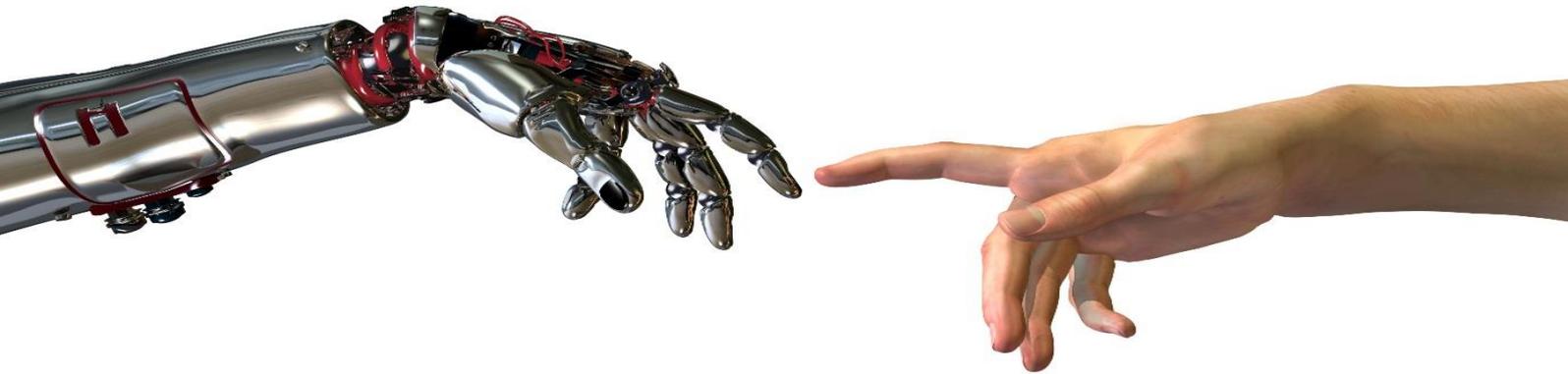


Embodying Fantastika



8-10th August 2019
Lancaster University

Embodying Fantastika

8–10th August, Lancaster University, UK

Conference Schedule

Thursday 8th Training Day (11.30 – 17.00, Bowland North Seminar Room 20)

Friday 9th

08.30 – 09.15 Registration (Management School Lecture Theatre 4 Foyer)
09.15 – 10.30 Panels 1A, 1B & 1C
10.45 – 12.00 Panels 2A, 2B & 2C
12.00 – 13.30 Lunch
13.30 – 15.00 Keynote – Prof. Sherryl Vint
15.00 – 15.45 Refreshment Break
15.45 – 17.00 Panels 3A, 3B & 3C

Saturday 10th

09.00 – 09.15 Registration (LUMS LT 4)
09.15 – 10.30 Panels 4A, 4B & 4C
10.45 – 12.00 Panels 5A, 5B & 5C
12.00 – 13.00 Lunch
13.00 – 14.30 Keynote – Dr. Sara Wasson
14.30 – 15.00 Refreshments
15.00 – 16.00 6A, 6B & 6C
16.15 – 17.00 Closing Roundtable



Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has helped contribute to either the journal or conference since they began, we massively appreciate your continued support and enthusiasm. We would especially like to thank the Department of English and Creative Writing for their support – in particular Andrew Tate, Brian Baker, Catherine Spooner, Liz Oakley-Brown and Sara Wasson for their advice and assistance with these events. A huge thank you to all of our volunteers, chairs, and helpers without which these conferences would not be able to run as smoothly as they always have. We are also hugely appreciative of the Arts and Humanities Research Council who have helped fund this year's conference through the North West Consortium Doctoral Training Programme.

Thank you

Kerry Dodd and Mike Ryder
Conference Organisers

Training Day – 8th August

Day one of our conference programme is dedicated to training and personal development. We have workshops on building your digital profile and academic CV writing, followed by a theory session late afternoon.

11.30 – 12.30	Registration and Lunch Welcome and registration in Bowland North Seminar Room 20.	
12:30 – 14.30	Training #1	
	Building your digital profile Mike Ryder shares tips on how to build your academic profile online.	Academic CV Writing Careers consultant Elaine Davies delivers a session on how to write an academic CV.
14.30 – 15.00	Refreshment Break – provided	
15.00 – 17.00	Training #2 Theorising Embodiment with Fantastika Frameworks This session will offer a forum to have a longer and more open discussion about theoretical frameworks relating to embodiment and their application to Fantastika texts. The workshop will include an opening round-table of invited speakers (Prof. Sherryl Vint, Dr. Chloé Germain Buckley and Dr. Liz Oakley-Brown) who will introduce their approach to embodiment theory and its relation to their research; a break-out small group discussion exercise where participants can reflect on their interaction with theory; and finally a full-group plenary to reflect upon Fantastika’s interaction with embodiment theoretical frameworks.	
19.30	Informal Social at The White Cross pub.	

Friday 9th August

08.30 – 09.00	Welcome and Registration (<i>LUMS LT4</i>)		
09.00 – 10.30	Panel Session 1		
	1A: Trans(forming) Bodies <i>(LUMS LT4)</i> Taylor Driggers Thomas Moules Felix Kawitzky	1B: Mechanising the Human <i>(LUMS LT11)</i> Molly Cobb Zoe Wible Courtney Kidd	1C: The Objects we Live with <i>(LUMS LT12)</i> Leonie Rowland Marita Arvaniti Kerry Dodd
10.30 – 12.00	Panel Session 2		
	2A: Consumption, Appetites and Desires <i>(LUMS LT4)</i> Craig Ian Mann Stephen and Isabella Curtis Ruth Booth	2B: Chinese Neoliberalism <i>(LUMS LT11)</i> Lyu Guangzhao Sarah Dodd Chelsea Haith	2C: Disrupting Identity Narratives <i>(LUMS LT12)</i> Mia Harrison Virginia Conn Tom Kewin
12.00 – 13.30	Lunch		
13.30 – 15.00	Keynote #1: Prof. Sherryl Vint (<i>LUMS LT4</i>)		
15.00 – 15.30	Refreshment Break (provided)		
15.30 – 17.00	Panel Session 3		
	3A: Confronting Monstrosity <i>(LUMS LT11)</i> Shellie McMurdo Megen de Bruin-Molé	3B: Clowns, Comedy and the Carnavalesque <i>(LUMS LT12)</i> Oliver Rendle Valentino Paccosi	3C: Re(production) <i>(LUMS LT4)</i> Elenora Rossi Katie Stone

Saturday 10th August

09.00 – 09.15	Registration (<i>LUMS LT4</i>)		
09.15 – 10.30	Panel Session 4		
	4A: Weird Kin and the Cthuluscene (<i>LUMS LT4</i>) Rob O'Connor Beáta Gubacsi Steffen Hantke	4B: Patriarchal Subversions (<i>LUMS LT11</i>) Luke Turley Miranda Corcoran Jane Hartshorn	4C: Ballet Gothic (<i>LUMS LT12</i>) Karen Graham Daisy Butcher Kate Harvey
10.45 – 12.00	Panel Session 5		
	5A: Uncanny Spectres and the Divided Self (<i>LUMS LT4</i>) Daniel Pietersen Joe Howsin	5V: Surgical Transplantations (<i>LUMS LT4</i>) Ahmet Yuce Rachel Simpson	
12.00 – 13.00	Lunch		
13.00 – 14.30	Keynote #2: Dr Sara Wasson (<i>LUMS LT4</i>)		
14.30 – 15.00	Refreshment Break (provided)		
15.00 – 16.00	Panel Session 6		
	6A: Military Bodies (<i>LUMS LT4</i>) Chris Hussey Mike Ryder	6B: Weird Ecologies (<i>LUMS LT11</i>) Michael Wheatley Shelley Webster	6C: Augmentation and Prosthesis (<i>LUMS LT12</i>) Chen Michaeli Daniel Martin
16.15 – 17.00	Closing Roundtable (<i>LUMS LT4</i>)		

Abstracts and Bionotes

Keynotes

Friday: Management School Lecture Theatre 4 - Prof. Sherryl Vint

Suspending Death, Reinventing Life

This keynote argues that we are in the midst of a philosophical reinvention of what the idea of 'life itself' means in the context of biotechnology and its widespread commodification of biological entities and processes. This situation requires new biopolitical figures through which to theorize the social and political risks because liberal frameworks of human rights are no longer sufficient protection against the ways that vitality is extracted by capital. I find such new figures in the genres of the fantastic, and use Don DeLillo's *Zero K* and Rachel Heng's *Suicide Club*, two novels about life-extension technologies, to theorize a posthuman way to conceptualize living and embodiment that resists these neoliberal trajectories.

Bionote:

Sherryl Vint is Professor in the Department of English at the University of California, Riverside.

Sherryl Vint's current research project, *The Promissory Imagination: Speculative Futures and Biopolitics*, reads science fiction in the context of biopolitical theory. Expanding upon earlier work that argues science fiction functions as a supplementary discourse to the discourses of science, this book will explore the exchanges between speculative imagination and material practice in personalized medicine, agribusiness and other genomic research. Within a context in which biotechnology itself relies on speculative discourses, and one in which the economy is largely propelled by such fantasies, critical discourses of science fiction have a crucial role to play in ongoing struggles over how to imagine the future.

Dr. Vint's work begins from the premise that popular culture both expresses the cultural anxieties and preoccupations of its contemporary audience and intervenes in the construction of cultural common sense, engaging with rather than merely reflecting surrounding technoculture. She has previously published *Bodies of Tomorrow* (2007), which investigates representations of the body in science fiction and in posthumanist discourses to argue for a version of posthumanism focused on expanding our connections to others rather than embracing fantasies of disembodiment, and *Animal Alterity* (2010), which extends this exploration of how we understand the human, and whom should be included in our ethical communities, focusing on the human/animal boundary articulated in philosophical and scientific discourses now restructured by material technoscientific practice and speculative representation. Dr. Vint has co-authored *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* (2011) and co-edited *Beyond Cyberpunk* (2010), *The Routledge*

Companion to Science Fiction (2009), and Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction (2009). She has also published widely on sf film and television, and most recently on the HBO's The Wire for Wayne State UP's Television Milestones series.

Her most recent publications are the edited collection Science Fiction and Cultural Theory: A Reader and the special issue The Futures Industry, on the political project of imagining the future.

Dr. Vint directs the Science Fiction and Technoculture Studies at UCR, where she founded the Science Fiction and Technoculture Studies Book Prize.

She is an editor of the journals Science Fiction Studies and Science Fiction Film and Television, and is the incoming President for the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts.

Saturday: Management School Lecture Theatre 4 – Dr. Sara Wasson

Slow Lacerations: Time in Tissue Transfer Fantastika

How do we show history, money, and surgical and pharmacological change intersecting with bodies? How do we express the times of transplantation, the temporalities of its many dimensions impacting human tissue and flesh and kinship? This paper considers recipient experience and of harvestee vulnerabilities and networks of predation that can feed tissue transfer networks, and suggests that fantastic registers and forms – gothic, horror, science fiction, speculative fictions – can be particularly valuable, even necessary, in excavating some of the stranger experiential dimensions of the process for multiple parties, as well as for communicating inequalities within the systems within which harvests occur.

I will draw on Rob Nixon's concept of slow and transgenerational violence, emerging work in the critical medical humanities of affect and illness, and my own concept of stigmaphilia in a minor key, and bring these into dialogue with work including 1950s French horror film, 1970s medical horror, and twenty-first century science fiction. I examine how fantastic modes and registers can express the slow lacerations of tissue economies and transfer process.

Bionote:

Dr Sara Wasson is lecturer in Gothic Studies at Lancaster University. Her research focuses on two strands: the Second World War Gothic of the British Home Front, and the twenty-first century Gothic and Science Fiction. Both of these strands are concerned with ethical witness in response to individual and collective suffering.

Dr Wasson's current research projects include a monograph entitled *Transplantation Gothic*, exploring Gothic and horror fantasies of tissue transfer, and her role as Primary Investigator on the AHRC network Translating Chronic Pain, researching literary representations of chronic pain. For more information, see Dr Sara Wasson's research profile.

Panels

Panel 1A: Trans(forming) Bodies

Chair: Chelsea Haith

- Taylor Driggers (University of Glasgow, UK): Drag(on) Culture: Gender Disruption and Queer Embodiment in Earthsea

Abstract

The later novels and short stories in Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea series are notable for their dramatic shift in tone, narrative voice, and subject matter compared to earlier entries. The novels *Tehanu* (1990) and *The Other Wind* (2001), and the short story collection *Tales from Earthsea* (2001), all participate in radical revisions of the series' worldbuilding and storytelling to parallel Le Guin's own evolving feminist politics. Accompanying these texts' newfound emphasis on women's subjectivity, attention to gendered violence, and disinterest in patriarchal authority figures is a renewed interest in dragon lore, which in turn destabilizes the series' previously established mythology, challenging its essentialist focus on 'true names' and immutable being.

This presentation will argue that the figure of the dragon in the Earthsea series increasingly becomes the means by which Le Guin extends and refines the project of fantastical gender-queering begun in her 1969 novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Through analysis of the characters of Kalessin, the fisherwoman of Kemay, Tehanu, and Irian, it will examine how the shapeshifting dragons of Earthsea can provoke imaginative reflections on embodied subjectivity that unbuild the walls set up by binary gender, and may help to alleviate the violence it legitimizes. These characters are united in their refusal to be confined within reductive identity categories, their ever-changing and contingent body morphologies troubling the notion of a fixed and unitary essence and rendering them inscrutable within the patriarchal logic of the art magic practiced by the wizards of Roke. This analysis will thus also bring attention to the ways in which the fantastic intersects with historically intertwined, but nonetheless contentious, discourses on gender put forth by queer and trans theorists, including those concerned with decolonizing gender.

About the Speaker

Taylor Driggers is a PhD researcher at the University of Glasgow, focusing on how fantasy texts provide a narrative ground for re-visioning religion from queer and feminist standpoints. His work has appeared in the *Journal of Inklings Studies* and in the collection *The Inklings and King Arthur* edited by Sørina Higgins.

- Thomas Moules (Independent, UK): Undeclared Gender: Embodying Systems of Gender Beyond The Binary In JY Yang's Tensorate Series

Abstract

JY Yang's Tensorate novellas, comprising *The Black Tides of Heaven* (2017), *The Red Threads of Fortune* (2017) and *The Descent of Monsters* (2018), explore a world with a very different attitude towards concepts of gender. Featuring a diverse cast of characters of a variety of different genders, the series takes a fundamentally intersectional approach to worldbuilding.

The first two novellas follow two siblings, twins, who in discovering their different genders are led on different paths in life. Reading these novellas through the lenses of various queer theorists, beginning with Judith Butler and branching outwards, this paper aims to explore the ways in which different characters relate to their gender identities, and the ways that those identities are received by the world.

The series moves beyond the concepts of cis and trans as we would understand them. Children are considered to be genderless until (and if) they choose to declare otherwise, and magic and science combined have the ability to fit people's bodies to their identities, in the majority of cases. The exceptions to this are few, but significant, and are used to explore the diversity of ways that bodies and gender identities interact. Some characters understand their gender from a young age, while others take longer to reach that understanding.

Present in two of the novellas (*Threads* and *Descent*) is a character known as Rider. They are from a different continent, and unlike most of the other characters, they use neutral pronouns as an adult. The reactions towards Rider, including misgendering and a sense of scepticism towards their identity, are used by the author to explore the issues that non-binary people face even in a world that has a much more libertine attitude towards gender.

About the Speaker

Thomas Moules is currently a freelance academic, with a BA(Hons) in English Literature from Anglia Ruskin University and an Mlit in Fantasy Literature from the University of Glasgow. They have written and presented papers on a variety of topics, and plan to return to academia to study for a PhD.

- Felix Kawitzky (University of York, UK): The changeling's story: The fantastic duplicity of queer bodies in Sci-Fi and fantasy fiction

Abstract

This paper consists of a series of semi-autobiographical anecdotes, like the one above, interspersed with more direct analyses of the queerness and transhumanity of entities deemed non- or sub-human in sci-fi and fantasy literature.

The experience of being trans in a non-speculative, 'real' world can result in a rupture – a dislocation which generates planes of parallel existence out of splintered desires, necessities and modes of survival; above ground, Under the Hill, and out into the endless alien recesses of space. Being trans means inhabiting a body which is possible in some worlds, and impermissible in others. Side-stepping any debate about whether transness is 'real', I would say, I don't want to be real. I don't even want to be human.

In this instance, the implication of real is natural, and the meaning of "natural" is "of this world".

As a trans person, I have a supernatural experience of my body. Along these lines, this paper includes stories about aliens, changelings, and AI's, and describes how these speculative states – the grotesque, bizarre, undesirable or misleading bodies of science fiction and fantasy – can also be states in which queer bodies can thrive.

I will draw from Octavia Butler's alien Oankali in *Lilith's Brood*, Ann Leckie's exploration of the relationships between Artificial Intelligence, non-human bodies and personhood in *Ancillary Justice*, and Jeff VanderMeer's writing of genetic mutation and changelings in the *Southern Reach* trilogy, focusing on:

How queer and aberrant bodies have been marked with tropes of ugliness, trickery, fear and transgression, and how these traits manifest as 'creatures' in speculative fiction. The ways in which "grossness" and duality is interrogated by the listed examples. And, how this sense of bodily transgression, which feeds on revulsion, otherworldliness and the trans/sub-human, can be re-appropriated and harnessed by queer and trans entities to speculate about other ways of existing in this world.

About the Speaker

Felix Kawitzky is a non-binary trans artist, writer and lecturer. They are a PhD candidate at the University of York, researching in the fields of queer science fiction, fantasy, collective storytelling, and tabletop roleplaying games. They have an undergraduate in Fine Art, and a Master's degree in Theatre Making from the University of Cape Town (UCT).

Panel 1B: Mechanising the Human

Chair: Grace Michaeli

- Molly Cobb (University of Liverpool, UK): ‘Machine imitation’ of ‘real life’: The effect of human obsolescence on the individual self’

Abstract

1950s America saw a rise in technologies such as television that not only increased the role of machines in people’s lives but encouraged the mechanisation of certain aspects of society. The minimisation of the human in the workforce due to robots and automated devices led to increased tension in the 1950s by suggesting the obsolescence of the human in favour of automation. Various works published by Alfred Bester during the 1950s address this tension by extrapolating future societies in which the line between man and machine have become blurred, both physically and psychologically. This paper examines the ways in which Bester explores the mechanisation of the human, or the destruction of the human in favour of the machine, and the dissolution of mankind as a distinct species. The move from machine as object to machine as subject works to render the human obsolete by removing the specificity from ‘human’ as a category. It will be shown how the destruction of the individualised (physical and psychological) self in favour of a conformed (mechanised and inorganic) collective blurs the line between man and machine both literally and figuratively by examining the relationship between these merged identities and the conformity found within a 1950s America struggling with the Cold War. The loss of the individual self in the texts examined will be extrapolated to demonstrate how it reflects an overall loss of autonomy through the ways in which Bester questions what makes someone or something human as the physical self becomes increasingly outdated and the role a collective society plays in this. The role of the physical body in personal identity will subsequently be examined by considering how the redundancy and lack of specificity found in automated/mechanised selves hinders personal identification and suppresses individuality.

About the Speaker

Molly Cobb currently teaches at the University of Liverpool on 19th through early 21st century American Literature and also contributes to the Science Fiction Studies MA. Her research focuses on how science fiction engages with psychology. She is currently an Affiliate Member of the Olaf Stapledon Centre for Speculative Futures.

- Zoe Wible (University of Kent, UK): Defamiliarizing embodiment: Strategies for the representation of disembodied characters in film

Abstract

Our inter-subjective experiences rely on the premise of an embodied subject. Most filmic conventions follow this premise, and convey information to an embodied spectator (through visual and aural stimuli), and present characters who are also embodied. This creates a para-subjective and para-social relationship between embodied subjects.

But what happens when the character does not possess a body? AIs, ghosts, and other supernatural creatures (such as demons) are common character archetypes for speculative fiction. Using examples from films such as *Hollow Man*, *Her*, and *Blade Runner 2019*, I will analyse the intersection of the fantastic body and film form, and explore the various strategies that filmmakers adopt to get around this tension between perceptual representation and disembodiment. This dichotomy in turn defamiliarizes our relationship with embodiment and evokes debates around Cartesian dualism and the politics of identity.

The most common strategy is to manufacture embodiment (possession, mind transfer, embodied AI). From a storytelling perspective, the character then has all the advantages of a physical, visible, audible body (usually represented by a human performer), but through the embodiment, issues of gender and race are bound to arise. Secondly, various visual effects can represent an absence of a physical body: ethereal manifestations, holograms, fragmented body parts (floating head, eye or mouth). This strategy allows for selective use of aural or visual elements, while still signalling Otherness. Finally, the furthest from embodiment, another strategy sees the foregrounding of the aural element: in this case there is no visible body, only an audible voice. This strategy mobilizes and problematizes techniques like the voice-over and the voice-off, and conversely defamiliarizes the relationship between characters and visible on-screen space.

From re-embodiment to pure invisibility, disembodied subjectivity in film interrogates our relationship to the haptic, visible, audible body.

About the Speaker

Zoe Wible is a PhD student in Film at the University of Kent. Her research interests include science-fiction and cognitive film theory. Following her master's dissertation on the reception of androids in contemporary television show *Westworld*, she is now researching the relationship between imaginary creatures and spectator engagement in visual narrative media. She also draws on recent developments in interactive media and forms of engagement, including video games and online fandom spaces. The provisional title for her thesis is: "Monster schemas and the space of possible minds: A cognitive approach to science fiction characters in contemporary cinema".

- Courtney Kidd (University of Edinburgh, UK): The more virtual the more real: How video games and the virtual world develop identity

Abstract

Formation of identity is an old concept, yet one that has found new avenues in virtual worlds. With the idea that ‘the more virtual, the more real,’ one begins to uncover how virtual worlds propose the question, which of you is the true-self: -the virtual, or non-virtual? This paper will explore how the richness of experiences and authentic nature of those involved have created a ‘more real’ self in the games compared to traditional storytelling mediums where connection to created characters is the goal. It is the idea of identity, not constrained by social norms and culture in the non-virtual world but by the individual’s true self, free to be expressed with low-risk through these mediums. These virtual worlds are not separate from the non-virtual, often linking the person’s non-virtual identity or events with the game with shared experiences (Stone, 1991 p.85).

Arguments on whether the entirety of existence is a simulation have been disproved to the best of abilities (Ringel & Kovrizhin, 2017), the widespread acceptance of the possibility gives insight to the proposition that human consciousness may exist within a virtual world. These theories show not only an attempt to explain existence but build upon a long-standing notion found in philosophy and literature far before the advent of virtual worlds. “-You won’t make yourself a bit realer by crying-” (Through the Looking Glass, 1871) speaks to a dream-state, questioning existence of what might be an illusion, impossible to test empirically by the subject, though not negating its legitimacy. Willingness to become part of the virtual-world, and at times, forsake the non-virtual one is also unsurprising, yet begs the question: -are we now realer in the virtual world?

About the Speaker

Courtney Kidd, LCSW is a PhD student in Science & Technology Innovative Studies at the University of Edinburgh. Her current research looks to understand how emotional responses in Video Games and Virtual Reality can be better understood, measured, and developed for social good. She can be reached at C.Kidd-3@sms.ed.ac.uk.

Panel 1C: The Objects we Live with

Chair: Kathryn Poole

- Leonie Rowland (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK): ‘She lusted after buildings, and they lusted after her’: Objectophilia and Commodity Animism in Junji Ito’s *Fragments of Horror*

Abstract

Global interactions with the inanimate are becoming increasingly intimate. This is certainly true in Japan, where the relationship between people and things is a defining feature of twenty-first-century life. In Junji Ito’s *Fragments of Horror*, women seduce buildings and futons consume people, suggesting that the horrors of late capitalism are embodied by the structures we live in and the objects we own. As such, this paper argues that short stories ‘Futon’ and ‘Wooden Spirit’ conflate bodies with objects to interrogate the realities of who, and what, we let into our homes. In the first, a man hides from malicious spirits under a trusted futon, only to discover that it is filled with hallucinogenic mould. In the second, a woman seduces a cultural heritage site, which responds to her advances by transforming into a monster. In both cases, the characters become part of the objects in question.

In her book *Millennial Monsters: Japanese Toys and the Global Imagination*, Anne Allison examines perceptions of Japanese materialism, which social critics often attribute to ‘a culture of transparency where people value personal acquisitions far more than they do interpersonal relations.’ This is facilitated by a cultural interest in animism, which sees the attribution of souls or personalities to inanimate objects. Allison coins the term ‘commodity animism’ to describe the capitalist version of this, where goods are sold as substitutes for human connection; she argues that the solitary lifestyle lead by many has created a spiritual void for consumerism to fill, meaning that possessions are not only used to vocalise the self but internalised as part of it. As such, my paper indicates that post-millennial Japanese horror has shifted to meet the demands of a nation that finds comfort and fear in an increasingly object-orientated world.

About the Speaker

Leonie Rowland is a Masters Student with the Manchester Centre for Gothic Studies. She graduated from The University of East Anglia with a BA in English Literature, and her research interests include Asian Gothic, globalgothic and J-Horror.

- Marita Arvaniti (University of Glasgow, UK): Huge Clay and Creeping Shadows: Fantasy Houses and the Bodies That Move Them

Abstract

In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre refers to a house as a vampire object, something that depends on its inhabitants to survive, absorbing and deriving all its properties from the human action that takes place within it. In Fantastika genres this idea can be fully realised, with horror and fantasy being particularly rife with cases of characters that seem to be fully embodying their environments, acting either as extensions or a personification of their places of residence. Interestingly, women seem to often find themselves in the heart of narratives like this. Like the literary successors of dryads, nereids, and naiads, these women are the soul of the houses they inhabit and have little to no agency in their narratives; at best they act as active agents of the will of the houses, at worst, they are little more than ghosts.

The following paper will examine the importance of women acting as the living embodiment of their houses, and how their treatment drastically changes across genres. Drawing examples from works such as Mervyn Peake's *Gormenghast*, Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, John Crowley's *Little, Big*, and Helen Oyeyemi's *White is for Witching*, this paper will also argue that the gender of the authors changes the way the fate of these women is presented, and what this reveals about the way we view the relationship between female bodies and the domestic sphere.

About the Speaker

Marita Arvaniti is a PhD candidate at the University of Glasgow. Her research focuses on the relationship between theatre and the fantastic and explores the role played by drama and performance in the birth and evolution of contemporary fantasy. Other research interests include the self-referential nature of fantasy, folk horror, Terry Pratchett, and Diana Wynne Jones.

- Kerry Dodd (Lancaster University, UK): Object-Shock: ‘This Item cannot be used here’

Abstract

Video games are full of objects; whether these are interactable items or the assets that make up the player’s avatar and the world that surrounds them, they are fundamental to the way that these virtual spheres are encountered. Likewise, objects are often associated with a ‘description’, a narrative method to taxonomically explain their relevance and placement within the wider game world. Each object is frequently encoded with a specific function or purpose, an embedded sense of belonging that is reaffirmed to the user that there is a specific ‘place’ where each object may be ‘used’. Items in video games are thus curated with a specific intent, one that reveals human materialist attitudes and perceptions towards designations of object belonging.

In this paper I argue that video games are the perfect medium to interrogate such anthropocentric notions, in which the encoding of function or textuality reflects upon ‘real’ materialist processes. Indeed, such a critique lies at the core of what I term as ‘Object-Shock’ games (*Systemshock*, *Bioshock*, *Prey*, *Dead Space*) that encourage the player to re-think their engagement with the world around them through alternate paradigms of item utilisation. Opening with a brief definition of this genre, this paper primarily focuses on Arkane Studios’ *Prey* (2017) and how the player’s avatar – Morgan Yu – is encouraged to challenge their attitude towards non-human ontologies through their encounter with various disruptions of material boundaries. Analysing resource scavenging, inventory management and object ‘mimicry’, I highlight how such processes within *Prey* offer new frames of contact with the non-human, ones that cause ‘object-shock’ through new adaptative or transformative formations. Drawing on object-orientated ontology and archaeogaming theory, I argue that video games can uniquely confront anthropocentric perspective towards tool utilisation and thus reflect upon more nuanced framings of object encounter.

About the Speaker

Kerry Dodd is a PhD researcher at Lancaster University, UK and Acting Head Editor for *Fantastika Journal*. His thesis, entitled “The Archaeological Weird: Excavating the Non-human,” examines the intersection between archaeology and Weird fiction. Focusing on the cultural production of the artefact encounter, his thesis explores how archaeological framings can offer a re-conceptualisation of object ontology through the Weird. Kerry also works more widely in the fields of: Science Fiction (particularly Cosmic Horror and Cyberpunk), the Gothic, and glitch aesthetics.

Panel 2A: Consumption, Appetites and Desires

Chair: Chris Hussey

- Craig Ian Mann (Sheffield Hallam University, UK): You Are What They Eat: Anthropophagy in Alien Invasion Films of the 1980s

Abstract

Following the release of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), science fiction narratives focused on alien visitors to Earth became more popular and prolific than they had been since the 1950s. Invasion films experienced a particular resurgence, with many films borrowing their basic narratives from the science fiction films of that earlier decade, including *Strange Invaders* (1983), *Night of the Creeps* (1986) and *They Live* (1988), which variously borrow from the likes of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *The Brain Eaters* (1958) and *Plan 9 from Outer Space* (1959). However, while these films owe a great deal to the golden age of sf cinema, they frequently revise its Cold War politics for the Reagan era. In *They Live*'s take on the *Body Snatchers* narrative, for example, infiltrating aliens no longer stand in for communists but capitalists: its extraterrestrials are interstellar yuppies who silently brainwash the inhabitants of other planets with subliminal messages encouraging obedience and consumption.

A distinctly 1980s sub-set of alien invasion films are concerned with aliens coming to Earth to consume humans as a food source. While this type of invasion narrative was not unique to the 1980s (its most famous antecedent is *The Twilight Zone*'s 'To Serve Man' [1962]), it became a particularly popular theme in that decade in films such as *Without Warning* (1980), *The Deadly Spawn* (1983), *Lifeforce* (1985), *TerrorVision* (1986), *Killer Klowns from Outer Space* (1988), *Critters* (1986) and its sequel *Critters: The Main Course* (1988). This paper will explore the theme of extraterrestrials eating humans – thus usurping our position at the top of the food chain – as an element of the invasion narrative particularly pertinent to the Reagan era. It will explore how these films, in which human beings are reduced to little more than meat, can be considered to satirise the individualist rhetoric, greed and rampant consumption that underpinned Reagan's America.

About the Speaker

Craig Ian Mann is Associate Lecturer in Film & Media Production and Film & Television Studies at Sheffield Hallam University. His first monograph, titled *Phases of the Moon: A Cultural History of the Werewolf Film*, is forthcoming from Edinburgh University Press. He is broadly interested in the cultural significance of popular genre cinema, including science fiction, horror, action and the Western; his work on this subject has been published in *Science Fiction Film and Television*, *Horror Studies* and the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* as well as several edited collections. He is co-organiser of the Fear 2000 conference series on contemporary horror media.

- Stephen and Isabella Curtis (Lancaster University, UK): ‘I Never Drink... Wine’ – Negotiating Consumption in Children’s Vampire Media

Abstract

Long established as a relocation of sexual intercourse, the bloody feeding of the vampire is obviously its most iconic and embodied behaviour. How then do the authors and directors of the ever-popular children’s vampire story negotiate the clear inappropriateness of such consumption? Examining a range of recent television and film texts, such as *Count Duckula*, *Mona the Vampire*, *Young Dracula*, *The Littlest Vampire* and the *My Sister is A Vampire* series of books, my chapter proposes to highlight the various ways in which the central characteristic of the vampire is rendered obscene in its most literal sense, whilst concluding that the necessity of such subterfuge in fact only serves to call attention to that which cannot be shown.

Summarised in typically laconic fashion as ‘Vegetarian Vampires’ on TvTropes.com, across much of vampiric media these non-blood drinking nosferatu often in fact substitute animal or synthetic blood for human but even this is generally unacceptable for the standards of taste and decency required for cultural products aimed at children. Given this clear unsuitability, why is the vampire so popular within children’s media? I argue that the very unrepresentability of the vampire’s appetite paradoxically enables it to take centre stage. In contrasting the hidden consumption of these texts with the more sensational and shocking depiction of children as vampires in contemporary Gothic (in texts like *Let the Right One In* and *Interview With the Vampire*) I maintain that this bloodless portrayal actually produces a more authentic Gothic experience.

I also draw attention to the central paradox of the marketing strategies that surround many of these child vampire texts – encouraging cultural consumption whilst ensuring that the vampiric analogue remains obscured. In short, therefore, I intend to expose the ways in which hiding the bloody consumption essential to the identity of the vampire creates and maintains desire and demand within Young Gothic media.

About the Speaker(s)

Dr Stephen Curtis specialises in the darker aspects of Early Modern Literature, and is currently writing a book on Early Modern Horror for University of Wales Press. This research interest comes from a lifetime spent immersed in horror fiction, films, and games. He has presented on a wide range of contemporary Gothic and horror topics, ranging from death in videogames to the particular horrors to be found on British farms. He tweets at @EarlyModBlood and is always happy to chat about blood and all things horror.

Isabella Curtis is his daughter and research assistant for this project.

- Ruth Booth (University of Glasgow, UK): What are Little Girls Made of? The Monstrous-Feminine Child in Frances Hardinge's *Cuckoo Song*

Abstract

Barbara Creed's (1993) concept of the monstrous-feminine is widely used to explore sexism in speculative media. Creed's focus on reproduction and sexual desire means explorations of the monstrous-feminine have centred on attitudes to young women and adults, even in children's fiction. However, Wilkie-Stibbs (2006) notes children are also abjected in children's literature, while Daniel (2006) finds this is particularly marked in representations of disorderly eating. Garland's (2008) analysis of the *Alice* books locates the monstrous-feminine, specifically the vagina dentata as a symbol of sexual power, in disorderly eating by girls. Can a similar association between eating and female empowerment be detected in recent children's literature?

In this paper, I explore the monstrous-feminine in Frances Hardinge's *Cuckoo Song* (2014), where a young girl, Triss, discovers that she is a changeling created to replace an abducted child. Many signs that Triss is in fact 'Not-Triss' focus on her body: for example, Not-Triss is only full if she eats Triss's possessions, consuming the psychic remains of the self she replaces. This recalls Garland's identification of the vagina dentata in children's literature; but while bodily control is a key theme in Hardinge's book, sexual power is not her central concern. Instead, Not-Triss's changeling body is a metaphor for her fragile sense of self, and reflects the unsustainable, doll-like treatment of Not-Triss by adults. Her eating therefore echoes Daniel's concept of cannibalism as expressing a yearning for integrity – but in children, not adults. I argue Not-Triss's body is abjected and must be reclaimed by the heroine in a struggle for agency, but Hardinge's text resists narratives of sexualization. Instead she provides a counter-narrative to the monstrous-feminine in children's literature, replacing female agency over reproductive function with agency over the whole body.

About the Speaker

Ruth Booth is a Creative Writing doctoral candidate at the University of Glasgow, examining uses of speculative adaptations in exploring toxic masculinity. She co-organized the first three Glasgow International Fantasy Conversations (GIFCon). An award-winning author, her column for *Shoreline of Infinity* was shortlisted for the BSFA Best Non-fiction Award (2018).

Panel 2B: The Return of the Discarded

Chair: Kerry Dodd

- Lyu Guangzhao (University College of London, UK): Embodying the Neoliberal Hybridity: Migrant Workers and the Female Cyborg in Chen Qiufan's *The Waste Tide*

Abstract

This paper will engage with Chinese science fiction (sf) writer Chen Qiufan's (b.1981) award-winning novel *The Waste Tide* (2013) regarding the embodiment in the protagonist Mimi of China's neoliberal social and cultural shifts since the 1990s. While witnessing a wide array of market-driven and neoliberal policies brought forward by the nation-wide privatisation, Chinese people are allowed to develop a certain degree of individual autonomy resulting in a reconfiguration of economic, social, political, and cultural powers. Since the Chinese discourse on neoliberalism has elaborated a subjectivising impulse that aims to prime the powers of the private self, people still found themselves in a turmoil where the previous living stability projected by the socialist ideology and planned economy had been replaced by the uncertainty and insecurity accompanied with the competitive nature of the neoliberal market. The consequential developmental unevenness between the favoured regions and the rest, therefore, has produced a huge gap between the rich entrepreneurs and the marginalised migrant workers.

As one of the leading figures of the "New-Born Generation" authors marking the latest upsurge of the Chinese sf New Wave, Chen Qiufan in *The Waste Tide* draws upon the fierce social conflicts in a cyberpunk Silicon Isle famous for its e-waste recycling industry, where tens of thousands of migrant workers are enslaved by the money-making local entrepreneurial clans and transnational corporations while exposed to toxic e-waste as well as virulent medical body replacements. In this case, this paper will feature on the heroin of *The Waste Tide*, an innocent waste girl named Mimi, whose body hosts two split identities after surviving a fatal virus – i.e. Mimi 0, the original weak, sensitive, yet benevolent character, and Mimi 1, the rational, nearly omniscient, yet merciless and violent consciousness who eventually triggers a rebellion of migrant workers against the local clans through the cyberspace. It will be argued that such a combination of Mimi 0 and Mimi 1 represents an embodied hybridity among China's migrant worker in the neoliberal era, which indicates the uniqueness of China's acceptance of neoliberalism.

About the Speaker

Lyu Guangzhao is a PhD student of Comparative Literature at UCL, working on a comparative study between contemporary (mainly post-1990) British and Chinese Science Fiction. He is currently a member of London Science Fiction Research Community (LSFRC) and one of the co-organisers of London Chinese Sci-fi Group.

- Sarah Dodd (University of Leeds, UK): ‘Thresholds of Becoming’: the Hybrid Body in Contemporary Chinese Science Fiction

Abstract

This paper explores the work of what has been called the ‘Torn Generation’ of contemporary Chinese science fiction authors, through the lens of Jerome Jeffrey Cohen’s ‘Monster Theory’ (1997) and the figure of the cyborg. Monsters, argues Cohen, are good to think with, because they are ‘cultural bodies’, and because they escape from categories; existing at borders, standing at the threshold of ‘becoming’. Monsters speak in specifics and universals at the same time. And whilst many of our most beloved monsters are fleshly creatures, there are also human-machine hybrids whose humanity/ inhumanity can be explored through this conceptual framework, exposing the anxieties and desires that surround humanity’s changing relationship with technology.

Using Cohen’s seven ‘monster theses’, I will look at the work of contemporary Chinese SF authors such as Chen Qiufan and Xia Jia, examining the ways in which they construct – and deconstruct – meetings of human and machine bodies. One of the key issues this younger generation of writers explores is the return of the discarded or abandoned, which is then, in its meeting with human flesh or consciousness, used to supplement and change ideas of ‘the human’. I will focus in particular on Chen’s novel *The Waste Tide*, in which a young migrant worker sorting electronic waste is transformed into a cyborg – a messianic figure who becomes an embodiment of a new collective consciousness, giving the ‘waste people’ a new voice and power. In this novel, human bodies are thresholds; becoming monstrous, they become sites of possibility and change, allowing the most precarious in society to take back what has been thrown away, letting out the ghost in the machine and seeing what can stand at these uncertain, malleable borders.

About the Speaker

Sarah Dodd is a lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Leeds. She is deputy director of the Leeds Centre for New Chinese Writing, and part of the Transcultural Fantastic project. She also co-edits *Samovar*, an online magazine of speculative fiction in translation.

- Chelsea Haith (University of Oxford, UK): “As if I was already only a machine”: Posthumanism and the politics of techno-desire and fantasy in Ken Liu’s ‘Good Hunting’

Abstract

Drawing on Deepika Bahri’s notion of the “reincarnative politics” of the so-called civilising mission of imperial colonialism, I will explore the redemptive anti-capital narrative in the evolution of the sexualised machine-woman from the *hulijing*, a fox-woman animal spirit, in Ken Liu’s acclaimed short story ‘Good Hunting.’ Yan, the *hulijing*, becomes trapped in her human body as a result of the changing landscape of rural China and the building of a railroad that interferes with the veins of *qi* in the land. In Hong Kong she is forced into prostitution, and becomes the mistress of the Governor’s son, a man obsessed with technological development to the extent that it becomes a sexual proclivity: “In a city filled with chrome and brass and clanging and hissing, desires became confused.” He drugs her and begins to alter her body, beginning with the amputation of her legs, replacing them with “shiny chrome” ones. This goes on until Yan is almost entirely mechanised, at which point she runs away from her abuser, seeking out an old ally, the spirit hunter, who has since become an engineer on the railways. She begs for his help, and he agrees to construct her body to her specifications, until assumes her “true form.” This paper seeks to explore the intersection of colonial biophysiological interference with the production of the sexualised machine, reading the woman in terms of Donna Haraway’s cyborg metaphor. The transformations of the *hulijing* into a woman and thence into a cyborg creature provides an analogy for materialism within the narrative of progress as inherently good. This paper will consider whether the image of the woman problematically signifies a pre-lapsarian, pre-colonial purity of rural China. It will also consider the construction of the mechanised, and therefore presumably programmable woman, in terms of the notion of the cyborg as it is bound by the “integrated circuit” of the market as a sexualised commodity.

About the Speaker

Chelsea Haith is a fully-funded DPhil candidate at the University of Oxford, working on urban geopolitics in speculative fiction. She is a Mandela Rhodes scholar and has worked in publishing and journalism. Her research interests include refugee literature, gender studies, the politics of representation, urban geopolitics and speculative fiction.

Panel 2C: Disrupting Identity Narratives

Chair: Mike Ryder

- Mia Harrison (University of Sydney, Australia): Heterogeneous Embodiment and the Chimaeric Zombie

Abstract

The zombie has proven itself not only as a powerful popular metaphor and a legitimate subject of pop culture scholarship, but also as a strong tool of critical thought in the field of biomedicine. This paper draws from research in my PhD thesis, in which I use the zombie as a modelling tool to critically think about hegemonic biomedical narratives of the body. I am particularly interested in the *reciprocal* relationship between the zombie and biomedical narratives; not only is the zombie employed as a metaphor, adjective, or modifier in biomedical discourse, it is also used to model real-world biomedical crises, to think through philosophical conundrums, and is the subject of various hypothetical thought experiments where real-world logics are applied to fictional zombie scenarios.

My paper explores the potential of the zombie as a modelling tool, focusing on the phenomenon of microchimaerism. Microchimaerism occurs when foreign cells or DNA are present within the body of an individual. I am interested in how the zombie can be thought of as a chimaeric body (and vice versa), where nature and science meet to challenge lay knowledges of immunology and selfhood. Everyday understandings of a self/other binary, along with immunological narratives of foreign invasion into the homogenous threatened self, produce overly simplistic and largely inaccurate ideas of the body and immunity. Drawing on the scientific and feminist scholarship of academics such as Karen Barad, Margrit Shildrick, and Aryn Martin, I explore how microchimaerism radically queers classical biological narratives of immunity and homogeneity. In bringing together the zombie with microchimaerism, this paper proposes the chimaeric zombie body as a site for creatively rethinking ethical and ontological knowledges of 'self' and 'other.'

About the Speaker

Mia Harrison is a doctoral candidate in the Gender and Cultural Studies department at the University of Sydney. Her research uses the zombie as a modelling tool to critically think about heterogeneous embodiment and bioethics. She is also a Research Associate in the Digital Ethnography Research Centre at RMIT University in Melbourne and the co-host of the pop culture podcasts "Trope Watchers" and "A Clash of Critics."

- Virginia L. Conn (Rutgers University, USA): Embodiment, National Character, and the Politics of Representing Illness

Abstract

Chinese literature has an extensive history of conflating illness and national infirmity, beginning with the “Sick Man of Asia” stereotype promulgated by the West after the country’s forced opening and internalized by Chinese authors and individuals in the following decades. Waging a war against germs, the rural-based CCP portrayed itself as wielder of modern scientific knowledge capable of combatting disease carriers and conquering all of China. Adequately portraying the role of illness and death in the future were integral to the projection of an ideal society, and addressing even the existence of infirmity within the body politic could be a potentially dangerous pastime for authors.

The SF novelette “Corrosion” by Ye Yonglie subtly engages with the conflation of illness and moral character so as to support the socialist realist project. “Corrosion” follows a scientist who is ideal in every way—physically, mentally, in terms of his work ethic and patriotism—as he attempts to find a cure for a corrosive extraterrestrial virus. His rival in these endeavors is depicted as his opposite in terms of appearance, yet over the course of the story, it is revealed that it is the swarthy, uneducated-appearing rival whose heart is actually pure, and the narrator who, despite his outward appearance, has a soul eaten away by greed. In their pursuit of scientific truth, the body becomes a site where external pathologies and moral failings are mapped onto anatomical systems, so that “greed” and “corruption” are made visible. In doing so, the very idea of a surface becomes porous, wherein the internal disease/degradation is seen as indicative of something fundamentally rotten and merely hidden by an obscuring surface.

This paper will underline the difficulty of normative national inclusion for non-normative bodies and the challenges this posed for a literature attempting to create a model world, one where even acknowledging bodily infirmity or the potential for illness was subject to censure.

About the Speaker

Virginia L. Conn is a comparative literature PhD candidate at Rutgers University whose work occurs at the intersection of comparative languages and literatures (Sinophone, Anglophone, Francophone, Germanophone, and Russophone literatures) and science and technology studies, particularly those aspects of STS that investigate circulations of knowledge and biopolitics. Her dissertation focuses on posthumanism and science fiction within a socialist context.

- Tom Kewin (University of Liverpool, UK): ‘The first six million years had been all fun and games’: Posthuman Curators and the Question Concerning Storage in Alastair Reynolds’ House of Suns and Slow Bullets

Abstract

At the onset of Alastair Reynolds’ 2007 science fiction novel *House of Suns*, *Campion*, one of the primary protagonists of the novel, visits the *Vigilance*, who are curators of a vast interstellar archive, whereupon the means by which interstellar history is recorded, on a posthuman scale, is outlined. This process of data exchange is of central focus in *House of Suns* with *Campion*’s accusations of ‘structured enquiry’, of a deliberative narrativizing of history across deep time; the nature of the *Vigilance*’s bias being that ‘[they] value certain forms of information more than others, at least when [their] transactions are examined over deep time’.[1] Which is to say, where *House of Suns* explores the erasure of historical events from an encompassing view of interstellar life, Reynolds’ *Slow Bullets* addresses this crisis of erasure as a question of storage through the titular ‘slow bullet’ which represents the manner in which one’s embodied becomes an archive, and can thus be transformed through prosthetic means. This paper therefore reflects on the figure of the posthuman curator in Alastair Reynolds’ *House of Suns* and *Slow Bullets* through a broader discussion on what unmoors Reynolds’ posthuman characters from a classical sense of identity and historical contingency, narratively-speaking. To which extent occupying the role of curator poses questions of accountability whereby one’s embodied existence calls into question the classical notion of identity and being, whereupon, as Karen Barad reflects, a ‘new arithmetic, a new calculus of response-ability’ is required.[2] This relationship between curation and Reynolds’ work is thus elucidating on issues of materiality with regards to posthuman existence, the often-fraught nature of maintaining posthumanist accounts of history and life, whether radically reconfiguring identity in response to the dearth of storage or expanding embodied awareness through treating one’s material existence as an archival.

About the Speaker

Tom Kewin is a doctoral student researching into speculative fiction in the Department of English at the University of Liverpool. Tom is currently embarking on a research project which concerns posthumanism and the ways in which different conceptions of the human have been curated; as such, his thesis concerns the manner in which contemporary British science fiction explores narratives implicit to posthumanist theory and likewise challenges certain assumptions within the field; as such, his thesis concerns the manner in which contemporary British science fiction explores narratives implicit to posthumanist theory and how both fiction and theory perform ideas within the field. As well as this, Tom has worked extensively with the Widening Participation programme within the University of Liverpool to lead research-specific programmes, alongside working on the *Being Human* Festival in 2015 and 2016 and co-organizing the *Current Research in Speculative Fictions* Conference (2017-2019).

Panel 3A: Confronting Monstrosity

Chair: Craig Ian Mann

- Shellie McMurdo (University of Roehampton, UK): Visualising Video Palace: The Sound of Monstrosity

Abstract

The podcast *Video Palace* is an intriguing text through which to examine monstrous embodiment, as the presence, texture, and appearance of its monsters is reconceptualised through sound alone. This paper will demonstrate how *Video Palace* uses what could be considered “bad” noise, such as distortion, glitches, and interference, to assist the audience in their visualisation of monstrosity, and examine how it pushes its diegetic recording technology to the point of (faux) breakdown to imply monstrous forms that cannot be contained by its medium.

The anxieties present in *Video Palace* circulate around both old and new media forms, the uncanny possibilities of technology, and the fragile boundaries between realms. Through noise, the podcast creates monstrous beings that straddle a spectral past full of fading memories of VHS rental stores and the uncanny possibilities of new technology in our current cultural moment. This paper will therefore investigate how the “bad” noises in *Video Palace* are utilised to underline both its horror and its authenticity.

This paper will present *Video Place* as representative of a new and innovate subgenre of podcasts that are connected to, but different from, found footage horror cinema, and in doing so will demonstrate how *Video Palace* encourages a form of active listening during which the audience lean into the sound, recreating the found footage horror subgenre – ordinarily very visual in nature – on a purely audio level.

Video Palace not only uses “bad” sound, distortion, and glitches to assist the listener in their visualisation of monstrous bodies. It is also concerned with the physiological reactions we have to sound, and as such this paper will connect it to earlier binaural radio plays and accounts of real life horror without visual referent, while showing how it utilises the podcast form to create monsters for the digital age.

About the Speaker

Shellie McMurdo is in the final year of her PhD, and her thesis is titled “Blood and Broken Lenses: Cultural Trauma and American Found Footage Horror Cinema”. She has recently published work on American Horror Story and the True Crime Community, and co-edited a chapter on late phase torture horror.

- Megen de Bruin-Molé (University of Southampton, UK): ‘Monstrum Sum’: Intersectional Otherness in *The Extraordinary Adventures of the Athena Club Books* (2017-2019)

Abstract

Theodora Goss’s *Athena Club* series uses neo-Victorian monster mashup to interrogate contemporary identity politics. Set at the turn of the twentieth century, *The Strange Case of the Alchemist’s Daughter* (2017), the first book in the series, chronicles the adventures of the daughters of famous ‘mad scientists’ from Victorian literature, and their eventual formation of the Athena Club to help other women like themselves. Characters include Mary Jekyll (the daughter of Henry Jekyll from Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 1886), Diana Hyde (daughter of Jekyll’s alter-ego Edward Hyde), Catherine Moreau (the puma woman from H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, 1896), Justine Frankenstein (a version of the female creature from *Frankenstein*, 1818), Beatrice Rappaccini (from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 1844 short story ‘Rappaccini’s Daughter’). The books draw supporting characters from a range of late Victorian fiction.

By presenting a world full of difference, populated by not one but multiple monsters, the *Athena Club* novels remind us that even when the monster is the privileged subject of its own narrative, there are still Others on the margins. As Judith Butler writes in *Undoing Gender*, we must ‘underscore the value of being beside oneself, of being a porous boundary, given over to others, finding oneself in a trajectory of desire in which one is taken out of oneself, and resituated irreversibly in a field of others in which one is not the presumptive center’ (2004, 25). As this paper will show, *Athena Club*’s textually and diegetically monstrous revival of past fictions decentres its subjects, placing them alongside each other rather than against *the Other*.

About the Speaker

Megen de Bruin-Molé (@MegenJM | Frankenfiction.com) is a Teaching Fellow in Digital Media Practice at the University of Southampton. Her research interests include neo-Victorianism, popular feminism, and contemporary remix culture, and you can find her published work in Brill’s *Neo-Victorian* edited series, and the journals *Deletion*, *Science Fiction Film and Television*, *Film Criticism* and *Assuming Gender*. Her monograph *Gothic Remixed: Monster Mashups and Frankenfictions in 21st-Century Culture* comes out later this year.

Panel 3B: Clowns, Comedy and the Carnavalesque

Chair: Ashish Dwivedi

- Oliver Rendle (Independent, UK): ‘Why So Liminal?': Horror, Humour and Clowning About

Abstract

‘Why so serious?’ asks Heath Ledger’s incarnation of The Joker, inviting us to not only look on the bright side of death but to join him and a whole clown-car of other cinematic and literary characters in their macabre revolution, their ruthless uprising, the infectious madness of their monstrous carnival. Concealing and revealing in equal amounts, the figure of the clown skips back and forth across ideological and thematic boundaries in the twenty-first century, alternating between horrifying and amusing, turning order into chaos, and earning a remarkable following as they do so. But long before Heath Ledger and Bill Skarsgård were helping *The Dark Knight* (2008) and *IT* (2017) rake in critical acclaim and millions of dollars, the clown was already a figure of controversy, fascinating contradiction, and – unsurprisingly – the subject of extensive critical attention. This paper will explore the significant popularity of the clown figure in twenty-first century mainstream cinema. By utilising the theories of Noël Carroll, Schopenhauer and Bakhtin’s carnivalesque, it will argue that this cinematic clown ‘fetish’ is symptomatic of a society riddled with disillusionment and dissatisfaction; one increasingly obsessed with characters who embody the philosophical amalgamation of Horror and Humour in their very appearance, motivation, and maniacal disruption of the status quo.

About the Speaker

Oliver Rendle is a graduate of Glasgow University’s Fantasy MLitt program; his research interests include Pessimism, Horror, Humour and Children’s Literature. He has presented papers at Glasgow International Fantasy Conversations, Lancaster University’s Fantastika Conference and Tales of Terror at the University of Warwick.

- Valentino Paccosi (Lancaster University, UK): Laughing at the Horror: Horror Films and the 'Failed Carnival'

Abstract

Carnival laughter is a significant feature of American horror films from the late 1970s onward which is often overlooked. In this paper I address this critical gap by developing the concept of 'failed carnival'. The failed carnival takes elements from Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of festive laughter and Linda Hutcheon's theories on parody, elaborating them through the concept of interpretive communities introduced by Stanley Fish. The audience, familiar with tropes and characters of the horror films, enjoys the over-the-top violence of the failed carnival and produces a festive laughter.

However, the failed carnival does not completely erase the negative elements of terror and horror: as in any other carnival, it has well-defined limits and outside them stands what I call the 'absolute obscene'. Originating from Julia Kristeva's theories on 'abjection' and Kelly Hurley's on the 'abhuman', the absolute obscene represents those elements that cannot be part of the failed carnival as they remain too disturbing to be laughed at.

In my paper, through the analysis of *The Evil Dead* (1981), *Evil Dead 2* (1987) and *Evil Dead* (2013) I will demonstrate how films featuring failed carnivals allow viewers safely to become part of the carnival, thus creating a strong sense of community and a safe and positive way to perceive horror. Moreover, the possibility of the re-introduction of the absolute obscene into the failed carnival demonstrates horror film audiences' relationship with taboo topics.

About the Speaker

Valentino Paccosi is a PhD student in English at Lancaster University, UK and he teaches on the Film Studies program there. He is currently researching on the fictions of H. P. Lovecraft, their different readings and their influence on different genres in contemporary media such as film, TV and graphic novels.

Panel 3C: Re(production)

Chair: Miranda Corcoran

- Eleonora Rossi (Birkbeck College, University of London, UK): Feeling Pregnancy in Contemporary Feminist Dystopias

Abstract

Feminist dystopias are a significant marker of women's overall state of dissatisfaction within a given time and socio-cultural context. The contemporary rediscovery and rise in popularity of dystopias authored by women points to a shift in the political and socio-cultural climate worldwide. Specifically, recent dystopias such as *Red Clocks* by Leni Zumas, *Future Home of the Living God* by Louise Erdrich, *The Water Cure* by Sophie Mackintosh, and *Gather the Daughters* by Jennie Melamed address contemporary anxieties concerning the future of women's reproductive rights. These novels investigate the understanding and value of women's childbearing potential in societies where birth rates have plummeted due to increasing infertility (or where evolution has reversed itself), and where pregnancy has thus become heavily state-regulated. In these dystopic futures, pregnancy is presented as both a miracle and a curse, a status which elevates a woman above all others, but which also condemns her to isolation and confinement, as well as to losing control over her own body. To this end, female characters develop highly conflicting feelings towards their pregnant bodies: while they care for and strive to protect their foetuses, they also often seek to manipulate, pause, or even end their own bodily existence, so as to escape this particular embodied state as well as its social significance. In my paper, I seek to examine how the tension between the pregnant women's dual wish for regaining ownership of their bodies and for becoming disembodied, is created and manifested both in the narrative and through the use of language.

About the Speaker

Eleonora Rossi (BA, MA) is an MPhil/PhD candidate in English & Humanities at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her research examines the link between womanhood, reproduction, and spatial confinement in key contemporary Anglo-American feminist dystopias. Prior to her MPhil/PhD, Eleonora read for an MA in Sociology (Gender, Media and Culture) at Goldsmiths College, University of London, where she focussed on street harassment as well as on the literary articulation of women's experiences while walking in the city.

- Katie Stone (Birkbeck College, University of London, UK): Unnatural Creatures: Cyborg Bodies and Feminist Science Fiction

Abstract

In Susan Stryker's essay 'My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix' she likens her own experience as a trans woman to that of Frankenstein's creature. Both she and the creature are continually made aware of the contingency of their existence: of the fact that their bodies are the product of, often hostile, violent and patriarchal, medical experimentation. However, despite their embattled position, Stryker sees their shared creaturely status as an invitation to rethink the politics of embodiment as such. Her awareness of the ways in which her own body has been made and re-made does not separate her from the world of supposedly "natural" beings. Rather, it reveals the labour, the technology, the effort which goes into creating all life. As Stryker puts it:

"The Nature you bedevil me with is a lie. Do not trust it to protect you from what I represent, for it is a fabrication that cloaks the groundlessness of the privilege you seek to maintain for yourself at my expense. You are as constructed as me; the same anarchic womb has birthed us both."

In this paper I read Fantastic feminist texts – from Frankenstein to the short stories of James Tiptree Jr. – alongside writing such as Stryker's, in which constructed, technologically supplemented, consciously crafted bodies are the stuff of material reality. I examine, for example, how Sophie Lewis' theorisation of commercial surrogacy as a practice which lays bare the usually invisible technologies and labor practices of reproduction, speaks to the monstrous birthing of Octavia Butler's 'Bloodchild'. Donna Haraway – with whom the term "cyborg feminism" originated – has argued that "the line between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion," and I intend demonstrate that the porous, mutable, creaturely bodies imagined and inhabited here continually transgress that line.

About the Speaker

Katie Stone is a PhD student at Birkbeck, University of London. Her thesis explores childhood and utopianism as imagined in science fiction. Katie is co-director of the London Science Fiction Research Community and co-editor of a forthcoming special issue of *Studies in Arts and Humanities Journal* titled 'Utopian Acts'.

Panel 4A: Weird Kin and the Cthulhuscene

Chair: Michael Wheatley

- Rob O'Connor (York St. Johns University, UK): A (New) Weird Teratology: The tentacular monster as abcanny body in the work of China Miéville

Abstract

The tentacled monster is a recognisable staple in the work of fantasy, horror and science fiction writers as a metaphor and motif for an invading “otherness” upon our established status quo. They simultaneously remind us of the wonders of our natural world but also defamiliarise it as something which is still significantly incomprehensible to us. Whether it is the real-life aquatic specimens of the Spirit Collection in the British Natural History Museum or the tentacles frequently found in Manga and Anime or other examples of popular culture, the tentacular body is one of alluring mystery and metaphorical symbolism. From the weird fiction of H.P. Lovecraft to the more recent work of China Miéville, the tentacled monster invites us to consider our own physical bodies and materiality.

Miéville describes such tentacular monsters as “abcanny”, referring not only to Sigmund Freud’s theory of uncanny repression being brought back to the fore but also Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject, the repulsive disruption of physical boundaries. For Miéville abcanny monsters ‘are teratological expressions of that unrepresentable and unknowable, the evasive of meaning’. They break down our perceptions of the physical body, consist of ‘oozing gloopiness... shapes that ostentatiously evade symbolic decoding by being all shapes and no shapes’. The tentacle is the perfect physical embodiment of this abcanny ideal, a formless mass of writhing biology, simultaneously familiar yet alien. This paper will explore how Miéville develops this theory of the abcanny body through the tentacular monsters that he uses in his novels, especially the Kraken and the character of Motley from *Perdido Street Station* (2000), demonstrating how his application of fantastical teratology is also a methodology for discussing various aspects of contemporary culture, from body modification to judicial punishment.

About the Speaker

Rob O'Connor is a Literature Studies PhD student at York St John University, studying the role of monsters as social commentary in the work of China Miéville. His other interests include genre theories, science fiction, fantasy, contemporary literature and creative writing. Rob also teaches creative writing and literature studies.

- Beáta Gubasci (University of Liverpool, UK): Embodying the Chtulhuscene: the Cthulhu Mythos and Global Weirding in *Bloodborne* (2015) and *The Old Hunters* DLC (2015)

Abstract

Current academic publications, such *The Age of Lovecraft* (2016), edited by Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, Paradoxa's special edition, *Global Weirding* (2016), edited by Gerry Canavan and Andrew Hageman, or Anna Kerchy's *Posthumanism in Fantastic Fiction* (2018), draw parallels between the Weird tradition and Posthumanism based on the similarities in their approaches to environmental crisis of the Anthropocene and human-animal relationships. Considering the recent appearance of titles such as *Bloodborne* (From Software, 2015) and its DLC, *The Old Hunters* (2015), *Call of Cthulhu: The Official Videogame* (2018), and the upcoming *The Sinking City: Death May Die* (expected release date, June 2019), it is safe to say that the Lovecraftian or Weird turn, signifying the recent revival of interest in both the Cthulhu Mythos and, especially, its distinctive aesthetic features, has most certainly reached the gaming world. While *Call of Cthulhu: The Official Videogame* feels a faithful and straightforward adaptation of the original classic from Lovecraft, altering it in a seamless and organic manner, the more transformative nature of the *Bloodborne* games draw attention to the scope of contemporary interpretations of the Lovecraftian "cosmic horror" and, more broadly, the Weird. In the first half of the paper I would like to enumerate the different ways in which various elements of the gameplay simultaneously utilise and subverts the features of Lovecraftian horror from the complex worldbuilding to level design and gameplay. The second half of the paper would focus on posthumanist interpretations of the "bestly scourge". Arguably, on one hand, it is an embodiment of the human hubris and its apocalyptic consequences – the complete breakdown of civilisation and its exploitative power dynamics. On the other, the bestly bodies and monstrous transformations embody the paradoxical posthuman hopes and anxieties that the future of humanity might not be fully human – the intermingling of human, animal and alien in the body horror of reproduction.

About the Speaker

Beata Gubacsi is a PhD candidate at the University of Liverpool, and "SFRA Support a New Scholar Grant" holder for 2019-2020. While working on her thesis, "Trauma in the Anthropocene: Posthumanism in New Weird Narratives", she is running the column, "Medical Humanities 2.0", for *The Polyphony*, the blog of the Institute for Medical Humanities at Durham University. She is co-organiser of the Current Research in Speculative Fiction conference, and recently she has joined the team of the *Fantastika Journal* as assistant reviews editor. Her research interests are genre, trauma, climate and animal studies, technology in medicine and healthcare with a focus on gaming and mental health.

- Steffen Hantke (Sogang University, South Korea): The Abject Body in Lovecraftian Horror: Anti-Humanist Discourse in Popular Culture

Abstract

One side effect of twentieth century modernity has been the decentering of the human body as a critique of humanism. From Kafka's vast bureaucracies to Celine's industrial war machine, this critique has been stripping the human body of its privileged status as (a marker of) the measure of all things. While much of popular culture has continued to operate within the confines of an older humanism, its insistence on individual bodies exercising heroic or tragic agency has rendered it, to its detractors, an escapist response to high culture's sobering anti-humanism. Some strains of popular culture, however, have worked to translate the larger modernist project into the vernacular of popular genres. Though the murder mystery depends on the bloodied corpse of the victim at its core, the police procedural tends to displace that body in favor of institutional and procedural structures exceeding individual agency (e.g. *The Wire*). Similarly, the war film has produced an anti-humanist strain in which the soldier's abject body has been erased, just as human agency has been attenuated, in favor of the elaboration of structures and procedures (*Catch-22*, *Dr. Strangelove*). As in the police procedural and the war films, abject bodies are at the heart of the horror genre. As one specific branch of this genre, Lovecraftian horror has been celebrated for its anti-humanist stance (Eugene Thacker, Mark Fisher, Michel Houellebecq). Unlike the police procedural and the war film—both of which struggle with the erasure of the body from their conceptual framework, framing it, tragically or ironically, as the cost of modernity—Lovecraftian horror presents a pop-cultural version of anti-humanism unwilling to make this bargain. Despite the decentering of the human as a broader category in Lovecraft's work, abject bodies still abound. Assessing Lovecraft's work in light of this idiosyncrasy is the goal of this presentation.

About the Speaker

Steffen Hantke has edited *Horror*, a special topic issue of *Paradoxa* (2002), *Horror: Creating and Marketing Fear* (2004), *Caligari's Heirs: The German Cinema of Fear after 1945* (2007), *American Horror Film: The Genre at the Turn of the Millennium* (2010), and, with Agnieszka Soltysik-Monnet, *War Gothic in Literature and Culture* (2016). He is also author of *Conspiracy and Paranoia in Contemporary American Literature* (1994) and *Monsters in the Machine: Science Fiction Film and the Militarization of America after World War II* (2016).

Panel 4B: Patriarchal Subversions

Chair: Katie Stone

- Luke Turley (Lancaster University, UK): ‘Who doesn’t enjoy a good scare’: Liberal Horror in Netflix’s *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018)

Abstract

Chilling Adventures of Sabrina (2018), an adaptation of the long running Sabrina comic book series by Archie Comics, uses tropes and motifs of both the Gothic and Fantasy to create a liberal gaze at numerous points within season one. The liberal audience watches as the conservative villains are often and repeatedly subjected to minor horrors which the protagonists, with whom the audience primarily identifies and feels embodied by, escapes largely unscathed. Only the major horrors of the series, which drive the narrative, is felt by Sabrina and her friends. Laura Mulvey in ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975), argued for a dualistic male gaze which, from behind the camera, subjugated its female subjects in two specific ways: voyeurism, which saw the punishment of women through pain, be it emotional or physical; and scopophilia, in which women were eroticised to fulfil the fantasies and desires of male spectators. Now 45 years later, I argue that with the move towards an increasingly liberal society we have seen the creation of a liberalised gaze, which in contrast to the gaze that subjugates women, targets the prejudiced and discriminatory and as such effects the use of Horror within series such as *Chilling Adventures*.

About the Speaker

Luke Turley is a first-year PhD student at Lancaster University. His thesis focuses on magic and 21st Century politics in Contemporary Fantasy and he is currently writing a chapter which considers the representation of Feminism in Fantasy and the impact of magical systems on patriarchal structures. His wider research interest includes Fantasy, Science Fiction and the Gothic across a variety of media.

- Miranda Corcoran (University College Cork, Ireland): “A Pack of Bobby-Soxers”: Adolescent Embodiment and the Figure of the Teenage Witch in American Popular Culture

Abstract

From the moment of her emergence as a distinct social demographic in the decades following World War II, the teenage girl has been a source of anxiety and unease. Posited as hormonal, precociously sexual and rebellious, the teen girl was viewed as a threat to the social order and was depicted as both culturally and biologically disruptive. In 1949, these anxieties about female adolescence were explored by Marion L. Starkey in her book *The Devil in Massachusetts*. Here Starkey undertakes a study of the Salem witch trials that attributes the 1692 witchcraft panic to a group of teenage girls, whom she telling describes as a “pack of bobby-soxers”, “unbalanced young girls” addled by hormones and “hysteria”. Starkey’s book is significant, firstly, in that by connecting the Salem witchcraft scare to adolescence, she solidifies a connection between teenage girls and the occult that would influence the cultural archetype of the teenage witch for decades to come. Secondly, Starkey’s book evidences a preoccupation with adolescent embodiment, with the manner in which teenage bodies are “inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressure external to them” (Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* x). Starkey’s book not only attempts to comprehend the Salem trials from a twentieth-century perspective, but it also utilises the figure of the witch as a means of exploring adolescent embodiment and navigating the complex intersections of biology and culture that define teenage girlhood. This paper analyses how Starkey constructs the teenage witch as a conceptual avatar through which the biocultural constitution of adolescent femininity can be explored. Moreover, I will argue that Starkey’s employment of witchcraft as a framework for investigating adolescent embodiment would prove highly influential, reverberating through works as diverse as Ray Bradbury’s “The April Witch” (1952), *The Craft* (1996) and *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018 – present).

About the Speaker

Miranda Corcoran is a lecturer in the School of English, University College Cork. She is currently working on a monograph focussing on witchcraft and adolescence in American popular culture. She is also the co-editor of *Exploring the Horror of Supernatural Fiction: Ray Bradbury’s Elliott Family* (forthcoming from Routledge).

- Jane Hartshorn (University of Kent, UK): Shapeshifting and the ‘monstrous feminine’: exploring the experience of the sick woman through the figure of the lycanthrope

Abstract

This paper will investigate the extent to which the embodied experience of chronic illness can be explored through the shapeshifting figure of the therianthrope. Expanding on Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject, I will unravel how the body of the sick woman ‘strays on the territories of animal’ in order to consider how this collapse of the boundary between human and animal can critique and complicate normative categories of sex and gender. I will employ Barbara Creed’s notion of the ‘monstrous feminine’, or the *femme animale*, in order to challenge patriarchal notions of acceptable and unacceptable female bodies. I will argue that social and cultural discourses of sex and gender place pressure on female patients to conform to hegemonic ideals of beauty and desirability, and that recovery narratives often support gender normative notions of what constitutes a ‘healthy’ body. Furthermore, I will argue that women are often prohibited from expressing the reality of their bodies due to the pressure placed on them to embody heteronormative definitions of femininity.

I will focus specifically on the figure of the lycanthrope found in folklore and myth in order to subvert patriarchal forms of representation. As a figure of resistance and transgression, the female werewolf can undermine essentialist notions of sex and gender and provide a new model of thinking about female identity as fluid and evolving rather than rigid and discrete. Exploring the amorphous body of the sick woman through the figure of the lycanthrope will enable me to examine the embodied experience of illness, whilst unsettling binary notions of femininity.

About the Speaker

Jane Hartshorn is a Practice as Research PhD candidate at the University of Kent. Her poetic practice explores female embodiment in relation to cultural and social discourses of illness and wellbeing. She has had poems published in *amberflora*, *Front Horse*, *Raum*, and her pamphlet *Tract* was published in 2017 by Litmus Publishing.

Panel 4C: Ballet Gothic

Chair: Marita Arvaniti

- Karen Graham (University of Aberdeen, UK): Agony and Ecstasy: Ballet and the Gothic Body

Abstract

Filmed versions of classical ballets have been consistently popular since the screening of *Don Quixote* in 1973. In contrast, the “ballet movie” that follows the staging of a ballet comes in and out of fashion. One of the earliest examples is *The Red Shoes* (1948), starring Moira Shearer as the ballerina preparing for her first major role. The internal politics of the ballet company, including the often-sexual relationship between prima ballerina and director, becomes the focus of the ballet movie’s plot.

Darren Aronofsky’s thriller *Black Swan* (2010) revisits this format. Playing on the Gothic doubling present in *Swan Lake*, it explores the physical and mental strains of a ballerina attempting one of the most demanding roles in ballet. This is an early example of an emerging artistic engagement with the Gothic undertones present in classical ballets, as can be seen in Bourne’s *Sleeping Beauty* (2012) and ballet adaptations of classic gothic texts like Nixon’s *Dracula* (2014) and Scarlett’s *Frankenstein* (2016).

Black Swan and the ballet movie alike depict the physical strain the rehearsal and performance place on the body. A notable example of this is the opening sequence of “breaking in” pointe shoes accompanied by images of bleeding feet and split or missing nails. Indeed, the connection between dance, female sexuality and bodily excess can be traced back to texts such as Anderson’s ‘The Red Shoes’ where the female protagonist is punished for wearing her red shoes to church by being forced to dance in them forever until she has to chop them off. As such, this ubiquitous depiction of bleeding and damaged feet is the visual manifestation of ballet’s Gothic heart. By examining the staging of traditional romantic ballets in conjunction with body horror and psychological thriller elements of the modern ballet movie this paper will make the case that ballet is inherently, archetypally Gothic.

About the Speaker

Karen Graham has a PhD in myth and contemporary fantasy fiction from the University of Aberdeen. She has 10 years’ experience in professional services in Higher Education and is currently Senior Faculty Administrator at Strathclyde Business School. She studied ballet, tap, modern and disco from the ages of 3-17 and holds both Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) and Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) qualifications.

- Daisy Butcher (University of Hertfordshire, UK): Dewinging Fairies: Mutilation and trauma in *La Sylphide* (1832) and Disney's *Maleficent* (2014)

Abstract

In this paper I will analyse the trope of the pinioned fairy seen in both one of the world's oldest surviving ballet *La Sylphide* and Disney's *Maleficent* (2014) feature film. I will interrogate how men trusted as lovers in these tales in James and Stefan choose to take the wings from their fairy inciting trauma that can be read as a metaphorical rape. Wings can be seen as a symbol of freedom and beauty and as such mutilating, destroying or removing these from a woman is a form of oppression. In *La Sylphide*, a farmer named James who is already engaged to be wed to another, falls in love with a sylph/fairy. An old witch appears predicting he will betray his fiancée and he churlishly sends her away. Later, he jilts his fiancée at the altar and pursues the sylph. James meets the old witch again and she offers him a magical scarf which will bind the sylph's wings and allow him to catch her and keep her forever. As he wraps the scarf around the Sylph her wings fall off and she dies. Moreover, Angelina Jolie who played the titular fairy and served as executive producer in the recent film, revealed herself that the dewinging scene in the film was indeed a metaphor for rape. With this in mind, I will discuss how important it is to redress these scenes as symbolic of rape and the male desire to possess and conform the female body for their pleasure and convenience. I will argue how both stories can be viewed as feminist fairy tales, highlighting *Maleficent's* redemption as she regains her wings in the 2014 film and also how in *La Sylphide* the old witch is triumphant as James does not receive his happily ever after.

About the Speaker

Daisy Butcher is a Gothic, Horror and Fantasy scholar attached to The Open Graves Open Minds project. She has been granted a funded PhD at the University of Hertfordshire and is working on her thesis focusing on the monstrous feminine and body horror from the nineteenth century gothic short story to modern film and TV.

- Kate Harvey (Stirling University, UK): Body Brisé: Control, Possession and the Female Gothic in Starz Originals Flesh and Bone

Abstract

Flesh and Bone is an eight part mini-series from 2015 following Claire, a troubled ballet dancer who runs away from her hometown to audition for a New York ballet company. This series is a Gothic exploration of the female body as a source of commodity even now in the 21st century, and the battle Claire has to establish her identity surrounded by those who wish to use her for their own purposes.

Her body becomes the both the site of and inspiration for revenge, and by the end, there is reckonings for those who have abused her, or exploited her for their own gain. This is seen most clearly through the interaction between Claire and the prominent male characters of the series- the flamboyantly homosexual director of the ballet company, Claire's brother recently returned from military service, the suspicious Russian owner of a nearby stripclub, and the autistic homeless man that lives on Claire's street.

The series uses Gothic tropes in order to convey Claire's struggles to establish an identity she is comfortable with, yet subverts some stereotypes regarding physicality – such as hair cutting and use of blood – to reassert power within a feminine narrative. Claire struggles with her identity throughout, yet ultimately it is through her dance ability that she is able to come to terms with the myriad of demands from external sources.

About the Speaker

Kate Harvey has studied literature at Stirling University, where they completed their Undergraduate in English Literature and Masters degree in The Gothic Imagination, with a dissertation looking at the female body in relation to the werewolf in contemporary literature.

Kate has had the privilege to have been selected to present papers at MMU's Gothic Styles conference, and at Trinity College, Dublin at their Gothic Nature conference, both in 2017. In 2018 Kate also presented at Sheffield University at their annual Reimagining the Gothic conference, the Supernatural Cities conference held at the University of Hertfordshire and the IGA in Manchester celebrating the bi-centennial of Frankenstein.

Panel 5A: Uncanny Spectres and the Divided Self

Chair: Kerry Dodd

- Daniel Pietersen (Independent, Edinburgh, UK): Are You Lena? – Selfhood and the Unheimlich in *Annihilation*

Abstract

The 2018 cinematic adaptation of *Annihilation*, written and directed by Alex Garland, received criticism for changes it made to the narrative of Jeff VanderMeer's 2014 source novel. However, change should not be surprising as both works are concerned deeply with the impact of change and, specifically, change that is perceived to be deviant. Through this paper I will use both versions of *Annihilation* to investigate:

- **The Inconstant Self:** The constancy with which we view our own selfhood is an illusion that arises, like the illusion of film, from our inability to detect the slight changes between each version of ourselves. We flicker between now and then, this and that; we hover in a liminal state.
- **The Insular Self:** Human society is built on communication and collapses due to the lack of it. However, as much as we want to reach out to others we also fear the collapse of the distinction between self and other – an osmosis that gives rise either to a tainted co-mingling or the manifestation of an uncanny doppelgänger.
- **The Invaded Self:** The combination of these two attacks against selfhood – the refutation of constancy and the collapse of integrity – gives rise to the fear that we can unwittingly (or unwillingly) become something other than ourselves; a mixture of the weird piercing-in of otherness and an eerie absence of expected presences.

However, I contend that this *unheimlich* fear of the invaded self – *unheimlich* often being translated roughly as 'unfamiliar' but also able to mean 'unhidden' – is a fear rooted in the human tendency towards conservatism. *Annihilation*, I will demonstrate, illustrates how change is a permanent and necessary part of the human condition which, if fought against, leads not only to stagnation but to destruction.

About the Speaker

Daniel Pietersen is an author of weird fiction and critical non-fiction, published in the likes of *The Audient Void*, *Mycelia* and *Thinking Horror*. An essay on the liminality of folk horror is pending publication in *Revenant*. Daniel lives in Edinburgh with his wife and dog.

- Joe Howsin (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK): Undressing the Ghost: Embodying Bereavement Trauma in Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris*

Abstract

As in many ghost stories, the spectres which haunt Stanislaw Lem's science fiction novel *Solaris* are birthed from trauma and loss. However, unlike traditionally non-corporeal spectres, the visitors that haunt *Solaris* possess a frightening physicality; a physicality closely tied to the workings of trauma theory. As such, this paper argues that these figures are physical embodiments of the distortive effect of trauma on memory.

Dr Kelvin is the newest arrival on the planet Solaris, a world almost entirely covered by a metamorphic ocean-like organism. His mission is to aid ongoing efforts to communicate with the ocean, and so he travels to the space station which hovers just above the planet's surface. Upon arrival, Kelvin finds that his friend Dr Gibarian is dead. The other inhabitants, Dr Snow and Dr Sartorius, are rambling and dishevelled. All of them encounter 'visitors' created by the ocean who resemble people from their past.

Kelvin is visited by his late wife Rheya, and it quickly becomes clear she is a manifestation of mourning. Rheya believes fervently that she is Kelvin's deceased wife; she possesses an innate need to be with him at all times, and if she is adjected she will return as though nothing has happened. However, we are assured by Kelvin that the visitor is not the real Rheya.

As the novel progresses, Rheya is proven to be more than a mere echo of her former self; she is a new being created from Kelvin's imperfect memories. My paper will examine how Kelvin's relationship with Rheya mirrors the relationship between people and their traumatic memories and ask the ultimate question: can we ever really escape our past?

About the Speaker

Joe Howsin is a masters student studying contemporary trauma theory, 20th Century Gothic and Contemporary Gothic at Manchester Metropolitan University. He previously graduated from Sheffield Hallam University with a BA in English Literature. His research interests include 20th century Gothic, Horror, Modernism and Science Fiction.

Panel 5B: Surgical Transplantations

Chair: Leonie Rowland

- Ahmet Yuce (Georgia State University, USA): Hand Transplant as Hauntology in *The Hands of Orlac*

Abstract

This paper argues that the depiction of organ transplant in *The Hands of Orlac* (Robert Wiene, 1924) recalls both the Derridean notion of hauntology and the centrality of the hand in phenomenology. In Derrida's philosophy, hauntology indicates that the presumptive self-sameness of any given presence is always already contaminated by the spectral traces of its others; thus, pureness/completeness cannot be achieved. Nevertheless, Derrida emphasizes that this inevitable contamination paradoxically stimulates an insatiable desire to arrive at a state of pureness/completeness. The same desire can be found in the phenomenological accounts of the hand as primary corporeal extension potentially enabling an unmediated contact with the world. The aim behind this phenomenological postulate is to reach the things themselves, and, for Derrida, it is this aim that is doomed to failure.

The Hands of Orlac pictures a collective nightmare, still prominent today, regarding organ transplant in which the acquired organ acts independently of the recipient's will. After receiving a murderer's hands, the film's pianist protagonist begins to believe that the hands remain spectrally tied to the murderer's proneness to kill, thereby continuing committing crimes unbeknownst to the pianist himself. It later turns out that the hands bear no attachment to the murderer's body. By raising the question of whether the murderer's predispositions haunt the pianist's grasp of the world following the surgery and by jubilantly showing in the end that the hands do not harbor cellular memory, the film plays out the fears concerning contamination and the desire for purity in relation to hand transplant. In doing so, the film not merely resonates with the Derridean notion of hauntology and the phenomenology of embodiment but also creates room for reflecting on the recurring anxieties surrounding organ transplant in light of these two paradigms.

About the Speaker

Ahmet Yuce is a Ph.D. candidate in the Moving Image Studies program at Georgia State University in the US. His research interests are surgical/medical visual aesthetics, film-philosophy, phenomenology, and poststructuralism. He presented papers at SCMS, LACK, Rendering (the) Visible, Derrida Today, NECS, and Film-Philosophy conferences.

- Rachel Simpson (University of Edinburgh, UK): Are robot-assisted surgeons using the Da Vinci Surgical System “Cyborgs”?

Abstract

Through dissolving human-machine boundaries, the ‘cyborg’ challenges traditional conceptions of embodiment. Thus, identifying a singular conception of what it means to be human may become increasingly impossible within a contemporary, cyborg-infused reality. The term cyborg has been appropriated within a mixture of utopian and dystopian accounts to describe various hybrid bodies; Haraway’s (1991) visions of feminist liberation have intertwined with both monstrous Science-Fiction machines and ‘everyday cyborgs’ (Haddow, 2015). This talk will align with Laughlin (1997:146), arguing that we must preserve the cyborg’s explanatory power by carefully considering its applied relevance prior to labelling new innovations. A phenomenological approach will be adopted to explore cyborg depictions alongside medical literature, envisioning how robot-assisted surgeons may experience ‘being-in-the-world’ (Heidegger, 1996) through present and future surgical systems. When the surgeon extends their natural, material body into the world and specifically the patient’s body, they gain feedback in return. However, when the surgeon merges with the robot to extend their body, their feedback is felt through the machine and translated back into their body in an alternative, mechanized form. Consequently, by considering the level of bodily autonomy robot-assisted surgeons are able to maintain while temporarily enhancing their bodies through technology, I will argue that conceptualising robot-assisted surgeons as cyborgs risks descending the term into the metaphorical banal; robot-assisted surgeons currently have the ability to fully detach themselves from the machine and maintain agency over their own bodies. While Science-Fiction cyborgs alter their identity through subjecting their own bodies to violent reconstruction processes, surgeons shape their own identities through reconstructing the bodies of others. However, due to rapid technological advancement there is a distinct possibility that surgeons may one day become cyborg, further breaching their bodily boundaries to access new, subjective worlds in the pursuit of professional excellence.

About the Speaker

Rachel Simpson is a Masters by Research Student in Science Technology and Innovation Studies at the University of Edinburgh. She is currently undertaking a qualitative research project entitled ‘Regulating Robotic Surgery: new sociological explorations in ethics and embodiment’ which aims to explore human-machine interactions within a variety of clinical settings.

Panel 6A: Military Bodies

Chair: Daniel Pietersen

- Chris Hussey (University of Cambridge, UK): Becoming transhuman: exploring the adaptation of the body for war and conquest in the Black Library's *Horus Heresy* series

Abstract

"So he made us, demi-gods, to stand beside him... The mere fact of me frightens me sometimes."

(Abnett, Horus Rising, p134-135)

Over the past 30 years, Games Workshop's iconic 'Warhammer 40,000' setting has centred around a key narrative conflict set in the 31st millennium: the era known as the Horus Heresy, involving two sides of augmented superhumans, Loyalists versus Traitors, battling it out for control of the galaxy. Based on a tabletop wargame, Games Workshop's publishing arm, The Black Library, has focused on writing a rich tapestry of background stories centred around the forces and characters involved.

These superhumans are the Legiones Astartes, Space Marines, who are to wage war across the galaxy as part of a conquest of pacification and compliance, which ultimately results in a war against one another. Each undergoes drastic changes, as a youth conscripted for their physical and mental prowess, before being augmented through receiving the 'gene seed' that alters them genetically and the implantation of organs that makes them into a transhuman warrior. They are stripped of emotions, conditioned to know no fear, and become instruments of violence and purpose – ascending to an alternative adulthood.

This paper considers the implications of such body modifications and the subsequent consequences, both within the narrative setting and for society more broadly. It posits whether the affordances of this elevation beyond being simply a human vicariously robs them of their humanity – and whether becoming transhuman ultimately makes them less than human, rather than more. It contemplates the body as an object and as a tool, and how such perceptions may be both enfranchising and dehumanising in equal measure. Furthermore, it will explore the nature of physical adaptation within such works of Science Fiction, engaging with their perceived function as well as the affordances of these (re)constructions, for those that experience these transformations to their bodies, and those that then experience what these monstrous bodies may subsequently enact.

About the Speaker

Chris Hussey is a part-time PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge, UK, exploring real and literary place in Children's Literature. His research interests focus on aspects of space, place, and identity, in both realist and fantastic texts, particularly works by China Miéville and the Black Library's *Horus Heresy* series.

- Mike Ryder (Lancaster University, UK): Conscripts from birth: war and soldiery in the grim darkness of the far future

Abstract

“In the grim darkness of the far future, there is only war...”

Ever since Robert A. Heinlein published his famous novel, *Starship Troopers* in 1959, science fiction – and specifically, military science fiction – has had a concern with the ‘future soldier’, and the impact of technology on the process of war fighting and body of the soldier. This is reflected perhaps none better than in Games Workshop’s *Warhammer 40,000* universe, and its many paradigms of military conflict and servitude, including the conscript, the servitor and the Space Marine.

In this paper, I will explore early science fiction depictions of the ‘future soldier’ and their influence on the GW universes and the interesting links to be found between fictional universes and the modern-day world. In particular, I will look at the ethical dilemmas posed by the soldier, and the problematic relationship between the soldier, the citizen and the state.

While Space Marines may be instrumentalised soldiers from birth, their transformation leaves them no scope to return to their former lives. In this way, they are more like Frederik Pohl’s *Man Plus* (1976) than they are like Heinlein’s super-soldier concept depicted in *Starship Troopers*, as for the Space Marines, there can be no end to the eternal war.

But then, whose war is it anyway? If the Space Marines aren’t human, and can’t know a life beyond war, then what is it they’re really fighting for? Is there any room for the Space Marine in the post-war universe? All these questions and more will be explored in a wide-ranging interdisciplinary paper spanning the worlds of literature, culture, philosophy and ethics. As I will demonstrate, there’s far more to the world(s) of Games Workshop than first meets the eye!

About the Speaker

Mike Ryder (M.J. Ryder), is an interdisciplinary researcher at Lancaster University, and co-organiser of the Embodying Fantastika conference. His recent publications include chapters in *Blade Runner 2049 and Philosophy*, and a forthcoming book on 1960s sci-fi. His research interests include war, sovereignty, biopolitics and ethics. His website is www.mjryder.net. You can also listen to his podcast, www.inthepodcast.com.

Panel 6B: Weird Ecologies

Chair: Luke Turley

- Michael Wheatley (Royal Holloway, University of London, UK): “The form of all things but devoid of form”: Transcending the Corporeal in the ecoWeird

Abstract

This paper considers how ecoWeird texts frequently position an abandonment of anthropocentric thought alongside a transcendence of the physical body. A new generic term to encompass the corpus of ecologically-minded Weird fiction, the ecoWeird draws upon Timothy Morton’s theory of dark ecology in order to argue that the Weird historically dismantles the human/nonhuman binary. This paper considers three texts: *The Great God Pan* (1894) by Arthur Machen, *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* (1912) by Algernon Blackwood and *Annihilation* (2014) by Jeff VanderMeer.

As the human characters of these texts become spiritually attuned to human/nonhuman interconnectedness, and the limits of anthropocentric thought, they transcend the corporeal. In *The Great God Pan* this transcendence manifests as a string of suicides and a dissolving of traditional human anatomy; in *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*, a surrendering to hybridising with the nonhuman; and in *Annihilation*, a becoming one with landscape. Each of these transcendences is destructive, often involving physical death, yet are positioned as an understanding of a greater truth. This paper draws from this consideration that within ecoWeird fiction, the human body is presented as equally limiting as an anthropocentric mind. As one is abandoned, the other must be abandoned with it.

Employing Morton’s dark ecological theory alongside primary source material, this paper endeavours to highlight the frequent correlation within the Weird between transcending anthropocentrism and transcending the corporeal. In doing so, it hopes to further reframe the Weird tale from the cosmic to the natural.

About the Speaker

Michael Wheatley is an MA student in Creative Writing at Royal Holloway, University of London. His PhD, ‘EcoWeird: An Ecocritical Re-evaluation of Weird Fiction’, will reconsider the Weird as an ecological mode. His debut collection of short stories, *The Writers’ Block*, is published by Black Pear Press.

- Shelley Webster (University of Wollongong, Australia): Encountering Cyborg Plants: Embodied Experiences of Vegetal Beings in Contemporary Science Fiction Art

Abstract

In multispecies studies, the cognitive bias known as plant blindness can be identified within the environmental humanities, as critical animal studies have largely dominated much of multispecies discourse. However, theorists such as Michael Marder and Matthew Hall have recently brought to light the need for critical plant studies and the ethics and politics surrounding vegetal beings. As such, this paper studies how embodied experiences *of* and *with* vegetal beings through cyborg technologies in contemporary science fiction art is a means to bringing a greater environmental consciousness by enriching human and plant relations for the future. Céleste Boursier-Mougenot's 2015 installation *Rêvolutions* and Anil Podgornik, Saša Spačal, Mirjan Švagelj's 2015 installation *Myconnect* exemplify a trend identified by Amelia Barikin where contemporary science fiction artists materialise, enact and perform science fiction. By enacting science fiction, these works aid audiences to develop a greater awareness of vegetal beings as active agents and living beings.

In *Rêvolutions*, a work commissioned for the 56th Venice Biennale, three cyborg pine trees meander through private and public spheres as sentient beings. By robotic means, the trees are ascribed sentience and mobility as they move through the pavilion and gardens. As vegetal cyborgs, their movements are determined by a robot that senses the sap velocity as well as human movement. *Myconnect* is an interspecies connector that facilitates interactions between human and mycelium, the vegetal component of fungi, through a biofeedback loop. Connected in a capsule as a symbiotic cyborg, a "mycosynapse" is created when the physiological functions of a human body's nervous system are transmitted to the mycelium through an interface, whereby the mycelium responds through auditory, visual and tactile sensory impulses in an embodied co-experience. Both works bridge the human-nature divide to overcome plant blindness through embodied experiences with cyborg plants.

About the Speaker

Shelley Webster is a PhD candidate at the University of Wollongong supported by the Australian Government Research Training Program as a scholar receiving the Australian Postgraduate Award. She is completing a practice-based research doctorate on ethics and politics of multispecies philosophy in contemporary science fiction art. She is trained in painting, drawing and fine art photography which she incorporates in her installations.

Panel 6C: Augmentation and Prostheses

Chair: Molly Cobb

- Chen Michaeli (Tel-Aviv University, Israel): Visibility/Disability; Steampunk Prosthetics, Bodies and Industrial Society

Abstract

Steampunk, a hybrid genre of new-Victorianism and science fiction, until recently has suffered from a lack of academic attention, on the one hand criticized for romanticizing the Victorian era, and on the other, disregarded as nostalgic and perhaps even juvenile pulp. However, unlike other genres, steampunk has first emerged as a primarily performative aesthetic movement, and more significantly, promoted itself as “more than just a fad or fashion”, but rather a lifestyle and a “politics of presentation” (Stimpson Kristen, 22). Through these visual bodily expressions, steampunk addresses ambiguities which exist at its key junction point of the past and the present, the mechanic and the organic as well as social gaps, characteristic mostly of 19th century England, but which also apply to contemporary society. In this paper, I intend to discuss representations of prosthetics and disability (which are notable in Victorian street literature concerned with working classes) in steampunk texts to claim that such maimed bodies, which are reliant on the technology of their prosthetic, in fact allegorize the conflict between man and machine that concerned Victorian society as well as ours. In these contemporary texts, such as di Filippo’s *Victoria* (1991), Malzieu’s *A Boy with a Cuckoo-Clock Heart* (2007), Kent’s “*The Heart is the Matter*” (2012) and more, the steampunk fictional world does more than offer an aesthetically pleasing industrialized utopia; it addresses widely spread social concerns of 19th century as well as contemporary perceptions of body versus society. In short, this essay intends to demonstrate how the historical background of prosthetics and disability, specifically in the Victorian era, and its class connotations, are addressed in steampunk and its reclaiming of human body in face of industrial repercussions.

About the Speaker

Chen F. Michaeli has recently completed her English MA at McGill University, and is currently a PhD candidate at the English department at Tel-Aviv University. Other than writing her dissertation, focused on post-apocalyptic adaptations of *Alice in Wonderland*, Chen is a committee member at Tel-Aviv University’s international Science-Fiction Symposium and is currently co-editing a science-fiction essay collection for the Cambridge Scholars publication.

- Daniel Martin (Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, South Korea):
Demonizing the ‘Abnormal’Body: Conjoined Twins as ‘Obsessive Avengers’ in East Asian Horror

Abstract

Depictions of individuals with disabilities or genetic abnormalities in horror have often been problematic, focusing on the ‘otherness’ of the physically anomalous as villainous, murderous, and psychotically unstable. While a growing body of scholarly work is examining disability in the horror film, little attention has been paid thus far to depictions in cinema from East Asia. This paper therefore examines monstrous representations of genetic ‘abnormality’ in the Hong Kong film *The Bride with White Hair* (Ronny Yu, 1993), and the Thai production *Alone* (Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom, 2007). Both films feature troubling depictions of conjoined twins, prime examples of ‘obsessive avenger’ archetypes: characters assumed to be angry and bitter about their disability, motivated to commit violence by a high degree of self-loathing.¹

The Bride with White Hair combines horror, swordplay, fantasy and romance to fashion a story of heroism in which sorcerous conjoined twins, a brother and sister, are the ultimate malevolent antagonist. Their self-destructive psycho-sexual oddities mark them as (an) object(s) of pity and depravity, and their narrative arc ultimately suggests their condition is a burden from which they are happy to be finally, though fatally, relieved. *Alone* is equally complex in terms of its depiction of sexual desire and self-loathing, focusing on the sole surviving twin from a pair of conjoined sisters. Haunted by the ghost of the siblings he killed, the film’s protagonist hides her homicidal past, and similarly symbolizes the supposed desire for ‘normality’ and a ‘cure’ for the conjoined condition. In both films, the immoral, murderous natures of the conjoined characters are tied to their status as genetically anomalous.

Drawing on work in the fields of horror film as well as disability studies, this paper explores the ways these films depict disabled individuals as the ‘monstrous other’ and reflect cultural attitudes to (and assumptions about) the lives of conjoined siblings. At a time when discussions of disability and difference, sexuality, physicality, and horror are intersecting to greater degrees, the inclusion of East Asian cinema in these studies is increasingly important.

1. Travis Sutton, ‘Avenging the Body: Disability in the Horror Film’, in Harry M. Benshoff (ed.), *A Companion to the Horror Film* (Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp.73-89.

About the Speaker

Daniel Martin is Associate Professor of Film Studies at the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology (KAIST). He is the author of *Extreme Asia: The Rise of Cult Cinema from the Far East* (2015), co-editor of *Korean Horror Cinema* (2013) and *Hong Kong Horror Cinema* (2018), and has published articles on the subjects of East Asian cinema in numerous edited collections and journals.

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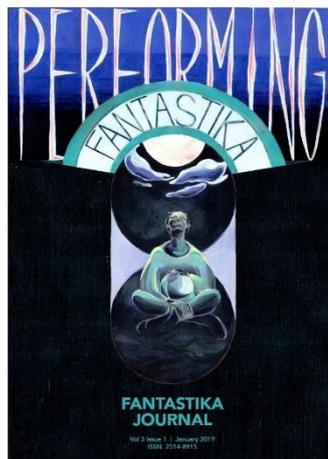
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