiction. They can be read as linked discourses with a commitment to science, technology, and the project of positing a credible relationship between present and future. Both forms of writing contribute to a socio-technical imaginary (Jasanoff 2015) that drives innovation in robotic technology. Upon reading the vision statements of the top twenty robotics companies in the world, one finds that there is a shared story structure that emerges about our robotic future. I argue that this narrative addresses the two gaps that Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. (1991, 2008) suggests define science fiction: the gap between the conceivability of future changes and the possibility of their occurrence, and the gap between the possibility of future technological innovations and their broader ethical and socio-cultural implications. Through this SF narrative about the robotic future, corporations work to position themselves at the centre of desirable technological and social change.

Bio

Neil Gerlach is an Associate Professor of Sociology at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. His research interests are in the field of the sociology of the future, and he has published in the areas of future managerialism, genetic technologies and social control, prophecy and religion in popular culture, and zombies and pandemics in public culture. He is presently part of an engineering research team developing self-replicating robot factories. His current research involves examining the potential social and cultural reception and impacts of new robotic technologies.

SILVIA GIANNI

Surveillance and Control in Contemporary Graphic Novel Adaptations of *1984*

Within the dystopian genre, totalitarian or despotic dystopia represents a central strand, characterized by the control of the individual through political, ideological, and technological mechanisms. George Orwell stands among the most prominent figures of this current, and his *1984* (1949) remains a cornerstone of surveillance dystopia. The novel portrays a world in which the human being is subjected to constant surveillance, primarily through technological means, as symbolically exemplified by the telescreens. Originally conceived as a critique of twentieth-century totalitarian regimes – particularly Nazism and Stalinism – the novel's impact has far exceeded its historical context. Over the latter half of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, technological revolutions have profoundly reshaped the mechanisms of social and individual control, making them increasingly sophisticated, pervasive and even visceral. Consequently, dystopian narratives have continued to evolve, incorporating these new forms of supervision into their fictional worlds. Nevertheless, the slogan “Big Brother is watching you” preserves its iconic and symbolic power, affirming the ongoing relevance of Orwell's vision. In 2021, just over seventy years after Orwell's death (1903–1950), the expiration of copyright protections paved the way for a range of adaptations, including three graphic novel versions: *1984* (2020) by Fido Nesti, *1984* (2021) by Matyas Namai and *1984* (2021) by Jean-Christophe Derrieu and Remi Terregrossa. This paper aims to explore the significance and implications of adapting *1984* in today's cultural and technological context. Specifically, it focuses on graphic novel adaptations and examines how the visual and sequential language of the medium reinterprets the novel's central themes. Through an analysis centered on spatial representation and focalization strategies, the paper investigates how the graphic novel format visually translates the concept of supervision and control, thereby renewing the symbolic force of *1984* in the contemporary world.

Bio

Silvia Gianni studied Modern Literature at the University of Milan. She is currently a PhD student in Visual and Media Studies at IULM University (Milan), with a project on the evolution of the dystopian genre in the intermedial adaptation from novel to graphic novel. Her research areas include Genre Theory, Intermedial Theory, Comics Studies, Comics Journalism, Science Fiction and Dystopia. She is the author of the forthcoming volume *Storie di voci collettive. Morfologia del graphic novel di reportage* (Ledizioni, 2025).

EMILIO GIANOTTI

One Man's God is Another Man's Moloch: Utopia, Dystopia, Reader-Response Theory and Divine AI.

As Kenneth M. Roemer observed regarding readers' responses to Utopian texts, “it is [...] practically impossible to predict exactly how an individual reader will respond to a particular text” (2003, xii). However, his work and bibliography reveal that it is possible to identify textual structures that enable critics to explore the distinctions between Eutopia and Dystopia (Moylan, 2000) based on their relationship with readers. In post-cybernetic narratives featuring divine AIs, for instance, the religious

language used, along with specific narrative techniques such as truncated endings, creates critical dilemmas that reflect conflicting techno-eutopian and techno-dystopian trends that are still present in contemporary culture. My paper aims to analyze how these narratives—Richard Brautigan’s *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (1967), Michael Fayette’s *The Monster in the Clearing* (1971), Isaac Asimov’s *The Evitable Problem* (1950) and *Sis* (1975), and Frederick Brown’s *Answer* (1958)—operate within a realm of possibility that, in an Iserian sense (and reminiscent of Huxley’s satires), invites the reader to determine whether the perfectly machine-controlled society depicted is a Dystopia or a Eutopia. This process activates ideological biases and preconceived notions regarding divine watchfulness *specifically*, compelling the reader to confront these ideas and potentially reconsider their views. In this analysis, Ursula K. Le Guin’s reflections on Dostoevsky’s *Grand Inquisitor* prove insightful.

Bio

Emilio Gianotti holds a Ph.D. in Anglo-American Literature from the University of Urbino – Carlo Bo. His research interests encompass fiction theory, translation, the relationship between science and literature, and American popular literature. He has published works on Douglas Adams, Thomas Pynchon, Thomas Ligotti, narrative multiverses and representations of divinized AI in media. His doctoral thesis investigates case studies within the science-literature relationship in detective fiction through a fiction theory lens. As a translator, he published *Da New Amsterdam a New York: il passato della Grande Mela nei documenti delle sue origini* (2023) and contributed to the first Italian translation of the US Vietnam veterans’ poetry collection, *Winning Hearts and Minds* (2025).

SHERYL N. HAMILTON

Regulating Technology Through Forms of Science Fiction: Future Scenarios in the World Health Organization’s Human Genome Editing Governance Framework

From producing autistic dogs and avian flu resistant chickens, to exterminating disease-carrying mosquito species, ‘resurrecting’ woolly mammoths, and creating bespoke genetic therapies for sick human babies, news reports of recent developments in gene-editing technologies (CRISPR) read like science fiction. This is consistent with a long history of representing genetic technology with science fictional tropes, images and language (Gill 2020; Schmeink 2017; Vint 2021). Predictably, the dystopic figures of “designer babies” and “mad scientists” saturated global public responses to Dr. He Jiankui’s 2018 use of heritable gene-editing in human twins. SF frames contributed to the ensuing wave of regulatory anxiety felt in many nations around the world. The World Health Organization (WHO) responded, appointing an expert committee to study the issues. It released a discussion paper and governance framework for human genome editing in 2021 and these guidelines continue to serve as touchstones for national governments as they decide which CRISPR applications to fund, legalize, and ban. Interestingly, the WHO policy documents embrace science fiction. They do so in three registers: first, the recognition of science fiction texts and the genre itself as a source of public knowledge; second, the repeated use of futurist/speculative discourse; and third, the presentation of seven fictional future scenarios. Focusing on the latter, I argue these scenarios operate as a technique of *anticipatory governance* (Barben et al. 2008; Guston 2014), particularly apt to emergent technologies framed as simultaneously revolutionary and risky. Representationally, the scenarios promote an ideal technoscience invested in improving human individual and species life while reinforcing commodity capitalism and its legal infrastructure. Yet the WHO’s science fictions are not only rhetorical; they are also the very regulatory form advocated for this technology. Drawing on Peter Galison (2014), I argue the WHO is engaged in writing *state science fiction* (cf. Boenink 2014) and in this paper, I explore the ramifications of that.

Bio

Dr. Sheryl N. Hamilton is Professor at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada, in the Communication and Media Studies Program and the Department of Law and Legal Studies. She has long studied the intersection of technologies and science fiction (e.g. her book *Becoming Biosubjects: Bodies. Systems. Technologies.* (with N. Gerlach et al. (2011); a chapter on human clones in her 2013 monograph on personhood; and articles on Dolly the Sheep, media and SF in *Science-Fiction Studies* (2003) and the mad scientist figure (with N. Gerlach) in *Communication Theory* (2005), among other work. She is currently writing a monograph entitled, *Disease Media*, including a chapter theorizing “disease-positive” science fiction.

SCOTT JORDAN

Wild Stories: Power, Technology, and Being in Speculative Fiction

As Western philosophy continues to be dominated by objective-subjective divides that attempt to fit phenomena traditionally referred to as “subjective” into the realm of the quantifiable (i.e., scientific) “objective”, the arts (Hahn & Jordan, 2014), humanities (Sundberg, 2013), and speculative fiction (Jordan, 2018) have continually provided a holistic counterforce to such reductionistic efforts by emphasizing our innate connectedness to reality and each other. The purpose of the present talk is to discuss a recently created ontology (Wild Systems Theory—WST, Jordan, 2024, 2013) that agrees with the holism of the arts, humanities, and speculative fiction, and is simultaneously consistent with science. WST achieves such holism by conceptualizing all living systems as self-sustaining, energy-transformation systems that necessarily intake, transform, and dissipate energy to sustain themselves. In addition, the reality in which such systems exist is referred to as a self-organizing, energy-transformation hierarchy (Odum, 1988) in which less-complex forms of energy (e.g., electromagnetic radiation from the sun) are captured by more-complex forms of energy (e.g., plants) as a fuel source. Because such systems must necessarily be thermodynamically open (i.e., be capable of intaking energy as well as dissipating byproducts) their internal dynamics are naturally and necessarily ‘about’ the external context in which they sustain themselves. In short, such systems can be coherently conceptualized as *embodiments of context*, or *embodied aboutness*. By modeling organisms as self-sustaining embodiments of context, or embodied aboutness, WST bypasses traditional objective-subjective divides as it implicitly asserts that organisms ARE meaning. The present talk will utilize the holism of WST to examine the relationships between power and technology expressed in speculative fiction narratives such as W.G. Sebald’s “The Rings of Saturn”, Amazon Prime series, “The Expanse”, Hayao Miyazaki’s, “Princess Mononoke”, and HBO’s “Deadwood”.

Bio

J. Scott Jordan, Ph.D., is a cognitive psychologist who studies the neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy of cooperative behavior. He regularly publishes papers about connections between pop-culture narratives, psychology, and the realities of lived life. He has published a peer-reviewed, song about the ‘self’ (*It’s hard work being No One*), (song), which received a positive review in Discover Magazine. He is the organizer of ReggieCon, a virtual comic-con panel series that celebrates diversity and heritage months during the academic year. He also produces the Dark Loops Productions channel on YouTube. Finally, he is extremely proud of his international comic-book collection.

TAMARA KAMATOVIĆ and AUGUSTO PETTER

Archaeologies of the Future: Speculative Fiction and the Ethics of Temporality

This paper critically examines the political instrumentalization of speculative and science fiction by tech elites and accelerationist thinkers. Figures such as Peter Thiel and Curtis Yarvin (aka Mencius Moldbug), often draw from speculative narratives to legitimize radical visions of post-capitalist

superintelligence, life extension, and techno-authoritarianism. Their engagements with science fiction—from Musk’s SpaceX inspirations to Thiel’s Tolkenian references and Lovecraftian mythologies—reveal a troubling slide from speculative ontologies into ethically charged worldviews, often cloaked in the language of innovation and futurism. By tracing how speculative fiction is mobilized within the ideological frameworks of the “Dark Enlightenment” and ultra-accelerationist thought, the paper asks: what does it mean for fiction to remain truly speculative, rather than serve as ideological infrastructure for elite techno-political projects? Drawing on Ludwig von Mises’s notion of inherited will and Nikolai Fyodorov’s cosmism, we explore the ontological claims implicit in visions of cryonics, life extension, and post-human futures. These narratives often propose an ethical imperative to overcome mortality—turning speculative possibility into a moral obligation. The paper argues that speculative fiction has increasingly become a site where ontological arguments—about what the present is—slide into ethical prescriptions about what should be done in the future. Inversely, ethical anxieties about catastrophe and survival (environmental collapse, civilizational decline) feed back into ontological assumptions about time, life, and the human. This cyclical logic is explored through analyses of speculative texts, including *The Substance* and other techno-utopian or dystopian imaginaries. Ultimately, this paper seeks to reclaim speculative fiction as a space for ambiguity and radical potentiality, resisting its capture by hegemonic master narratives (Jameson). Through an archaeology of speculative temporalities, we reassert fiction’s capacity to disrupt rather than serve the future imagined by today’s techno-capitalist visionaries.

Bio

Tamara Kamatović is a Lecturer at CEU’s Yehuda Elkana Center for Teaching, Learning, and Higher Education Research. She completed her doctorate in Germanic Studies at the University of Chicago in 2020. Tamara mentored PhD and postdoctoral students appointed as Global Teaching Fellows, co-managed the OSUN “Developing Teaching Professionals” project, authored and presented work on the impact of AI technologies on writing and education. Her interests include critical and experimental pedagogies, the impact of emerging technologies on open society, and theories of democracy and their relation to democratic pedagogy.

Augusto Petter teaches at the Sciences Po Paris. He holds a PhD from the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. He has experience researching history of time, modern monarchies and philosophy of history. Augusto is a member of the Modern Monarchy in Global Perspective Research Hub (University of Sydney). He currently teaches courses on Necropolitics, Posthumanism, and Theory of History. His research interests centre on the exploration of apocalyptic narratives and the aesthetic and temporal aspects of sovereignty.

BENIAMIN KŁANIECKI AND E. DAWSON VARUGHESE

Neoliberal gestation: (re)production of techno-capitalism in semi-peripheral speculative fiction from Poland and India

In this paper, we offer a comparative reading of two semi-peripheral speculative short stories that explore literary manifestations of what we consider ‘neoliberal gestation’. The selected texts, both centre on themes of neoliberal capitalism, technology and pregnancy, and thus on female embodiment, are: “Pierwocina” (2015; trans. *First-Yield*), a Polish-language story by Poland’s leading science fiction author, Jacek Dukaj, and “The Persona Police”, an Indian English-language story from the interlinked short story collection *Analog/Virtual and other simulations of your future* (2020)* by Lavanya Lakshminarayan. We situate both stories within the post-1990 speculative fiction markets of Poland and India, shaped by both countries’ parallel shifts towards neoliberal free-market capitalism. We argue that these shifts are mediated in these stories through a nexus of technology, neoliberal capitalism and ‘gestation’, which figuratively marks the development of the new techno-capitalist reality through the symbolism of human reproduction. Dukaj represents the birth of

neoliberal Poland as a prolonged and monstrous pregnancy, while Lakshminarayan problematises the notion of technologised reproduction in the age of hyper-productivity. We read both texts as 2010s revisions of classic cyberfeminist thought of Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti, as articulated from their respective semi-peripheral perspectives. We argue that these positions enable a reassessment of the optimism of 1980s Western feminism, revealing instead the illiberal face of technologically enabled neoliberal capitalism in the global semi-periphery.

*Published in Europe as *The Ten Percent Thief* (2023) by Solaris

Bio

Beniamin Kłaniecki is a Humboldt Post-Doc Fellow at Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany and Assistant Professor at the Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. His research lies at the intersection of literature, queer studies and masculinity studies, with a primary focus on post-millennial Indian fiction in English.

E. Dawson Varughese is Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies at Manipal Institute of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts (MISHA), Manipal, South India. Her most recent monograph is *Post-millennial Indian Speculative Fiction in English: Desi dystopias and ideas of belonging* (Bloomsbury, 2025). She divides her time between India and the UK.

PAOLA LAMBERTI

Counter-Narratives of the Anthropocene: Youth, Technology and the Ecological Revolt

In the time of the climate crisis, speculative fiction emerges as a critical space in which the relationships between power, technology and ecological subjectivity are redefined. This contribution proposes a comparative analysis of two recent audiovisual works: *The Swarm* (ZDF/RAI, 2023) and *How to Blow Up a Pipeline* (Goldhaber, 2022), that address the environmental emergency through radically divergent representations of the relationship between technical knowledge and the non-human world. In the first case, the environment appears as an obscure entity, inaccessible to scientific rationality: the cognitive and operational infrastructures of modernity – from predictive models to contribution protocols – prove to be inadequate, defused by the irruption of another, unassimilable intelligence. Technology, here, is represented in its epistemic fragility, as a regime of truth in crisis. *Pipeline*, on the other hand, imagines a conflictual and performative use of technology: the coordinated sabotage of fossil infrastructures becomes an ecopolitical gesture and the founding act of a collective subjectivity, capable of rejecting extractive governance and affirming new forms of radical agency. In both of them, the youth component emerges as a vector of transformation and critique, activating alternative narratives of the relationship between technique and biosphere. The analysis adopts a hybrid theoretical perspective, weaving together device studies, ecological aesthetics and visual environmental humanities, reading the two works as aesthetic dispositive: fictional machines capable of producing imaginaries, affects and symbolic configurations of the changing environment. If *The Swarm* shows the collapse of technical-scientific hegemony, *Pipeline* instead explores the possibility of the re-appropriation of technique as an instrument of fracture and counter-power. In opposite ways, both works interrogate the possibilities – and limits – of ecological subjectivation in the late Anthropocene.

Bio

PhD student in Visual Culture at the University of Salerno. Proposing a mixed approach between visual culture, ecocriticism, media and youth studies and assemblage theories, her research explores the narrative, affective and performative practices of digital youth cultures in relation to the climate crisis, with a focus on the representation of eco-anxiety and environmental aesthetics on social media. She collaborates with Laboratory of Audiovisual Storytelling (University of Salerno) and participates in the PRIN PNRR 2022 Aesthetics and Therapiea (PI Daniele Guastini, La Sapienza)

and the NextGenerationEU RETURN project - Multi-risk science for resilient communities under a changing climate (PI Stefania Leone, Salerno).

MICHELLE LECCESE

Playable Dystopias: Interactive Storytelling as Lens on Technology and Control

The Fallout franchise offers a unique speculative lens on the entangled relationship between power and technology in post-apocalyptic societies. Set in a retrofuturist world shaped by nuclear war, the games critique unchecked capitalism, scientific overreach, and authoritarian control through interactive, world-rich storytelling. Drawing from mid-20th century American optimism and Cold War anxieties, Fallout imagines a dystopia where corporations like Vault-Tec monopolize civilian safety, artificial intelligence governs critical infrastructure, and wearable devices like the Pip-Boy serve as surveillance, communication, and medical tools—anticipating today’s smartwatches. This paper explores Fallout through the lens of science fiction prototyping (Johnson, 2011), ubiquitous computing (Dourish, forthcoming), and speculative world-building (Pendleton-Julian & Brown, 2018). The Pip-Boy, as both gameplay mechanic and narrative artifact, functions as a prototype of ubiquitous surveillance and integrated digital identity. The franchise critiques technological determinism by placing ethical choices in players’ hands—inviting reflection on how technological power is deployed or resisted. For example, Fallout: New Vegas allows players to decide whether to activate a pre-war AI weapon, presenting dilemmas that parallel contemporary debates about autonomous systems and militarization. Unlike passive media, Fallout’s interactive nature positions players as agents of technological resistance or compliance, enacting speculative futures shaped by individual and systemic decisions. This interactivity transforms science fiction into a site of experiential critique. As such, Fallout models not only dystopian control but also speculative agency—how individuals might intervene in technological systems designed to dominate. By examining its wearable tech, branching narratives, and critiques of corporate sovereignty, this paper argues that Fallout is not merely entertainment, but a deeply layered, playable critique of power, technology, and speculative futures.

Bio

Michelle Leccese is a PhD candidate in Communication at the University of Southern California, where her research examines the intersection of trauma, technology, and narrative across digital and analog game environments. Her work focuses on the psychological and therapeutic applications of speculative media, with particular attention to how games engage memory, agency, and affect in trauma recovery. Leccese’s dissertation investigates tabletop role-playing games (TTRPGs) as play-based interventions for PTSD and stress-related disorders. Her broader scholarship engages trauma-informed design, interactive storytelling, and science fiction as a platform for cultural critique and technological imagination.

DAVIDE LUNERTI

Neither Red nor Blue Pills. Queer Hacking Practices in Speculative Fiction and Visual Arts

According to Paul B. Preciado’s philosophical thinking, biopolitical power is exercised through coercive forms of technology designed to divide individuals into binary identity categories: a red pill or a blue one. The author warns not only of the hypersurveillance to which technologies subject us, but also of more insidious forms of control, such as the hormonal substances that pharmaceutical companies administer, moving from the external social gaze of the panoptic to one that penetrates under the skin. Preciado himself, in a political and performative act, boycotts the pharmaceutical control over his gender identity by independently procuring himself testosterone doses. Similarly, queer artist Mary Maggic simulates a speculative world where transgender women, instead of having to request doctor’s visits and prescriptions, can cook their own personal estrogens from home

(*Housewife making drugs*, 2019). Biohacking is not the only proposed way of resistance. In *Glitch Feminism*, curator Legacy Russell remembers how, as a young woman, she had managed through her avatar to impersonate the complexities of her queer black identity by finding refuge in anonymous forums and digital social platforms. Internet social instances have largely changed since then: just as happens along the plot of the novel *Contactless Intimacy* (Hsin-hui, 2025), or in videogame *Cyberpunk 2077*'s universe, the network begins to be increasingly controlled, until every marginal space of encounter is jeopardized. It becomes necessary to find ways to hack the network, to cause glitches where one can create interstitial spaces of resistance. The paper I propose for Electric Dreams conference would illustrate how such literary and artistic practices are directed to circumvent the heteropatriarchal system, managing to escape its coercive power. Taking advantage from operations such as glitching, cheatcoding and biohacking, these works construct posthuman utopias that manage to be, in Braidotti's words, "equal to the complexity of the real."

Bio

Davide Lunerti (Rome, 1995) is a curator and researcher. He holds degrees in Cultural Heritage from University of Bologna and Visual cultures and curatorial practices from Brera Academy. In 2024 he worked as curator-in-residence for Fondazione La Quadriennale di Rome. He curated: *Ultraqueer* (Palazzo Merulana, 2022), *Revolutionari3* (Mattatoio, 2023), *Queer Pandemia* (BASE Milan, 2023), *D3CAM3RON3 2025* (Palazzo Lucarini, 2025). He is currently a PhD student at the Academy of Fine Arts of Rome, with a project entitled "Queer science fiction imaginary in contemporary artistic production." This research originated in 2024 with a paper about ecofeminist sci-fi literature for POESIA/EUROPA conference.

SHANNON MAGRI

Techno-Eco-Topia: The Ecosophic Power of the Gardener-Robot, from *Silent Running* (1972) to *Wall-E* (2008)

In the realm of speculative science fiction, the dynamics between power and technology often involve the figure of the robot integrated into everyday human life. The topos of the android is typically developed along two main lines. On one hand, the robot is a faithful, unconscious servant, entirely at the service of the human according to the three laws of robotics conceived by Isaac Asimov—as seen, for instance, with Robby the Robot in *Forbidden Planet* (Wilcox, 1956). On the other hand, the robot's ability to learn and process data leads to an actual *coup d'état*—a power grab that overturns the human-android relationship. Such rebellions are depicted in *Blade Runner* (Scott, 1982), while total subversion is portrayed in the *Terminator Saga* (1984–2019). In contrast to this dual development of the robot figure in science fiction, this proposal aims to explore a third path in cinematic representation—one that goes beyond the dichotomy of servitude and rebellion. The paper focuses on the gardener-robot as depicted in *Silent Running* (Trumbull, 1972) and in the Pixar animated film *Wall-E* (Stanton, 2008). Referring to Félix Guattari's seminal text *Les trois écologies* (1989), this paper reflects on the transfer of power from humans to robots within the context of care and regeneration of natural environments. In Trumbull's film, astronaut-gardener Freeman Lowell bequeaths the botanical garden on the space ship *Valley Forge* to his robotic assistants Huey, Dewey, and Louie. In Stanton's film, the robot Wall-E is the only one capable of restoring the planet's ecosystems after centuries of human abandonment and environmental degradation. In this sense, the machine becomes the bearer of Guattari's 'three ecologies' (environmental, social, and mental) and inherits an ecosophic power that humans are no longer capable of exercising. This proposal seeks to examine this perspective, while also acknowledging the potentially problematic drift toward a green-rooted technosolutionism within these ecotopian narratives.

Bio

Shannon Magri is a PhD candidate in Transcultural Studies in Humanities at the University of Bergamo: her doctoral research explores representations of the anthropogenic climate crisis through the lens of impression of reality. She is a member of the CiMAV – Cinema and Audiovisual Media Research Group, and works as a research assistant at the Visual Media Lab at the University of Bergamo – Department of Humanities, Philosophy, Communication. From September 2024 to February 2025, she was a Visiting Assistant in Research in Film and Media Studies at Yale University, where she collaborated with the Center for Collaborative Arts and Media.

JANE MALAFAIA FRANCIONI DE ABREU

Comparisons of Patriarchic Authenticity and Narrative Control in Thomas Middleton's *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623) and the Television Series *Westworld*: Past Affects Future

This paper compares authenticity and narrative control in *The Spanish Gypsy* by John Ford, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, and William Rowley with the contemporary television series *Westworld*. The play based on Cervantes' *La Fuerza de la Sangre* and *La Gitanilla* blurs the lines of comedic and romantic elements with darker themes of sexual violence and gender oppression. Similarly, *Westworld* portrays female automatons manipulated by men and technology to fulfill gendered fantasies, continuing patriarchal systems that historically subjugates women. *The Spanish Gypsy* explored within beliefs of the 1600s is steeped in Christian forgiveness, patriarchal honor, and rigid gender roles. Clarissa's rape is an offense to her family's honor rather than a personal violation. The rapist's repentance and the Clarissa's forgiveness conform with the Christian views of mercy filtered through a male-authored narrative lacking authentic female perspective. In *Westworld*, set in a futuristic 2050s amusement park, the same dynamic exists through technology. Women are not merely victims of patriarchal norms, but are literally programmed to serve men. Just as religion and moral codes governed female behavior in the Middle Ages, advanced technology serves the same function in a dystopian future. Both narratives romanticize violence and use implausible plots to enforce complicity where control of women is more valued than women themselves. These works expose how early modern drama and contemporary storytelling negotiate violence, forgiveness, and social restoration. A long lineage of romanticized violence exists in literature and pop culture since before the creation of *The Spanish Gypsy* and continues to be created after *Westworld*. Are these affronts to another human (even women) anything corresponding to the true tenants of Christianity or any genuine moral code? By examining *The Spanish Gypsy* and *Westworld*, we view the uncomfortable legacy of literature and media that privileges social order over personal justice, and silence over authenticity.

Bio

Jane Malafaia Francioni de Abreu is a first-year PhD student at the University of Salamanca, researching how gender, cultural identity and honor intersect in early modern English drama. Her project focuses on *The Spanish Gypsy* (1623) which explores patriarchal and religious norms that romanticize violence and marginalize women. An award-winning author with three published books—one fiction and two non-fictions, Jane merges the creative with scholarly pursuits. Her work examines how literature, past and present, reinforces or resists systems of power and she is especially interested in how individual choices shape personal and social consequences.

JENNIFER MALVEZZI

Retribalization and Collective Agency. Tracing McLuhanism in Superstudio's *Fundamental Acts* film cycle.

This paper aims to offer an analysis of the technological representations developed in the early Seventies in the films made by the radical architects' collective Superstudio. Starting from the

founding influence on the collective's works of Marshall McLuhan's theoretical dictates, above all the concepts of “global village” and “retribalization” as a product of the sensorial simultaneity brought about by the advent of the so-called “electric age”, we will examine the movies of the *Fundamental Acts* cycle. The films in the Fundamental Acts series can be attributed to the artistic movement known as “Hippie Modernism” (Blauvelt, 2015). This is a completely utopian form of “modernism” in which imaginary technologies are used for social engineering to create a new, democratic, egalitarian and anti-capitalist society. Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, some radical collectives chose to express these manifesto projects in the language of cinema, precisely because of its imaginative power and ability to evoke alternative realities. Of the five films initially conceived by Superstudio, only two were made. The first of these was *Supersurface: An Alternative Model for Life on Earth* (1972) and *Ceremony* (1973). The others remain as complete storyboards, published in the magazine Casabella. These films were made using images from technical magazines and science fiction comics, as well as animations and footage shot in a mock documentary style. In the first film of the series, *Supersurface: An Alternative Model for Life on Earth*, a utopian “indispensable electrical technology” is presented. This technology is conceived as a planetary electrical network made up of equidistant nodes, covering the entire surface of the planet. This *Supersurface* is presented as a potentially tangible and accessible 'central nervous system' that is present everywhere, from deserts to mountains. It could enable a society characterized by radical nomadism. This new society would be free from three-dimensional buildings, as well as from dependence on work, power and violence. Each connection to the grid is imagined to be identical to the others, ensuring an egalitarian distribution of energy across the globe. However, it would be simplistic to liken this network to the internet, as the science fiction device depicted here possesses almost messianic powers, capable of generating a “new mental attitude” and, with it, a new humanity. This widespread device enables an extended techno-hippie community to survive anywhere, devoting itself completely to expanding its consciousness and sensory apparatus. The other films in the series were intended to depict the “fundamental acts” (*Education*, *Ceremony*, *Love* and *Death*) in the life of this new, enlightened human community. *Education* was intended to demonstrate the operation of an imaginary “thinking machine” for education (*Perceptron*), while *Love* was intended to demonstrate the operation of a “machine for falling in love” (*Inamoratrix*), capable of making a person experience all the love they would feel in a lifetime in just a few seconds. In contrast, *Death* describes new ecological burial rituals and the possibility of storing and cataloguing individuals' memories in special “memory capsules”. *Ceremony* presents a series of ritual gestures in a mock documentary style to celebrate detachment from architecture and consumer objects that have become shared symbols of collective resistance. In these representations, Superstudio proposes the use of minimal, reticulate and decentralized technologies that can support primary needs and an environmental ethos. These technologies would be integrated into widespread infrastructures that encourage collective action and ecological self-sufficiency. Superstudio's ecocritical approach hypothesized the “concrete” realization of McLuhanian utopias, envisioning a reversal of the technological power of electricity and its transformation from a tool of control into a model of post-capitalist emancipation and ecological reconfiguration of anthropized space.

Bio

Jennifer Malvezzi (PhD) is a researcher at the University of Parma. She teaches New Media Aesthetics, Film History Principles, and History of Radio and Television. Her research focuses on the relationship between the moving image and other arts, experimental film and video. She has written essays for journals and volumes and co-curated several exhibitions. She is the author of the monograph *Remedi-action. Dieci anni di videoteatro italiano* (2015) and *Taroni Cividin. Performance, Video, Expanded Cinema 1977-1984* (2023), edited with Flora Pitrolo. She collaborates with the Home Movies Archive for the “Art & Experimental Film” project, dedicated to films by Italian artists and filmmakers. Additionally, she is a member of the scientific board of the Umberto

Bignardi Archive, and series editor of ExSeries, a multilingual book series devoted to experimental cinema.

FRANCISCO JOSÉ MARTÍNEZ MESA and ANA-CLARA REY SEGOVIA
“Solutionism, Accelerationism, and Capitalism in 21st-Century Utopian and Dystopian Narratives”

This proposal seeks to examine how 21st-century utopian and dystopian narratives have been shaped by technological solutionism, accelerationism, and the consolidation of financial and digital capitalism. From an interdisciplinary perspective that brings together political theory, cultural studies, and textual analysis, it investigates how these imaginaries, far from sustaining the critical vocation that historically characterized the dystopian genre, now tend to reinforce political inaction and naturalize dynamics of structural inequality. Special attention is paid to how solutionism shifts democratic debate by presenting technology as the sole path to progress, while accelerationism advocates intensifying capitalist logics to precipitate radical mutations disconnected from any egalitarian or deliberative horizon. Recent examples such as *Black Mirror* (Charlie Brooker, 2011–2019), *Westworld* (HBO, 2016–2022), *Upload* (Amazon, 2020–2022), *Severance* (Apple TV+, 2022), the film *The Circle* (2017) based on Dave Eggers’ novel, video games like *Detroit: Become Human* (2018) and *Watch Dogs: Legion* (2020), as well as novels such as *The Every* (Dave Eggers, 2021) and *Autonomous* (Annalee Newitz, 2017), illustrate how contemporary dystopian imaginaries are articulated around hypertechnologized scenarios dominated by surveillance, algorithmic control, artificial intelligence, and social fragmentation. This proposal also explores how these narratives are re-signified by ultraliberal and technocratic discourses that legitimize democratic withdrawal, algorithmic opacity, and resignation in the face of institutional decay, displacing political agency toward individualistic or corporate solutions often under the banner of “disruptive innovation.” Ultimately, this analysis seeks to reflect on the risks posed by the mutation of the contemporary dystopian imaginary, which, by renouncing the call for collective alternatives, ends up consolidating a status quo governed by depoliticization, automation, and the imperative of individual adaptation. The presentation draws on these recent cultural productions to open a critical debate on the political and cultural implications of this shift.

Bio

Francisco José Martínez Mesa is an Associate Professor of Political Theory at Complutense University of Madrid, with a focus on utopian and dystopian imaginaries, modernity, and technopolitical discourse. His latest contributions include the chapter “Anatomía de un colapso: Contexto y subtexto en rascacielos” in *Subir, salir, entrar, bajar. 50 años de rascacielos* de J.G. Ballard (Comares, 2025, pp.1–12) and two articles in *El Futuro del Pasado*, Vol. 14 (2023): “Presentación. Espacios contemporáneos de la utopía y la distopía” (pp. 17–20) and “Imágenes de un futuro demasiado cercano: la inscripción de lo distópico en la España actual” (pp. 151–188). In 2023, he co-edited *Las luces del progreso y la conciencia de la Modernidad* (Tecnos) contributing the chapter “Ciencia, progreso y discurso crítico en la narrativa utópica de la Ilustración” (pp. 91–129) His research critically examines how capitalist and technological structures shape political agency.

Ana-Clara Rey Segovia holds a degree in Audiovisual Communication and a PhD in Communication and Interculturality from the University of València (UVEG). Her doctoral dissertation, titled “¿No hay alternativa? Aperturas utópicas y clausuras distópicas: una mirada al futuro a través del cine de masas del siglo XXI”, examines a broad selection of contemporary Hollywood dystopian films, while also offering a historical overview of the most iconic utopias and dystopias. She is currently part of the research project “Utopías trasatlánticas: imaginarios alternativos entre España y América” (PID2021-123465NB-I00), funded by the Spanish Government’s State Plan for Scientific, Technical

and Innovation Research (2022-2025). She teaches in the undergraduate programs in Audiovisual Communication and Art History at the University of València.

PETER MELVILLE

Similes and the Politics of Containment in *The Mortal Instruments*

My paper investigates the use of simile as a “literary technology” (Alarauhio 16) that promotes a politics of containment in Cassandra Clare’s popular paranormal urban fantasy series *The Mortal Instruments*. The paper takes its critical starting point from Farah Mendlesohn’s description of the rhetorical trajectory of “intrusion fantasy,” a category into which paranormal urban fantasy squarely falls. In such texts, writes Mendlesohn, “the world is ruptured by the intrusion [of the fantastic], which disrupts normality and has to be negotiated with or defeated, sent back whence it came, or controlled” (115). Even as it moves from “*denial* to *acceptance*” of fantastic realities (115), intrusion fantasy is in this sense generally conservative, its rhetoric aimed primarily at resisting, suppressing, or containing the fantastic as a threat to the normative functioning of the status quo. My paper argues that this trajectory of containment in *The Mortal Instruments* series often begins with Clare’s prolific use of similes, particularly when focalizing her main protagonist Clarissa “Clary” Fairchild’s initial encounters with paranormal creatures such as demons, faeries, werewolves, and vampires. As a literary technique, the simile is useful for rendering unfamiliar images in familiar terms, comparing the unknown to what is known. When Clary first encounters a Ravener demon, for instance, the narrative focalizes her impression of this creature by comparing it to “[s]omething like a cross between an alligator and a centipede” (Clare 50). While the simile provides recognizable images for Clary (and the reader) to visualize a previously unknown entity, the linguistic operation of the comparison arguably diminishes the unsettling strangeness of the creature – its radical difference – by subjecting it to a discourse of similarity. The Ravener is neither alligator nor centipede, but these familiar images of animate nature determine the demon’s intelligibility within the fantastic imaginary of Clare’s novel. Compared to a more innovative urban fantasy like China Miéville’s *Bas-Lag* trilogy, where fantastic figures remain singularly strange through intense description of minute details, Clare’s frequent use of the simile’s familiarizing technology obscures rather than preserves the alterity of fantastic intrusions in her series. Thus mediating intersections between the paranormal and the mundane, Clare’s deployment of the simile resonates with her protagonist’s primarily conservative role as a demon-slaying Shadowhunter – namely, to minimize, contain, or eliminate destabilizing intrusions of the strange and paranormal into the lives of ordinary people. My paper does not conclude, however, that *The Mortal Instruments* lacks potential for progressive politics. Even as the series’ rhetorical trajectory moves toward reestablishing the normative, it implicitly exposes normality as a surface fiction that requires the operation of suppressive technologies to maintain. These technologies are not limited to the violence of magical weaponry and demon detection devices but likewise include, as I have suggested, *literary* devices like the simile that render and distort paranormal difference in terms of mundane familiarity. Beneath the surface of this familiarity, the novel seems to suggest, lies a hidden world of disruptive potential always on the verge of release.

Bio

Peter Melville is Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg in Manitoba, Canada, where he specializes in fantasy fiction, poetry, and British Romanticism. In addition to previous work in Romantic studies, he has published recent essays on the fantasy genre in edited collections and academic journals including *Extrapolation*, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Studies in the Fantastic*, *Fafnir: Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research*, and *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*.

LORETA MINUTILLI

Imagining Future Women Scientists Through Speculative and Solarpunk Fiction

In traditional fiction, the representation of women scientists is often marked by stereotypes and marginalization. Eva Flicker identified six recurring stereotypes used to depict women scientists in films between 1929 and 1997 — from the “spinster” to the “invisible assistant” — all of which share an inability to portray a fully autonomous woman scientist or to build a meaningful imaginary around women’s scientific work (Flicker, 2003). Speculative fiction, inherently oriented toward imagining radically different futures, offers fertile ground for challenging these models and for freeing the figure of the woman scientist from the symbolic and social constraints that render her subordinate in the dominant imaginary. Providing a space to rethink the power dynamics embedded in scientific knowledge and technological development, speculative fiction can reconfigure relationships between science, gender, and authority, often proposing alternative models of technoscientific agency. In Octavia E. Butler’s short story *The Evening and the Morning and the Night*, for instance, female scientists embody a form of science that listens, mediates, and offers the only hope for treating a rare genetic disease. Their authority lies not only in their technical expertise, but in their capacity to subvert traditional hierarchies of power by integrating ethics, care, and relationality into their scientific practice (Butler, 1987). A similar pattern can be found in the novel *Oval* by Elvia Wilk, where the protagonist becomes entangled in a project involving mood-regulating pills designed to stabilize society. Through her, the novel explores the contradictions of green techno-capitalism and the ambivalent role of women scientists as both agents and critics of technological power. Wilk’s narrative questions the neutrality of innovation and highlights the ethical tensions faced by women working within — and against — dominant structures of authority (Wilk, 2019). This perspective extends to many solarpunk narratives, in which women scientists often stand at the center of horizontal networks of shared knowledge, actively engaged in building sustainable, community-oriented, and decarbonized futures. A compelling example is *Island Green* by Australian writer Shauna O’Meara, where the protagonist embodies a science that actively resists extractive logics and power structures tied to colonial and profit-driven models of technological development (O’Meara, 2017). This talk will analyze these texts through the lens of feminist technoscience (Haraway, Braidotti), focusing on how speculative fiction reimagines the relationship between women scientists, power, and technology.

Bio

Loreta Minutilli holds a degree in Astrophysics from the University of Bologna and a Master’s in Science Communication from the University of Padua. Her interests focus on the history of science and the impact of technological innovations on our present, approached from a gender perspective. In her essay *Le tessitrici. Mitologia dell’informatica* (effequ, 2023), she explored the connections between weaving and computing through the lens of mythology and the lives of women scientists. Her most recent work is *Messaggeri cosmici. L’universo, i suoi emissari e noi* (Edizioni Tlon, 2025).

JOHAN NILSSON

Wild Futures: Technology, Nature, and Power in *The Wild Robot*

This paper explores the intersections of technology, nature, and power in *The Wild Robot* (2024), an animated science fiction film aimed at children. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, the film follows Roz, a service robot who finds herself stranded on an island dominated by nature and only populated by animals. As she adapts to the environment and learns to communicate with the animals, traditional binaries of technology vs. nature, autonomy vs. control and logic vs. emotion are disrupted. *The Wild Robot* offers a somewhat nuanced portrayal of a post-apocalyptic world, where survival depends on empathy, relationality, and evolving beyond one’s “natural” inclinations. By treating these themes in a film for children, the narrative presents an ethical framework where technology is not just a tool for

control and destruction but also contains the possibility to evolve, to empathize, and to exist in the natural world. As such, the film becomes a topical comment on the development on AI, and it partly challenges and expands on conventional tropes in speculative fiction for children, as for instance seen in films like *Wall-E* (2008), *Big Hero 6* (2014), or *Next Gen* (2018). This paper contributes to ongoing discussions about how children's media engages with broader cultural discourses, in this case about technological futures and AI (see Jaques, 2015; Goga et al., 2018). Through an analysis of how these themes are expressed through narrative structure and visual style, this paper argues that *The Wild Robot* is a nuanced example of children's speculative fiction that reframes the post-apocalypse as not only about survival but of potential.

Bio

Johan Nilsson is a senior lecturer at the department of Media and Communication Studies at Örebro University in Sweden. He has published on satire in American film, intermediality in Joker narratives, slow TV, and media literacy in children's comics. His most recent research focuses on children's media and the construction of transmedial worlds.

TAMIRES OLIVEIRA

Split at the Core: About Grief, Guilt, and Emotional Resonance in *Split Fiction*

Split Fiction's narrative game invites players to navigate the emotional aftermath of trauma while advancing with the protagonists, Mio and Zoe. Even though the game relies on conventional dystopian/sci-fi aesthetics only for half of its chapter, it still fully operates within a speculative framework that questions how power, interactive technology, and emotional regulation can get entangled in a gamified story. This discussion explores *Split Fiction's* potential to be considered a system of affective control that uses branching narrative formations as a label of technological architecture that shapes moral choice, the agency of players, and the production of psychological labor. The core speculative element of *Split Fiction* goes beyond the game's setting and enters its structure of a world where grief and identity get fractured across different timelines navigated by players that become vulnerable to the emotional responses coded into the gameplay's logic. Departing from game analysis, affect theory, and trauma studies, this paper defends that *Split Fiction* can be seen as a microcosm of governance because of its game design, and interpreted as a digital sample that requires players to inhabit moral ambiguity, face their choices, and learn how to navigate grief. In this sense, *Split Fiction's* world echoes some of the issues highlighted in other games, such as *Deus Ex* and *Real Humans*, regarding the simulated agency and digital systems used for the conditioning of subjectivity. By interpreting the concept of emotional decision-making through the lenses of narrative control, this paper adds to ongoing debates about how different mediatic pieces of speculative fiction critique but also model technological power. Like other game worlds that embraced affective manipulation, *Split Fiction* takes advantage of digital interactivity to sustain how technologies can exploit and sometimes trigger emotional work with our inner selves. As McLuhan (1967) defends, our relationship with media will touch different parts of how we are, and *Split Fiction* is a great example of how emotions can be scripted and engineered for players to navigate story worlds as part of a bigger and speculative imaginary of control.

Bio

Tamires Oliveira is a PhD candidate and an academic researcher specializing in the nuanced dynamics of Middle Eastern narratives. In academia since 2019, and currently a researcher at CECC (Research Centre for Communication and Culture), she is interested in the affective economies and digital communities, especially in social media platforms, particularly Instagram, due to its visual appeal, and in games, due to its space for identity negotiation. Her work bridges media studies, critical cultural analysis, and humanitarian communication, aiming to foster more inclusive, empathetic narratives across digital and interactive environments.

GIUSEPPINA PIROZZI and BRANDO RATTI

Power Narratives and Aesthetics in Sci-Fi Videogames: Patriarchal Representations of Power and New Forms of Visual Resistance

The aim of the present study is to investigate the multimodal constructions of power in Science-Fiction video games, with a specific focus on patriarchal representations of masculine power in *Star Citizen* (2017) and new forms of visual resistance in *Half-earth Socialism* (2022). Video games are cultural vectors that promote and contrast ideologies of power through aesthetic representations and game play. They can reinforce dominant ideologies of power or challenge them by disseminating new forms of subversion of naturalised power dynamics. Throughout history, the representation of power has always been shaped by the dominant narratives, often framed through the patriarchal categories of masculinity: biblical monsters, colossal buildings, military symbolism and cult of corporeality. Cultural hegemonies (Gramsci, 1975) progressively changed their media and modes, conforming them to social and cultural transformations while never abandoning patriarchal categories of power representation. Due to their large-scale production and distribution, video games are directly involved in these processes. Sci-fi video games, specifically, configure themselves as key examples to investigate because of their inherent characteristics. Some video games, like *Star Citizen*, represent power as majestic, repressive and hostile. Others, like *Half-earth Socialism*, offer practical forms of resistance to dominant narratives and structures, presenting power through different paradigms that are apparently detached from patriarchal dynamics and emphasising collective liberation over domination. The hybrid methodology selected for the study combines the analytical frameworks of political philosophy and gender studies (Butler, 1990) with multimodal critical discourse analysis (Kress, 2010). Frames from the two video games will be critically analysed to expose ideologies and perspectives encoded within the visual narratives of power. Additionally, particular attention will be given to the players of each video game in order to examine their social function and impact on individuals and society (Bittanti, 2020). Ultimately, this analysis will provide a comparative reflection on two types of video games, emphasising their cultural potential to influence the target audience in either embracing or challenging forms and structures of power.

Bio

Giuseppina Pirozzi is a PhD Candidate in English and Comparative Linguistics at the University of Parma. Her research interests include feminist critical discourse analysis, multimodality, feminist discourses and the discursive construction of gender and identity. Her research project investigates the discursive construction of feminisms in contemporary culture through a feminist multimodal critical discourse analysis of TED Talks in English and 一席 YiXi in Chinese. Giuseppina Pirozzi holds a Master's degree in Comparative Literature and Cultures from the University of Naples "L'Orientale". Her Master's thesis examined the discursive construction of feminisms in three case studies in English, Italian and Chinese.

Brando Ratti holds a degree in Philosophy from the University of Genoa, where he studied under Professor Marco Damonte. His academic interests encompass subcultures, underground music scenes, cultural studies, video games, and media. Between 2019 and 2020, he hosted a radio program on Contatto Radio, Popolare Network (Massa-Carrara). Since November 2023, he has been pursuing a PhD in Game Studies at the University of Turin. His research focuses on how Italian cultural identity and diverse social backgrounds influence video game consumption and the sense of belonging within the Italian gaming community.

MATTEO QUINTO

The Power We Didn't Have: Steampunk and Nostalgia in Animation

Science fiction has always depicted the relationship between technology and power through both technophilic perspectives, which see scientific progress as a way of individual emancipation and social improvement, and technophobic ones, which imagine technical inventions as new ways of exercising power, surveillance coercion and control. This ambivalence is very clear in animated representations and particularly in steampunk. In this genre, in fact, technology on the one hand appears as liberating, carefree and adventurous, becoming the emblem of the possibilities of invention and overcoming the limits of humanity, a challenge to the unknown and the impossible towards which humanity is driven by curiosity and industriousness. In these imaginaries, technology is certainly linked to forms of power and control over nature and reality, which, however, mostly have a positive effect on individuals and communities. On the other hand, within the same genre, machines also become uncanny means of destruction perpetrated by mankind over nature, in a relationship of domination by individuals or organizations over societies, often also with colonial, gendered, imperial or even totalitarian optics. By analysing a number of animated filmic or serial products, this paper aims to observe how technophilic and technophobic visions of the relationship between scientific progress and technology are linked in steampunk. In particular, it will be shown how these representations and reflections take place in uchronic imaginaries dominated by nostalgia for the future and are always, therefore, configured as projections of the desires, fears, regrets or intentions of those who create them. In a horizon dominated by a complex and non-linear idea of time, these representations also have a value for reality and the present, since they are configured as the future in the past that has not been experienced, in which we project what we would like to have happened as a utopia and what we fear might occur as a dystopia.

Bio

Matteo Quinto completed his studies at the University of Pavia, where he was fellow of the Collegio Ghislieri and of the IUSS, he pursued a PhD in Studi Umanistici Transculturali at the University of Bergamo, where he is fellow in Narratologies, Semiotics, Seriality and Transmedia Studies and Literature and Cultural History. His research interests concern animated cinema, fantasy, science fiction, identity, memory, nostalgia, posthumanism, intermediality and non-fiction in cinema and literature. His publications include essays on Antonio Franchini, Jonathan Littell, Marco Bellocchio, Brian De Palma, Ari Folman, on posthuman identity, dystopia and on children-parents relationship in animated cinema and a monography on Hayao Miyazaki. He is the editor of books on Erich Auerbach, Dario Fo, Pier Paolo Pasolini and on Italian female writers of the 20th century.

FRANCISCO SAEZ DE ADANA

Comics, Technology and Time Travel

Time travel is a narrative element that is widely used in literature, film and television. When addressing temporal displacement, it is necessary to establish a set of rules associated with the time stream that corresponds to physical laws and are related with the technology associated with the time travel. This contribution examines how the time stream is articulated in different comics and how the alternative realities that are created from the different examples of time travel are. For instance, if *Back to the Future* is mentioned, it can be said that the Chaos Theory fundamentally governs the time stream in its narrative because any small alteration in the past produces large alterations in the present and future and, overall, such alterations are unpredictable; the new reality is characterized by totally chaotic behavior. In the new version of *Star Trek* by JJ Abrams, the time travel is governed by the theory of parallel universes, which appeared in the fifties and the sixties of the last century to make concrete and understandable some of the discoveries of quantum physics and general relativity, because alterations in the past produce an alternate reality that gives rise to parallel universes. Finally,

there is the scientific determinism of the film *12 Monkeys*, because the past is fixed and cannot undergo alterations. This classification will be applied in this paper to different examples taken from comics, particularly from the Marvel and DC Universes.

Bio

Francisco Saez de Adana is Professor at the Universidad de Alcalá in Spain. He works as a comic scholar and focuses mainly on American comics. He has published two books, and several chapters in books and papers in Spanish and international journals, including *Studies in Comics*, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* and *Journal of Popular Culture*; and several conference papers. He is part of the editorial board of the academic journals *Studies in Comics* and *Sequentials* as well as director of the most important Spanish academic journal in that field, *CuCo*, *Cuadernos de Cómic*. He is also working on the potential of comics and graphic narratives as educational tools, particularly in the field of science.

SAVA SAHELI SINGH and DEBRA MACKINNON

Vulnerable Bodies: Diagnostic Politics of Health and Wellbeing in Frames

A woman refills a stranger's transit card by pointing her phone at them. She leaves an unusually large tip for a café worker. She is up to date on rent. There is an 89% chance she'll interact with the man she passes on the street. In the short film *Frames*, we watch these seemingly mundane moments in the day of a woman's life as captured by the urban surveillance assemblage. *Frames* is one of four research-informed near future speculative fiction short films in the Screening Surveillance project that highlights the social implications of surveillance technologies. *Frames* shows that as we navigate our increasingly networked and smart environments, the combined gaze of cameras, wearables, IoT sensors, apps, platforms, and AI generates various forms of data. Recent discussions of urban data focus on post collection practices of translation and circulation – following data threads, journeys, and exhaust as they enact urban life. As our bodies become information, the accuracy and affordances of these data portraits remain critical sites of inquiry. *How do these urban surveillance technologies render and perform human and non-human interactions? How do they exacerbate injustice? How do these technologically mediated ways of seeing reveal vulnerabilities within systems, but also mis/diagnose human vulnerability – especially in terms of mental health and wellbeing?* Through an exegesis of *Frames*, we “flesh out” discussions of human rights, data justice, future-ing, and implications for the urban body. Focused on what is included (and excluded) from the “frame”, we examine: 1) point of view and visibility, 2) economic logics, and 3) coded norms; highlighting how these collectively render a ‘singular’ diagnostic politic, and contribute to injustices. With corporate storytelling promoting the potential of these technologies to expose and address the mental health crisis, we highlight how these systems, while well-meaning, could do more harm than good.

Bio

Dr. Sava Saheli Singh (she/her) is an Assistant Professor of Digital Futures in Education with the Faculty of Education at York University. She is an interdisciplinary scholar and filmmaker working at the nexus of education, technology, surveillance, speculative futures, critical digital literacy, labour, abolition, and research creation, with a strong commitment to community-based public scholarship.

Dr. Debra Mackinnon (she/her) is an Assistant Professor and inaugural Faculty Research Chair in Interdisciplinary Studies at Lakehead University. She is a surveillance studies scholar, focused on the intersections of urban governance, private security and policing, technology and social justice.

LAURENCE SCHERZ

The Machine as a Villain: Narrative Empathy and (Emotive) Robots in Speculative Fiction

Recent films such as *Subservience* (S.K. Dale, 2024) and *M3GAN* (Gerard Johnstone, 2022) depict female, ‘docile’ robots that provide care within the familial structure by attending to the child’s or the husband’s needs—until they transform into villainous, homicidal characters. Narratives like these not only show us a mirror into the future but also shape it. Through engagement with stories, we enhance our Theory of Mind (ToM), i.e. our ability to gauge another person’s emotions. Immersed in a well-structured narrative, narrative empathy—“the sharing of feeling and perspective-taking [...] of another’s situation” (Keen, 2013)—can arise, leading to improved prosocial action. After all, fiction is a “form of consciousness [...] passed on from one mind to another” (Oatley 2016), which provides a ‘real’ milieu for the human brain to express its full humanity. What happens, then, to our empathy towards machines when portrayed as villains in speculative fiction? This presentation compares the aforementioned depictions of robots with more nuanced examples found in the novels *Little Eyes* by Samanta Schweblin (2018) and *Klara and the Sun* by Kazuo Ishiguro (2021). In the first, a variety of characters either purchase or ‘inhabit’ cute, animal-shaped robots called Kentuki, which they keep as a sort of pet. In the second, we get to know Klara, a sensitive robot who wants nothing more than to meet the sun and feel actual rays on her ‘skin’. Both portrayals steer clear of villainising the robot: in fact, it is humans who are cruel. (An important distinction to make is that Kentuki, albeit robotic in behaviour, are controlled by humans.) Comparing characterisations such as these with the truly horrific ones—which also establish a skewed gender dynamic—can shine a light on the impact of narrative empathy. Do we perceive a big, bad machine or something to cherish?

Bio

Laurence Scherz is a novelist, editor, researcher and spoken word artist. As a researcher, he’s affiliated with the Institute of Network Cultures (Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences) and VU StoryLab (Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam). His research focuses on psycho- and neuro-narratology, narrative empathy, and the activist potential of fiction. He’s currently working on his first novel, *The Prospect of Touch*, a Black Mirror x magical realism story about AI, love, and our relationship to the technological body.

TONGUC SEZEN and DIGDEM SEZEN

Contested Futures: Speculative Technology Trees and Paradigms of Control in Strategy Games

In his discussion of how strategy games utilize deterministic technology tree systems, Slocombe (2019) compares these structures—particularly era mechanics—to Kuhnian paradigm shifts. These shifts, as Kuhn (1962) defines them, disrupt established scientific consensus by introducing new conceptual frameworks, redefining how reality is understood. In most strategy games, advancing to a new era not only unlocks further technological developments but also updates the diegetic and narrative elements of the game, which reflect shifting socio-cultural structures. Although some games allow limited flexibility in the order of technological discovery, the majority of tech trees remain fixed in structure, embodying a particular political worldview with progress-oriented goals (Ghys, 2012; Christiansen, 2015). Frequently, these culminate in a singular Western techno-utopian endpoint, leaving alternative pathways unexplored. Yet as Heinimäki (2012) argues, the architecture of technology trees can be reimaged to accommodate diversity, randomness, and pluralism. Through OR/AND prerequisites, faction-specific trees, and stochastic elements, players may be encouraged to engage in counterfactual experimentation. Games like *Millania* (2024) integrate unrealized historical concepts, such as Leonardo Da Vinci’s fighting vehicle, as speculative alternatives within branching timelines. Heinimäki notes, however, that the most ambitious and variable tech tree designs tend to appear in games set in the future, where speculative technologies

can be imagined without strict historical constraint. Nonetheless, as op de Beke (2020) and Frelik (2024) warn, futurity alone does not guarantee ideological diversity; many games still reproduce anthropocentric, techno-deterministic visions of control. This paper examines how speculative strategy games, particularly 4X titles, represent competing visions of technological development and its political consequences through the design of non-linear technology trees. Drawing on Suvin's (1979) notion of the novum as a disruptive innovation capable of producing paradigm shifts, the paper will explore how these design architectures model divergent—and sometimes conflicting—futures. Case studies include Sid Meier's *Alpha Centauri* (1999), with its interdependent tech branches and factional ideologies; *Civilization: Beyond Earth* (2014), whose rhizomatic technology web and affinity system allow divergent evolutionary paths; and *Stellaris* (2016), which deploys a randomized card-draw mechanism to produce emergent, multispecies narratives of development. Through close analysis of these games' mechanical systems and diegetic framing, the paper argues that technology trees are not just instruments of gameplay progression but speculative diagrams of power: they script who can control the future, how, and at what cost.

Bio

Dr Tonguc Sezen is a Senior Lecturer in Games at the School of Games and Creative Technology within the University for the Creative Arts. His scholarly interests include game design, game writing, worldbuilding, interactive narratives, transmedia storytelling, and toy culture.

Dr. Digdem Sezen holds the position of Senior Lecturer in Games at the School of Games and Creative Technology within the University for the Creative Arts. Her scholarly interests include games, interactive digital narratives, transmedia storytelling, digital culture, and cinema.

DAISY TAM

Imaginarities of Waste: From Dystopian Chinese Sci-fi to Counter-actions of Collective Intelligence in Urban Landscapes

Waste is a persistent and nagging problem in our current time, and it lingers in our imaginations of the future. Chen Qiufan's 2013 novel *The Waste Tide*, for example, depicts a dystopic near-future where dump sites of electronic waste become part of the toxic landscape that forms the backdrop to an environmentally degraded world. The excesses of contemporary consumer society — the things we discard, reject and deem unwanted — are a roadblock to our shiny, clean utopian future, one that is free from the messiness of waste. In Hao Jingfang's novelette *Folding Beijing* (2012), for example, the city is literally wrapped up and the rubbish is folded away into the darkness of the night, offering a clean solution. Speculative fiction has always held up a mirror to our times, and our imagination of how waste is treated and handled remains surprisingly familiar: it is sorted, managed, contained, discarded and stocked away out of sight, and is relegated to the lower echelons of society. Waste workers mainly constitute the precariat that lives and works amidst the toxicity of discarded waste. Waste is not only matter that is out of place, it is also out of time and out of sync. The way that things are rejected and discarded reflects social processes and classification systems (Douglas, Loboiron, Lepawsky) mirroring systems of power and the uneven infrastructures that shape and alter forms of life. But what if waste is not noise, but a signal? What if we were to tap into it and harness the exhaust as a source of power? What if technology facilitates collective intelligent action? What if this is already happening in real life? This paper moves from speculative fiction to a case study of Hong Kong, where the design of a web app has been used to transform rejected items into a successful food rescue operation.

Bio

Daisy Tam is Associate Professor at the Academy of Language and Culture at Hong Kong Baptist University. With a PhD in Cultural Studies, her research focuses on the ethical practices of care particularly around issues of food security and migrant domestic workers. She combines academic inquiry with community engagement and emphasizes practical solutions. Selected Publications (2022) ‘Moving from Risky to Response-able Care’, *Antipode*. Wiley, 54(3), pp. 914–933. (2021) ‘Listening to Noise : Breadline — Food Rescue as System of Interruption’, *International Journal of Communication*. USC Annenberg, 15 and “Towards a Parasitic Ethics” in *Theory, Culture and Society* London: Sage 2016 (33: 4), pp. 103-12.

LARS R. “JONES” VADJINA

Algorithmic Utopia or Technocratic Control? AI as Power in Speculative Media

From HAL9000 to the algorithmic governance system in *Foundation*, speculative fiction has long grappled with artificial intelligence not merely as a tool but as a force of governance. This presentation explores how science fiction narratives envision AI as a form of technocratic power that blurs the line between benevolent automation and authoritarian control. Drawing from a curated selection of speculative media, including *Colossus: The Forbin Project*, *Person of Interest*, *The Matrix*, and *Devs*, the talk analyzes how algorithmic systems in fiction often replace or reshape traditional authority structures. Whether framed as utopian efficiency or dystopian domination, these representations offer a cultural blueprint for how we understand real-world AI governance, predictive systems, and automated decision-making. By combining media analysis with strategic foresight and ethical critique, the presentation investigates how speculative narratives illuminate contemporary debates around algorithmic bias, transparency, and control. It asks:

- Who gets to design and direct these synthetic decision-makers?
- Can predictive AI maintain agency without eroding human autonomy?
- And how might fiction help us imagine governance systems that are neither naively utopian nor blindly technocratic?

Ultimately, this talk argues that science fiction functions as a critical mirror and anticipatory framework for the power dynamics of AI in society. Far from escapism, these stories shape how we prepare, or fail to prepare, for algorithmic futures.

Bio

Lars R. “Jones” Vadjina holds a BA in Interdisciplinary American Studies and an MBA and is a certified innovation manager. His current research focuses on the ethical and epistemological implications of artificial intelligence in speculative media and emerging technologies. He has presented at numerous international academic conferences, including SWPACA, MAPACA, and the Digital Dilemmas symposium. Drawing from interdisciplinary methods, his work explores the role of narrative frameworks in shaping public understanding and policy approaches to AI. He is currently completing his thesis on AI ethics and the cultural imagination at the intersection of science fiction and technological innovation.

ONDŘEJ VÁŠA

The Convex and Concave Curves of the Future: Satellites and Domes as Symbols of Futurity

Have you noticed? When a film, video game, or sci-fi illustration seeks to emphasize the “futurity” of a given territory, it often does so through the deployment of satellites and domes. These elements represent not only key stylistic features of futurity itself, but above all its optimism – albeit often a disappointed one. Both are ultimately means of expansion and, to no lesser extent, of anxious control over the environment. And yet, both appear strangely anachronistic. This paper will focus on the curious genealogy of this anachronic symbolism, tracing it back through Norman Foster’s designs for

Mars settlement, Buckminster Fuller's domes, and the Zeiss planetarium, all the way to Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace, a shining example of architectural control freak. It will demonstrate how the satellite and the dome logically belong together – or more precisely, how the satellite symbolically extends the logic of the dome, translating its heterotopic character into the dimension of communication. And it will show that the symbolic futurity of these two literally “communicating vessels” is deeply rooted in the Victorian conception of greenhouses as ships that “contained wonders of the world within themselves, eclipsing quite the visionary scenes of fairy lore and marking the course of great events to come” (Golder 1867). The paper will conclude by pointing to one remarkable consequence of implementing the imagination in question on contemporary Earth. The domes of cosmic imagination primarily protect humanity's *past*: like membranes in an inhospitable environment, they preserve inherited data, relationships, and indeed life itself – as a phenomenon of heredity – within a single cell. On Earth, however, the domes become Noah's arks of the navigable *future* that declare everything outside their walls as latently past and incongruous. This symbolic “architecture of the elsewhere” engage in the “absolute break with the traditional time” (Foucault 1967): it *lands* on Earth only to expose it as anachronic, provisional or even prehistoric.

Bio

Mgr. Ondřej Váša, Ph.D. (<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ondrej-Vasa>, <https://cuni.academia.edu/OndrejVasa>) is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University in Prague. He has long focused on the interdisciplinary overlaps of philosophy, science and art, with particular emphasis on the utopian/dystopian visions of “man's place in the universe”. He is the author of numerous studies and five books, in 2023, he edited a special issue of the *Philosophical Journal*, devoted to the ideas of the “worlds without people”, and co-edited a special section of the American journal *Semiotica*, dedicated to the phenomenon of inhumanity.

IRENE VILLAESCUSA ILLÁN

Are We Nothing but Memories? Techno-philosophical Questions in Speculative Fiction

The iconic scene in *Blade Runner*, in which Rachel shows Deckard pictures of her childhood to prove her humanity, foregrounds the idea that being human means having memories. However, the film also challenges this notion by demonstrating that memories can be created artificially without the need for actual lived experience. Regarding the relationship between our material existence (the body) and our abstract, symbolic universe (the mind), Katherine Hayles has highlighted the problematic tendency to reduce human ontology to its capacity for abstract thought, while rejecting or subordinating the sensory body (and its cultural inscriptions). Furthermore, Hayles contends that this approach to understanding humans and artificial intelligences reintroduces the Cartesian divide between body and mind, as if AI did not require energy, resources, labour, or land to exist. This presentation explores how different techno-philosophical interpretations of what it means to be human (as discussed by S. Wynter in *Being Human as Praxis* and by K. Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman*) are manifested in two examples of speculative techno-fiction. More specifically, I examine how humans and AIs are represented as performative repertoires and technologies of memory (Plate & Smelik) in the 2021 film *After Yang*, directed by Korean-American filmmaker Kogonada. The film tells the story of a human-like care robot categorised as a ‘technosapiens’ by the film's heritage museum. I also examine the novel *Este es el Núcleo* (2024), written by Spanish author Leonardo Cano, in which building an individual memory archive for use in the ‘definite life’, after one's body has perished, gives humans a sense of purpose. The argument is that by reflecting on technology and memory to speculate about what it means to be human, these works demonstrate an understanding of the mind as a technology of memory and the body as the waste of ‘modern design’, as Z. Bauman would put it. This suggests that in the human symbolic world, we are perhaps little more than our individual and collective memories. However, they also demonstrate that these

memories are inextricably linked to material relational experiences. Even for our futuristic artificial intelligences.

Bio

Irene Villaescusa Illán teaches comparative literature and cultural analysis in the University of Amsterdam. She specialises on hispanic literatures with a focus on Philippine literature written in Spanish on which she has published a book (*Transcultural Nationalism in Hispano Filipino Literature*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), as well as numerous articles and book chapters related to this field. Currently she is working on a new project that surveys imaginaries of the future (work, education, food) through speculative fiction written in Spanish.