



**UNIVERSITY
OF HULL**

Apocalypse and Authenticity

**Conference of the
Theology, Religion and Popular Culture Network**

**University of Hull
11-13 July 2017**

**Abstracts & Short Bios
(alphabetically)**

Abraham, Ibrahim

University of Helsinki

Evangelical Popular Musicianship and the Burdens of Sacred and Secular Authenticity

Applying the insights of philosopher Charles Taylor and musicologist Allan Moore to research with Evangelical punk, hip hop, and heavy metal musicians, this paper analyses the competing and often contradictory criteria for authenticity imposed upon Evangelical musicians, by religious and secular audiences. As Taylor's considerations of authenticity in religious and modern secular culture make clear, the role of the artist as communicator of established truths in traditional religious cultures fundamentally differs from the role of the artist as the creator of personal truths in secular modernity. Further, as Moore's analysis of the discourses of authenticity in contemporary popular music argues, the demands of audiences for artists to faithfully represent the established truths of fan communities differs from the demand for artists to communicate subjective experiences unmediated by external economic or ideological constraints. Utilizing interviews and ethnographic data gathered from research with Evangelical musicians in Australia, Britain, South Africa, and the USA, this paper will illustrate the contradictory burdens placed upon Evangelical musicians, demonstrating the ways in which they either achieve, or fail to achieve, acknowledgment of the authenticity of their creative activities in sacred and secular contexts.

About the Presenter

Ibrahim Abraham is a postdoctoral research fellow in anthropology at the University of Helsinki, where he is researching contemporary Christianity in South Africa. He has published articles on religion and popular culture in journals including *Bible & Critical Theory*, *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, and *International Journal for the Study of New Religions*, and his book *Evangelical Youth Culture: Alternative Music and Extreme Sports Subcultures* is in preparation for Bloomsbury.

Asimos, Vivian

Durham University

Slender Man's Authentic Face: issues in communal re-creation and online mythology

In 2009, the forums on the comedy website Something Awful gave birth to a new online-based mythology centred on a strange horrific creature known as the Slender Man. The mythos began with one user's images which was honoured with continual communally re-creation in multiple other forum posts, which subsequently spread over the next several years to include web-videos and even video games. The process of communal re-creation, essentially to both the birth and continued existence of the mythos, led to an important question of authenticity in the narratives: what made a Slender Man narrative authentic? Was any Slender Man creation an authentic creation? The forum's response to the question of authenticity was to disregard the possibility of creating a canon in favour of individual creativity and representation. The result was a view of the Slender Man that could be constantly changing and shifting – essentially canonically allowing for each individual narrative to be considered authentic. This decision had a joint result which made the Slender Man become an incredible supernatural figure, with a belief system which mirrored apophatic theology which comes to life with a Western understanding of the esoteric Buddhist concept of Tulpas. These two combined aspects allow for every created narrative to be automatically considered authentic, and which paved the way for the mythos's continual existence in the digital environment.

About the Presenter

Vivian is a PhD student at Durham University, researching popular culture by analyzing pop culture narratives as mythology. She received her MSc from the University of Edinburgh, and BA from University of South Florida.

Bender, Stephanie

University of Freiburg

Representations of the Apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy: Between Popular Entertainment and Longing for Eden

Walter Benjamin's prediction that we "might come to enjoy the spectacle of [our] own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure (cf. Bouson 2015)" seems to become ever more plausible in contemporary fiction, in which the apocalypse has become an almost ordinary feature. Rather than depicting the human apocalypse as a threat only, many popular literary works such as Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy reveal its utopian potential under the current circumstances of global warming and ecological destruction. Interestingly, in the trilogy, the apocalypse as a new beginning is eagerly anticipated from two traditionally diametrically opposed sides: science and religion. While for the scientist, who wilfully triggers the apocalyptic event, humanity represents a deranged species to be replaced by a biotechnologically improved variant, the eco-religious sect called the God's Gardeners celebrate it as rebirth to a better form of human civilisation in harmony with nature. The novels also mirror their own staging of the human apocalypse as part of the present cultural imaginary on an intradiegetic level, as a *mise-en-abyme*. In the story-world, too, apocalyptic visions have become "a queasy form of popular entertainment. There had been online TV shows about it: computer-generated landscape pictures with deer grazing in Times Square, serves-us-right finger-wagging, earnest experts lecturing about all the wrong turns taken by the human race (MaddAddam 31)." I would like to argue that the aesthetic simulation of the apocalypse both in and through popular contemporary fiction represents the quest for a radically different kind of ethics or values in the age of the Anthropocene.

About the Presenter

I am currently a PhD candidate at the University of Freiburg, Germany. My dissertation topic is "Future Fictions in the 21st Century: Ethics and Aesthetics." I graduated in English and Sport Science in 2014 (also in Freiburg) and completed teacher training earlier this year before taking up my PhD thesis in English Literary and Cultural Studies.

Boswell, Anna

University of Auckland

Possums in Paradise

Long-conceived in the European imagination as an authentic South Seas haven, Aotearoa/New Zealand is internationally renowned as a ‘clean’, ‘green’ pastoral paradise and eco-wonderland. As the New Zealand government’s own Biodiversity Strategy (2000) has noted, however, the New Zealand environment is in fact one of the most radically, rapidly and catastrophically changed on earth. So-called ‘new world’ places such as Aotearoa/New Zealand are founded through willed ecological crisis, with European newcomers seeking to obliterate and replace an existing indigenous lifeworld by importing ark-like consignments of new biota. Latter-day nostalgia for what has been lost and/or imperiled by the floodtide of acclimatised species has produced a conservation agenda in such places which distorts what an apocalypse ‘is’ and what environmental authenticity might mean.

This paper examines the conflicting apocalyptic configurations in which the Australian brushtail possum is entangled in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The possum—*Trichosurus vulpecula*, or *paihamu*—was deliberately introduced in the nineteenth century with the intention of inaugurating a national fur industry. The species has flourished in Aotearoa/New Zealand but is widely and vigorously demonized here, not least because of its predilections for destructive browsing on native forest canopy and locally-endemic fauna, and because of its reputation as a reservoir and vector for bovine tuberculosis. Among other things, the possum’s treatment as state enemy has involved banishment, bounty-hunting, baiting, large-scale biochemical warfare, and the development of a Space Invaders-inspired, Crown Research Institute-sponsored online game that invites players to ‘stamp out zombie possums’ (Radio New Zealand, 2014). The virtual reality of this game has been brought to life in the New Zealand government’s newly-unveiled ‘Predator Free 2050’ campaign, which promises to counter the imagined zombie possum apocalypse with an apocalyptic extermination of possums themselves. Understanding these applications of the notion of apocalypse as a ‘truthing’ mechanism of a particular kind, the paper proposes that the possum can be conceived as an isomorph for the figure of the settler who disrupts and remakes local habitats, who secures the future of their own settlement through reproductive dominance, who cannot be expunged, and whose ongoing presence in the place troubles any claim to authenticity. Planned purging of the possum in Aotearoa/New Zealand,

the paper proposes, is itself the vectorial expression of a disturbed settler response to the apocalyptic premise and promise of the settler colonial project.

About the Presenter

Anna Boswell is a lecturer in Writing Studies at the University of Auckland. She talks and writes about settler colonialism in terms of ecology and pedagogy, and has recently been awarded an early career Marsden Fund Fast Start grant by the Royal Society of New Zealand for a research project examining zoos and wildlife sanctuaries in the settler south (2016-19). Anna is a research associate of the New Zealand Centre for Human-Animal Studies and a founding co-editor of *Argos Aotearoa: A Journal of Place/Politics*.

Bromwell, Tom

University of York

The Apocalypse of Stanley: Authenticity and Millennium in Stanley Spencer's Resurrection Paintings

The religious belief informing Stanley Spencer's (1891-1959) paintings has been widely recognised, to the extent that it is something of a cliché to refer to Spencer as 'visionary'. The artist's highly subjective artwork combined his idiosyncratic Christian philosophy with his imaginative interpretive ability and the experiences that were familiar to him. Yet the most significant engagement Spencer made in his paintings with religious subjects was with the Christian conception of the eschaton – of which the most prominent examples are the Resurrection paintings that were produced in earnest throughout his mature career.

The significance of the Resurrection subject has never been given full expression. His monumental early Resurrection paintings from the 1920s clearly visualise the Last Day, however subsequent examples frequently incorporated a sexual dimension that has problematized the reading of the work's religious content. Art historical scholarship has accordingly focused on Spencer's biography and the sexual character of his artworks, with the theological dimension having largely been marginalised.

This paper argues that the Resurrection subject, as conceptualised by Spencer, is a symbolic event rather than an allusion, and that it became the principal means for Spencer to articulate his desire for renewal and reconciliation after the tribulation of the Great War. By reconciling the Resurrection paintings and restoring the religious content, it is possible to revise the critical perspective rooted in the artist's apparent eccentricities, and unveil a distinct theological vision: Spencer's Resurrection paintings constitute a manifesto for realising the millennium.

Campos, Javier

Apocalypse as critical dystopia in modern popular music

The last book of the New Testament has inspired countless narratives and cultural productions, most of them unaware of its complex and metaphorical contents. Apocalypse/apocalyptic has thus become a self-referential category in the collective imagination, an actually fascinating icon, no matter how far from the original. In the realm of popular music and especially after the two world wars, the Apocalypse was passionately embraced as synonymous of imminent catastrophe, generating a mainly dystopian discourse. Importantly, in dystopian rock, devastation is anticipated in present life; hence the urgency of its apocalyptic assertions. As a tool for analysis, the concept of critical dystopia (Moylan 2000; Swanson 2016) has built a useful bridge between apocalyptic menaces, re-enchantment of the world, and social protest.

On the other hand, ‘authenticity’ is a sacred dimension within rock, the antidote of commercialism and ‘mainstream’ as musical prostitution, very much in Biblical-style. The connection between Apocalypse and authenticity is therefore immediate and natural, the former becoming the desired and eschatological consummation of the latter’s victory against the evil/falsehood forces, developing into both an aesthetic and moral universe of personal engagement, highly respected by rock fans. Authenticity becomes revelation of the divine to the worshippers, and a cathartic projection into the future/salvation.

U2, The Rolling Stones, David Bowie, Bob Dylan, Iron Maiden, Alice Cooper, REM, The Doors, Tom Waits, Johnny Cash, Blackalicious, Busta Rhymes, and other celebrated musicians, have created relevant songs involving the apocalyptic-as-dystopia rhetoric, which are the case studies this work is based upon.

Works cited

Moylan, Tom. 2000. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Swanson, KJ. 2016. “Sinners, Saints, and Angels on Fire: The Curiously Religious Soundtrack of The Hunger Games’s Secular Dystopia”. *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 28(1). doi: 10.3138/jrpc.28.1.3235. Accessed October 2, 2016.

About the Presenter

Javier Campos Calvo-Sotelo is PhD in Musicology (Complutense University of Madrid, 2008). He has been member of several research projects on identitarian keys in popular music, modern forms of religion, Celtology, and revival, specializing also in Eurocentrism, globalization processes, and some areas of systematic musicology. The results of his works have been exposed in a number of publications and international conferences.

Course, Eleanor

Leeds Trinity University

Authentic Theology and Culture in Hull 2017

The announcement that Hull was to be the UK's City of Culture for 2017 generated bitter humour among some, with lots of people commenting on social media that Hull had no culture at all. In 2003, The Idler website published a book naming Hull as the UK's "crappest town". My paper will explore what Hull's church leaders' think of its culture and what factors most influence their churches engagement in 2017. I will examine their theological understandings of culture, both at the beginning and the end of 2017, and whether they change over the City of Culture year. I argue, with Stephen Bevans (2002), that "there is no such thing as theology, only contextual theology", and all attempts to understand God and the Christian faith must look to people to gain a fuller understanding of not only their faith, but about God too.

I will argue that seeing a town as "crap" and its culture as primarily negative diminishes the self-esteem of its residents, and that churches have a part to play in boosting people's understanding of their own value. I will argue that a creation-centred theological understanding of culture enables Hull's churches to cherish their city and want its people to flourish.

I will also explore my use of visual research methods to generate rich and deep data due to these methods' ability to 'break the frame' of reference of both researcher and participant, leading to fresh insights on authentic theology and culture.

About the Presenter

Eleanor Course is a PhD Student at Leeds Trinity University.

Cross, Simon

University of Hull

The Slovenian Zombie Apocalypse

In 1991 the Republic of Slovenia withdrew from Czechoslovakia, the peaceful departure heralded a new dawn for the former communist state, which saw an upsurge in GDP and a growth in prosperity across the country. But it didn't last, and by 2012, after years of recession had dramatically reversed the initial economic growth, fury at the corruption of the 'elite' ruling class boiled over into violent street protests.

From the midst of the melee of protest came something extraordinary, a new religion was born. The Trans-Universal Zombie Church of the Blissful Ringing was founded by its high priest, political activist Rok Gros, and costumed worshippers began to hold Zombie masses outside government buildings.

With its ranks swelling to more than 10,000 adherents, the Zombie Church quickly became the fifth biggest religion in Slovenia: with some commentators likening it to the better known 'Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster' due to its irreverent nature, and satirical approach. But the Zombie Church has a serious role to play, followers are genuine, committed, political activists, who see their part in bringing about social change as a deeply important one – sacred even.

The Zombie Church is apocalyptic in the sense that it reveals the truth about the corruption of the Slovenian political and economic system, what makes it doubly interesting is the way in which it co-opts the Zombie motif.

The paper will feature new material from a special interview with Zombie Church founder Rok Gros.

About the Presenter

Simon Cross is a Chaplain for Oasis UK, a social and spiritual activist, and a PhD Theology student at the University of Hull. He has worked previously as a journalist, and published on 'New Monasticism' and 'Nature Connection' in the Christian tradition.

Deacy, Chris

University of Kent

Finding Authenticity through the Inauthentic: Radio Nostalgia and the Interplay between Past, Present and Future

The interplay between nostalgia for a golden age that has passed and the eschatological hope for a better – even, in apocalyptic terms, for a dramatic and cataclysmic – future lies at the core of much cross-disciplinary research. Even when the binary is expressed without an apocalyptic strain, as when within British cinema history Andrew Higson writes of the ‘longed-for’ and ‘imagined’ past vs. the present which is construed as being characterized by ‘moral disintegration, deterioration and degeneration’ (1995), what stands out in these accounts is the need to (re-)connect with authenticity. From Higson’s language of ‘purity, truth and fullness’ to the way within biblical studies the New Jerusalem encapsulates the notion of a longing for a prelapsarian past as being a pointer to the fulfilment of messianic hopes and dreams, as well as how the Christmas festival draws on images of an innocent childhood past in order to supply a model of human perfection, transformation and redemption, authenticity is a key driver in eschatological discourse. This paper will focus on the way in which nostalgia-orientated radio programmes are a pivotal, but largely overlooked in scholarly discourse, site of authenticity, in the way that they enable listeners to negotiate their relationship with their real or imagined pasts, in programmes like BBC Radio 2’s Sounds of the 50s/60s/70s/80s or Pick of the Pops, and in so doing recover, reclaim and recapture a sense of personal integrity and fulfilment. This notion of finding authenticity through often trivial, kitsch and ostensibly ‘inauthentic’ forms will form the edifice of this paper which will draw on specific radio testimony from a range of national, regional and local BBC stations, as well as a number of scholarly positions on nostalgia, including Svetlana Boym, Susan Stewart and Clay Routledge.

About the Presenter

I am Reader in Theology and Religious Studies, and have been at Kent since 2004. Since 2013 I have been Senior Tutor for the School of European Culture and Languages and previously served as the School’s Director of Learning and Teaching and as Head of Religious Studies. I have worked primarily in the field of religion and film. My most recent monograph, *Christmas as Religion*, published by Oxford University Press in 2016, takes issue with traditional ways of conceptualizing the relationship between Christmas and religion.

Gardiner, Karen

Nottingham University

Alice's Apocalypse

As the introductory material for the conference states "Ours is a time of crises, it seems".

But the twenty-first century is not unique in considering itself crises ridden.

If the twenty-first century's fear is that of things coming to an end, the mid-nineteenth century mind was pre-occupied by what might come after that end.

This paper will consider the crisis of faith in the nineteenth century, and the extent to which contemporary writers of children's fiction were dealing with the controversial issue of hell and eternal punishment in their popular books.

Lewis Carroll was, via his close friend and fellow writer George MacDonald, an associate of the theologian F. D. Maurice, whose radical reimagining of the meaning of eternity, challenged the Church's stance on eternal punishment. Lewis Carroll himself, wrote a sermon on eternal punishment, and in his letters writes about his beliefs.

This paper will explore whether Alice is in Wonderland or Hell, what the book can tell us about the nineteenth century crisis of faith, what contemporary interpretations of Alice reveal about our beliefs about eternity, and whether Lewis Carroll has actually left us with a spiritual classic hidden in a children's book.

About the Presenter

Karen is interested in cross-disciplinary work, having previously studied Theology, Imagination and Culture at Sarum College, Psychology of Religion at Heythrop College London, and earlier in life training and working as a Music therapist. Karen is a Priest in the Church of England and is currently based in the Vale of York.

Greenwood, Laelie

Monash University

Natural Disaster: The Role of Apocalyptic Nature in F.T. Marinetti's 'Zang Tumb Tuuum'.

This paper will address the role of the environment within Italian Futurism's conception of apocalypticism, as well as the function of nature in facilitating technological progress. Established in 1909, Futurism responded to the drastically transforming modern milieu by engaging in explosive, and often violent, experimentalism. A fundamentally apocalyptic movement, total annihilation was understood to be a precursor to reconstruction and, consequently, to the realisation of perpetual modernisation.

Due to the Futurist's technophilia, critics have traditionally viewed nature as entirely antithetical to the movement's conception of modernisation and renewal, and therefore rejected by Futurism in favour of urbanisation and technological advancement. My close analysis of F.T. Marinetti's text 'Zang Tumb Tuuum' suggests that this traditional understanding is mistaken. Nature appears in two forms: the feminised, sexualised organic, and the destructive elemental 'masculine' form. When associated with the 'feminine', nature is presented as a seductive entity dangerously aligned with inertia, sentimentalism and traditionalism. By contrast, 'masculine' forms of elemental nature are presented as active and violent forces containing the same destructive potential as warfare. In 'Zang Tumb Tuuum' natural disasters such as the 1908 Messina-Reggio earthquake and tsunami, volcanic activity, and uncontained and powerful fire and water, are clearly aligned with destructive warfare, and are, therefore, examples of apocalyptic annihilation.

In revising the role of nature within the movement, this paper will chart the importance of apocalypse for Futurism, and will further expand understanding of the significance of the environment within dramatically modernising avant-garde movements.

About the Presenter

Laelie Greenwood is a student of International Literatures and Italian Studies at Monash University. Laelie's research is focused upon Italian literature and translation, specialising in Italian Futurism. Laelie received First-Class Honours in 2016, and was the recipient of the Monash University Jubilee Honours Scholarship (2016) and the Monash University Merit Scholarship (2012).

Jorritsma, Marie

University of the Witwatersrand

South African #FeesMustFall protest songs as the sound of apocalypse

In October 2016, several factors simmering within the South African political landscape led to the national #FeesMustFall student protests. Across the country, students resolved to shut down universities completely, with the more immediate consequences of placing the 2016 academic year in jeopardy but also, even more seriously, calling into question the future of the country's tertiary education structure. The abandonment of humanity manifested in the violence shown by some students as well as police and private security personnel meant that to this observer, the protests were decidedly apocalyptic in nature. Far from an isolated movement, these protests should be interpreted both in the context of the #FeesMustFall protests of 2015 and the general 'protest culture' active in South Africa (Duncan 2016). This movement is also related to anti-apartheid protests from the 1980s, especially because the students performed several struggle songs dating from this period during their meetings. These songs have a venerable history in South Africa and are often revitalised with new lyrics to suit particular protest contexts. Based only on their lyrical content which features descriptions of struggle heroes and a reworking of the South African national anthem, these #FeesMustFall songs are not inherently apocalyptic. Analysed on their use within the #FeesMustFall context however, I will demonstrate that they contain elements of an apocalyptic nature. These findings reveal that, in addition to analysis of 'typical' apocalyptic musical genres, we can also locate apocalyptic themes in music when our analyses incorporate the social contexts and use/function of the songs themselves.

About the Presenter

Marie Jorritsma received her doctorate in ethnomusicology from the University of Pennsylvania and is currently a Senior Lecturer at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her research interests focus particularly on music in the South African Karoo region and its intersections with gender, race, landscape and social/cultural history. Her monograph, *Sonic Spaces of the Karoo: The Sacred Music of a South African Coloured Community* was co-published in 2011 by Temple University Press and Wits University Press.

Kinney, Kathryn

Washington University in St. Louis

Born Again Apocalypse: Secularity and Religion in the “Eve of Destruction”

A top ten US/UK hit in 1965 for Barry McGuire, the song “Eve of Destruction” warns of impending devastation while providing a catalog of violence and injustice in both global and US-domestic domains. This paper demonstrates how the song’s history reveals a reverberation in the 1960-70s US between a generally apocalyptic ethos and an evangelical eschatology. McGuire’s song rocketed to the top of the charts while simultaneously sparking public outcry, radio censors, and several musical retorts including Barry Sadler’s “The Ballad of the Green Berets.” The secular apocalypticism reflected in “Eve of Destruction” relies on a foundation of witness to material decline or trauma. When folk-rock flower child McGuire experienced a religious conversion in 1971, becoming an integral part of the early Jesus People movement that was radiating out of southern California, “Eve” was similarly born again with a new identity as a Jesus rock track on McGuire’s 1974 *Lighten Up* album. The song now drew its meaning from 1970s Christian eschatological music, which tended to emphasize messages of warning or waiting, both of which relied on a foundation of belief in prophecy and prophetic interpretation. The traffic between secularity and religion in the life of this song highlights a suture between materiality and belief, neither of which function without the other in either frame, secular or religious.

About the Presenter

A Ph.D. candidate in musicology, Kathryn Kinney specializes in music of the 1970s Jesus People Movement. Her dissertation-in-progress supervised by Patrick Burke has the working title "Sounding Anxiety: American Evangelicalism and Christian Pop, 1967-1878." Her research interests include evangelicalism, spirituality, and identity. She has previously presented at the Society for Christian Scholarship in Music.

Knowles, Steve

University of Chester

Prophecy, Brexit and Babylon: Semiotic Promiscuity in Late Modernity

When Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England gave his post-Brexit statement in an attempt to calm nerves in the immediate aftermath of a seismic shift in European politics, his speech attempted to address the impending sense of uncertainty that loomed over the United Kingdom. He spoke of a trinity of uncertainties that affected the economy: geo-political, economic and policy. All of them feed into what he described as “living in times of considerable uncertainty”[1].

For Christian fundamentalists who hold to a premillennialist eschatology, that same uncertainty is interpreted in an entirely different fashion. Whereas, uncertainty has become a consistently applied trope for describing the flux of everyday life in western society, premillennialists paradoxically seek to find assurance and stability in that very same turbulent and unsettled climate. Indeed, the trinity of uncertainties Carney referred to are actually understood as the ‘right signs’ from their perspective because they point to the end of the end times.

Richard Landes refers to the preoccupation with such events as semiotic arousal (2011, 14). Specifically, within the worldview of Christian premillennialism I would go further and refer to it as semiotic promiscuity. Premillennialists are on high alert regarding the possible meaning of contemporary geo-political events; there is little in the apocalyptic imagination in this context that needs arousing.

Signs of the end times are everywhere and particularly concentrated in the European Union: its single currency; the European Parliament building in Strasbourg (allegedly and deliberately designed in the shape of the Tower of Babel; the symbol of the women on the beast (Rev 17) on EU currency, and the flag of the European Union the twelve stars which supposedly betrays the influence of Roman Catholicism in Europe and represents ecclesiastical Babylon. Examples of this are also apparent in debates around Brexit. Such representations were held up as reason for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union.

Apocalyptic semiosis is more prominent in late modernity than at any previous time. In this paper I argue that semiotic promiscuity is clearly evident in both the way many premillennialists view the current European Union and in how they approached the debates around Brexit.

Endnotes:

[1] Full speech available at <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/publications/Documents/speeches/2016/speech915.pdf>. Accessed 10.01.17.

Bibliography

Landes, R. (2011). *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of Millennial Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

About the Presenter

Dr. Steve Knowles is Senior Lecturer in Religion and Popular Culture at the University of Chester. His current research interests include examining the interface between religion and popular culture with a specific focus upon contemporary apocalyptic beliefs. Related to this is an interest in the correlation between notions of risk in contemporary western society and apocalyptic ideologies.

Kwiatkowski, Fryderyk

Jagiellonian University in Kraków; Facta Ficta Research Centre in Kraków

A Road to Gnostic Salvation? The Ascension of the Soul in the Post-apocalyptic World of "Snowpiercer" (2013)

In the last 25 years ideas commonly linked with ancient Gnosticism have been noticed in many Hollywood films: "The Matrix" (1999), "The Truman Show" (1998), "The Thirteenth Floor" (1999), "Dark City" (1998) or "Vanilla Sky" (2001). All of them can be read through the concept of the Gnostic myth. It tells the story about Sophia's fall, one of God's emanations, which resulted in the creation of the illusory world built by a malicious being, Demiurge. He is a monstrous child of Sophia who entrapped human beings within his material realm.

My paper will be focused on the interpretation of "Snowpiercer" (2013) by Joon-ho Bong in the light of the Gnostic myth. Firstly, I will elaborate the characteristics of the myth by taking into account recent research outcomes in the field of Gnostic studies. Secondly, I will show how particular components of the myth relate to visual and narrative ideas depicted in the film, e.g. Demiurge, archons, cosmic spheres, etc. Thirdly, I shall explain in what ways the Gnostic myth was reinterpreted and transformed in "Snowpiercer" by putting main accent on the concept of gnosis which can be viewed as parallel to the idea of authenticity.

In my conclusion I will explain the possible reasons why the Gnostic myth serves as an attractive narrative pattern for contemporary cinematic stories in which one can find apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic themes.

About the Presenter

Fryderyk Kwiatkowski - PhD candidate at the Institute of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He is also affiliated to the Facta Ficta Research Centre in Kraków as a researcher. He prepares a dissertation about the idea of the Gnostic myth and conspiratoriality in Hollywood (1990-2016). His research interests include the reception of esoteric ideas in contemporary Western culture, with particular focus on Gnosticism in philosophy, literature, and popular culture. He is an editorial assistance "Nag Hammadi Bibliography Online" in Brill Publishing and "Facta Ficta Journal". He did internships at the "Center for Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents" (University of Amsterdam) and at the "Department of Jewish, Christian and Islamic Origins" (University of Groningen).

Lunau, Sandy

PhD Student at the Institute of World Literature and Scriptbased Media, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

The Ends of Literature - Apocalypse and the Power and Boundaries of Art

The relation of literature towards reality has been a topic of controversial debate since the times of Aristotle. It was Plato's contention that poets are liars because of their inability to capture the true essence of an object. Aristotle countered, that man is an artificer and in this aspect resembles nature which creates ceaselessly. In his opinion art is only one of the many forces producing the new and thus enriching reality. This controversy still seems to influence today's poetological debates. Is art relevant? Does it deliver truths? Can the artist claim access to privileged knowledge? Where does inspiration come from? The Postmodern era more than any other time is prone to the self-scrutinizing of art through art. In a context where there are no certain truths anymore, the very concept of authenticity in art or communication has been shattered. Authors meet with this reality by a poetological exploration of the abilities of literature and the role of the poet. In this endeavor, the apocalypse can function as a pattern since it is itself deeply concerned with the transmission of fundamental truths, the creation of authority in the speaking voice and the authenticity of the message. In my presentation I am going to show how two postmodern authors – Samuel Beckett and Hans Magnus Enzensberger – use the apocalypse as a pattern for the exploration of truth and authenticity in literature. I will discuss this topic on the basis of Beckett's *Fin de Partie* and Enzensbergers *Der Untergang der Titanic*.

About the Presenter

Sandy Lunau is a PhD candidate at the Gutenberg-Institute for Worldliterature and scriptbased media of the Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz. The topic of her research is: „Literarische Apokalyptik der Gegenwart“ (contemporary apocalyptic literature).

Lynch, John

Karlstad University

Mr Robot: Hacking the Apocalypse

The American television series Mr Robot gives form to many contemporary concerns about the potential of technology to generate an apocalyptic event that can transform the world. As a successful, award-winning series, it connects with a number of anxieties produced by a profoundly destabilized global financial and personal economy that is subjected to invasive tracking and threatening data leaks effecting a generalized state of paranoia and fear of societal breakdown. Mr. Robot is the story of a digital security engineer named Elliot Alderson recruited by the titular character to join a shadowy network of activists called #FSociety. This group is bent on destroying the underpinnings of capitalism by hacking the largest multinational bank in existence and erasing its records. However, Eliot as an unreliable narrator struggles with schizophrenia, social phobia and drug addiction. At one point in a recovery programme meeting he rages against God for the injustices in the world, “I don’t believe my own imaginary friend, why...should I believe yours?” The paper will examine how the drama stages its engagement with these motivations, agitations, philosophical and theological problems and argues that this series, dense in reference and meaning, oscillates between appearance and truth in a frenzied search for ultimate meaning.

About the Presenter

John Lynch is Associate Professor in Film and Media Studies at Karlstad University, Sweden. He has researched such areas as pictures of HIV/AIDS in British media culture, the role of the image in the Northern Ireland conflict, technologies of visualization in justice campaigns, and issues of faith, hope and resistance in serial television drama.

Momen, Moojan

Apocalyptic Thinking and Process Thinking: Managing Apocalyptic Expectations

The founders of the Baha'i Faith claimed that their religious movement fulfilled the prophecies of the Time of the End or the Day of Judgement and Resurrection that exist in the Qur'an and the Bible. Much of their writings are taken up dealing with those who protested that none of the apocalyptic signs associated with the Time of the End had occurred – the sun had not been darkened, the dead had not risen from their graves and the apocalyptic battle had not been fought. The Baha'i scriptures use three main hermeneutic methods to respond to such questions: that the prophecies about the Time of the End relate to spiritual events and not physical events; that God works not by sudden supernatural acts of intervention in the world but by processes that effect change over a period of time through human action; and that time is both cyclical and progressive. The paper will examine the explanations found in the Baha'i scriptures regarding both the expected destructive apocalyptic events and the constructive millennialist vision of a new world.

About the Presenter

Dr. Moojan Momen was born in Iran, but was raised and educated in England, attending the University of Cambridge. He has a special interest in the study of Shi'i Islam and the Baha'i Faith, both from the viewpoint of their history and their doctrines. In recent years, his interests have extended to the study of the phenomenon of religion. His principal publications in these fields include: *Introduction to Shi'i Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); *The Phenomenon of Religion* (Oxford: OneWorld, 1999, republished as *Understanding Religion*, 2008); and *The Baha'i Communities of Iran (1851-1921)*; Vol. 1: *The North of Iran* (Oxford: George Ronald, 2015). He has contributed articles to encyclopaedias such as *Encyclopedia Iranica* and *Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World* as well as papers to academic journals such as *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Past and Present*, *Religion*, *Iran*, and *Iranian Studies*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society.

Moon, Paul

Auckland University of Technology

Rua Kenana and the founding of an authentic Maori religious movement

Rua Kenana (1869-1937) was a Maori prophet, religious leader, and self-proclaimed 'New Messiah'. He augmented Biblical teachings with his own prophecies, and by 1905, had established a religious community at Maungapohatu, in New Zealand's central North Island, which grew to around 1,000 followers. Despite almost a century of Protestant and Catholic evangelisation in New Zealand, many Maori were attracted to Rua's sect on the basis that his religious message resonated with their own experiences as a colonised people on the brink of extinction. Drawing on oral histories as well as archival material, this paper will explore the doctrinal basis for Rua Kenana's religious movement being regarded as 'authentic' by his followers, and will examine the paradox of an indigenous people abandoning much of their traditional spiritual beliefs and finding an authentic religious experience based on a modified version of the religion of the coloniser.

The religion Rua Kenana developed was based on an earlier fusion sect – Ringatu – led by Te Kooti, a Maori prophet from a previous generation. The derivative nature of Rua Kenana's religious movement further complicates the claims of authenticity which he preached, and which was believed by his followers.

Rua Kenana promised to come back to life after his death, but his failure to do so saw his religious movement collapse, and drained it of the authenticity with which his followers once perceived it.

About the Presenter

Professor of History at Auckland University of Technology, specialising in New Zealand's colonial history.

Nir, Bina

The Department of Communication Director, Honors BA Program The Academic College of Emek Yezrael, Israel

Western Apocalyptic Time and Personal Authentic Time

The concept of time is culturally dependent. During different periods in the history of Western culture, differing conceptions of times competed for primacy, sometimes contradicting one another, sometimes complementing each other. Modern Westerners, I will claim, live on two timelines—a linear, historical, and cultural timeline directed to the “end of days” and a personal, authentic timeline.

The Bible is a central cultural source for the linear conception of time: In the entrenched Judeo-Christian Western conception, time has a beginning, “In the beginning,” and an end “in the end of days.” Time is directed, in its entirety to this final event, to the establishment of God’s kingdom. The biblical timeline depends on the actions of people in history. Augustine identifies the past with historical memory, and the future with anticipation. This linear conception of history and its division into segments which accumulate and progress towards an end, became dominant in all cultural spheres which base their worldviews on the Bible, and even today it still serves as a basis for cultural, historical and ideological narratives.

As the processes of secularization grew stronger in Europe, the connection to mystic, eternal time was weakened, and people began to be more grounded in earthly time. This process of secularization allowed for the development of individualism in its modern iteration. In our modern consumer society, which is wholly concerned with personal time, collective time has lost its purpose and its reason for being preserved. The relationship to time started to gradually change from the general conceptions of linear, collective time which is external to us, to a more subjective, personal conception of time. In consumerist capitalism, time becomes a personal, authentic resource.

About the Presenter

Dr. Bina Nir is Director of the Honors B.A. Program at the Department of Communication at the Academic College of Emek Yezreel, Israel. Her research interests include time in western culture and the separation of human beings and nature.

Peng, Sheng-Yu

Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary

Toward Aesthetics of Apocalypse: A Nostalgic Approach of Authenticity

In this essay I will examine Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetics, which I will argue that it is a nostalgic approach of authenticity. And through his aesthetic lens, we can obtain more insight into our understanding of the relation between apocalypse and authenticity.

Hans Urs von Balthasar is one of the most important Catholic theologians in the twentieth century; he suggests that apocalypse and aesthetics must stand together. With its postmodern tone, von Balthasar's theological aesthetics, calls for the re-establishment of this positive relationship by re-examining the originality of apocalyptic experience. His work has been supported by some as postmodern, while dismissed by others as pre-modern, or, more interestingly, as a type of the "postmodernity of nostalgia". "Postmodernity of nostalgia" means a lot to us, because it shows that while postmodernism simply deconstructs modernity, "nostalgia" for the pre-modern can be constructive in providing a basis for a new spiritual homeland for the period after (post) modernity. This, I think, is exactly presents the value of von Balthasar's theological aesthetics with regard to the issue of authenticity.

Von Balthasar's theological aesthetics is grounded in a return to human's initial spiritual source, human wonder at divine apocalypse, a world in which apocalypse and beauty shine upon each other. For von Balthasar, the original feeling of wonder (awe) at the world has degraded from the rationalist era onwards; humans' worldview has strayed from wonder (*Ver-wunderung*) at the world in which truth and good and beauty combine seamlessly, to simply admiration (*Be-wunderung*) with the characteristics of scientism and positivism. This explains why von Balthasar thinks apocalypse and aesthetics must stand together. Aesthetics as a discipline detached from the authenticity of truth and goodness not only is methodologically problematic, but also is reflective of a particular sort of worldview. More precisely, such aesthetics, in reflecting a particular sort of worldview, betrays a perspective which determines our understanding of questions. The risk of the development of aesthetics is that aesthetics no longer has something to do with the authenticity of the true and the good, it to some extent shows its own independence, and it begins to go in the direction of aestheticism. As far as the uncertainty of relativism is concerned, and the relationship between religion and culture is concerned, it is not hard to see why von Balthasar proposes his theological aesthetics and calls for a concrete ground from apocalypse.

The aim of this essay therefore is to search the history of beauty in order to investigate the manner in which humans gradually lost their ability to perceive the attractiveness of apocalypse. By doing so, I attempt to return apocalypse to the central position of beauty, and suggest that modern aesthetics requires the eternal divine apocalypse of God, especially in an era of relativism, precisely because it is the appreciation of the eternal divine apocalypse of God which can allow us to recognize the absoluteness and eternity of the meaning of beauty. Developing this insight, I explore the relation between apocalypse and authenticity and propose that the apocalypse of faith is the original source of culture.

About the Presenter

I hold a Ph.D. in Theology (topic: theological aesthetics, 2013) from New College, The University of Edinburgh in Scotland.

I currently live in Taipei and am an Assistant Professor at Taiwan Baptist Theological Seminary where I teach Systematic Theology, Theology and Philosophy, Theology and Art, Biblical Hermeneutics, Christian Ethics. In my teaching and research I always try my best to share the experience of art; for me, art can be regarded as text for theology, and art can also be viewed as an expression of the human situation. Besides this, I am also passionate about the topic of beauty. For me, beauty has played an important role in my thought and work.

Rowson, Emily

Northumbria University

Postfeminism at the End of the World: Authenticity and Identity in Doctor Who

Apocalypses and monsters abound within Doctor Who, and far from being simple nightmares designed to invoke tension and terror this paper contends they explicitly engage with, and ‘monsterise’, contemporary, societal anxieties. Broadly speaking, Doctor Who uses a backdrop of the end of the world to offer present day morality tales, contrasting villains and heroes in order to forward authentic and desirable forms of humanity. This paper contends that Doctor Who uses the character of Lady Cassandra to personify and ‘monsterise’ a specifically postfeminist conceptualisation of the relationship between beauty, body and self with this preoccupation being one that is promoted through makeover reality television. Read as a metaphor for postfeminist values, Doctor Who presents a warning of the societal obsession with, and acceptance of, consumerism, neoliberalism, and pursuit of bodily perfection. Using the dual images of the inevitable implosion of the Earth, and the horrifying prospect of a postfeminist future, Doctor Who constructs a vision of authentic humanity in the form of ‘ordinary, working class’ femininity.

About the Presenter

Emily Rowson is a third year PhD candidate at Northumbria University, Newcastle. Her current research is primarily concerned with gendered identities, sexualities, and bodies in science fiction film and television. She has presented papers on the potential for a mutually beneficial conversation between feminist theory and science fiction media, depictions of infertility and reproduction in contemporary Hollywood cinema, and currently works specifically on construction of gender in British science fiction television.

Teittinen, Jouni

University of Turku

The Eyes of a Child: Figuring Innocence and Authenticity in P.C. Jersild's *After the Flood* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*

The presentation focuses on the figure of the child in two post-apocalyptic novels, the Swedish author P.C. Jersild's *Efter Floden* (1982, trans. *After the Flood*) and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). While children in post-apocalyptic narratives often naturally straddle the tensioned thematics of nostalgia and futurity, the figure of the child also connects to the issue of authenticity: first, through the child's "natural" freedom from the ways of civilization, which also makes the child an "authentic" witness who perceives the post-apocalyptic condition (as it were) on its own terms; secondly, in the more abstract sense of representing humanity's "new childhood", which carries with it the hope of a future humanity that is less vile because more in touch with (its) nature. Both aspects evoke the ideal of innocence, whether epistemic or ethical, and carry heavy expectations and assumptions concerning human nature.

These aspects and ideals receive strikingly different treatments in Jersild's and McCarthy's novels. Both have at their center "children" born soon after the apocalypse, framed against father figures (the boy's father in *The Road*, Edvin's mentor Petsamo in *After the Flood*) whose partly pre-apocalyptic bearings reflect the reader's relation to the novels' post-apocalyptic realities. In *The Road*, the boy retains an aura of fundamental otherness, as the narrative is largely focalised through the father, while *After the Flood* employs its childlike (actually adult) protagonist Edvin as the first person narrator. The reader's relationship to the two "children" is thus construed on markedly different terms, which also affects how the thematics of innocence, authenticity and human nature become variously articulated. A comparative analysis, I suggest, may both illuminate the novels' core problematics and extract some general insights concerning today's post-apocalyptic imagination.

About the Presenter

Jouni Teittinen is a doctoral student in Comparative Literature at the University of Turku, Finland. His dissertation concerns the thematic, structural and philosophical questions pertaining to time and temporality in post-apocalyptic literature, working through such issues as memory, technics, species and extinction. He has published on human-animal relations and presented, besides apocalypse and animals, on Emerson and American Romanticism.

Thornton, Daniel

Alphacrucis College

It's the end of the world as we know it: How authenticity and eschatology cohere in contemporary congregational songs

The Christian church has been fascinated by the end times since its inception. Jesus addressed the subject on multiple occasions, the apostles reinforced it, and the biblical canon ends with a book of eschatological fanfare. This apocalyptic emphasis has also been lyricised in Christian song from the earliest days of the church. Contemporary congregational songs (CCS), alternatively known as 'praise and worship', originally emanating from pentecostal/charismatic centres, still carry the eschatological heritage of their movements, and Christianity more broadly.

This paper utilises data from Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) to explore the degree to which the most popular CCS engage with eschatological ideas. It further examines how apocalyptic lyrics in CCS are musically framed to communicate an authentic contemporary Christianity. The importance of this research is in its unique contribution to the intersection of popular music, apocalyptic themes, contemporary Christianity, and notions of authenticity.

About the Presenter

Rev. Dr Daniel Thornton is the Director of Learning and Teaching, and the Head of Department, Music and Creative Arts at Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia. His 20-plus years of professional experience and expertise inside the Pentecostal church and Christian music industry, alongside his PhD research in the contemporary congregational song genre, give Daniel a unique authority in the field of contemporary church worship.

Wanner, Kevin

Western Michigan University

A Taxonomy and a Few Interpretations of Superhero Comic Book Apocalypses

Apocalypses abound in American superhero comic books (hereafter SHCBs) of recent decades. Both Marvel and DC Comics have published numerous “events” (mini-series that cross over with regular titles) in which the world’s, universe’s, or multiverse’s existence is threatened. My paper’s first aim is to provide a taxonomy of SHCB apocalypses—whether these are averted, realized, or reversed—that will be useful for comparing their forms, themes, and messages. My plan is to present a four-quadrant chart, in which the vertical axis’s poles are labeled “Destruction” and “Gentrification,” and the horizontal’s poles “Benevolence” and “Malevolence.” The chart’s corners will also be labeled, with “Utopia” at bottom left (where maximal benevolence and gentrification converge), “Nirvana” at top left (where maximal destruction and benevolence meet), “Annihilation” at top right (destruction + malevolence), and “Dystopia” and/or “Totalitarianism” at bottom right (gentrification + malevolence). After indicating how SHCB apocalypses from the 1980s through today can be placed along these axes/in these quadrants, I will illustrate the taxonomy’s heuristic usefulness by comparing a subset of stories in terms of plot progression and outcome, superheroes’ roles and reactions, messages, and reception. I will especially highlight recent series such as DC’s “Convergence” and “Rebirth,” and Marvel’s “Ultimate End” and “Secret Wars” (all 2015-2016). These events—both of which feature walled remnants of lost multiverses co-existing uneasily on a single globe- or disc-shaped world before they are reconstituted, if partially and imperfectly, as independent cosmoses—will be interpreted in light of contemporary concerns over globalism, nativism/nationalism, and transcultural migration.

About the Presenter

Kevin J. Wanner is a Professor in the Department of Comparative Religion at Western Michigan University, where he has worked since 2004. He has a Ph.D. in the History of Religions from the University of Chicago Divinity School. His main areas of research interest are the religion, myth, and culture (both Christian and pre-Christian) of medieval Scandinavia, and theory and method in the study of religion, but he has recently started to teach courses and publish on the themes of religion, myth, and gods in mainstream American superhero comic books.

Woodward, Jennifer

Edge Hill University

Totalitarian Opportunism: J. J. Connington's Nordenholt's Million (1923)

J. J. Connington's 1923 British disaster novel *Nordenholt's Million* is an extreme, proto fascist work that responds to the interwar context of economic decline and social unrest in Britain. It utilises an apocalyptic scenario (soil denitrification) to draw an analogue of contemporary Britain and is uncompromising in its critique of conventional government systems and social decline. The novel depicts a situation where, to enable survival, the weak, dissenters and the unskilled are sacrificed in a drive towards creating a utopian future. Accordingly, in *Nordenholt's Million* the apocalypse is a transformative opportunity. It offers a wish fulfilment tale involving the emergence of strong, decisive leadership to instigate a highly efficient, eugenically constructed 'ideal' post-apocalyptic society. At the conclusion, a new civilisation emerges in which what the novel has framed as the social, political and economic problems of Britain have been overcome.

Drawing upon the appeal of extreme politics *Nordenholt's Million* tackles the morality of its politics by emphasising the necessity – and even desirability - of dictatorship in difficult circumstances. It presents dictatorship as the political solution to weak government and contemporary crises. Such a positive representation of dictatorship, even one apparently justified by catastrophe, could only have been written in a pre-World War II context. However, less than a century later, the extremes that the text presents as so appealing are echoed in new social and political arenas informed by fear and discontent. *Nordenholt's Million* is then, a revealing and disconcerting novel that explores the appeal of fascism during periods of social and economic unease.

About the Presenter

Dr. Jennifer Woodward is a senior lecturer in English Literature and Film Studies at Edge Hill University. Her publications include critical work on the adaptation of Deluge for Gylphi's *Science Fiction Across Media* (2013), and a chapter on J. Michael Straczynski in *Fifty Key Figures in Science Fiction* (Routledge, 2009). Her research interests include disaster narrative studies, speculative fiction across media and adaptation theory. Her current research examines pre-1945 British disaster literature and adaptation studies.