

Call for Abstracts

Speculative Literary and Visual Narratives on Ecological Crises: Dystopia, Cli-fi, Sci-fi, Climate and Society

With the difficulties of handling land waste, disappearing habitats, shrinking biodiversity and climate issues such as rising sea level, extreme weather conditions, desertification, the threatening difficulties of food production, ecological crises have become arguably the most significant challenge the globe is facing in the new millennium. Although the United Nations, the Paris Agreement, governments and NGOs are working together internationally on better solutions to the worsening predicament, such crises still cast a shadow of uncertainty on human communities and societies. In recent decades, with climate change at the forefront, literary and artistic narratives have begun to earnestly and passionately rhapsodise about the causes and effects of ecological crises. Early efforts such as J.G. Ballard's *The Wind from Nowhere* (1961), *The Drown World* (1962) and *The Burning World* (1964) that portrayed a series of dystopian visions, although in these early examples the environmental catastrophes do not necessarily result from human activities, became the forerunners of a diverse body of works on this subject. In 1973, Richard Fleischer released a thriller, titled *Soylent Green*, which depicts an extremely apocalyptic scene of food shortages in New York City in the year of 2022. This cautious prediction, although fortunately unfulfilled, inspired a large number of 'speculative narratives', in various genres and media such as sci-fi (science fictions), cli-fi (climate change fictions), films, television series, animations and even video games. These narratives not simply seek to represent or imagine possible consequences of climate change. As they enter the sphere of popular culture, these 'near future' dystopias provide all human communities with an opaque lens through which to view the past and the present, to raise awareness, and to elicit response and/or to manufacture consent, through what J.L Austin refers to as 'performative discourses'.

Such speculative narratives in ecological crises, literary or visual, may be the start of something very new, a genre that enacts both the long-vaunted decentring of the human and the disavowal of anthropocentrism, a genre that displaces a homogenous narrative voice with multi-vocal speakers and perspectives, a genre that replaces linear temporality and plotting with disjunctions and recursions, a genre that ultimately makes us work harder and think more actively rather than we are accustomed to doing. Despite their profound potential as a structural innovation on, if not a challenge to, existing literary and artistic paradigms, glaring problems of form and content, and of attitude towards historical legacy still remain unsettled. Authors run the risk of being preachy, of overloading the reader with data, of providing scenarios rather than stories, of boring a readership already numbed to climate change issues, of dumping down the material, and of writing narratives that function simply either as confirmations of readerly biases or as entertainment detached from the realities of the contemporary world. In order to address these issues, this conference will seek answers to a number of queries, including but are not limited to: Would speculative narratives in ecological crises naturally lead to a disavowal from anthropocentrism and a decentring of the human? How to locate speculative narratives within the axis of 'near future', when their scope naturally carries classical legacies such as didactic and committed literature? How should we recognise and possibly, negotiate the underlying national, sexist, and racist discourses, under the façade of audio-visual carnivals such as Hollywood blockbusters? And, would new technologies such as AI, VR and MR lead such narratives to new aesthetic standards?

For this "Speculative Literary and Visual Narratives in Ecological Crises" International Conference to be held in Shenzhen **November 18-20, 2023**, we will invite papers to address the topics as follows:

- literary strategies that 'speculative narratives' use to convey the disruptions ecological crises produce to our conventional sense of time and the implications of these changes for the *form* of narrative itself
- the disavowal of anthropocentrism and some of the disarming implications it has for literature and art

- genetic materialism and AI and the challenges they present for genre
- performative discourses in ‘speculative narratives’ regarding ecological crises
- the influence of new technologies, such as VR and MR on ‘speculative narratives’
- the pervasiveness of sexism and racism in ‘speculative narratives’ in ecological crises
- the poetics of persuasion in ‘speculative narratives’
- case studies

In order to be considered for participation in this conference, an abstract of 250-300 words and a brief author biography of 100 words should be sent via email to chinaconf2023@hotmail.com no later than 30 April 2023. Results of abstract selection will be notified via email to one of the organizers by May 15, 2023.

Registration fee: 800 RMB (students: 400 RMB).

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