2025 Eaton Conference on Speculative Fiction

Reimagining the Archive

Registration: bit.ly/Eaton2025

	Friday, April 4	Saturday, April 5
9:30 - 10:50	Panel 1	Panel 5
11:00 - 12:20	Panel 2	Panel 6
12:30 - 1:30	Lunch Provided	
1:40 - 3:00	Panel 3	Panel 7
3:10 - 4:30	Panel 4	Panel 8
Friday, April 4, 4:45 - 6:15 Keynote by Malik Gaines & Alexandro Segade		Saturday, April 5, 4:40 - 6:00 Panel 9

All panels and the keynote will take place in the INTS 1128 screening room.

Lunch will be served at a nearby room in the INTS building for all panelists/presenters.
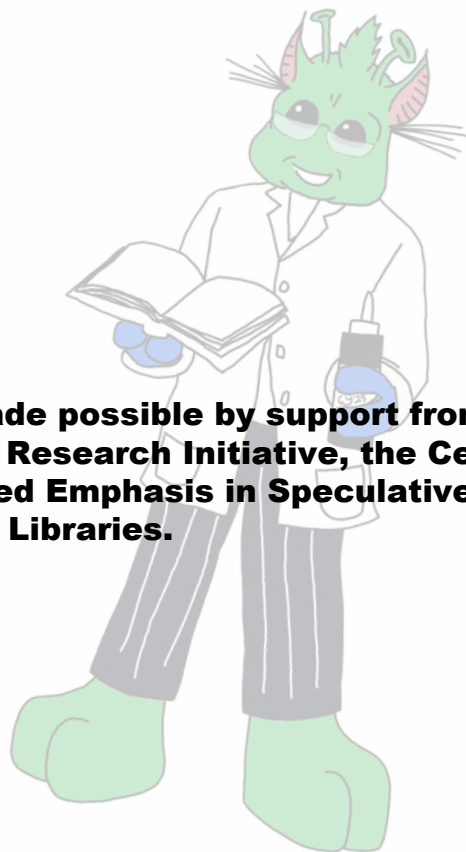
Panel 1: Speculative Fiction, Agency, and the Human Condition

Panel Contact: Keilee Bessho (keilee.bessho@email.ucr.edu) - Panel Abstract

1. Aaron Suduiko (suduiko@usc.edu)
   The first paper examines the interplay between speculative fiction and gaming, focusing on how interactive narratives shape and challenge our understanding of agency. Drawing on examples from speculative fiction that foreground choice, strategy, and world-building, this presentation explores how the gaming paradigm enriches the genre's narrative possibilities and sheds light on human agency in constrained and imaginative contexts.

2. Annemarie Munn (annemarie.munn@email.ucr.edu)
   The second paper turns to speculative fiction's portrayal of neurodivergent individuals, analyzing how these narratives challenge traditional conceptions of agency and capability. By drawing on theories of neurodiversity and the archive of speculative works, this presentation interrogates how such texts reimagine the potential and limits of human agency, providing a more inclusive vision of human flourishing in imagined worlds and offering valuable insights for contemporary discussions of neurodivergence.

3. Keilee Bessho (keilee.bessho@email.ucr.edu)
   The final paper delves into speculative fiction's engagement with the meaning of life and the worth of life, particularly in relation to pain, horror, and existential dread. By focusing on how speculative narratives confront these questions, this presentation highlights how the genre grapples with the darkest aspects of the human condition while simultaneously offering pathways to understanding resilience, value, and self-discovery.

4. "Afrofuturism and the Activation of Futurity in Afrobeats: A New Nigerian Cultural Speculation" - Chijioke Izuegbunem
   (chijiokefidelis.izuegbunem@alumni.ashoka.edu.in)
   Significant insights into the dynamics of Black identity, creativity, and futurity in the 21st century can be gained from the convergence of Afrofuturism and Afrobeats (not to be mistaken for Afrobeat)—a thriving nexus of cultural production, technological innovation, and speculative imagination. The late 1960s saw the emergence of Afrobeats—a distinct musical genre—amid the rapidly changing postcolonial terrain of West Africa, particularly Nigeria, and Ghana, which offers a compelling case study for interrogating Afrofuturist ideals and aesthetics manifestation in contemporary popular culture. The rapid global ascension of Afrobeats in the early 21st century, necessitated by the embrace of digital technologies in production and distribution, situates Afrofuturist

themes of technological empowerment, and cultural hybridity underscores the assertion of Fela's ideology: "Music is the Weapon of the Future." As a revolutionary art movement for global unity and Black solidarity, this positions Afrobeats as an afrofuturistic tool against cultural and aesthetic oppression.

As a multifaceted aesthetic, political, cultural, and artistic movement that traverses a variety of media, including music, film, literature, and visual arts, Afrofuturism since its emergence in the 20th century attempts to reinvent and envision the future of the Black experience through the lens of speculative fiction, technology, and historical revisionism. Conceptually, through the intersections of cultural recovery, technological optimism, and socio-political critique, Afrofuturism through Afrobeats permits a speculatory bridge between the harsh realities of the past and the transcending possibilities of future liberation where Black futures are shaped in opposition to long-standing oppressions of cultural acceptance. This is possible by revisiting history as it challenges dominant narratives while exploring potential futures that liberate, empower, and radically rethink the Black identity. The reimagination of Nigeria's socio-political identity and future is made possible through Afrobeats—African polyrhythms, hip-hop, dancehall, and highlife. Therefore, I believe Afrobeats embodies the Afrofuturistic propensity that has already activated Nigerian futurity on a global stage through the portrayal of an image of Africa as a cultural, artistic, and political force to be reckoned with.

Panel 2: Cultural Speculations

1. "One of the Good Ones: Representations of Black and African Religion in Western Horror Films" - Cal Plett (cahliaplett@gmail.com)
   Horror is a genre that has been both criticized for its lack of depth and also praised for its approach towards social issues, which most genres fail to address. Horror is commonly used to represent contradictions in societal values. Despite this, the Western-centric lens is not critical of its representation of what is "normal" and what is "bad-horrifying." In this paper, I will be addressing the Western representations of religion in horror, starting with Christian propaganda within the horror movie industry and continuing to describe the multiple and problematic ways that "African and Black religions," a vast and emblematic overgeneralization about how Othering through religion both reifies Abrahamic religion and further mystifies non-western religion. The horror genre in film often insinuates that the practicing of Christianity is inherently good until used for "evil" purposes. For non-Christian/western religions, contrarily, religious practice is demonic, evil, and inherently "bad" until

practiced in a spiritually ambiguous and socially acceptable way and by "one of the good ones." This moralism is based directly on raced and classed depictions of religions. While representations can produce nuanced narratives that are meant to address these contradictions, the homogenization of non-Western religions and the anachronistic tendencies of the films in their depiction of Black and African religions. I argue these are incredibly damaging and may further religious discrimination. I present how, through aesthetics, new forms of religious expression within horror can represent the many fascinating and "good-horrifying" ways that religion can be expressed and interacted with through the horror genre.

2. "Tilismic Futures and the Neo-Djinn" - Rida Altaf (raltaf@purdue.edu)
The first works of Urdu speculative fiction, Dastan e Amir Hamza (1855) and Tilism e Hoshruba (1890), emerged from an oral storytelling tradition dating back centuries. These stories, often filled with elaborate occult elements, served primarily as entertaining diversions, akin to Bollywood films with their extravagant spectacles. Contemporary Pakistani speculative fiction writers, however, reinterpret this legacy. While still drawing from these classics, their use of the occult now serves a dual purpose: it entertains but also critiques. Through an analysis of works like Usman T. Malik's "Resurrection Points" (2021), Shazaf Fatima Haider's A Firefly in the Dark (2018), and Sami Shah's "Reap" (2017), I argue that modern Pakistani speculative fiction has evolved the occult into what I term the 'neo-djinn,' a politicized tool that reflects social anxieties and aspirations. Additionally, I propose that the genre's subtlety enables these writers to craft 'tilismic futures'—alternative realities where entrenched power structures are upended. The presence of both the 'neo-djinn' and 'tilismic futures' creates opportunity for a postcolonial, futuristic vision that resists dependence on Western paradigms, and is therefore, both progressive and inclusive.

3. "The Space for Fabelprosa" - Maria Pederson (marialp@live.no)
Science fiction (sf) serves as archives reflecting past preoccupations with technology and where future uses might take us. From environmental damage to blissful utopias, the genre is a body of information echoing the collective and individual understanding of the possible and the impossible in the world. Yet, if sf works as an archive for the mind and a tool to think about the past and future, what does it mean that works largely recognized as part of the canon derive from a relatively few countries, often western and English-speaking? As a scholar of Scandinavian literature, my paper considers the influence the larger sf canon brings to Norwegian sf to think critically about the role sf has played and plays for Norwegians. I also contemplate Norwegian sf, often

referred to as *fabelprosa*, to consider whether/how themes and issues found in Norwegian sf is distinctly different from the larger sf canon, where Norwegian sf are set, how big is the genre in Norway/Scandinavia in comparison to other genres, do Norwegians prefer Norwegian/Scandinavian to non-Scandinavian sf, and what can the answer to these questions tell us about the position Norwegian sf has in the country compared to the larger canon. I use scholarship on archive theory and sf in Norway and the broader world to ask in what ways non-Scandiavian and Norwegian/Scandinavian sf works as an archive, whether/how it fuels the collective memory and collective thinking about tomorrow in Norway. While these northern countries are considered part of the west and in many ways heavily influenced by countries like the US and Britain, they, like all small countries, have their own unique history and geography that conjointly influence how they envision the future. Reflecting on the genre's role in Norway is therefore essential, not only to gain insight into the underpinnings and worries that arise in more remote corners of the world, but also because study of minor sf canons like the Norwegian broadens the scope of the sf genre. Novel circumstances and contexts often forge novel social and technological-related issues with the potential of rendering us more knowledgeable about the world and the undercurrents that drive it.

4. "Forgoing Techno-Orientalism: Asian American Speculative Futures" - Samantha Tecson (stecson@usc.edu)

   Science fiction has a history of associating Asian people and cultures with advancing technologies. This techno-orientalist tradition carried into American films such as Blade Runner (1982) and The Matrix (1999) franchise where Asian aesthetic blend so heavily with future technology that it nearly erases or flattens the presence of Asian people. Techno-orientalism has often been perpetuated by non-Asian creatives and coincides with the historical under-representation of Asian labor both in front of and behind the scenes in Hollywood. Despite the trope, two science fiction films created by Asian American filmmakers leave behind associations of Asianess with technology to instead place emphasis on the multiverse and martial arts. The One (2001) directed by James Wong and Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022) directed by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, use multiversal plots and Asian actors with strong transnational star images to speculate worlds where Asian American characters can explore ideas of identity and personal relationships beyond technology. Using David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu's research on techno-orientalism alongside Vera Thomann's assessment of the multiverse trend, I argue that the technology within the films are not associated with the main character's Asianess instead, they serve as gateways into the

multiple universes where they must self-reflect on their actions for the embetterment of Asian family and community. Referencing Sabrina Qiong Yu's work on the career of Jet Li and Lisa Funnell's examinations of transnational Chinese female stars such as Michelle Yeoh, I further assert that both Li's (The One) and Yeoh's (EEAAO) association with their films provides places where their strong Hong Kong martial arts film star image give agency in the shift from technology to martial arts as a form of redefining the Asian American future. By textually analyzing the films, I claim that Asian American directors can break free from the confines of techno-orientalist thinking by supporting fellow Asian creatives and forming stories emphasizing humanity over the spectacle of technology. In the worlds of The One and Everything Everywhere All at Once, the speculative future for Asians is one of healing and empowerment, not invisibility.

Panel 3: Against Empire

1. "The Cuento of Earth and the Story of Sagan: Storytelling as History/Memory, and the Complications of Space Colonization" - Lucy Louis Lee (lucylouislee@gmail.com)

   In Donna Barbera Higuera's novel The Last Cuentista, Earth is going to be hit by Halley's Comet and there is no hope for survival except to escape to the stars. As complications arise, the main protagonist Petra is simultaneously battling a group known as the Collective who have erased all memory of the past while also attempting to escape to the planet Sagan in order to survive, using her abilities as a storyteller (cuentista) to save herself and a group of children. The narrative continually focuses on questions of history and memory while avoiding the complex issue of colonization and colonialism that is often justified in the "harmless emptiness" of space. While The Last Cuentista warns us about the dangers of forgetting the past, it continues a speculative tradition of justifying non-Earth colonization.

   In analyzing Petra's dual role as a cuentista and as a colonizer, I use concepts of counterstorytelling and storytelling as a type of historical methodology to reckon with ideas of space colonization in the speculative fiction genre. Counterstories, a term created by Richard Delgado, offer us a way to challenge the dominant narrative and center minority perspectives. Similarly, as Toni Morrison tells us in writing her own stories, "I cannot trust the literature and the sociology of other people to help me know the truth of my own cultural sources" (Morrison, 386). Counterstories operate here as a way to think about the use of Latine culture in a speculative tradition that suggests a

reclamation of colonialism in the setting of interstellar science fiction. In order to remember and reckon with the past, we must acknowledge all parts of it, and in doing so we can speculate on a future that holds hope.

2. "Archives Without Walls: Collective Memory in Palestine +100" - Que Kong (kongque0517@gmail.com)
This article explores the speculative reframing of Palestinian collective memory and historical narratives in the science fiction anthology Palestine+100. Edited by Basma Ghalayini, the anthology features work by 12 Palestinian writers who imagine what Palestine might look like 100 years after the Nakba, a pivotal moment of mass displacement in 1948.

Through a close analysis of key stories in the anthology, such as Salim Haddad's Song of the Birds and Samir El-Youssef's The Archive, the study shows that speculative fiction becomes a powerful tool to resist historical erasure. These narratives transcend linear temporality, creating alternative spaces where repressed memories and potential futures coexist. By interrogating the boundaries between memory, trauma, and imagination, the anthology reveals the complex ways in which Palestinian writers process historical violence and cultural survival.

The study argues that Palestine+100 represents more than a literary practice; more importantly, an archival practice that challenges attempts to systematically erase Palestinian historical consciousness. These speculative narratives function as "living archives without walls," where memory becomes an act of resistance to imposed amnesia. By reimagining futures that resist simplistic conflict and settlement narratives, these stories reveal ongoing struggles for cultural preservation and historical recognition.

Ultimately, this article reveals how speculative fiction can serve as a critical method for understanding contested histories. The narratives in this anthology demonstrate that imagination is not escapism but an act of profound political and cultural resilience. Through these speculative explorations, Palestinian writers reclaim narrative subjectivity, challenge the "perpetual now" imposed by historical oppression, and create potential spaces for change.

3. "Unearthing the archive: silver mining in contemporary speculative fiction" - Sonji Shah (ss3037@cam.ac.uk)
In this paper, I explore how speculative fiction can contribute to insights into the earth as archive. Speculative genres have for a long time offered different ways to understand human connections to the earth, which has become increasingly urgent in the context of what has been called the Anthropocene. While the earth can be viewed as a natural archive through fossils and geological strata, I examine how geologic speculative fiction expands this notion and provides

alternative relationalities to the earth. In contrast to 19th century hollow earth sci-fi, much contemporary speculative fiction has focused on the more intimate relationalities between humans and earth, introducing notions such as 'becoming-lithic' and 'geohapitcs'. This challenges dominant, extractive 'grammars of geology' which Kathryn Yusoff (2018) argues, make possible historical and ongoing systems of racialisation and colonisation. Given the discipline of geology's speculative origins, I argue that speculative fiction creates narratives of the past that do not require a direct correlation to known reality, if they make possible imaginations of different futures.

In NK Jemisin's Stone Sky (2017), RF Kuang's Babel (2022) and Silvia Moreno-Garcia's Mexican Gothic (2020) the extraction of silver for profit illustrates how speculative fiction interjects in dominant narratives. Silver mining in these stories is connected to genocide, to haunting, to industrialisation and war. While the earth holds memory both materially in its layers and metaphorically for people's experiences on it, fantastical elements push this notion further. Silver transforms into something else. It becomes subject and sets narrative in motion. Its material effects reach beyond the use of silver in known reality which inspires questions around non-extractive engagements with the earth as archive and with the use of speculative fiction more broadly.

4. "Subverting and Reclaiming the Archive: Embodied and Affective Archival Practices in Octavia Butler's Kindred" - Sayeong Kim (skim988@ucr.edu)
   Octavia Butler's Kindred (1979) intricately explores the intersections of race, gender, and power through a speculative lens, offering a narrative that underscores the struggle to reclaim and reconstruct both personal and collective histories. This article examines Kindred as a site of archival reconstruction, where the protagonist, Dana, navigates the violent legacy of slavery in the antebellum South. Her involuntary time travel forces her to confront the lived realities of her ancestors, thereby constructing an archive not through written records, but through embodied experience. Dana's repeated encounters with her enslaved ancestors reveal how systemic oppression erases and distorts marginalized histories, particularly those of Black women. Through a racialized and gendered lens, Kindred interrogates how archival practices are entangled with colonial and patriarchal structures, questioning whose histories are preserved and whose are silenced. Dana's journey serves as both a recovery of family lineage and a critique of traditional archival methodologies that prioritize textual records over oral, embodied, and affective forms of memory. Butler's narrative destabilizes colonial notions of the archive by privileging lived experience over detached historiography, illustrating how memory and trauma can serve as alternative modes of historical preservation.

From a postcolonial perspective, Kindred reflects on the continuing reverberations of slavery and colonialism in contemporary identities, urging readers to reimagine the archive as a dynamic and contested space. This analysis argues that Dana's actions in reclaiming her ancestry and asserting agency within the violent constraints of history represent a radical act of self-definition and historical reclamation. Butler's work, thus, becomes a powerful meditation on the necessity of constructing archives that encompass silenced voices, challenging hegemonic narratives while affirming the role of memory and storytelling in reconstructing fractured histories.

Panel 4: Speculative Histories

1. "Finding the Time-Traveling Child in the Archive" - Sumaria Butt (sbutt@ucdavis.edu)

   My research attempts to historicize the tropes of time-travel to demonstrate how the fictional manipulation of space-time represents a political desire of surplus populations to change their relation to the wage. I argue that the figure of the time-traveling child in particular, embodies the liminality required to sublimate this political desire.

   In this talk I would like to explore the overlap between early hard sci-fi and children's literature. We find that debates asking where sci-fi ends and fantasy begins (delineating between science and magic) are the same criteria used to silo children's literature away from other speculative genres. I intend to do a comparative reading of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865), and Lewis Padgett's short story "Mimsy Were the Borogoves" (1943). Padgett's revisionary story attempts to use sci-fi tropes of time-travel to rescue Alice from being an unwilling player in Carroll's gamescape called Wonderland. With their intertextual method, Padgett forces us to revisit the generic distinctions between satire, children's literature, and sci-fi.

   Carrying this into our contemporary moment of commodified hyper-nostalgia, it is interesting to see how despite the persistent romanticization or sentimentalizing of the child, there is still room for irreverence. That is, with every revision of the child figure, there is space for some tropes to wrangle with contradiction (the paradoxes of time travel being among them). What emerges is the child figure that repeatedly travels across genres, as they oscillate between being either active players or playthings to the archive.

2. "Between Historical & Elegiac Writing" - Mei Du (meidu@arizona.edu)

Liu Cixin's Three-Body Problem recreates the paradox in the writings of the modern Chinese writer Lu Xun and early 20th-century Chinese discourse – an unresolved tension between dystopian, amoral Darwinian cosmology and utopian hopes for spiritual/moral transcendence. Although a cyclical view of historical progress/regress has appeared in the writings of both, Lu Xun's cyclical history is closer to an upward spiral, yet Liu's trilogy offers a more pessimistic outlook: history becomes, at best, an infinite cycle between the phase of Darwinian struggle and cosmic "reboots" prompted by moral transcendence, and, at worst, a hopeless Darwinian universe without even a chance of redemption.

Liu's trilogy re-enacts not only the collective existential anxiety found in Lu Xun's "iron house" parable, but also a moral transcendence from individual to collective concern, tied to a militant utopian/dystopian heroism. He recreates in his heroine, Cheng Xin, Lu Xun's archetypal "interim" heroes who embody a Janus-faced utopian hope and dystopian grief. I argue that Cheng Xin's memoir in Liu's trilogy, like Lu Xun's Wild Grass, functions as both historical and elegiac writing, poised to become a historical record for future readers or an elegy mourning the loss of a collective past, present, and future. It is through historical/elegiac writing that Lu Xun's transient "interim" heroes and Liu's Cheng Xin invoke a kinship with all the lives that have existed in their memories and those that continue beyond their own. Ultimately, despite the dark dystopian framing of history in Liu's Three-Body Problem, the trilogy conveys a strong utopian desire to unite individual and collective time.

3. "Human Memory and Digital Archives" - Rubab Batool (rubabbatool169@gmail.com)
   This speculative fiction piece is set in the year 2065 and 2085. It uses dual narrative technique to juxtapose two time-travel stories of the year 2065 and 2085 in order to explore the contemporary digital archival spaces and their impact on future historical narratives. It further investigates the transformations of human memory as an archival space against digital archives. The first story is set in the year 2065 where human emotions are being translated in real-time data across the digital platform of Pulsefeed through the use of neural implants. This examines how emotion itself can be archived and commodified in a future of digital capitalism. It uses this narrative to depict the future dystopian implications of technology and emotional authentication in terms of digital surveillance. This narrative is inspired by one of my published articles titled as "NEURAL IMPLANT SURVEILLANCE: EMOTIONS AS DATA IN THE YEAR 2065" that directly delves into the impact of digital archives and its interference with human neural networks. The second story goes further in the year 2085

where humanity is hit by an eye pandemic. Only few left with sight called as Visionaries among survivors of pandemic now control records of human history and memory in M-Vault: containing all erased memories of surviving humans. This section of the dual narrative critiques the impact of current digital archival spaces on collective memory and identity in a hegemonic future of M-Vault and Visionaries. This work poses the question of how access to "what to remember and what to forget" has serious implications in a futuristic world dominated by digital formats constantly archiving human emotions and memories.

4. "Octavia Butler and the Archive of Speculative Dictatorship" - Abraham Encinas (aencinas@ucla.edu)

   In 2016, mainstream media articles frequently mentioned Octavia Butler's Parable novels in relation to Trump's incoming authoritarian presidency. I propose that while mainstream articles dealt superficially with her work, a close reading of her fictional and speculative representations of dictatorship, in the form of the Christian America movement and its authoritarian leader President Andrew Steele Jarret, can be useful for creating an archive of "speculative dictatorship" fiction. This subgenre of literature, I claim, can be delineated by analyzing the characteristics of a Latin American genre that has existed for at least a century now—the dictator novel. While I offer a summary comparison between Latin American dictator novels and Butler's representations of dictators, authoritarianism, and fascism, I ultimately emphasize the speculative aspect of her work. I propose that the main difference lies in the Latin American dictator novel's historical orientation toward dictatorship and speculative fiction's future orientation toward the same. When we search U.S. literature for other texts that mention future dictatorships, we find other novels (like Sinclair Lewis' It Can't Happen Here and Philip K. Dick's Man in the High Castle) begin to constellate into an archive of speculative dictatorship. I argue that this emergent archive prompted by Octavia Butler's speculations remains a sure survival guide in a U.S. that increasingly becomes more authoritarian in its foreign and domestic policies.

Panel 5: Recovery and Preservation

Panel Contact - Killian Vetter (kvetter3@gatech.edu) - Panel Abstract

1. "George Schuyler and the Birth of Afrofuturism" - Killian Vetter (kvetter3@gatech.edu)

   Killian Vetter, who led Prof. Lisa Yaszek's research team throughout this recovery project, will talk about his role in the overall process and how it

inspired his research on conservative African American satirist and IFS editor George S. Schuyler, who invented a set of "instructions" for good Black genre fiction that guided both Moore's story in particular and the development of commercially oriented Black genre fiction more generally.

2. Title [<mark>TBD</mark>] - John Jennings (johnj@ucr.edu)

   John Jennings, who created the cover art for the forthcoming "Martian Trilogy" reprint and who will talk about how that art pays homage to both the celebrated artists of the Harlem Renaissance and the uncredited artist who created the illustrations that accompanied Moore's story when it first appeared in the IFS.

3. "Reading Doc Savage Mail" - Nathaniel Williams (ntlwilliams@ucdavis.edu)

   By preserving serial texts in their original format, archives enable us to see the complexities of mass-market characters that developed over decades. Nowhere is this clearer than when dealing with corporate-owned, multimedia properties, and no character demonstrates this better than Doc Savage, the proto-superhero owned by Street and Smith publishing from 1933 to 1949. Doc Savage enjoyed a second life when the character's pulps were re-printed as mass-market paperbacks in the 1960s. These paperbacks, with covers by James Bama, Boris Vallejo, and other fantasy-art stalwarts, defined the character as a science-fiction hero for the three generations, inspiring director George Pal's 1975 film and many fanzines.

   Only in archives committed to collecting pulp SF can readers find material omitted from the original pulps by those Bantam paperbacks—most notably essays by Street and Smith editor John Nanovic. Nanovic never wrote a Doc Savage novel but nonetheless dramatically shaped the characters' reception. His essays, and the letters from readers reprinted in them, engaged the original audience in ways that are now too easy to overlook.

   Doc Savage's letter column demonstrates how fans promote their ownership of a character. These are early examples of a mostly recent phenomenon where, as fan studies theorists Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse note, fans become "an important and sought-after audience of engaged leaders" (The Fan Fiction Studies Reader, 15). A "Doc Savage Club," founded partly by reader requests, becomes Nanovic's soap box. He emphasizes the title character's ideals of moral development. Fans who wrote in, including young author Leigh Brackett and actress Anna May Wong, quickly embraced the "Doc Savage Code" of conduct and encouraged others to do the same. To modern readers only familiar with the paperbacks, such detours into ethics may seem at odds with the pulps' action-oriented, often violent content. Doc Savage magazine's early mail changes that perception, showing that even when

Nanovic doubted the believability of the character's altruism, audiences supported it enthusiastically.

4. "I Think I'm Just a Bookmark" - Beck Morawski (beckmorawski@gmail.com)
Sportswriter Jon Bois's 2016 multimedia web-serial 17776: What Football Will Look Like in the Future is difficult to explain succinctly. On its surface, it is an intricate web of GIFs, YouTube videos, public domain images, vintage audio samples, footage animated in Google Earth, transcribed dialogues, and imagined Wikipedia pages. It is also a moving rumination on transhumanist identity and utopias in far-flung futures. At its core, it ultimately is a dissection of American nostalgic symbols and an interrogation of what can be salvaged from our shared American cultural identity in the wake of the 2016 election. Bois's techniques of digital assemblage and repurposing existing media intertwine his core thesis with a DIY ethos, leaving readers with a complex art piece that treats culture as a mutable tool for developing speculative fictions with political potential.

This paper seeks to look at web projects such as 17776 through the lens of existing scholarship on science-fiction fanzines as community archives, such as Sarah Baker and Zelmarie Cantillon's interpretations of Michelle Caswell's principles of community archives discourse in their 2022 article "Zines as community archive". Framing Bois's work as a continuation of the lineage of assemblage work such as the science-fiction zines found in the Eaton Collection and the Hevelin Fanzines at the University of Iowa Libraries, the author proposes the potentiality of digital projects as lasting community archives spaces for the digital era. Both formats create spaces for authors to reinterpret culture and familiar works as a means of making statements and constructing narratives. Grappling with the tension of digital preservation and link rot frailty inherent in web-hosted projects, this paper thinks about the necessity of preservation of speculative fiction projects such as these. A formal analysis lens allows for a close reading and comparison of the two mediums as a means of drawing out each's potential for connection in their contemporary moments and their resonance as historical artifacts. Proposing digital multimedia works such as Bois's 17776 as a unique form of collective memory recording troubles the boundaries of traditional archives and draws attention to existing archival gaps in the digital sphere.

5. "Why an Exhibition? Reflections on Affirmation/Transformation" - Kate Rose (k.rose@marquette.edu)
Affirmation/Transformation: Fandom Created is an in-person and online art exhibition that ran at the Haggerty Museum of Art from August 23 through December 21, 2024, and will continue to run through May 2025 online. This

exhibition, part of a non-traditional dissertation project, utilizes fine art and fanworks to present fandom as an act of active creation. This paper explores the process of and reasoning behind the creation of the Affirmation/Transformation exhibition and the resulting archive of fanworks. Fan studies has explored fan creation since its earliest texts. Yet, through necessity, fanworks are most often divided and categorized by type of work or by individual fandom (e.g. Enterprising Women (1992) focused on fanzines, fanfiction, and art objects, while Textual Poachers (1992) singled out Beauty and the Beast and Star Trek fan communities). This practice understandably continues today—necessitated as a means of managing near limitless content. Still, siloing fans and fandoms hinders the realization of unforeseen and unexpected intersections between seemingly unrelated works. What might be discovered when fanworks created for Star Wars, BTS, and Fantasy Football, for example, are considered as inherently similar. By creating an exhibition open to all fandoms and all fanworks, and by displaying those fanworks alongside each other, Affirmation/Transformation provides an opportunity to celebrate the diversity inherent in fan creation while also working to draw new connections between disparate texts. Additionally, the creation of an academic archive to house these works, as well as their display in an art museum, provides further legitimacy to fannish activities.

Panel 6: Playful Archives

Panel Contact: Nicolas Valdivia Hennig (nvald031@ucr.edu) - Panel Abstract

1. "Playful Archives and Posthuman Memories in the NPC Trend" - Jorge Poveda Yanez (jpove001@ucr.edu)
   This paper investigates the NPC (non-player character) movement as a speculative and playful archive, reconfiguring how memory, corporeality, and ecology intersect in posthuman contexts. Emerging from social media trends where users emulate the awkward, repetitive movements of NPCs in video games, this phenomenon demonstrates a shift from human-centered creativity to machinic-inspired aesthetics. By embodying the gestures of NPCs, these performers create a unique, dispassionate disposition that reflects the ecological and cultural complexities of the posthuman condition. Conceptualized within the framework of Derrida's "archive fever" and Alenda Chang's ecological critique of digital infrastructures, this paper interrogates the material and epistemological implications of digital archives. Traditional archives, reliant on energy-intensive, plastic-based technologies like servers

and consoles, generate significant ecological footprints. Contrasting these unsustainable systems, this study speculates on the possibility of organic repositories—human bodies, coral reefs, and ice caps—as alternative archives capable of preserving memory. However, these organic archives challenge conventional notions of temporality and permanence, as their forms are inherently ephemeral and entwined with ecological precarity. Positioned within speculative fiction's broader engagement with archives, the NPC movement highlights the convergence of the organic and the machinic. It functions as a metaphor for speculative futures where embodied memory resists the rigidity of technological determinism, embracing playfulness as a tool for rethinking preservation. This playful archival approach aligns with speculative fiction's imaginative potential, suggesting a future where machinic gestures and ecological care coexist. Ultimately, this paper situates the NPC trend as a playful and provocative lens to explore speculative archives. By emphasizing embodied practices and ecological consciousness, it proposes new narratives for understanding memory, performance, and the archive in the Anthropocene, inviting us to reconsider what, and how, we choose to preserve.

2. "Speculative Dialogues in Play: Guaman Poma Meets Machiavelli in Hawk and Puma" - Nico Valdivia Hennig (nvald031@ucr.edu)

This presentation explores the speculative potentials of Hawk and Puma, a minimalist video game that reimagines the life and work of Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, a 17th-century indigenous Andean chronicler, as a site for decolonial narrative and archival intervention. The game juxtaposes Guaman Poma's Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno, a thousand-page illustrated letter denouncing colonial abuses, with the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli to interrogate hegemonic paradigms of power, sovereignty, and resistance. Through speculative play, Hawk and Puma uses pixel art inspired by Guaman Poma's hand-drawn illustrations and an ambient Andean-inspired soundtrack to create a respectful distance between the player and the historical material. This aesthetic strategy allows the game to evoke the cultural and material dimensions of Guaman Poma's work without reducing it to mere spectacle. The presentation also examines how the minimalist design, made possible by the open-source Bitsy engine, reconfigures both the visual language and the storytelling potential of retro-style games to confront colonial histories. Positioning Guaman Poma's narrative as an indigenous counterpoint to Machiavelli's Eurocentric vision of political power, the game engages speculative fiction as a means to decentralize dominant archives of governance and sovereignty. The work's collaborative production, involving members of the ÑawpaÑan community in the Sacred Valley of Peru, further grounds its

decolonial ethos, transforming it into a living archive of collective memory and resistance. This paper argues that Hawk and Puma expands speculative fiction's engagement with the archive by reframing both Machiavelli's and Guaman Poma's works as playful, contested sites for envisioning alternative futures.

3. "The Talking Dead: Occult Evidence and Investigation in Ace Attorney and Famicom Detective Club" - Luna Loganayagam (sloganayagam@ucdavis.edu) Detective and mystery video games uniquely engage speculative fiction by merging logical deduction with alternate knowledge systems, questioning established authorities of truth. The Ace Attorney (2001–2024) and Famicom Detective Club (1998–2024) series juxtapose the logical/legal with the spiritual and supernatural, inviting players to navigate warring epistemologies. Through mechanics like death divination, seances, and spirit channeling, these games explore how occult knowledge critiques the shortcomings of traditional legal frameworks, turning gameplay into a negotiation of evidence and meaning. This interplay exemplifies the procedural rhetoric of speculative fiction, where world-building becomes a tool for interrogating systemic authority. The player's role extends beyond solving mysteries—they are implicated in the ethical responsibility of shaping the narrative and determining which truths to present to sovereign authorities. The occult, functioning as an alternate and often omniscient witness, introduces evidence inaccessible to traditional deduction. This challenges players to reconcile embodied, sensory legal precedent with supernatural interventions, often forcing a critique of institutional biases and tampered sources. Mark Jerng's Racial Worldmaking and Sora Han's concept of "dreamwork" emphasize precedent as speculative, where forward- and backward-thinking processes turn legal structures into acts of imaginative world-building akin to time travel. Through this lens, Ace Attorney transforms the courtroom into a speculative space, where supernatural evidence displaces rigid frameworks of logic to advocate for alternative systems of knowing. Similarly, Famicom Detective Club uses the uncanny to question the reliability of memory and human intuition, placing the player as a mediator between chaos and order. Both series reveal the law as speculative fiction, where occult knowledge reshapes procedural truth. This paper situates detective games as archives of speculative play, blending embodied performance, legal critique, and world-building. By aligning occult knowledge with speculative fiction's epistemic flexibility, these games create spaces for reimagining justice and truth in posthuman futures.

4. "Libraries of the Unseen: Speculative Fiction and the Play of Archival Knowledge" - Jacob Wilson (Jacob.wilson@student.csulb.edu)

This paper examines the intersections between speculative fiction and archival studies, focusing on how fictional libraries and codices in Fantasy RPGs and fantasy literature engage audiences with knowledge that is both real and fictional. From The Elder Scrolls series Elder Scrolls to The Name of the Wind's Archives, these imagined repositories function as narrative devices and epistemological tools, offering readers and players a participatory role in world-building. This study interrogates how such archives blend reality and imagination, challenging the boundaries between the two and how these blurred lines reflect or critique real-world archival practices.

Central to this inquiry is the role of interactivity: how do the immersive, player-driven experiences of RPGs compare to the more passive, interpretative engagement of literary readers? Through this lens, the paper explores how speculative fiction archives reframe questions of authority, accessibility, and the ethics of knowledge curation. Situating these fictional constructs within the broader cultural context of digital information and participatory storytelling reveals their relevance to contemporary debates about preserving, accessing, and interpreting knowledge in the digital age.

This interdisciplinary approach bridges literary studies, game studies, and archival theory, providing a nuanced perspective on how speculative fiction archives challenge traditional understandings of textuality and historiography. Ultimately, this paper argues that these fictional spaces do more than advance their respective narratives; they model new ways of engaging with and questioning the nature of knowledge, inviting readers and players alike to consider their roles in creating and disseminating information. Including whole has access to that information and whether or not someone's identity keeps them from accessing knowledge.

Panel 7: Undergraduate Scholarship

1. "SF Fans are All in Universities" - Zijian Xia (xiazijiangf@outlook.com)
   In general, sci-fi fans tend to be teenagers or people exposed to sci-fi since they were teenagers. In China, however, the community of science fiction fans in institutions of higher learning is huge and specific: compared to the seemingly aging western science fiction fans, Chinese science fiction fans are almost exclusively concentrated in universities, and centrally active through science fiction clubs set up on campus. College sci-fi fans and the clubs they belong to are often described as an important source of sci-fi talent in China, an essential foundation for the sci-fi industry, and a typical consumer group. However, this is shaped not only by China's relatively short history of sci-fi

development but also by the discursive production of college sci-fi fans with the usage of archives. By keeping archives of events, awards, and so on, science fiction fans in colleges and universities shape a legitimate discourse of their existence and use this discourse to seek their space within the school. Since the establishment of the first student sci-fi club at Sichuan University in 1993, college sci-fi fans have used the preservation of their archives to help the clubs and communities survive, to gain legitimacy in different arenas of the school and society, and ultimately to form the unique position of Chinese college sci-fi fans and college sci-fi clubs in the field of science fiction through the preservation, memorization, and active telling of the archives within the fandom. These archival materials are not only historical, but also constructively bear witness to the growing subjectivity within the Chinese science fiction fan community.

2. "Beatrice" - Chaunti Hatchett (chaunti.t.hatchett@gmail.com)
The Reconstruction Era of American history directly followed the Civil War. Formerly enslaved Black people experienced a shining moment of progress, hope, and enfranchisement that was met with Jim Crow laws less than a decade after it began. Black citizens lost rights they would not get back for nearly another century. The Reconstruction Era is not widely known, and for decades, it was viewed as a period of corruption due to prevailing racist ideology. The proposed research and creative inquiry aims to bridge this knowledge gap while drawing similarities to the Reconstruction Era and modern times through speculative fiction.

  The proposed story collection for presentation is set in the 1870s and follows a young, Black, blind heiress named Beatrice. Through pure dumb luck, Beatrice's life becomes entangled with that of the ancient Greek Gorgon, Stheno, following Stheno's accidental appearance in Virginia. This collection will draw heavily on historical and social sources of the time, such as W.E.B Du Bois and Peniel Joseph's The Third Reconstruction. It will also shed light on the underresearched mythological character, Stheno, by supplying scholarship into her myth and cultural impact as a symbol of vengeance, survivorship, and lust. Finally, the collection will further the Afrofuturism genre by drawing on specific authors in the Eaton Collection, such as Octavia Butler and James Arthur Percival.

  Through diligent research and creative schedules, I will create a substantial body of historical research and a 20,000-word creative inquiry novella. This piece will bring in perspectives that have been subterranean throughout history: those of women, Black, Queer, and disabled people. This lens in which to view the Reconstruction Era would be groundbreaking in the

field. Speculative Fiction, especially Afrofuturism, has always been a lens through which to imagine not only brighter futures but fuller pasts. This scholarship aims to prove the importance of imagination and perspective-taking, especially in academia. My research is sponsored at UCLA by faculty advisor Dr. Fred D'Aguiar and is under consideration for sponsorship by the Undergraduate Research Fellows Program. Presenting my research and creative inquiry at the Eaton Symposium would be a privilege.

3. "Critical Fabulation as Speculative Fiction" - Cara Rieber (cararieber@g.ucla.edu)

   The criteria for what kinds of works should be included within the genre of speculative fiction have been in flux since the genre's origin in the early 1940s. Although there are many definitions and criteria for the genre, the foundational criteria is that the work should be "fictional". Due to the fact that archival material is traditionally thought of as "real", archival material is often not considered when defining which works are speculative fiction. However, recent scholarship has shown that archives actively erase the lives and stories of minoritarian subjects and therefore change the way that history is narrated. Emergence of this scholarship illustrates the fact that history is a story, one that is actively being reshaped and reconfigured. Saidiya Hartman coined the term "critical fabulation" to describe the way she approaches archival research. Critical fabulation is a methodology that Hartman uses in her research about the Atlantic Slave Trade in order to speculate about the lives of enslaved people. Critical fabulation uses a combination of archival research, historical research, and fictional narrative in order to recover what has been omitted from the archive.This paper argues that critical fabulation should be considered a form of speculative fiction because of the way that it is focused on building new worlds within the archive and imagining new possibilities within existing histories despite the fact that its subjects are real people. Despite the fact that critical fabulation temporally looks backwards, instead of in the future, Hartman argues that by taking the time to imagine the worlds of minoritarian subjects, we are able to create new futures. This paper will assess Hartman's work Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals and illustrate why it is a work of speculative fiction. Arguing that critical fabulation should be considered a speculative fiction does not diminish the practice's material power but instead highlights the unique ability that speculative fiction works have to shape the world, especially considering the emergence of sub-genres like Afro-futurism, feminist speculative fiction, Indigenous futurism, etc.

4. "History on Trial: "Living Witness" and the Politics of Memorial Museums"- Wendy Walter (hwalter3511@scrippscollege.edu)

While set in a utopian future, throughout its various incarnations Star Trek has always kept a close eye on the past -- often through literal time travel, but also through engagement with libraries and archival records. The Voyager episode "Living Witness" combines aspects of both of these modes of reckoning with the historical record and, in so doing, places a unique focus on understanding the past as a political subjectivity.

"Living Witness" sees the Doctor 'wake up' seven hundred years into the future, having become a literal museum piece. This museum, the Museum of Kyrian Heritage, configures the utopian future of Voyager into a flawed and traumatic past. Over the course of the episode, The Doctor becomes an embodied archive of historical knowledge, breaking the silences of the archives and revealing the omissions and gaps in the historical record -- as well as the way in which historical narrative centered by the Museum of Kyrian History has been constructed within its own fundamentally political present. Institutionalized knowledge emerges as a key mechanism by which status quo is maintained -- a status quo that is revealed to be fundamentally untenable once the stability of historical knowledge is disrupted.

"Living Witness" explores the social construction of history in the museum context. Yet, even as "Living Witness" examines and critiques the inherent politics of historical narratives and the political function of museums within the state, it ultimately upholds the idea that an ideal future can be reached if only museums centered "real" history, eliding other structural concerns. The "problem" then shifts from a concern with the way in which memorial museums, even ones that seek to elevate subaltern perspectives, reproduce the hegemonic structures of power, to one that considers that subaltern history (and, implicitly, a marginalized populations) as "problematic." Nevertheless, in its configuration of past, present, and future, "Living Witness" contains fascinating potential.

Panel 8: Visions and Madness

1. "Mad Futurisms" - Jumi Bello (jumoke.adeola.bello@gmail.com)

On the surface, my doctoral dissertation is a literary speculative novel about mental illness, addiction, and prisoner re-entry, but it's really a story about communal forgiveness as a tool for liberation and the radical framework of disability justice. It's a literary narrative that imagines the collision of anti-psychiatrists, psychiatric survivors and the Black Panthers. It's a creative

dissertation that asks the question, what does it take to be forgiven? What does it take to receive care when you have done harm?

My creative dissertation tells the story of Black Panther Party activism and radical mental healthcare from the perspective of a sentient halfway house in mid-twentieth century Chicago. The building tells the story of its life from the late 1950s to the early 1990s as it is burning down in a fire set by a mysterious arsonist. My dissertation will contribute to the speculative fiction genre by merging historical research with speculative storytelling, exploring new possibilities for mental healthcare systems within a radically just, decolonized future. By integrating historical and creative perspectives on mental healthcare activism and mad studies, the project aims to promote new understandings of disability justice, while honoring the legacy of past movements like the Black Panther Party's health programs.

For this conference, I plan to provide a live reading from this literary speculative novel as well as discuss how this new work is contributing to Disability Studies as well as the emerging fields of Mad Studies and Futurisms, a contemporary sub-genre of SFF which was recently named by Taryne Jade Taylor, Isaiah Lavender and Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay as a new form of science fiction which utilizes decolonial worldbuilding. By operating in a speculative mode, my dissertation offers a critique of the medical-industrial complex while examining the intersections of the psychiatric survivors movement and the Fred Hampton-era of the Black Panther Party.

My creative dissertation asks, what would the future look like if we centered people with psychiatric disabilities? I call my dissertation the youngest cousin to join the family in the emerging sub-field of Futurisms: Mad Futurism, a disability justice framework of science fiction and fantasy narratives that center communities who have psychiatric disabilities.

2. "Paranoid Stones: Prophecies of the Digital in Tranströmer, Popa, and Pizarnik" - Sam Yaziji (syaziji9946@sdsu.edu)
   This paper proposes a reading of Tomas Tranströmer (1931-2015), Vasko Popa (1922-1991), and Alejandra Pizarnik (1936-1972) as prophets of digitality, who prefigured a digitally-mediated experience of the world in their paranoid depictions of the archetypal stone in post-war poetics. This paper focuses on their prose-poems and fictional narrative cycles (specifically Popa's cycle St. Sava's Spring, Tranströmer's prose-poems in The Wild Market Square, and Pizarnik's prose-fragments, the posthumous Shadow Texts). This paper reveals that the three poets came to the same startling conclusions about the world of objects despite their disparate linguistic and cultural backgrounds—all three expressed contemporaneous anxiety over humanity enframing things into

non-things, and they anticipated the aesthetic, spectral life-world of digitality. All three were obsessed with the image of the elemental stone, and they each depicted its transfiguration by modernity. Tranströmer's stone is buried in a tapestry-world—an inscrutable, synthetic "weave," wherein crafted, technological objects have supplanted the sensory experience of the elemental Real. Pizarnik's stone is a "face" fitted into the medium of "darkness"—another image of the natural element buried in a synthetic, spectral artifice (which emerges as an idiosyncratic, symbolic psychogeography). Popa's stone is personified—"shepherded" and "milked"—in a syncretic, animist environment formed out of the hagiographical archive of Medieval Serbia (an artifice both hypermodern and Byzantine, populated by "ancestral bullets"). I conclude by arguing that the ideas of speculative theory ought to be synthesized with insights from post-phenomenology and applied to contemporary poetics, putting Darko Suvin's notion of "cognitive estrangement" into conversation with Yuk Hui's work on digital objects as data, and Byung-Chul Han's notion of "non-things." I argue, anachronistically, that each poet engages in speculative "world-building" in the same vein as SF writers—that each infuse their imagery with the prescience of the dissolution of the terrestrial order into the digital order, despite the fact that all three wrote before the formal onset of the digital age. Finally, I examine the logical end of their paranoid dispositions—their shared creation of silent, pseudo-monastic worlds as the solution to the noise of modernity and the untethered chaos of the digital life-world.

3. "The Palanaeum and the Numinous: The Epistemology of Scholarship in Brandon Sanderson's Stormlight Archive" - Liz Busby (contact@lizbusby.com) Several key plot points in Brandon Sanderson's epic fantasy series the Stormlight Archive revolve around the evolution of scholarship. The translation of a Rosetta-stone-like ancient document brings new historical knowledge that leads to a political upheaval. The experiments of engineers bring about a magical industrial revolution. At the heart of these discoveries are two characters with opposing viewpoints on the construction of knowledge. Jasnah Kholin represents atheistic rationalism and seeks to put natural explanations to supernatural events by reconstructing the past from fragments of myth and folklore. Her meticulous research in the archives of the Palaneum, including systematic note-taking and scholarly correspondence, match our contemporary understanding of what it means to engage in scholarship in the humanities. Yet her greatest breakthroughs are quickly outstripped by supernaturally revealed knowledge, which encompasses and surpasses the truths she worked years to discover. Meanwhile, her mother Navani Kholin and her team of scholar-monks engages in the scientific method and the engineering design process to create

new technological wonders. Though science and engineering might be stereotyped as eminently rational, Navani is portrayed as a character of faith whose discoveries are shaped by supernatural communications and her own intuition and instinct. This paper will examine the epistemology of these two key scholar-characters to show how Sanderson's work questions the nature of rational, mediated scholarship and makes space for other ways of knowing, including supernatural revelation and personal inspiration. This perspective puts Sanderson's work into conversation with post-secular theories, where secular epistemology is acknowledged as merely one way among many.

Panel 9: Queering Ontologies: Rethinking the Human

Panel Contact: R Baker (rrbaker@ucsb.edu) - Panel Abstract

1. "Cosmogenetics: Trans Futurity and Re/Narrativizing the Human in Lilith's Brood and To Be Taught, If Fortunate" - R Baker (rrbaker@ucsb.edu)
   To be transgender is to inhabit a liminal space, straddling the ontogenetic embodiedness of biology and the qualitative–yet no less real–sociogenic constructedness of gender-normative expectations. This liminality is often weaponized against the trans/GNC (trans+) community, as bad actors seek to justify damaging political legislation, bigotry, and outright violence through the language of science. Trans+ existence is thus simultaneously denied outright ("it's basic biology!") while also ostentatiously demonized via appeals to moral rectitude and the preservation of cultural normativity ("protect the children!").

   In this paper, I examine two works of speculative astrobiological science fiction–Octavia Butler's Lilith's Brood trilogy (1989) and Becky Chambers's To Be Taught, If Fortunate (2019)--through the lens of embodied and gender alterity. Although neither work deals explicitly with transness, I argue that both texts' preoccupation with extraterrestrial ecological worldbuilding, the in/stability of human embodiment, and building networks of kinship across difference is a generative lens through which to contextualize the contemporary, media-driven obsession with (trans)gender lives. I draw on Sylvia Wynter's conceptualization of the human as a fundamentally hybrid creature–the bios of our species' phylogeny comes together with the logos of cultural origin stories and value systems, resulting in what she dubs homo narrans–the storytelling primate. Particularly in the context of speculative fiction, this hybridity opens a conceptual space for alternate modes of conceptualizing what it is to be human. I argue that both novels subvert (or rather, invert) sf worldbuilding norms via their treatment of biology as mutable in the context of complex, multispecies

ecologies; in both stories,the genetic alteration of human bodies–what Chambers dubs "somaforming", as opposed to terraforming–enable them to change in order to fit their circumstances, rather than the other way around. But this re-formulation of the human is also problematized, particularly in Butler's work, with acknowledgement of the trauma that can ensue alongside the rupture of deeply-held, normative belief systems. Such change, though imperative to bringing about a new conceptualization of the human, can also be painful, confusing, and frightening. Drawing parallels between these themes and the ongoing struggle faced by the trans+ community to be recognized as fully human, I argue both novels work toward destabilizing the anthro-biocentricity of homo sapiens, and productively unsettle normative conventions surrounding bodies, gender, and the recognition of kinship across difference.

2. "Light Eating and the Metabolics of Solar Fantasies in Kazuo Ishiguro's Klara and the Sun" - presenter [TBD]
   My paper examines speculations of light eating which emerges in tandem with cultural fantasies of solar-power infrastructure in the 21st century. Turning to Kazuo Ishiguro's novel Klara and The Sun (2021) which imagines and stories human and technological systems that eat and metabolize light, I argue that depictions of light eating acts as an eco-metabolic device to offer a form of subsistence outside capital and within speculative food cultures of the anthropocene. Through a reading of Ishiguro's solar powered artificial intelligence protagonist Klara, who receives "nourishment" from sunlight, I examine how questions of solar energy are represented as simultaneously ecological and metabolic, concerning both energy infrastructure and the energetics of the body. By attending to the anti-capitalist logics that arise when existing food and health systems are destabilized through speculations of light eating, the paper proposes light as a fantastic food of the anthropocene. The paper also argues that alongside other representations of light eating in the works of Han Kang's The Vegetarian (2007) and Sumana Roy's How I Became A Tree (2017), there is a collective a queering and expansion of trophic categories represented by the autotrophic plant or photosynthetic light eater.

3. "Integrating Humans with Machines: Cybernetics and Early 1960s Chinese Science Fiction" - Ruiying Zhang (rz464@cornell.edu)
   In the early 1960s, Chinese science fiction witnessed a proliferation of depictions of human–machine integration in the cybernetic sense, wherein a human operator engages with a machine or computerized system, fostering an uninterrupted information flow. This paper investigates the underexplored history of cybernetics in socialist China by examining its representation in

science fiction narratives, alongside state ideological documents, media, and scientific publications such as Xuexi Yicong (Collected translations of foreign knowledge) and Kexue Tongbao (Science bulletin). These archives, deeply intertwined with the Chinese Communist Party's modernization agendas, illustrate a narrative that sought to channel human–machine communication into socialist construction and industrial productivity. However, these stories and the broader discourse on cybernetics also reveal tensions and contradictions. Archives show that the translation of the term "cybernetics" underwent a period of hesitation before ultimately settling on "kongzhi lun" (literally, the theory of control), which emphasized the control of machines for automated production, in contrast to "danao jixie lun" (literally, brain mechanism theory) to avoid the implications of human–machine parallels. Besides the utilitarian focus, early 1960s Chinese intellectual and public discussions on cybernetics primarily upheld an anthropocentric perspective, demarcating the boundary between organisms and machinery components. However, this boundary, which Marxist and Maoist ideology claims is absolute, is blurred in science fiction when both humans and machines contribute labor to a system, with machines gaining humans' praise and recognition. By engaging with archival sources and representations of cybernetic systems in fiction, this paper argues that Mao-era science fiction unintentionally reimagined the socialist future in ways that complicated official narratives of progress and control. The blurred boundary between humans and machines in socialist science fiction produces unintended consequences, such as challenging the notion that thinking is the product of labor and social relations, and rendering human labor potentially invisible.

4. "Hybridity & Its Discontents: Adrian Tchaikovsky's Alien Clay" - Steven Shaviro (shaviro@shaviro.com)

Adrian Tchaikovsky's 2024 novel Alien Clay deals in novel ways with the old science fictional scenario of human encounters with alien life forms. The protagonist/narrator is a political prisoner, held in a forced labor camp on an alien planet. The planet hosts a teeming biosphere, whose life forms operate on far different principles than those of Earthly life, but which seem able to infiltrate human and other Earthly beings. The totalitarian dictatorship that controls Earth, and runs the labor camp, is committed to an ideology of human supremacy (or perhaps it is better to just say humanism tout court). The prisoners are employed in researching the planet's alien life; the rulers are driven both by a ruthless will to know (and thereby to control), and by a need to reinforce their human-supremacist ideology. This is reflected in the novel's account of scientific practice. Science is all too often a form of power and domination, but science is also a practice that must accept, and that therefore

is impelled by, whatever it unexpectedly discovers. The research narrated in the book draws a wedge between these two imperatives; its findings reveal a force of life that resists control and manipulation. The will to dominate is compromised by the prospect of hybridity, which it can only regard as contamination. The book ends with a reversal, involving both the collapse of the dictatorship and the celebration of radical hybridity. But this is a hard-won accomplishment, and not without its own risks and dangers. My talk will track the dynamics of hybridity, and the dread of hybridity, throughout the novel.

5. "Slay: A Queer Horror Analysis of Blade" - Angelica Barajas (angelbar1016@gmail.com)

During the 1990s with Marvel Entertainment on the verge of collapse and filing for bankruptcy, they created the film Blade (1998), the first of many Marvel films to reflect on current society and culture. This film jumpstarts the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), and reveals and discusses more than comic book characters. Blade marks the beginning of comic book films reflecting more of the current state of society they take place in, using a genre and medium (horror and films) best suited for Blade's vampire lore. This movie reiterates many fears discussed in other iterations of vampire culture; deviant sexuality, fear (and fascination) with serial killers, and a growing immigrant populous. In building on an already popular franchise and monster culture to utilize parallel world building, which would eventually promote other more explicitly political comic book characters, this article argues that Blade reflects 90s queer communities, their issues, and negative attitudes towards AIDs within a vampire metaphor. Revealing issues largely untouched by white mainstream medias, the film addresses how a shared identity within a community does not necessarily entail shared values or goals, particularly within a raced and classed context. Expanding on base analyses of the use of Blade's vampirism as a threat and savior of national body and vampire society in the film as global capital opposition, this article speaks to culturally analyze film parallels addressing social anxieties about deviant identities and hegemonic norms.