

STRIKING BACK? ON IMPERIAL FANTASIES AND FANTASIES OF EMPIRE

Conference hosted by the Max Planck Research Group “Empires of Memory”
September 12-13, 2019 | Alte Mensa, Wilhelmsplatz 3, Göttingen

Thursday **12** Sep

Greeting, Opening Remarks 9:00-9:30

Panel 1 FANTASIZING THE OTHER 10:00-11:30

“Colonial Fantasies in the Shadow of Homo economicus: Historicising amok and the Spectre of Colonial Capitalism”
Jialin Christina Wu (Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne)

“Fantasies of Empire and the Anti-Semitic Imagination: Jews in Eastern Europe between Colonised and Colonisers”
Raul Cârstocea (University of Leicester)

“Between Curiosity and Mastery: Reading Fantasies of Empire in the Fractured Resistance of (Un)Becoming Other”
Anna Karthika (Makerere University)

Coffee Break 11:30-11:45

Panel 2 EMPTY SPACE 11:45-13:15

“What on Earth! Slated Globes, School Geography, and the U.S. Empire at the Turn of the Twentieth Century”
Mahshid Mayar (Bielefeld University)

“Aesthetic Nationalism, Informal Empire: Fantasies and Structures of Domination in Brazil and the United States”
Sean T. Mitchell (Rutgers University, Newark)

“Canvas and Mirror: Deserts and the Imperial Gaze”
Nicholas Myers (Cornell University)

Lunch 13:15-14:15

Panel 3 VISUAL CULTURES OF IMPERIAL FANTASY 14:15-15:45

“Illustrating Fantasy, Documenting Destruction: the Islamo-futurist Architecture of a War Correspondent”
Katie J. Hickerson (University of Chicago)

“Beyond Repatriation: Puerto Rican Film History in the Imperial Archive”
Pedro Noel Doreste Rodríguez (University of Chicago)

“Apocalyptic Transmissions and the Apotheosis of Empire”
Emily Pothast (Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley)

Coffee Break 15:45-16:00

Keynote Lecture 16:00-17:45
“Art’s Maneuvers: Inter-imperial Interventions”
Laura Doyle (University of Massachusetts-Amherst)

Friday **13** Sep

Panel 4 EMPIRE OF SCIENCE FICTION 9:00-10:30

“All Your Base Are Belong to Us’: Imperial Politics in Mass Effect (2007-12)”
Paweł Frelik (University of Warsaw)

“Genius, Billionaire, Playboy, Philanthropist’: Tony Stark, Iron Man, and Post-9/11 Imperial Fantasy-Making”
Zaynab Quadri (George Washington University)

“Georgian Soviet Science Fiction as a Nation’s Coping Mechanism: The Periphery’s Dreams for the Metropolis”
Ketevan Chartolani (Free University of Tbilisi)

Coffee Break 10:30-11:00

Panel 5 IMPERIAL EXCHANGE AND FANTASY 11:00-12:30

“Pilgrimage, or Rooting Imperial Fantasies with 16th-century Dried Gardens”
María M. Carrión (Emory University)

“Civilizing Vision? Education, Museum Histories and Empires”
Deepti Mulgund (Kunsthistorisches Institut Florenz)

“Zoophilia, Melancholia, and Necrophilia: Figurations of Post-Invasion Egypt in the French Romantic Imagination”
Burcu Gürsel (Kirkklareli University)

Lunch 12:30-13:30

Panel 6 IMPERIAL ZOMBIES, POST-MORTEM STRUCTURES 13:30-15:00

“The Commonwealth and Brexit: A severe case of ‘Imperial nostalgia?’”
Philip Murphy (University of London)

“The ‘Return to Africa’: Unearthing the Ottoman Past, Rewriting History in sub-Saharan Africa”
Ezgi Güner (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

“Family of Nations: Visions of Empire in the Late-Habsburg Monarchy”
Scott Moore (Eastern Connecticut State University)

Coffee Break 15:00-15:15

Keynote Lecture 15:15-17:00
“Revenant, Repetition, Road Block: Foreclosed Futures in Late-Anthropocene SF”
Mark Bould (University of the West of England, Bristol)

Summary discussion and final remarks 17:00-18:00

Keynote Lecture

16:00-17:45

Laura Doyle (University of Massachusetts-Amherst)
“Art’s Maneuvers: Inter-imperial Interventions”

To approach the theme of fantasy and empire, this lecture first lays out a dialectical and long-historical perspective on the arts and empire. Recalling that in any period there are typically several vying empires, I describe how the unfolding of history has been catalyzed by both the competing projects of empires and the ongoing resistance to those projects among the colonized and the conscripted. These volatile contestations constitute what I call the geopolitical field of inter-imperiality. Art has been pivotal in this field of relations, I argue. Through both patronage and conscription, empires have instrumentalized literary and other arts to authorize their power--and to make it seductive. Yet at the same time, artists of all kinds have shrewdly commented on and intervened in this order of things, whether working in the halls of power, laboring on the land, or giving birth in either place. In particular, close study of literary histories reveals that artists have often understood the constitutive centrality of empire’s sex-labor and capital-accruing economies. That is, given that empire-building requires labor on a vast scale, the organization and reproduction of labor have been among the main activities of empires, including through control of marriage and sexuality. Authors and artists have for centuries engaged with these aspects of inter-imperial economies, sometimes commenting implicitly on their own conditions of production. The later sections of the lecture analyze literary examples, ranging from 1001 Nights to recent postcolonial novels. I close with questions about how recent television, film, and other media might be understood within an inter-imperial framework.

Keynote Lecture

15:15-17:00

Mark Bould (University of the West of England, Bristol)
“Revenant, Repetition, Road Block: Foreclosed Futures in Late-Anthropocene SF”

After In the new millennium, science fiction is a privileged site for playing out fantasies of empire against the backdrop of anthropogenic climate destabilisation. This paper will discuss a number of sf films in which monsters emerge from Empire’s peripheries to challenge the hegemony of the metropolitan core. In the current conjuncture, the still ongoing global cycle of zombie movies cannot not be about climate refugees, those vast, mobile and ‘unwanted’ populations that challenge the inhumanity of contemporary economic and geopolitical configurations. For example, 28 Days Later... (2002) and 28 Weeks Later (2007) recapitulate the colonial history of British and American empire, from the Caribbean slave trade to the ‘assymetry from above’ counterinsurgency strategies favoured by the Pentagon. Recent giant monster movies and alien invasion movies – forms blended together in the Monsters (2010–14), Pacific Rim (2013–18) and the MonsterVerse Godzilla (2014–20) franchises – are more explicit in figuring the magnitude of the climate crisis and the various massive inadequacies of Empire’s response. Perhaps most interesting of all, however, is the reiterative time-loop narrative of Edge of Tomorrow (2014), trafficking in triumphalist nostalgia for the Normandy landings even as every route off the beach – and through the garden of forking paths – is blocked. That the resolution depends upon contradicting the rules of the diegetic world – upon doing something ‘impossible’ – points to a way out of the impasse, of learning to imagine not the end of the world but the end of capitalism.

Alte Mensa
Adam-von-Trott-Saal
Wilhelmsplatz 3
37073 Göttingen



Event organizer
Jeremy F. Walton (MPI-MMG)

Contact information
Marina Czesielsky, Office
+49 (551) 4956 - 201
czesielsky(at)mmg.mpg.de