

## Camera-Stylo 5

### Approaching Extinction: Anthropological and Environmental Encounters in Literature and Cinema

Sydney University and Online, 12–14 July, 2023



The Sydney Literature and Cinema Network

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Sydney Literature and Cinema Network would like to acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and the law of Country on which the University of Sydney stands. Darlington and Camperdown, where the University of Sydney sits, is a place that has for millennia been a meeting place, a place for sharing culture, for collaboration, for knowledge systems intermingling. It has been for thousands of years a place of meaning and learning. We would like to acknowledge that we are holding this conference from these lands that were the ancestral and unceded lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We recognise and respect the custodianship of elders past, present, and emerging who have cared for and continued care for this country.



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## Keynote One: Robert Sinnerbrink



Robert Sinnerbrink is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Macquarie University and former Research Fellow at the Cinepoetics Center for Advanced Film Studies, Freie Universität, Berlin. He is the author of *New Philosophies of Film (Second Edition): An Introduction to Cinema as a Way of Thinking* (Bloomsbury, 2021), *Terrence Malick: Filmmaker and Philosopher* (Bloomsbury, 2019), *Cinematic Ethics: Exploring Ethical Experience through Film* (Routledge, 2016), *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (Continuum, 2011), *Understanding Hegelianism* (Acumen, 2007/Routledge 2014), and is co-editor of *Contemporary Screen Ethics: Absences, Identities, Belonging, Looking Anew* (Edinburgh UP, 2023), *Emotion, Ethics, and Cinematic Experience: New Phenomenological and Cognitivist Perspectives* (Berghahn Books, 2021) and *Critique Today* (Brill 2006). He has published numerous articles on film and philosophy in journals such as the *Australasian Philosophical Review*, *Angelaki*, *Contemporary Aesthetics*, *Film-Philosophy*, *Necus: European Journal of Media Studies*, *Projections: The Journal of Movies and Mind*, *Post-Script*, *Screen*, *Screening the Past*, and *SubStance*.

### Ecocinema and Ecological Value: Documentary Ethics in the Anthropocene

One of the major aspirations of documentary cinema is to educate and persuade the public concerning a range of social problems and political issues. How can documentary cinema contribute to raising awareness, changing attitudes, and fostering action in relation to environmental threats and social justice issues? In this talk I explore the question of documentary cinema and ecological value, examining how recent documentaries approach environmental threats, ecological justice, and moral persuasion through imaginative means. I consider three representative documentary approaches, the *evidentiary-argumentative* approach, the *poetico-aestheticist* approach, and a hybrid approach—which I call *poetico-discursive*—that combines these two in ways that are both aesthetically engaging and argumentatively persuasive. *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim, 2006) offers a paradigmatic example of the first approach. Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out of Balance* (1982) offers a well-known example of the second approach. The recent documentary *Anthropocene* (Burtynsky, Baichwal, and de Pencier 2018) presents a striking instance of the hybrid approach. The latter, I argue, avoids the pitfalls of the other two approaches (didacticism and lack of emotional/imaginative engagement versus subjectivism/aestheticism or romanticisation) while harnessing their strengths (discursive argumentation coupled with aesthetic stylisation and imaginative-emotional engagement). I suggest that such 'hybrid' documentaries, combining discursive argumentation and poetic expression, are more likely to foster enduring attitudinal and social change.

## Keynote Two: Rex Butler



Rex Butler teaches Art History in the Faculty of Art Design and Architecture at Monash University. He is the author of *Stanley Cavell and the Arts* (2020) and has recently finished co-editing a book on Joshua Oppenheimer.

### Despero Ergo Sum

An ethics of film and literature? There is really no such thing. How might film and literature help us to think the looming climate crisis? They won't or can't because it's already too late. The end is already upon us. It's already taken place. In fact, it was our very thinking – all the resources poured into it, all the plane trips to conferences, all the lights left on at night at universities – that helped bring it about. In some ways, the end came before the beginning. It was destined and there was nothing we could ever do about it.

Western thought, perhaps all thought, has always wanted to imagine the end: revelation, eschatology, teleology. And now it is wanting to think the end of everything, including thought and those who think it: accelerationism, climate dystopia, mass extinction. But of course it's a paradoxical undertaking, this thinking of the end of the human because for whom are we thinking it? In principle, everybody else will die and it will only be you thinking. One thinks this end only for oneself and there is no one else one can tell about it or at least no one else it is meant for. If we wanted a filmic illustration we are all familiar with – this being a film and literature conference, after all – it would be like Sarah Connor at the end of *The Terminator* sitting in the petrol station getting her car filled. She knows how the world will end, an event that has already happened, but there is no one she can talk to about it. And in a strange kind of way it's her knowledge that is the one thing that stands out and is unaccountable for in that endless loop between past and future. Which is to say that it is her very knowledge that at once predicts this end and prevents it from coming about.

This is the paradox or self-contradiction of all attempts to think the end. At once the end doesn't exist outside of our thinking of it (even our climate crisis exists not so much or not simply in its truth and science but in our imaginings of and hypotheses about it) and yet it is just this thinking that means it hasn't happened yet and will not as long as we can think it. Indeed, it is just this self-contradiction that characterises all powerful thought, all thought that lives on: it is not partial, empirical, perfectionist, but totalising, irrefutable, doubling, and the one thing that means it is not true is the fact it can be thought. In this sense, our contemporary attempts to think the end of the human are merely part of a long tradition of Western thought, in which we might say that the end must occur before we can begin.

We will consider all these matters using a range of films and books, including but not limited to *The Omega Man*, *Children of Men* and the documentary *Hyperstition*.

### Keynote Three: Andrew B. R. Elliott



Andrew B.R. Elliott is Visiting Fellow at the University of Lincoln, UK, where he researches medievalism, history and memory in popular culture. He is also Director of Sustainability and the Hotels with Heart Foundation for the St Giles Hotel group. Author of *Remaking the Middle Ages* and *Medievalism, Politics and Mass Media*, he has published on film, TV, games, social media, and popular cultural depictions of history from classical Rome to the modern day. His forthcoming book, *Bad History*, examines historiography and prediction through popular culture, from conspiracy to astrology.

Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer's 2000 article, "The Anthropocene", has had an impressive legacy for a one-page paper. The concept they introduced has proven to be immensely valuable for interdisciplinary thinking about environmental catastrophe. Indeed, in only twenty years the term describes what Pieter Vermuelen calls a fundamental shift, changing "the way we think about our relation to nonhuman life and the planet."

Even so, what the term seems unable to do is to imagine a planetary life without humans. The language deployed by the Anthropocene—even the term itself—is seemingly incapable of sloughing off its insistent human-centred focus. Even its most urgent calls to action to protect the planet inevitably recentre humans as the protagonists of a narrative we don't actually get to write. Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz's book, *The Shock of the Anthropocene* takes as its starting point not the environmental catastrophe but the human origins, a stance encapsulated by their subtitle, "The Earth, History, and Us". Carolyn Merchant lays out a terrifying set of statistics about the ongoing (and still unfolding) climate crisis before asking "what do these trends mean for the future of humanity and the planet?"

This paper will explore how historical film—as a genre which has incessantly challenged its own capacity to narrate humanity—has responded to reflections on the end of the world. Using catastrophe films as its central case studies, it will ask how, and whether, historical film can help us sidestep anthropocentrism to articulate and narrate prognoses of our own demise.



## Conference schedule

|                  | Wednesday 12th                                                                                                                                                                                              | Thursday 13th                                                                                                                                         | Friday 14th                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9am – 10:30am    |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Parallel Sessions 1                                                                                                                                   | Grad Session                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 10:30am – 11am   |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Morning tea                                                                                                                                           | Morning tea                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 11am - 12:30pm   |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Parallel Sessions 2                                                                                                                                   | Session 6                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 12:30pm – 1:30pm |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Lunch                                                                                                                                                 | Lunch                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 1:30pm – 3pm     |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Session 3                                                                                                                                             | Session 7                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 3pm – 3:30pm     |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Afternoon tea                                                                                                                                         | Afternoon tea                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 3:30pm – 5pm     |                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Session 4                                                                                                                                             | Session 8                                                                                                                                                                             |
| 5:15pm – 6:45pm  | <p>Opening remarks and keynote introduction.</p> <p>Keynote 1: Robert Sinnerbrink<br/>Chair: Paul Sheehan</p> <p>Law Annex Lecture Theatre 026</p> <p>Zoom Meeting ID: 84436750998<br/>Password: 775638</p> | <p>Keynote 2: Rex Butler<br/>Chair: Audrey Mitchell</p> <p>Law Annex Lecture Theatre 026</p> <p>Zoom Meeting ID: 85245480855<br/>Password: 097568</p> | <p>Keynote 3: Andrew B. R. Elliott<br/>Chair: Sabina Rahman</p> <p>Closing remarks.</p> <p>Law Annex Lecture Theatre 026</p> <p>Zoom Meeting ID: 83760799965<br/>Password: 581618</p> |
| 7pm              | Conference opening drinks                                                                                                                                                                                   | Conference dinner: Rubyos                                                                                                                             | Casual dinner: Forest Lodge Hotel                                                                                                                                                     |

## Daily Schedule: Thursday 13th

|                      |                         | Panel one: Room A                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Panel two: Room B                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Session 1</b>     | <b>9am – 10:30am</b>    | <b>Beyond Humanity</b><br>Susan Potter<br>Thomas Britt<br>Livia Monnet<br><b>Chair:</b> Bruce Isaacs<br><br>Law Annex Seminar Room 022<br><a href="#">Meeting ID: 84821382409</a><br><a href="#">Password: 707924</a>                                                 | <b>The Antipodean and the Anthropocene</b><br>Will Jeffery<br>Freya MacDonald<br>Melanie Ashe<br><b>Chair:</b> Kaitlin Lake<br><br>Law Annex Seminar Room 028<br><a href="#">Meeting ID: 82683553667</a><br><a href="#">Password: 699136</a>                      |
| <b>Morning tea</b>   | <b>10:30am – 11am</b>   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Session 2</b>     | <b>11am -12:30pm</b>    | <b>Asia and the Anthropocene</b><br>Devika Singh<br>Juan Wu<br>Honguan Zou<br><b>Chair:</b> Max Bledstein<br><br>Law Annex Seminar Room 022<br><a href="#">Meeting ID: 84821382409</a><br><a href="#">Password: 707924</a>                                            | <b>Encountering the human(?) at the end of the Anthropocene</b><br>Kaitlin Lake<br>Amelia Saunders<br>Bruce Isaacs<br><b>Chair:</b> Paul Sheehan<br><br>Law Annex Seminar Room 028<br><a href="#">Meeting ID: 82683553667</a><br><a href="#">Password: 699136</a> |
| <b>Lunch</b>         | <b>12:30pm – 1:30pm</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Session 3</b>     | <b>1:30pm – 3pm</b>     | <b>Exploring Humanity</b><br>Zoe Alderton<br>Fraser Gray<br>Jakob Boer<br><b>Chair:</b> Sebastian Sparrevohn<br><br>Law Annex Seminar Room 022<br><a href="#">Meeting ID: 84821382409</a><br><a href="#">Password: 707924</a>                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Afternoon tea</b> | <b>3pm – 3:30pm</b>     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Session 4</b>     | <b>3:30pm – 5pm</b>     | <b>The Anthropocene and Other Media</b><br>Sebastian Sparrevohn<br>Roko Zaper<br>Wyatt Moss-Wellington and Lili Pâquet<br><b>Chair:</b> Will Jeffery<br><br>Law Annex Seminar Room 022<br><a href="#">Meeting ID: 84821382409</a><br><a href="#">Password: 707924</a> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Keynote 2</b>     | <b>5:15pm – 6:45pm</b>  | <b>Keynote: Rex Butler</b><br><br><b>Chair: Audrey Mitchell</b><br><br>Law Annex Lecture Theatre 026<br><a href="#">Meeting ID: 85245480855</a><br><a href="#">Password: 097568</a>                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## Daily Schedule: Friday 14th

Law Annex Seminar Room 022

Meeting ID: 84821382409

Password: 707924

|               |                 | Panel                                                                                                                                                                            |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Session 1     | 9:30am - 11am   | Post-Grad Session                                                                                                                                                                |
| Morning tea   | 11am – 11:30am  |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Session 2     | 11:30am -1pm    | <b>The Donkey and the Beastly Burden of Representation</b><br>Megan Nash<br>Alexander Howard<br>Nicholas Hannan<br><br>Chair: Wyatt Moss-Wellington                              |
| Lunch         | 1pm – 2pm       |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Session 3     | 2pm – 3:30pm    | <b>Experiential Ecology</b><br>Daniel Carrigy<br>Wyatt Moss-Wellington<br>Max Bledstein<br><br>Chair: Bruce Isaacs                                                               |
| Afternoon tea | 3:30pm - 4pm    |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Session 4     | 4pm – 5:30pm    | <b>Ecology, Extinction and Historical Revision: Adaptation as Anthropological Critique</b><br>Niamh Delfendahl<br>Kirstin Mills<br>Stephanie Russo<br><br>Chair: Audrey Mitchell |
| Keynote 3     | 5:15pm – 6:45pm | <b>Keynote: Andrew B. R. Elliott</b><br><br>Chair: Sabina Rahman<br><br>Closing remarks.<br><br>Law Annex Lecture Theatre 026<br>Meeting ID: 83760799965<br>Password: 581618     |

## Abstracts

### The Aesthetics and Ascetics of the Disappearing Human

By Dr. Zoe Alderton

Pro-ana, or pro-anorexia, is a philosophy that celebrates starvation and destruction of the human body. Motivations for this behaviour are diverse. In this paper, I explore pro-ana as a way of imagining a post-body future where the soul is freed from corrupting flesh and the need to consume resources. This asceticism has strong Jain, Buddhist, and Christian heritages. More recently it is present in 'secular' movements like straightedge and parkour. Common threads include the perception that nature is pure, spontaneous, and free. The human is encumbered by excess and damaged interpersonal relationships that are divorced from their proper state.

These ideas are shared and explored in the aesthetic output of the pro-ana community who share a variety of texts related to their philosophy of bodily transfiguration, hatred of one's existence, and escape from the selfish human form. Many of these texts are reworkings of stills or shorts taken from films including *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), and *To the Bone* (2017). Original poetry is also used to explore themes of perfecting the body down to nothingness to rebel against excess. Bones are presented as the essential representation of no need and rejection of humane comfort.

This creative output and filmic bricolage raises the question of whether self-denial can be seen as a kind of eco-anarchism to combat the global hedonisms that have led to the Anthropocene age. These confronting texts also raise concerns over whether there can be an *unacceptable* level of worldly rejection during an era where consumerism is increasingly viewed with suspicion and many people share in a drive towards minimal consumption of non-renewable resources.

**Bio:** Dr Zoe Alderton holds a PhD from the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney. She works as a casual academic, usually in the fields of writing and communication. Her recent projects include the monographs *The Aesthetics of Self-Harm: The Visual Rhetoric of Online Self-Harm Communities* and *Harmful Behaviour in Online Communities: Censorship and Interventions*.

## **“This wasted land”: Uncovering extraction and film production in *Mad Max 2***

By Melanie Ashe

This presentation contributes to recent scholarship into film and media studies that consider how legacies of ‘extraction’ are central to media histories, by offering a case study of *Mad Max 2*, made on location in far western NSW. A remote, sparsely populated and arid bioregion, far western NSW has been a major resource extraction site in Australia’s recent colonial history, and is also host to a lucrative on-location film industry, having been involved in over 60 features and countless advertisements since 1970 (*Wake In Fright*, *Mad Max 2*, to name a few examples).

In this presentation, I argue that extractive environmental histories and film production processes were central to the production of *Mad Max 2*. Firstly, drawing from scholars like Kaythryn Yusoff, I emphasise that the making of media is embedded in extractive legacies of colonial exploitation upon marginalised bodies, whether through dispossession, slavery or indirectly through environmental harm on Indigenous lands. Filmed on location around active mine sites in far western NSW, I explore how *Mad Max 2* is implicated in ongoing acts of dispossession and violence towards the local Wilyakali First Nations people that can be traced to the colonial projects of agriculture and industrial extraction. Secondly, through an exploration of the production practices used to maintain the apocalyptic Mad Max ‘landscape’ during the shooting of the film, I speak to how environmental management throughout location shooting is essential to maintaining the boundaries of the apocalyptic genre. For example, the removal of greenery in the surrounding areas to maintain a visual aesthetic of Mad Max’s ‘outback apocalypse’. I purport that uncovering the environmental histories of Australia’s film history in this way is a form of understanding Australia’s cultural production from an ecological perspective, an approach that is formative in the thoughtful creation and analysis of future cultural production that is more cogent of holistic and dynamic environmental contexts.

**Bio:** Melanie Ashe is a PhD candidate at the school of Film, Media and Journalism at Monash University in Australia. Her research is interested in the environmental materiality of film production, including how this interacts with genre and other filmic modes. Her current project explores how resource-extraction has shaped the Australian moving image and its surrounding industry and cultures, focusing on the region around Broken Hill as a case study.

## **Insect Entanglements: Interspecies Transformative Otherness in Bernard Rose's *Candyman***

By Max Bledstein

This paper examines the depiction of environmental encounters between humans and insects in Bernard Rose's *Candyman* (1992). The film's titular villain is the son of a formerly enslaved man; Candyman is murdered by a lynch mob who smear him with honeycomb, which leads to him being stung to death by bees. His body is burned on land which becomes the real-life Chicago housing project Cabrini Green, where protagonist Helen goes to conduct anthropological research. She finds that Candyman continues to haunt Cabrini Green, perpetually accompanied by the bees which killed him. The relationship between people and bees in *Candyman* parallels Tony M. Vinci's argument that the fiction of Clive Barker, whose short story 'The Forbidden' (1985) was the basis for the film, 'highlights interspecies entanglements while articulating ways in which the individual never exists outside of such entanglements.'<sup>1</sup> Such entanglements take on particular prominence in *Candyman* through the film's foregrounding of the relationship between Helen, Candyman, and the bees. The increased focus on the bees in the film accompanies Rose's shift from discussion of British class relations in the story's Liverpool setting to American racism in Chicago. The interspecies encounters parallel the white Helen's confrontation with both the historical racialised violence of Candyman's death and the ongoing structural discrimination evident in the poverty-stricken Cabrini Green. This confrontation illustrates what Adam Lowenstein calls the 'transformative otherness' of horror cinema: according to Lowenstein, normality and monstrosity are not clearly separable in the genre, but rather engage in 'contingent, ongoing struggle surrounding those relations.'<sup>2</sup> I argue that the transformative otherness seen in *Candyman* captures such a struggle between humans and bees, showing the ultimate inextricability of humanity and the non-human entities sharing environments.

**Bio:** Max teaches film and media at UNSW, where he completed his PhD in film studies. An essay excerpted from his thesis won the 2021 Graduate Student Essay Award from the Horror Studies Scholarly Interest Group of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. His work has appeared in *Monstrum*, *Inks*, *The New Americanist*, and *Jeunesse*. He is Web and Social Media Editor for the *New Review of Film and Television Studies* and a member of the editorial board of *Studies in Comics*.

## **The Phenomenology of Slow and Ecocinema Spectatorship: An Empirical Response to the Ideal Viewer.**

By Jakob Boer

This paper examines the intersection and convergences of slow cinema and ecocinema discourses. I argue that a phenomenological perspective on slow/ecocinema spectatorship can productively inform and reinvigorate these discourses.

Both these debates converge around a set of similar and unwarranted claims about the supposed worldview and behavioural, short and long term effects of these films. Even though both these discourses centre around conceptions of spectatorship, they have been largely based on the theoretical notion of an ideal viewer who is modelled to the researchers' own subjective experiences of these films—informed by their particular intellectual and cultural backgrounds (i.e., *habitus*)—and mostly lack empirical substantiation. In order to circumvent these overly strong claims and their underlying political-ideological positions, I argue that a more modest and grounded theory of slow/eco-cinema spectatorship is needed.

I propose that the innovative, empirically-informed research method of micro-phenomenology provides the necessary means to rigorously study the reception of these films and consequently inform or ground theories of spectatorial effects. As a case study, I discuss the (preliminary) results of my own research project on slow cinema spectatorship, in which I employ this method, to assess and argue for its methodological value. Moreover, I suggest this could also have beneficial implications for studying the aesthetic spectatorial effects and critical potential of eco-cinema and audiovisual media more broadly.

My paper nuances existing academic ecocritical and slow cinema discourses by probing the discrepancies that possibly exist between these critical debates and the actual reception of such films by a wider demographic. Empirically exploring this type of slow/ecocinema spectatorship opens up ways of making more convincing and appealing claims of the aesthetic and potentially ethical effects of these films. Finally, I contribute to the field(s) of (slow and eco) film studies by implementing a productive new research method for exploring cinematic viewing modes.

**Bio:** Jakob Boer is a cotutelle PhD-student in film studies and philosophy at the University of Groningen (The Netherlands) and Macquarie University Sydney (Australia). His research interests include slow cinema, experimental film, phenomenology, aesthetics, philosophy, and audience reception.

## Human Problems and Off-world Solutions in Contemporary Science Fiction Films

By Dr. Thomas Britt

I propose a paper that involves post-humanism, technological futures, and AI and the environment, all of which appear as relevant themes in your call for papers. My paper focuses on a group of science-fiction films bearing a significant variety of commercial and artistic styles but responding to the same humanistic/post-secular tension about options humans employ to avoid global catastrophes, often of their own making. I will argue that in some films, there is a form of infinite regress to the reasoning of such plots, reasoning that situates human beings as sufficient to solve problems caused by humans.

One common feature of these infinitely regressing narratives, present in films such as Danny Boyle's *Sunshine* (2007) and Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014), is the need to go off-world to save a planet threatened by conditions that metaphorically parallel the present climate crisis. In these plots, the answers lie in outer space. Still, the human agents who employ these solutions, ranging from protagonists to antagonists, require near-supernatural upgrades to affect their metaphysical solutions to human problems. One irony of these films involves the regular claim that they are more scientifically motivated than other popular science-fiction films, particularly concerning their technological futurism. Yet their climactic action involves human characters with godlike capabilities that no human possesses.

More coherent are films such as Alex Proyas's *Knowing* (2009) and Roland Emmerich's *Moonfall* (2022), which share none of the critical acclaim of *Sunshine* or *Interstellar* but whose plots are in some ways franker about human nature and fallibility. In these films, the renewal of civilizations requires benevolent aliens, angels, and AI who intervene to rescue humans from their catastrophes. I hope to connect these less-celebrated films with science-fiction classics such as Stanisław Lem's *Solaris* (1961), which remains a progressive vision for its critique of human rationality as the center of the universe.

**Bio:** Thomas Britt is a professor of Film and Video Studies at George Mason University. He is the head of the screenwriting concentration for the film department, where he also teaches several classes, including Ethics of Film and Video and Global Horror Film. He has received numerous teaching awards from George Mason University, having been named a Teacher of Distinction and receiving the Teaching Excellence Award.

## **String Theory and Prophetic Bullets: Perennial Destruction and Decay in *There There* (2018) and *Reservation Dogs* (2021-).**

By Daniel Carrigy

In a now famous open letter to scholars of Western literary studies in 1999, Sam McKegney argued that Native American literature is fundamentally born from and consequently affects Native American communities. McKegney referred to this exchange as an “intrinsic and extrinsic” relationship. In essence, community forms text and text informs community. Within this exchange, however, lies a fundamental caveat. As Arnold Krupat points out, even though Native Americans had developed “writing” in broad terms, “the letter and the book were not found among native cultures in the precontact period.” As a result, Krupat suggests that writing and English literature signify “for the Indian the cultural other”. Nevertheless, Native American literary history is replete with examples of Native American writers using a multitude of literary forms to reflect both their experience of community and their engagement with white colonisers. As Simon Ortiz argues, Native American peoples have continually and “creatively responded to forced colonization” by way of adapting European language “on their own terms.”

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine how contemporary Native American texts have creatively responded to and explored the continuing ecological and environmental impacts of white colonisation. The paper will provide a comparative study of Tommy Orange’s novel, *There There* and Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi’s television series, *Reservation Dogs*. In doing so, it explores how both texts situate the decay and destruction of contemporary Native American communities within the broader historical context of white colonial greed and violence. As such, Orange, Harjo, and Waititi posit that contemporary gentrification, urban decay, socioeconomic struggle, and environmental neglect in Native communities are by no means phenomena endemic to the Anthropocene. Rather, such issues are historical struggles reincarnate - the latest chapters in a perennial and seemingly never-ending battle against white American greed, neglect, and even violence.

**Bio:** Daniel Carrigy is Lecturer in English and Curriculum Studies at Alphacrucis University College. His research predominantly focuses on representations of the American frontier in contemporary literature, film, and television. Some of his most recent work includes an examination of the transtextual influences of Clint Eastwood’s Westerns, as well as an analysis of Matt Reeves’ recent Batman adaptation according to the principles of detective fiction. He is a recent PhD graduate of Macquarie University and is currently working on his first monograph.

## Taking the Part of the Trees: The Old Forest and the ecoGothic in Middle-earth

By Niamh Delfendahl

The forests of Middle-earth stand as some of the most recognisable forest-scapes of fantasy literature. Throughout J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* novels, the forests act as a site of re-enchantment meaning Tolkien used their distinct personalities as a space to re-inspire a love for the natural world that he had deemed lost in the modern world. Although an awe-inspiring natural world and lively forest are significant features of Peter Jackson's film adaptations of the trilogy, viewers do not experience the same re-enchantment through the natural world as they do through the books. This paper will analyse the concept of re-enchantment in Tolkien's Middle-earth, and how it is translated, or, more accurately, misinterpreted on screen. The missing enchantment experience from Jackson's films is due to The Old Forest being omitted from the films. As a result, the films misinterpret Tolkien's environmental ideology that is present in the books, and audiences do not gain a renewed relationship to the natural world as readers do. In order to explore the environmental changes made in Jackson's film trilogy, I examine the appearance of the ecoGothic in Tolkien's texts, which created living, breathing forests that could inspire re-enchantment. I further analyse how Jackson misrepresents the forest by ignoring the ecoGothic, and through this, prevents the forests from becoming a site of re-enchantment within his films. Whilst the forests of Middle-earth are a popular field of study, little has been done to analyse the appearance of the ecoGothic in Middle-earth's forests, nor how important the ecoGothic is to the personality and purpose of Tolkien's forests and his project of re-enchantment.

**Bio:** Niamh is a PhD candidate in the Discipline of Literature at Macquarie University. Focusing on the ecoGothic, medievalism and folklore, she analyses the relationships between the forests of Middle-earth, and Tolkien's gothic influences. She is currently producing a thesis on how JRR Tolkien utilised the ecoGothic to create lively forests that would inspire a re-enchantment in his readers.

## Who or What Can Speak?: Literature and Politics in the Anthropocene

By Fraser Gray

Aristotle was the first to put into words the defining distinction which would separate the political, human being from the long-long list of non-political life. As he would have it: “man [sic.] is a more of a political animal” because it is Nature which has endowed humanity only “with the gift of speech [logos].” Whereas all other animals have only “mere voice” (phone) which can only indicate “pleasure or pain.” And everything else, the vast array of mute things, is left by the political way-side. The distinction between political beings with possession of logos and those non-political beings with possession of phone, or nothing but their own muteness, has been part and parcel of the anthropocentric parlour games humans (mostly the Western kind!) have been playing to separate themselves from all other forms of life. In this age of mass extinction – the Anthropocene – many scholars have proposed different ways of thinking about the role that art has to play in breaking down the distinctions between human and non-human and, consequently, to propose the formation of a new ecological politics. <sup>3</sup> But here I want to focus on Jacques Rancière, a thinker who has often criticised attempts by those who attempt to expand his work in politics and aesthetics to include non-humans. Regardless of his hesitancy, I argue that his work on literature has interesting political implications. For Rancière, literature emerged as a distinctive art form because it dealt with “mute speech,” the Romantic discovery that things themselves speak by bearing their signs upon their body, as though words were woven into their being. As such, it distributes speech, the political capacity par-excellence, to humans and non-humans alike. To illustrate this, I will sketch out Rancière’s argument surrounding the connection between literature and mute speech and tease out its political implications. Although Rancière himself has refused to recognise non-human speech as being politically relevant, instead suggesting that it is only germane to aesthetics, I argue that we need not follow him down this path and that we should double-down on the mute speech that literature brought to light. In doing so, we can recognise that things have something to say about the state of our common world, to recognise speech which is as politically illuminating as it is cryptic.

**Bio:** Fraser Gray is a graduate student in the Macquarie University philosophy department. He is currently completing his Masters thesis on non-human politics, looking at the work of Bruno Latour and Jacques Rancière. He completed his undergraduate studies at the University of Queensland.

## **From the Pyrenees to Poland, via Turin – the beast of burden as fabular figure in film**

Dr. Nicholas Hannan

Jerzy Skolimowski's recent hit film *E.O.* notably transposes the bold premise of Robert Bresson's donkey-centric masterpiece *Au Hasard Balthazar* from mid-century France to current-day Poland. How does this thematic develop over the course of these 56 years, and what can we surmise from their comparison? What burden of signification does the beast come to bear in each case, and how might we consider their difference? Why does the ass in particular carry such resonance, relevance, and even a certain reverence? Taking these questions as its cue, I will look to historical figurations of the beast of burden in fable, religion, and philosophy in order to explore the special significance of the donkey, specifically in films that seek to illuminate moral and ethical questions concerning the creaturely life of human and animal alike.

**Bio:** Dr. Nicky Hannan is a sessional lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Sydney, where he completed a thesis on Bela Tarr/Agnes Hranitzky's cinematic collaborations with writer Laszlo Krasznahorkai. Nicky writes on cinematic temporality, mood, and affect, and is particularly interested in intersections between literature, philosophy, and cinema.

## **“Do you think God gives a damn about miniature donkeys, Colm?”: Animals in the Film and Theatre of Martin McDonagh**

By Dr. Alexander Howard

This paper delves into the intricate relationship between animals and humans as depicted in the works of Martin McDonagh, the renowned contemporary Irish dramatist and filmmaker. Offering close readings of plays such as *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001) and films including *Seven Psychopaths* (2012) and *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022), this paper argues that McDonagh’s creative oeuvre works through what Laura McMahon might describe as “a set of age-old fascination of commonalities and differences,” (2019, p. 10), in order to productively challenge received wisdom as per such fascinations. At the same time, this paper explores how animals—most notably, donkeys—in McDonagh’s works serve as powerful symbols and metaphors that speak to certain aspects of Irish political and economic history. This is especially true of the aforementioned *Banshees*—a film that resonates when read alongside Robert Bresson’s canonical *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966)—and which will serve as the central case study in the second half this paper. Reading McDonagh’s *Banshees* alongside the dramatic cycle known as the ‘Aran Trilogy,’ the second half of this paper looks to understand what the has to tell us about McDonagh’s understanding and depiction of natural and animal worlds, and how representations of these worlds in McDonagh’s work in turn afford us the means with which to appreciate the artist’s distinctive contribution to the realms of theatre and cinema.

**Bio:** Dr Alexander Howard is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Sydney. His most recently published research features in *Film-Philosophy* (26.1).

## The Zombie in the Era of the Anthropocene

By Dr. Bruce Isaacs

The zombie as social, political, and aesthetic figure carries enormous baggage in twentieth and twenty-first century representation. The evolution of this figure responds to an increased awareness of and anxiety toward the relationship of bodies to natural, built, and artificial environments. This paper examines the unique relationship of the zombie to apocalyptic narratives founded on political fragmentation, resource scarcity, and bodily degradation. I examine several sequences in a set of seminal zombie films – *Dawn of the Dead* (Romero, 1978), *Zombie 2* (Fulci, 1979), and *World War Z* (Forster, 2013) – to speculate on how bodies and environments tell us about a radically changing relationship to our world.

**Bio:** Bruce is an Associate Professor in the Film Studies discipline at the University of Sydney. His interests lie in histories of film, film aesthetics and style, critical approaches to film production, and popular culture (including the relationship between film and other pop culture art forms such as television, literature, and music).

## **Can film music be inappropriate?: Understanding the Indigenous cultural landscape of *Walkabout* (Roeg, 1971) through film music**

By Will Jeffery

John Barry's musical score for *Walkabout* (Nicholas Roeg, 1971) is undoubtedly beautiful. However, there is the question of whether it is appropriate: is using romantic Western tonal music appropriate for a narrative predominantly about an Aboriginal boy's cultural walkabout? In this paper I investigate the use and power of film music in narrating a certain cultural landscape. I will consider Anahid Kassabian's idea of cultural "competence" to question whether John Barry's use of romantic Western tonal music for an Australian Indigenous narrative is indeed appropriate. Competence, to Kassabian, is a culturally acquired skill possessed to varying degrees in varying genres by all hearing people in a given culture. Kassabian makes the point in her book *Hearing Film* that film music 'works' through encodings and decodings of culture, language, music knowledge and the fluency of such processes. For film music to work, to engage its audience, there needs to be this cultural competence. Considering cultural competence in *Walkabout*, the film relies on Western tonal musical competence to shape Indigenous Australian narrative, which complicates but also highlights the treatment of indigenous culture and history from Western perspective. This anthropological consideration indeed unveils the power of film music in constructing a narrative image and ideological stance of not just Indigenous Australia from Western traditions, but global culture from exclusive competence.

**Bio:** Will Jeffery recently completed his PhD in Film Studies at The University of Sydney, researching a new method for analysing film music. As well as film music, Will is interested in a wide range of film-related topics including: the evolution of special effects and its relation to film genre, Hollywood, European, early Soviet cinema, and the films of Ingmar Bergman, Dziga Vertov and Steven Spielberg.

## Screening the (post)human condition through AI modes of 'memory'

By Kaitlin Lake

What is to become of the so-called Anthropocene in the wake of artificial intelligence? Will the “rise of the machine” usher in the dystopic end of humanity and the planet as we know it, or might it be the very thing that heralds the realisation of what Glenn Albrecht has referred to as the Symbiocene? Either of these scenarios suggests the radical transformation of the very condition of humanity.

The cinema has long interrogated the human condition in its various iterations of the post-human – from the maschinenmensch Maria in Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927), Ridley Scott’s replicants in *Blade Runner* (1982) or Samantha in Spike Jonze’s *Her* (2013). Cinema has questioned the strict demarcation between man and machine, fundamentally interrogating the ontology of the human and destabilising our anthropocentric tendencies. Kogonada’s *After Yang* (2021), based on Alexander Weinstein’s 2016 short story “Saying Goodbye to Yang” interrogates the anthropocentric tendency to equate both memory and morality with humanness, through the figure of Yang (Justin H. Min) a faulty techno-sapien who begins to “decompose.” Ironically, the equating of morality and humanity is the very thing that seems to undo an anthropocentric model of the world and guides a self-effacing ontological questioning of humanness.

With attention to *After Yang*, this video essay interrogates how the undoing of the anthropocentric hierarchy makes room for Artificial Intelligence through cinema’s affective exploration of AI “memory.” I argue that *After Yang*’s ontological questioning lays the foundations for humanity to enter into a state of harmonious, non-hierarchical coexistence with the natural world and all of its non-human entities. AI need not supersede the human; dystopia need not be the only outcome.

**Bio:** Kaitlin is a final year PhD candidate at the University of Sydney. Her doctoral research explores the affect of the unresolved narrative film as a mode of cinema that engenders existentialist experiences through expressions of absence, freedom, the imagination, and encounters with ‘nothingness.’

**Environmental Fiction and Social and Environmental Imaginaries: close reading the Australian Summer of 2019/20 and the global climate emergency.**

By Freya Grace MacDonald

This presentation takes focus on the stories that lived experiences of the global Environmental Crisis have spurred. Reflecting on literary responses to the 2019/20 Summer Mega Fires, this presentation seeks to elucidate the relationship between contemporary Australian environmental fiction and environmental, climatic, and social imaginaries in contemporary Australia. In doing this, it seeks to illuminate the central ways in which eco-fiction is shaping social awareness of, and individual and collective responses to, the environmental emergency in a domestic context, while examining both eco-fiction and environmental culture in a post-2019/20 Australia.

**Bio:** Freya Grace MacDonald is a PhD Candidate in the Department of English at The University of Sydney, a Doctoral Fellow at The Sydney Environment Institute, and a Research Assistant on the Sydney Environment Institute's *Developing Systems and Capacities to Protect Animals in Catastrophic Fires* research project. Freya's PhD research examines the relationship between social, climatic, and environmental imaginaries and contemporary environmental fiction. Of central focus to her research is an analysis of literary responses to the Australian Summer of 2019/20.

## **“You’re not a monster; you’re a werewolf, like me”: Monstrous Teens and Species Extinction in *Teen Wolf* and *Wednesday***

By Dr. Kristen Mills

Recent decades have seen an increase in the adaptation of popular properties, which range from the plethora of literature-to-film adaptations to the host of remakes and reboots that flood film and television screens. While the reboot has popularly come under criticism as a cheap way to appeal to an existing fan base, the form, while undoubtedly appealing partly to nostalgia, also provides a unique opportunity to address present-day concerns via the direct intertextual comparison with the past. This is particularly so in what I term the “Gothic Reboot”, which is a property that in the process of being rebooted or remade, has been rendered Gothic. This format has emerged as a popular format for twenty-first-century teen television, most especially in the hit MTV series *Teen Wolf* (2011-2023), which adapts the 1984 film comedy of the same name, and Netflix’s recent *Wednesday* (2022), which adapts the twentieth-century comic-Gothic Addams Family series and films. Both series illustrate my contention that the “Gothic Reboot” emerges in response to anxieties about the adolescent inheritance of a damaged world marred by the threat of extinction, whether ecological, economical or political, in which teens emerge as an “othered” group – a separate and “monstrous” species – threatened with extinction by older generations (who were themselves teenagers at the time of the original properties). This paper considers how these reboots achieve their Gothic Horror not only through their visual and (inter)textual techniques and construction of Gothic settings (relying especially on a unique deployment of the Gothic forest trope), but also and especially through their shared thematic engagement with the concept of species extinction. It analyses the role of

the werewolf and “monstrous” teen as a marginalised species, reading the threat of extinction as a metaphor for the true monster: the destruction of the futures owed to today’s youth.

**Bio:** Kirstin is a Senior Lecturer and Director of the Master of Research in the Faculty of Arts at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. Her research specialises in the Gothic from long-nineteenth-century literature to twenty-first-century digital and screen adaptations. Her current projects include monographs on these Gothic digital and screen adaptations, and an edited collection, *The Victorian Gothic and the Occult*. She is also a series editor for the new Nineteenth Century Studies Association book series with Clemson University Press.

## **Speculative Anarcheologies and Posthuman Interbeing in Larissa Sansour's *In Vitro* (2019) and LuYang's *Doku: The Self* (2022)**

By Dr. Livia Monnet

Hilan Bensusan has recently argued that speculative archeology is concerned with resistance to determination, and with the excavation of anarchetypes such as parodies and simulations. It also delights in advocating for unruly, alternative, or speculative versions of history (Bensusan 2016). The Zen master, scholar, poet, and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh (1926-2022) has defined interbeing as the interdependence of all things and beings on one another, life, and the cosmos (Nhat Hanh 2017). This presentation argues that Larissa Sansour's sci-fi film *In Vitro* (InV, 2019) and LuYang's digital animation *Doku: The Self* (DTS, 2022) articulate decolonial speculative archeologies that, rather than imagining a radical breakthrough from a repetitive cycle of violence, suffering, and attachment to constraining values propose a critical analysis of the factors that participated in the production of suffering. In Sansour's film these factors include settler- colonial history, native dispossession, and an elusive national identity. DTS posits samsara as the main cause of suffering. Global extractive capitalism is evoked in both films as the principal source of ecological disasters and nuclear apocalypse. While both InV and DTS adopt a critical stance with respect to modern science and technology and reject the notion of a putative inherent self, they also suggest that the potential for a livable multispecies futurity may be found in posthuman interbeing. The underground orchard in InV and the buddha-body of reality (dharmakaya) in which the avatar Doku disintegrates at the end of DTS embody such a perspective. The techniques sustaining the visualization of these imaginings may be seen as irrational logics of aberrant movements that effect "an ongoing experimental dis-identification" (Rajchman 2017, Lapoujade 2017). Such techniques include the clone Alia's simulated haptic memories in InV, and the monadic avatar-dream-image in DTS (Monnet, forthcoming). Structured respectively by ecofeminist and indigenous cosmovisions and by meditation practices in Tibetan Buddhism, these techniques render visible the power of art and non-dualistic thinking to generate resistance, resilience, and more-than-human resurgence.

**Bio:** Livia Monnet is a Professor of Comparative Literature, Film, Asian Studies, and Environmental Humanities at the University of Montreal. Her research interests span feminist and queer fiction, film, and media art, Asian ecocinemas and environmental art, indigenous speculative fiction and art, indigenous critical studies. Recent publications include *Toxic Immanence: Decolonizing Nuclear Legacies and Futures* (2022) and a co-edited special issue on the Chinese artist LuYang in the journal *Screen Bodies*, 7.1

## **Dead Asses: Sentimentality and Sincerity in works of Laurence Sterne and Martin McDonagh**

By Dr. Megan Nash

In an unflattering reference to Laurence Sterne and *A Sentimental Journey*, Lord Byron once described the author as “that dog, [...] who preferred whining over a dead ass to relieving a living mother” (2005, Dec 1, 1813). Comparing the pathos of Sterne’s fictional depiction of a man mourning the death of his donkey to the novelist’s reputed mistreatment of his actual wife, Byron’s insult encapsulates some of the principle and enduring objections that have been raised against sentimental forms and feelings: that they can be selective or misdirected, that they are more self-indulgent than practically helpful. Most importantly, Byron here singles out the donkey as the source and site of such equivocal feelings. In this paper, I argue that this image of the dead ass has become something of a *locus classicus* for sentimentality and pathos, and explore how the trope is taken up and developed by Martin McDonagh in his recent film *The Banshees of Inisherin* (2022). While a sudden break in friendship between McDonagh’s two protagonists Colm (Brendan Gleeson) and Pádraic (Colin Farrell) serves as the inciting incident in the film, the friendship between Pádraic and his donkey Jenny never wavers. Moving between humour and pathos, the depiction of the renownedly “dull”, donkey-loving Pádraic recalls, at times, Cervantes’s comic Sancho Panza, and at others, the profound simplicity of Dostoyevsky’s “idiot” Myshkin. Maintaining this ambivalence, McDonagh uses Jenny and Pádraic to interrogate the nature and function of pathos itself. Setting the pair against the highly-intelligent and artistically-accomplished Colm, he measures the relative values of simplicity and sophistication, of kindness and meanness, of low and high culture.

**Bio:** Dr. Nash recently completed her doctorate at the University of Sydney, where she is now working as a sessional tutor in FASS and Film Studies. Her current book project - *Tearful* - is focused on eyes and emotion in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, with particular attention the organ’s oft-neglected affective affordances. By rethinking what it might mean to cry, it contemplates how eyes can know the world in ways that do not rely on vision.

## Engendering Care for the Environment through Podcasts

By Dr. Lili Pâquet and Dr. Wyatt Moss-Wellington

In this paper, we will present our findings from research that analyzed and compared episodes of the environmental podcasts *Outrage + Optimism* and *Sustainababble* produced in 2020 and 2021. We ask how these podcasts present an emotionally resonant narrative to provoke heightened care for, and delight in, the environment, and how those emotions are related to the more negative affect of activist rhetorics (for instance, a motivating anger, guilt or shame). Through analysis of the chosen podcasts using the theories of rhetorical identification and emotion, we will show how global, diverse audiences may identify with environmental arguments, find them emotionally resonant and become empowered to make changes to the world. Our research finds that environmental podcasts aim to strike a balance between anger, hope and humour, using emotional, aural narratives to build a feeling of community, through which listeners are given motivation for personalized environmental adaptation and activism.

This personalization of activist rhetoric is key to understanding the intended influence of environmental podcasts. People of differing professions and life circumstances hold different responsibilities for climate action. Environmental podcasts thus seek to motivate individuals to pursue climate action in their own worlds, rather than prescribing one manner of best-practice activism. The podcasters instead adapt their messages through the capabilities of the aural medium to engender an activistic disposition; our research reveals the mix of emotions environmental podcasters incite to contribute to such a disposition.

**Bio:** Dr. Lili Pâquet is a Lecturer in Writing at UNE with research interests in digital literatures, ecocriticism, and rhetorical theory. Her latest research has appeared in journals such as *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *Computers and Composition*, *Crime Media Culture*, *New Writing*, and *Green Letters*. Her poetry and fiction have recently been published by *Rabbit*, *Australian Poetry*, and *Recent Work Press*. She was a finalist in the 2023 Joanne Burns Microlit Award, and runner-up of the 2020 Russel B. Nye Award for outstanding article published in *Journal of Popular Culture*.

## **“The Future of Lesbian Romance and Human Existence”**

By Dr. Susan Potter

In the last few years there has been a notable cycle of lesbian period dramas, including *The Favourite* [2018], *Ammonite* [2020], and *The World to Come* [2021], films that seem far removed from end-of-the-world post-apocalyptic cultural imaginaries. While from one perspective these films are ostensibly progressive recuperations of the historical existence of women’s sexual desires and relationships, this paper will argue that the figure of the lesbian couple offer a displaced, contradictory site for working through anxieties concerning reproductive futurity in the face of catastrophic environmental collapse and its existential threat to human civilisations. To state this argument so baldly seems outrageous, since the latter scientific narrative (see for example the late Will Steffen, 2020) seems on geological, planetary and global scales incommensurable with intimate drama and its human-scaled historical timelines. Yet the lesbian couple is now associated in contemporary liberal and normative imaginaries with reproductive futures (as a family) while at the same time carrying the baggage of a history in which the lesbian is not only associated with reproductive barrenness (as the spinster) but is also figured as an impossibility, as non-existent. As evidenced by their closing images of animal population explosion and lesbian domination, of geological time and lesbian existence, and the apparitional lesbian who lives after death, this small suite of mainstream films seems to mobilise the lesbian couple to articulate, consciously or not, an entangled set of anxieties regarding species reproduction and the continuity into the future of the ‘human’.

**Bio:** Susan is Senior Lecturer in Film Studies in the School of Art, Communication and English at the University of Sydney, Australia. She is a Pākehā person of English and Scottish settler heritage, born in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her essay on “*Il diverso* (the different one)” is forthcoming in the Pier Paolo Pasolini dossier edited by Jane Mills in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*.

## **“It’s often said that if you’re a 5 in London, you’re a 10 in Bath”: Persuasion, Adaptation and Anachronism**

By Dr. Stephanie Russo

The 2022 Netflix adaptation of *Persuasion*, directed by Carrie Cracknell, has attracted a barrage of negative criticism centred on its self-conscious modernisation of Austen’s last novel. The film represents Anne Elliott (played by Dakota Johnson) as a ‘Fleabag’-esque character who breaks the fourth wall to directly address the audience throughout the film. *Persuasion* is also quite consciously a film designed to appeal to a contemporary audience; there are references to ‘playlists’ and ‘exes,’ for instance. While some have read *Persuasion* as signalling a crisis of confidence in the ability of the ‘traditional’ literary adaptation to attract an audience, I locate *Persuasion* within the anachronistic turn in representing history on the screen. The anachronistic elements of this adaptation of *Persuasion*, I argue, do not reflect anxieties about the appeal of Austen adaptations—or of Austen more generally—but instead reflect the desire to both create a useable past for viewers and emphasise the transhistoricity of human emotions and experiences; instead of suggesting the past was strange and/or glamorous, anachronistic historical fictions suggest the past and the present are almost indiscernible from each other. Building on postmodern historical fiction and the comic history, both contemporary historical fictions and adaptations of canonical novels consistently make their presentism explicit, reframing the genre as forward-facing, rather than backward-looking. *Persuasion*’s supposedly ‘shocking’ anachronisms then, are simply a reflection of the shift away from an emphasis on fidelity and accuracy in representing the past on the screen.

**Bio:** Stephanie is Discipline Chair of Literature at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. She is the author of *The Afterlife of Anne Boleyn* (2020) and *Women in Revolutionary Debate* (2012) and has published widely on historical fiction and women’s writing of the eighteenth century. She is currently working on a monograph on the use of deliberate anachronism in historical fiction, drama, film and television, to be published by Routledge.

## **Lights, Camera, Inaction! The divided body at the end of the Anthropocene**

By Amelia Saunders

The end of the Anthropocene is coming. Scientists warn that continued inaction may trigger a series of climate catastrophes that end the human era. This video essay offers a cinematic perspective on inaction, and the end of the human history, through an analysis of the changes to the make-up of the cinematic body.

In Deleuze's sensory-motor schema, to change its situation, a cinematic body must integrate perception, affect, and action: the functioning cinematic body sees, feels, and acts to alter the world. Through an analysis of disaster films, culminating with *Don't Look Up* (2021), we see how this schema has been progressively threatened, and finally ruptured. The body has split into two incommunicative parts. The body that sees, feels, and understands the enormity of the threat is not the body that has the capacity to act, at least not on the scale required. So the agent of the disaster film must expand their capacities for action, limit the situation they hope to influence, or recruit a more powerful body to act in their stead. Increasingly, it is this final option that breaks down. The perceiving, feeling body cannot convince the body of action to use its powers. Thus the disaster film demonstrates how the division of sensory-motor capacities has led to a paralysed and disintegrating social body.

Without the capacity to act, we are condemned only to perceive. Today, we do this with energy, forcing ourselves to bear witness to climate calamities worldwide. But Deleuze's schema demonstrates the futility of cultivating awareness, of piling perception on perception. Perception without the capacity to act traps us, child-like, in the affection image. In this all-seeing, all-feeling, motor-inhibited state, we are being sped towards the end of the Anthropocene.

**Bio:** Amelia's doctoral thesis "The Cinematic Subject Gets Social: An Apparatus Theory for Instagram" was conferred in April 2023. Her research has been published in *Black Camera*, and her short films have been included in selection at film festivals in Australia, the UK, Canada and throughout the US.

## Exploring the Glocal concerns through an Ecocritical lens: Jeannette Armstrong and Tamsila Ao

By Devika Singh

The Pandemic and individuals like Greta Thunberg have timely drawn international attention towards environmental issues, which are an inseparable part of existence. While the entire world intensifies its fight against the Covid 19 pandemic, the demography that is emerging among indigenous populations is generally overlooked, if not suppressed. Ecocriticism looks at global ecology and the inevitable cross-border exchanges (cultural, physical, and ecological). Ecocriticism guides us to examine the world around us and critiquing the mannerisms of society in the treatment of Nature. There are various novels from various writers belonging to different countries who have chosen ecological themes like Tamsila Ao's Short story collection *These Hills are Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*, Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash and Whispering in Shadows* and many others.

In this paper, I will do a comparative study of Tamsila Ao's *These Hills are Called Home: Stories from a War Zone* and Jeannette Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows*.

The texts of Jeannette Armstrong deal with globalisation and indigenous territories, and look at environmental justice in terms of power and land. It also deals with how colonialism frequently links peoples with "nature" in order to justify conquering them, stealing their land, and "developing" it for financial gain. The protagonist gets involved in political activism. The importance of land is linked to the very identity of the native people and their tradition is repeatedly stressed upon in the novel. Land as territory for sale is a European concept, not a Native one. They believe that they are fundamentally different from anyone else in their land, fundamentally different from the white Canadians. The basis of the difference is land, their passion for it and their understanding of their relationship with it. They belong to the land; the land does not belong to them.

Tamsila Ao, a prominent Indian writer from the Northeast, has been instrumental in bringing Nagaland's sixteen ethnic clans together. Identification with nature acts as part of a support structure for the characters engaged in Insurgency, militancy and political activities of Nagaland. She focuses on the Indigenous tribes' profound affinity with nature which is ultimately what saves the environment from the destructive consequences of conflicts.

In terms of local and regional concerns, but also with an eye toward a broader global perspective from around the world is what I will focus on in the paper. This understanding inspires us to want to contribute to environmental rehabilitation, not only as a hobby, but as a literary representation. Ecocritics encourage others to consider the aesthetic and ethical difficulties offered by the environmental crisis, as well as how language and literature communicate values with important ecological impacts.

**Bio:** Devika graduated in English Literature Honours from Hindu College, University of Delhi and Masters in English from University of Mumbai, India. Currently, a Research Scholar at Central University of Haryana. I have participated and presented papers at various National and International seminars and webinars. I have five publications to my credit in UGC- Care and Peer reviewed journals.

## Approaching Extinction: Anthropological and Environmental Encounters in Literature and Cinema

By Sebastian Sparrevohn

In this time of Anthropocene literature, when the humanities are reflecting upon the human causes of ecological disaster and the devastating impact it has on future generations, this paper proposes that the visual language of comics offers a path of hope through heterochrony and its underlying ecological unconscious. The paper builds on Alison Gibbons' synthesis of heterochrony and combines it with Glenn Willmott's definition of the ecological unconscious of comics.

These concepts are applied to two comics: the time-travel space opera *Paper Girls* (2015-2019) by Brian K. Vaughan, Cliff Chiang, Matt Wilson, and Jared K. Fletcher, and the memoir *Ducks: Two Years in the Oil Sands* (2022), by Kate Beaton. *Paper Girls* is a bildungsroman narrative of four newspaper delivery girls who get caught up in an intergenerational time war. The comic is set in suburban Ohio, during the consumer and pop-culture boom of 1980s middle America and problematises the technocultural dream of progress. *Ducks*, meanwhile, is about the author's time spent in the early 2000s participating in ecological exploitation in Canada's lucrative oil sands as the means to get out from under the weight of her student debt.

These comics share an exploration into the relationship between selfhood and place. The Paper Girls see their small-town home of Stony Stream through a heterochronic overlapping. Beaton leaves her home and is unable to connect with any other place while her choices are dictated by the capitalist matrix of labour and value extraction that erodes the land and the self. The promises of progress and of wealth are shown to be myopic and finite rather than utopian. As a part of the broader conversation of this conference, this paper is a reminder to reflect on each other's relationship to land and home, and to be curious about how living in the world makes us feel as humans as well as scholars.

**Bio:** Sebastian Sparrevohn is a PhD candidate in the discipline of Literature at Macquarie University. His thesis is on the utopian impulses in North American fantasy comics, exploring the legacy of mainstream middlebrow comics from the 1970s on the contemporary market. His previous work was on Kazuo Ishiguro's reflexive use of fantasy and the Künstlerroman genres.

## Sustainability, Streaming Media, and Responsible Engagements with Science in Screen Studies

By Dr. Wyatt Moss-Wellington

This paper addresses the incursion of pseudoscience in film and media studies and shows how irresponsible engagement with environmental sciences compromises an ecocritical agenda. I interrogate claims made in screen studies that are continuous with misinformation campaigns, that cite work from online and popular media rather than climate specialists and circumvent rigours ordinarily extended to peers within one's field of expertise. Non-specialist media researchers replicating the work of climate scientists can amplify claims that appear to take climate justice seriously, but instead circulate a carbon lobby-backed doomerism with unintended results. I argue that when scholars work from a background of compromised evidence in digital media ethics, we create ethical conundrums demanding solutions that compromise particular communities; in particular, younger generations who are often asked to shoulder the costs of individualised responsibility rather than collective action.

I take as a primary case the claim that video streaming is responsible for 1% of greenhouse emissions. I show how this notion is drawn from pseudoscientific online reportage, and arguments presuming a meritorious quality to the physicality of analogue moving images in film philosophy. Scholars heralding the "death of cinema" at the hands of digital filmmaking and streaming services extrapolate their argument to an injurious directive to new generations of filmmakers and consumers, relying on misinformation as an argumentative bulwark.

For humanistic researchers, taking science seriously can mean citing scientific evidence, in many cases collaborating with scientists, and even "playing" with that evidence, extrapolating it to new theories and ethics—but not presuming our own evidence gleaned from non-scientific means is synonymous with that of situated experts. Yet there are also consequences for a lineage of methods in humanistic inquiry that could be *augmented by* rather than *become* science. I conclude by showing how a history of arts-led thinking remains crucial and requires protection as it is attacked by conservative agendas around the globe.

**Bio:** Wyatt Moss-Wellington is Lecturer in Film Studies at the University of Sydney. He is the author of *Cognitive Film and Media Ethics* (Oxford UP, 2021), *Narrative Humanism: Kindness and Complexity in Fiction and Film* (Edinburgh UP, 2019) and co-editor of *ReFocus: The Films of Spike Jonze* (Edinburgh UP, 2019) with Kim Wilkins. Moss-Wellington is also a progressive folk multi-instrumentalist and singer-songwriter with four studio albums: *The Kinder We* (2017), *Sanitary Apocalypse* (2014), *Gen Y Irony Stole My Heart* (2011) and *The Supermarket and the Turncoat* (2009).

## **Frog, Fertility and Frustration: Cultural Anthropology Interpretation of Frog Symbols and Goddess Signs in Mao Yan's *Frog***

By Juan Wu

Mo Yan, one of China's most revered contemporary novelists, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2012. His novel *Frog* chronicles the sweeping history of modern China through the lens of the controversial one-child policy. There is much study on its illegal surrogates, forced abortions, and cruel birth policy. However, less attention has been paid to its underlying environmental crisis, gender conflict and mythical foundation. This paper takes a cultural anthropology approach to investigate the frog symbols and unearth the Goddess signs in Mo Yan's *Frog*. First, it examines the textual representation of frogs in the novel to explore their symbolic implication and to demonstrate the analogy of frog (wa) and baby (wa), which share identical pronunciation and formative roots in Chinese characters. Second, it analyzes the narratives on the frog in ancient Chinese classics, such as the frog tales in *Yuejueshu* and *Strange Tales From a Chinese Studio*, and the Chinese mythology of Nüwa, the mother goddess who creates humanity and repairs the Pillar of Heaven to reveal that the frog motif enjoys a long tradition in Chinese literary history. Third, it presents archeological evidence of the stone toad in Xilongwa Culture, the coloured pottery frog of Majiayao culture, the jade frog-goddess or frog-female in Hongshan culture, and the golden frog in Sanxidui culture to explore the interaction between frog and Goddess. It proposes that our ancestors noticed the frog's distinct transformation and took it as a sign of Goddess, a symbol of fertility and eternity.

**Bio:** Juan Wu is a PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at The University of Sydney. Juan was previously an associate professor of English at the Beijing Institute of Technology and a visiting scholar at the University of Oxford. Her academic research mainly focuses on modern and contemporary American literature and East Asian culture. She was awarded David Harold Tribe Postgraduate Research Fellowship at the University of Sydney and the colloquium group leader at the Institute for World Literature. She authors a monograph Vladimir Nabokov: "A Rigid Moralist", and 39 articles in academic journals, such as *Nabokov Studies*, *Comparative Woman*, *Foreign Literature Studies*, *English Studies*, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* and *English Literature*. She is a member of the International Vladimir Nabokov Association and the International Comparative Literature Association.

## **Creating a Blue Game: exploring the potential of video game aesthetics to imbue non-anthropocentric relations with the marine environment and animals**

By Roko Zaper

My audio-visual essay will seek to address eco-aesthetics in video games and how they are able to advocate for non-anthropocentric worldbuilding approaches regarding marine environments and animals within game constructs. It will do so through a multimedial lens by examining how the use of traditional art media, such as ink and watercolours have a role to play in the digital age by aiding sensual presentness, immersion and aesthetic contemplation. This will be examined within the context of my own video game project, *Nautilus Epoch*, a creative practice-based response to both emergent environmental theories and the potential for video game design to contribute to a re-evaluation of the human place within the biosphere.

My approach to eco-aesthetics represents both an analytical and creative response to *Green Gaming* studies (Chang 2019), an emerging approach to video game studies which encourages rethinking of how to foster greater ecological awareness. It is an approach also informed by the study of both historical and contemporary video games (*Ecco the Dolphin*, *Abzu*) and how they have approached anthropological and environmental encounters. This analysis serves to aid in creating a blueprint for novel approaches to eco-aesthetics in the future.

As well as eco-aesthetics, my audio-visual essay will touch on representations of hauntology and extinction in the current ecological crises. It will do so by focusing on encounters with one particular species of animal facing extinction, the Mediterranean Monk Seal. The Monk Seal will be examined from mythological, environmental and visual design perspectives which will provide an insight into how theoretical and creative processes intersect and how they can be used to address real existential threats.

**Bio:** Roko is a researcher, illustrator and video game designer based in Sydney, Australia, currently undergoing a PhD at the University of New South Wales. His main area of interest is how video games can be designed to reflect less anthropocentric relations with animals and environments. He has also worked extensively in media and education and is passionate about pushing the creative boundaries of multimedia and creating novel forms of storytelling that resonate in the current climate crises.

## **The Loess Plateau in Eco-cinema: Representing the Tension Between China's Environment Policies and Vanishing Landscapes Through Three Cinematic Moments**

By Dr. Hongyan Zou

This research explores how films portray the Loess Plateau (a region that covers parts of Gansu, Shaanxi and Ningxia provinces in northwestern China) and what they reveal about the social, cultural and environmental changes that affect the Han and non-Han peoples inhabiting the area. The Loess Plateau is the cradle of Chinese civilization and has been featured in many films such as critically-acclaimed *Yellow Earth* (dir. Chen Kaige, 1984). There are three significant moments in the history of Chinese cinema that depict the area differently. The first is dated back to the 1980s when a new generation of Chinese filmmakers were seeking the remote and marginalized area as a reflective space of the tradition and modernization of mainland China. The Loess Plateau was cinematically represented either as a demonic wasteland deprived of probability of salvation or as a poor village afflicted and depopulated by water scarcity in films such as *Old Well* (dir. Wu Tianming, 1987). One decade later, with the prevailing marketization in the Chinese film industry, the area became a common setting for Chinese western films, inspired by the Hollywood Western genre. The cinematic wasteland during this period conveyed little ecological significance, merely acting as the brutal environmental background for action scenes featuring thrilling Kung fu sequences. Examples of this genre include *Wind Blast* (dir. Gao Qunshu, 2010) and *No Man's Land* (dir. Ning Hao, 2013). The third moment is marked by an increased representation of disappearing homeland and production mode due to environmental deterioration. Films such as Li Ruijun's *Walking Past the Future* (2017) and *Return to Dust* (2022) belong to this category. These three moments of cinematic Loess Plateau not only show how the local image has evolved over time but also illustrate the dialectical tension between continuity and rupture, government environmental policies and individual people's well-being and welfare in the ways in which the people and environment are portrayed on the Chinese screen.

**Bio:** Hongyan Zou is a lecturer at Sichuan University. She has published a chapter "Chinese films and the sense of place: Beijing as 'Thirdspace' from In the Heat of the Sun to Mr. Six" in the edited book *Making Publics, Making Places*. She is also the author of *Western China on Screen: An Urban Exploration* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021). Her research focuses on the dynamic relationship between cinema and cities, Chinese minority films and Chinese Westerns.

## Acknowledgments and Thanks

'Camera and Big Cat' image generously supplied by Scott Turner, wildlife cinematographer, Roar Media Group.

