

Call for papers: Maison Française d'Oxford 2019 Interdisciplinary Conference :

## **Race, Gender and Technology in Science-Fiction**

**A conference to be held at the Maison Française, Oxford**

25-27 April 2019

The Maison Française conference committee invites proposals that examine the themes of race, gender and technology in science-fiction from the classical period to the present, in all media (print, film, television...) and from any continent.

### **Race and Gender**

Aliens, journeys into space, time travel, wormholes, parallel universes, dark matter, artificial intelligence, robots, cyborgs, self-replicating androids, super computers becoming self-aware, memory implants, optograms, secret weapons, autonomous objects, connected objects, enhanced reality, mass surveillance and the global panopticon, robocops, utopias, terraforming, galactic empires, future cities, technosociety, mutants, degeneration, dystopias... Whilst the focus in science-fiction studies has often been on the ethical dilemmas that accompany (real or anticipated) scientific innovations, this conference wishes instead to concentrate on the illuminations that science-fiction stories can bring to critical race theory and gender studies. Writers of science-fiction extrapolate from the realms of scientific knowledge or theory, or from technology, techniques, machines or instruments, and thus envisage the possibilities of new social organisations, the appearance of new social facts, or new social norms. This conference aims primarily to explore the intersections between fictional science and the dynamics of race and gender.

How has anticipatory literature (including short stories, graphic novels, films, TV series...) interacted with the life sciences to question the biologisation of race and gender? How have its utopias/dystopias engaged with questions of gender, sexuality and empowerment? How have its scenarios addressed the African-American, Chicano/a, Asian-American, Native American experience, double-consciousness, colourblindness, whiteness or white privilege? How does science-fiction engage with history, the colonial past, Jim Crow or slavery? How has Afrofuturism changed in the digital age? Papers that investigate any of these topics are particularly welcome. Whilst the examples above, for the purposes of exposition, refer primarily to North America, we invite papers on science-fiction emanating from any geographical territory.

### **Technology and the societal paradigm**

On the subject of technology, how have writers linked science, experimentation or techniques with self-identity, sexuality, social organisation, nationhood, or economic models, from socialist utopias to post-scarcity or reputation-based economies? What might be the material history of science-fiction artefacts? Papers that address these issues without explicitly engaging in critical race theory or gender studies are also very welcome. Papers may be disciplinary or multidisciplinary.

Science-fiction narratives typically imagine the enhanced performance of machines or bodies, including superpowers, by extrapolating from existing technological innovations over the

progress of the centuries, such as communication over distance and manned flight in the nineteenth century, to cybernetics and space flight in the twentieth. In a word, science-fiction is anchored in history. Furthermore, it is common in science-fiction stories to discover that scientific and/or technological discoveries stem from societal and political changes, or at least that they are symmetrical. The texts and visual explorations of science-fiction posit technology as a powerful force driving the socio-political order, transforming bodies and the natural world, hybridizing the organic and the inorganic, blurring the boundaries between the individual and the collective, and so on. In so doing, science-fiction gives material form to theories of progress and modernity born of industrial and post-industrial societies — as exemplified by the early Soviet science-fiction — through dystopian scenarios, and by questioning our social use of technology today (for example, in the TV series *Black Mirror*). Papers are invited that address the historical context that produced specific narratives, such as the post-war periods, the cold war, the war on terror, the digital age, Brexit, etc. and their potential self-fulfilling outcomes, to the extent that fictional models can have a real impact on contemporary scientific research. They may also examine the influence of national traditions (such as Franco-British exchanges in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries), and the growing importance of transmediality across national frontiers, such as the film adaptations of comics, mangas or graphic novels, for example.

#### **Themes and studies**

- The dynamics of race, gender and sexuality
- Masculinity in sci-fi culture
- Ethnographies of sci-fi audiences
- The use of ancient civilisations as (political) models
- The engagement with history and the colonial past
- Science-fiction as propaganda
- The engagement with forward-looking political science or economic models
- The transformation of everyday life
- The transformation of the body
- Technology as totalitarian or libertarian
- The history and theory of academic interest in sci-fi as a popular subculture

Papers shall be given in English.

Proposals are due by 1 December 2018.

Send 300-word abstracts (as an email attachment in Microsoft Word format, RTF, or PDF) along with a one-page CV to

[mfosf2019@gmail.com](mailto:mfosf2019@gmail.com)

Roundtable sessions of 60 to 90 minutes may be proposed. They should be pre-organised, and include 3 to 5 panellists. To propose a roundtable, the discussion moderator will send a single 300-word abstract describing the chosen topic, as well as supplying the full details of each panellist, namely their contact information (email and phone number), affiliation and a one-page CV for each. Please be sure to confirm the participation of all panellists before submitting an abstract.

Roundtable proposals are due by 1 December 2018.

Proposals are accepted on the principle that they represent original research that has not been published elsewhere, and on the understanding that the conference organisers will have priority in taking the papers to publication.

Confirmation of acceptance will be sent by the end of January 2019.

One-page/500-word abstracts must be sent by the end of February 2019.

The proceedings are intended for publication, and the final texts are to be sent by the end of May 2019.

Conference venue :

Maison Française d'Oxford

2-10 Norham Road

Oxford OX2 6SE

Oxfordshire

England

Organisers:

Paul Edwards (MFO, CNRS/LARCA, Université Paris Diderot)

Marie Thébaud-Sorger (MFO, CNRS)

Vivien Prigent (MFO, CNRS)

Elodie Grossi (MFO, UVSQ)