BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

FORGOTTEN, MISPLACED, MARGINALIZED:
SPECULATIONS WE DON'T SEE

American Studies Center, University of Warsaw, May 8-10, 2025

The conference is co-organized by
Speculative Texts Research Group and Weird Fictions Research Group

Design by: @lenasol.o

Miguel Angel Albujar-Escuredo (The University of Kansas)

„Sublimating Creative Destruction, a Schumpeterian analysis of Kentukis (2018) by Samanta Schweblin"

In Kentukis (2018) by Samanta Schweblin the reader bears witness to the portrayal of a novel product that has taken the world, and, from the most materialistic mindset, alters the way human beings interact with each other. The popular new commodity is a sort of stuffed animal with audiovisual recording capabilities that can randomly connect strangers, one person would take the role of voyeur, and the other one would be a flaunter. The scenario of the narration depicts the transformation that such a technology causes in experiencing human intimacy and exemplifies the logic behind the concept of "creative destruction" theorized by Joseph Schumpeter. Indeed, the item, the 'Kentuki', seems to provide a service to consumers that goes beyond the fetishism of dealing with personal interactions through the frame of a tech artifact, since it reveals, through a globalized sublimation, an absence of human connections. The nature of such sublimation is illustrated in the short stories that build the narration: highlighting a melancholia of something missing or perhaps bringing up the realization that something that was meant to exist, never did. This paper states that Schweblin, in *Kentukis*, describes a hypothesis of absence in our globalized Capitalist society through the representation of the Schumpeterian "creative destruction" that is the backbone of Capitalism.

İbrahim Mertcan Alçınkaya (The University of Warsaw)

"RoboCopaganda: American Video Games as Glorification of Police Power"

In the nascent field of cultural police studies, or cultural criminology, video games have received little attention compared to film and prose. Considering the recent surge in the production of Police-SIM LEO-SIM, MIL-SIM, and SWAT-SIM games such as *Police Simulator, Ground Branch, Squad, Ready or Not, SWAT Commander, The Precinct,* and many other current and upcoming police-/military-themed productions, video games allow for a critical lens to view police power. In this paper, I will be discussing the „cop knowledge" in video games as a potential critique as well as glorification of policing. As such, political theorist Mark Neocleous' theory of police power will enable a conceptual framework to analyze selected key video games, including *Ready or Not, Ground Branch*, and *Battlefield Hardline*. While the thematics and narrative in the above-mentioned video games offer social critique, the gaming elements such as the UI, visual effects, and other digital assets arguably glorify policing violence, functioning as video game „copaganda."

Francesca Arnavas (The University of Tartu)

"Fairy-Tale Speculations: Fantastic Bodies"

The ubiquitous and multiform genre of the fairy tale can be connected to speculative fiction. Not only fairy-tale fragments (in form of characters, plot's elements, or settings) appear in multiple novels and stories pertaining to the genre of speculative fiction or even sci-fi, but also what are called "traditional" or "classic" fairy tales exhibit the potential for the expression of counterfactual scenarios and counterfactual thinking. In this paper, I would like in particular to focus on how the depiction of bodies in literary fairy tales (considering texts from different epochs, but in particular paying attention to the time span going from the 17th to the 19th century) engages with complex speculations on the human embodied presence in the world (and in a given environment). The fantastic bodily shapes and metamorphoses that we find in fairy tales encourage us to imagine different ways of being physically present in the world: they stretch the boundaries of the realistic imagination but they also indirectly lead us to notice differences as well as unexpected continuities and similarities between fantastic embodiments and real bodies and minds. Familiarity with the marvelous creates the perfect conditions for readers not to question the impossibility of certain body-minds per se, and rather to reflect on the continuities (and discontinuities) that still hold between physical features or external appearance and mental states and capabilities. Confronted with a mermaid, for instance, instead of simply turning away from the sheer impossibility of a creature half-human and half-fish, readers are given the chance to explore through the tale what new desires and possibilities for action as well as limits and frustrations this hybrid condition might bring about. In this paper thus, I am going to show how the literary fairy tale represents fantastic bodies and body-mind interrelations that can bring forth speculations connected with topics such as posthumanism, disability, gender, queerness.

David Ashford (The University of Groningen)

"The Modern Prometheus: A Brief Introduction to the Horror of Enlightenment"

This paper will offer audiences a brief introduction to *A Book of Monsters*, a cultural history of Promethean Horror in the modern age, by the poet and cultural historian David Ashford. Beginning with M. Shelley's Frankenstein, this new book explores imaginative literature that exploits popular fears relating, not to a "Gothic" darkness, but to a scientific Enlightenment. Provoked by the Promethean ambitions of Modernism, the Promethean Myth is discovered to have become a pervasive and increasingly oppressive component in our post-Modernist political, economic and cultural reality. Revealing why it is that Modernism (a phenomenon

become imbued with the uncanny, *A Book of Monsters* considers an eclectic range of cultural material including psycho-geographical fiction by Iain Sinclair and Alan Moore, the fantasies of J.R.R. Tolkien, Gorilla horror-movies, anxieties relating to Artificial Intelligence in Science-Fiction and philosophy of science, and popular debates surrounding the legacies of post-war Brutalist architecture, in a sub-genre of the dystopia that is specifically anti-Keynesian. Building on post-humanist philosophy, while engaging with recent debates concerning animals and Artificial Intelligence, *A Book of Monsters* attempts to place urgent theoretical controversies in a new historical context, making connections with issues in architecture, linguistics, economics and cultural geography. In so doing the book presents a compelling and comprehensive overview on the West's collective "dream-work" in those decades since the dreams of the nineteenth-century were realised in Modernism, tracing the inception and outlining the consequences of literary fantasies.

Paweł Baran (The University of Szczecin)

"Satire or Celebration? Examining the Narrative, Aesthetics, and Reception of Paul Verhoeven's Starship Troopers (1997)"

Although written, directed and produced in the USA, *Starship Troopers* is far from the world of American sci-fi cult classics. Upon its release, Verhoeven's 1997 film encountered vehement criticism (Ebert). Overall poor critical acclaim and poor box office performance makes *Starship Troopers* fall into a category of niche science fiction. The film has laid in wait, distant from the genre juggernauts such as *Alien* (Ridley Scott 1979) or *Robocop* (Paul Verhoeven 1987). Recently, social media discussions have awoken it from its slumber. Critics and pundits alike come out from time to time to discuss the meaning and significance of *Starship Troopers* online.
It occurs that such discussions have invigorated and breathed new life into this often-omitted film. The reason for these discussions is the fact that the film in question is said to be, by narrative and aesthetic design, a satire of fascism. From the dystopian setting, where serving in the military provides citizenship, to the patriarchal portrayal of the protagonist, many aspects of *Starship Troopers* point to this tendency. Such "quasi-fascist militarism" (Ebert) approach to parodying a fascist state is the reason for such social media upheaval about the film. The purpose of my paper is to examine the satire on fascism in the narrative and aesthetics of *Starship Troopers*. This examination serves to lay the foundation for the analysis of its modern reception and how it evolved after the 90s. To achieve this goal, I use both the original reviews of the film in confrontation with the new sources. Online X (formerly: Twitter) discussions or videos from panels about *Starship Troopers* show just how the perception and meaning of the film changed in this new social and political environment.

Maria Celińska (Akademia Górniczo-Hutnicza w Krakowie)

"Beyond the Canon: A Data-Driven Exploration of Science Fiction in BTS Fanfiction"

Fanfiction is inherently transgressive, challenging traditional notions of genre, authorship, and canon. Within this liminal space, speculative fiction–particularly science fiction–flourishes in unexpected ways, even within fandoms not explicitly linked to the genre. This presentation examines the presence and significance of science fiction in BTS fanfiction, analyzing nearly 2,000 works tagged as "Science Fiction" on Archive of Our Own (AO3). BTS, as a globally influential K-pop group, inspires vast amounts of fanfiction, including Real Person Fiction (RPF)—stories that feature real-life figures in fictional narratives. While RPF is often dismissed in academic discourse due to its controversial nature (Hellekson & Busse, 2006), it offers a valuable lens for understanding genre fluidity and creative world-building. Drawing on Rebecca Black's concept of fanfiction as literary rebellion and M. J. Coyle's argument that fanfiction reshapes genre expectations, I explore how young writers reimagine K-pop idols in futuristic, dystopian, and cybernetic settings. The incorporation of sci-fi tropes demonstrates how these stories engage with and subvert traditional sci-fi frameworks. Rather than analyzing K-pop sci-fi RPF as a whole, it is necessary to examine each fandom separately, as every group has its own internal narratives, concepts, and aesthetic choices that influence fan creativity. These in-fandom elements generate distinct storytelling trends, meaning sci-fi RPF emerges differently in each fandom. BTS provides the strongest example of this phenomenon, as their extensive transmedia narratives serve as creative catalysts for fanfiction writers. Their fandom has the largest and most developed sci-fi K-pop RPF representation on AO3. This presentation argues that BTS sci-fi fanfiction challenges rigid literary categorizations. These works, often excluded from conventional publishing spaces, offer critical insights into contemporary speculative fiction, demonstrating how science fiction transcends genre boundaries and emerges in unexpected literary spaces.

Anna Celska (University of Warsaw)

"Queer Lines of Vampiric Desire in Anna Rice's The Vampire Chronicles"

Tell me you're gay without telling me you're gay – asks the internet, to which Christopher Rice has only one response: I'm Anna Rice's son. That's how the Twitter/X conversation between user @benjipasek and the author unfolded in late 2020. And in many ways it is the best possible introduction to my submission in which I would like to critically analyse *The Vampire Chronicles*. For every *Vampire Chronicles* fan, to say that Anna Rice's works are queer in some way is to state that the sun rises every day on a horizon. Such a view wasn't shared by the

author herself, though. She was (un)famously known for antagonizing fan fiction creators, allegedly even suing them for misuse of her characters. This is only one of the ambiguities important for mapping what *Vampire Chronicles* are about. In my presentation I would like to answer that seemingly easy question by inviting you for an exercise in speculation: what happens if we consider *Vampire Chronicles* as a case study of queer lives and queer desires? Could we read Anna Rice's subsequent tales of becoming a vampire as taming of the multiplicity of roads to come out? Maybe *Interview with a Vampire*, *Vampire Lestat* and *Queen of the Damned* are a reckoning with a queer legacy while trying to find a voice on your own? I would like to trace the queer lines of desire in Anna Rice's first five books of *The Vampire Chronicles:* enquire conditions of possibility of a queer metaphor for vampiric life and reflect further on such a framework and its implications for readers and potential for academic/queer studies.

Zhui Ning Chang (Birkbeck, University of London)

"'Let Us Tend This Garden Together':
Postcolonial Time Travel in Ng Yi-Sheng's 'Garden'"

This presentation examines how *Garden* (2018), a time-travel short story by Singaporean author Ng Yi-Sheng, challenges the hegemonic national mythos and imagines alternative approaches to Singapore's historiography through dual frameworks of speculative fiction and postcolonial temporalities. First is the disruption of linear time through a branching narrative structure, destabilising the conventional idea of teleological civilisational progress in Singapore's national narrative. Then, the presentation investigates the ideological estrangement of founding fathers Stamford Raffles and Lee Kuan Yew to critique the (neo)colonial paternalism that underpins their governance, and draws attention to the subaltern in Singaporean history through queer female companionship and regional networks of exchange and solidarity. Lastly, *Garden* integrates Singaporean speculative futures as part of its future history, suggesting processes of myth-making and myth-breaking that are collaborative, cyclical, and constantly reinvented to challenge colonialist paradigms of time and historiography.

Krzysztof Chmielewski (Kazimierz Wielki University)

"Kurt Vonnegut's Forgotten Impact on Game Design"

This study examines two distinct facets of Kurt Vonnegut's work. The first section of the presentation explores Vonnegut's perspective on user experience, derived from 21 interviews

conducted between 1966 and 1996. These insights are compared with a selection of the author's short stories published within the same period. This analysis is further juxtaposed with key themes from popular books on video game design released after 1996. The second section focuses on Vonnegut's lesser-known board game, GHQ, and investigates its potential contributions to game design had it been published [Engelstein, 2024]. Adopting a game design studies approach, the presentation examines the core mechanics of GHQ, linking them to gameplay and user experience. The study also evaluates the overall design quality of the game in the context of prominent board and electronic games of its era.

Aksel Dadswell (Edith Cowan University)

"A Genre Beneath Our Feet: Unearthing Fungalpunk"

The properties, aesthetics, and possibilities of fungi are explored in a plethora of media, from the mycelial network facilitating space travel in *Star Trek: Discovery*, the hallucinogenic horrors of Ben Wheatley's *In the Earth*, to the reanimated monsters of *The Girl with all the Gifts* and *The Last of Us*, and the gender-sharpened terror of both Aliyah Whiteley's *The Beauty*, and Silvia Moreno-Garcia's *Mexican Gothic*. Fungus in popular media often serves as the monstrous other, either a monster itself or a catalyst for monstrosity, a hostile force that colonises and irreparably transforms the human body and mind; this is a trend set by writers like William Hope Hodgson and John F. Blackburn. More recently, some authors and creators have incorporated fungi into their narratives' technology, society, human physiology, and everyday life. In the same way that William Gibson's *Neuromancer* opened science fiction up to the complexities and possibilities of cyberpunk (a term coined by Bruce Bethke in 1982), with its potential for posthuman forms and technological advancements, this paper will argue that Jeff VanderMeer's *Ambergris Trilogy* (with a focus on his novel, Finch) serves as a touchstone for the burgeoning subgenre of fungalpunk. Fungalpunk clearly already exists, but hasn't been adequately defined, nor its works analysed, collated, or catalogued. This essay will serve such a purpose, exploring the history, variety, and evolution of fungal-inflected works.
It will explore examples of fungal horror, as well as texts that transcend the hostility of fruiting bodies. Other texts examined will include Premee Mohamed's The Annual Migration of Clouds, Sascha Stronach's The *Dawnhounds*, T. Kingfisher's *What Moves the Dead*, David Walton's *The Genius Plague*, Martin MacInnes' *Gathering Evidence*, and potentially more. Note that this paper is adapted from my essay entitled *A Genre Beneath Our Feet: Unearthing Fungalpunk*, to be published in Fungal Futures edited by Simon Bacon (2025).

Magdalena Dziurzyńska (University of Szczecin)

"Forgotten Futures or Failed Societies? Dystopian Separatism and Gendered Fears in 1920s Pulp"

The early twentieth century saw pulp magazines emerge as a dominant cultural medium, offering insights into societal tensions around gender and feminism during a time of profound social change. This paper examines three short stories by male authors published in 1920s pulp magazines: *The Last Man on Earth* by John D. Swain (Munsey's Magazine, 1923), *The Voice from the Inner World* by A. Hyatt Verrill (Amazing Stories, 1927), and *Last Man* by Wallace G. West (Amazing Stories, 1929). All three texts portray separatist, future female-only worlds as dystopian, critiquing feminist aspirations by presenting such societies as flawed and destructive. Through a close reading of these stories, the paper explores how pulp fiction reinforced patriarchal norms by framing female-dominated environments as cautionary tales against feminist ideologies. These narratives cast women as the architects of dysfunctional or oppressive societies, reducing their roles to antagonists who destabilize societal balance. The trope of the „last man" surviving in feminized dystopias reflects anxieties about shifting gender roles and male disempowerment, offering exaggerated warnings against the pursuit of gender equality. In contrast to feminist utopian works like *Mizora* (1880) and *Herland* (1915), which envisioned progressive, female-led societies, these pulp stories reveal a cultural backlash against feminist movements, particularly after women gained suffrage in 1920. By analyzing these largely forgotten texts, this paper situates pulp fiction within broader discussions of marginalized cultural artifacts and gendered power dynamics. It interrogates how speculative fiction of the period not only reflected but actively shaped societal attitudes toward feminism, highlighting the role of pulp magazines in perpetuating antifeminist discourses. This study contributes to the recovery of overlooked cultural texts, offering a critical lens on how speculative fiction responded to and resisted feminist progress during the early twentieth century.

Andrew Erickson (Schaufler Lab@TU Dresden)

"Railroading History: Mobilizing Afrofuturism to Reconstruct Past and Future Worlds"

My contribution demonstrates how Afrofuturism engages speculative history to resurface and reimagine aspects of the past to forge pathways to potential futures. By blending historical erasures with imaginative reconstructions, works like Colson Whitehead's 2016 *The Underground Railroad* challenge rigid frameworks of traditional historiography, which often marginalize or omit Black narratives. Instead, it embraces storytelling to infuse documented history with speculative elements to uncover what was lost or overlooked. Christina Sharpe's

concept of "wake work" underscores this approach, emphasizing how the past continually shapes the present and future. Sharpe highlights the need to confront "accumulated erasures, projections, fabulations, and misnamings" within archives that obscure Black experiences (Sharpe 12). Afrofuturism reclaims these absences, turning them into fertile ground for reimagining and constructing histories and futures of own making. The role of the speculative continues to be crucial to reclaiming this intellectual and material space. As Sigbørn Skåden (Sami) recently claimed, there's been a shift from (only) imagining future possibilities to (also) exploring alternate pasts. This reimagining reveals the constructed nature of historical narratives and opens space for revising the official hegemonic record. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's "potential history" resonates with this, focusing on the latent possibilities within overlooked or suppressed events (350). Afrofuturism exemplifies this speculative engagement with history, crafting alternative timelines that elevate Black voices and envision transformative futures. The Underground Railroad offers a powerful example, expanding the documented history of the Underground Railroad by reimagining it as an actual subterranean network. This speculative retelling deepens the historical narrative, shedding light on the ingenuity and resilience of those who resisted oppression. By blending fact with speculative fiction, Whitehead not only revisits the historical record but also foregrounds Black agency and innovation, offering a more expansive and nuanced lens through which to view both the past and potential futures. By reimagining the past through speculative history, Afrofuturism disrupts conventional narratives, reclaiming erased histories and envisioning new futures. It transforms historical gaps into opportunities for potential futures, asserting the continuous presence and influence of Black experiences in shaping the world.

Gözde Ersoy (Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University)

"The Intra-action of Otherworldly: Belgin Yücelen and Ray Nayler"

My paper will explore the weird and eerie qualities of Ray Nayler's *The Mountain in the Sea*, which at first instance, is classified as a science fiction novel for taking place in a future world setting dominated by AI and corporate power. The hyperintelligent and enigmatic octopus species in the center of the story causes a feeling of awe while limiting human comprehension with its decentralized and unknown life form. Moreover, while living in the eerie atmosphere of the deep ocean, the octopus – mountain in the sea — communicates with others through the bioluminescent patterns on skin. In their attempts to decode the language of the octopus, human and humanoid characters emerge from the process as something new through their acts of co-creation and intra-action. At this point, Karen Barad's "agential realism" theory functions as an entry point in the exploration of the weird and strange. Meanwhile, into the narrative discussion of Nayler's novel, the artwork interpretations of a Turkish-American multimedia artist, Belgin Yücelen, are added. Because in some of her symbolic and abstract

works that seem otherworldly, the less known artist similarly invites viewers to be active participants of their own consciousness. Yet, anthropocentric views of intelligence and self-awareness might be limiting in understanding the new and unknown. Therefore, through the thematic connection of existential unease, my paper aims to connect the intricately-woven invisible threads in the marginal works of artist Belgin Yücelen and writer Ray Nayler.

András Fodor (Independent)

"Weird Minor: the Literary Scales of the Habsburg Empire – Of Monsters and Space in the Fiction of Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz, and Stefan Grabiński"

The "weird" refers to a mode of literary inquiry that disrupts conventional understandings of time, space, and reality. Within speculative fiction, the weird challenges familiar narratives, offering alternative perspectives that invite us to reconsider our conceptions of identity and existence. While themes such as the construction and manipulation of space have often been overlooked in speculative fiction studies, weird literature compels us to examine these aspects in new ways. It presents a perspective that allows one "to see the inside from the perspective of the outside" (Fisher 2016, 10), revealing "the presence of that which does not belong" (Fisher 2016, 103, emphasis in original). A key feature of the weird is its ability to disrupt traditional binary systems and transcend conventional narratives. As Mark Fisher notes, the weird evokes a "fascination with the outside, […] which lies beyond standard perception, cognition, and experience" (Fisher 2016, 7). In this paper, I explore the themes of spatiality and monstrousness in the works of Habsburg-weird authors from the early 20th century, including Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz, and Stefan Grabiński. The concept of Habsburg-weird, shaped by the political and cultural realities of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, has yet to be fully explored. This paper proposes an interpretive framework that transcends the boundaries imposed by nationalism, examining the influence of Austria-Hungary on these authors' works. Drawing on Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, I argue that these authors' works function as examples of "minor literature," challenging dominant cultural narratives. Additionally, the paper incorporates Henri Lefebvre's and Edward W. Soja's theories of space, along with Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's Monster Theory, to analyse how spatial and monstrous imagery in these works critiques social and political structures.

Julia Gatermann (TU Dresden)

"Forgotten Bodies, Remembered Futures: Reclaiming Identity in Contemporary Speculative Fiction"

Contemporary speculative fiction offers a powerful venue for exploring the marginalized, forgotten, or erased elements of identity, embodiment, and history. This paper examines how Rivers Solomon's *The Deep* and N.K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy resurrect silenced narratives and neglected bodies to critique dominant Western frameworks of normativity, identity, and history. These texts engage with themes of memory, trauma, and transformation, situating bodies that are not legible within hegemonic frameworks of normativity as sites of resistance against systemic erasure and as conduits for reimagining inclusive futures. Drawing on Sylvia Wynter's critique of the colonial construction of „Man" as a Eurocentric and exclusionary category, this paper explores how speculative fiction redefines humanity through the lens of marginalized embodiments. In The Deep, the Wajinru's collective memory of the Middle Passage transforms pain into a source of community and resilience, envisioning a future grounded in relationality and resistance. Similarly, Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy portrays orogenes—figures both feared and exploited by their society—who transform their experiences of systemic violence and trauma into acts of creation, survival, and world-building. In both works, pain is reframed not as a marker of weakness but as a generative force that drives characters from a static "being stuck" in traumatic histories toward transformative action and agency. This analysis draws on Isiah Lavender III's concept of Afrofuturism as a methodology of empowerment (Afrofuturism Rising) and Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality to argue that Solomon and Jemisin reclaim marginalized bodies as integral to speculative futures.
The narratives illuminate how difference and diversity are not barriers but essential components of imagining equitable futures. Through close readings of Solomon and Jemisin, this paper argues that speculative fiction becomes a site of remembrance and reclamation, offering a vision of the future where pain and difference catalyze the emergence of more inclusive and just worlds.

Francis Gene-Rowe (Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton)

"In the Belly of the Monster: a Conversation on Monsters, Technology, and Speculative Fictions"
[ROUNDTABLE PANEL with Amy Cutler and David Ashford]

Now is a time for monsters. We take as underlying principle for this conversation the taxonomy-breaking, binary-dissolving plurality of monsters and monstrosity. Braidotti (2011) outlines monsters in relation to societal othering, divination, settler colonial science, and the cyber-teratological, while Tsing et al. (2017) state that "Monsters are the wonders of symbiosis and the threats of ecological disruption […] In all our heedless/vulnerable entanglements with more-than-human life, we humans too are monsters". Monsters have been used in the bordering of innocent subjects from evil not-subjects, a necropolitical project which burgeons to this day in Palestine and Congo. The horrors of progress and Enlightenment, of the nightmare myth of infinite growth from finite resources, of the hidden structures of hegemony, of fascism – these monstrous processes overlay ancient and crucial forms of monstrosity which, once revealed, collapse the constitutive myths of modernity (Haraway, 2018). We view monsters and the monstrous not solely as metaphors for the ruling episteme but also its hidden bedrock, clues to its viscera, as well as what it elides. We ask: what are we seeking to dissolve? What can we subvert, retell, seize back for ourselves? Which monsters and monstrosities are we seeking to conjure, invoke, build kinship with, with what forms of sympoesis, mythopoeisis, thinking, being?
Our discussion may touch on:
- Monsters as reflections of sociopolitical anxieties (SCP Foundation, The Backrooms).
- The role of technology and technoculture in marking and unmarking lives and deaths.
- Monstrous subjecthood as: othering, artificial subjecthood, against "the conceit of the individual" (Tsing et al.), 'aesthetic' (e.g. goblincore, rot girl), defiance against liberal recognition politics.
- Queer/aspirational/malfunctioning monstrosity, monster fucking.
- The time(s) of monsters. Histories of technology and technoculture, the monstrous spectrality of denied and cancelled futures.
- Biosphere monstrosity, technoculture monstrosity, their crosspollinations.
- Contamination and vulnerability (Tsing, 2015).
- De-extinction, beast-machines, species carnivalised (Bryld and Lykke, 2000). The primacy of the visual and what hides behind or is obscured or silenced by the visual bias of nature documentary.
- Orc poetry, goblin futures, etc.

Piotr Gorliński-Kucik (Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach**)**

"Poetry as a Method of Science Fiction Diagnosis"

If we understand science fiction as a way of thinking, a discourse, or a bundle of issues in which a futuristic chronotope serves mainly to critique the present, then – as we well know – it can occur not only in different genres of literary types, but also in different media. SF poetry is therefore possible (Suzette Haden Elgin), but this most often means either treating SF as poetry (e.g. the concept of Seo-Young Chu) or lyrical impressions (such as haiku). As a result, SF poetry is a marginalized discourse. Therefore, I would like to talk about two poetic volumes: *Nebula* (2020) by Anna Adamowicz and *Zakłady holenderskie* (2020) by Radosław Jurczak. Inspirations for both of them are linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, with its technological escalation, isolation and apocalyptic fears. They are therefore reactive in nature, yet they register some important social trends and concerns. In diagnosing elements of a tangled, science-fiction reality, they make use of the critical discourse characteristic of Polish contemporary poetry. These two volumes of poetry are a rarity in the landscape of Polish literature, and at the same time an excellent example of an unobvious combination of science-fiction speculation and poetic language, a combination that brings about an original critical discourse towards the themes trending in contemporary discourses.

Sarah Hamblin (University of Massachusetts Boston**)**

"Empty Metal's Invisible Revolution"

This paper explores the relationship between (in)visibility, revolution, and political cinema in Sweitzer and Khalil's speculative film, *Empty Metal* (USA 2018). Visibility has long been central to political action – for something to change we must first perceive the problem. Radical cinema, therefore, has historically focused on raising consciousness by making various systems of oppression visible to the spectator, who is then imagined to act based on this new awareness. In our contemporary moment, however, this belief no longer holds true. Our present is marked by an absence of radical energy, but not because we don't know what the problems are; every day we are confronted with fresh evidence of structural racism, capitalist exploitation, and political corruption, yet the large-scale, widespread resistance needed to force radical change is conspicuously absent. The problem is not that we don't know, it's that we don't care to know what we know. It is in this breakdown of the relationship between seeing, knowing, and acting that *Empty Metal* attempts to intervene by imagining a new revolutionary strategy based on three versions of invisibility. First, the film uses telepathy to imagine a new method of communication, one capable of overcoming the impasse between knowing and doing. Using the well-known murders of Trayvon Martin, Eric Garner, and Michael Brown as the starting point

for revolution but not mentioning the names of either the victims or their murderers, the film itself operates as a kind of telepathic communication that attempts to bridge the disconnect between the spectator's knowledge of injustice and inaction against it. Second, the film highlights the power of invisibility in a highly surveilled world. It underscores the hyper-visibility of marginalized people and the perpetual threat of state violence that characterizes such conspicuousness. By having three white musicians carry out the assassinations—characters whose race and class offer them the privilege of being able to move unseen and untracked by state power—the film rejects the visible performativity of the ally in favor of the clandestine action of the accomplice. Third, *Empty Metal* uses invisibility as a means of imagining wide-spread resistance in the contemporary moment. Here, the film takes its cues from the Invisible Party as it attempts to forge "impossible alliances" between seemingly antithetical political actors and connect all anti-capitalist action regardless of motivation. As such, the film speculates on the nature of contemporary revolution, imagining it not as an appreciable and ideologically coherent crusade but as a kind of disjointed and thus unacknowledged and anti-climactic decay, while at the same time centering sf as the form necessary for radical cinema to reconnect seeing with this kind of revolutionary doing.

Agnieszka Haska (Institute of Philosophy and Sociology, Polish Academy of Sciences / SF_PL research team at IKP UW)

"In the Year 2000. Visions of the Future in the Public Discourse of the Second Polish Republic"

The main idea of restoration of Poland's sovereignty as the Second Polish Republic in 1918 was to build an independent and powerful country and gain respect (and fear) on the international level. The public discourse and political culture of interwar Poland came to be structured not only by a certain imagination goal but also by a particular set of science-fiction and speculative fantasies about modern futures, even as distant as the 21st century. These projects of imagined future obviously can best be seen in the interwar science-fiction literature, but are also widely present in – often overlooked in academic research – articles in daily newspapers, polemics and even parliamentary speeches. In my paper I will present which visions of the future dominated the mass imagination shaped by public discourse of the Second Polish Republic, asking how they were connected to wider contexts – or had only local impact and shape.

Felipe Hernandez Vallejo (Independent)

"The Baroque Future of Latin America: A Model for Reading Latin American Science Fiction based on the Ideas of Bolivar Echeverría"

For the past three decades, critical studies on science fiction produced in Latin America have grown steadily, driven by the massification of narratives of the genre in media such as film, television and comics. The advent of Internet and social media fostered a surge of new followers, readers and academics from all over the world interested in learning about the literary production of science fiction created beyond the Anglo-Saxon canon, which contributed to the creation of channels of dialogue and multidisciplinary discussion groups aimed to establish a formal field of literary and cultural research. This multidisciplinary approach and the incipient interest of hegemonic circles of literary criticism in niche literature - science fiction, horror, weird - have allowed the development of new ways of approaching texts, embracing the epistemological heritage of Anglo-Saxon literary criticism, but seeking local perspectives that provide a much more holistic view, not only of science fiction stories but also of their authors, their communities and their consumers. It is at this point of contact that this paper is written: by applying the concepts of modernity, identity and historical ethe found in the work of mexican philosopher Bolívar Echeverría, the aim is to create a framework of observation from Latin American Marxist theory that will provide new perspectives of analysis for science fiction narratives in the region, especially with regard to the transgenerational tradition of the Latin-American short story, using as an example three contemporary short stories found in the anthology *El Tercer Mundo Después del Sol* (The Third World After the Sun, 2021)

Karoline Huber (Ruhr-University Bochum))

"Coming-of-Mind in 'Water'"

This presentation investigates generational tensions in the environmental indigenous SF short story *Water* (2014) by Aboriginal Australian author Ellen van Neerven, by reading it as a coming-of-mind narrative. Despite winning serval Australian literary awards, the collection Heat and Light in which this story appears is still under-researched outside of Australian academia. The story follows Kaden, a young indigenous woman working for the government delivering so-called formula to the newly discovered plant people, a species that was found on the construction site of 'Australia2'- an island meant to host indigenous Australians. As Kaden develops a relationship with the plant person Larapinta, she discovers that the formula she has been delivering to the plant people is actually supposed to weaken and kill the species, which makes her question governmental authority. While the story has been read as a Bildungsroman,

my presentation will show that it is also what Heather Houser calls a "coming-of-mind narrative," a story where the formation of identity is reversed as their identity is remade due to gaps in their preexisting knowledge about environmental destruction (61). Discovering that the plant people are her own ancestors, and that she has been contributing to their uprooting and displacement, Kaden becomes an activist defending her ancestors and their land from the government. The short story engages with the generational conflict in environmental destruction, as is the case with many climate fiction texts. However, it does so not by looking towards future generations but backwards at generations past by calling Kaden's ancestors back to life in the shape of the plant people. It not only recalls the colonial past of Australia, but also functions as an analogy for environmental destruction.

Sebastian Imoberdorf (Université de Fribourg / Universität Freiburg)

"What We Should(n't) Touch. Weird Fusions & Body Horror in 'El Gusano' by Luis Carlos Barragán Castro"

Since the publication of *El Gusano* (The Worm, 2018), Luis Carlos Barragán Castro has established himself as one of the most daring and provocative voices in contemporary Colombian literature. In this experimental novel, the narrative explores a surreal phenomenon that unfolds in 1997: human skin ceases to act as a boundary, allowing individuals to merge physically and share traits through mere touch. This concept is exemplified by the Colombian protagonist, César, and Sara, a young Syrian girl, who undergo such a transformative fusion. This talk seeks to analyze , *El Gusano* within a dual theoretical framework encompassing the *New Weird* (VanderMeer 2008; Miéville 2009; Noys & Murphy 2016; Quigley 2017; Greve & Zappe 2019; Fernández Giordano & Sanchiz 2022) and *Body Horror* (Folio & Luhning 2014; Aldana Reyes 2024). The analysis is structured into three key dimensions:
a. Between Arabfuturism, Orientalism (Said 1978), and Colombian Sci-Fi (Bastidas Pérez in López-Pellisa 2021): The fusion between César and Sara signifies not only a physical transformation but also a cultural hybridization of Latin American and Arab identities. This section examines whether the novel's depiction of these interwoven futures leans toward orientalist representations or disrupts them through an authentic synthesis of visions.
b. Inter-Species Fusions and Posthumanism: Barragán Castro transcends human-to-human and cultural amalgamations, introducing inter-species and techno-human fusions emblematic of (T)ec(hn)ological Posthumanism (Imoberdorf 2025). This section explores exemplary instances where humans merge with animal forms or modern technologies, expanding the boundaries of identity and corporeality.
c. The Politics of Body Horror (Barragán Castro 2024): While the novel employs body horror, it does so not merely to evoke fear but to articulate a political statement. This reimagining of horror emphasizes political equality within individuality, asserting that the notion of "the other" is ultimately a construct.

Dominik Jaszczuk (University of Warsaw)

"A Planet Made of Flesh. The (Cosmic) Horror of the Meat Industry in Meat Madness (2022)"

Meat Madness, a video game created by three anonymous developers known under the pseudonyms dukegoobler, hl__ur, and Noodle1234, imagines a future in which scientists discover that the dwarf planet Ceres is not an ordinary celestial body, but, in fact, a giant living organism. Having already exhausted virtually all of Earth's resources and consequently facing famine on a global scale, humanity has no choice but to, as the creators themselves phrase it, "feast upon the planet's flesh," and thus a corporation called IngestiCorp launches a space operation to extract meat from Ceres. The player controls a rescuer who has been tasked with finding the members of one of the harvesting expeditions, with whom all contact has been lost. As it turns out, the planet-creature drove the missing crew insane and then forcibly absorbed them into its biomass. Using the concept of the industrial sublime as framed by Jonathan Bate and Brian Black, as well as referencing an array of works representing the scholarship on sublimity, animal studies, ludology, and horror, I argue that *Meat Madness* employs cosmic horror to undermine the capitalist perception of industrialized meat production as a sign of human progress. By depicting the non-human animal subject as an unimaginable and incomprehensible alien entity that devours those who attempt to exploit it, the game shows that the meat industry will eventually lead to humanity's downfall—not only because it is ecologically unsustainable, but also because it perpetuates the systemic oppression of both human and non-human animals. It effectively blurs the line between human and non-human animals, or, more precisely, between human animals, who are not to be consumed, and non-human animals, who are to be slaughtered and later consumed.

Joanna Kaniewska (University of Warsaw)

"Death to the Holy – The Satanic Speculation of Zeal & Ardor"

"What if the slaves of the Deep South had turned to Satan instead of God?" (Robertson) For avant-garde metal band Zeal & Ardor, it is more than a simple hypothetical question. In their first three albums (*Devil Is Fine* [2016], *Stranger Fruit* [2018], and *Zeal & Ardor* [2022]), the band led by Manuel Gagneaux, a Swiss-American multi-instrumentalist and producer, travels back to the times of slavery in the Deep American South. The albums imagine a world where Black slaves decide to reject the Christian credo imposed on them by their oppressors and embrace the ultimate figure of rebellion: the Devil himself. The Satanist turn becomes then a nexus point (Hellekson), a point of birth of an alternate African American history. While the collaborative effort of Gagneaux, his band, and his audience could be easily dismissed as yet another example of postmodern "historicism" (Jameson), *Zeal & Ardor's* Satanic uchronia

deserves the academic scholar attention as a significant manifestation of the complicated intersection of contemporary Western politics of race, class, and nationalities. This paper will focus on the speculative aspect of their music, expressed through various lyrical, aural, and paratextual tools. It will identify and analyze the elements constructing Gagneaux's alternate history, such as his unique blend of black metal with African American spiritual, gospel, and blues (Clough; Spracklen); his extensive use of Occult references and Latin quotations in the lyrics; and the off-modern Afropessimism that informs a substantial part of *Zeal & Ardord's* oeuvre (Peters). It will also place the Satanic uchronia trilogy in the broader cultural contexts: both of contemporary metal culture (Clough; Spracklen) and of the speculations that blend history with fiction (Hellekson; Southgate; Thiess; Yaszek).

Ciarán Kavanagh (Ghent University)

"In Search of Awe: The Lost Affect of SF Studies"

The emotion of awe is a critical component of science fiction, intrinsic to the genre's bearing towards the future, to its ability to craft interesting, human narratives from stories whose scale far exceeds The human, that spans, for example, the planetary, the generational, the cosmic, and the temporal. While awe is intrinsic to SF's popular appeal, it has received scant attention within SF Studies. This is broadly due to the association of the related sense of wonder concept with SF fandom and Fantasy, from which early academic critics sought to differentiate both themselves and the genre. For example, before the academic field of SF Studies, fan-turned-critic Damon Knight heralded awe's importance in his 1956 In Search of Wonder. By 1979, however, SF Studies founding critic, Darko Suvin, had proclaimed the sense of wonder concept to be "superannuated . . . due for a deserved retirement" (83). This attitude largely continues into today: Nicholls and Robu's (2024) Science Fiction Encyclopedia entry for 'sense of wonder' relates its experiencing to the naivety of younger readers. It is less suited, they suggest, to more sophisticated eyes. With the notable exceptions of work by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay and China Miéville, this is representative of a wider trend of curiously cursory disregardings of an emotion that SF fans, creators, readers and writers have by no means turned Their back on. In this paper, I argue that awe is a lost critical focus of SF Studies. This paper performs two situatings: first, I contextualise the sense of wonder within SF Studies' historic concern with the seriousness of the genre, which extends to the experiencing body of the SF reader. Secondly, I situate a sense of wonder within the wider tradition of Awe Studies, and thus to wider awe emotions like the sublime and dread.

Michał Klata (University of Warsaw)

"Food for Thought: of Worldbuilding and Cookbooks in Transmedia Storyworlds"

Cookbooks are perhaps the most under-researched element of transmedia storyworlds. The largely neglected medium has its own, singular affordances, with new means of immersion in the fictional world, part book, and part a set of practices infusing everyday life with ideas from works of science fiction and fantasy. The analysis employs the perspective guiding Colin Harvey's research on transmedia universes, and extends it to the new medium, investigating the tools used by the authors to supplement, extend, or modify elements of the canon. Examples from *The Witcher Official Cookbook, Fallout: The Vault Dweller's Official Cookbook*, and T*he Unofficial Lord of the Rings Cookbook* are used to illustrate issues concerning coherence, canonicity, policies of franchises, and strategies that can be used to add elements which are not usually associated with cookbooks but contribute to world-building, such as the frame narrative of a traveler, roaming the lands of the Witcher universe collecting recipes.

Przemysław Kordos (University of Warsaw)

"Apousia. The Curious Case of Modern Greek Science Fiction"

Lucian of Samosata, often considered one of the forefathers of science fiction, was a Syrian who wrote in Greek. His texts have inspired numerous modern proto-fantastic authors worldwide. Surprisingly, speculative fiction has never truly flourished in the Greek language and remains on the periphery of contemporary Greek literature. Although a substantial body of science fiction texts is available in Greek, it consists almost exclusively of translations of foreign works, including those by renowned authors such as Stanisław Lem and Andrzej Sapkowski. Consequently, the local Greek science fiction scene remains minimal and peripheral. This presentation addresses the notable scarcity – or even absence – of original science fiction within contemporary Modern Greek literature. It offers a concise overview of the current landscape, highlighting works by local authors such as M. Markopoulos (Άρης [Mars], 2021), U. Foskolou (Ήσυχα να πας [Go Calmly], 2022), M. Dimitriadis (Κατάβαση [Descent], 2021), and the recently acclaimed M. Albatis (Και οι νεκροί ας θάψουν τους νεκρούς τους [And Let the Dead Bury Their Dead], 2022). The exploration focuses on how speculative fiction in Greece operates at the margins of the mainstream, appearing primarily as „side projects" by established authors, through tentative interactions with Greece's dynamic comics scene, and in literature produced by the Greek diaspora, notably the English-language short stories by N. Theodoridou. Finally, the presentation proposes hypotheses regarding this phenomenon – the intriguing coexistence of domestic scarcity and foreign abundance within Modern Greek speculative fiction.

Gabriela Kozakiewicz (University of Warsaw)

"Beyond the Genre, Gender, Genus and Greece: Vassilis Vassilikos' „The Plant" and the Speculative Exercises in 'Making Kin'"

In a literary landscape where any attempt to break with the realistic poetics puts a text at the risk of being dismissed as 'paraliterature' (cf. Παρίνης 2007), Vassilis Vassilikos' Trilogy (1961) stands out as a bold and fascinating work. While not entirely unknown to the scholars of Modern Greek prose, these early novels of Vassilikos' have largely been overlooked outside Greece and among the speculative fiction researchers. By bringing the first part of the Trilogy, *The Plant* (Το Φύλλο), into the spotlight, this paper argues for its inclusion into the speculative family. Labelled by critics as 'experimental,' 'symbolic,' or 'postmodern,' *The Plant* defies traditional genre boundaries and invites a reimagining of its place within speculative traditions. This paper reconsiders *The Plant* through an interdisciplinary lens that combines ecocriticism, posthumanist thought and queer theory. The portrayal of the protagonist's evolving, intimate relationship with the eponymous plant calls for an interpretation that foregrounds Lazaros' longing for more-than-human kinship, prompting him to transgress not only heteronormative sexuality, but also fundamental assumptions regarding both human and plant beings. Grounded in the theories of Donna Haraway (2016) and the posthuman thinkers she has inspired, the following analysis situates Vassilikos' narrative as a speculative exercise in abandoning the anthropocentric perspective in favor of cross-species alliances. Consequently, this paper argues that *The Plant* defies more than just genre expectations or even traditional views of gender and sexuality – it questions the very notion of the human and its place within the environment. In the spirit of 'making kin,' this paper situates *The Plant* within a transnational dialogue alongside more recent speculative(?) plant fictions, including Ángelo Néstore's *Desfloración*, Dominika Słowik's *Wegetacja*, and Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*. By tracing affinities across time and geography, this paper demonstrates how the urge to speculate about the vegetal being and human-plant relationships transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries, constituting a truly global phenomenon.

Stanisław Krawczyk (University of Wrocław)

"Speculative Polishness: How Authors of Middle-Brow Literature Use Fantastika in Poland" [ROUNDTABLE PANEL]

Until about 2010, fantasy, SF, and horror stories were generally classified in Poland as a very particular kind of fiction – good-selling, perhaps, but low-prestige and addressed strictly at a specific group of readers. Recently, however, elements of these genres have been adopted by writers who are not normally identified as authors of fantastika. Examples include Remigiusz Mróz's *Chór zapomnianych głosów* (*The Choir of Forgotten Voices*, published in Polish in 2014),

Ziemowit Szczerek's *Siwy Dym* (*The Gray Smoke*, 2018), Jakub Żulczyk's *Czarne słońce* (*The Black Sun*, 2019), Agnieszka Szpila's *Heksy* (*Hexes*, 2021), and Max Cegielski's *Nazywam się Czogori* (*My Name Is Chogori*, 2022).

These novels represent a wider trend in Polish literature that we have preliminarily called 'the imaginative turn' (drawing from the French term "les littératures de l'imaginaire"). In this turn, the speculative becomes an element of the so-called mainstream, ceasing to be recognised as a marker of any particular genre (e.g., science fiction). That can happen in mass-market fiction, but it can also happen in middle-brow literature, which is written for broad and diverse audiences while aiming at literary prestige as well. This process can clearly be seen in Poland but it also appears to occur in other countries – for instance, in France with Hervé Le Tellier's *L'Anomalie* (*The Anomaly*, 2020) or in Chile with Nona Fernández' *La dimensión desconocida* (*The Twilight Zone*, 2016). Possible explanations of the imaginative turn include specific qualities of the speculative, through which writers can employ the effect of cognitive estrangement to discuss important social issues, and the 'acceleration' of contemporary reality which makes science fiction 'the realism of our times,' to quote Kim Stanley Robinson.

This use of the speculative in literature has long been described with regard to speculative fiction written in the US and the UK – for instance, in the discussions of SF as a genre and as a mode. Here we want to look at how the imaginative turn plays out specifically in Poland, and for this purpose we propose a roundtable panel involving different perspectives on Polish literature. In the introduction, we will suggest a conceptualization deriving from Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems theory (as employed by Franco Moretti and developed further by Andrew Milner and J. R. Burgmann), and from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field. Afterwards, a moderator from KŚW – Komisja Światów Wyobrażonych (the Committee of Imagined Worlds, University of Warsaw) and four panelists will offer distinct perspectives on this transformative trend. The panel will take 90 minutes: 70 minutes of roundtable discussion followed by 20 minutes for audience questions.

The panelists will include:
1. Literary critic, asked to analyze the imaginative turn from outside the speculative discourse (name still to be confirmed).
2. Max Cegielski, author of middle-brow literature, asked to comment on their use of the speculative in their work.
3. Magdalena Salik, recognized writer of speculative fiction, asked to offer an insider's perspective on the imaginative turn.
4. Małgorzata Gałysz-Wróbel, publisher, asked to reflect on the economic and cultural shifts driving the turn.

The discussion will examine the growing genre hybridity within the Polish literary field, asking why speculative elements are increasingly present in middle-brow literature and what this signals about shifting prestige hierarchies. The panel will consider the lingering stigma

attached to speculative fiction, the role of literary awards in validating or marginalizing works, and the strategies of publishers in navigating new readership markets. Finally, we will analyze how middle-brow authors, writing for diverse groups of readers, use the speculative as a narrative strategy to engage with contemporary Polish realities, criticizing national and societal problems as well as delivering and subverting patriotic tropes.

Szymon Piotr Kukulak (AGH University of Kraków**)**

"Beyond Tarkovsky's Solaris.
Early Film Adaptations of Stanisław Lem's Novels in the Eastern Bloc"

Although Stanisław Lem remains probably the only globally recognizable Polish science fiction writer up to date, his works have rarely been successfully adapted into films. In particular, Cold War-era adaptations made on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain remain all but unknown today, overshadowed by Western-made post-1991 movies, like Soderbergh's *Solaris* (2002) or Folman's *The Congress* (2013), with a notable exception of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972). The paper would examine two earliest of those largely forgotten adaptations, both predating the period of detante: GDR-made (with Polish cooperation) *Der schweigende Stern* [*The Silent Star*] by Kurt Maetzig (1960) and Czechoslovakian *Ikarie XB-1* by Jindřich Polák (1963), based on two earliest of Lem's science fiction novels: *The Astronauts* (1951) and *The Magellanic Cloud* (1955), respectively. The paper focuses on how contemporary political landscape affected both screenplays, specifically: the way the source material (itself influenced by Stalinist censorship) was transformed, in order to better comform to realities of the 1960s, replacing pre-Thaw geopolitical vision of the future (as in the originals) with , peaceful coexistence' paradigm of Krushchev's era. In addition, notable choices of film creators would be pointed out in regard to the visuals, important as case studies of how Eastern Bloc science fiction imagery of the future was being made, e.g. relatively extensive usage of local landscape (Tatra mountaints in *The Silent Star*) or real-life cutting-edge technology (e.g. an iconic Korean War-era MiG-51 fighter that was, cast' in Maetzig's movie, as the most, futuristic' aircraft available).
In broader context, the aim of the presentation would be to show how the general vision of the communist-led future of mankind, somewhat unlike its variant presented in the books (Lem was known to despise Maetzig's film), differed in content and poetics from the one that prevailed: the one present in the Western science fiction cinema of the era.

Fryderyk Kwiatkowski (AGH University of Kraków)

"From Arcane Texts to Streaming Platforms: Gnosticism in Recent Sci-Fi TV Shows"

Over the past few decades, there has been a surge in pop culture texts reflecting ideas linked to Gnosticism – philosophical-religious movements from late antiquity that remained suppressed and largely forgotten until the mid-nineteenth century. Many of them shared a creation myth featuring a bad world creator, or creators, who fashion a fake reality, our cosmos, and imprison human beings within to feed on their life-giving component. In my talk, I will analyze how a group of recent TV series, e.g. *Silo, Severance, Westworld,* and *Black Mirror*, reinterpret the Gnostic myth. In the first part, I will draw on relevant passages from programmatic Gnostic texts such as the Apocryphon of John to outline key elements of Gnostic cosmology. Next, I will show how specific components of the TV shows' fictional worlds invoke the discussed features, focusing on the distinction between the diegetic primary world (true reality) and the hypodiegetic secondary world (fake reality), along with specific elements such as geography, history, and physics, world-ruling entities (e.g., demons), and the means by which imprisoned beings are kept in ignorance of their condition (e.g., memory manipulation). In the final part, I will explore key differences between Gnostic cosmology and the storyworlds of the TV series, illustrating how the latter reinterprets the former to diagnose our contemporary spiritual and political crises.

Sarah Lohmann (ETH Zurich)

"'Rocks have their dreams, and the earth changes': Dream Space, Feminist Cognition and Trans-Corporeality in Ursula K. Le Guin's The Lathe of Heaven and N. K. Jemisin's The Fifth Season"

In my paper, I will explore Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* and N. K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* as representative of a form of quasi-postapocalyptic science-fictional climate fiction (cli-fi) that responds to the climate crisis with a literary form of posthumanist 'trans-corporeality', a feminist mode of embodied connectedness put forward by Stacey Alaimo that marks the 'material interchanges between bodies (both human and nonhuman) and the wider environment' (Alaimo, *Bodily Natures*, p. 16). However, I suggest that this trans-corporeality here affects not just embodiment but cognition: it employs the science-fictional mechanism of cognitive estrangement to paradoxically reshape along feminist lines what cognition itself might look like, allowing the reader to inhabit other forms of knowledge and perception to imagine a way out of the climate catastrophe. This reading stands in tension with the 'hyperobject' view of climate change (Timothy Morton) and draws, for example, on Jennifer Mae

Hamilton and Astrida Neimanis' concept of 'weathering' as carrying racist injustice within the body and mind, Ritch Calvin's writings on the feminist epistemology of feminist SF, and Lynn Margulis' work on microorganisms for the Gaia hypothesis. In particular, I want to show how Jemisin and Le Guin make use of dream space to put forward a type of personalised embodied cognition, deeply connected with the non-human other in a rhizomatic mode, that subverts SF genre conventions to challenge both Enlightenment-era hierarchical thought and the 'social thermostat' view of contemporary cli-fi.

Christina Lord (University of North Carolina Wilmington)

"The Space Opera Nostalgia Regime in French Comics Valérian et Laureline"

This study delves into the significant yet often overlooked influence of the French science fiction comic series *Valérian et Laureline* (1967-2010) by Pierre Christin and Jean-Claude Mézières. My argument posits that the first volume of the comics reimagines the space opera. *Valérian et Laureline* not only revitalizes this "American" subgenre from the 1930s to 1950s by embedding socio-political critique in its narratives. It also challenges the nostalgia regime – to expand on Fredric Jameson's notion of the nostalgia film – prevalent in 1960s France. Christin and Mézières offer a series of comics that transcend mere escapism and nostalgia for a supposedly simpler time by juxtaposing futuristic, interplanetary adventures with careful reflections on postwar French nationalism and oppressive systems of power. Their innovative approach, particularly through the female protagonist Laureline, subverts traditional gender roles and aligns with the progressive ethos of New Wave science fiction and, later, New Space Opera. Ultimately, by putting the French comics in dialogue with their visual successor of the 1977 Star Wars, this study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of science fiction's cross-cultural dynamics, emphasizing the importance of marginalized and understudied works in the evolution of sf.

Katarzyna Lubawa (Kazimierz Wielki University)

"Love Kills with Flowers: The Trope of Hanahaki Disease"

Fanfiction is a well-known practice and important part of participatory culture. Yet it often remains unseen beyond the social aspect of fans' engagement and affect toward the source material. As more of fan-made narrative tropes are used as marketing labels for original fiction, it is worth exploring the worldbuilding aspects of fanworks. This paper aims to bring attention to the Hanahaki Disease, one of the prominent narrative tropes unrelated to

a specific fandom. The term hanahaki comes from the Japanese words „hana" (花) meaning „flower" and „hakimasu" (吐きます) meaning „to throw up", which provides a vivid description of the symptoms caused by unrequited love. The concept of this deadly disease leading to growing flowers in one's lungs is examined by implementing two interpretative frameworks of body horror and plant turn in contemporary humanities. The "writing in the margins," as Henry Jenkins defines fanworks, therefore takes on a new shape allowing to shift focus from the relationship between reader/writer and the source material to one between reader/ writer and their experience of reality that is reconstructed in fanfiction while still providing satisfying narratives ensuing from fans interpretation and criticism. The Hanahaki Disease trope serves as an instrument of exploration of cultural notions of love, body autonomy, and environmental issues leading to the creation of a new space for fanfiction authors to express their perspectives, fears or desires, beyond the interaction with existing characters or fictional worlds. The paper seeks to uncover this marginalized layer of fanworks and to open a new discussion around storytelling in fanfiction.

Weronika Łaszkiewicz (University of Białystok)

"Visions of Indigenous Resurgence in the Works of Catherine Knutsson, Cherie Dimaline, and Waubgeshig Rice"

Gathered under the umbrella term of Indigenous Futurisms, the various speculative narratives produced by contemporary Indigenous writers subvert the dominant Western-centric modes of thinking and invite Anglo-American readers to consider other futures that could unfold in the wake of apocalyptic cataclysms. In these scenarios, the collapse of settler-colonial states facilitates the rebirth of Indigenous communities which rise from the ruins of Western civilization and strive to reclaim their sovereignty. The Indigenous and Métis protagonists of these narratives are individuals whose fight for physical survival in a devastated world is inextricably entwined with their retrieval of their ethnic identity. The aim of the following paper is to examine selected works by contemporary Indigenous writers—Catherine Knutsson (Métis), Cherie Dimaline (Georgian Bay Métis community), and Waubgeshig Rice (Anishinaabe from the Wasauksing First Nation)—via the theoretical lens of Indigenous survivance, resistance, and resurgence provided by the research of Gerald Vizenor and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Vizenor, an Anishinaabe scholar and writer, unmasks the multifaceted misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in the mainstream culture and develops the notion of survivance as a mode of resistance to cultural distortion and erasure. Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg writer and artist, explores, in *As We Have Always Done* (2017), the positionality of modern Indigenous individuals and their retrieval of identities, ancestral connections, and traditional lifeways. When read in the context of Vizenor's and Simpson's research, the novels by Knutsson, Dimaline, and Rice become, arguably, literary manifestos of Indigenous resilience and rebirth.

Jerry Määttä (Stockholm University)

"When Winter Doesn't Come:
Climate Change in Contemporary Swedish Mainstream Dystopias"

Since the turn of the millennium, a large number of Swedish mainstream authors have turned to dystopias and science fiction to discuss future threats and challenges against Swedish society. While the topics and scenarios range from civil war and pandemics to artificial intelligence, surveillance, immigration, xenophobia, and radically changed gender roles, the aim of this paper is to discuss some of the dystopias dealing with climate change, and how Swedish mainstream authors have imagined and depicted the near-future effects of the ongoing Earth system transformation. Focusing on a relatively large number of novels and short story collections published in recent years – such as Conny Palmqvist's *Vintern* (*The Winter*, 2016), Nils Håkanson's *Ödmården* (*The Backwoods*, 2017), Hanna Rut Carlsson's *Sista hösten i Legoland* (*The Last Autumn in Legoland*, 2019), Jesper Weithz's 2020: *En framtidsoptimistisk roman* (2020: *A Future-Optimistic Novel*, 2020), Jens Liljestrand's *Även om allt tar slut* (*Even if Everything Ends*, 2021), Anna Dahlquist's *Det är tropiska nätter nu* (*It's Tropical Nights Now*, 2021), Jonas Gren's *Kromosomparken* (*The Chromosome Park*, 2022), Johanna Holmström's *Handbok i klardrömmar* (*Handbook of Lucid Dreaming*, 2022), Erik Hågård's *Ursinnet* (*The Rage*, 2023), and Niklas Rådström's *Drömmarna vi tillsammans drömmer* (*The Dreams We Dream Together*, 2024) – the paper explores what kinds of scenarios are portrayed, how climate change is depicted narratively and stylistically, the varying focus on ecosystems, societal and psychological effects, and how all this is related to the narrative strategies and interests of science fiction proper. Whereas climate change has been a fairly popular topic in Swedish literary fiction in the last decade, this body of works has rarely been acknowledged as a subgenre of its own, and has practically never been discussed in relation to science fiction and its particular narrative strategies.

Karolina Madoń (University of Warsaw)

"Hauntology of Liminal Spaces in Dreamcore (2025)"

Produced by an Argentinian indie game studio, Montraluz, *Dreamcore* is a psychological horror video game building on the concept of the liminal spaces internet aesthetic, which utilizes empty and transitional spaces entwined with feelings of uncertainty and nostalgia. The player occupies a disembodied first-person point of view, seeing the world through a VHS-like filter, walking through a human-absent environment consisting of an unknown number of uncanny yet familiar spaces, such as pool units or suburban houses. *Dreamcore* evokes a sense of both the absence and presence of the human, circling in a world of hauntingly familiar landscapes

with no possible escape. To analyze the video game, I apply Mark Fisher's theoretical frameworks of hauntology, an expanded Derridiean concept developed in the context of the twenty-first century's rapid cultural and technological transformations. Along Fisher's logic, the societal present time is a combination of past, present, and future – the specter of the past, which never dies and does not allow to accommodate capitalist realism, permeates the present along with the haunting remains of the lost future due to the unfulfilled promises of neoliberal capitalism. Utilizing both the eerie horror and the aesthetic of liminal spaces evoking nostalgia and melancholy, *Dreamcore* allows one to acknowledge the failures of the past and present and opens the possibility of imagining alternative futures.

Sean Matharoo (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

"Toward a Library of Elsewhere:
Maghrebian Francophone Speculative Fiction"

This paper conceptualizes Maghrebian francophone speculative fiction as an interruption of the mode's utopian/dystopian dialectic through three case studies. First, Algerian author Mohammed Dib's novel *Qui se souvient de la mer* (1962) meta-allegorizes the Algerian revolution in the wanderings of a nameless theorist in an unnamed city besieged by fantastic forces and surrounded by a once-rejuvenating sea that perpetually recedes, leading the narrator to go underground to study its structures that mirror those aboveground. Second, Moroccan Amazigh author Mohammed Khaïr-Eddine's novel *Agadir* (1967) meta-allegorizes post-independence Morocco in the fragmentary writings of a nameless poet and civil servant tasked with surveying the bitter survivors of the 1960 Agadir earthquake, plunging the narrator into an existential crisis that leads him to desert the city's ruins and wander without nation-states, to build on emptiness. Third, French-Jewish-Tunisian author Albert Memmi's novel *Le scorpion ou la confession imaginaire* (1969) meta-allegorizes the process of Tunisian independence in the disillusioned ophthalmologist-narrator's attempts to understand why his writer-brother disappeared through the study of texts and photos he left behind, which commences a wandering polygraphic essay of speculations on the science/ideology dialectic. By bringing these texts into alignment and drawing on modern French philosophy—with a focus on French-Jewish-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida—I demonstrate that Maghrebian francophone speculative fiction posits an "elsewhere" that magnetizes a process without a subject (i.e., history) to at once destroy the past logic of anthropological difference and invent the future ex nihilo. The dominant effect of this magnetization process is wandering in place, or speculating on the contingency conditioning materiality in language. Emphasizing the symbology and rhetoric of these novels, I then bring this relentlessly unstable nominalism that formalizes a nonhuman ecology into dialogue with solarities in the energy humanities, suggesting that the speculation authorized by the elsewhere is an expenditure of renewable energy.

Yauheniya Mc Daniel (University of Warsaw)

"From 'Women' to Humans: Corporeal Metaphors of Oppression and Resistance in Before She Sleeps by Bina Shah"

Hélène Cixous's 1975 manifesto, *The Laugh of the Medusa*, remains deeply relevant today. In a recent interview discussing women's protests in Iran, Cixous observed that men often obscure women by placing veils over them, effectively rendering them invisible, "like phantoms." She noted that her concept of Medusa, which defies the stigmatization and silencing of women, holds significance within Muslim cultural contexts, where veiling serves as both a literal and symbolic metaphor for control. Referring to Cixous's theory, I explore the „veiled" reality and complex struggles of women in a dystopian Pakistan as envisioned by Bina Shah, a critically acclaimed Pakistani feminist writer. This presentation argues that, despite the rigid, objectifying metaphors perpetuated by patriarchal discourse, contemporary feminist authors like Bina Shah in *Before She Sleeps* reimagine and challenge fixed narratives surrounding women's bodies, sexuality, and selfhood. Drawing on Cixous's écriture féminine and conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), I examine how Shah's metaphors navigate the intersections of Islamic cultural norms and global gendered oppression. The novel's dystopian vision of a veiled and controlled society becomes a site for unveiling insights into women's corporeal resistance and agency. By situating Shah's work within both feminist theory and Muslim cultural discourses, I argue that her narrative dismantles oppressive structures while foregrounding the transformative potential of women's embodied experiences.

Matin Nikookar Ardestani (University of Warsaw)

"Selling Today as Tomorrow: Neom, or Speculative Urban Dystopia"

When "it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism," speculative imaginaries reinforce the structures of the present; NEOM is a case in point. Described as a "start-up the size of a country," NEOM is a massive urban project in northwest Saudi Arabia designed to feature, among other developments, a 170-kilometer-long linear city, a floating port, and an inverted skyscraper embedded within a mountain. This techno-utopian project is articulated through science fiction modalities, constructing a narrative of ecological harmony, cutting-edge technology, and social progress operated by robots and artificial intelligence. Beneath this seemingly utopian surface, however, lies the concealment and perpetuation of present-day exploitation and subjugation. This paper examines NEOM's promotional material as speculative media. It analyzes the appropriation of science fictional aesthetics and speculative imaginaries within NEOM's narrative and visual strategies and the ideological, political, and economic functions they fulfill. Contextualizing these media artifacts within Saudi Arabia's

regional and domestic dynamics, the paper interrogates how solarpunk motifs and speculative imagery serve to legitimize a project that oscillates between a tangible development and a speculative dream, while masking exploitative labor practices, ecological contradictions, and neoliberal ideologies. This paper contends that by constructing a speculative future steeped in the ideologies of the present, NEOM perpetuates systemic relations of exploitation, domination, and subjugation inherent to neoliberal rationality and technocratic modes of governance, repackaging them as utopian progress. Drawing on scholarship across disciplines, it emphasizes how neoliberal speculative media define the confines of public imagination by positing the present's continuity as the only possible future, rendering alternative socioeconomic orders unimaginable, even in techno-utopian visions.

Grzegorz Nogal (Independent)

"Speculative Fiction and Aviation in Early 20th Century Poland"

I would like to examine how the Polish speculative fiction of the first decades of the 20th century reacted to the invention of an airplane. While the fictional (and also speculative) representations of the ballooning existed in Polish literature since the late 18th century, the technical progress gave rise to more genre fiction. The connections of early aviation in Poland with speculative fiction can be visible with the Polish word for invention being attributed to the science fiction writer and so-called "Polish Verne" of the time – Władyslaw Umiński in his novel *In Plane Around the World*. The specultative short stories were also included in the specialist aviation press that sprung as early as 1909 when the first air shows started in Poland. Some writers saw the new invention as a harbinger of a more connected world. The enthusiasm was seen in the stories where the aviators easily travelled through space and time while also crossing the borders between the "science" and "weird" fiction as easily. The fantastical representation of an airplane could also turn attention to mythologizing the machine and pilot as a "knight and dragon of the new era" or the attemts at creating horror narratives with relation to the airplanes I would also like to examine how the writers of the 1920s dealt with the aftermath of some of the prophesized future coming early and turning their attention towards other visions of mass bombings and destruction of the new Great Wars. At the same time the state controlled Air Defense League (LOPP) was also to a degree sponsoring the creation of speculative fiction concerning aviation that has also steered the genre work towards certain propagandic themes.

Hugh O'Connell (University of Massachusetts Boston)

"Weird Currencies: The New Weird Economics of Michael Cisco's Animal Money"

This presentation probes the intersections of new weird fiction and the abstract financialization of the contemporary economy. One of the precepts of the financialization of capitalist accumulation is that it is weird; it presents new assemblages, reversals, and perversions of and to traditional capitalism. While new weird criticism has produced significant research in relation to the Anthropocene, queer and gender studies, and critical race theory, its intersection with economics has not received as much attention. This presentation therefore asks how the new weird engages with and mediates our increasingly weird economy. To anchor this presentation, I turn to Michael Cisco's 2015 novel *Animal Money*. Despite being praised by Jeff Vandermeer as "possibly the finest weird novel of the modern era," *Animal Money* has flown largely under the academic radar. The central conceit of the novel involves the theorization and employment of a new form of currency – animal money – that intervenes in the heart of capitalist exchange and accumulation by privileging quality (difference and use) over quantity (equivalence and exchange). The novel turns on a confrontation over the means of narrative speculation: the problem is fantasy. The fantasy money that is traded by the greatest of our world's fantasists. They make their predictions about what will go up or down. They buy and sell bits of the future, and don't know that all along they are writing science fiction. [...] Just because you do that, you brokers [...] doesn't mean you own science fiction, or fantasy, or even horror (Cisco 399) Ultimately, the presentation focuses on a series of inter-related questions both mediated by the novel's form and interrogated by its narrative: How does contemporary finance act as a weird form of capitalism? What constitutes a counter weird-economics? How do the formal dis/continuities of the weird relate to the formal dis/continuities of financial, fictive, and speculative capital? How does new weird fiction provide new insights into the abstract financialization of accumulation?

Keren Omry (University of Haifa)

"Making Kin with Genre in Israel"

Alternate History has at its very core a paradox of negation, an historical palimpsest whereby one is always reading doubly: that-which-was-not overlapping that which we trust was. I propose that, in turning to alternate history, storytelling in general and, in particular for this paper, Israeli narratives of emergence offer the means to practice kinship. Whether history pivots with an averted Holocaust, resilient Sixth-century Jewish Khazar warriors, or any other PODs depicted, the many texts depicting alternate Israels do so primarily through excavation,

exposure, remembrance, and recentering. Thus, in shifting the dominant historical narrative to the margins, these texts make way for new and critical subject positions and possible collectivities within contemporary Israel. The 2018 Israeli mini-series *Autonomies*, alongside novels by Lavie Tidhar, Yoav Avni, and others, offer different expressions for these possibilities, uncovering hidden truths or giving voice to the unspoken. Like language, which relies on familiarity, consensus, and intention, alongside the difference and meaning expressed by each new utterance, so too does the genre of alternate history rely on the familiar and the foreign in order to establish new ties. In their article about Indigenous Epistemologies, Lewis et al. propose making kin as the practice which extends "circles of relationships," and it is the practice I use as the operating factor in my readings of these texts. The proposed paper will discuss the three examples mentioned, in order to show how alternate history makes kin and demands an ontology that is insistently relational and local, a kind of mutual obligation and intersubjectivity that go to the very bones of our humanity.

Maciej Ożóg (University of Łódź)

"Seen by the Technological Other. Exploring ‚ Alien Perception' in AI Art"

In this paper I would like to explore how alien perception and cognition, specific to artificial intelligence, influence the construction of human identity, how our image, self and personality is reconfigured, modulated and profiled through the prism of non-human agency of AI. These issues occupy a central position in the discourse of up-to-date new media art. Recalling works of such artists as Lynn Hershman Leeson, Verena Friedrich, Lauren Lee McCarthy, Paolo Cirio, who utilize and at the same time critically address AI in various ways I will analyze aesthetic tactics and strategies that they develop to problematize numerous applications of AI in today's media universe, especially in social media. I will focus on the ways they raise questions about the specific mode of "individuation" that is triggered and controlled by intelligent machines, how we become technology-made human in relation to and under supervision of the "technological Other". Also, referring to Ian Bogost's concept of "alien phenomenology", Joanna Żylińska's interpretation of non-human turn and algorithmic culture as well as to more general reflections on AI aesthetics introduced by Lev Manovich and Eduardo Navas, I will propose a prospect for critical AI art/aesthetics that goes beyond and contrary to imitational/mimetic aesthetic of so called "artificially intelligent art".

Patrycja Pichnicka-Trivedi (University of Warsaw)

"Political Entanglements: a Case Study of One French-Russian Weird Story"

This paper analyses the „Vourdalak" story. It mostly focuses on the 2023 French movie (The Vourdalak, in original Le Vourdalak), but it examines it in the context of the Aleksey Konstantinovich Tolstoy's story "*The Family of the Vourdalak*" (in original *La famille du Vourdalak: Fragment inédit des mémoires d'un inconnu*) from 1839, on which the movie was based. The story was written by a Russian author, but it was written in French, and only later on translated into Russian by Boleslav Markevich. This makes a story a complex phenomenon illustrating complicated relations of domination between Western and Eastern Europe, which Madina Tlostanova defines in terms of secondary imperialism of Russia (and of Eastern Europe in general). Indeed, the movie presents the story as a French narrative, told from the perspective of a French hero, and a French gaze on Eastern Europe. It is created on the background of the complicated socio-political attitude towards the Eastern European migration from both EU and non-EU countries and the perceived clash of civilisations between so called old-Europe and new Europe inside the European Union itself. The Vourdalak is also located in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian war and the subsequent wave of migration. The paper analyses the movie in all its dimensions. The Vourdalak has an innovative form, mixing psychological drama, camp style, oneiric fairy tale, fantasy and horror genres to create a remarkable weird fiction. Yet, as this paper proves, the imagining of Eastern Europe is still done in a post-Enlightenment way described by Larry Wolff, enacting secondary imperialism just as the original Tolstoy's story does.

Karol Popow (University of Warsaw)

"Reassembling the Self Anew: The Body of the Weak Cyborg in the multimodal narrative of Citizen Sleeper 1 and 2"

The speculative tropes of cyborgs in fiction are often associated with power and terror, but the body of the Sleeper, the protagonist of *Citizen Sleeper* (Fellow Traveler, 2022), challenges this archetype. Weak, exhausted, and precariously balanced between biology and technology, the Sleeper's existence relies on cyclic regeneration and constraints dictated by the game's mechanics. As a narratively framed assemblage, the Sleeper demands constant in-game synchronization and empathetic, insightful player's reading. The game's second-person narration situates the player within a biopolitical framework, immersing them in the vulnerability of a body that cannot survive without others' solidarity. In contrast to cyberpunk's dystopian themes of alienation and technological dominance, *Citizen Sleeper* introduces a

parallel vision—rooted in survival and communal resilience. It reframes cyborg embodiment within a solarpunk ethos, emphasizing renewal, cooperation, and acceptance of imperfection over individual power and autonomy. This shift is significant within a speculative discourse increasingly shaped by capitalist imaginaries. In this presentation, I will analyse the narrative, audiovisual, and ludic dimensions of the Sleeper's embodiment. Employing Rose's (2022) visual methodologies and Kłosiński's (2022) insights into second-person narration, I will explore how the game engages the player with the biopolitical problem of bodily governance. Integrating these methods, the study highlights how *Citizen Sleeper* constructs a fragile and weak cyborg self, diverging from genre conventions of strength and control. Despite its acclaim as an indie title, and with a sequel released in 2025, the game's narrative and mechanics remain under-explored in academic discourse. This analysis addresses that lacuna by examining *Citizen Sleeper* through its visual depictions of the Sleeper's body, narrative constructions of its precarious self, and critique of post-capitalist precarity. Contrasting cyberpunk's corporate hegemony with solarpunk visions of solidarity and renewal, *Citizen Sleeper* redefines cyborg tropes, centering fragility, interdependence, and resistance to capitalist necropolitics as key themes in speculative media.

Jeanne Prevost (University of Warsaw / Independent)

"Splatterpunk and the (un)Ethical Slaughter: Grounding Animal Rights Through Visceral Horror Fiction"

Splatterpunk's conceptualisation intersects genre and political movement. Occasionally dismissed as shock exploitation, Splatterpunk's foregrounding of grotesque viscerality forces the reader and/or viewer to bear witness to atrocities that perverse material reality that would otherwise be minimised, and holds them to account as active participants in the structures sought to be critiqued by the literature. Through mirroring the simulacra which upholds animal exploitation industries, Splatterpunk shatters projections and exposes what is attempted to be emulated. Through a close reading of Clive Barker's *Books of Blood*, Agustina Bazterrica's *Tender is the Flesh*, and selected works of Sayaka Murata, the potentiality of Splatterpunk will be explored in the anchoring of animal rights and the subversion of the semiotic relationality held between the text and the reader. This paper will touch on the subgenre formation of Splatterpunk and the integrality of animal rights therein as well as criticisms of structures which reinforce passive apathy towards nonhuman cruelty. It will examine the perspectives adopted which allow. It will continue on to provide a poststructuralist critique of legal systems in the Global North as it pertains to speculative fictions demonstrated in the previously mentioned works.

Alicja Relidzyńska (University of Warsaw)

"Anthropocene Visualized: Climate Change and Petroleum Culture in American Photography"

Throughout the centuries, America's relationship with nature has functioned as a both constructive and destructive force, irreversibly altering the US landscape and shaping the nation's identity and culture. For many years, environmentally harmful phenomena—with petroleum culture being the most prominent example—evoked mostly positive associations in the United States. However, due to the unfolding climate crisis and the recent recognition of its serious threats, public perception of oil has become much more complex and negative, since its impact on the biosphere has been eventually made evident (Steffen et al.). Hence, the highly detrimental impact of petroleum is reflected in numerous American visual texts beyond the genre of environmental photography. This "visual turn" is motivated by the very nature of the Anthropocene as the new (yet still unofficial) geological era defined by human-caused harms to the biosphere: since it cannot be fully perceived from the human time perspective, it can "only be visualized" (Mirzoeff). The proposed paper aims to examine 21st-century visual narratives of the Anthropocene and the declining oil culture, as presented in the works of Troy Paiva, an American photographer. I argue that Paiva's images offer an accurate representation of the ongoing change in general attitudes toward both oil and climate change as a global, alarming issue. By depicting derelict symbols of energy-intensive industries, the discussed works reflect different, at times contradictory, approaches to the discussed issue: denial and a certain longing for the past when the use of petroleum was not called into question, acknowledgment of the climate crisis with a poignant sense of disorientation, and a less pessimistic, nature-oriented perspective. As a result, the discussed works accurately represent the complex emotions accompanying the widespread acknowledgment of climate change and its hazards.

Brittany Roberts (Appalachian State University)

"The Closed Circuit of Russian History in Karen Shakhnazarov's Zero City"

Mikhail Gorbachev's Glasnost' policies created a previously unavailable space for Soviet citizens to discuss the shortcomings of the Soviet system. The newly liberal atmosphere also expanded the possibilities of genre, allowing speculative fi ction fi lms such as Karen Shakhnazarov's *Zero City* (*Gorod Zero*, 1988, Russia) to explicitly critique the contradictions and limitations of Soviet daily life. Refusing to recuperate the Soviet system that it unambiguously targets, Shakhnazarov's absurdist, speculative satire follows the increasing entropy of its narrative to its illogical conclusion, dissecting both a society on the edge of collapse and the self-devouring historical and political myths that have supported it. *Zero City* has a simple premise: its

protagonist, Varakin, arrives in Zero City on assignment, only to discover that he cannot leave. In town, his questions are met only with disordered and misconnected answers, increasingly trapping him within the town's warped narrative of history. Although Varakin makes multiple attempts to leave, he cannot find an exit: the town, like the film's depiction of Russian history, is a closed circuit. As the film becomes more and more absurd, Varakin and the viewer are drawn into a cat-and-mouse game with history, in which it is no longer possible to tell where truth ends and falsehoods begin. In this talk, I consider several key scenes from *Zero City* alongside the larger cultural context of Glasnost' to investigate how Shakhnazarov uses genre to critique the closed circuit of Russian history. I argue that the film's embrace of speculative absurdism as a means of questioning Russian and Soviet versions of history suggests that the perceived lack of meaning in Russian daily life during the 1980s was not merely a product of late Soviet malaise, but also of a centuries-old tradition of distorting, national myth-making that has continued into Putin's Russia today.

Patrycja Roguska (University of Warsaw)

"Weird King: Surrealism and Psychology in Stephen King's Fiction"

Stephen King's fiction, albeit not frequently analyzed through the lens of the weird, has famously been influenced by writers such as Lovecraft, Bradbury, and Poe. The aim of this paper is to explore the psychological, surrealist, and weird underpinnings of Stephen King's writings with special regard to his 2008 novel Duma Key, greatly inspired by the surrealist art of Salvador Dali. The paper focuses on suffering as a lens through which one may look at the ways in which the contemporary Master of Horror transcends the constraints of the variety of genres combined in his hybrid literary universe, painting a detailed, complex, and surrealist portrait of human psyche. King—maintaining the distinctiveness of his writing style as well as deriving from idiosyncrasies of the gothic genre and his personal experiences of suffering after the 1999 accident—breaks the chains of the genre writer label and goes far beyond it, opening the floor for questions concerning the most tangible manifestation of fear—the terror of the real-life suffering. The ill and the disabled characters of Duma Key, artistically inclined and endowed with supernatural powers as well as combating supernatural entities along the way, struggle with the weight of traumatic memories, cope with the limitations of their minds and bodies as well as the permanent sense of loss accompanying their lives, and try to reconstruct their identity in isolation from the society, following King's philosophy of recovery, which predicates that "any act that re-makes the world is heroic". The pain and the suffering, both mental and physical, are not noble and symbolic, they are cruel, isolating and substantial, constituting the basis for exploration of the nuances of the characters' transforming senses of identity through their growing awareness of the womb-to-tomb balance between wellness and sickness, the normal and the peculiar. In his nuanced exploration of the depths of the human

psyche, King enters the realm of a deeper, psychological inquiry into his characters' minds, dreams, memories, vulnerabilities, fears, frustrations, and desires while keeping an eye on their humanity and providing a timeless commentary on the human condition.

Juan Jose (Pepe) Rojo (UCSD)

"The Air Loom and the Prophet Mode"

This paper thinks through the conceptual apparatus of science fiction through the sadly wonderful case of James Matthew Tilly's delusion. Matthew Tilly, an inmate of London's Royal Bethlem Hospital from 1797 to 1814, had the certainty that his (and others) thoughts and actions were controlled though the fumes of a pneumo-chemical machine which he called the "air loom." Tilly's delusional idea, conceived between the French and the Industrial Revolution, is the first modern delusion (in which a machine substitutes supernatural creatures as agents of control), the first case-study of a delusion (jump-starting psychiatry), as well as the first conspiracy theory (well and alive today: machines control us, wouldn't we agree?) and the first modern example of a science-fictional "mode of awareness": science fiction in the wild, before the genre was packed as a product into books, magazines, movies and video-games (almost three decades before Mary Shelley's *Frankestein*). For Tilly, the science-fictional device was very, very—and horribly—real. If we think of science fiction as Csicsery-Ronay defines it, "a mode of awareness" (1971), Matthew Tilly's case points towards a different genealogy—and kinship—of the genre, bringing it closer to conspiracy theories and paranoid psychoses, while maintaining its foreshadowing and visionary characteristics. In the paper I will argue that science fiction's literalization of metaphors, as conceptualized by Samuel Delany (1971) is an essential part of the genre, while also being one of the main symptoms of psychoses, and should be understood as a critical device inherent to what I call the "prophet mode," an attempt to make "cognitively estranging" referents "available for representation" (Chu, 2011). Science fiction can be understood as an attempt to literalize what is already happening: a mode of depiction where identification is forced because it lacks proper representation, which is also a crucial critical factor in a technocapitalist world whose referents have jumped out of science fiction novels and become quotidian and quite difficult to see, understand and articulate. That is why understanding Matthew Tilly's "delusion" is so importan; through the first literalization of what would become a science fiction metaphor, his "air loom" forebodes both state and market surveillance, and opens up the question of how to science-fictionally read madness and conspiracy theories.

Curtis Runstedler (University of Stuttgart)

"Man-Made Sex Robots: Sexual Politics, Women's Bodies, and Cultural Misogyny in Sierra Greer's Anniebot"

The increased demand and production of sex robots remains a controversial topic in both AI and feminist research. In her novel *Anniebot* (2024), Sierra Greer depicts an advanced AI protagonist named Annie whose primary function is to sexually satisfy and serve Doug, her human male owner. In doing so, her novel extends beyond the parameters of speculative fiction by also engaging with recent feminist readings and critiques of the real-life sex robot industry and its ethical foundations, particularly its exploitation of the female body. Following Kathleen Richardson's Campaign Against Sex Robots and radical feminist approach to the topic, I argue that *Anniebot* transgresses the genre boundaries of speculative fiction by showing the immediate effects that the widespread use of sex robots poses for women's rights and bodies. According to Richardson, the construction of sex robots is inherently problematic because it mimics the bodies of women. As the novel's focalizer, Annie's third-person narrative shows firsthand the arguable abuse and degradation of her body at the hands of her misogynistic owner, reflecting real-life male violence and toxic relationships against women. When she appears to become less compliant, for example, he modifies her programming to make her more subservient to him. Moreover, I suggest that Doug's objectification of Annie and her body reflect a disturbing cultural misogyny that is analogous to Andrew Tate's brand of enslaving women. This paper draws upon feminist theory and literary analysis to show how Anniebot speculates beyond its genre and engages with the ethical and sexual politics of the sex robot industry, as well as the misogynistic culture that it entails. Consequently, it presents some hypothetical solutions, such as recognizing bodily autonomy and challenging the normalization of objectifying the female body.

David Shipko (Johns Hopkins University)

"Rituals of Renewal and Revolution in Frostpunk and Snowpiercer"

My presentation examines how the survival city-builder computer game *Frostpunk* (2018) and the film *Snowpiercer* (2013) mobilize the repressive novum of the arcology to critique capitalist narratives of climate change adaptation, and produce visions of and desires for emancipated futurities grounded in a preference for extinction over the endless sustainment of violent subjugation. Approaching the game as a continuation of and response to the film, I examine them as a sequence of attempts to symbolically resolve the antagonism of sustainability and industrial development inherent to the climate crisis, through both visual and ludic narrative. Analyzing the narrative and formal strategies of both texts, focusing in particular on

Frostpunk's game mechanics and narrative delimitation of its possibility space, as well as on Snowpiercer's visual construction of a dialogue of violent class struggle that can only be won through explosive escape, I demonstrate how each text indexes contemporary discourses of so-called sustainable capital and climate change adaptation strategies that seek to preserve not the universal humanity but the particular ethno-class that Sylvia Wynter has theorized as "Man," the ultimate agent of capital. Comparing the narrative and formal resolutions of the film and game, I reflect on their respective successes and failures to contend with the ideological distortions that they seek to negate. Drawing on the degrowth Marxist theory of Kohei Saito's *Marx in the Anthropocene* (2023) and *Slow Down* (2024), I ultimately locate *Frostpunk* and *Snowpiercer* within a broader horizon of the cultural production process of the climate change denialist unconscious, which I demonstrate is a process of endless bourgeois self-delusion that attempts to continuously renew its own faith in the possibilities of endless growth in the face of the intensifying forces of resistance produced by the ever-widening metabolic rifts that capitalism itself incessantly opens, of which climate change represents the most extreme instantiation.

Adam Skowroński (University of Warsaw)

"The Butlerian Jihad? Reading of the Book of the Machines"

The Book of the Machines is a speculative text, part of Samuel Butler's satirical utopian novel *Erewhon* (1872), origins of which can be traced back to the 1860s, when the author anonymously published a series of essays inspired by Darwin's vision of evolution. In these essays, Butler proceeds to present what was, at that time, a controversial idea of machines succeeding the human species as the next rulers of the Earth. With the panpsychic aesthetics of the work, the Victorian writer not only proposes that machines are a species of their own, but also anticipates humanity's demise due to its dependence on technology. Butler's understanding of machines as organic forms is pivotal to his later scientific theories. By treating machines as living entities capable of adaptation, Butler integrates these speculations into a broader critique of Darwinian natural selection, advocating instead for a Neo-Lamarckian vision of evolution driven by volition. Butler's criticisms of Darwin's emphasis on natural selection – and his broader rejection of professional scientific authority – led to his marginalization in Victorian intellectual circles. Dismissed as a satirist and amateur, Butler's ideas were largely ignored during his lifetime, though they were – albeit to some extent – rediscovered in the 20th century. Some scholars have traced their influences in the emergence of certain theories, such as psychoanalysis or Schrödinger's theory of life. In my presentation, I will explore *The Book of the Machines* as both a literary speculation and a precursor to Butler's scientific theories. By examining its role in shaping his Neo-Lamarckian worldview, I aim to illuminate the relation between his literary and scientific ideas, highlighting the text's significant yet often overlooked contribution to speculative thought.

Simon Spiegel (University of Zurich)

"SWISS MADE 2069: Switzerland's First Science Fiction Movie"

In 1968, on the occasion of its 100th birthday, Schweizerische Volksbank commissioned three young Swiss filmmakers to make short films about their vision of Switzerland. Contrary to the bank's intentions, the three films, collectively known as SWISS MADE, did not end up as celebrations of Swiss virtues, but instead turned all out to be highly critical. This is especially true of Fredi M. Murer's episode 2069. In his 45-minutes film, Murer, who later became one of the most celebrated Swiss filmmakers of his generation with films such as *HÖHENFEUER (ALPINE FIRE*, CH 1985) and *VITUS* (CH 2006), presented a vision of his homeland 30 years in the future as a perfectly regulated dystopia in which everything is controlled by a central computer system. The premise of Murer's film is the visit of an alien being to Switzerland. In the style of a mockumentary, the nameless creature does not really interact with its surroundings but merely acts as silent observer of the mores of future Switzerland. Although it is more or less forgotten, *SWISS MADE 2069* can rightlybe called the first Swiss science fiction film. What is particularly striking about the film is the design of the alien creature, for which HR Giger, a fellow student of Murer's at the Zurich University of the Arts, was responsible. Giger's creature can be seen as an early version of the Xenomorph from *ALIEN* (Ridley Scott, US/UK 1979) for which he would receive an Academy Award and which would establish his worldwide fame. In my talk, I will situate *SWISS MADE 2069* at the intersection of a very specific critical dis-course about Switzerland in the late 1960s and the burgeoning genre of cinematic dystopias.

Jerzy Stachowicz (University of Warsaw)

"On the Borderlands of Genres and Media – Theatre and Radio of the Interwar Period and Polish Science Fiction"

The history of Polish science fiction before 1939 is primarily, usually rightly, a story about a literary genre; after World War II, cinema occupies an important but subordinate place on the timeline; other genres seem to come to the fore in analyses only in the 21st century. Referring to ideas of Richard Barbrook, Richard Taylor, Elisabetta Ferrari and especially Siegfried Zielinski's concept of media archaeology, I recognise that it is possible and worthwhile to study SF from a media perspective, to analyse its media manifestations, and that science-fiction is then a certain mode of aesthetic expression and a form of thinking that takes various media forms, experiments with media, wanders through media, deconstructs and creates media. In my presentation, I will turn to the media-places where SF appears in an incomplete and incidental way – radio and theatre in the Second Polish Republic. Using selected examples, I will try to show that the fantastic imaginarium and imaginary futures in the interwar period

colonised those spaces that today are hardly associated with Polish science fiction, genologically undefined and media blurred – not to mention that various realisations of SF themes have been completely forgotten.

Svetlana Stefanova (Universidad Internacional de La Rioja)

"Alternate History Meets Afrofuturism: Multipolarity and Afro-capability in Nisi Shawl's Everfair"

The exploration of parallel dimensions and alternate universes—often considered variations of the alternate history genre—has gained significant momentum in recent years. Since the turn of the millennium, literary and cinematic studies have increasingly interrogated the possibilities and limitations of temporal interconnectivity, speculating on how the homogenized, strictly choreographed lens through which we interpret the past shapes our present. Perhaps the most renowned alternate history novel remains Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962), and while counterfactual narratives are a defining feature of science fiction, the alternate history genre has not yet received extensive scholarly attention. Afrofuturist authors such as Octavia Butler, particularly in *Kindred* (1979), employ temporal disruptions to revisit historical traumas—such as slavery—revealing systemic injustices. Though diverse in their respective approaches, Octavia Butler and Nisi Shawl share a common commitment to disrupting exclusionary narratives. Nisi Shawl's *Everfair* (2016) reimagines the era when King Leopold II of Belgium established the Congo Free State, enslaving, maiming and murdering the local people to enforce rubber production. His reign earned infamy for its extreme brutality and torture of the indigenous population. Shawl's alternative history pivots on a speculative divergence: the Fabian Society's purchase of land from Leopold, leading to the founding of the fictional nation of *Everfair*. This essay argues that Shawl's reconfiguration of the past moves beyond the colonial paradigm of domination and subordination, adopting a model of multipolarity and entanglements instead. By examining the interplay between alternate history and Afrofuturism, this study highlights *Everfair*'s engagement with Afro-capability and the potential of Shawl's creative use of temporal disruptions to disturb the past and fuel the future.

Filip Świerczyński (University of Warsaw)

"Future Envisioned, Future Forgotten: Exploring Stanislaw Lem's Concept of Self-Dispersing Microreplicators"

One of the pivotal yet frequently obscured and forgotten subjects of futurological reflection to which Stanislaw Lem (1921–2006) returns throughout his oeuvre is the question of microrobots and, more comprehensively, of self-dispersing microrobotic armies. It constitutes a focal theme and "central singularity" in the novel *The Invincible* (1963) and the apocryphal essay *Weapon Systems of the Twenty First Century or the Upside-down Evolution* (1983/1986), both of which can be regarded as complementary ideological explorations in this perspective. The primary objective of the lecture, as well as the main body, is a comprehensive analysis of Lemian concepts regarding self-dispersing microreplicators and self-dispersing microrobotic armies, which, according to his reception, are to be the predominant actors in future warfare. Discussing the post-Feynmanian imperative of microminiaturization and selected technical characteristics of self-assemblers (including their (re)productive cost-effectiveness, substitutability, and redundancy), as envisaged by Lem, the author investigates the concept of artificial instinct, proposed as a more efficient and economically viable alternative to conventional artificial intelligence. A significant portion of the research focuses on the imperative of dispersion and swarm intelligence in the operational dynamics of microrobots, as well as to the two important principles outlined by Lem in this context: the principle of autonomy and the principle of telotopism. The technological realization of their apogee is envisaged as a self-bonding and freely proliferating brain-mind system. The interdisciplinary nature of the conducted analysis combines the methodological instrumentation offered by literary studies on the one hand, and, on the other, a shift towards the latest advancements in engineering and micro-/nanotechnology, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of Lemian concepts.

Jagoda Targońska (University of Warsaw)

"Environmental Politics in Extrapolations: Critical Approach to the Portrayal of the Climate Crisis in the Science Fiction Series"

Extrapolations (2023) is a climate-focused speculative science fiction series that presents its view on the future of the Planet Earth overtaken by the deep consequences of the Climate Crisis. Through the speculative science fiction genre the series presents the possible outcomes that the Climate Crisis, powered by mega-corporations, as well as actions of individual people, can have not only on the environment itself, but also on the future of the society, mainly from the Global North. These ideas, as presented in the series, are connected to

the discussion about the Anthropocene and its portrayal mostly centered around the countries of the Global North—mostly the United States—within speculative science fiction. Through this kind of critical analysis, *Extrapolations* is explored as a series that failed to capture the possible complex consequences of the Climate Crisis and Post-Capitalist society in a much more global and inter-class context. The paper argues that despite its preachy narratives, *Extrapolations* lacks the deep approach and commentary on issues connected to the Climate Crisis and its effects on the society, as it mainly focuses its narrative on individuals of higher classes, and centralizes its plot on the thriving capitalism. *Extrapolations* has not been academically analyzed before, thus the analysis of the series, through a critical approach, adds a new contribution to the discourse around the centralization of western and privileged narratives in speculative science fiction.

Ali Riza Taskale (Roskilde University)

"Speculating Beyond the Genre: Transgression and Predatory Abstraction in Jonas Eika's After the Sun"

How can speculative narratives that defy academic and common-sense definitions of speculation illuminate the abstract and virtual dimensions of speculative finance while engaging with their material realities? Moreover, how can such narratives, unconstrained by traditional genre conventions, critically and politically reimagine contemporary speculative markets and reveal alternative possibilities? As the future becomes increasingly foreclosed, the present often feels like a financial temporal prison, trapped within cycles of speculation and what I call "predatory abstraction". In this context, unconventional speculative fictions are crucial for exposing contradictions inherent in financial speculation and uncovering latent possibilities in the present. Danish writer and activist Jonas Eika's *After the Sun* (2021) exemplifies this potential. Translated by Sherilyn Nicolette Hellberg, the collection has earned the Nordic Council Literature Prize, the Michael Strunge Prize, and the Montana Prize for Fiction. It was longlisted for the International Booker Prize and the Republic of Consciousness Prize and includes the O. Henry Prize-winning short story *Me, Rory, and Aurora*. This paper is structured in three parts. First, it examines the aesthetic manifestations of speculative finance's implosion, particularly through trading derivatives, where speculative reality and fiction converge. Second, it explores themes of economics and tenderness, highlighting how speculative financial capitalism alienates minds, thoughts, and bodies. Finally, it explores how the novel critiques speculative finance by blending dystopian and utopian elements. The dystopian aspects expose the predatory abstraction and violence of financial speculation, while the utopian dimension defamiliarizes speculative finance, offering critical distance and space for alternative imaginaries. Through its innovative narrative strategies, After the Sun illustrates how speculative fiction can challenge the predatory mechanisms of financial capitalism while breaking free from rigid genre conventions and marketing categorizations.

Anna Temel (University of Warsaw)

"Disrupting Norms in Neon: Queering Cyberpunk in 2064: Read Only Memories (2015)"

Video games have often been criticized for perpetuating heteronormative narratives and marginalizing queer identities, reinforcing societal biases instead of utilizing their potential to offer inclusive spaces for self-expression and the exploration of diverse experiences. While the cyberpunk genre is often linked with themes of dystopian futures, resistance, and the fl uidity of the body in the face of technological progress, many of its games fail to include meaningful queer representation. However, *2064: Read Only Memories* (2015), a neo-noir indie game that received relatively little public attention, utilizes the cyberpunk genre to envision an inclusive and hopeful future where queerness is not only present but central to the game's speculative world-building. This paper explores *2064: Read Only Memories* through the lens of queer theory, focusing on its portrayal of non-normative identities and relationships as integral to its narrative. The game's characters, such as Turing, a non-binary sentient AI exploring the meaning of personhood, and Jess, a hybrid (genetically modifi ed human) activist encountering systemic prejudice and oppression, show how the cyberpunk genre can be used to explore the themes of identity fl uidity, chosen families, and body modifi cation, as well as to question binaries and biases that underlie social norms. By analyzing how the game's narrative and worldbuilding resist binary and normative constructs and engage with marginalized perspectives, this paper examines the game's potential to envision futures where queerness is, at least to a certain degree, celebrated and normalized. Ultimately, this paper considers whether *2064: Read Only Memories* succeeds in challenging normative conventions or whether it refl ects lingering biases connected to how queer identities are represented in games.

Jan Topolski (Nicolaus Copernicus University)

"Ufonades, Time Travels and Zdenek Liška. The Sound in Czechoslovak Sci-fi Films"

The science fiction genre takes a special place in Czechoslovak cinema history. Its pioneer, animation master Karel Zeman, used to draw his inspiration from Jules Verne's books, illustrations included. The editing and aesthetics of his awarded films owes a lot to Zdenek Liška music though – the most prolific Czech composer, who left a mark on many other local sci-fi films. His electronic and prepared sound loops for *Ikarie XB-1* aka *Voyage to the End of the Universe* (1963) create the eerie and claustrophobic mood of Jindřich Polák's film (this soundtrack was released as LP recently). Verne held his position as the patron of Czechoslovak sci-fi, being adapted to the screen by Oldrich Lipský in his *The Mysterious Castle in the*

Carpathians (1985). Here the singing voice and sounds of bizarre inventions also play crucial roles, as well as in other director's comedies: *Joachim, Put It in the Machine* (1974), *I Killed Einstein, Gentlemen* (1970) or *The Man from the First Century*. The last two deal with time travel leitmotiv, which is interestingly orchestrated by Zdenek Liška or Vlastimil Halá. The other typical theme of (especially late) is the encounter with UFO which led to the local term of "ufoniada" for such films. *Warm Welcome from the Earth* (1983) by Lipský or *The Saucer over Velký Malíkov* (1977) by Jiri Jires could be listed among them. I would like to examine these films in frames of Michel Chion's "audio-vision theory" to see how the sound renders some material qualities or evoke affects, with the reference to the visuals.

Myron Trzeciak (University of Warsaw)

"Flirting With Eugenics – Disabled Futures in Meda Kahn's 'Difference of Opinion'"

The presentation aims to examine traditional conceptualisations of disability in science fiction through an analysis of Meda Kahn's short story *Difference of Opinion* (2017). The plot follows an autistic, non-verbal janitor as she develops a relationship with a philosopher and a member of a committee of eugenics, who wishes to learn her perspective on disability-centered eugenics and „curing" disability. By way of both plot and narrative, Kahn builds a story
centred on the intersections of queer, feminist and disabled identities. As noted by Anna Kurowicka (2020) and Anna Felicia Sanchez (2014), autism and developmental disabilities are of particular interest to science fiction as they have been used to characterise nonhuman beings (e.g. aliens, robots), while representations of human autistics have been far less common. However, more recent texts, especially those created by self-identified autistic authors, offer new perspectives on human and nonhuman neurodivergent characters. I believe *Difference of Opinion* provides a guideline for conceptualising what disability (physical and/or developmental) has historically been for science fiction and what it can be, with a focus on self-advocacy and inclusivity. Drawing on Alison Kafer's (2013) reclamation of disabled futures, posthumanist theories of kinship and the political and social potentiality of speculative fiction, I would like to explore opportunities for disability studies theory in science fiction as a way of rebelling against the well-established ableism, exclusion and erasure within the genre and real-world imagined futures.

Jagoda Tyczyńska (University of Warsaw)

"Translation is the Message: Pre/Post/Neo-Colonial Language in Priya Sarukkai Chabria's Clone (2018)"

In an actualization of myth and history through the instruments of sf production, Priya Sarukkai Chabria offers an Indofuturist dystopian story to test the ties between post-national memory and the post-colonial imaginary. Experimental in style, the narrative of *Clone* (2018) does not merely depict a journey across space, time, and consciousness but also, blends together plot, poetry, and exercises in translation to portray a "sel(f) forged out of language" (Kothari 2022). Further, in so far as Western concepts of time may interpret the present as a forking of the linear trajectory of a singular past into multiple future imaginaries (Shaviro 2024), *Clone* appears to utilize the plurality of sf frameworks of time to offer alternative visions of a global humanity. The evocation of ancient Indian mythology and global histories through the memories of a fourteenth-generation clone effectively enacts a cross-referencing and crosspollination of cultural identities across space and time. On top of a proposed plurality of expression, the story's compression of poetics and aesthetics ranging from the Vedic period to 24th century India demonstrates how the entirety of history can be lived out in the present through an embodiment of language. In my presentation, I would like to focus on the instrumentality of the language in *Clone* to explore how it may act as an adhesive between "life-worlds and logics of marginalization" (Kothari). For this purpose, I will examine the role of poetry and translation in reconfiguring the story's post-colonial imaginary (Ramakrishna 2000); how operating on and within the English language rather than local hegemonic languages may reflect a permanent "split-ness" of Indian history and identity (Kothari); and how the tempo of unveiling history and excavating memory in *Clone* may be seen as protest of Western neoliberal immediacy (Kornbluh 2024) through the story's favoring of a strongly intermediary experience of fragmented collective memory over a precise plot-drive.

Xan van Rooyen (Independent)

"Queer Imaginings in Africanfuturism Inspired by African History"

In this paper, I will talk about queerness, queer theory, and the application of queer imaginings in Africanfuturism, inspired by African history. This chapter is a brief exploration of how to resurrect the ancient and traditional queerness present across the African continent, eroded and erased by Western hegemony, in speculative fiction that moves toward an African-inspired post-gender society.

Weronika Wadecka (Independent)

"Heteroromantic Experimentation with Gender in Sentient Object Romance Genre"

Romance genre has been frequently criticized as repetitive in its structure and perpetuating hetero-patriarchal stereotypes. Contrary to this belief, Tania Modleski (2008, 81) considers it as an exploration of female fantasies filled with the dilemmas relevant to women's everyday troubles. The offered narratives reveal the approach to femininity, sexuality, and contemporary conditions of women living in the patriarchal society. Sentient object romance sub-genre—a niche, experimental cross between romance and fantasy, expands on those ideas by offering a unique perspective on intimate relations. The heroines presented in this type of fiction become seduced or otherwise entangled in the romantic and usually sexual relationship with everyday use objects, which, due to magical influence, gain self-awareness. The relationships are usually a blank slate—since the objects do not have a perception of gender binary nor social hierarchy, their character is shaped by the heroines themselves. Those stories pose women as in control of their lovers; the object becomes a manifestation of their needs, freed of anxieties connected with convoluted human relations. Although they are often advertised as parodies, the texts offer an insight into a contemporary female experience. This work aims to analyze the approach towards female sexuality and cross-gendered relations presented in sentient object romance fiction. Those texts can be considered as queering the traditional heterosexual relationships by demasculinizing the male counterpart, despite the inclusion of stereotypical romantic tropes.

Brian Willems (University of Split)

"Anthropocene as Pathocenosis: Orly Castel-Bloom's Dolly City"

In Orly Castel-Bloom's novel *Dolly City* (1997), the main character Dolly sees illness and danger everywhere, which leads her to perform unnecessary surgeries and transplants on her son, as well as injecting people, car tires, and welfare checks with anti-cancer drugs. While the novel is explicitly about Israel-Palestine relations and motherhood, Mark Bould's idea of how „the Anthropocene is the unconscious of, the art and literature of our time'" is used to demonstrate how an unconscious relation to the environment is made visible by showing how care and abuse are intertwined. The Anthropocene can be seen as „sick" in a number of ways, however, reading the role of cancer in the novel, I argue that *Dolly City* foregrounds three characteristics that cancer and the Anthropocene share: it is hard to detect when the damage begins, the spreading is out of control, and there is no single cure. These three characteristics are then related back to the novel's main themes through medical historian Mirko Grmek's concept of pathocenosis, which reads disease, society, and theory together.

Jing Yang (Guangdong University of Foreign Studies)

"Alternative Narrative of Alien Encounter in Chinese Science Fiction Cinema"

The booming Chinese science fiction cinema since the 2010s has brought the marginalized genre into public attention. Previously a niche cinema mainly serving for educational purposes, Chinese sci-fi films now venture into staple materials like space exploration and alien encounter. Compared to the well-established Hollywood tropes, the tale of intergalactic (non) communication is interwoven with folk mythology and grassroots wisdom in a plethora of Chinese films. Through the comedic bending of futuristic fantasies to an everyday setting, the tension between technological progression and cultural convention is inscribed into the quasi-narrative of interstellar interaction. By exploring how these films triangulate artistic innovation, mainstream sentiments and the Hollywoodized market imperative, this paper argues that the Chinese sci-fi cinema nurtures alternative visions of the future in negotiation with the Western media discourse.

Sang-Keun Yoo (Marist University)

"The Forgotten History of Korean Translators Using European SF to Resist Japanese Colonialism in the Early 1900s"

This paper examines the early 20th-century development of the science fiction genre in colonial Korea, a period largely forgotten and marginalized in Anglophone scholarship despite recent interest in contemporary South Korean SF novels and media. This paper (1) traces the origins of science fiction in Korea to the onset of Japanese occupation, highlighting how the first science fiction novels arrived through indirect translations from Chinese or Japanese rather than from original texts; (2) explores how Korean translators and editors strategically introduced European science fiction by modifying book and chapter titles as a means to promote Western scientific knowledge, aiming to empower a colonized Korean readership; and (3) argues that while science fiction was intended to familiarize Koreans with Western scientific concepts, its visions of future science and social systems often seemed incomprehensible or untranslatable, leading to adaptations that incorporated local, familiar concepts of fantasy. To support these arguments, the paper analyzes the translation history of seminal Western science fiction works, including Jules Verne, H.G. Well, and Frederick Dey. In doing so, this study demonstrates that the unique history of early Korean science fiction offers valuable insights into Anglophone SF scholarship, challenging the common belief that the genre's development required a fully formed scientific worldview as seen in Western Europe.

Agata Zarzycka (University of Wrocław)

"Speculative Tourism of YouTube Ambient Videos"

The interest in the affective potential of placeness is shared by ambient music, tourism, and speculative worldbuilding. Ambient relies on emotional and imaginary spatiality (Eno, 1986); tourism combines space and affects in the process of "placemaking" (Lapointe & Coulter, 2020); while links between subjectivity and space in speculative fiction are addressed, among others, by Darko Suvin's "cognitive estrangement" (2014). Simultaneously, insights into the YouTube platform identify its emergent preoccupations with engineering viewers' affective engagements, such as the ASMR culture (Gallagher, 2016) or the pandemic turn towards practical applications of ambient music (Freitas, Porfírio & Durand, 2021). This presentation considers the impact of the spatial-affective combination on the employments of SF on YouTube ambient channels such as Chronoscapes, Eternal Dystopia or Ambient Outpost. The dynamics between the narratives, visuals, music, and pragmatic focus of ambient videos unfolds into a network in which speculative fiction is, to various degrees, operationalized through biopolitical strategies of tourism, aimed to provide the receiver with a specific embodied experience (Lapointe & Coulter, 2020). Such operationalization generates tension between SF's "estranging" qualities and the affective predictability of videos designed for particular effects, e. g. relaxation, deep focus, or sleep.

Tianxing Zhou (University College London)

"The Narrative and Aesthetic Potential of VR in Futuristic Speculative and Historical Reenactment through So Long"

In the age of immersive technologies, Virtual Reality (VR) interactive storytelling has emerged as a powerful yet underrepresented medium within both artistic and speculative domains. So Long transports players to a speculative future where they encounter Voyager 1, the long-lost probe, and engage with its Golden Record as a dynamic, holographic archive. This project exemplifies VR's unique capacity to merge the past with speculative futures through an immersive, first-person narrative, allowing players to explore humanity's legacy in a sensory-rich experience. Embodying a cosmic explorer guided by an AI, players traverse time and space, rediscovering Earth's forgotten past through an intimate interplay of storytelling and interaction. This paper positions So Long as a case study in the potential of VR storytelling as a marginalized art form—one that transforms historical artifacts into interactive experiences that invite reflection on human aspirations, memory, and continuity. By analyzing So Long's narrative structure and aesthetic approach, this study advocates for VR's inclusion in artistic and educational frameworks, proposing it as a crucial medium for connecting audiences to speculative futures and fostering a reimagined understanding of human history and legacy.