

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

9:30 - 10:00 Arrival & logging on.

10:00 - 10:05 Words of welcome

10:05 - 10:55 1st Panel:

When the Environment Attacks.

Chair: Sophie Larue

Pau Font Masdeu

"The Spanish Flu (1918-1919) in Spain: A National Disease."

Suphi Keskin

"An Analysis of Solaris: On the Edge between Psychoanalysis and Anthropocentrism"

10:55 - 11:15 Coffee Break

11:15 - 12:30 2nd Panel:

Visions of Dystopia in Literature.

Chair: Liani Lochner

Ryan Haddad

"White Noise and They Live: Hidden Messages in Changing Landscapes"

Claire Liszka

"Feed (2002) and *Brave New World* (1932): Posthumanism and Transhumanism in Dystopian Literature"

Shelby Haber, Nived Dharmaraj, Cassandra Luca, & Avneet Sharma

"Sex and Citizenship in *Nineteen Eighty-*



1:45- 3:00 3nd Panel:

Pessimism and Postmodernism for the End-Times.

Chair: Jean-Philippe Marcoux

Saba Pakdel

"Surviving the Ruins with Pessimism: A Comparative Study of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's Conception of the Ruins and Eugene Thacker's Pessimism"

Nigel Finch

"Beckett's Apocalypse: An Immanent Ending that Never Occurs in *III Seen III* Said"

Carrie Lynn Evans

"Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*: Cyberpunk's "Second Wave"?"

3:00 - 3:20 Coffee Break

3:20 - 4:20 Keynote Speaker

Dr. Graham Murphy

Science Fiction and Virus Culture: Catastrophe, Contagion, and Cyberpunk"

4:20 - 5:00 Social & transition to restaurant



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Pau Font Masdeu (University of Girona, Catalonia)

Pau Font i Masdeu holds a degree in History for the University of Girona (2019) and a Master in Research in Humanities (2020). He started his PhD studies on the political impact of the Spanish Flu epidemic. During these years, he has also collaborated with the History Department and the Archive and Documental Management Unit in the University of Girona.

"The Spanish Flu (1918-1919) in Spain: A National Disease."

This presentation explores the links between the flu epidemic of 1918-19 and the decadence of the Spanish political system—both morally and materially—using a Political and Cultural History perspective.

The Spanish Restoration regime, emerged in 1874, already shown signs of crisis and instability, well before 1918. The lack of an efficient response to face the epidemic generated plenty of criticism, which converged to other debates about the general crisis of the regime: the epidemic was yet another evidence of the system inadequacy in solving the Spanish nation's needs.

From this point of view, it is analysed the general context where the epidemic breaks, including discourses about the decay of Spain as a nation, started at the beginning of the century. Next, it is explained how the criticism on government management of epidemic becomes an embedment to the whole political system, beyond the sanitary administration. At the same time, discourses that claim for a "sanitary dictatorship" and an "epidemic language" appear, with a discursive association between epidemic-evil, constantly used in many other political debates. Lastly, a long-term view on the epidemic political impact is considered, making connections between discourses and demands during the outbreak, and political and discursive practices during the following years of Primo de Rivera's dictatorship.

Suphi Keskin (Ulster University, Ireland)

Suphi Keskin is a Ph.D. researcher in the Program of Contemporary Film Studies at Ulster University. His working fields are new media theory, philosophy of cinema, and Turkish Literature. Keskin published a book chapter on media-driven sexism in 2017. He also published three articles, respectively, in *Dokuz Eylül University Journal of Humanities*, FSM Scholarly Studies Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, and Cinej Cinema Journal.

"An Analysis of *Solaris*: On the Edge between Psychoanalysis and Anthropocentrism"

Throughout his cinema career (1966-1986), Andrei Tarkovsky produces films that focus primarily on his dreams, memories, and the subconscious. As a psychiatrist who added new concepts to the field by reinterpreting the psychoanalytic theory since the 1950s, Jacques Lacan is considered the scholar who made the most powerful impact in psychoanalysis since Freud. His renewal of psychoanalysis profoundly maintains to affect the intellectuals and the field of psychiatry even today. Although he declines the symbolism in his films, the metaphorical expressions Tarkovsky employs in his films provide suitable material for investigating his cinema from a Lacanian perspective.

In Solaris (1975), Tarkovsky unifies his familiar themes, such as memories and subconscious within a script including a planet—Planet Solaris creating psychotic reactions and playing the role of authority for surveillance —that represents the revenge of nature in the face of humanity through an apocalyptic, psychoanalytical, science-fiction adaptation from Stanislav Lem's novel. Through this script, Tarkovsky masterfully continues employing the peculiar themes of his filmography with criticism of anthropocentrism, and this fruitful plot grants the opportunity to scrutinize it from a perspective that accentuates the effect of nature's destruction from the view of a psychosis pandemic within a surveyed space situation; hence, divergent from director's other movies, Solaris is required a different way of psychoanalytical approach. Within this context, the Lacanian Mirror Stage is the keyword for this analysis in order to comprehend the results of surveillance, the authority on human psychology and nature, along with engaging some other concepts, The Symbolic and The-Name-of-The-Father. This presentation deals with Solaris according to the above mentioned theoretical approach and discusses Tarkovsky's ethical advice about impending disaster from 1975.



11:55 - 12:30 2nd Panel:

Visions of Dystopia in Literature.

Chair: Liani Lochner

Ryan Haddad

"White Noise and They Live: Hidden Messages in Changing Landscapes"

Claire Liszka

"Feed (2002) and *Brave New World* (1932): Posthumanism and Transhumanism in Dystopian Literature"

Shelby Haber, Nived Dharmaraj, Cassandra Luca, & Avneet Sharma

"Sex and Citizenship in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*"



Ryan Haddad (Western University, Ontario)

I am a Master's student in Comparative Literature currently completing a one-year program at Western University in London, Ontario. I am originally from Lebanon, which is where I fostered my love for literature and film. My current research focuses on the intersection between life and art as primarily exhibited through the works of Yukio Mishima.

"White Noise and They Live: Hidden Messages in Changing Landscapes"

They Live, one of John Carpenter's lesser known films, has become a cult classic. The story follows an unnamed protagonist who finds glasses which reveal hidden messages within his surrounding media landscape, and realizes that his environment is explicitly designed to brainwash the masses. The film's commentary on capitalist influence and power-disparity was especially apt for its 1988 release, and continues to be relevant today. Published three years prior to They Live, Don DeLillo's White Noise presents a similar reality where ordinary people find themselves at the mercy of a smaller, more dominant ruling class controlling everything they do, from the shopping they enjoy to the media they consume, and presents a grim representation of modern life as being inhabited by living, breathing zombies as opposed to autonomous citizens of a sound, democratic state. Through an interarts comparison between White Noise and They Live (along with Eight O'Clock in the Morning, the short story by Ray Nelson the film was based on), I will examine how the themes existent in both works, mainly those pertaining to consumer culture, corporate brain-washing, and dystopian implications, translate between the creative universes of the novel and the film. I will then focus on how the dystopian elements of both works continue to exist in today's modern world but through

modified mediums such as internet ads, YouTube, and TikTok, with a special light on how the COVID-19 pandemic has altered and influenced the different corporate strategies at play in influencing the world and its people.

Claire Liszka (East Tennessee State University)

Claire Liszka is a graduate student seeking an MA in English at East Tennessee State University. She earned a Bachelor of Arts and Sciences in English with a dual minor in Spanish and Women's Studies from East Tennessee State University the Spring of 2021.

"Feed and Brave New World: Posthumanism and Transhumanism in Dystopian Literature"

Dystopian literature has a rich history of depicting imagined societies to tell a cautionary tale designed to criticize aspects of contemporary society, warn us about our potential futures, and embolden us to take action to prevent such futures. Within the last twenty to thirty years, dystopian literature has exploded in popularity in young adult (YA) literature, and almost universally present in all YA dystopian novels is advanced technology. In Feed by M. T. Anderson (2002), society is dominated by a form of advanced technology called the feed or feeds. These feeds are directly implanted at a young age into the brain, to which they directly stream — or feed, if you will — media like shows, virtual

advertisements, virtual chats, and games; all of which directly condition society. Similarly in the adult dystopian novel Brave New World by Aldous Huxley (1932), the public is conditioned from birth (more accurately from production/cloning) to ensure that individuals will always recognize their predetermined hierarchical status.

This paper examines possible posthuman and transhuman interpretations of *Feed* by M.T. Anderson and *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley. Posthumanism is the theoretical exploration of what it means to be human, and transhumanism studies how technology can enhance the human condition, with both often addressing the state of humanity in the age of technology. Specifically, this paper observes the portrayals of technology in both novels — their similarities and differences — and how each portrayal of technology relates to posthumanism and transhumanism

Shelby Haber, Nived Dharmaraj, Cassandra Luca, & Avneet Sharma (McGill University, Montreal)

Nived Dharmaraj (he/him) is a Master's student in McGill's Department of English. His research areas include science fiction, postcolonial theory, and queer theory. Nived is a founding editor at Caret, McGill's graduate Humanities journal.

Shelby Haber (she/her) is a Master's student in McGill's Department of English. Her research areas include literary modernism, reader-response theory, and intertextuality. Shelby's work has been published in Spectrum and Constellations, undergraduate journals at the University of Alberta. She is a founding editor at Caret, McGill's graduate Humanities journal.

Cassandra Luca (she/her) is an MA candidate in the Department of English at McGill University. Her research interests include Internet culture, textual and visual memes, labour, and relationships between language change and socioeconomic instability. She is a founding editor at Caret, McGill's graduate humanities journal.

Avneet Sharma (he/him) is an MA candidate in the Department of English at McGill University. His research interests include contemporary British literature, sex in fiction, queer theory, cinema studies, and pop culture. His SSHRC-supported thesis explores the relationship between sex and politics in the novels of Alan Hollinghurst.

"Sex and Citizenship in Nineteen Eighty-Four"

This paper explores the role of sex in the dystopian society of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. We ask: what happens when straight men, accustomed to having regular access to women, are denied the sex they assume they should be having? Those guilty of "sexcrimes," ranging from lustful thoughts to non-

reproductive coitus, risk losing their citizenship in Oceania. Although sex is political, it is not revolutionary, as other scholars suggest: sex upholds the Party's values. We examine the roles of celibacy, homophobia, and misogyny in the Party's ideology to posit that Winston and Julia having sex in the clearing is a rejection of Party citizenship. The Party expects its citizens to be celibate. Celibacy is not inherently oppressive or liberating. The Party's desire for future generations requires sex within heterosexual marriages, leading Winston to see abstinence with his wife as a potential form of rebellion. While sex within marriage is considered "goodsex," sex between men is a "sexcrime." Winston and O'Brien's homoerotic relationship reveals the links between homophobia, misogyny, and the driving force behind Big Brother's reign: heteronormative patriarchy. Orwell depicts Winston's repressed male sexuality as the novel's primary sexual issue, producing a world in which the goal is to return to readily recognizable Western sexual practices. Winston and Julia having sex is a rejection of the Party's values and of citizenship, but it is not a revolutionary act. It does not challenge the Party's nuanced weaponization of forced celibacy, homophobia, or patriarchal hegemony, instead precluding all supposedly deviant sexual behaviours.



12:45 - 1:45 Lunch

1:45 - 3:00 3nd Panel:

Pessimism and Postmodernism for the End-Times.

Chair: Jean-Philippe Marcoux

Saba Pakdel

"Surviving the Ruins with Pessimism: A Comparative Study of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's Conception of the Ruins and Eugene Thacker's Pessimism"

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"Beckett's Apocalypse: An Immanent Ending that Never Occurs in *III Seen III* Said"

Carrie Lynn Evans

"Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*: Cyberpunk's "Second Wave"?"



Saba Pakdel (University of Victoria, British Columbia)

Saba Pakdel is a poet, modernist scholar, and PhD student in the English department at University of Victoria. She specializes in migration studies and

contemporary literature with a focus on exile, refugee, and immigration problems. Her research addresses the identity formation of migrants away from Euro-centric formulations based in twentieth century ideas about migration, largely derived from post-WWII circumstances, toward a contemporary reckoning with experiences of migration.

"Surviving the Ruins with Pessimism: A Comparative Study of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's Conception of the Ruins and Eugene Thacker's Pessimism"

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's The Mushroom at the End of the World opens with a rhetorical query about what readers do "when [their] world starts to fall apart" (1). This is a reminder of the condition of life in the ruins as we practice survival. There is no predictable, glorifying, colourful sense of futurity proposed by Tsing, she rather pictures a prolonged presence that is survivable regardless of its inevitable precarity. We are indeed living through "precarious" times precisely because we are amidst "the condition of trouble without end" (2). Eugene Thacker's Cosmic Pessimism, in a similar fashion, opens with a direct statement describing our present condition: "We're doomed" (3). His focal idea is the neglected philosophy of pessimism that has not received much attention in comparison to other philosophies. Thacker's text explores the genealogy of pessimism and pessimist thinkers in a fragmentary and poetic discourse with

some references to pessimistic musicology. Conclusively, he foregrounds the implications of cosmic pessimism which exceeds human beings' species-specific conceptions of pessimism, and rather concerns pessimism in an anthropocenic turn. Studying Tsing's perspectives on survival in the ruins along Thacker's depiction of cosmic pessimism opens a theoretical space to think through a pessimistic survival that meets both scholars in the middle. I am interested in finding out how we can reconfigure Thackerian post-humanistic pessimism as an approach applicable to living in and during the ruins described by Tsing.

Nigel Finch (Western University, Ontario)

I am a PhD candidate in the department of English at Western University. I am primarily focused on British literature and culture of the Nineteenth century. My current research examines the connection between elegy and ecology, and explores how (and why) Poets turn to the environment to mourn in the Victorian period.

"Beckett's Apocalypse: An Immanent Ending that Never Occurs in *Ill Seen Ill Said*"

My paper will examine the (post) apocalyptic nature of Samuel Beckett's *III Seen III Said*. In Beckett's short story, there is simply nothing left but a minimal trace of what

has been. In this discussion of the Beckettian apocalypse, I suggest that there may not have been a single event that has led to this post-living world; rather, the apocalypse presented in *III Seen III Said* is one that has always already taken place. Instead of a singular catastrophic event - such as a nuclear holocaust, for example - the Beckettian apocalypse is one that takes place over a long period of time – it comes from the very environment itself due to a strong desire to end. In "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," Derrida writes on an event, which he calls a rupture, that has taken place and had a great effect on the structure of discourse and our society. He speaks of this rupture as an event which has caused a "disruption" which "would presumably have come about when the structurality of structure had to begin to be thought, that is to say, repeated ... this disruption was repetition in all of the senses of this word" (2). I use Derrida here to examine how the Beckettian apocalypse seems to address a crisis, of the structure that organizes society and nature. While attempting to elucidate the Beckettian apocalypse, I will engage with Derrida's essay on the disruption within structure, Blanchot's The Writing of the Disaster, and Frank Kermode's The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction to bring forth an answer to the following questions: does the Beckettian apocalypse, as witnessed in III Seen III Said, offer a pessimistic or hopeful tone? And does this apocalypse fear the end of nature or does it yearn for it? 16

Carrie Lynn Evans (Université Laval)

Carrie Lynn Evans is a PhD student in English Literature at Université Laval in Quebec. Her master's thesis focused on gender, technology, and cyborg theory in Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Her dissertation work seeks precedent for contemporary American astroculture, as expressed through science fiction and the public imaginary, in ancient travel stories, including Homer's *Odyssey*. In addition to sci-fi, research interests include technology and culture, horror, and postmodern theory.

"Denis Villeneuve's *Blade Runner 2049*: Cyberpunk's "Second Wave"?"

In the 1980s, cyberpunk erupted as "SF's avant-garde, its newest, hardest new wave" (Easterbrook), speaking to the decade's sense of dread at the growing powers of multinational capital and information technology, with aesthetics and themes established in works such as William Gibson's Neuromancer (1984) and Ridley Scott's Blade Runner (1982). Even though critics were claiming the literary movement was over as early as 1992 (Whalen), the popularity of its neon-futurist aesthetic has never waned, prompting some today to complain that "[t]he future has looked the same for almost four decades" (Walker-Emig). I argue, however, that today's literary cyberpunk, as exemplified in Denis Villeneuve's Blade Runner 2049, neither uncritically engages in mere nostalgia nor participates in a developmentalist



assumption of technology's positive teleology, but instead undertakes constructive social critique; the film addresses contemporary social concerns and transcends cyberpunk's original context, while remaining faithful to the genre's defining characteristics. Aside from the style of its surface, cyberpunk is concerned with society's obsession with consumerism and hypercommodification of life, inequality and wealth disparity, and the threat of corporate power eclipsing the supposed freedoms promised by modern democracy; its stories demonstrate how these pressures undermine the stability of the subject, which becomes fragmented. disillusioned, cynical, and ultimately anti-social. These are themes that are, if anything, more relevant than ever. In critiquing these social conditions, cyberpunk is a literature of resistance, even as it acknowledges the difficulty of escaping its context. Moreover, where the tone of the original cyberpunk was arguably defeatist, with social ills seen as so inevitable that the only escape was to retreat into the ephemeral world of cyberspace, contemporary iterations, such as Blade Runner 2049, instead signal a new era of possibility. I will argue this goes to explain why near-future, neon-lit, gritty dystopias today remain persistently one of SF's most popular modes, despite the extent to which they appear to be bound up with the 1980s.

3:00 - 3:20 Coffee Break

3:20 - 4:20 Keynote Speaker

Dr. Graham Murphy

Science Fiction and Virus Culture: Catastrophe, Contagion, and Cyberpunk"



Dr. Graham Murphy (Seneca College, Toronto)

"Science Fiction and Virus Culture: Catastrophe, Contagion, and Cyberpunk"

Graham J. Murphy is a professor with the School of English and Liberal Studies at Seneca College (Toronto). He is the co-editor of Fifty Key Figures in Cyberpunk Culture (Routledge, 2022), The Routledge Companion to Cyberpunk Culture (Routledge, 2020), Cyberpunk and Visual Culture (Routledge, 2018), and Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives (2010). He has also written book chapters for Plants in Science Fiction: Speculative Vegetation (2020), The Cambridge History of Science Fiction (2019), Canadian Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror: Bridging the Solitudes (2019), Dis-Orienting Planets: Racial Representations of Asia in Science Fiction (2017), Science Fiction and Computing: Essays on Interlinked Domains (2011), Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction (2009), and The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction (2009), among other titles.

In addition, he co-authored Ursula K. Le Guin: A Critical

Companion (Greenwood, 2006) and his articles have been published in Science Fiction Studies, Science Fiction Film and Television, Extrapolation, Foundation, Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts, ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies, and Ariel: A Review of International English Literature. He has a book chapter coming out later this year on Indigenous Young Adult Dystopias in The Routledge Handbook of CoFuturisms and a book chapter on feminist-queer cyberpunk for The Routledge Companion to Gender and Science Fiction, all while he's currently working on two short book projects.

In addition to his academic work, Graham J. Murphy is the former Chair of the 2005 Philip K. Dick Award committee, administered the academic track at WorldCon in 2009, functioned as an Associate Editor for Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts from 2007 to 2021, and sits on the Editorial Board for Science Fiction Studies, Extrapolation, Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts, and the Journal of Posthumanism. Finally, with the support of Seneca College he hosted online the most-recent Science Fiction Research Association annual conference.

4:20 - 5:00 Social & transition to restaurant





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NARRATIVES OF CATASTROPHE Pale Horse

It is with great pleasure that the Association des Étudiant·e·s Gradué·e·s en Littérature d'Expression Anglaise welcomes you all to the 2022 edition of our graduate conference.

On behalf of our program we thank you for your presence, be it online or in person.

This year's conference engages with works of literature that do the imaginative work of forecasting possible futures and testing potential solutions in such times of crisis.

This year's edition is organized by Carrie-Lynn Evans, Marie Laberge, Gabrielle Laroche and Sophie Larue.

