

**GFF Annual Conference, "Speculative Fiction and the Political"
Online Panels**

Thu, Sep 24, 7:00 PM CEST – *Indigenous Futures*

Sarah Cullingham (Ontario) – “Worlding Dystopia: Settler futurity in Margaret Atwood’s world of Gilead”

Ania Paluch (Ottawa) – “Matriarchs of the Anthropocene: Indigenous North American and Eastern European Dialogues Through Feminist Ecocriticism”

Nora Castle (Warwick) – “Alternative Foodways and Alternative Futures: Food and Politics in Contemporary SF”

Join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85453175406?pwd=N0FtRExjbUVxYVhNRmJYMXdOak5Wdz09>

Fri, Sep 25, 6:00 PM CEST – *Science-Fiction and Historical Voices*

Torsten Kathke (Mainz) – “From 'Future Shock' to 'Winning the Future': Newt Gingrich's SF Politics”

Bodie Ashton (Passau) – “‘Hier ist ein Märchen von Übermorgen’: Raumpatrouille and Rethinking Germany’s Place in the Global Future”

Amanda Dillon (Norwich) – “Unheard Voices: The Time Travelling Woman as Writer of History”

Magdalena Wasowicz (Krakow) – “Alternate History and Politics of Memory in Poland”

Join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84700158664?pwd=R1N0b05wUDlzbVlyby9Danc2bzMxQT09>

Thu Oct 1, 6:00 PM CEST – *Re-reading Myths and Folklore in Contemporary Fantasy*

Jennifer Neidhardt (Düsseldorf) – “Lovers from the Underground: Revisions of the Hades/Persephone Myth in Contemporary Fantastic Fiction”

Mark Schmitt (Dortmund) - “On Folk Horror as a Political Mode”

Rebecca Graß (Bochum) – „Rebellen vs. Soldaten: Das Individuelle gegen das Uniforme in der Fantastik“ (*German language!*)

Join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85307583794?pwd=eFJseWlqRXh0ZXJtSjFPcjNDc1ZrUT09>

Thu, Oct 1, 7:00 PM CEST – *Gender and the Role of the Body in Science Fiction*

Iuliia Ibragimova (Dublin) – “Countering the Weapon Fetishism: Call for Non-Violence in Popular Culture of the Cold War Period as represented by *Captain America Volume 1* (1941-1996) and Anne McCaffrey’s *The Ship Who Sang* (1969)”

Joseph Jenner (London) – “The Gendered Politics of the Anthropocene: The Body and Look of the Female Astronaut”

Cristina Algaba (Sevilla) – “Empowering the simulacrum. Changing roles and power relationships in the dystopian theme park Westworld”

Join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85907431996?pwd=VjhvaHVvZnJpZGN5SHp6cnlyNy9nQT09>

Fri, Oct 2, 6:00 PM CEST – *Contemporary Science Fiction Fandoms*

Christina Wurst (Tübingen) – “The Rise of Skywalker Social Media Fan Response – Ideological Discourses in Online Fan Communities”

Ashumi Shah (Augsburg) – “Participatory Culture and Experimental Speculative Fiction”

Join: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88596251092?pwd=c09zczF3b3U4WHF4cFc5eE9jbWQ4QT09>

Thu, Sep 24, 7:00 PM CEST – *Indigenous Futures*

Sarah Cullingham (Ontario) – “Worlding Dystopia: Settler futurity in Margaret Atwood’s world of Gilead”

The genre of speculative fiction provides a rich source of material through which to interrogate our views of history, elucidate our contemporary cultural milieu, and chart what futures we see as possible. Within contemporary settler-Canadian, and wider north-American-settler, and even wider British-colonial-commonwealth contexts the world of Gilead as imagined by Margaret Atwood has materialized as a popular vision in this genre. Cast through the form of two novels, *The Handmaid’s Tale*, published in 1985, and *The Testaments*, published in 2019, as well as a HULU television series, the dystopian theocracy of Gilead pervades this, my own, cultural context. Taking my own position as a starting point, and employing an auto-ethnographic method of inquiry, this paper interrogates what the current popularity of the speculative world of Gilead says about contemporary settler-Canadian culture. Focusing on Atwood’s two novels this paper draws on the work of Donna Haraway and Indigenous scholars to trouble the prominence of the dystopic world of Gilead with settler-Canadian futurisms. Read within the genre of speculative fiction and in relation to Indigenous futurisms, Atwood’s speculative practice in constructing the world of Gilead is revealed as reflecting a limited and stilted political outlook, one which serves a particular purpose (an awakening) for a particular (privileged) audience and does little to chart a path towards a different kind of future. Understood this way, the popularity of this work suggests settler-Canadian speculative fiction has not yet realized its full political potential in relation to settler decolonial practice. The paper concludes by imagining new possibilities for what decolonial worlding practice within the genre of speculative fiction could look like from a settler perspective.

Ania Paluch (Ottawa) – “Matriarchs of the Anthropocene: Indigenous North American and Eastern European Dialogues Through Feminist Ecocriticism”

Science fiction (SF) within the last fifty years in Eastern European and North American Indigenous spaces often are reactionary pieces to realities faced within a Communist regime or colonial space (respectively). These SF spaces make room for language revival/continuation, folk art, traditional oral stories and mythologies, as well as commentaries on living in oppressive Communist regimes or colonial states. Indigenous SF creators form their own unique ‘ethnoscapes’ using technology, land sovereignty, and tradition. With widespread Westernization, Slavic Futurism is less focused on overt representations of outer space and technology, but more of reclaiming traditional imagery, often pre-Christian, in a contemporary setting. The act of giving new life to these images is futuristic in itself, as if the traditions of the ancestors hopped through a ‘slipstream’ (Grace L. Dillon) into the future (the present). SF in these cases is being used as a political tool for cultural ‘survival’ (Gerald Vizenor).

Within the aforementioned spaces one can find feminist ecocriticism in speculative fiction films and literature. This paper addresses transnational matriarchal roles in SF medias that promote cultural continuation among Indigenous people in North America and cultural revival in Eastern Europe post-Soviet Bloc; how culture, language and traditional methods, protected by female-identifying characters, are used in these branches of SF film and literature to survive ecological dystopias. The connections I propose between the groups are not accidental – research

has shown predominant focus in using traditional legends and oral stories in the works of Metis, Inuit and Slavic SF writers, theorists and filmmakers. These include Cherie Dimaline (Metis), Danis Goulet (Metis), Nanobah Becker (Navajo), Tanya Tagaq (Inuit), Tomek Baginski (Polish) and his portrayal of female protagonists, as well as the Estonian Kostabi-Society.

Nora Castle (Warwick) – “Alternative Foodways and Alternative Futures: Food and Politics in Contemporary SF”

“There is nothing more political than food.” – Anthony Bourdain (2017)

Food is both a basic necessity and a complex cultural object. It shapes and is shaped by social structures, cultural contexts, and political policies and actions. It can be used metaphorically to express a variety of meanings, including political positions (cries of “eat the rich” now abound on social media) and relationships between people and social classes. It is also inextricably intertwined in both the causes and consequences of climate change, making it a worthy subject for speculative fiction, which, per Jameson, articulates the anxieties of the present.

This presentation will examine the sociopolitical implications of food and foodways in two contemporary speculative fiction works: Sarah Hall’s *The Carhullan Army* (2007) and Waubeshig Rice’s *Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018). Both novels occur after an apocalyptic event, and in both, a return to more traditional foodways is valorized. In the former, that valorization is part and parcel of an anti-authoritarian rebellion; fresh produce is synonymous with new life, and rehabilitating the land becomes a metaphor for rehabilitating society. In the latter, which centers on an Anishinaabe reservation, those who have continued to follow traditional Indigenous foodways are the ones best positioned to survive an unknown apocalyptic situation. The non-Indigenous consumption habits in the novel also metaphorically invoke the historical oppression of Indigenous peoples.

In each novel, the oppressive ruling party relies on tinned foods procured through industrial agriculture and global trade, while the protagonists engage in alternative and local foodways. This presentation will therefore argue that the return to agrarian ideals in each novel – to the homestead farm in *The Carhullan Army* and to traditional Indigenous methods of hunting and gathering in *Moon of the Crusted Snow* – enacts a critique of globalized capitalist (food) systems. It will also question some aspects of these alternative foodways and their potential for implementation in the real world, such as the importance of meat-eating in both novels and the ethics of extrapolating Indigenous foodways as potential solutions for non-Indigenous contexts.

Fri, Sep 25, 6:00 PM CEST – *Science-Fiction and Historical Voices*

Torsten Kathke (Mainz) – “From 'Future Shock' to 'Winning the Future': Newt Gingrich's SF Politics”

When C-SPAN's book talk show "After Words" premiered in early 2005, the first author interviewed was former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich. Political scientist and conservative commentator Norm Ornstein conversed with him about a new book, in which Gingrich presented his game plan for the 21st century. "Winning the Future," styled as a follow-up to the "Contract for America" for which Gingrich had become famous and infamous ten years earlier, was an update on the politician's recurring plans to future-proof the United States.

Gingrich had gotten a PhD in history, but had quit academia for politics and an eventual run for the House in the 1970s. He had co-founded Congress's "Space Caucus" in 1981, even

before becoming known as the mind behind the influential "Conservative Opportunity Society." Knowledge of the past for Gingrich provided the roots for an enduring interest in the future. During the 1970s, when academic study into automation, a new style of economy and politics, and future societies were becoming national topics of debate, Gingrich befriended prominent futurists and science fiction writers, such as Alvin and Heidi Toffler, and Jerry Pournelle. They, like him, moved in the circles of what W. Patrick McCray has called "visioneers"—a cadre of scientists, technologists, and thinkers who conceptualized a broad future of high technology and space exploration.

This talk seeks to contextualize Newt Gingrich's speculative fictions, published under the guise of political commentary, within a broader discourse of thinking about politics, society, and the future in the late 20th century U.S. Using his (often co-written) non-fiction publications, in which the genesis of many of Gingrich's ideological through lines can be discerned, I argue that Gingrich's confrontative style of politics stems from his intellectual roots in a specific future-facing discourse. This discourse centered on the above mentioned networks whose members were concerned with the creation of new modes of living, new political models, and an overall narrative of disruption that would likewise become a hallmark of 21st century technology companies.

Bodie Ashton (Passau) – “Hier ist ein Märchen von Übermorgen’: Raumpatrouille and Rethinking Germany’s Place in the Global Future”

Premiering on ARD just nine days after Star Trek first aired on NBC in the United States, Raumpatrouille Orion was the first science fiction television series to be produced in Germany. To some degree, both shows covered similar ground, with Major Maclane and the Orion substituting for Captain Kirk and the Enterprise. However, Raumpatrouille’s limited run of seven hour-long episodes, as opposed to Star Trek’s initial three seasons, subsequent motion pictures, television spin-offs, novels and comics, left it little room to construct an intricate in-universe backstory for the civilisation and historical context in which that action took place. This necessitates that every on-screen moment spent inventing that background is significant. With this in mind, the universe of Raumpatrouille is curious indeed: a German show written by German writers and played by German actors, yet all but entirely absent German characters and, seemingly, acting as a rejection of what political actors as well as artists and writers had constructed for the prior century or more as the essence of an orderly ‘German future.’

This paper conceives of Raumpatrouille as a unique window looking into a Germany (or, rather, West Germany), whose identity was undergoing stark political transformation at the time of its production. Where Star Trek often fell back upon the touchstones of political life in its American homeland in order to portray virtue, Raumpatrouille — emerging from West Germany just two decades since the end of the Second World War — seemed self-consciously to reject familiar German conceptions of public life and the body politic. The end result is a true time capsule to a retro-future that wasn’t: a ‘fairy-tale from the day after tomorrow’ that simultaneously acted as a clear and decisive political statement in the foreground of revolutionary movements of the late 1960s.

Amanda Dillon (Norwich) – “Unheard Voices: The Time Travelling Woman as Writer of History”

This paper explores the intersection of politics and science fiction through a consideration of gender politics of the writing of history in Connie Willis’s 1992 novel Doomsday Book. Willis’s

protagonist, the history Ph.D. student Kivrin Engle, is sent back in time to pre-plague era Oxford in order to study the period for her thesis. As is so often the case in time travel narratives, everything goes horribly wrong and Engle and the plague arrive simultaneously in Oxford. To add to her problems, Engle quickly finds that almost everything she has been told about the period is incorrect — and she begins noting the differences. This act of writing moves beyond simple corrections of historical ‘fact’ to recording information that no one else in her time has: the names of those who fall to the plague as she watches until she is the only person in the town left living, and the helplessness the ‘contemps’ feel as they dig grave after grave.

In this novel, Willis constructs a finely balanced consideration of historical truth and historical authorship, with a particular emphasis on the importance of gender in the writing of history. Falling in line with other similar narratives, such as Gabaldon’s *Outlander* series and Baker’s *The Company* series, Willis’s novel presents women as ahistorical figures who are capable of working in ‘hidden’ areas of history, both as writers and as historical actors. Invoking historical and literary theory ranging from gender history and time travel to postmodern conceptions of authorship and narratology, this paper provides a reading of the novel that argues not only that the writing of history is a political act, but that science fiction provides us the tools to imagine just how political an act this might be.

Magdalena Wasowicz (Krakow) – “Alternate History and Politics of Memory in Poland”

Alternate history is a genre of fiction which describes a world in which one or more major historical events occur differently. Alternate history is often considered to be pure entertainment. Yet, as Gavriel David Rosenfeld points out, an examination of alternate history novels can give us an insight into mechanisms of collective memory and politics of memory. In Poland, alternate history often reflects certain politics of memory. While Polish scholars usually point to the fact that Polish authors tend to create scenarios in which Poland becomes a world power, in fact most Polish novels describe alternative worlds in which Poland does not exist. In my paper I would like to analyze two book series and describe how they fit into politics of memory connected to World War II.

I am going to confront Piotr Bojarski’s *Kryptonim Posen* (“Cryponym Posen”) book series and Marcin Wolski’s *Wallenrod* and *Mocarstwo* (“Empire”). Both novels describe an alternate history of the World War II in which Poland allies with Nazi Germany. Yet the outcome of the alliance is totally different. While Marcin Wolski creates an utopian vision in which Poland becomes a world power, Piotr Bojarski describes a dystopian reality in which Poland is dominated by Nazi Germany. Both stories are highly political. They engage in a discussion about Polish history and exhibit their authors’ views about the contemporary world. They also draw inspiration from collective ideas about the past and criticize Polish martyrology. I am going to describe these problems and motifs in detail.

Thu Oct 1, 6:00 PM CEST – *Re-reading Myths and Folklore in Contemporary Fantasy*

Jennifer Neidhardt (Düsseldorf) – “Lovers from the Underground: Contemporary Revisions of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter”

My paper discusses the revision of the Homeric Hymn to Demeter in contemporary literature and queerfeminist online communities. While numerous feminist critics have rightfully regarded the myth of Hades and Persephone as one of the most prominent examples for glorified sexual

violence in the Western literary canon, recent adaptations have reclaimed this archetypal narrative as a power fantasy of emancipation and liberation. Hades, now portrayed as a gloomy but devoted spouse and idealized lover, exists merely to fulfill Persephone's desires, who functions as an object of identification. Consequently, the Underworld becomes a Utopian space of escape from social norms and sexual repression. Drawing on Per Faxneld's *Satanic Feminism: Lucifer as the Liberator of Woman in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (2017), I argue that these revisions of Hades as a monstrous lover reflect earlier feminist appropriations of the Christian devil and are part of a larger trend towards monstrous lover figures in contemporary popular culture. Even though webcomics and feminist pop poetry might not be regarded as serious literature by some, they playfully challenge underlying power structures within the western literary canon and establish an alternative and more inclusive collective memory. Nevertheless, I will also address the problematic aspect of the reliance on a male savior figure and provide alternative approaches such as the female depiction of Hades in Sarah Diemer's independent novel *The Dark Wife* (2011).

Mark Schmitt (Dortmund) – “On Folk Horror as a Political Mode”

When filmmaker Piers Haggard, during an interview with Mike Gatiss for the documentary *A History of Horror* (2010), described his 1971 *Blood on Satan's Claw* as a “folk horror film”, he probably didn't foresee that the term would take on a life of its own in the years to come. The term was taken up by scholars to label any cultural text that engages with British folklore “to imbue itself with a sense of the arcane for eerie, uncanny or horrific purposes” to dramatize a “clash between such arcania and its presence within close proximity to some form of modernity” (Scovell 2017: 7).

Folk horror now encompasses a variety of representations that negotiate the ambiguous relationship between tradition and modernization in British history, ranging from films such as Robin Wright's *The Wicker Man* (1973) to Gareth Evans' *Apostle* (2018) and beyond. In 2018, Paul Wright released *Arcadia*, an essay film about the British countryside and its folkloric traditions. The initial release was accompanied by “Elysium Found?” – an essay by nature writer and Dark Mountain Project member Paul Kingsnorth. The text caused a controversy that threw into sharp relief the ideological and political aspects of engaging with the British countryside, notions of rurality and its future. Dan Coxon, editor of the folk horror story collection *This Dreaming Isle* (2018), subsequently made it clear that neither he nor any of his authors intended to use folk horror to promote “old-fashioned patriotism and nostalgia” or convey a “right-wing, reactionary tone” (2018: 5). However, what he shares with other recent folk horror writers and artists is an anxious unease regarding the future of Britain and its countryside that is expressed in an aestheticization of fear in the folk horror tradition (Coxon 2018: 5). Likewise, visual artist Paul Watson has engaged with such questions in his cycle of coal drawings called *England's Dark Dreaming: The Matter of England and the World Turned Upside Down* (2018).

In my talk, I will demonstrate that folk horror, rather than a genre label, can be considered as an aesthetic and political mode that encompasses different discourses on the contrast between country and city, tradition and progress, the flaws and breaking points of modernity, and eco-politics in contemporary Britain. It is a mode through which the “politics of fear” (Furedi 2005) concerning the future of Britain and its countryside are being negotiated. Folk horror, I will argue, can have both a progressive and a conservative bent. I will demonstrate this by looking at seminal “ur-texts” of folk horror such as *The Wicker Man* as well as at newer folk horror texts

such as the novels of Andrew Michael Hurley, the essay film *Arcadia*, as well as Watson's *England's Dark Dreaming*.

Rebecca Graß (Bochum) – „Rebellen vs. Soldaten: Das Individuelle gegen das Uniforme in der Fantastik“ (German language!)

In der Fantasy- und Science-Fiction-Literatur ebenso wie in Filmen dieses Genres wird überdurchschnittlich häufig der Kampf Gut gegen Böse thematisiert, oft nach dem David-gegen-Goliath-Prinzip: eine Gruppe einzelner gegen einen übermächtig erscheinenden, oftmals staatlich organisierten Gegner. Politisch spiegeln diese Szenarien häufig den Kampf gegen ein diktatorisches, meist faschistisches Regime, dem sich Einzelne aus allen Gesellschaftsschichten und mit den unterschiedlichsten Motivationen und Hintergründen widersetzen. Dem Regime wiederum untersteht meist eine Armee aus Soldaten, denen jede Individualität abgesprochen wird: sie tragen Uniformen, sie bewegen sich als Heer wie eine Einheit, sie folgen blind Befehlen und erscheinen mehr wie Roboter oder Maschinen denn wie Menschen. In drei der größten Fantasy- und Science-Fiction-Serien der letzten Zeit findet sich diese Art besonders ausgeprägt. In J.K. Rowlings Harry-Potter-Serie starten Einzelne einen Kampf gegen Lord Voldemort und seine Todesser, während viele andere Mitläufer oder vor Angst gelähmt sind. In George Lucas' Star-Wars-Reihe stehen die Rebellen (die dort auch explizit so genannt werden) der einheitlichen, roboterähnlichen Armee aus Sturmtrupplern entgegen – erst in Episode 7 wird mit dieser Einheitlichkeit gebrochen, als einer der Sturmtruppler sich als Individuum herausstellt. Auch die Herr-der-Ringe-Saga von Tolkien befasst sich mit dem Kampf gegen das Böse, das unter der Herrschaft Saurons droht, ganz Mittelerde zu „infizieren“ und zu verschlingen. Hier ist der Kontrast zwischen Uniform und Individualität besonders gravierend. Sauron lässt seine Elite-Soldaten, die Uruk-hai, extra züchten, es ist eine Soldatenproduktion. Im Gegenzug dazu sind die Gefährten bzw. die „Rebellen“ nicht nur aus unterschiedlichen Gesellschaftsschichten, sie entstammen sogar den verschiedenen Völkern Mittelendes und repräsentieren damit und durch ihren Zusammenschluss Diversität und Toleranz. Gegenstand der Untersuchung ist, wie sich in der Sprache die Gegenüberstellung von Soldaten und Rebellen ausprägt und welches Bild von Rebellion – und auch von Zivilcourage – gezeichnet wird. Politisch sind diese Arten der Darstellung und der Fantasy/Science-Fiction jedoch zweifellos: durch die positive und v.a. individuelle Darstellung der Rebellierenden werden den Lesern Identifikationsmöglichkeiten angeboten, die zur Nachahmung auffordern.

Thu, Oct 1, 7:00 PM CEST – *Gender and the Role of the Body in Science Fiction*

Iuliia Ibragimova (Dublin) – “Countering the Weapon Fetishism: Call for Non-Violence in Popular Culture of the Cold War Period as represented by *Captain America Volume 1 (1941-1996)* and *Anne McCaffrey's The Ship Who Sang (1969)*”

The presentation dwells on two popular culture characters – a superhero Captain America and a sentient spaceship Helva, the protagonist of *The Ship Who Sang* and the way their images can be seen as propagating the ideas of non-violence in the tense political atmosphere of the Cold War. Steve Rogers, an art student with weak health, becomes a superhero after a technological intervention – an enhancement by a serum, which radically improves his physical parameters. The main attribute of Captain America as a superhero is a shield, not a weapon, sending a message of non-violence contrasting the mainstream “superweapon” fetish. Helva, a bright female born

to an inviable human body, is integrated into a spaceship, which she perceives as her body. In addition to her professional success as a scout spaceship, she is rather advanced in her hobby – singing. Helva, the spaceship, is heavily and impenetrably armoured, but she is not equipped with any kind of weapon, which condones the non-violence and peace message of the novel.

The fictional biographies of these characters contains several parallels - their initial physical limitations, subsequent technological modification of the bodies, augmenting them, connection to art, and lack of weaponry, constituting an integral part of their image. They also facilitate considering both characters from posthumanist perspective. In both the comic series and the novel, there are plotlines overtly and covertly ratifying the peace movement and non-violence appeals, which were on the rise in the US in 1960s-1970s, for instance, Captain America's alter-ego Nomad and absence of weapon in *The Ship Who Sang*.

Analysing these plotlines and the premise of the characters, the presentation shows how they counter weapon fetishism, prevalent in the Cold War cultural production, and how they promote the ideas of non-violence amidst the environment of two superpowers' heated political rivalry.

Joseph Jenner (London) – “The Gendered Politics of the Anthropocene: The Body and Look of the Female Astronaut”

In this paper I will examine films such as *The Cloverfield Paradox* (Julius Onah, 2018), *One Under the Sun* (Riyaana Hartley & Vincent Tran, 2017) and *The Space Between Us* (Peter Chelsom, 2017) as well as television series such as *Extant* (2014-15) and *The 100* (2014 –), to argue that, in parallel to recent feminist revisions of masculinist Anthropocene discourse, the increase in female astronauts in contemporary science-fiction has revised the notion of who is capable of political agency and intervention in the Anthropocene. Following the work of Frank White (1987), I will argue that such female astronauts view life on an ecologically troubled Earth from an expanded spatial and temporal perspective. Drawing on Donna J. Haraway's latest work *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) and Richard Grusin's edited volume *Anthropocene Feminisms* (2017), I will argue that there is a political connection between female astronauts and the sexual politics of the Anthropocene, a body of writing that perpetuates the association of technology-male and Earth-female. The recent increase of female astronauts on screen, including women of colour, suggests a political reconfiguration of agency in the Anthropocene. However, contemporary science-fiction film and television is also populated by female astronauts who are grieving a lost or dying child, are infertile, or give birth to alien or monstrous children. As I will argue, the failure of procreation is projected onto anxieties about the Earth's increasing inability to sustain life on Earth. There is, then, a deep ambivalence about views of Earth as witnessed by female astronauts – both a progressive political gesture within Anthropocene politics and a perpetuation of the displacement of cultural anxieties onto the female body. This paper draws on my article publication in *Science Fiction Film and Television* (2019) entitled “Gendering the Anthropocene: Female astronauts, failed motherhood and the overview effect.”

Cristina Algaba (Sevilla) – “Empowering the simulacrum. Changing roles and power relationships in the dystopian theme park *Westworld*”

The relevance of science fiction television series, and dystopian narratives in particular, as cultural products that reflect contemporary values and recent sociopolitical features is outlined by several authors (Telotte, 2001, 2008, 2014; Baccolini and Moylan, 2003; Johnson-Smith, 2005; Geraghty, 2009). Referring to American science fiction, Johnson-Smith states that “Modern American sf

television is neither utopian nor dystopic; it enforces a critique of the Western mythos, whilst renegotiating its finer aspects” (2005, p. 253). These productions not only contribute to the development of this “American mythos” but also contain a discourse in accordance with the values of an epoch.

With regard to the expressed above, the present work studies the HBO’s dystopian series *Westworld* (2016-), whose plot is developed in a typical Western movie scenario where human guests interact with the androids (hosts) that live in this theme park. In this sense, *Westworld* combines the Old and New America in a pastiche which reflects the connection of this audiovisual production with certain postmodernism features: simulacrum, nostalgia, parody, remix... (Shafiee, 2016) and a critical discourse on capitalism (Busk, 2016). In our analysis, we will observe how Baudrillard’s reflection about Disneyland and the sense of imaginary and hyperreal (1994) is transferred to the theme park *Westworld* and which ideological elements are underneath its surface and different scenarios. In addition to this, a third element has been inserted to analyse how this cultural and ideological background deals with the concept of power. We specially focus on how main characters’ (both humans and androids) actantial dimension (Greimas, 1989) and different roles evolve throughout the three seasons of this TV series, by following Foucault’s binary structure: dominators vs. dominated (1991). By following the results, other ideological issues related to the current context of the series will be addressed, comparing this product with its previous versions: the films *Westworld* (Michael Crichton, 1973), its sequel *Futureworld* (Richard T. Heffron, 1976) and the TV series entitled *Beyond Westworld* (CBS, 1980).

Fri, Oct 2, 6:00 PM CEST – *Contemporary Science Fiction Fandoms*

Christina Wurst (Tübingen) – “The Rise of Skywalker Social Media Fan Response – Ideological Discourses in Online Fan Communities”

“reylos are gross and problematic and deserve to die” – a cryptic statement for those unaware of the complex ideological discourses of Star Wars fans on social media. Recent times have proven both the scholarly dream of participatory culture as a utopian force for democratizing mass media, as well as the public perception of fan culture as a largely apolitical activity to be far from the truth. While much research has highlighted the activist potential of these spaces, only recently has the flipside of the same coin come to attention: Fan communities being pathways to online radicalization.

The fantasy and sci fi genre with their huge impact on popular culture have proven themselves to be sites of culture wars and therefore particularly suited to be the subject of both explicit and implicit ideological discourses on social media. Star Wars’ fan responses to the franchise’s latest two installments have been particularly controversial and associated with targeted online harassment (both against fans and actors), as well as Russian bots, conspiracy theories and reactionary critique in general.

I propose that the response to *The Rise of Skywalker* on Twitter mirrors both the rise of populist rhetoric in contemporary politics as well as general tendencies of online activist strategies, both progressive and reactionary. This becomes for instance apparent in the case of “reylos” with fans framing a discussion of personal narrative preferences in the larger context of (anti-)feminism: Fans whose support of a relationship between protagonist Rey and antagonist Kylo Ren is often seen as indicative of romanticizing abusive behavior and therefore deserving of toxic online behaviors directed against them. Having been read as both misguided attempts at

feminist activism and confirmation of the inherent sexism in fandom, this phenomenon is one of several ways in which an analysis of this film's reception sheds light on the intricacies of ideological discourse in online communities.

Ashumi Shah (Augsburg) – “Participatory Culture and Experimental Speculative Fiction”

The pervasive nature of new media – be it Twitter, Instagram or Tumblr – calls for an examination of participatory culture, especially where popular television shows are concerned. Not only must one don the lens of participatory culture and active audiences, but also take on an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of new media audiences. The project aims to do just that with tools from genre studies, television studies, fan studies and digital humanities for a more integrated, holistic approach to how digital natives consume, produce and disseminate all the media on offer. In the current draft, the project covers the shows Black Mirror, The OA, and the literary celebrity of Neil Gaiman.