



## **29th SERCIA CONFERENCE**

### **Old and New Science Fiction Imaginaries in English-Speaking Cinema and Television**

**La Fabbrica del Vapore, Milano**

**September 2-4, 2024**

**Keynote speakers: Naomi Mandel (Hebrew University of Jerusalem), Pawel Frelik (University of Warsaw)**

In an interview about the end of the last millennium, James Ballard argued that Science Fiction (SF) had created the greatest popular literature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The imagery that we saw in the cinema, television, advertising and other media was the most powerful imagery produced in the last hundred years. By the end of the century, the genre had done its job and it was dead. This hypothetical death has aroused a widespread interest in the many ways in which it generated a collective social imaginary through popular images and stories that, in Ballard's words again, had "created the psychology of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century." This debate positioned the genre at the centre of academic discussions. The result was that SF, previously seen as a minor genre, became an important lens to understand not only

the 20<sup>th</sup> century but the new millennium as well. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, SF territorialised the future and, by extension, familiarised people with a large number of technologies and phenomena that have now become standard in our current mediascape and social context. In other words, by territorialising the future, the genre had built the present.

Ballard's statement implied that the genre was now no longer able to continue to produce the imagery of the future or, as Vivian Sobchack argued, it had lost its ability "to reconcile man with the unknown." And yet, over the course of the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have witnessed a huge increase in the general interest in SF stories. This increase also encouraged the reformulation of some foundational SF stories: the adaptation of literary texts to the screen – *Minority Report* (2002), *The Handmaid's Tale* (2017-), *Altered Carbon* (2018-20), *Dune* (2021, 2024) – or from the big screen to TV – *Westworld* (2016-22) –, as well as remakes and sequels of earlier films and series – *Battlestar Gallactica* (2003, 2009, 2012), *Total Recall* (2012), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) and *The Matrix Resurrections* (2021). At the same time, the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has also been a rich and fertile period for the production of new SF stories, some of them originating in literature, like Ted Chiang's "Story of Your Life", adapted as *Arrival* (2016), others directly conceived for the big screen, like *Children of Men* (2006), *Moon* (2009), *Interstellar* (2014), *Avatar* (2009) and its sequel (2022) and *High Life* (2018), and successful global TV series like *Utopia* (2013-14), *Black Mirror* (2011-) and *Stranger Things* (2016-), among many others.

The 29<sup>th</sup> SERCIA Annual Conference intends to celebrate SF, both in its manifold 21<sup>st</sup>-century manifestations *and* by commemorating the old and long relationship between the genre and the cinematic image, from George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) to current ergodic and interactive narratives such as *Bandersnatch* (2018). We, therefore, welcome not only studies of contemporary audiovisual manifestations of the genre but also critical re-evaluations of 20<sup>th</sup>-century landmarks. We would also like to extend the debate to the analysis of different forms of speculative audiovisual fiction in order to better understand the ways in which the two main instruments for the production of the social imaginary of the last century (film and SF) have familiarised us with technological devices, dystopian social scenarios, high-tech posthuman realities, extraterrestrial presences and non-material digital universes. In other words, we propose to explore the ways in which SF and the filmic image imagined the future during the last century and, in so doing, generated our present time and sparked our own future-directed imaginations.

We encourage proposals dealing with the following issues from a variety of perspectives (aesthetic, cultural, economic, historical, etc.) in English-speaking films and series of the new millennium:

\* The history of SF, exploring and celebrating the enduring relationship between SF and film, the inscription of contemporary films and series in the aesthetic and ideological traditions of the genre, notably through comparative studies between literature and film, or between new and canonic works, as well as new perspectives on the classics of the genre.

\* Mapping the present time, imagining the future: we encourage proposals that deal with the ways in which the future is imagined (and imaged) through SF. This is to say, how, in the course of the last century, SF territorialized our present time and, by extension, populated our daily lives with themes and devices that have built our present reality. We would like to discuss the ways cinema depicted the future in the past.

\* Reformulating the genre: new media technologies generate transmedia and adaptive phenomena that naturally modify genres. From this perspective, proposals could analyze diverse forms of speculative fiction and/or attempt to identify new narrative forms and to map, in the genre's universe, new topoi that could be identified as new declensions of SF.

\* Adaptation, analyzing the ways in which the complex narrative structure of SF is adapted to the screen. Proposals that enquire into the transition of certain technological devices from a textual dimension to the image are also welcome.

\* Cyberpunk: we would like to open a space for the discussion of social problems and phenomena related to technological developments. We encourage contributions that engage with the main topics of cyberpunk, and identify them in our current audiovisual production. We welcome analyses of the ways that the main cyberpunk topoi (e.g., dystopia, A.I. societal collapse, among others) have been reformulated after the Digital Revolution.

\* Theoretical formulations and re-formulations of the genre, its limits and its intersections with other genres are also welcome.

Send proposals to German A. Duarte ([GDuarte@unibz.it](mailto:GDuarte@unibz.it)) and Celestino Deleyto ([cdeleyto@unizar.es](mailto:cdeleyto@unizar.es)). Deadline. May 3, 2024.

**Prospective participants are advised that, in order to participate in the conference, they must previously become members of SERCIA. Go to**

<http://www.sercia.net/index.php/how-to-join-sercia> or contact [mariannekacvergne@gmail.com](mailto:mariannekacvergne@gmail.com).

**Scientific Committee: Delphine Letort, David Roche, Marianne Kac-Vergne, Christophe Gelly, Pablo Gómez, Julia Echeverría, German A. Duarte, Celestino Deleyto.**

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Berardi, (Bifo) F. (2013) *Dopo il futuro. Dal Futurismo al Cyberpunk: L'esaurimento della Modernità*. Roma: DeriveApprodi.

Duarte, G. and Battin J.M. (eds.) (2021) *Reading Black Mirror: Insights into Technology and The Post-Media Condition*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Freedman, C. (2000) *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Frelik, P. (2020) "I Have Heard Things You People Wouldn't Imagine': *Blade Runner's* Aural Lives," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 13.1: 113-118.

Frelik, P. (2017) "Eye(s) in the Sky: Icons of War and Techno-Gaze in Contemporary Audiovisual Culture," *Spaces of Expression and Repression in Post-Millennial North-American Literature and Visual Culture*, eds. Izabella Kimak & Julia Nikiel. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017, 23-36.

Gomel, E. (2011) "Science (Fiction) and Posthuman Ethics: Redefining the Human" in *The European Legacy*, V. 16, Issue 3, pp. 339-354.

Gomel, E. (2010) *Postmodern Science Fiction and Temporal Imagination*. London: Continuum.

Mandel, N. (2015) *Disappear Here: Violence after Generation X*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

Todorov, T. (2015) *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Sobchack, C. (1997) *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. New York: Rutgers University Press.

Sobchack, C. (1980) *The Limits of Infinity: The American Science Fiction Film 1950-1975*. New York: Barnes & CO.

Suvin, D. (1979) *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre*. New Haven: Yale University Press.