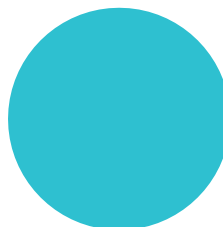




Rethinking the Political: Narrative, Protest and Fiction in the 21st Century

Programme and Abstract Booklet

Monday 9th – Wednesday 11th of September 2024
58-76 Grand Parade, University of Brighton, BN2 0JY



Hosted by



University of Brighton

Centre for Applied
Philosophy, Politics and
Ethics

Programme

Registration | 09:00 - 9:30 | Grand Parade Foyer
Tea & Coffee | 10.00 – 11.00 | Grand Parade Café Foyer

Welcome and Keynote Address:
11.00-12.30 M2 Grand Parade: Chair Mark Devenney

Keynote Address:
Dr German Primera, University of Brighton

**“Colonial Biopolitics and the Arc of Refusal:
rethinking grammars of resistance”**

Lunch | 12.30 – 1.30 | Grand Parade Cafeteria

Session 1: 1.30 – 3.30

Panel 1 What do Novels Do?

Room: M2 Grand Parade | Chair: Charlotte Woodford

Gerard Ronge, Adam Mickiewicz, University of Poznań: Tadeusz Peiper and Rita Felski: Polish contributions to the debate about post-critique.

Ana Tomljenović, University of Zagreb: A Politics of the Death Drive in Ranko Marinković's Never More.

Liam Connell, University of Brighton: Can the Novel Act?

Tomasz Mizerkiewicz, University of Poznan: Novel, Joy, Politics. A Perspective on Children's Games in Oksana Zabuzhko's Museum of Abandoned Secrets and Brygida Helbig-Mischewski's Niebko/Kleine Himmel.



Panel 2 | Thinking the Political Future in the Past Tense:

Room: G4 Grand Parade | Chair: Tanay Gandhi

Mikołaj Dalek, University of Wrocław: Obliteration: Contesting informational entropy in the digital public sphere.

Viktoria Huegel, University of Vienna “Training for the future”: embodied action and radical politics.

Marina Protrka Štimatec, University of Zagreb: Fidelity to our futures past. Miroslav Krleža as a writer of the revolution.

Karlo Drzaic, University of Zagreb: Political Education in the People’s Republic of Croatia.

Coffee & Tea | Grand Parade Café Foyer| 3.30-4.00

Session 2: 4.00 – 5.30

Panel 1 | Remaking the Demos/Polis

Room: G4 Grand Parade | Chair: Craig Jordan-Baker

Wojciech Ufel, University of Wrocław: The “return of tragedy”? Challenging visions and narratives of rethinking democracy.

Clare Woodford, University of Brighton, UK: Politics within or outside the polis? How to (re)turn to the city, or perhaps discover that we never left it.

Tim Christiaens, University of Tilburg: Cyberfascism in Italian Theory.

Panel 2 | Rebellious Fictions

Room: M2 Grand Parade | Chair: Tara Talwar Windsor

Andrea Milanko, University of Zagreb Models of Rebellion and Novel's Grace.

Arianna Preite and Chiara Xausa, University of Bologna: New technologies of



re/production and a world beyond the family: Tlotlo Tsamaase's Womb City and Virtual Snapshots.

Patrick Eiden-Offe, Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung: Is it (still) O.K. to be an anti-fascist? Looking back at Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow after 50 years.

**5.30-7.45: CHEESE and WINE RECEPTION:
Grand Parade Café & Foyer**

The Politics of Publishing, Writing and Performance

Independent Bookshops and the Politics of Writing (Chair Vedrana
Velickovic)

Carolynn Bain (Afrori Books) and Ivana Drazic (Booksa Zagreb)
in conversation

The Novel and the Poem: Award Winning
Novelists and Poets read work in progress

Alice O'Malley-Woods
Natasha Kennedy
Éloïse O'Dwyer-Armary
Craig Jordan-Baker (Chair)



TUESDAY 10th of SEPTEMBER

Late Registration | 09:00 - 9:30 | Grand Parade Foyer

Keynote Lecture: 9.30 – 11.00 | M2 Grand Parade |

Chair: Joanna Kellond

Professor Moya Lloyd, University of Essex
**Radical corporeal politics: Flesh as a locus of
political struggle.**

Tea and Coffee Grand Parade Café Foyer: 11.00-11.30

Session 3: 11.30-1.30

Panel 1 | The Politics of Capitalism in Question?

Room: G4 Grand Parade, | Chair: German Primera

Sue Lucas, Area Dean Waltham Forest: The Paradoxical Practice of Politics against the Contradictions of Capitalism.

Ante Andabak, University of Zagreb: Towards a Marxist Conceptualisation of the Political.

Alexandra van Laeken, University of Ghent: Who's Afraid of the Subject? On the emancipatory potential of aesthetic practices from Althusser to Badiou and Rancière.

Inka Maria Vilhelmiina Hiltunen, University of London: Exploring new modes of subsumption of labour under capital in financialization – and the battle against.

Panel 2 | Decolonial Narratives

Room: M2 Grand Parade | Chair: Natasha Kennedy

Tim Huzar, Kings College, London Apprehending Wayward Lives: Rethinking the Temporality of Politics.



Chalo ũa Waya University of Cambridge: Negotiating globality: critical Afropolitanism as epistemic self-assertion in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Americanah.

Noirin MacNamara, TU Dublin: On the necessities of ceding ground: Bringing the work of Bracha Ettinger, Judith Butler and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí into conversation.

Samuel Rua-Nimetz, University of Brighton The Coloniality of Political Boundary Making.

Lunch| Grand Parade Cafeteria | 1.30 – 2.30

Session 4: 2.30 – 4.30

Panel 1 | Queer Imaginaries 1

Room: M2 Grand Parade | Chair: Vedrana Velickovic

Roel Wolters, Radboud University: Ironizing the Witch-hunts and the Politics of Androcentrism.

Joanna Kellond, University of Brighton: The Church Fathers of Staten Island: Mobilising Speculative Fiction Against the Speculative Fictions of Male Supremacy in Everything for Everyone: An Oral History of the New York Commune 2052-2072.

Błażej Warkocki, A.Mickiewicz University, Poznań Poland Politics, Protest and the Anthology of Polish Queer Literature.

Natasha Kennedy, University of Brighton: Hetero-lingualism as literary activism: resisting oppression through (e)strangement of language.

Panel 2 | Theorising Political Forms

Room: G4 Grand Parade| Chair: Liam Connell

Zrinka Bozic, University of Zagreb: The politicisation of form: rethinking the political in literature.

Mark Devenney, University of Brighton: What 'is' the Political? The politics of the verb 'to be'.



Zvonomir Glavaš, University of Zagreb: The protean eschaton: on the actuality, contradictions and limits of Bloch's utopian Marxism.

Alice Romagnoli, Università degli Studi di Macerata: Politics in crisis: past, present and futures.

Coffee & Tea | Grand Parade Café Foyer| 4.30-500

Session 5: 5.00 – 6.30

Panel 1 | The Politics of Anthropocentrism Room: Room M2 Grand Parade| Chair Mark Devenney

Luke Edmeads, University of Brighton: Democracy at the limits of subjectivity: Animals, Humans, Objects.

Sophia Hatzisavvidou, University of Bath Finding the political in climate fiction: envisioning nature on a climate-changed planet.

Azucena Blanco, University of Granada: End(s) of the World, Temporality and New (Ec)ontologies in the Global Novel.

Panel 2 Queer Imaginaries 2: Room: Room G4 Grand Parade| Chair: Vedrana Velickovic

Polina Whitehouse, University of Oxford: Utopia as Feminist Method.

Lucile Richard, University of Oxford: Towards a Coalition of the (Un-)Cared For? Feminist Care Politics, the “Care Crisis” and the (Under)theorization of Care Receiving.

Elena Betti, Queer Form, Intertextuality and Political Reimagination in Olivia Laing’s The Lonely City.

Conference Dinner | New Era Chinese Restaurant| 8.00pm 6B Queens Road, Brighton, BN1 3WA



WEDNESDAY 11th of SEPTEMBER

Grand Parade M2: 9.30-11.00

Chair: Mark Devenney

Can we theorise 'The Political'?

**Alan Finlayson, German Primera, Moya Lloyd, Zrinka Bozic and
Joanna Kellond in Discussion**

Coffee & Tea | Grand Parade Café Foyer | 11.00-11.30

Session 6: 11.30 to 13.30

Panel 1 | Decolonial Politics 2

Room: G4 Grand Parade | Chair: Joanna Kellond

David Ventura, University of Newcastle Time and the Middle Passage in Édouard Glissant's Thought.

Chris Griffin, University of Brighton Representation and Overrepresentation: Anticolonial Counternarratives in the Novel.

Eric Bergman, University of Zagreb War, Race, and National Belonging as Politics in Veijo Baltzar's *Polttava tie*.

Rumana Hashem, University of Brighton: Racialised sexism and gendered precarity: Untangling unlivability for Im/migrant women of colour in 21st century Britain.

Panel 2 | Thinking the Politics of Fiction

Room: M2, Grand Parade | Chair: Liam Connell

Ivana Perica, Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung: Politics and Literature: Novels from the New Century.



Adrián Viéitez Torrado University of Granada: Don't want to be free want to be with you: political contradictions within Anne Carson and Ursula K. LeGuin's work.

Mirela Dakic, University of Zagreb: The life of genre: tracing the political in the political novel between literature and sociology.

Nenad Ivić University of Zagreb: Coup d'état: The technique of the novel – Mario Vargas Llosa's Tiempos Recios.

Lunch 13.30 – 14.15| Grand Parade Cafeteria

Conference Keynote and Closing Session: Chair Liam Connell
14.15 – 3.45 M2 Grand Parade

Professor Alan Finlayson, University of East Anglia

A Hero's Journey? Ideological Entrepreneurs
and Reactionary Digital Politics



Abstracts

Ante Andabak | University of Zagreb | aandabak@m.ffzg.hr

Towards a Marxist Conceptualisation of the Political

In rethinking politics for the 21st century, one could, on the face of it, hardly find a less suitable candidate to serve as a guide and an aide than Karl Marx. From the catastrophic consequences of the 'really existing socialism' (Alec Nove) to the fact that, quite apart from those historical experiences, his theory is frequently billed as economistic and therefore seen as being directly opposed to understanding politics as an autonomous field of action and a subject of study. However, things are far more complex and deserving of greater scholarly attention than the received wisdom might lead one to believe. One very telling and often overlooked point is the great importance Marx accorded to the position of the Irish working class in England and of the Afro-Americans in the USA and the specific political problems they faced which were not due to their economic circumstances. And, indeed, ever since the Political Marxism of Robert Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood in the late '70s, there has been a steady stream of very valuable explorations of the status of the political in Marx's writings (in the last decade alone, there were important contributions by William Clare Roberts, Tony Smith, Isabelle Garo, Alexandros Chrysis, Satoshi Matsui, Levy del Aguila Marchena...).

One of the major contemporary Marxist economists, Andrew Kliman, has an especially noteworthy approach. He is working in the tradition of Raya Dunayevskaya, a political and theoretical firebrand, a pioneer of intersectional Marxism, and one of the most insightful, if unfortunately commonly overlooked Marxists of the 20th century. Kliman on the one hand objects to political voluntarism, warning that the overcoming of the capitalist mode of production quite clearly can't happen by 'politics alone', while at the same time staunchly criticising a common type of leftist politics which focuses solely on the economic problems while sidestepping or even downplaying other political causes. Women, black and LGBTQIA+ emancipation, among many other liberatory struggles, must not be put on the backburner in the name of big tent politics which would readily invite in all working-class people without demanding that bigotry be left at the door. The aim of this talk will be to provide a brief survey of these theoretical positions and to further grapple with various facets of



what Theodor W. Adorno called, in his Introduction to Sociology lectures, the ‘ambivalent’ nature of politics in Marx’s thought.

Eric Bergman | University of Zagreb | ebergman@m.ffzg.hr

The Past, Present, and Utopian Futures of Race and Politics in Veijo Baltzar’s *Polttava tie*

The goal of this paper is to join the discussion in the subfield of Critical Race Narratology (e.g., Weik von Mossner, Mikić & Grill 2023) to better understand the representations and implications of race in Finland in the past, present, and future. The text under analysis is Veijo Baltzar’s 1968 novel *Polttava tie*, the first novel published by a Roma in Finland, which has thus far not analyzed by scholars. In the novel, race goes from being a textual artifact indicating the historicized sociocultural, economic, and political context to becoming a constituent part of the formal aspects of the text itself. Race is the basis of the ‘us’ and ‘them,’ the inside and outside of society and spheres of the story, which extends to characterization, focalization, processes, emotions and experiences, and, as handled in detail here, time.

In the past and present of the storyworld, which are covered in Part I of the novel (chapters 1–7), Roma’s marginalization and subjugation are explicitly and often tied to race. Though the character narrator Viktor is conscripted into the military, for example, he and other Roma are categorically rejected from most other forms of national belonging (Anderson 2006) based on their race. However, Part II of the novel, a single chapter, jumps forward to an imaginary utopian future in which race will cease to meaningfully exist. In the meantime, Viktor and his family hold on tightly to what is beneficial in their Romani identity (community, helping others, generosity) while accessing that which is good in Finnish society (education, housing, and jobs) and rejecting what is harmful (capitalistic competition).

This paper argues that Baltzar’s proposed and imagined assimilation process can be understood as a kind of in-betweenness that has, with meaningful differences, in fact occurred in Finland since the novel’s publication (The Finnish Roma Policy Programme 2023–2030). One important difference is that, as one of the EU’s most racist countries (FRA), racism has not disappeared from Finland. For this reason, it is imperative to better understand the racist tropes, stereotypes, and narrative



techniques used in the past in Finland so that we may be more attuned to their variants and echoes today. It is only by honestly contending with the past that we might hope to make Viktor's future less utopian.

Elena Betti | elenabetti2@gmail.com

Queer Form, Intertextuality and Political Reimagination in Olivia Laing's *The Lonely City*

This paper explores Olivia Laing's *The Lonely City* as a compelling case study for examining how form can aesthetically shape and inform content. Although not a novel, Laing's text employs a diverse range of narrative techniques, defined as a queer form, to craft political content that challenges and reconfigures our understanding of socio-political structures. Using memoir's capacity for deep emotional and psychological exploration, as well as autotheory's self-reflexive approach, Laing reveals the fractured and contingent nature of urban life. Her narrative structure, blending personal anecdotes with art criticism, cultural history, and critical theory, creates a multifaceted view of loneliness that interrogates conventional political narratives.

This paper argues that Laing's use of personal narrative not only depicts but actively remakes the political by proposing new ways of understanding community and care. The queer form she employs allows her to weave together disparate elements – personal experiences, historical contexts, and theoretical insights – into a cohesive critique of political exclusion and a vision for new forms of living together. By employing intertextuality and by practicing reparative reading, defined by Eve K. Sedgwick, Laing reimagines kinship within her text while simultaneously retrieving a fragmented self, proposing alternative forms of connection that deviate from normative structures. This talk will aim to demonstrate how Olivia Laing's *The Lonely City* exemplifies the use of a queer form to aesthetically remake the political by revealing and challenging the exclusionary foundations of urban life, thereby offering innovative perspectives on community, care, and the possibilities of collective existence.



Azucena G. Blanco | University of Granada | azucena@ugr.es

End(s) of the World, Temporality and New (Ec)ontologies in the Global Novel

I consider that the current “malaise of culture”, to paraphrase Freud, lies in a pessimism that is connected, in turn, to two other crises: the current crisis of temporality and the crisis of modern ontology. The first, as a consequence of temporal alienation and of the incapacity to envisage redeeming utopias that the environmental crisis has emphasized, and the second, which now defines a subject as transitory and becoming, and not as substance.

In the debate on the “global novel”, I propose a revision of the temporal alienation that acquires a clear impact in novels with ecological and biopolitical themes. In this context, it is necessary to rethink new temporalities (heterotemporalities) as a critique of capitalist Modernity, as an opening of the world (worldly) and, thus, search for a new ethical telos as (ec)ontologies for a time of care. Keywords: Temporal alienation; Global Novel; Econtology; Care; Dysphoria; Hypommenata; Heterotemporalities; Sensorium.

Zrinka Bozic | University of Zagreb | zrinka.bozic@ffzg.unizg.hr

Politicisation of form, rethinking the political in literature

In the last two decades, it has been repeatedly noted that the concept of formalism has acquired a bad reputation in the age of historicism (or various historicisms) (Culler, Loesberg, Levinson). Under the influence of post-structuralism, the comprehensive attempts at systematisation that were characteristic of the structuralist tradition of thought were gradually abandoned. As they considered this impossible and politically inappropriate, literary scholars turned to analysing individual topics from a historical and interdisciplinary perspective. This opening up of literary studies to other disciplines led on the one hand to an extraordinary creativity and heterogenisation of literary studies, but on the other hand also to a neglect of classical literary studies knowledge: genre theory, novel theory, the basics of verse theory, rules of rhythm and the like. Instead, literary studies turn to problems of language, identity, the body, hybridity, desire, sexuality, power, liminality and so on. So when Culler, Loesberg and Levinson speak of various historicisms, they are not referring to the new historicism, but to the state of the discipline after the post-structuralist heyday of the theory. As a result, today formalist close reading is often strictly separated from the historical study of the socio-political aspects of literature, with the latter being favoured under the pretext that the insistence on



formal analysis is outdated. Formalism, as Culler emphasised almost two decades ago, does not reject historical interpretation, but those approaches that see the literary work as a symptom that has its causes in historical reality. This will be the starting point for a new formalism, expressed on the one hand in the works of contemporary authors such as Caroline Levine or Anna Kornbluh, but also for a renewed interest in aesthetics placed in a socio-political perspective (Armstrong, Loesberg, Rancière). According to Levine, formalist analysis is a valuable approach for understanding socio-political institutions as well as for reading literary works. We are surrounded by forms, they are everywhere, which is why they should not be reduced to the aesthetic sphere. They belong equally to philosophy, mathematics, military science and crystallography, Levine claims.

The aim of this paper is to examine the new formalist claims in relation to the rich Eastern and Central European theoretical tradition of so-called old formalism and its specific approach to form in order to clarify whether the so-called politicisation of form is a new phenomenon or a suppressed and neglected aspect of the formalist tradition since its beginnings in the wake of the October Revolution and in the context of the artistic and literary practise of the avant-garde.

Tim Christiaens | Tilburg University | (t.christiaens@tilburguniversity.edu)

Cyberfascism in Italian Theory

With the rise of social media and AI, fascist discourse and political tactics have moved into a new era. While there are clear resonances between the public rallies and speeches of, for example, Donald Trump and Benito Mussolini, late fascism today would never have been so successful without the online war machine of the alt-right. The online far-right is composed of white supremacists, a resentful manosphere of incels and gaming geeks, 'edgelord' New Atheists, and even trolls without ideological commitment who are there only "for the lulz". Maurizio Lazzarato has called this patchwork, loosely kept together through the viral dynamics of social media, 'cyberfascism'. Using the notion of plebiscitarian public sphere as developed in the writings of Giorgio Agamben, Alberto Toscano, and Alessandro Baricco, I argue that there is an elective affinity between fascism and social media that becomes visible in the tactics of the cyberfascism. While social media do not cause fascist upsurges, their design is also not neutral to political struggle. They constitute a unique terrain in



which some political tactics operate better than others. Social media establish an attention market that thrives on engagement and cults of personality that fit extraordinarily well with the fascist understanding of the public sphere as the domain of acclamation for a political leader. Cyberfascism constitutes the right's response to the structural transformation of the public sphere in the age of social media.

Sarah Colvin | University of Cambridge

Horrible Histories: Epistemic Ghosting in Zimbabwe and Ukraine, in novels by NoViolet Bulawayo and Serhiy Zhadan

Epistemic injustice controls by eliminating its targets' experience from collective memory and narratives. *Epistemic ghosting* denies or ignores knowledge and memory. People are not only ghosted or treated as non-existent in the present but their experience and knowledge of the past is erased.

Serhiy Zhadan's *Voroshilovgrad* was published in 2010 and is set in a fictional Ukraine in the early 2000s: an imaginative world where the dead and the living intermingle. The narrator-protagonist, Herman Korolyov, travels back to the world of his childhood to deal with his brother's disappearance (or perhaps his death). Herman has ghostly encounters and even plays a football match on a team of ghosts. In going back, he addresses *epistemic loss* – the loss of stories and people associated with his childhood in a differently narrativized Ukraine. In going back, he deals (and indeed allies himself with) with the spirits who linger.

NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *Glory* (2022) plays in a fictional Zimbabwe. The protagonist, Destiny, is (like Herman) coming back or returning, and like Herman she is met by ghosts and hauntings from a past that has not been dealt with. Unlike Herman, Destiny does not survive her own story - about a third of the novel plays out after her death, in her ghostly or haunting presence.

My paper will explore how the novels seek to do justice to hidden or obliterated experience. I will read them as in some sense ghost stories; the stories of, as Sara Ahmed puts it, 'spirits who linger [...] because of the violence that has not been dealt with'. They address history and politics and seek epistemic or (to borrow David Lloyd's term) poetic justice.



Liam Connell | University of Brighton | l.j.connell@brighton.ac.uk

Can the Novel Act?

Starting with Hannah Arendt's conception of politics as action I ask how this allows us to understand something that we might call the political novel. I begin by briefly reviewing some of Arendt's chief contentions principally: her distinction between work and action, which may consign philosophy/aesthetics and politics to separate spheres; the innate plurality of action, as one of its distinguishing features; the link between the concept of action and citizenship; and the conflation of action and speech. From here I ask how we can apply these contentions to the novel as a form of speech that is plural and 'in public'?

In response to this question I turn to some well-established debates within literary studies to think about whether, and how, a political novel can be understood as a form of action. This includes a consideration of Barthes' notion of the readerly [lisible] and writerly [scriptible] text, offers opposing notions of politics: either a command model in which texts act upon the reader, or an activist model in which texts are the co-productions of reader and written objects. Relatedly I reflect on the idea of the novel's voice and consider critical work that has tried to identify reading with hearing. Lastly, I consider theories of reading, which on the one hand construe the novel as a form of private contemplation, and on the other, such as in modernist theories of the nation, highlight the capacity of the novel to situate readers within an imagined public.

I conclude by briefly contrasting Diana Evans' *Ordinary People* (2018) with Colson Whitehead's *The Nickel Boys* (2019), both shortlisted for the Orwell Prize for Political Fiction, to speculate about how they help us to understand the 'political novel' in the context of this discussion.

Mirela Dakic | University of Zagreb | mdakic2@m.ffzg.unizg.hr

The life of genre: tracing *the political* in the political novel between literature and sociology

Between the most influential contributions to the question of the politics of literature and the integral approaches to the political novel as a genre, the paper will offer an insight into the methods of analysis of the literary field developed at the interface of literary studies and sociology. Although the relationship between the analysis of the literary text and the historical, social, economic, political and cultural context of its production and reception is one of the main points of discussion and divergence in this interdisciplinary endeavour, methods and approaches such as Franco Moretti's



“sociological formalism” attempt to bridge this gap. Drawing on Moretti’s analyses of the novel published in the last two decades, we will turn to the influence of formalist conceptions of literature and literary history on contemporary literary studies and discuss their relevance for the theoretical and historical study of the political novel. Although the story of the life of a particular genre can be told from different perspectives, one that attempts to explain its critical points – beginnings and transformations – requires, according to Moretti, the method of distant reading and formalist critical vocabulary. We will therefore consider what contribution this approach can make to theoretical and critical reflection on the political novel.

Mikołaj Dalek | University of Wrocław

Obliteration: Contesting informational entropy in the digital public sphere

The question of contesting entropy is a question of political imagination: necessitating an inquiry into the bodies of text that undergird it. As outputs of large language models (LLMs), most notably commodified under the branding of ChatGPT, increasingly permeate the digital public sphere, the problem of increasing informational entropy — as understood in terms initially laid out by Bernard Stiegler — becomes one of vital importance. Sharing considerable similarities with the conditions of the climate catastrophe and the Anthropocene epoch at large, the issue of an increasingly entropic informational environment is inextricably tied to the current political-economic order and political practice within the digital, in a tight feedback loop.

This paper intends to problematise the relationship between the digital public sphere and informational entropy, and, consequentially, problematise the continued existence of the digital public sphere itself. This will be achieved, in part, by tracing back the mechanisms which determine the functioning of LLMs as they relate to human public activity in the digital space. From there on, I outline a possible future of negentropic practice, engaging in dialogue with Bogna Konior’s notion of the Internet as a “dark forest”, a concept borrowed from the work of Chinese novelist Liu Cixin. The upshot is a sketch of one possible transformation of the digital public sphere in the 21st century.



Mark Devenney | University of Brighton

What 'is' the Political? The politics of the verb 'to be'.

In the 1960s following the French reception of Heidegger and in opposition to Marxism, a group of political theorists sought to think the 'political' as ontological. In the later works of Laclau, Mouffe, Marchart and others the Political was characterised as instituting moment of the social. However, following the turn to Heidegger's ontology, because there is no ultimate ground for any social order these theorists concluded that concrete politics is the constant struggle to achieve such grounds, a struggle is necessary but that must fail. All social orders, despite their sedimentation, are vulnerable to rearticulation. Yet, despite the contingency of all social orders, the classic gesture achieved here is to find a moment that is not subject to change, that is itself the motor of all change. Rendered exempt from politics, ontology founds (though in post-foundational terms) all actual political struggles. I argue that this ontology is in fact deeply political, and worse that it replicates an unconscious coloniality. This renders it deeply problematic when trying to comprehend the climate crisis and histories of coloniality. First, it cannot comprehend that what its ontology characterises as 'mere objects' might challenge the basic distinction between being and existence. I begin this critique by returning to the 'mere object'. Second, it presumes a politics of identification that partially grounds social order. However, this account of identification derived from Freud, presumes an ontological need that is a form of anthropomorphism, and that repeats racist tropes. Here I draw on Derrida's account of 'the animal' and contemporary Black pessimist thought. Last, I reject the link between this ontology and populist politics. For post-foundational theorists, populism is the royal road to the Political - echoing Freud's account of the dream. If the ontology is problematic then so too is this reductive approach that assumes that the political is of necessity populist. I characterise democratic politics in terms of the future perfect – a tense that scrambles any claim to being, and confuses any conception of linear time.

Karlo Držaić | University of Zagreb

Political Education in the People's Republic of Croatia: What Did SKOJ Members Read?

The period from the end of World War II until mid-1948, marked by the conflict with the Cominform and the Soviet Union, was a transformative era in the history of socialist Yugoslavia on many levels. Alongside the rapid establishment of government structures, largely modelled on Soviet experiences, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia sought to introduce programs to rapidly combat illiteracy and poor education among the population, while simultaneously reshaping the educational system to align with the ruling ideology. The Young Communist League of Yugoslavia (SKOJ) played a



crucial role in this process, being an organization of young people destined to become members of the Communist Party and leaders of socialist society in Yugoslavia.

In this paper, I will analyse the Marxist political education of SKOJ members during the period leading up to the beginning of de-Stalinization through the courses and training they attended, but primarily through the books they read. By applying narratological concepts, I will explore the strategies used in these texts to disseminate the ruling ideology in the broader socio-political context of creating a "socialist man."

Luke Edmeads | University of Brighton | l.edmeads2@brighton.ac.uk

Experiments with Subjectivity: Animals, Humans, Objects

In this paper I offer a reassessment of democracy through an examination of the differentiation between animals, humans, and objects, highlighting the underlying currents of domination and precarity within these distinctions. I posit that challenging and dismantling these binaries gestures towards an equality beyond human subjects, considering the interdependence between human and non-human entities.

I address the violent relegation of animals and objects as 'other' to humans, underscoring the political implications of constructing a separation between human and non-human. This division perpetuates the exploitation and commodification of animal life and non-human objects, positioning humans as dominant subjects and animals as mere objects. However, acknowledging the 'animality' within humans challenges and disrupts these distinctions. I draw on Theodor Adorno's readings of animality in Kafka's work to point beyond this distinction, showing the limits of constitutive human subjectivity. I argue that through gestures towards animality, Kafka shows how human and non-human life is implicated by one another. I then examine a similar undoing of these violent relations in Julia Armfield's *Our Wives Under the Sea* which I contend remakes humans in relation to the objects that it has been constructed in opposition to. I contend that merely advocating for an expanded definition of what constitutes 'humans', 'animals' and 'objects' falls short. Rather, this acknowledgment requires a radical change to these terms. In undoing these relational sets, we open up the possibility of openness that is not pre-defined by exclusion, suffering, and repression. I conclude by suggesting that this poses challenges to anthropocentric notions of democracy,



extending to a broader democratic ethos that transforms our understanding of non-humans in social and political life.

Patrick Eiden-Offe | Leibniz-Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung Berlin | eiden-offe@zfl-berlin.org

Is it (still) O.K. to be an anti-fascist? Looking back at Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow after 50 years

My talk aims in two, hopefully convergent, directions:

Firstly, a reassessment of Pynchon's seminal novel in the light of current debates about the political and the political novel. Pynchon's novel already reflects on what the Call for papers refers to as the collapse of a 'common ontology' of the political; Pynchon's points of reference are colonialism, gender relations and the history of science. My revision will also take a look at the German translation of the novel by the feminist communist writer and later Nobel Prize winner Elfride Jelinek.

Secondly, a reassessment of our current debates in the light of Pynchon's novel. Given the rise and strengthening of neo-fascist and neo-authoritarian movements and regimes not only around the world, but also in the core zones of liberal-parliamentary capitalism, one might assume that the politics and literature of anti-fascism should also be gaining momentum again. This is clearly not the case.

So, whatever happened to the attitude and literature of anti-fascism, that is obviously missing just when we need it most? In my talk I will show how Pynchon manages to install anti-fascism as an integrating political perspective in the ontologically broken and fragmented world he shows us in his novel. It will have to be discussed what consequences can be drawn from this thesis for a debate on the political novel, if it proves to be correct.



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A Hero's Journey? Ideological Entrepreneurs and Reactionary Digital Politics

Alan Finlayson is Professor of Politics at the University of East Anglia. His research combines contributions to the development of democratic political and cultural theory with the theoretical, historical and interpretive analyses of the ideologies that shape political culture, political economy and 'governmentality'. He has particular expertise in the theoretical and practical study of rhetoric, having developed "Rhetorical Political Analysis" which he has applied variously to the study of policy, political performance and protest songs. He is currently co-authoring a book which analyses the rhetoric and ideology of 'Reactionary Digital Politics'.. He has published widely in political and social thought, including in *Political Studies*, *Soundings*, and *Theory, Culture and Society*. In this lecture he will discuss how digital platforms and their uses are changing how we encounter and experience politics, in ways which are advantageous to conservative, right-wing and far-right politics.

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The protean *eschaton*: on the actuality, contradictions and limits of Bloch's utopian Marxism

Ernst Bloch, "always a rebel" (Boldyrev 2014) and a "consistent heretic whose evasive coherence and inability to win his contemporaries to his insights was the price he paid for his originality" (Hudson 1982), never formed a school of thought or had a group of disciples. Yet despite the accusations made by some influential Marxists as early as the 1960s that his thought was retrograde and long outdated, some authors have repeatedly pointed to its potential to be the guiding thread in various (contemporary) attempts to rejuvenate Marxism. The decisive factor that predestines Bloch for such a role is undoubtedly the overtly political dimension of his "activist metaphysics" (Moir 2019). However, although his utopian philosophy offers a wealth of starting points for a productive exchange with contemporary approaches to questions of the political, it is also not free of contradictions, which become particularly apparent in this context.



Adorno was already suspicious of Bloch's philosophy, as he judged any form of identity metaphysics and utopian thinking to be essentially totalitarian. On the other hand, Bloch's ontology of the not-yet was a thorn in the side of authoritarian Marxist orthodoxy. Moreover, the eschaton of Bloch's messianic thought is said to lie beyond any structure of expectation, yet it is repeatedly expressed in Marxist terms of the classless society, the end of alienation, the "naturalization of man" and the "humanization of nature". And although Bloch was one of the first Marxist philosophers to grapple with the problem of non-contemporaneity and to opt for a philosophy of history that was not so Eurocentric, some critics argue that his utopian thinking occasionally remained too Eurocentric itself. Even though his speculative materialism was a precursor to various contemporary attempts to overcome the strict separation between subject and object and the typically anthropocentric perspective of much of Western philosophy, it can be argued that Bloch's utopian thinking is still based on a rather old-fashioned, traditional humanism. Finally, although Bloch insisted on the universal character of the utopian, he occasionally acknowledged the class character of any utopian projection and the need to combine proleptic utopianism with the critique of ideology.

In this paper, I will explore the potential of these aspects of Bloch's thought to contribute to contemporary political thought, as well as the limitations that arise from the shortcomings and contradictions addressed. The latter will lead me to pose a question about the apparently protean nature of Bloch's eschaton and whether the apparent contradictions could somehow be bridged and reconciled with the help of Ernesto Laclau's political thought and its possible points of contact with Bloch's utopian Marxism.

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Touching and Un-Touching: Dalit Literature as Protest Literature

In this paper, I discuss Dalit literature in Kerala, or, literature written by the lower castes, as a form of protest literature that ethically opposes the continued presence of caste-based violence in India. Dalit literature is often understood to be a literature of "protest" and "historical revisionism", focusing on the "documentation of the violence, oppression and structural inequality" of the caste



order (Gajarawala 2013, 1-2). It is embedded with a “caste consciousness”, due to which it addresses the many aspects of the violence of caste, addressing various aspects of caste violence, including the erasure of Dalits from mainstream literature (Limbale 2004).

In this paper, I explore Malayalam Dalit literature, originating from Kerala, a state in the south-western corridor of India. I analyse the literary works by anti-caste activists and social reformers TKC Vaduthala and C Ayyappan, specifically the short stories *Father, here is Your Scapular* (2017) and *Madness* (2011). The former narrates the story of a Dalit Christian convert Devassy whose humiliation as a Pulaya (the name given to a lower caste) continues despite his conversion to another religion. The latter is the story of “Krishnan Master”, who pretends not to recognise his mad sister because he has become “respectable”, unlike “the rest of his lot”, who remain “awfully backward”.

Written in the register of autobiographies, I discuss the various narratological strategies the authors use to foreground the authenticity of experiences faced by the protagonists. In both cases, I argue, the authors confront humiliation and shame through the physical and metonymical acts of *touching* and *un-touching* (Guru and Sarukkai 2012). On the one hand, it is Devassy’s eventual discarding and visceral un-touching of the scapular that challenges the reformist rhetoric of British missionary work in India in the 19th and 20th centuries. On the other hand, Krishnan’s refusal to acknowledge his sister’s insanity forces him to confront his own “untouchable” status and his fractured sense of identity. By situating these works within a philosophical framework of touching and shaming, I argue that Dalit literature becomes a form of poetic justice, exposing the everyday functioning of caste society and revealing its violent inner workings.

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Representation and Overrepresentation: Anticolonial Counternarratives in the Novel

Current efforts to account for the coloniality of our prevailing political formations must reckon with the contingency and constructedness of the narratives that have produced them. If this has so far proven impossible, it is not only because the “truthfulness” of these narratives is constitutive of the episteme of Man, thus shaping possibility itself, but also because this regime is sustained by the discursive form in which truthfulness is held in suspension: the novel. Representation is one lens through which to examine this relationship. As well as being a representational medium that is fundamentally depictive and symbolic, the novel is imaginative, requiring and inspiring



representation in thought, while also being a forum for reconceiving the systems of representation and delegation intrinsic to contemporary electoral democracies. Because these three forms of representation have contributed to what Sylvia Wynter calls the “overrepresentation” of Man—the synecdochic belief that the subject of European humanism stands for the human in general—the novel is a potential source of anticolonial narratives.

In Annalee Newitz’s *Autonomous*, set in 2144, advances in artificial intelligence have seen robots gain consciousness. In its depiction of nonhuman thought processes, the text reveals that one of the speculative narratives of Man—the Kantian-Hegelian claim that the putative universality of imaginative self-representation legitimises political representation—corresponds more closely with robot consciousness than it does with human consciousness. In showing that this narrative portrays the figure of mechanistic philosophy, not humanity in total, *Autonomous* prepares the way for a counternarrative of representation to appear.

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Racialised sexism and gendered precarity: Untangling unlivability for Im/migrant women of colour in 21st century Britain

This paper addresses oppression and forms of care in modern societies by drawing on sexualised and racialised-gendered abuse, and analyse discourses of gender, race and sexuality by considering mobility and precarity in contemporary Britain. The concept of precarity would be looked at and analysed at two-levels, considering mobility and border struggles, and precariousness at work. In using auto-ethnography and combining event-centric narrative analysis, I will analyse mobility within and beyond Britain (as transnational) and the politics of bordering and belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2011). I will first argue that precarity shapes and reshapes identities of women im/migrants of colour and indeed, any displaced persons of colour - whether they are documented (refugees), citizens who had anchored in Britain as immigrants, and undocumented migrant status – and misrepresent and misrecognise these people as social citizens and nationals eligible for care receiving. My second contention is that the precarious status at work of im/migrant women of colour in the corporeal world enables spaces for identity theft and racialised sexism at work, and imposes new and undeserved identity to highly skilled workers/people who are misrepresented through precarity and who end up submitting to unliveable conditions for work and life. This latter argument draws on



Vicker's (2019)¹ theorisation of immigrants and working class, and how class structures and imperial state policies in capitalist societies - in this case Britain – produce working class and all migrants as workers (low class), simultaneously creating divisions between immigrants and working class British. The former contention is informed by Bhattacharya (2023) that despite its crisis capitalism renews spaces for racism and exclusion, which I argue scapegoats women immigrants of colour in particular and endorses victimisation in racialised sexism and makes it impossible “to build commonality with each other”², thereby promoting vulnerability and uncaring care service for women immigrants.

1 Vickers, T. (2019) *Borders, Migration, and Class in an Age of Crisis : Producing Immigrants and Workers* Bristol: Bristol University Press.

2 Bhattacharya, G. (2023) *The Future of racial capitalism*. UK: Polity Press.

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Envisioning ecopolitical futures: reading climate fiction as political theory

Scholarship on how speculative knowledges can contribute to envisioning better—just, sustainable, feminist—futures is thriving. Although the importance of science and climate fiction for expanding the social and political imagination is now well established, there is less attention to the specific ways in which political theory as a form of speculative knowledge is relevant to this endeavour. This paper calls to attention and defends the speculative quality of political theory by arguing that climate fiction as environmental, political theory can help envision just sustainable futures. Unlike scientific scenarios and canonical theoretical texts, climate fiction has the capacity to foster an understanding of how ecopolitical decisions can shape the future in ways that invoke the mental and affective dimensions of political imagination. To illustrate this argument, the paper turns to Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* as a text where the political encounters the ecological. Focusing on the novel's engagement with questions of institutionalisation, the paper investigates how the colonial logic of global climate governance and the Eurocentric universalism underpinning it are negotiated.



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Exploring the capital-relation under financialization

I bring into conversation few distinct works to examine the subsumption of labour under capital in financialization. Firstly, Christopher J. Arthur's (2022) reconstruction of value theory that shifts the primacy of labour as the substance of value found in Marx to the primacy of the abstract value form, which imposes itself on the content of economic and social life. Secondly, value-debates within financialization-literature. I argue that within Marxism, financialization requires us to integrate the value-form theory with the labour theory of value, and the agency of the state to account for the changing frontiers of capital accumulation. I will show that, first, financial valuation found in mainstream and heterodox economics strikingly reflect the "dual ontology" of capital, proposed by Arthurs. Second, I use Arthur's decisive split of ideality from materiality to propose that alienation is experienced in both sides, capital and labour, since what he calls the "recalcitrance" of labour makes concrete labour incompatible with the ideality of the value form which expects no material barriers. Consequently, capital encounters limits due to the conflict of the abstract with the concrete. That said, I make a detour to critical macro-finance and to the concept of "de-risking state" (Gabor 2020, 2021, 2023) to argue that the state holds a fundamental role in mediating the conflict between the abstract ideality of the (financial) value form, and the concrete materiality (of risk), ensuring the subsumption of living labour, social relations and nature under capital. Lastly, I make the claim that we must take seriously the relative independence of (financialized) value as it is formative of our social relations, in order to account for the concrete forces and dynamics that maintain and reproduce its hegemonic fetishism.

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"Training for the future": embodied action and radical politics

This paper investigates the role of embodiment, and embodied knowledge, for the imagination of democratic futures. The role of bodily presence is an aspect often neglected by political theories of prefiguration, which is why I turn to an archive of artistic practices (including new interview material



with performance artists) following the paradigm of “organic theory”. The project *National Collection* by the performance group *Public Movement*, for example, demonstrates how the modern nation state rest upon its recurring enactment, the inscription onto and reenactment by its bodies; it requires the training of the civic body (Katsof 2022; Marchart 2015). The performance exposes the embodied knowledge that sustains national identity. However, the performance is following its own protocols of performativity; “it enacts what it seeks to show, and to resist” (Butler 2018, 137). More so, *Public Movement* draws on this knowledge to turn participatory art projects into a “training for the future” (Staal/Malzacher 2021). Such performative practices (rhythm, choreographed movement, sound) that re-appropriate public space and reconfigure the ways of how our bodies relate to each other, I argue, are vital to radically re-imagine political life in the 21st century.

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“Apprehending Wayward Lives: Rethinking the Temporality of Politics”

This paper rethinks the intersection of politics and temporality through a close reading of Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*. I argue that Hartman’s method of “fabulation” occasions a space of appearance that spans not just space but also time. For Hannah Arendt, a space of appearance emerges when people gather together synchronically to disclose their unique “whoness.” However, Hartman’s fabulations of the lives of queer Black people in the early 20th century United States suggest that a space of appearance can also manifest diachronically, across temporal disjuncture, as a narrator apprehends the singular uniqueness of those who lived in the past.

I term this mode of attending to another's uniqueness “apprehension” to signal its distinction from representation or recognition. Apprehension concerns the form of existence that becomes apparent in the moment of contact between narrator and narrated, rather than any straightforward representation of an absent other. In fabulating wayward lives, Hartman manifests a form of existence that also implicates her own uniqueness, highlighting the ineluctable relationality of any ethics or politics predicated on singularity and our attending to it.

Hartman’s work thus requires us to rethink the bounds of the political. By revealing how a space of appearance can reverberate across time through the act of apprehension, she expands our sense of what counts as politics and where it can happen. No longer restricted to the formal, synchronic



gathering of citizens, the political becomes a more informal, improper affair, one predicated on the diachronic apprehension of unique singularity in all its unaccountable difference. In this way, Hartman's fabulations sketch the contours of a fugitive politics, one that stands in contrast to any proper accounting of the polis.

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*Coup d'état: The technique of the Novel. Mario Vargas Llosa's *Tiempos recios**

In 2019 Mario Vargas Llosa published a novel *Harsh times (Tiempos recios)*. The novel is set in Guatemala et recounts the successful military coup against president Árbenz Guzmán. The novel, historical and political in the conventional generic sense, offers a blend of established facts and fictional characters and destinies, and draws on a rich tradition of political novel in South America, from Asturias and Roa Bastos, to Carpentier and Márquez etc. The paper proposes a reading of the novel from the standpoint resumed by Alejo Carpentier in *Reasons of state (Recurso del método, 1974)*: “Descartes amid carnivorous plants”, through the lense of Curzio Malaparte’s *Coup d’état: the technique of the Revolution (Technique du coup d’état, 1931)* to examine the political rationale of Vargas Llosa’s narrative rendering and its world-effect.

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The Church Fathers of Staten Island: Speculative Fictions of, and against, Christian Nationalism and Gender Traditionalism in *Everything for Everyone: An Oral History of the New York Commune 2052-72*

Speculative fiction has long been considered a tool of political intervention. Since the 1970s, feminist writers have produced speculative texts that “draw people away from common sense reality to an alternative political world” (Mukerji 2021). Such works, for instance the novels of Ursula Le Guin and Margaret Atwood, often employ the speculative mode to draw out the implications of norms and ideologies that circulate in contemporary society. At the same time, political actors are well-known for weaving ‘speculative fictions’ that leverage power in the present by conjuring imaginary futures. Today, on the populist right, the politics of fear are driven by notions of a ‘Great Replacement,’ an



imagined result of immigration, and Christian nationalist discourse warns of an impending apocalypse that can only be averted by shoring up the nuclear family and binary gender norms.

Conceptualising speculative fiction as something that circulates in culture and politics, contesting the distinction between them, this paper turns to a recent fictional work that employs the speculative mode: *Everything for Everyone: An Oral History of the New York Commune 2052-72* (Abdelhadi and O'Brien 2022). Focusing on one of the text's fictional interviews, 'S. Addams on the Church Fathers of Staten Island,' the paper reads this account as a speculative rejoinder to the fictions of Christian nationalism and anti-gender politics that are increasingly prominent in a range of contexts around the world. Through this analysis, the paper aims to contribute to understanding and theorising the fictionality of politics, and the political character of fiction, foregrounding the place of literature in countering increasingly reactionary political discourse.

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Hetero-lingualism as literary activism: resisting oppression through strangement of language

In Rebecca F Kuang's 2022 acclaimed novel *Babel*, language becomes a resource of Empire, and a means to a colonial end. Feigning a scholarly façade, Kuang's Oxford-based Translators' Institute is in fact a powerhouse where translation matches inscribed on silver enable the expansion of the British Empire through magic. At the same time, whilst "native speakers" are praised for their insights into their languages, they are made to behave like "Englishmen", and are constantly discriminated against in the XVIII century Oxbridge setting. Though a fantasy novel, this story makes a strong political statement that linguistic resources and the exploitation of those are similar to that of material resources and peoples around the world under British Imperialism.

With the expansion of the English language, and the often-witnessed repercussion of "native" or "minority" languages falling into disuse or becoming considered as "lesser", language plays a huge part in nationalism and political power dynamics throughout history.

The XVIII and XIX century idea of "national literature" reinforces this notion (Minnaard & Dembeck, 2014), and Myriam Suchet states that our conception of "la langue" is rooted in colonial power dynamics (2014) but addresses a form of literature that deconstructs these ideals.

Heterolingualism (coined by Grutman in 1997) is the creative use of multiple languages in a single text, but it is also a means of rethinking language (Suchet, 2014). Drawing on examples from Suchet's *L'imaginaire Hétérolingue* and my own ongoing research on contemporary heterolingual poetry, my paper will look at the ways in which heterolingualism can be a factor in the XX and XXI



century political novel (or poetry) by “stranging” the language used and disrupting the supposed monolingual hegemony.

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Radical corporeal politics: Flesh as a locus of political struggle

From Aristotle onwards, politics has been associated with ideas about speech and language. Indeed, man has been assumed to be political precisely because of language use. This downplays not just the significance of corporeality and the ways in which agency is embodied but also the political significance of bodily actions that are not immediately or directly reducible to discourse, speech or language. In this paper I take as my starting point Jacques Rancière’s account of disidentification. Disidentification is his term for the ways in which policed identities are rejected, equality is enacted, and democratic subjectivation takes place. It thus offers an account of the agency of the excluded but, crucially, one that centres on speech as the real locus of political activity. Reading Rancière against the grain in this talk I seek to re-read disidentification (also) as a corporeal practice. To do so I discuss a protest that took place in Bolivia in 2007, in which protesters employed a range of radical or extreme actions that involved self-harm, self-endangerment, and/or self-mutilation, including hunger striking and lip-sewing. That is, actions that are not always immediately understood as political or agentic. My aim is to show how radical embodied actions such as the above both de- and re-constitute political subjectivities. It will explore how bodies are done and undone through such activity and how in specific contexts flesh becomes the locus of political struggle, a site of agency and contestation, a resource for politics and resistance, a medium through which sensate claims are made, as well as an occasion for disidentification.

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The Paradoxical Practice of Politics against the Contradictions of Capitalism

In *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, David Harvey argues that global crises of the 2007-2008 sort were surface manifestations of the inner contradictions of capital. Nevertheless, in neither Marx nor his followers is there any systematic account of those contradictions. Harvey’s eventual provisional taxonomy of seventeen contradictions, mined from Marx’s own oeuvre, makes clear how interlinked and mutually supportive capital’s contradictions are. What emerges is a more



decentred picture of capital than is usually portrayed, as a ‘violent fusion of disconnected factors operating independently yet correlated within it.’

This paper seeks to respond positively to Harvey’s question at the end of this book: given the contemporary, post-national, post-universal polis, post-colonial site of contemporary politics, what might it look like to develop an anti-capitalist politics that takes seriously the need to oppose capital’s contradictions and develop a new political imaginary of human flourishing? Harvey is clear that the contradictions of capitalism cannot be reduced to questions of race, gender, or queerness; nor is it that to be a feminist or queer theorist or anti-racist is necessarily to be anti-capitalist. This paper argues that sites of feminist, queerness race and gender, in opposition to the contradictions of capital, offer not a contradictory, but a paradoxical space of interest, in which, through performative practices such as community organising, alliances of interest become possible ways of constructing just such a new political imaginary.

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Reading the Novel in the Context of Anthropocenic Disruption

The paper explores how reading novels in the Anthropocene era affects our understanding of fiction. The core argument is that the climate crisis and planetary destruction necessitate a new politics centred on ecological ethics in reading practices.

The first part is an analysis of the concept of “scale framing,” as laid out by Timothy Clark in his book *Ecocriticism on the Edge*. Clark’s theory urges readers and critics to reconsider the scale at which we understand novels, reflecting on anthropogenic impacts on the environment. The Anthropocene challenges our perceptions of the future, present and past. It shifts our sense of the future by highlighting the potential unviability of human living conditions if current trends continue. It changes our understanding of the present by emphasizing our deep entanglement with nonhuman and nonbiological systems, urging us to re-evaluate the implications of everyday actions. The Anthropocene also reconfigures our sense of the past, diminishing the significance of events like territorial wars compared to environmental impacts such as the introduction of invasive species.

The paper then uses a well-known example of “petrofiction,” Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*, in order to illustrate the implications of reading a novel using different scales. *On the Road* has had a



demonstrable and material impact on the ecosystem, both in terms of the journeys across the Americas it depicts, and also in its afterlife as an inspiration for the modern travel economy. Drawing on the methodology proposed by Clark, the paper offers a scalar reading of the novel in three timeframes: 1) as a product of the early 1950's, 2) as a product of the era of industrial capitalism, 3) as a product of the Holocene. In the last of these frames, the exigencies of the Anthropocene force us to narrow our focus on the carbon emissions from the protagonists' cars. While the novel promotes environmental carelessness, it also played a crucial role in fostering environmental consciousness and ecological ethics. The conclusion advocates integrating these nuanced values into considerations of Anthropocenic temporality, moving beyond reductionist third-scale readings.

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On the necessities of ceding ground: Bringing the work of Bracha Ettinger, Judith Butler and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí into conversation.

In this paper I outline Bracha Ettinger's matrixial theory, arguing that it demonstrates the embeddedness of a strong orientation toward constant individuation in Western culture, alongside a persistent fear and disavowal of processes of co-emergence at a non-cognitive level of subjectivity.

Judith Butler criticises positioning the generation of mass support for our ideals as the paramount social transformation strategy. They stress the importance also of cultural translation - practices which involve ceding ground. Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí distinguishes between relational, dynamic, fluid social hierarchies organised by seniority, and hierarchies organised by body-reasoning which are oriented toward fixity and certainties. She argues that the structure of Western hierarchies is culturally particular.

Drawing on the work of Bracha Ettinger and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí, I propose that – to enable a rethinking of the political and enact new forms of living in common – the practices of translation that Butler proposes must include an accounting for our orientations and investments within subjectivity, themselves shaped by historical and cultural particularities/societal organising principles.

I propose that matrixial theory provides a robust account for how psychic processes informed by 'body-reasoning' (Oyěwùmí) structure Western orientations. I argue that not accounting the embeddedness of constant individuation and a persistent disavowal of processes of co-emergence at a non-cognitive level of subjectivity sets constraints on processes of social transformation. This limits a re-thinking of the political and the potential development of sensate democracy.



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Models of Rebellion and Novel's Grace

In my paper, I will present both points of contact and dissonance in individual's rebellion by comparing three novels: *Michael Kohlhaas* (1810) by Heinrich von Kleist, *On the Edge of Reason* (1938) by Miroslav Krleža and *Disgrace* (1999) by J. M. Coetzee. *Michael Kohlhaas* has resonated for decades after its publication, being ahead of its time in terms of its style of writing, particularly due to the detached and observational tone. Krleža's novel is noteworthy not only for its choice of first-person narrator by the author who never before or later opted for the same type of narrator, but also because it was received as an allegorical condemnation of Stalinist authoritarianism. *Disgrace* is a novel that "has received more media and scholarly attention than any other work of fiction in all of South Africa's literary history" (Attwell 2016: 191-182), the fact that points to a necessity of re-thinking the political via literature, all the more so since the novel "makes the power relations between males and females, privileged and underprivileged, whites and blacks, and humans and animals dethrone one another's supremacy on an almost daily basis" (Biti 2022: 182).

At first glance, they seem incomparable, being divided by languages, centuries, and geography, but they do share several important features: author's opting for realist exposition, plot's dominance over overtly narrative strategies, narration from protagonist's point of view, and similar plot, namely all three protagonists fall from grace when they dare oppose doxa and political discourse prevalent in their historical period. However, novels' authors go about different routes exploring how literature can tackle the political when politics crumbles. It is my desire to investigate literary devices, techniques, and strategies used to articulate shifting political positions, as well as to outline models of rebellion when battle is fought over and on the battlefield of words.

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Novel, Joy, Politics. A Perspective of Children's Games in Oksana Zabuzhko's Museum of Abandoned Secrets and Brygida Helbig-Mischewski's Niebko/Kleine Himmel

Some of the contemporary theories of new democratic politics return to the lost potentials of the experience of communal joy (B. Ehrenreich, T. Morton). Polish writer and theorist of children's plays, Krystyna Miłobędzka, stressed their possibility to arrange unknown links between most intimate and most common. This will be a starting point for reading two novels referring to the very same girls play called 'niebko' (little heaven) in Poland and "secret" in Ukraine. Drawing from the uncontrolled



creativity and mobility of the forms of children's plays 21st century novels try to unlock spontaneous and joyful ways of political gatherings. The political needs to be shifted to the realm of the novel to become anew a space for rediscovering communal forms of joy. This is one of the reasons why the political novels are energizing readers for more democratic activities. Oksana Zabuzhko (*Museum of Abandoned Secrets*) and Helbig-Mischewski (*Niebko/Kleine Himmel*) help us understand how women's novels are part of unpredictable outbursts reshaping political order through festive joyful events such as Ukrainian Maidan and others.

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Politics and Literature: Novels from the New Century

Taking a historical detour, the paper seeks to examine how literature is rethinking politics in the 21st century and asks about the precursors of this rethinking in the 20th century. It considers the affordances of the political novel of the last century for our present time: while the political novel of the 20th century attempted to compensate for the loss of transcendence by either constructing new political narratives or questioning these constructions, the novel of the 21st century seems to shun any immediate communication with the former's legacy. While the kitschy recycling and derivation of slogans from the political writing of the interwar period or even the rocky 1960s is completely unproductive for a politics and aesthetics of the future, we still need to ask ourselves about literary legacies and their afterlives in contemporary contexts. To this end, I will review the titles that were discussed at the Berlin book club Politics and Literature: Novels for the New Century between October 2023 and July 2024: Natasha Brown's *Assembly*, Marie Darrieussecq's *Our Life in the Forest*, Michel Houellebecq's *Submission*, Georgi Gospodinov's *Time Shelter*, Dinçer Güçyeter's *Our German Story*, Katrin Röggla's *Ongoing Trial*, Anna Burns's *Milkman* and finally Vladimir Sorokin's *Manaraga*.



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New Technologies of Re/production and a World Beyond the Family: A Close Reading of Tlotlo Tsamaase's *Womb City*

In *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Shulamith Firestone argues that a feminist revolution could establish a new ecological balance by liberating women from childbirth and dismantling the patriarchal nuclear family through technology. Firestone's ideas align with Marge Piercy's critical utopia *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), which also viewed reproductive technologies as liberating and allowed readers to envision such ideas through its narrative. Both works significantly influenced debates on reproductive technologies and feminist kin-making. This contribution aims to re-examine the current debate on the topic, taking the parallel between Firestone and Piercy as a starting point and highlighting how fiction serves as a crucial ground for exploring future alternatives and understanding present inequalities (Margree 2018; Merck, Sandford 2010). The paper examines the necessity of creating new family structures, not bound by genealogy, through a close reading of Tlotlo Tsamaase's *Womb City* (2024). Set in a futuristic Botswana, this work depicts AI-controlled artificial wombs that ostensibly free women from traditional roles but also turn bodies into government resources. The analysis will engage with recent critical contributions on family abolition and reproductive technologies (Lewis 2019; Balzano 2021, 2024). Tsamaase's depiction of oppressive family structures will be examined to explore whether such critiques envision a post-family future as a decolonial imperative (Lewis 2022; Hartman 2016; Gumbs, Martens, Williamswhich 2016). This study will explore the intersections of gender, race, class, and ability to evaluate whether Tsamaase's technoscientific visions advocate for hierarchical domination or propose new revolutionary futures.



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Colonial Biopolitics and the Arc of Refusal: rethinking grammars of resistance

German Primera lectures Philosophy and Politics at the University of Brighton. He serves as the deputy director of the Centre for Applied Philosophy, Politics, and Ethics (CAPPE) and is an editor for the journals Contemporary Political Theory (CPT) and the Journal of Italian Philosophy. His research focuses on French and Italian contemporary philosophy and politics, Black studies, and Biopolitics. He probes the limits of political theories that deny their implication in histories of coloniality and racism, while reworking theories of relational ontology. His book *The political Ontology of Giorgio Agamben* interrogates the relation between political ontology and violence. He is collaborating with Mark Devenney on a forthcoming book titled *Troubling Democracy: On Practices of Care, Fugitivity, and Refusal*. In this lecture he rethinks biopolitics in light of coloniality.

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Towards a Coalition of the (Un-)Cared For? Feminist Care Politics, the “Care Crisis”, and the (Under-)Theorization of Care-receiving.

Scandals involving negligence in elder care facilities, long daycare waiting lists, and images of overburdened healthcare professionals have popularized the feminist diagnosis of a pervasive “crisis of care” (Fraser, 2017). In particular, the decline in access to quality care due to privatization and cuts to public services has strengthened feminist argument for the transformation of labor conditions for overextended and under-resourced caregivers. This argument suggests that improving caregivers’ circumstances will benefit those they care for, such as young children, the elderly, and incapacitated individuals. However, this presumed trickle-down effect requires scrutiny, as it risks marginalizing the perspectives of care-receivers, who have historically been infantilized, ostracized, and debilitated by intersecting systems of patriarchy, capitalism, and white supremacy.

This presentation thus critically examines the prevailing focus on caregivers in feminist care politics. To better address the subjugation of those needing care, who are often excluded from or discriminated against within dominant care institutions, it proposes a shift from prioritizing caregiving to centering care-receiving in the politicization of the “care crisis”. It argues that the shared yet distinct experiences of those mistreated by inadequate or inaccessible care offer a more inclusive and intersectional foundation for feminist care politics. This approach enables a more



thorough problematization of coalition-building among social groups differentially subjugated through hegemonic care practices, aiming to foster more equitable and just care relationships.

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Politics in crisis: past, present and futures

In Politics, Aristotle argued that anyone who isn't capable of living in a society must be a beast or a God. Today, more and more people aren't capable of living in this society, and it has nothing to do with their beastly or divine nature but with precarity, climate crisis, wars and a tentacular economic system based on (voluntary and involuntary) enslavement.

Politics, understood as the great modern emancipatory utopia, is in crisis and there are many reasons. The present is marked by the end of the Hegelian-Marxist teleological narrative, by secularisation and the collapse of Universals, by an acceleration that erodes democratic processes and the basic question of Aristotelian politics about common good has been privatised - it too.

The crisis is profound. Without its emancipatory strength, politics remains trapped in a present that is unable to transform and is reduced to personalism, bureaucracy and technocracy. A rethinking of politics is necessary and passes through the recovery of a social-collective dimension and the repopulation of horizons of emancipation far from forms of paternalism.

These horizons of emancipation seem to be able to exist only outside institutional politics: in social movements in which resist a social - multifaceted and multiform (Della Porta) - identity; in a labour that is not only production but also living together (Dejours). But what is the extent of their political function? After a critical reconstruction, the last part of my contribution intends to examine these two paths as models for a re-narration of politics.



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Tadeusz Peiper and Rita Felski. Adding Polish context to the debate over the postcritique.

The aim of the paper is to juxtapose selected threads of the contemporary debate around the notion of postcritique with the philosophy of Tadeusz Peiper, an eminent Polish poet and theoretician, one of the most important representatives of the Polish avant-garde.

The notion of postcritique was introduced by Rita Felski, who pointed to the limitations of the paradigm of suspicious reading that dominates literary studies. This theme was then taken up by Toril Moi, who challenged the implicit opposition of depth and surface in literary studies. Felski's intention was to take stock of the merits and limitations of the hermeneutics of suspicion as the most influential methodology for the study of cultural texts in the Anglo-Saxon world. An analogous context in the Polish humanities seems to be the specific form of contestation of consumerism imposed by thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman and Maria Janion, clearly inspired by the thought of the Frankfurt School, particularly Herbert Marcuse.

In his programme manifestos from the interwar period, Tadeusz Peiper expressed admiration for the processes of rapid industrialisation of Polish cities that he observed. Coming from Marxist positions, he watched with hope the birth of mass culture, which he saw as a force potentially accelerating emancipatory processes. His enthusiasm was subsequently invalidated by the cataclysm of the Second World War, while the framework for the discussion of mass culture was set by Critical Theory, constituted in Frankfurt. The contemporary debate on postcritique is a pretext to revisit the concepts of the Polish theorist and to look for tools to properly appreciate the emancipatory potential inherent in the development of the culture industry, while carefully analysing the mechanisms of late capitalism using the critical apparatus of the Frankfurt School.



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Immediacy and the Contemporary Political Novel: Anna Kornbluh and Ali Smith.

In *Immediacy, or, the Style of Too Late Capitalism*, Kornbluh argues that “immediacy [is a] master category for making sense of twenty-first century cultural production” (6) that also provides “the basis of economic value, the regulative ideal for behaviour, the topos of politics” (7). Kornbluh understands immediacy as a sense of urgency and as a validation of self-presence, authenticity and transparency that entails the negation of mediation as a “social process of making representation, connections and meaning” (8). Contemporary cultural production, therefore, bypasses mediation in favour of immediate presence, immersion and authentic intensity.

Ali Smith’s *Summer* – the last part of her “Seasonal Quartet” – can be seen as relying upon, but also defying, Kornbluh’s sense of immediacy. The relative immediacy of the novel being published allowed Smith to make direct political interventions in reaction to social and political events whilst they were still current. However, seemingly aware of the danger of aesthetic immediacy, Smith works to harness but also problematise contemporary modes of discourse and epistemology – the emoji and internet being cases in point – at the same time as insisting on the particular qualities of different media.

It is argued, then, that Smith embraces elements of immediacy that Kornbluh has identified in order to tackle directly contemporary issues, yet simultaneously asserts the necessity of mediation that might fashion an “active process of relating” (Kornbluh 5).

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Fidelity to our futures past. Miroslav Krleža as a writer of the revolution

Thinking politics in terms of care, practice, and the realization of an equality that is presented as desirable and never quite attainable, one might arrive at a genuine tendency of the avant-garde. Although Peter Bürger (1984) claims that the political ambition of avant-garde projects to reorganize life practices through art remained unrealized in contrast to their undeniable and far-reaching impact on the artistic field, it is historically evident that radical artistic movements interact with both social/political revolutions and authorial interventions in the field. The radical political and esthetic



gesture of the avant-garde constantly reconstitutes itself by manifesting its revolutionariness as “its fidelity to its futures past” (Roberts 2010). As an example of this gesture from the Southeast European periphery, I will discuss the Croatian avant-garde writer Miroslav Krleža’s emancipatory vision of humanity, which he heretically depicts from the cosmological perspective of Bosnian medieval Bogomil thumbstones (stećak). From the perspective of the post-imperial political, intellectual and cultural space of South and Central Eastern Europe, Miroslav Krleža presents the medieval upright position of the reliefs on the tombs as a position of humanity, as a vision of the humane “victory under the sun”. Regardless of their own later historical and contemporary “peripheral distance to East and West alike”. This dual peripheral position of “never having “been the East and never quite the West in history” allows Krleža to address the long history of oppression and a new emancipatory perspective that embraces political change in the field of social justice as well as the poetics and authenticity of art and literature.

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A Politics of the Death Drive in Ranko Marinković's *Never more*

In a study dedicated to considering the political project of psychoanalysis, Todd McGowan posits that “the death drive is the revolutionary contribution that psychoanalysis makes to political thought” (McGowan, 2013: 21). McGowan criticises the conservative understanding expressed in “a ‘politics of nostalgia’ based on the notion “that we might return to a stable relation with the natural world”, which is our “nonlacking past” (42-43), and rethinks the psychoanalytic concept of freedom in terms of the shared experience of loss itself and the impossibility of overcoming it.

The article offers a comparative analysis of the last novel “Never more” (1993) by the Croatian writer Ranko Marinković and the novel “The Tin Drum” (1959) by Günter Grass, in which the common motifs that reflect the path of escape from politics and the necessity of returning to the political are worked out from a psychoanalytical perspective.



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The “return of tragedy”? Challenging visions and narratives of rethinking democracy

In *The Death of Tragedy*, George Steiner claims that this literary genre tests the view of reality in which persons are “unwelcome guest[s] in the world”. He follows with a social analysis of the bourgeois, which eradicated tragedy and replaced it with genres such as comedy or farce. In these genres, the opposition between the Good and the Evil is clear, and the desired moral outcome rarely cast any doubts. Derek Barker extrapolate this conclusion to the political thought of the Enlightenment, claiming that its main purpose is to “reasonably” eradicate or transform unsolvable conflicts.

Following this logic I offer a commentary on three contemporary texts regarding possible transformations of democracy in times of its (variously understood) crisis: Solnit’s *Hope in the Dark*, Boswell’s *Magical Thinking*, and Jessop’s concept of “romantic public irony”. I argue that these accounts draw on the middle-class drama, avoiding the recognition of the tragedy of the Anthropocene and – in a broader sense – of the political. As a result, their practical recommendations – calls for action – end up being either naive or insensitive to gendered, racial, or class exclusions and exploitations.

I conclude my paper with an invitation to a common reflection on what the “Return of Tragedy”, a narrative focused on skepticism and the acknowledgement of humanity’s intricate conflict with nature and society, could mean for the endeavor of radically rethinking democracy. I especially investigate the potential role of katharsis in opening up imaginative possibilities for crafting alternative visions of democracy.



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Who is afraid of the subject? On the emancipatory potential of aesthetic practices from Althusser to Badiou and Rancière

Alain Badiou and Jacques Rancière are both direct students of Louis Althusser. They inherit their master's political engagement and philosophical aim to theorise politics. Philosophy for Althusser is a a-historical practice dividing scientific categories from ideological ones. The only way to rigorously carry out this practice is within an subject-less materialist framework, as the subject is, following Althusser, always subjected to ideology. Yet, in light of, and inspired by the events of May '68, Badiou and Rancière pose the question of subjective political engagement. How can one understand the passionate revolts carried out by so many people without having a concept of the subject? This leads Badiou to introduce within a dialectical materialist worldview a new kind of subject, one that is 'faithful' to a universal truth. Rancière, more radically than Badiou, even rejects the objective materialist framework of Althusser, and instead reintroduces a universal subject of equality. What consequences does this conceptual transformation of the subject have for emancipatory politics? In this paper, I discuss the transformations of the subject from Althusser to Badiou and Rancière, using the example of aesthetic practices to think through the subjects at stake.

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Time and the Middle Passage in Édouard Glissant's Thought

This paper elucidates Édouard Glissant's contribution to contemporary scholarship on the "afterlives of slavery" (Hartman 2007; Sharpe 2016) by attending to his varied explorations of the ongoing temporal meaning of the Middle Passage. In theoretical writings such as *Poetics of Relation* (1997), Glissant extensively casts the Middle Passage as an "abyss" that radically disfigured all senses of time for those who (or whose ancestors) survived the traumas of enslavement and a violent transportation from Africa to the Americas (6). Moreover, in fictional works such as *The Overseer's Cabin* (2011) and *The Fourth Century* (2001), Glissant creatively reimagines the history of Martinique as a way of exploring how these brutal historical experiences continue to ambivalently affect the lived temporality of Caribbean and other racialized peoples today. Addressing a tendency in recent Glissant scholarship to separate his theoretical from his fictional texts (Drabinski 2019; Yountae



2017; Chandler and Pugh 2023), this paper reads those aspects of his work in tandem to argue that Glissant's thought uniquely casts the Middle Passage as a temporal movement in a dual sense: as both the radical shift in temporal coordinates that the historical experience of transatlantic slavery continues to impose on Caribbean and other racialized peoples, and as the condition for a potential shift away from the oppressive, racializing, and colonizing configurations of time that have emerged in the wake of this violent historical legacy. Indeed, insofar as Glissant (2020) thinks the meaning of the Middle Passage not only an abyss but also as a *beginning* containing lessons that are "valid for everyone," his work vitally intimates a diversity of poético-political strategies of resistance and refusal against the unjustly racialized configurations of temporality that continue to dominate our world today (7).

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Don't want to be free want to be with you: political contradictions within Anne Carson and Ursula K. LeGuin's work

Freedom's action space, as described by Michel Foucault in his last works from the early 1980s, demands to be reimagined given 21st century's state of thought and political praxis. Julia Kristeva, in a short text published in 1999, called for an "alternative definition of freedom, immanent and non-transcendental". Such freedom, Kristeva recalled, should be constructed by a process of "interiorization of the outside": that political tension leads us to a productive and more fruitful notion of freedom, able to take care of the contradictions encapsuled in the frontier between the private and public space, and oriented into a nomadic understanding of the whole picture. This paper underlines the complexity and potential flexibility of 'freedom' —both a political and philosophical category— on the account of two different authors: Ursula K. LeGuin and Anne Carson. Our purpose should be to notice how their different strategies, from science-fiction narrative in LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* to Carson's versified novel *Autobiography in Red*, meet in that estranged political space where violence is contested with counterintuitive tenderness. In both cases, the main characters are confronted with strongly structured scenarios of epistemological violence. What remains interesting to us is how they manage to preserve themselves —and those significant others who, following Judith Butler, are to become a key part in their processes of giving account of who they are and who they mean to be—defying the classical space of 'freedom' as a category, simultaneously surrendering to its impossibility and constantly imagining whole new scenarios for its renewal.



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Negotiating globality: critical Afropolitanism as epistemic self-assertion in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*

In *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*, the Afro-Latino American writer Juan Flores discusses the nature of community – *comunidad* in the Spanish. He says that it is both a phenomenon existing in something akin to a state of nature and as the result of deliberate human interventions. The *comun* part of *comunidad* is the element that does not require human intervention. For example, as a matter of course, humanity has gone forth and filled the earth, and is now returning to a state of functioning as one – global – community on many levels. The *unidad* part is where various forces in society use their situatedness and power – to the extent that they possess any – to negotiate the nature and shape of the community. Differently situated groups in society have different capacities to shape the nature of the community in which they are co-existing. Their (assigned) place in a continuum ranging from epistemic and sociopolitical agents to mere states of affairs determines their discursive capacity to shape the very world in which they must have their being. In this article, I will argue that critical Afropolitanism should be seen as an attempt by African and Afrodescendiente writers to stake a claim in the *unidad* processes and practices through which a becoming-one-again global *oecumene* is making and remaking itself. I will argue that critical Afropolitanism is a crucial effort at pluralising the ways of knowing, being and relating. Based on an analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), I will show how African and Afrodescendiente writers are playing an important role in dismantling colonial and postcolonial epistemic genealogies and their monolithically Eurocentric conceptions of cosmopolitanism and globality. I will demonstrate critical Afropolitanism's potential to challenge the epistemic, sociopolitical, economic and physical immobilisation of the African and Afrodescendiente subject – narratively bringing into view a way for this stigmatised and silenced subject to emerge from the margins and the (continent-sized) reservation and into a space of shared humanity.



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Politics, Protest and Anthology of Polish Queer Literature

During my presentation, I would like to introduce the academic project "Anthology of Polish Queer Literature" funded by the (Polish) National Program for the Development of the Humanities, which has resulted in the publication of a comprehensive volume entitled "Dezorientacje. Antologia polskiej literatury queer" [An Anthology of Polish Queer Literature]" (edited by Alessandro Amenta, Tomasz Kaliściak, Błażej Warkocki), Warsaw 2021. I would like to pay particular attention to the political effect of this anthology - in its many dimensions.

I will outline 1. the history of the project (including clashes with the national discourse and the context of political protest that was at the root of the idea for the anthology), 2. its methodological background (the importance of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's work and its political implications on the one hand, and the Polish tradition based on the series of anthologies edited by Maria Janion "Transgressions" from the 1980s on the other), 3. the division of the literary material into 4 parts (pre-1918, the interwar period, the period of the Polish People's Republic and the period after 1989) and the reasons for the selection of texts; 4. The analysis of specific literary texts from the anthology; especially those novels that placed in a new frame - have gained a new political effect: from XIX century novels dealing with male homosociality till *Snow White and Russian Red* (2002) by Dorota Masłowska; 5. The reception of the anthology (to what extent one can think of an anthology of Polish queer literature as a virus in the system of Polish education).

The broadest frame of my consideration will be the question of the possibility of an Eastern European queer theory and decentring Western Europe as central to queer literature and theory.



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Utopia as Feminist Method

Reading utopian fiction as political theory, I argue that, though not inherently antipatriarchal, utopia's intertwining of high futurity and denaturalization renders it a uniquely powerful method for feminist thought.

I propose two dimensions—futurity and denaturalization—for organizing political-theoretic methods and situating utopia among them. Low denaturalization means taking much about extant society as given, whereas high denaturalization unsettles ideas of naturalness and inevitability. The futurity dimension spans the range from focus on past and present to focus on imagined futures.

Utopian thought denaturalizes by stepping into the subjunctive future, reachable through hypothetical displacement in space, as on More's distant island; time, as in Morris's future England; or both, as on Le Guin's planet Anarres. Given that gender ideology depends on naturalizing patriarchal relations and that no past or present society has fully achieved feminism's aims, denaturalization by way of imagining alternative and desirable futures offers a uniquely apt approach for feminist thought.

Two objections I address are that genealogical method obviates the particular usefulness of utopia and that feminism calls for the departure from key features of utopian form. Against the view that the value of utopia is confined to its negative function, I defend its constructive role. In response to scholars of feminist utopian novels suggesting that these works infuse the form with ambiguity and incompleteness, eschewing ideal blueprints supposedly characteristic of earlier utopias, I argue that imperfection and potential for change exist in the literary utopias of Morris and even More, but without rendering them feminist.

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Ironizing the Witch Hunts

This paper investigates the application of irony in contemporary interpretations of the witch hunts, positing that irony has been a significantly underexplored mechanism in the historical suppression of certain political groups while also serving as a catalyst for political change. Utilizing Søren Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Irony*, the paper examines the interplay between irony and androcentrism. Kierkegaard's theories are contextualized within modern political discourse, incorporating insights from Dera Sipe's "Kierkegaard and Feminism: A Paradoxical Friendship". Kierkegaard argues that irony, when properly controlled, acts as a disruptive force in political



discourse, thereby facilitating change. The discussion is further enriched by Silvia Federici's *Caliban and the Witch*, which explores the subjugation of female reproductive organs during the rise of the scientific era. Federici illustrates how intellectuals of that period adopted an androcentric and ironic stance toward the witch hunts, demonstrating that irony can also perpetuate the status quo. Additionally, Brydie Kosmina's *Feminist Afterlives of the Witch* is considered for its portrayal of the witch as a monstrous reclamation, offering an ironic critique of prevailing societal attitudes. In this context, ironic distance is not used for historical erasure but as a critique of pop culture's portrayal of the witch. Ultimately, the paper proposes that a playful approach, underpinned by a controlled sense of irony, can generate novel political discourses. This approach provides new perspectives on societal attitudes, particularly regarding the persistent androcentric system of knowledge, and demonstrates how irony can both hinder and facilitate societal change.

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Politics within or outside the polis? (re)turning to the city, or perhaps discovering that we never left it.

Despite the appeal of thinking the political from outside the history of the polis, offering the hope of a form of emancipation from the domination of political ordering and structure, this paper draws on the anarchist writing of Jacques Rancière to question the utility of such a formulation positing instead that it is only in the dis-agreement that occurs when the political encounters the polis that politics can happen. Indeed, it argues that in the face of the rising global threat of authoritarianism, it is urgently necessary to lay aside the arguments that pitch a return to the polis as a choice of siding with order over disorder, domination over emancipation, and police over politics, and instead posits that without the polis, politics could not exist and instead the challenge is to more closely theorise the relationship between these two logics. This requires responding to critics on both sides of the debate. In response to those who criticize the return to the polis as a fetishization of order and its too hasty linking with the state and forms of governance, it seeks to highlight and evaluate the continuities and tensions between competing notions of community, collectivity and sovereign state power, arguing that it is not only possible but necessary to create collective conditions more conducive to politics in order to fend off the authoritarian threat. In response to those who argue that the focus on political rupture precludes the question of how to attend to such collective conditions for politics, it argues that it is only by ensuring that these conditions remain open and collective that we can create more democratic- and less authoritarian - political structures in future, which would be more conducive to politics, whilst attending to the redistribution of wealth and power so urgently needed in today's world.

