

Electricdreams – Between Fiction and Society II

The (Post)human Condition in Times of Crisis: The Interplay between Artificial Intelligence, Otherness, and Environmentalism

International Conference

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

October 18-20, 2023

IULM University

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Monika Bakke (Adam Mickiewicz University)

Unexpected Diversities in the Making: When Abiotic and Biotic Communities Coevolve

Embracing scientific facts and fictions and speculating on change and growth rather than change and loss in the turbulent time of environmental crisis, I propose to transcend the predominant biocentric rescuer mindset and invite attentive attitudes towards the environmental bio-geo-techno-diversities with their complex life-nonlife dynamics and coevolution. I will look at art projects that enable viewers to experience plausible manifestations of future multispecies communities abundant with various types of intelligence, sensitivity, and awareness beyond the biological. This will help to articulate the current need to disrupt conventional knowledge production about sustainable environments and offer a chance to refuse the limitation of what is already recognized, accepted, established, and integrated. By speculating about transformations as effects of the coevolution of bio-, geo-, and technospheres, I will encourage a critical approach to material dynamics with a sense of wonder and open-ended questions to augment imagining them otherwise. The capacity to encompass contradictory and weird narratives as well as marvelous and terrifying objects helps overcome denial of the unruly agency of the nonhuman and inorganic and sensitize us to the precarity of present and future biological-mineral-artificial-synthetic entanglements.

BIO

Monika Bakke, professor at the Faculty of Philosophy and director of the Environmental Humanities Center at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Her research focuses on art and aesthetics from a postanthropocentric, transspecies, and gender perspective. She is the author of *Bio-transfiguracje. Sztuka i estetyka posthumanizmu* [Bio-transfigurations. Posthumanist art and aesthetics] (2010), *Ciało otwarte* [Open body] (2000) and the co-author of *Pleroma: Art in Search of fullness* (1998). She is also the editor of *Estetyki australijskich Aborygenów* [Australian Aboriginal Aesthetics] (2004), *Going Aerial: Air, Art, Architecture* (2006) and *The Life of Air Dwelling, Communicating, Manipulating* (2011). She has curated several art exhibitions, including *Refugia. Keep (out of) these places* (Poland), *Bio- Reminiscences* (Poland), *Seeing the Forest Through the Trees* (UK) and *Boundless Objects* (Portugal). Currently, her research focuses on nonlife forces and new articulations of mineral becomings in contemporary art.

Eleonora Federici (University of Ferrara)

Beyond Apocalypse: Ecofeminist visions and the redefinition of humanity

A major concern of both ecofeminism and feminist SF is the proposition that a society based on cooperation and balance rather than dominance and hierarchy is necessary for survival on this planet, ecofeminist scholars propose to think about a change in our perspective on communities based on a system of cooperation, ecology, and protection of our planet Earth underlining at the same time, how there must be a interconnectedness of all living things. While ecofeminism has developed as a widely encompassing ideology, touching on subjects as diverse as nature-based religion, animal rights, women's rights, environmental worries about water, land, and air pollution, wildlife conservation, the oppression of Third World countries by Western industrialized nations, feminist science fiction has emerged in the US context in the 70s and 80s from the intersections of feminist research and the various movements for social justice and environmental health sharing some of the same concerns and objectives. SF women writers have proposed apocalyptic stories about human/planetary agency bringing to more egalitarian societies beyond binary categories of sex, gender and race. The analysis of SF through ecofeminism(s) can thus offer a framework that seeks re-examine and augment both environmental and feminist issues while rethinking the notion of 'humanity' and human beings. My paper will focus on the importance of an inclusive, pluralistic and contextualised ecofeminism reflected in feminist SF through a diachronical analysis of novels from the 70s to the 2000s that offer post-apocalyptic visions of life and living beings fighting for a place in democratic, egalitarian and environmental friendly societies.

BIO

Eleonora Federici (M.A. e Ph.D University of Hull, UK) is Associate Professor of English Language and Translation Studies at the University of Ferrara. Her main research areas are: Feminist Utopias and Science Fiction, Ecofeminism, Gender Studies, Translation Studies, LSP (languages for special purposes – specifically tourism and advertising). She is currently the President of the Equal Opportunities and Inclusion Committee at the University of Ferrara where she teaches courses on translation, gender issues and inclusion. She is Director of the Language Centre at the University of Ferrara where she organises courses on language and inclusion. She coordinated European projects on translation and memory and she has published books and articles in international journals. She has worked as professional translator and translated SF novels into Italian. Among her publications: *Translating Gender* (2011 Peter Lang), *Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice in Translation and Gender Studies* (2013 con V. Leonardi, Cambridge Scholars), *Quando la fantascienza è donna. Dalle utopie del XIX secolo all'età contemporanea* (2015 Carocci), *Translation Theory and Practice Cultural Differences in Tourism and Advertising* (2018 Loffredo), *Gender issues. Translating and mediating languages, cultures and societies* (2021 con S. Maci, Peter Lang), *New Perspectives on Gender and Translation. New Voices for Transnational Dialogues* (2021 con J. Santaemilia, Routledge).

PARTICIPANTS

Lilith Acadia (National Taiwan University)

Power On: the Actually Inhospitable Smart Homes of SF

From the HappyLife Home that compels young children to feed their own parents to the lions in Ray Bradbury's *The Veldt* (1950) to Obi 3 helping its occupant through a solitary pregnancy and childbirth in a pollen tsunami in Nnedi Okorafor's *Mother of Invention* (2018), smart homes in speculative fiction (SF) literature and film range from the ominously sinister to the strategically life-saving. The artificial intelligence of smart homes in science fiction can inspire new ways to think about innovation, survival, power, and desire. Yet they contain warnings, about intelligence without empathy, or even highly ethical analytically deduced decisions that do not privilege the human actors. The site of the *home* is particularly meaningful, since the home is idealized as a utopian space of harmony and security, which makes it all the more vulnerable to the impact of technology. The ideal of the 'smart home' is to accentuate these qualities, personalizing the home in a way that is more comfortable, harmonious, and secure. The clear objective and narrow set of actors the smart home is meant to serve emphasizes a core concern about AI technology: that the machine's interests will conflict with the human's. This presentation draws upon early iterations of AI like the Machine and its religion of Technopoly in E.M. Forster's 1909 *The Machine Stops*, and well-know examples like HAL 9000 from *2001 A Space Odyssey* along with the vaguely distasteful clamorous sterility of the futuristic Villa Arpel in Jacques Tati's *Mon Oncle* (1958). This focused consideration of smart homes is part of a larger project on what SF can teach us about the promise and danger of AI, to prepare for a future where there's no option to power off.

BIO

Dr. Lilith Acadia is an Assistant Professor of Literary Studies at National Taiwan University, and PI of a project on Artificial Intelligence in Science Fiction funded by the Taiwan National Science and Technology Council. Dr. Acadia has a PhD in Rhetoric from Berkeley and received fellowships including Fulbright and Marie Curie.

Simona Adinolfi (Ghent University)

#GOBACKWHEREYOUCAMEFROM: technological space-time compression in contemporary novels of migration

In the last few years, the fast development of digital technologies has proven to be a double-edged sword for people on the move. If, on the one hand, devices, such as smartphones and laptops, help migrants to keep in touch with their loved ones far away and guide them throughout their journeys, surveillance technologies, such as drones or face recognition software, loom upon freedom of movement in unprecedented ways. Contemporary novels of migration are engaging with the possibilities and threats of technology, challenging our common understanding of concepts usually associated with migration, such as "distance" and "border". This paper seeks to explore how digital technologies affect the representations of distance in contemporary novels of migration on both the level of content and form. After exploring how distance and technology

intertwine in the critical posthumanities debate, I proceed with the analysis of two case studies, *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *Home Fire* by Kamila Shamsie. The former novel envisions a world in which mysterious portals erase the boundaries between countries, thus causing extraordinary flows of refugees towards the West. Through the literary device of the portals, the novel compresses the distance between countries and problematizes our understanding of borders and states. Drones and smartphones punctuate the novel, the first trying to patrol the portals, the second as prosthetic forms that make the protagonists “present without presence” (Hamid 2017). The latter, a contemporary rendition of the Greek tragedy *Antigone*, achieves compression through the multiplication of screens and social media, that act as the choir of this modern tragedy. Overall, both novels reproduce space-time compression through narrative strategies such as multiperspectivity and fragmentation which, contrary to our expectations, also manage to reduce distance between the reader and the characters, showing that stories are still powerful technological devices.

BIO

Simona Adinolfi is a PhD student at Ghent University and at the University of Wuppertal. Her PhD project, supervised by Prof. Marco Caracciolo and Prof. Roy Sommer, examines contemporary novels of migration, showing how canonical themes usually associated to migration fiction are being subverted and complicated on a formal level by analysing them through the critical posthumanities. She is part of the Horizon 2020 project OPPORTUNITIES, in which she analyses migration narratives in the Italian media.

Dario Altobelli (University “G. d’Annunzio” - Chieti-Pescara)

Crimes of the Present Future. From transhumanism to the the post of humanity and society

The debate on transhumanism has been going on for some decades now (eg Harsell, Grassie 2011; Lille 2013). Two positions have animated the debate for a long time (Savulescu, Bostrom 2001), one in favor (eg Bostrom 2005), the other against (eg Fukuyama 2002), but now both seem to be superseded by reality (eg Krüger 2021). Proof of this is the expanding market of biotechnology, the mass use of experimental drugs, the multiple technical implementations in the body, the radical transformation of fundamental anthropological aspects such as nutrition and sexuality, and so on. In this perspective, two major issues arise for critical thinking:

1. What exactly does the transhuman condition consist of?
2. What are the characteristics of transhumanity and of the social forms connected to them?

To begin to answer these questions, a socio-cultural study perspective is adopted by examining David Cronenberg's recent film, *Crimes of the Future* (2022) as a work capable of asking such philosophical and sociological questions on an aesthetic level. As we can see in the film, the human, in the way we still commonly understand it, is disappearing every day. This is a prelude to an accomplished transhumanism when the human form would have been definitively compromised in its physical and psychic complex. On one hand, a key to the interpretation offered by the film is, not surprisingly, identified in the metamorphosis of corporeality and in the practices connected to it such as nutrition, sexuality, sleep. On the other, in the background scenery we can glimpse forms of an alienated and nihilistic sociality / society represented in the artistic and performative

sphere. Cronenberg highlights the decisive question that seems to escape widespread social perception. Far from being a horizon or a prospect to come, trans-humanism is already the condition of the present time: it is properly our present future. In that sense, meaning the prefix in an etymological sense, would it be legitimate to consider trans-humanism as a phenomenon of transit towards the post of humanity and society?

BIO

Dario Altobelli is Associate Professor of General Sociology at the Department of Legal and Social Sciences at the University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara (Italy). Among his interests: history of human and social sciences, sociology of law and political sociology, sociology of science, utopian thought. Among his recent publications: "Dopo lo stato di eccezione? Temporalità e storicità nell'epoca pandemica", in *Interface - Journal of European Languages and Literatures*, 18, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.6667/interface.18.2022.170>; *L'inconscio sociale e la dimensione urbana. Utopia, immaginario e temporalità della città nell'adesso pandemico*, Milano University Press, Milano, 2023, <https://libri.unimi.it/index.php/milanoup/catalog/book/92>; *L'eredità del presente. Capitalismo, forme di vita, utopia*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine, 2023.

Javier Alvarez (University of Salamanca, HISTOPIA)

Posthuman Perspectives: Identity, Environmentalism, and Biology in Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy

This paper offers an in-depth exploration of posthumanism through Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy, comprised of the novels *Oryx and Crake*, *The Year of the Flood*, and *MaddAddam*. These dystopian works present a meticulous and sophisticated dissection of biotechnology and ecology, providing a novel perspective on human identity in an era of rapid technological advancement and growing environmental consciousness. Atwood breaks away from traditional human-centric schemas and instead introduces us to a posthumanist perspective that necessitates a fundamental rethinking of our relationship with nature and technology. Through the *MaddAddam* trilogy, she challenges the centrality of the human, suggesting a more integrated and less anthropocentric view of the world. This study aims to investigate how the trilogy utilizes the concept of posthumanism to explore the fluidity of human identity, biotechnological transformations, and the interconnection with the environment. In Atwood's universe, characters and nature merge into an inseparable whole that questions traditional barriers between human, animal, and artificial realms. It is argued that Atwood's narrative proposes a posthumanist vision in which the human is not a fixed or defined state but a condition in constant evolution, affected by both biology and culture as well as technology. From this standpoint, the implications of this perspective for understanding the relationship between science, society, and the environment, and how these elements interact and affect each other, are explored. Finally, it discusses how the *MaddAddam* trilogy, through its posthumanist lens, invites us to reconsider our role and responsibility in a world increasingly influenced by biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and environmental challenges, promoting a more inclusive and respectful understanding of life in all its forms.

BIO

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

Caroline Bailey (Stanford University)

Ursula K Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Its Posthuman Imagination of a Society without Gender

Ursula K Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* has long enchanted readers through its posthuman imagination of a society without gender. Because of this, language in this novel has been much discussed through the lens of gender and pronoun use, a conversation that has evolved alongside with American acceptance of non-binary pronouns. In this presentation, however, I aim to explore another angle on language in the novel: its use of neologism to convey cognitive and cultural difference. I focus on the formal practice of *shifgrethor*, a neologism with a multivalent definition, which I argue is instrumental in explaining both the dialogue and chronic misunderstandings of the novel. Using linguistic theorists such as C.S. Peirce, Paul Grice, and George Lakoff, I study the pragmatic functioning of *shifgrethor*. I argue that *shifgrethor* operates by flouting Gricean maxims and extrapolating upon unfamiliar metaphors. This concept, a posthuman means of cognitive mapping, is a metaphor itself for the power relations embedded in language. The novel's protagonist, Genly Ai, often misinterprets these patterns through the lens of gender because this is the linguistic power structure he has been raised with. Ultimately, the novel reveals how a posthuman understanding of interwoven binaries no longer needs to use gender as an origin point—we have the potential to grasp more fundamental tensions at the heart of human thought.

BIO

Caroline Bailey is a PhD Candidate in English at Stanford University, simultaneously pursuing a MA in Linguistics. Her research focuses on the intersection between language and culture in the experimental contemporary novel, looking at the impact of social attitudes towards linguistic diversity in fiction. In addition to her scholarly work, Caroline has a creative practice that blends bookmaking, writing, and visual culture, and she has worked on several limited-run zines and unique book objects.

Laura Blázquez Cruz (University of Jaén)

Beating Body Obsolescence: When Art Transcends Death. From Cronenberg's Fiction in *Crimes of the Future* to the Reality in Stelarc's and Orlan's Art Performance

David Cronenberg's film *Crimes of the Future* (2022) explores, within a prospective fiction context, the change from purely biological corporeality to transhuman physicality, proposing an ethical debate in his discourse: preserving and consolidating biological corporeality in the epicenter of society as a given body or, on the contrary and in response to the technological revolution, proposing its transformation into a hybrid entity capable of adapting to the context to the point

that the organs can digest synthetic food for their survival, consecrating, in this way, *a lived body*, a body in conversion and process —not a given and finished corporeity— and advocating experimentation on oneself by creating a “Body without Organs” (BwO), in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s terms. In order to foster this debate, Cronenberg includes two areas where the body is transformed. On the one hand, and from the perspective of ecocriticism, the filmmaker resorts to plastic because of its hyperobject nature (Morton 163) since its presence in the form of microparticles allows it to expand worldwide through water —even surviving humanity—, being, in turn, a source of multiple diseases that the manipulated organisms can deal with. The second area is artistic, where the transhuman questions and problematizes the prevailing canons of beauty through surgery, nanotechnology and the prosthetic as a body performance in order to enhance the physiognomy and overcome the limitations that the biological body imposes. In other words, this second approach implies creating the mutant and cyborg body, as artists such as Orlan and Stelarc have been exemplifying through interventions and modifications on their own bodies through the so-called “Carnal Art”.

BIO

Laura Blázquez is a PhD in Languages and Cultures from the University of Jaén (2023), as well as a teacher and researcher in the Department of English Philology of the aforementioned institution. Her research pivots around the study of monstrosity from the psychological, ontological and representative spheres, covering different arts, as well as focused on the body as a frame and field where politics, biology and technology converge. She has carried out research stays at the University of Lisbon with a scholarship obtained in a competitive competition. Some of the papers she has written and presented in conferences deal with the monstrosity of the androgynous body (University of Salamanca), the transgender in the cinema (University of Athens), or the relationship between post-memory and the ontological (Poland).

Dario Boemia (IULM University)

La letteratura italiana e l'arma nucleare. Intorno alla *Trilogia atomica* di Carlo Cassola

Carlo Cassola’s Atomic Trilogy – consisting of *Il sopravvissuto* (The Survivor, 1978), *Ferragosto di morte* (Mid-August of Fire, 1980), and *Il mondo senza nessuno* (The World Without Anyone, 1982) – was published between the late seventies and the early eighties, a period that coincides with a strong pacifist commitment on the part of the author. Cassola dedicated not only novels but also several political essays to the theme, such as *Ultima Frontiera* (The Final Frontier, 1976), *Il Gigante Cieco* (The Blind Giant, 1976), *La lezione della Storia* (The Lesson of History, 1978) *Letteratura e disarmo* (Literature and Disarmament, 1980), *Contro le Armi* (Against Weapons, 1980), and *La rivoluzione disarmista* (The Disarmament Revolution, 1983). From a narrative perspective, the Atomic Trilogy revolves around the outbreak of the Third World War, which led to the detonation of multiple atomic bombs, instantly killing millions and, within a few days due to radiation, potentially all survivors (the last survivor being Lucky, a dog and protagonist of the first novel). My investigation has a dual objective: first, I will explore Cassola’s contribution to the development

of the nuclear catastrophe theme in Italian science fiction; second, I will analyze the stylistic, narratological, and generic implications of Cassola's post-apocalyptic approach to writing. Despite strong consistency in both setting (the trilogy tells a single story from different perspectives) and theme (the theme of atomic war and its consequences), the most significant centrifugal force in Cassola's Trilogy is its genre: the politext shifts from the fable-like quality of *Il sopravvissuto* to the post-apocalyptic novel in *Ferragosto di morte* and culminates in the narrative failure of *Il mondo senza nessuno*. Starting with the second novel, and increasingly so, extensive essayistic digressions appear, engaging with issues related to what the politically communist, pacifist, and anticlerical narrator calls the "atomic age". These issues include freedom in democracy, the course of history, science and faith, fascism, and power.

BIO

Dario Boemia is a research fellow at IULM University in Milan and adjunct professor of Comics Journalism at Boston College in Italy. His primary interests lie in contemporary Italian literature, periodical studies, and comics. Among his recent publications are *La recensione letteraria a fumetti tra gli anni Sessanta e gli anni Settanta in Italia* (2019), *Alle soglie dei Sillabari di Goffredo Parise: Dalla terza pagina alle edizioni in volume* (2020), "L'intelligenza malinconica. Il dibattito intorno al Neorealismo" sulla rivista *La Chimera (1954-1955)* (2021), and *Al funerale dello Zio Sam. Le cronache americane nell'Italiano di Leo Longanesi* (2022). He is the author of the monograph *I denti dell'arte. La letteratura entre-deux-guerres nell'Italiano di Leo Longanesi* (Amos 2020) and, together with Stefano Locati, the editor of the volume *Book Reviews and Beyond* (Biblion 2021).

Iren Boyarkina (University of Tuscia)

Posthumanism and AI in *The Last and First Men* by Olaf Stapledon

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

BIO

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

Angela Cilenti and Renata Keller (Academy of Fine Arts, Naples)

Echoes: A Magazine of Multimedial Perspectives for Cyber Awareness

The Cyberpunk genre, which exploded in the 1980s, is now influential again in all media: television, video games, music and art are fascinated by the glow of neon lights and metal shells that serve as a new skin. NightCity is the place where everything happens, but good and evil can only meet in the suburbs: here we can see the cross-section of society. Although the extremes never collide, the rich and the poor live in the same scheme where new technologies have the potential to transform the very essence of humanity, fusion with the machine, genetic modification and enhancement of human capabilities. The real quest is to survive the overwhelming flow of information and get the latest system upgrade. Human and Machine have never been more alike and find the ultimate mix in the figure of the Cyborg. Through a research journey that touched on the major titles of the genre across all media, we imagined an information device that would be suitable for such an advanced reality, and that would take advantage of its means, creating a people-friendly, socially and environmentally conscious magazine. Echoes is thus conceived as an interactive magazine that takes advantage of artificial intelligence, so that it is constantly updated on the news. Echoes is structured as a visual presentation in which posthuman and transhuman imagery is explored. Specifically, two main thematic areas are considered: body and soul. The body dossier contemplates gender studies and human-machine hybridization. The soul dossier concerns religious evolution and the post-mortem, analyzing the chance of digital reincarnation. These dossiers are complemented by other sections regarding a more conscious city life and the possibility of sustainable fashion matching the cyberpunk aesthetics. Confusing and redundant, Echoes visually stuns according to principles of optical buzz, and questions the future of humanity.

BIO

Angela Cilenti graduated in Communication Design from the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples, achieving the specialization in Multimedia Design.

Renata Keller graduated in Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples, achieving the specialization in Multimedia Design.

Paola Della Torre (LUMSA University)

Neill Blomkamp's Science Fiction: Bioethical Transhuman Dystopias

Neill Blomkamp is certainly one of the most innovative contemporary science fiction directors. Not only because of his *sci-fi* trilogy that includes *District 9*, *Elysium* and *Chappie* but also because he has created a production studio with which he has made and continues to make sci-fi-themed short films (the *Oats Studios* series on Netflix). His gaze, strongly characterized by South African culture (he was born Johannesburg, although he is a naturalized Canadian), is aimed at reflecting on the increasingly close relationship between man and machine, natural and artificial, with a perspective that problematizes the dark sides of unlimited technological development. In this sense, his works can be seen as visualizations of the discourses and debates that bioethics is conducting on the topic of the posthuman and thus on the hybridized and "augmented" life that, by now, governs our existences. The paper seeks to demonstrate this bioethical nature of Blomkamp's sci-fi dystopias and to highlight the problems he addresses, foremost among them the new anthropological scenario toward which we are heading. The filmmaker's ultimate question is always about what humanity we are realizing and admonishes us about the responsibilities we have in realizing it. His point of view is to remind us not to suffer it but to guide it according to humanistic values and criteria.

BIO

Paola Dalla Torre is Associate Professor of Cinema and Television at LUMSA in Rome. Her fields of interest include the study of science fiction cinema, on which she has written a book (*Sognando il futuro*, Rubettino 2012), and the relationship between science fiction cinema and bioethical issues (*Cinema contemporaneo e questioni bioetiche*, Studium 2000). She also deals with storytelling in contemporary cinema and TV series (*La risata del Joker*, Studium 2022). In recent years she has also studied the economics of cinema, particularly the exhibition chain (PRIN "CinEx," 2020).

Elvira Del Guercio (Roma Tre University)

IA in the Belly of "Others": An Analysis of *Dead Ringers* by Alice Birch

The advent of test-tube conception has given rise to a number of technologies for assisted reproduction which include the possibility of storing embryos (cryopreservation) to delay pregnancy over time, allowing heterologous reproduction, based on donation of gametes (sperm or oocytes). Surrogacy occurs when a woman "hosts" one pregnancy for another woman and today occurs mostly as a "gestational", through the injection of a sperm into the donor egg, whose embryo is produced implanted in another woman who will carry the pregnancy. Abandoning the implant technique "directly" in her uterus, the host mother will not be so biologically related to the baby, even if a small genetic exchange still takes place during gestation. Gestation for others has always inflamed the feminist debate and still nowadays. In *The Dialectic of the Sexes* (1970), Shulamith Firestone looked forward to the day when women would be free from the constraints of procreation. There have been theories that, on the other hand part, they felt that ectogenesis threatened the reproductive rights of non-women valuing their contribution to reproduction

(Murphy, 1995); a continuum of practices of taxes on slave plantations in the United States, since in both cases the women lose their children for the profit of the rich (Davis, 1993). Today, the conservative right in power has overly trivialized the complexity of the issue of the GPA, making it return to the public debate in a superficial way. The goal of this contribution is to identify how, however, certain media, and in particular the television series, are able to tell how complex the theme is and, above all, the fact that it is not a single practice, but several different practices, depending on the conditions to which it occurs and the rules governing it. The case study is the current reboot of *Dead Ringers* (1988) by David Cronenberg, directed by Alice Birch (2023) which also questions the relationship between artificial intelligence - or rather, capitalist technology (Federici, 2023) - reproduction and body of women, alluding to the possibility that AI could be not only a tool of control and self-determination.

BIO

Elvira Del Guercio (1998) is about to graduate in Literature (Roma Tre) and she writes about movies, tv series and comparative literature from a gender and post-colonial perspective for some online magazines such as *Il Tascabile*, *Not* and *Snaporaz*. Some of her essays already appeared in academic journals and she works as a programmer for *Sicilia Queer Filmfest*. Her first book will come out next year for *Not* (Nero).

Lorenzo Denicolai (University of Turin)

From Metropolis to Humans and Reality: Human-robotics Relation and Daily Solidarity

Film and media imageries have often anticipated technology's attempts to modify reality. The relationship with the machine is a recurring theme in visual production due to the very mechanical nature of the cinematographic medium. The many dystopian readings, often of literary derivation, have gradually been joined by utopian declinations (i.e., the TV series *Humans* proposes an ethical and social attempt at co-existence between humankind and androids). In any case, the audiovisual media have had a firm hold on constructing an imaginary to reason about human life with robots. This contribution proposes a rereading on two levels. First, a theoretical framework about the robot as a “relational dispositive” will be proposed, starting from media and film studies and the Jean Louis Baudry's cinematographic dispositive theory. The robotic dispositive is a peer relationship that can result in bio-technological co-evolution. Secondly, but not in terms of importance, the co-existence of the human-robot dispositive could be a conduit for actions of awareness for sustainability and robotic and socio-cultural solidarity with humans. In this sense, the contribution attempts to outline how specific cinematic topoi and imagery of co-habitation, co-existence, and the sharing of everyday life can be glimpsed today in specific modes of co-working with the robotic machine, with a focus on the use of social robots, telemedicine robots, and AI in the medical and social spheres.

BIO

Lorenzo Denicolai (Ph.D.) is a Senior Cinema, Photography, and Television Researcher at the University of Turin, teaching Anthropology of Media and Audiovisual communication methodologies. His research interests focus on human-technology relation, audiovisual media, and media literacy methodologies. His latest monographs' publications: *Scritture medialì. Rappresentazioni*,

riflessioni ed esperienze mediaeducative (Mimesis, 2017); *Mediantropi. Introduzione alla quotidianità dell'uomo tecnologico* (FrancoAngeli, 2018), and the edited book *Robotmedium: dispositivi, intelligenze, cinema* (Meltemi, 2022).

Ljudmila Djukic (Independent Scholar)

Human/AI Interactions in *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* by Ted Chiang

Some of Chiang's stories deal with artificial life forms and *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* is his longest work of this kind. In this novella, we are told a story about "digients" - digital entities - artificial intelligences that have been created in a digital world and being brought by two friends Ana Alvarado and Derek Brooks. In his narration, the author thoughtfully conveys several conflicts and possible futures of artificial intelligence development. Chiang draws our attention not only to artificial intelligence, but to the concept of life itself as a whole. The article explores what the artificial intelligence entities and the humans have, or might have, in common, the points where they intersect and paths they might follow parallelly.

BIO

Ljudmila Djukic is a teacher, translator and curator from Belgrade, Serbia. She received her MA in Art History and an MA in Spanish Language and Hispanic Studies from the University of Belgrade.. Ljudmila has been teaching Spanish Language and world and art history and has worked in several international schools in Belgrade. As a teacher, she has been in charge of curriculum designing and planning, as well as organizing extracurricular activities. Ljudmila is a translator and interpreter, translating from English and Spanish into Serbian and Macedonian, and her publications include both technical translations and art, architecture, health and fitness books. She is also engaged in exhibition curating and interested in art history, cultural heritage and education.

Julia A. Empey (University of Cambridge)

Robotic Labour and Marginalization in *Ex Machina* and *After Yang*

Utilizing Alex Garland's 2015 film *Ex Machina* and Kogonada's 2021 film *After Yang* as case studies, this paper examines the role of labour in influencing human-robot relationships and how these dynamics are actively shaped through visual culture, specifically film. Both films are deeply invested in labour politics, with *Ex Machina*'s Kyoko functioning as a domestic slave, and Yang performing emotional care work more often associated with female-rendered robots. Through close analysis of the films' visual styles and by reading them through a critical posthumanist lens, I aim to place these films not only in conversation with each other, but in the larger history of robotic labour. Jennifer Rhee argues, robotics and labour, specifically care labour, have been "entangled since AI's earliest days" (31). What interests me is how these films do – and do not – take up issues of gender and race in labour politics in a more critical sense. Rather, these films extend a transhumanist fantasy turned nightmare by uncritically utilising women's and racialized minorities' oppression and labour as a means of exploring the technologies often created by men. This post-human figure out of science fiction, contrasted against the current global reality of these marginalized bodies and identities, speaks to a cruel irony of the Other's experience: the Other's embodied reality is not as

valid as the one constructed by men through technology. As Jasbir K. Puar contends, "societies of control tweak and modulate bodies as matter, not predominantly through signification or identity interpellation but rather through affective capacities and tendencies" (63). By critically examining these films, we are able to better ascertain not just how robotic labour is naturalized and expected, but also constructed alongside racist and misogynistic logics.

BIO

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

Marco Favaro (University of Europe for Applied Sciences, Berlin)

Virtual Post-apocalypses between Flame-hair Saviors and Useless Heroes: The Future of Humanity and Nature in the Video Game Series of *Horizon* and *The Last of Us*

In contemporary popular culture, we see a growing success of post-apocalyptic narratives. Video games are no exception: successful game such as *Fallout*, *Deus Ex*, *Detroit: Become Human* or *The Division* show a world in which society as we know it has ceased to exist, a narrative choice that allows players to find themselves in a new but at the same time familiar reality, thus giving them an uncanny experience. Among the many video games that recently depicted future utopian or dystopic worlds, two can be considered the most significant, both in terms of sales (they sold more than 32 million units worldwide) and impact of the stories told: *Horizon* and *The Last of Us*. In the first, the player takes on the role of Aloi in 31st century North America, a distant future where human civilization – first completely destroyed, then artificially recreated – has returned to a tribal lifestyle. Peculiar to this world are the gigantic animal machines, a legacy of the previous era. *The Last of Us*, on the other hand, offers a peculiar zombie dystopia, in which the infected are controlled by the Cordyceps fungus and humankind struggles to survive. What does it mean to live in a post-apocalyptic or even dystopian future? Adopting an existentialist perspective, this presentation intends to explore the possibilities offered to the player's avatar and its relationship with the game world (gameplay, enemies, environment), with the aim of reading both video games as a criticism of our society and as a warning about the consequences of ecological disaster and climate change.

BIO

Dr. Marco Favaro (1990) is Program Manager and lecturer at the University of Europe for Applied Sciences in Berlin. He obtained his PhD in cultural studies and human sciences at the Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg in cooperation with the Università degli Studi di Verona. He is the author of *La Maschera dell'Antieroe*, published by Mimesis Edizioni. The book defines the structures of the contemporary superhero genre and its implicit philosophical concepts. Marco and Prof. Justin Martin are the editors of *Batman's Villains and Villainesses*, an anthology which analyses the

Dark Knight's rogue gallery from a multidisciplinary perspective (forthcoming publication with Lexington Books). Marco studied Philosophy in Rome (BA) and at the Freie Universität Berlin (MA). In AY 2020/21, he taught at Bamberg University. Since September 2022 he collaborates with the Online Magazine *Lo Spazio Bianco*. Several of his essays are published i. a. by Routledge, McFarland or available online.

Sara Feio (Independent scholar)

Adam Fiasco: An Immersive Experience within Illustration

This report explores the process of creating a fictional persona as an immersive solution for expressing different parts of the Self when image-making. In search of an approach method that can rekindle passion for working as an illustrator after burnout, I explore the 'Batman Effect', a study made on children. This scientific experiment shows self-distancing and taking on a fictional persona as an effective method of perseverance when performing a task, and I take it a step further by creating a male alter ego that goes beyond the imagination and is embodied through a collection of artifacts and a work place, a clinic for his practice. By using written and drawn data collection on 300 Instagram stories to uncover what themes have been stifled by a professional practice taken too seriously, I experiment with the development of a practice-led Methodology of Play that puts to use these artifacts and focuses on analogue mark-making. From a smaller selection of 5 themes, I discuss the obstacles found when developing this Methodology of Play emerging from an exclusively digital practice. I make an argument for the advantages of working with materiality, and for the transformative power of physically embodying an alter ego, or a part of the Self. Lastly, I compare my process and discoveries with the findings of an experimental workshop I led with other digital-based creatives, to test the potential of the Methodology of Play on others. Looking to the future, I assess adaptations that need to be made to the employed methods, and how the clinic can be used to help others struggling with the same problem.

BIO

Sara Feio is a multidisciplinary illustrator and educator. With academic qualifications from University of the Arts London and Falmouth University, she divides her time between Portugal and the UK. As a freelance illustrator, Feio has collaborated with renowned clients such as Sony Music, Mini BMW, the University of Lisbon, Turin Museum of Natural History, and the British Fashion Council. In 2016, Feio founded the Illustration for New Media course at ETIC, Lisbon, where she serves as the course leader. Feio's work reflects her passion for illustration, education, and the intersection between the two.

Alice Giuliani (University of West London)

PHIL/ip: Re-animated Actors as Posthuman Simulacra

By discussing the posthumous simulation of actor Philip Seymour Hoffman in Cécile B. Evans' sf artist film *Hyperlinks* or *It Didn't Happen* (2014), my presentation will think about digital, cinematic re-animations of actors and posthuman entities in digital/post-cinema. By combining Deborah Levitt's (2018) reflection on the potential of the 'animatic' as the generation of life within cinema

with the figuration of “bits of life”, which “signifies today's cultural fusion of the biological and the technological” (Smelik and Lykke 2010), I will argue that PHIL, the lively synthespian of the film, emerges as site where the status of the human and human life in the posthuman predicament (Braidotti 2013) are negotiated vis-à-vis the intensified technological mediation of bodies and life. While some re-animations of actors reinforce related masculinist and humanistic ideals, in my reading PHIL, as a digital Deleuzian simulacrum of an already simulacral and other (queer, fat, mutable) body, assumes a digital life of his own, opening up a space for thinking life after the humanist subject, after the organism, after the human. Lively digital simulacra are Weird monsters that question our consolidated, habitual ways of thinking the world, and aesthetically reposition the human within a different, post-anthropocentric ontology of life: within *A Life* (Deleuze), or life itself.

BIO

Alice Giuliani is currently a Ph.D. student at the School of Film, Media and Design at the University of West London, where she is a member of the Thinking the Image research group. In her doctoral research, she engages with New Weird cinema, critical posthumanism, ecocriticism and monstrosity to investigate (post-)cinema's ‘will to art’ as a narrative-aesthetic-technological assemblage of and for the posthuman condition.

Giulia Iannuzzi (University of Trieste)

Automata Like Us. Exhibitions of Otherness, Mastering of Time, and the Emergence of Science Fiction as a Mindset

This paper locates some recent examples of artificial humans on the small and the big screen within the long-term history of the exhibition of otherness in European and North-American culture, and focuses on the automaton as a speculative trope exploited to problematise the philosophical, ethical, and legal boundaries of the human being. The automaton's fortunes in contemporary popular culture are attested by a wide constellation of works, ranging from *Ex_machina* (Garland, 2014) to *Tomorrowland* (Bird, 2015), and of which the television series *Westworld* (Nolan and Joy, 2016-2022) is adopted in this paper as a focal point. Artificial human beings which populate recent speculative fiction emerged from a complex cultural matrix including theme parks, dime museums, and side shows. These cultural settings are in turn rooted in the great late 19th- and 20th-century universal exhibitions, which staged new reifications of human otherness, and have been crucial laboratories of science fiction as a mindset – a disposition to enjoy techno-science as a source of spectacle, wonder, and willing suspension of disbelief. Against this backdrop, time as a culturally constructed experiential frame – at a social as well as subjective level – serves as a vantage point to look at the hierarchisation of otherness, the construction of cultural identity, and related mechanisms of individual, social, racial, and inter-species exclusion. The mnemonic and historical mastering of the past is represented in some recent narratives as an epistemic field in which the anthropocentric articulation of intersubjective reality may be discerned with particular evidence. Artificial intelligence may be identified in this context as a philosophically disruptive element, engendering moral dilemmas about the status of artificial beings and the very boundaries of human identity.

BIO

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

Hiroko Inose ((Dalarna University)

Human, This Ever-changing Creature: *Oshiko's Default Standard* by Yukiko Motoya

As seen in the classical SF *anime* film *Galaxy Express 999* (1979), relations between human and AI-enhanced transhuman, and an AI-controlled dystopian society have always been popular in Japanese imagination. These relations can be confrontational, or alternatively, affectionate as sometimes depicted in *shōjo manga*. In the novel *Oshiko's Default Standard* (*Oshiko no deforuto* in Japanese original) (2021) by Yukiko Motoya (1979-), however, there is no human-transhuman relations as such, as the story depicts the process of human rapidly transforming into AI-enhanced transhuman – in a seemingly dystopian society. Set in the post-crisis Japan, the novel focuses on an everyday-life sphere - child-rearing and nursery school - in a society in which co-prosperity with the AI had become the main national policy. The lessons at the nursery school aim to raise children with outstanding "abilities to become homogenous", as individual differences are now considered vulnerability rather than strength. Many professions have been taken over by white cube-shaped robots produced by a single company, and although there is no description of these robots actively controlling the society, people – especially children and youths - start idealizing them and imitating their functions through implanting devices in all body parts. Oshiko, the protagonist, is a mother of two and has adapted well to this society, in which everyone is connected to internet for 24hours/day and endlessly consume digitized content. The nature, including natural human feelings, has been tamed and trivialized to become mere "undigitized" or "raw" content for her. Through the close reading, the present paper analyses some of the issues this controversial novel raises, focusing on the possible changes AI-dominated society make on humans, including borders between normal and abnormal, connection with others and loss of individuality, shifting bodily senses, as well as the human essence which can only exist in the constant state of changes.

BIO

Hiroko Inose is a senior lecturer of Japanese at Dalarna University (Sweden). Her main research area is translation of contemporary literature (including transborder literature) into/from Japanese, cultural translation, and Japanese popular culture (in particular manga) and its translation.

Ciarán Kavanagh (Ghent University)

Cultivating Seriousness: SF, the News, and the Rise of 'AI'

Media coverage of new machine learning technologies, which has oscillated between evangelising and doomsaying, has drawn on SF tropes and jargon in reporting on these so-called AIs. A recent BBC article, for example, headed by an image of the Terminator, reports on the UK tech minister's exasperation with people highlighting AI's "Terminator-style" risks at the expense of its potential positives. In this feedback loop, SF provides tropes, imagery and thought-through potentials to the news media, which, through their use of the same, provide a measure of authority or credibility to SF. The result is an increase in serious attention to SF, specifically in matters relating to AI. My postdoctoral project, "Science Fiction and Seriousness", examines the idea of seriousness in SF's discursive culture: the concerns, expectations and anticipations that result in ideas of 'Serious SF' (and its opposite). In this paper, I examine a number of different SF short stories on AI within the discursive context of seriousness. Thus, I consider the text's formal features, content and tropes alongside the publication they appear in and its paratexts, and against a broader culture of SF in the mainstream. Stories that deal with AI tend to differ quite significantly along these lines if they are, for example, published in the "Futures" section of *Nature* as opposed to *Clarkesworld*, a dedicated SFF magazine. An AI narrator that is alien and estranging may cultivate serious attention in certain publications through literariness, whereas engagements that are more probable, but couched in SF jargon, might lose such attention in that same venue. Thus, I show that dealings with AI in SF—like so many other tropes—must be understood not only in relation to literary value, but in relation to this concept of seriousness, and the interpretive stakes of serious attention, whether through perceived literary value or other means.

BIO

Dr Ciarán Kavanagh completed his PhD, "Refiguring Reader-Response: Theorising Experience in Postmodern Fiction", in University College Cork, Ireland. He is currently an FWO Postdoctoral Researcher in Ghent University, Belgium, where he is pursuing a 3-year research project entitled *Science Fiction and Seriousness*. His reader-oriented research focuses on how the concept of seriousness is formed and debated in science fiction's discursive cultures.

Paulina Kędzia-Wiśniewska (University of Silesia)

The Perception of Artificial Intelligence in the Cinema of the 80s and the Latest Movies

This presentation explores the portrayal of Artificial Intelligence in movies throughout the years, tracing its transformation with a focus on films from the 80s and the newest movies. I will analyze the shifting perspectives and themes associated with AI in popular culture, by examining various films. Most of the popular films from the 80s explored the potential dangers of artificial intelligence development – rebelling against humans and causing chaos in the world. Movies like *Saturn 3* (1980, J. Barry, S. Donen), *Wargames* (1983, J. Badham), and *The Terminator* (1984, J. Cameron) share a persistent theme of humanity fighting for survival against a relentless enemy. They depict a future where machines have gained control over humans. These films, along with many others from that period, present artificial intelligence as something that could lead to a loss of control and pose a massive threat to humanity. On the other side, *Blade Runner* (1982, R. Scott) provides us with a more nuanced portrayal of AI. The movie inspired plenty of today's cinema productions.

Moving into the 21st century, the presentation will delve into films such as *Ex Machina* (2015, A. Garland) and *Her* (2013, S. Jonze), which blur boundaries between humans and machines. Recently we have seen cases of positive views on AI as companions (i.e. *Wall-E* or *Big Hero 6*). By giving Artificial Intelligence emotions, it becomes an empathetic friend. From dystopian visions of AI domination to explorations of AI as companion movies play a significant role in shaping public perception of new technologies. By examining the changing perspectives portrayed on screen, we can gain insights into the cultural and technological shifts that have influenced our perception of AI over time.

BIO

Paulina Kędzia-Wiśniewska is a graduate of cultural studies and she is currently pursuing a doctoral degree at The Silesian University. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on the concept of retromania in popular culture. She has authored the article *Time Closed in Aesthetics. Neonisation as an aesthetic strategy referring to the 1980s* and proposed an analysis of the phenomenon of including clues about time in the aesthetics of a film. With an active involvement in university life, she demonstrates a passion for film aesthetics.

Anwesha Maiti (Bankura University)

The Mother, the Other and the Posthuman: Speculating Motherhood as a Posthuman Condition through Jessamine Chan's *The School for Good Mothers*

The contemporary anthropocene, with its scientific breakthroughs in fertility treatments and increasingly regressive stance on female reproductive rights, along with escalating violence against women all over the world, is an interesting time to be living in as a woman, and especially as a mother. The modern woman, often raised witnessing traditional gender roles while simultaneously growing up with the teachings of feminism and women empowerment to become financially independent, finds herself at the crossroads more often than not. A similar crossroads is characteristic to the idea of posthumanism, which has created a space for possibilities, whether good or bad, beyond the exclusionary boundaries of androcentric humans. Considering the conflicting ideas of a woman's personal identity and the gender roles assigned to her, and taking cognisance of how a female's identity is often enshrouded by the physicality and feasibility of her body, women are found to be relegated as the other, and in the realm of posthuman. This particular paper aims to investigate the nuances attached to the idea of motherhood as propagated by the existing society and speculates motherhood to be a posthuman condition, with the aid of theories of critical and popular posthumanism, and feminism. Jessamine Chan's debut novel *The School for Good Mothers* (2022), tells the story of Frida, who lives in a society where the state, if unhappy with the display of maternal instincts, can often choose to send women to be trained and re-educated to become good mothers. Through a close reading of this novel, this paper aims to elaborate the condition of modern mothers in the society and tries to define motherhood. Furthermore, it will attempt to understand motherhood in the context of dystopia, and speculate whether the idea of motherhood can be established as a posthuman condition.

BIO

Anwasha Maiti is a Ph.D scholar in the department of English in Bankura University, Bankura, India. Her area of interest is popular literature and culture with a focus on the gender question, and her doctoral research work focuses on the nuances of the posthuman female body in Indian dystopian literature in English. She has an M.Phil. in Translation Studies from the University of Hyderabad, and is an avid reader of popular and young adult literature, both in Bangla and English.

Francisco Jose Martinez Mesa (Complutense University of Madrid)

Do Clones Dream of Being Humans? Cinematic Fictions around Transhumanist Dehumanisation

The increasing momentum achieved by transhumanist proposals in today's world has contributed to forge a very optimistic discourse regarding the infinite possibilities of improvement open to humans. Although these ideas are not new, the extraordinary technological and scientific development experienced in recent decades has led to the creation of greater expectations on the subject. But the emergence of all these proposals must be placed within a context, the present one, extremely complex and contradictory, where science is beginning to be questioned as a panacea for the ills and problems afflicting mankind. The age-old human aspiration to intervene and control everything that surrounds one's existence gained decisive momentum with modernity, to the point of extending and obsessively imposing it on all areas of human life and creation. It was no longer just a matter of conquering and extending control over the real world, but also over potentially undiscovered fields and scenarios. Improving the quality of life of individuals and increasing their life expectancy required the creation and opening of new techniques and avenues of research, which meant compulsively subjugating the future and extracting all its resources to the maximum. At times, at any cost. Within these multiple imaginaries around which people have projected their ghosts and fantasies about their future, we would like to dwell on one that is certainly modern and current, where many of the ethical, political, social, and existential dilemmas and conflicts that are today at the heart of the debate on transhumanism are revealed. We are referring to the question of the artificial creation of genetic material from human beings and the new scenario of possibilities and problems opened by the emergence of a new series of creatures conceived to replicate individuals, but systematically deprived of any of their rights. One of the spheres where the uncertainties and fears of this new, increasingly real framework have been best expressed has been the cinema. Through its screens, the public has been able to familiarise itself with hypothetically near futures where the cloning of individuals is a fact and the societies that promote it are subjected to serious dilemmas that threaten the concepts of essence and human identity. The analysis of some of these productions (*The Island* -2005, *Infinite Pool* -2023-, *Swan Song* -2021-, *Never Let Me Go* -2010-, *Moon* -2009- or *Womb* -2010-among others) will allow us to focus the debate and put in its true dimension our optimistic, but at the same time disquieting, present-day world.

BIO

Francisco José Martínez Mesa is an Associate Professor of Political Theory in the Department of History, Theories and Political Geography of the Faculty of Political Science and Sociology of the UCM (Madrid) and a member of the HISTOPÍA research group. His research field is specialized in utopian and dystopian studies, from a political and multidisciplinary perspective. Among his

latest works: “Dilemas y puntos ciegos en el discurso distópico actual: aproximación a una nueva tipología del género” in *Distopía y Sociedad*, 1 (2021) and “Years and Years: la vertiente gratificadora de la distopía” in Urraco, M., Mesa- Villar, J.M., Filhol, B. (eds.), *Imágenes distópicas* (Madrid, La Catarata, 2022), Pro, J. (dir.), *Diccionario de lugares utópicos* (2023), “Imágenes de un futuro demasiado cercano: la inscripción de lo distópico en la España actual” en *El Futuro del Pasado*, 14 (2023).

Jacob McElroy (Independent scholar)

The Many Batmen of Tomorrow

Over the past eight decades, a multitude of multiversal comic book stories and myriad motion picture adaptations have presented the human-all-too-human character Batman wearing suits, driving cars, and using gadgets in order to defend the innocent and defenseless, and to defeat or otherwise defy enemies, both superhuman and subhuman alike. Whether any given Batman story takes place in a parallel world or alternate future, animated adaptation or blockbuster franchise reboot, Bruce Wayne and other members of the “Bat Family” often use, espouse, represent, and influence a post- or (more often) trans-human ethos. In the following 19 minutes (and corresponding number of pages), I will enumerate and elaborate on a relatively small sample of moments from comic books, television series, and movies in which Batman exemplifies and embodies trans-human concepts found not only in other works of fiction, but also in recent news stories regarding contemporary technological advents and events. By the end of this paper/presentation, I will also demonstrate and describe how these moments relate to Batman’s prevailing theme of survival. Time permitting, I will also extrapolate, project, and speculate on what many Batman stories told 10, 50, and 100 years from now may need to include or address as our real-world technology inevitably outstrips most of the gadgets, suits, and vehicles presented in the Batman stories told so far.

BIO

Jacob McElroy is a former instructor of English Composition (Rhetoric & Narrative, Style & Evidence) and Film Appreciation at his graduate alma mater, the University of North Florida. He has been the head of the Joseph Campbell Foundation’s Mythological RoundTable® of Jacksonville, Florida, and has yet to relinquish the title. Jacob McElroy is currently on (indefinite) parental leave from the UNF English Department and Writing Center. He spends his unprofessional time as caretaker of McElroy Manor and its residents, as well as filmmaker-and-photographer-in-residence for Gracie Jiu-Jitsu St. Augustine. Sometimes he writes about Batman as an independent researcher.

Valerio Moccia (IULM University)

Exploring Post- and Transhumanism in *Tales From the Loop*

Tales From the Loop, initially conceived as an illustrated book by Stålenhag (2014), has evolved into a multi-platform phenomenon, including a critically acclaimed role-playing game (Hintze & Stålenhag, 2017) and a popular Amazon Prime series. Gaining the prestigious Kurd Lasswitz

Award in 2021, this book has also spawned a sequel titled *Things From The Flood* (Stålenhag, 2016 and Hintze & Stålenhag, 2019). Set in an alternative 1980s and 1990s Sweden and the United States, the narrative delves into the intricate relationship between humanity and technology, as experienced through the eyes of children and adolescents. Positioned as a captivating "low-fi science fiction", the television series, currently on production for its second season, has been academically acknowledged for its ability to induce viewers in a state of philosophical reflection, satisfying the hedonistic desire for existential fulfillment (Konfederat & Dyadyk, 2021). The series can be also perceived as sharing certain thematic affinities with the Mundane Manifesto (Ryman et al., 2004), despite being an uchronia, a genre that inherently defies the rule of "No alternative universes or parallel worlds". This contribution undertakes a comprehensive examination of the post- and transhuman elements embedded within these creative works, with a specific emphasis on the implicit dichotomy that emerges between these two philosophical approaches within the television series. Furthermore, it elucidates the influence of Heidegger's (1953/1977) ideas on the interplay between truth and technology as manifested in numerous key excerpts of both the series and the tabletop game. By unraveling these layers of thought-provoking storytelling, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the captivating interplay between humanity, technology, and philosophical inquiry within the immersive world of *Tales From the Loop*.

BIO

Valerio Moccia is a PhD student in Visual and Media Studies at IULM University in Milan (supervised by Prof. Daniela Cardini and co-supervised by Prof. Mariagrazia Fanchi). Currently, he teaches the module on Pitching and Public Speaking at the Catholic University of Milan. He holds an MA in Business, Media, and Organizational Communication, with an additional diploma from the International Master in Audiovisual and Cinema Studies. His current research is focused on Board Game Studies, specifically exploring the relationship between board games and television. He is also interested in Audience Studies and the evolution of cinema exhibition and movie theaters.

Federica Moscatelli (University of Bologna)

Tecnoutopias and Tecnocolonization in *Ygdrasil* by Jorge Baradit

Seeing the human from beyond the human destabilizes what is taken for granted and changes the very terms of analysis and comparison (Kohn, 2021). In the novel *Ygdrasil* by Jorge Baradit (2005), this going beyond the human is particularly evident in the fusion of the biological and technological body. The novel is fragmentary in its formal and content structure and is regarded as a science fiction narrative between cyberpunk, splutterpunk, cyberschamanism and magic realism 2.0. The mythical- religious and shamanic echoes, typical of the atavistic Hispano-American cultures, are superimposed on a highly technological and computerized dystopian imaginary where the main characters are cyborgs, monsters and hybrids that move in a hellish universe subjugated by the control of a mysterious corporation-state called Chrysler. The protagonist-heroine, Mariana, moves like in a video game, overcoming various trials and accompanying the reader in the exploration of this cyberspace. In my talk, I will analyse how, in Baradit's text, such transhuman ecology presupposes both tecnoutopia and tecnocoloization. On the one hand, the tecnoutopia of a connected mode that allows the human to overcome its biological limits and merge with

technological logics to increase its potentialities. On the other hand, the technocolonisation of the body in a society where capitalist production shapes a slave regime and a cyber hell where the human is alienated and amputated. In Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, the cyborg is a social creature, manufactured by the union of a machine and an organism, a hybrid just like every human being (Haraway, 1985). In Baradit, on the other hand, this organism is an infernal pastiche, a slave in the service of a capitalist and hyper-productive system. To conclude, the analysis of the text will explore the posthuman and transhuman dimension in Jorge Baradit's *Ygdrasil*, attempting to reflect on the social implications of this double reading in our contemporary times.

BIO

Federica Moscatelli is a PhD candidate for the XXXVIII cycle in Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures: Diversity and Inclusion - World Literature and Postcolonial Studies curriculum, L-LIN/06, Hispano-American Languages and Literatures. Her research interests include postcolonial studies, border studies, migration, and dystopian and post-apocalyptic literature in the Hispano-American context. She graduated from the University of Bologna with a thesis on Central American migration to the United States and carried out two periods of study and research in Mexico. Her doctoral thesis carries out an analysis of the reconstruction of alternative and communitarian futures after the apocalypse in dystopias and post-apocalyptic narratives in contemporary Hispano-American literature.

Teuvo Peltoniemi (Independent scholar)

Virtuality and Utopian Communities

My presentation explores the intricate relationship between technological utopias, virtual reality, and the potential for utopian communities in the digital era. It begins by discussing the pursuit of a Utopian standard of living through scientific and technological advancements, highlighting the dualistic nature of technology and its impact on daily life in the information society. The abstract emphasizes the role of technology in addressing climate change and the accelerated development of artificial intelligence during the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual reality is examined as a more immersive experience within the information society, raising concerns about excessive immersion and game addiction. The abstract discusses Facebook's role as the largest virtual community and the significant revenue growth in the global online and video game industry. The concept of metaverses is introduced, with Facebook's rebranding as Meta and the emergence of companies like Spanish Utopion, offering virtual land and enabling users to connect with friends, replicate businesses, and organize virtual events. The potential for virtual utopian communities is debated, with researchers arguing that existing virtual communities exhibit utopian elements through unrestricted information access and environmental friendliness. However, the abstract acknowledges the challenges of restricted information, personal data requirements, increasing regulation, and energy consumption. The rise of metaverses is seen as a potential catalyst for fully virtual or hybrid utopian communities, attracting technology enthusiasts. The abstract also

explores the similarities and differences between terrestrial and virtual utopian communities. It discusses the importance of leadership dynamics, commitment, shared values, and order in both types of communities. While virtual communities offer creative freedom and increased autonomy, they cannot fully cater to physical and physiological needs. Despite this limitation, virtual utopian communities are considered semi-utopias that surpass traditional communities in various aspects. In summary, this presentation provides insights into the complexities of technological utopias, virtual reality, and the potential for utopian communities in the digital era. It touches on topics such as the impact of technology on daily life, the emergence of metaverses, the possibilities, and challenges of virtual utopian communities, and the similarities and differences between terrestrial and virtual communities.

BIO

Teuvo Peltoniemi, Licenciat of Political Sciences (Helsinki University) is a Finnish researcher, science journalist and science writer specialised on technology, emigration, and health; social topics. He has worked as researcher, journalist, university teacher, communications director, media trainer, and prevention expert e.g. at universities, Finnish Broadcasting Company, *Tiimi* Journal and the EU. He has written or edited 18 books. In 1985, he published a book about the Finnish Utopian Communities, and in 2023 he will publish a new book about Finnish, American, Spanish and Scandinavian Utopian Communities. He has also written a large number of scientific and public articles and produced radio, TV and internet programs, and exhibits about emigration. Mr. Peltoniemi has received a number of Finnish and EU awards. In Finland he was the “Science Journalist of the Year”; in 2007 and in 2011 he was honored by the “State of Finland Award” for Life Work on Public Information.

Ana Peraica (Danube University)

AI Doppelgangers: Prolongation or Pollution of Life

Plenty of horror fiction movies, recorded already since 50s, have analysed possibility of creation of doppelgangers (Peraica 2020; 2021). In them, a biological carrier, another human body has been adapted to mimic the cheated one. With development of plastic surgery full copies of other people, usually famous figures as actors and singers, indeed started to mess up identities. Yet, despite copies of some people can be dangerous in regard to the first-glance identity hoax, in them only a physical agent, thus body-restrained copy, is being created. This agent, still, does not have the same body marks as fingerprints or DNA. With AI a possibility of replicating body image, mocking voice enhanced disembodied doppelganger – the one that has higher possibility than our natural body. In addition to qualitative data of face, voice and fingertip, and DNA, which can be “mined” by pattern recognition, but also quantitative metric phone and social number, geo-positions etc (Reneiris 2023)... are picked up. All these information are reconstructing more detailed version of us. Yet, is the new “re-constructed” body us or someone else? According to extropian prophecies, such solution of uploading our information is actually enhancing our longevity giving us life out of our own body. On the other hand, while preserving authentic biological (Dauvergne 2020) and data material they also present an ecological problem of doubling of life (Nourbaksh 2023).

BIO

Ana Peraica is the author of a number of books, including *The Age of Total Images* (Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2019), *Fotografija kao Dokaz* (Multimedijalni institute, Zagreb, 2018), and *Culture of the Selfie* (Institute of Network Cultures, Amsterdam, 2017). She is also the author of encyclopedia entries for Sage and chapters in anthologies and readers published by MIT Press, Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan, Bloomsbury, and Springer. Her articles appear in journals such as *Leonardo*, *Photographies*, *Philosophy of Photography*, *Art Documentation*, and others that are peer-reviewed. She is a Visiting Professor at Danube University in Austria and was a Visiting Fellow at Central European University in Budapest previously. Ana Peraica's work focuses primarily on post-digital photography; this includes semiautomated and automated photographic genres and forms, such as selfies, total images, deep images, and generative photography, in addition to operative images. Recently, she has defined the field of photogenetics, proposing several useful concepts for generative photography, including photogenes and phototypes, which she uses in the context of the Sixth extinction, characteristic for Photographocene (photography recording demise of life) and the problem of generative images of species.

Davide Persico (University of Naples Federico II)

Human/machine Relationships in *Her* (2013) by Spike Jonze

The paper studies *Her* (2013) by Spike Jonze. It is an extremely complex and significant film that explores artificial intelligence by anticipating and forecasting the implications and increasingly close relationships between man and machine, as well as between technological and human horizons. The film interprets sentiments, almost anticipating aridity that reigns in society and in human relationships, focusing on processes of humanisation and dehumanisation. In *Her*, the plot is not focused in a "biotechnical" way on machine/human relationships. There is no allusion to any man-machine nexus, which the cyborg and science fiction cinema of last decades have developed in depth. Just think of the Terminator and its franchise. In *Her*, the relationship between anthropomorphic subjects is relative to the possibility of interacting with an operating system, capable of thinking, feeling human emotions and dialoguing with a man directly, as in a normal conversation between friends or lovers.

BIO

Davide Persico is an adj. professor of cinema at the University of Naples "Federico II". He deals with theory and analysis of film, studies relationships between cinema and philosophy. He is particularly interested in hermeneutics and deconstruction. He has published essays in *Imago* and *Segnocinema* and participated in various conferences. He is the author of *Inland Empire. L'illusione e l'assenza* (Albatros, 2010), *Decostruire lo sguardo. Il pensiero di Jacques Derrida al cinema* (Mimesis, 2016) e *Blow-up e le forme potenziali del mondo* (Mimesis, 2020).

Stefano Pifferi (University of Tuscia)

At the Origin of the New Human: Umberto Simonetta's *I viaggiatori della sera* between Premonition and Newness

Sometimes, genre fiction is the place in which new paths, dynamics, trajectories of the world to come can find a place to be developed. This also happens with authors who are often involved in literature and novels that can be classified as minor, as is the case with Umberto Simonetta – a TV author and lyricist for Giorgio Gaber, a journalist, humorist, playwright, and co-creator with Paolo Villaggio of the cinematic character Fantozzi – and his novel *I viaggiatori della sera* (1976). With a frequently bitterly comedic approach and a more than clear-eyed view of contemporaneity, Simonetta investigates with apparent lightness current issues such as overpopulation, “human” consumerism, and the “scrapping” of those who are no longer useful from a productive standpoint. The same basic premise of Simonetta’s novel – by law, at the age of fifty, people are deported to a mandatory retirement in vacation villages that conceal a final solution reminiscent of nazists’ – after being adapted into a film by Ugo Tognazzi in his last directorial work with a version that is quite faithful to the novel, is found in *The Island*, a 2005 film by Michael Bay, where the Italian writer’s insight is combined with the post-humanist theme of cloning as a repair, with the human and its functional double immersed in a (re)productive cycle that only the upper echelons of society can access.

BIO

Stefano Pifferi is a researcher in Italian Studies. He is president of the Interdisciplinary Center for Research on Travel (CIRIV) of the Unitus, he is a member of CIRVI (Interuniversity Research Center on Travel in Italy), of the research group RRR (Rivoluzione Restaurazione Risorgimento) of the Sapienza University of Rome. He mainly deals with odepors of the late Modern Age, both on the theoretical-critical and on the literary-documentary front, and its cultural heritage in Italian Literature. Outside the odeporic field, his research is dedicated to twentieth-century dystopian literature, with essays on Volponi, De Maria, Alvaro, Morselli.

Francisco Pizarro Obaid (Diego Portales University)

Presence and Functions of the Sciences and Psi Knowledge in 20th-century Chilean Utopian and Dystopian Science Fiction Narratives

The present research proposes that the utopian and dystopian narratives developed in the field of 20th-century Chilean Science Fiction (SCF) were sensitive to the socio-cultural transformations of an era (industrialization; scientific progress; totalitarianism, wars, dictatorships, disasters), both globally and locally, but, at the same time, addresses the subjective configurations involved in these processes of change (desire, pleasure, frustration, happiness, fear, anxiety, hatred, etc.). In depicting the longing to achieve a better way of being concerning the world of belonging (utopia) or denouncing the risks and possibilities of the Avenir (dystopia), the Chilean SCF narrative not only incorporated European and local myths and legends, but also concepts, theories, and principles of the basic sciences, social sciences, and psi knowledge (psychology, psychoanalysis, psychiatry), to innovate in its plots and renew the configuration of its characters. On the one hand, the research proposes an interdisciplinary study that will attempt, through the resources of narratology and psi

knowledge to understand the functions that sciences and psychological knowledge have in the works of the period. On the other hand, it will try to broaden literary knowledge by identifying not only the motifs, the main works, and authors, but also by investigating the possible functions of the resources of other disciplines in the literary imagination of time (past/future), the socio-cultural transformations and the processes of subjectivization involved in the plot and characters of utopian and dystopian works. This research seeks to contribute to the knowledge of Chilean and Latin American literature, preserve the heritage, and value a cultural production that transcends the decades and has an important presence not only in literature but also in diverse contemporary cultural manifestations.

BIO

Francisco Pizarro Obaid, Psychologist, Universidad Diego Portales (Chile); Master in Clinical Psychology, Universidad Diego Portales (Chile); Ph.D. Université Paris 7 (France); Associated Professor at Psychology Faculty, Universidad Diego Portales (Chile); Director of the Ph.D. Program in Psychology, Psychology Faculty, Universidad Diego Portales (Chile). My research areas are the history of psychoanalysis, the interdisciplinary study of the fantastique, and science fiction literature. I also develop research in psychopathology and clinical psychology. I am currently the researcher in charge of the project “Presence and functions of the sciences and psi knowledge in 20th century Chilean utopian and dystopian science fiction narratives”, research sponsored and financed by the Chilean government through the National Agency for Research and Development (ANID).

Maria Raffa (IULM University)

AI for (Un)sustainability

The purpose of this contribution is to raise some questions about the supposed benefits of AI for sustainable development. Indeed, in the general debate on the global challenges that are becoming more and more urgent nowadays, there are always calls for new technologies and, in particular, for AI. However, there is a concrete risk of embracing the benefits of AI in the search for sustainable solutions to the environmental crisis, without examining its disruptive impact on various aspects, such as the social, ethical, political, and environmental levels (Floridi, 2022). Specifically, the energy consumption of machine learning models and the disposal costs of robots and other AI devices should be of concern. To this end, this contribution is organized as follows: after a general introduction about the current employments of machine learning models for sustainability, some examples of concrete applications of these models for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015 are presented, also considering the cases of some robots used in this field. Then, the critical aspects of these tools, which themselves pose a threat to sustainability, are stressed and finally conclusions are drawn.

BIO

Maria Raffa is a PhD student at IULM University, Milan. She obtained a Master’s degree in Philosophy of Information at the University of Urbino, and she later attended a training course in Data Science at the University of Pisa, where she acquired technical skills in the field of data

analysis and machine learning. Her doctoral research focuses on the relationship between mind cognition models and machine learning algorithms for sustainability.

Monika Riedmann (University of Innsbruck)

Underwater Dreams: Posthuman Metamorphosis and the Fascination of the ‘Medusa’ in Contemporary Science Fiction Literature

Contemporary science fiction frequently engages with posthuman imaginaries across its literary works, thus highlighting the constructed and obsolete nature of the binary paradigm that has traditionally shaped dominant ideologies. A prominent trend observed in these texts is the inherent ambiguity surrounding the posthuman subject (Neimanis 2017), often portrayed through a fluid, mutable body, “a heterogeneous assemblage of complex relational components” (Braidotti 2022, 12). The two short stories selected for this proposal depict a profound enchantment for the jellyfish on behalf of their protagonists, which ultimately culminates in a metamorphosis of the posthuman individual. *Aquarium* by Lucia Perrucci (2021), on the one hand, insinuates through fantastic elements a metamorphosis into these watery beings, deliberately refraining from definitively establishing whether it is a mere product of the characters' hallucinations or an actual transformation unfolding within the textual realm. In *Èxtim* by Ricard Ruiz Garzón (2021), on the other hand, the contact with an artificial jellyfish is established through virtual reality, although this fact only becomes evident towards the end of the story. The choice of the cnidarian in both texts is particularly interesting since the medusa not only carries rich mythological connotations but also embodies a paradoxical duality. Portrayed as a seemingly 'simple' creature devoid of a centralized nervous system, it can both evolve and involve and poses furthermore a threat to human existence. Through the portrayed contact and fusion of the (post)human with the animal, both texts embrace Haraway's 'tentacular thinking' (2016) by emphasizing our intertwined relationships with other beings and systems.

BIO

Monika Riedmann is an Italian third-year doctoral student at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, where she writes her thesis at the Department of Romance Studies. Moreover, she is a member of the Doctoral College “DC Borders, Border Shifts, and Border Crossings in Language, Literature, and Media”. She is currently writing her thesis about Italian and Spanish contemporary Dystopian Science Fiction through the lens of Posthuman Feminism. Her primary areas of research encompass therefore Gender Studies, Posthumanism and Narrative Studies in the genres of Science Fiction and the Fantastic.

Liam Rogers (University of Warwick)

Screening Holography: Materialised Transparency, Intangible Love and Posthumanism

Over the last 50 years, holography has become a “mainstay of science-fiction (sf)” (Johnston, 2016: 9) visions of technological futurity. Holograms replace screens as *the* signifier of a technologically advanced society, simultaneously facilitating utopian goals, of being in two places at once and aiding intergalactic travel, and dystopian nightmares, of capitalist exploitation and surveillance-

state suppression through three-dimensional adverts and neon billboards. Yet, despite their popularity onscreen, holograms are rarely afforded sustained attention as meaningful sites with which to rethink humanity's relationship to technology. In this paper, I turn to popular imaginations of holography to elucidate the "negotiated cultural tensions" (Wood, 2002: 177) that arise when taking holograms seriously as a technology with the potential to reconceptualise once sacred dualisms of human/machine, analogue/digital, presence/absence and reality/illusion. Through a methodological approach according with the burgeoning discipline of Film-Philosophy, I aim to use textual analysis to draw out the ways in which film and television, as audio-visual media, are adept at engaging with and actively philosophising critical posthumanist concerns of embodiment, presence and relationality in uniquely cinematic ways. After contextualising holography in Victorian optical illusions and fantasies of "total cinema" (Bazin, 2004), I unpack the unlikely posthumanist thought that arises at the intersection of Jean Baudrillard's (1994) discussion of "materialised transparency" and Jenna Ng's (2021) definition of holography as "post-screen." Following this, I examine sf imaginings of holography in relation to nostalgia, cartography, spectacles of capitalist illusion, and intangibly anthropomorphic, "human-passing" entities. This last embodiment, I argue, allows us to work through the consequences of what it means for humanness to be imagined in holographic terms. To examine this, I turn to the Netflix Korean-Drama *My Holo Love's* (2020) take on the romantic comedy, outlining how the series theorises a form of paradoxical posthumanism through its depiction of intangible love between human and hologram, a depiction, I argue, that offers us contradictory conclusions regarding what it means to form meaningful connections with others.

BIO

Liam Rogers is a final year PhD student and Senior Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Warwick. His current research, funded by Midlands4Cities/AHRC, examines the relationship between critical posthumanism and science-fiction film and television. Liam has previously received a BA (Hons) in Film Studies from the University of Warwick and an MSc in Film Studies from the University of Edinburgh. He was also the co-founder of Posthuman Bodies and Embodied Posthumanisms: An Interdisciplinary Conference, held at the University of Warwick in 2022, and is an active member of the British Academy for Film and Television Studies Society.

Valentina Romanzi (University of Turin)

Death of an Immortal Robot: Living and Dying in the Posthuman Age

Within the multifaceted field of the Posthuman, the transhumanist and posthumanist strands are often at odds, especially when it comes to defining the kind of subject that should inhabit a future, posthuman society. However, despite their differences, both branches seem to focus prominently on life, leaving a discussion of the role of death in the Posthuman on the side. Transhumanism, especially, seems to set itself up against death, understood as an obstacle to be removed through the application of technology, an aberration of nature which must be made away with. Indeed, its dominant narrative—from real-life conversations carried out by groups like Humanity+ to fictional depictions of cyborgian beings—purports that life, especially the human one, warrants its boundless extension on account of its desirability. Conversely, Posthumanism—especially the critical strain theorized by Rosi Braidotti (2013)—takes a more nuanced view of death, attempting

to reinscribe it within the wider concept of *zoe*, the vital impulse that pervades the world. In what follows, I will explore the role of death in and for a posthuman society, attempting to mediate between the trans- and posthumanist positions. Taking up Walter Tevis' 1980 novel *Mockingbird* as a case study, I will investigate how the age-old cautionary tale about immortality, traditionally a supernatural attribute of vampires, zombies, and other "creatures of the night," has been retrieved and updated in our technocentric age. Featuring a suicidal android called Spofforth as one of its main characters, the novel investigates the consequences of imposing eternal life on a creature without granting it the possibility to escape. Teetering on the edge between the transhuman desire for immortality and the posthumanist exhortation to accept death as a part of *zoe*, Tevis' novel grants its reader the space for a deep reflection on the role of death in a Posthuman age.

BIO

Valentina Romanzi is a Postdoctoral researcher at the University of Turin and an Adjunct Professor at the University of Verona. She holds a PhD in Transcultural Studies in the Humanities from the University of Bergamo. She specializes in contemporary popular culture, with a particular focus on utopias, dystopias and (post-)apocalyptic fiction. Her latest book is *American Nightmares: Dystopia in Twenty-First-Century US Fiction* (Peter Lang, 2022). She is an editor at *Iperstoria. Journal of American and English Studies* and a member of the Scientific Committee of *ContactZone. Journal of the Italian Association on Science Fiction and the Fantastic*.

Gi Taek Ryou (Chungbuk National University)

Cybernetics and Posthuman Embodiment

Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* interrogate the possibilities for symbiotic relationships between humans and machines, mind and body, biology and technology, and genuine and artificial. Both of these works incorporate the symbiotic feedback circuit that couples humans with nonhumans and dismantles the boundaries between subject and object, natural and manufactured, biological and technological, and mind and body. It is this feedback loop of cybernetics that helps us move beyond the traditional liberal humanism to view the human itself as a "system" entangled with other forms of life and technologies that constitute its environments. What cybernetics tells us is that humans have always been looped to the technologies they are using to transform the world, the act of which paradoxically transforms themselves. The cybernetics view of reality illuminates the dynamic and dialectical nature of existence, which is embedded in and emerges from the complex web of relationships between the observer and the observed, and by extension, the human and nonhuman. Thus, beyond the speculation and fantasy for robots and other cybernetic hybrids of human and machine, the cybernetics elicits, as Bruce Clarke claims, "symbiotic visions of the posthuman," in which humans and nonhumans are looped together through feedback circuits. It provides alternative ways of thinking about the posthuman, throwing us a question of the human in the age of artificial intelligence and hybridized life forms. With insights drawn from cybernetics, this paper examines the human-nonhuman coupling dynamics portrayed in Philip K. Dick's and Kazuo Ishiguro's works that epitomize our age of artificial intelligence and hybridized life forms. The paper juxtaposes humanoid robots (*Do Androids*) and human clones (*Never Let Me Go*), which

intimate artificial intelligence and genetic biology respectively, to investigate the embodied nature of posthuman that consolidates systems and environments and humans and nonhumans.

BIO

Gi Taek Ryoo is Professor of English at Chungbuk National University, Korea. He received his Ph.D. from the State University of New York at Binghamton. He has published a number of articles in the field of literature and science, ecopoetics, and posthumanism, such as “The Ecopoetics of Jorie Graham: Lyric Engagement with the Material World” and “Cybernetic Warfare: The Cold War Poetics of Elizabeth Bishop.” Particularly, he is interested in the parallel development of literature and science within a cultural context.

Anne Schmalstig (Texas A&M University at Qatar)

Posthuman Entanglements: Fear and Loathing and Hope in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Borne*

In college campuses across the world, professors are struggling with how to deal with student use of open-source AI (ChatGPT and others). Some view it as a threat to the sanctity of original thought, while others see it as an exciting new tool that will allow us to work smarter and make new connections. Likewise, I argue, the nonhuman entities in Jeff VanderMeer’s novel *Borne* represent these two sides of the same AI coin. Mord, a city-block-sized, biotech-engineered grizzly bear intent on destruction, is a representation of fears of AI gone too far, while Borne, a highly-adaptable vase-shaped entity with the ability to shape shift, learn human languages, and form close connections with humans, represents the unlimited possibilities that such new technology could afford. There has been much scholarship written about Vandermeer’s Southern Reach trilogy and his exploration of science at the limits of human imagination. Focusing instead on *Borne*, with its many failed biotech experiments, but also posthuman entanglements, this paper draws attention to the ways that the emerging New Weird genre is uniquely suited to address our dreams and nightmares about the world-changing possibilities that AI and biotechnology afford.

BIO

Anne Schmalstig is an Instructional Assistant Professor of English at Texas A&M University at Qatar, where she teaches literature and writing to a diverse student body of Qatari and international students. Her research interests include 21st century American literature, Afrofuturism, climate fiction, science fiction, and the environmental humanities. Her first book project explores affective responses to global climate crises in environmental speculative fiction.

Silvia Storti (Kingston University London)

Tales of Times to Come: The Contribution of Fairy Tales in the Transglossic Hour

In the traditional canon of fairy tales, the message that there is a key correspondence between outer and inner beauty is often also a character’s most recognisable trait. But what happens when that message is complicated by the introduction of bio-technological hybridisations? *The Lunar Chronicles* tetralogy by Marissa Meyer presents readers with a futuristic version of classic fairy tales and the overarching plot follows a cyborg Cinderella character. In Meyer’s space opera, otherness

takes the form of words such as cyborg, Lunar, shell, and even princess. Through the post/trans-human imaginary of *The Lunar Chronicles*, I discuss the contribution of the fairy-tale genre to the Transglossic, identified by Shaw and Upstone as the contemporary moment of planetary consciousness that speaks to human and non-human concerns. *The Lunar Chronicles* challenges, as Flanagan writes, established humanist paradigms of selfhood and identity by using a non-human protagonist, who is Other herself as well as being surrounded by otherness. Schalk reminds us that specific genre contexts must be considered when portraying dis/ability, but these new narratives push beyond the fairy tale by embracing the speculative genre and its relationship with the human and post/trans-human. The warped discourse on feminine beauty espoused by patriarchal fairy-tale narratives may thus be questioned by approaching the relationship between humans, nature, and machines through familiar characters in an unfamiliar context. Fairy-tale characters then come to embody otherness, both as something to be feared and as a metaphor for vulnerability; as my examples will show, the choice of destabilising fairy-tale expectations is consistent with the trend to challenge the established canon, and it is also revealing of how pervasive the beauty ideal still is in works of fiction, regardless of perceived genre distinctions.

BIO

Dr Silvia E Storti is a recent graduate of Kingston University London. Her research looks at villainy in fairy-tale narratives through the portrayal of otherness in fairy-tale retellings, reworkings, and adaptations from the Victorian Era to contemporary media. Part of that research is published in *Interdisciplinary Essays on Cannibalism* (2021), edited by Dr Giulia Champion. She is currently reworking her thesis for publication and her wider research interests are pop culture and adaptation studies, speculative fiction, and modern languages. She is a member of The Angela Carter Society, The Folklore Society, and of the Disney Culture and Society Research Network.

Evy Varsamopoulou (University of Cyprus)

All Too Human Post-human Futures: The Two Versions of AI in Ridley Scott's *Alien Covenant*

The second of the planned prequel trilogy to *Alien* (Scott, 1979), *Alien: Covenant* (Scott, 2017), approaches the ontological issues of *Prometheus* (Scott, 2012) from the perspective of the AI, David, whose talking head had been severed from his body by the godlike bio-engineers of humanity in the earlier film. David, whose updated and 'corrected' AI twin joins the prequel plot in *Alien: Covenant*, is the Wayland Corporation ship's cyborg; manufactured not only in conformity with 'Aryan'/Nazi human aesthetics of beauty (tall, blond, blue-eyed), but also supposedly perfectly rational and incapable of feeling. Claimed almost like a son by the rich and aging founder of the corporation funding the original expedition, David was envied by the biological daughter of the founder and despised by the crew as inferior because he supposedly lacked feeling despite his seeming perfection. The plot development disproved this prejudice and revealed his own contempt, and perhaps envy or resentment, of humanity, when he used the biological weapons of the Engineers to kill the chief female scientist's male partner. In *Alien Covenant*, David has visited the Engineer's planet and killed them all using their own biological weapons, and is trying to bio-engineer a species of being that combines these monstrous, predatory biological weapons with elements of (human) intelligence and human form. However, a new expedition has arrived in

search of the older one that disappeared, and on it is a more advanced version of David, programmed to be more faithful to humanity; his emotional world has not been allowed free development in order to be more controllable. The two Davids enter a lethal confrontation at the end of the film when the older David's nefarious experiments have been discovered. At the end, the viewers don't know which of the two Davids emerges victorious. But that is not the only big question that *Alien Covenant* leaves us with. *Prometheus* had raised a great number of metaphysical or ontological questions; *Alien Covenant*, not only did not answer them, but gave rise to a new set that have to do primarily with David's mind, his feelings, why he committed genocide on the Engineer's planet and what he did or what happened to Elizabeth, the chief engineer. In this paper, I will explore some of the questions the film can be seen to raise concerning aesthetics, ethics, gender and politics in the versions of AI David 1.0 and 2.0. in *Alien: Covenant*.

BIO

Evy Varsamopoulou is Associate Professor at the University of Cyprus. Her research includes articles and book chapters on Romanticism, ecocriticism, film, ethics, political philosophy, and aesthetics. She has also published a monograph, *The Poetics of the Künstlerinroman and the Aesthetics of the Sublime*, and edited special issues for the journals *NewComparison* (on the artist novel) and *The European Legacy* (on the future university). An edited volume, *Romanticism and the Future: Legacy, Prophecy, Temporality*, is forthcoming with Routledge.

Ondřej Váša (Charles University)

Aligned with the Cosmic Crime: Black Holes as the Metonymic Objects of Speculative Realism (and its Reassessment of Planetary Life)

The advent of black holes as the cardinal objects of cosmic imagination entails much more than a simple guard-changing at the planetary doors. To put it in one sentence, the departure of suns from their thrones has taken the thrones with it, and the solar *metaphorics* of excellence (and *life-as-excellence*) has been replaced by the *metonymies* of borderline excess, non-identity, and death as the fundamental dissimilitude. The paper will focus on the role of this “metonymic turn” within speculative realism, and its implications for rethinking the planetary nature of life. The paper will focus, in particular, on several interrelated arguments of authors, such as François Laruelle, Quentin Meillassoux, Ray Brassier, Timothy Morton, and, on the more extravagant side of the spectrum, Nick Land and Reza Negarestani. Despite all of the differences and disagreements between these authors, a shared reference to Freud's concept of the “death drive”, and an emphasis on extinction as the fundamental “truth” of life's cosmic presence, runs through their work. The concomitant Bataillean economization of life leads these authors to adopt the “criminal” imagery of black holes, as coined by the science fiction of the 1970s: of the “baleful blue balls” (Pohl 1977), or the “vast inner whole nothingness of everything” that is “more terrifying than hate, more sordid than fear, blacker than evil” (Benford – Eklund 1977), and, last but not least, of the “sanity [that is the] meaningless term beyond the event horizons of the hole” (Aldiss 1976). The convergence consequently leads to the employment of black holes as the *corpora delicti*, not only of the disputable competence of consciousness and reason, but also – since black holes represent the privileged *metonymic* figures of the speculative continuum between life and the “Great Outdoors” (Meillassoux 2006), – of the “unsuitability” of life and its “lying” character (Morton 2018).

BIO

Mgr. Ondřej Váša, Ph.D. received his Ph.D. at the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague. He now works as Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic, where he focuses on the overlaps of art and philosophy, with particular regard to Warburgian “nameless science” and the discursive figures of the modern cosmic imagination.

Pierandrea Villa (IULM University)

Artbreeder and the Non-human: Understanding Fear and Promethean Gap in Human/AI Interaction through Media and Fiction

Artbreeder.com is an image generation software employing GUN technology with editing tools based on a displacement of breeding procedures. Artbreeder.com is capable to manage “genes” of an image or carry out cross-breeding experiments. In this talk, starting from a series of observation on artbreeder.com, I will address the relationship between individuals and artificial intelligence through the lens of human/animal interaction, as it is a privileged field of investigation for our relationship with the non-human. With this correlation in mind and building on the notion of the subjectivity of consciousness (Nagel, 1974), I will examine the similarities and differences between these two distinct human/non-human interactions. More specifically, I will address the issue of communication—and thus the coding and decoding of a message —interaction—with specific reference to work, entertainment, play—and reciprocity—a fundamental element of distinction between human/animal and human/AI interaction. I will also explore the relationship between individuals and AI through the categories of domesticated/wild, fear/trust, and consciousness/intelligence by questioning the human/non-human interaction in films such as *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931), *Frankenstein Jr.* (Mel Brooks, 1974), *Fantastic Planet* (René Laloux, 1973), *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (Jonathan Mostow, 2003) and *Matrix Resurrections* (Lana Wachowski, 2021). Notably, the relationship between “programs” and humans in *Matrix Resurrections*, with specific reference to Morpheus’ “digital resurrection”, raises some fundamental questions about the replicability of human consciousness and its actual relevance in human interaction, imposing a re-discussion of the subject as a whole and, more specifically, of the “hard problem of consciousness” (Chalmers, 1995; 1996).

BIO

Pierandrea Villa is a PhD candidate in Film and Media Studies at IULM University in Milan. His main research interests include large media franchises, streaming platforms and fan re-use practices. His work ranges from academic writing to screenwriting. He recently published *Rabbit and Couch (If It's not Love)* an experimental fiction piece for Noia Magazine on the ontological status of digital images and the interaction between humans and artificial intelligence.

Karma Waltonen (University of California, Davis)

“Rule 334: Don’t Discriminate against Cyborgs”: The Trans/Post Human in *Doctor Who*

Contemporary depictions of artificial intelligence on *Doctor Who* might be summed up in an early quote about early computers (1975): “The trouble with computers, of course, is that they’re very sophisticated idiots. They do exactly what you tell them at amazing speed.” In other words, AI is depicted as threatening when its creators’ instructions lack nuance (as in 2017’s “Smile”). However, episodes with cyborgs and trans/post humans (and species serving as metaphors for humans) have that nuance, exploring discrimination, agency, and identity/alterity. This paper examines these themes, focusing on the Cybermen, other human and alien cyborgs in “Voyage of the Damned,” species whose biology has been married to machine interfaces (the Ood), and trans/post humans in “Daleks in Manhattan” and “Evolution of the Daleks.”

BIO

Karma Waltonen teaches a wide variety of courses at the University of California, Davis, including classes on *Doctor Who*, *The Simpsons*, Writing in Film Studies, Writing in Social Justice, and Writing and Performing Stand-Up Comedy. Waltonen’s most recent publications include her second book on *The Simpsons*, essays on religion in *Doctor Who*, postmodernism in *The X-Files*, asexuality in *Sherlock*, and time travel in *Star Trek*, and a textbook on evaluating and using sources. Waltonen is the editor-in-chief of Margaret Atwood Studies and won her university’s Academic Federation Excellence in Teaching Award in 2015.

Trevor Westmoreland (Autonomous University of Madrid)

Deconstructing Binaries and the Utopian Impulse in Becky Chambers’ *A Closed and Common Orbit*

This paper will explore what Becky Chambers’ recent science fiction trilogy *Wayfarers* can contribute to the conversation proposed by the conference regarding the ability of science fiction to explore what is theorized as both the post/transhuman, and particularly the ethical aspects of artificial intelligence and (human) genetic modification. Focusing particularly on her novel *A Closed and Common Orbit* (2016), I will discuss the way Chambers develops what she calls a “post-dystopian” scenario in order to project what I’d argue is a decidedly utopian project for the present into her future setting. By examining the interplay between the novel’s two main characters – an AI in a human-like body and a genetically modified woman raised by an AI – I will argue that Chambers’ fiction acts to deconstruct those binaries which today uphold vestigial elements of the Enlightenment project, supporting in its stead a vision in line with the posthuman vision of theorists such as Rosi Braidotti; the novel’s deftness in provoking sympathy in the reader for its nonhuman and posthuman characters matches Braidotti’s emphasis on “activat[ing] alternative views of the subject against the dominant vision” (PK n.p.). In general, I will argue that Chambers is a recent example of a move away from the dystopic which dominated the 1980s, 90s and early 2000s (Berardi), a voice which despite the extended crisis of the present moment manages to imagine things otherwise in a positive sense. However, rather than operate on the grand societal scale of the classical utopias, her fiction explores the complexities of interpersonal relations in the face of othered subjectivities within these societies organized otherwise. Finally, I will contend that

Chambers' fiction utilizes the science fiction genre to at once explore emerging possibilities of the post/transhuman subject and to deconstruct those boundaries which limit human freedom today, especially those of patriarchal-normativity and all it implies.

BIO

Trevor Westmoreland is an early career researcher in contemporary literature, originally from California but based in Madrid. He recently defended a PhD focused on space and time in the novels of Don DeLillo, and is now free to pursue other research interests as well, including those in utopia/dystopia, science fiction, liminality and crisis. He is currently teaching in the English Studies department at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.