



SHUDDER OF THE NEW

*cultural objects and
posthuman politics*

MKC/ Dom mladih - Beton kino
Split, Croatia - July 6, 2022, 10-17h

speculative literature and
film, Korean Literature,
economics, ecology +

Sponsored by: Korean Studies Promotion Service, Faculty of Humanities and
Social Sciences, University of Split, Centre for Cross-Cultural and Korean Studies,
Studia Mediterranea

Image: @worcesterterrariums

"The new is not a subjective category, rather it is a compulsion of the object itself."

—Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*

"Oak trees don't set an intention to listen to each other better, or agree to hold tight to each other when the next storm comes. Under the earth, always, they reach for each other, they grow such that their roots are intertwined and create a system of strength that is as resilient on a sunny day as it is in a hurricane."

—adrienne maree brown, *Emergent Strategy*

For Adorno the "shudder of the new" involves the recognition in cultural forms of the abstracted matter of capital. In their material reflection upon the given modes of production, art and other cultural objects compel new practices and forms of knowledge. Yet formidable forces proscribe the emergence of the new. In this respect, Jason W. Moore proposes a "double internality," whereby capitalism as system of organizing nature unfolds within the web of life, while simultaneously propagating a praxis of nature as external, exemplified in the exploited forms of underpaid labour, animals and natural systems. Thus the development of nonhuman politics is essential to a postcapitalist vision. In the context of our contemporary moment, which shudders with imperialist war, ongoing settler-colonial violence, resurgent far right politics and immanent planetary systems collapse, this conference explores how renewed attention to the politics of the nonhuman might foster the emergence of less exploitative practices and forms of knowledge. Presentations in the areas of speculative fiction and film, economics, Korean literature, ecological studies, and others will engage these issues from a variety of more-than-human perspectives.

The conference functions as Session 4, Split University Offline Session, of The 2nd East European Consortium for Korean Studies (EECKS) and the International Conference on East-Asian Korean Studies 2022: Toward the Reconstruction of Korean Studies.

Hosted by:

BK21 Team of Dept. of Korean Language and Literature, Yonsei University
Center for Korean Studies, Inha University
Institute of Integrated Humanities, Korea National Open University
Institute for Cross-Cultural Research, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies
Dept. of Korean Literature and Culture, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland
Center for Cross-Cultural and Korean Studies, University of Split, Croatia

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Brian Willems
Simon Ryle
organizers

SHUDDER OF THE NEW: cultural objects and posthuman politics

MKC/Dom mladih – Beton Kino
Split, Croatia July 6, 2022

- 9.30-10.00 Registration and Opening
10.00-11.00 Keynote: Sherryl Vint (University of California, Riverside), Irrational Exuberance: Science Fiction and Start-Up Futurism
- 11.00-11.15 Break
- 11.15-12.15 Luka Bekavac (University of Zagreb), Space and Sequence: The Topography of *Here*
Victoria Vestić (University of Split), Fractality in the Visual Cultural Object: *Ben Hur* (1959) – Breaking the Wheel
- 12.15-12.30 Break
- 12.30-13.30 Tomislav Medak (Coventry University), Beyond the Straitjacket of Green Capitalism's Alternatives
Simon Ryle (University of Split), *Eraserhead* and Sympathetic Action
- 13.30-14.30 Lunch
- 14.30-16.00 Gianna Brahović (University of Split), Is the Future of Speculative Realism in the Study of Literature?
Brian Willems (University of Split), Novels of the Future: Eugene Lim and Jang Jung-il
- 16.00-16.15 Break
- 16.15-17.15 Pelin Kümbet (Kocaeli University), Towards a Posthuman/Transhuman World: Posthuman Bodies in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*
Ante Jerić (University of Rijeka), The Shortcomings of Empathy: *On Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go*

Sherryl Vint

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Irrational Exuberance: Science Fiction and Start-Up Futurism

This paper explores how a logic that is tightly knit to the history of sf—particularly its libertarian authors—is deeply bound up with the ethos of Silicon Valley and, given the Valley's disproportionate influence on the economy as a whole, within our contemporary moment of platform capitalism. Using the example of the WeWork crash, it explores how the idealisation of 'unicorn' start-up companies draws from an intellectual history by which IT became associated with a countercultural ethos in Silicon Valley, a factor that has significant impact on the excitement these companies generate, which drives their rapid growth and thus the interest of VC investors. The paper argues that the cult of the visionary Founder that fuels the current start-up boom finds its parallel in early promotion of sf as a transformative literary form. Recovering this intellectual history is important to understanding the consequences of the gap between Silicon Valley's countercultural rhetoric and the damage done by its business model to disrupt its capacity to appropriate utopianism. It is crucial to recognize the role of sf in this intellectual history to better understand and counter start-up futurism's tendencies to naturalise capitalism, to prevent us from thinking about complex sociopolitical problems beyond the parameters of technological solutionism, and to materialise a future that is better only for a narrow group of privileged people whose representational practices conflate people 'like them' with humanity as a whole. Naming and analysing start-up futurism helps us to recognise how sf motifs have a disproportionate impact on all our futures.

Luka Bekavac

Space and Sequence: The Topography of *Here*

Richard McGuire's *Here*, an "artist book disguised as a graphic novel", follows a single viewpoint over a multimillennial timespan. Pursuing potential storylines on several apparently incompatible levels (gestural, historical, evolutionary, cosmological), this ostensibly simple concept provides a broad template for exploring non-linear narrative capacities of printed media: it could be examined as a non-anthropocentric visualization of a chronotope (Bakhtin), an SF staging of *espacement* (Derrida), an exemplary ergodic text (Aarseth), an exercise in tactile multimodality or collage fiction (Gibbons). The common ground of these perspectives is the material framework of a *codex*: the corner of a room depicted in the majority of *Here*'s pages structurally limits the potentially endless diversity of content, while also metonymically playing upon its own isomorphic relation to the book as a three-dimensional object. Since this disrupts the temporality of reading and storytelling in a variety of ways, the paper will focus on *Here*'s ambivalent position regarding the factors of sequence and simultaneity, narrative and spatiality.

Fractality in the Visual Cultural Object: *Ben Hur* (1959) – Breaking the Wheel

Fractals are complex self-similar patterns that spread potentially infinitely. They have been first ‘invented’ in mathematics (Leibniz, Sierpiński, Cantor, Poincaré, Klein), and then recognized as the “geometry of nature” (Mandelbrot 1982) in the shapes of flowers, trees, clouds, and other naturally occurring objects. Figures of speech such as metaphors have been long the cornerstone of literary criticism. Metaphors are traditionally understood as describing a relation between two things or concepts, “resemblance [...] by transference” (Aristotle). These relations, of different ‘degrees’ of similarity or dissimilarity could be also visualized graphically and geometrically by ‘transferences’ such as geometrical translation, mirror image, rotation, which also occur in fractals. This presentation argues that in cultural objects, metaphors can form interconnected ‘nets’ with ultimately fractal shapes which spread by these transformations and can be categorized using mathematical names for different types of these shapes, i.e., the Cantor set, the Sierpiński triangle... This presentation argues a case for fractality in the American 1959 film *Ben Hur*, where the metaphorical net’s arguable basic structure, the ‘Wheel of Fortune’, or the ‘circle’, forms the Apollonian net fractal, and the main transformation seems to be rotation. The scene where this fractal structure metaphorically (the Roman Fortuna and the concept of irresistible grace in Calvinism) and visually overlaps in *Ben Hur* is the chariot race scene. Finally, the concept of fractality in cultural objects seems to be pointing to an underlying layer of non-human politics.

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Beyond the Straitjacket of Green Capitalism's Alternatives

In my talk, I will grapple with the inadequacy of thinking of environmentally livable and socially just futures as "alternatives" to the central organising force of the capitalist system of production. In that camp of thought, in which I count myself, the alternatives-talk straitjackets social forces into the register of the small, localised, potential, pre-figurative. At best a swarm of counterhegemonic initiatives facing the unlikely odds of deposing the Global Juggernaut. Yet, the epistemic primacy that we tend to attribute to capitalism obscures the fact that that system is parasitic on the processes of environmental and social reproduction that create negentropic resources on which it draws on and which are, in ontic terms, its preconditions. Capitalism is framed as being global, world-systemic, all-pervading — which in the way it organises the lives of almost the entire global population and destabilises the world's biomes it certainly is — while it is also a dysfunctional, improvised and brittle part of that larger system of negentropic production. In its scale, capitalism is actually small and dependent relative to the web of life. Starting from that shift of perspective, I will try to unfold some of the implications for future environmental action in a destabilised planetary ecology.

Simon Ryle

***Eraserhead* and Sympathetic Action**

This paper uses the classical idea of *sympatheia* or “sympathetic action” to analyse David Lynch’s *Eraserhead* (1977). The paper introduces various classical, early modern, modern and contemporary forms of sympathetic action, from Empedocles’s poetry, Margaret Cavendish’s theory-poetics, George Herbert’s devotional poetry, Adorno’s negative dialectics, Gilles Deleuze’s concept of “sensation,” Jacques Rancière’s theory of “sympathetic poetics,” and contemporary vegan theory. The paper locates an aesthetics of sympathetic action in Lynch’s cinematography. For Adorno, the problem with aesthetic approaches to social and political injustice, is that they tend to render suffering in consumable form. The paper argues that Lynch’s *sympatheia* of the flesh expunges consumability.

Is the Future of Speculative Realism in the Study of Literature?

The movement of speculative realism has, in the 15 years of its existence, seeped into all spheres of academia, most notably the humanities and the arts even though it is made up of four distinctive, almost opposing philosophies. Interestingly, since the philosophies of the creators of the movement are so vastly different, their one common point of interest is found in literature, in the supernatural world created by the famous author H. P. Lovecraft. In recent years, speculative realism has been mainly present in the fields outside of philosophy, which asserts the theories as being appropriate in comprehending the complex world of the 21 st century. This presentation aims to give brief accounts on the ways in which literature can be observed through the philosophical lenses of the four main founders of speculative realism in order to determine the possibility of these philosophies remaining a part of the literary discourse.

Novels of the Future: Eugene Lim and Jang Jung-il

Eugene Lim's novel *Search History* from 2021, David O'Reilly's video game *Everything* from 2017, and Jang Jung-il's novel *When Adam Opens His Eyes* from 1990, are used to develop a theory regarding *algorithmic intimacy* in order to address what Hannes Bajohr names "the paradox of anthroponormative restriction," where AI is only considered sentient when it replicates the human, rather than creating works valued according to an alternative, or even their own, set of criteria. Therefore an argument to write with AI, in order to avoid the normative tendencies of both human and computer, could be a strategy for creating something new. This does not mean blindly following an algorithm's lead, for the only way to create meaningful change is to know where best to strike.

Towards a Posthuman/Transhuman World: Posthuman Bodies in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

In Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), posthuman cloned entities who are in less-than-human status are purposefully bred and raised as posthuman bodies (Carroll 26), in an institution that can be correlated with "biotechnological slavery" to become a prosthetic supplement for the "normal" human beings. Their vital organs are harvested to be transplanted into sick or impaired "human" bodies in order to extend their life expectancy and plummet their aging process by replacing their damaged organs, constituting a posthuman assemblage. These alternate humans serve to challenge our conventional ideas about what it means to be a human/posthuman and offer a perfect and poignant example of blurred boundaries between the natural and artificial human bodies through posthuman bodily figures.

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The Shortcomings of Empathy: *On Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go*

The talk is devoted to an analysis of the motive of empathy as elaborated in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me go*. I will demonstrate the way empathy, an ability which is almost universally equated with the basis of prosocial and moral behavior, is presented in this narrative text: it is depicted as an unreliable guide to moral conduct. The possible reasons for such a representation of empathy are elaborated at the end of the talk.

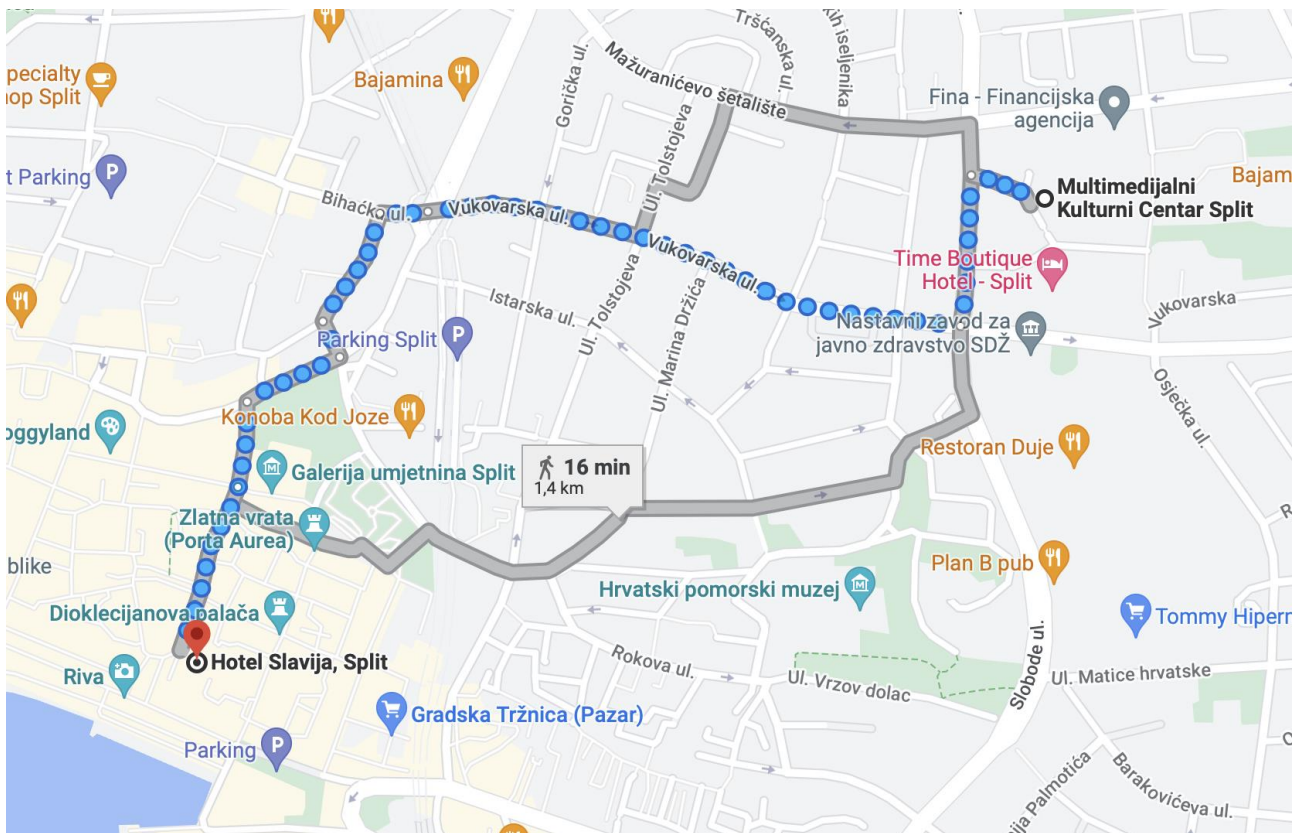
Locations and Other Info

Those of you staying at the hotel, it is Hotel Slavija, Andrije Buvine 2, 21000, Split
tel: +385.21.323.840

It is located in the center of Split's Old Town.

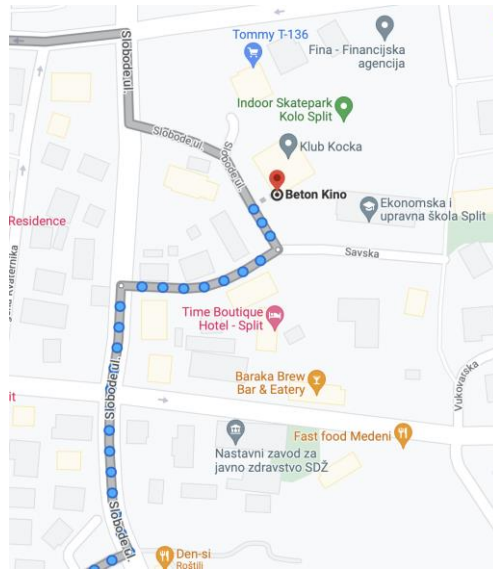
On Thursday, July 5th, Simon and I will reserve some tables at a cafe/bar near the hotel, Academia Club Ghetto. It is just a few steps outside. You can ask at the hotel to point you the right way. We will be there from 8pm.

Here is a map with the walking route from the Hotel to the Venue, MKC Split – Beton Kino. I will meet anyone who would like a ride where you can see the "Parking" sign just below the hotel. I will be there at 9.15 the morning of the conference (In front of the entrance to Diocletian's cellars). There will also be a ride back into town after the conference for the dinner, etc.



(Details about finding Beton Kino on the next page).

The actual location of the conference is at the Beton Kino of the Multimedia Cultural Center, located in the Youth Home (Dom mladih). It is a little tricky to find. The final street Google Maps takes you down is Savska Ulica.



After a minute on this street it will look like this, with a WWII bunker on the right side then the fork going right and left (and down a bit). As the map shows, take the "left"



It will lead you down into a small parking lot. You will then see "Beton Kino" on your left side.

A vegan and vegetarian lunch will be provided at the conference. Dinner will also be provided. We will have it at Pandora Greenbox: <https://www.facebook.com/PandoraGreenbox/>. Reservations for a few drinks afterwards have also been made.

If you have any other questions please feel free to to contact us at any point. Looking forward to getting together!

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