



STREAM

## **S22. Storying Wisely: Speculative Fictionings, Affect, and the Politics of the 'What If?'**

STREAM ORGANIZER(S)

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DESCRIPTION

This stream focuses on the overlap between affect theory and speculative fictioning. Speculative fictioning, or speculative fiction as method, gathers practices under the provocation “what if?”, taken up in research, teaching, critique, pedagogy, and creation. It often works by making scenes, prompts, and narrative experiments that people can think with, feel with, and act with, using stories and other texts as tools for inquiry. Affect can be understood as a capacity that both builds and leaks: intensities that gather, circulate, and drain across bodies, texts, technologies, and environments. How might affect theory and speculative fictioning work together to open possibilities, or to foreclose them?

This stream understands speculative fictioning as both situated and material: shaped by where and how it is made, by embodied and more-than-human conditions, and by feminist materialist commitments to partial perspective, relationality, and consequence. Storying wisely is a reminder that stories and speculative fictionings are never neutral. In the name of progress, or innovation, speculation is often treated as inherently good, but the question remains, progress for whom? Alongside speculation’s capacity to open futures, there are sinister speculations, forms of future-oriented practice that regulate behaviour, consolidate power, and foreclose possibility through anticipatory governance, racial capitalism, finance, eugenics, and settler colonialism. Storying wisely means staying with this double bind, and staying alert to how genres, methods, and media carry force in the world, including how speculative futures decide who is rendered possible, realistic, curable, and disposable, or written out of the future.

Work in this stream might pursue the meeting of affect and speculative method through forms such as SF, horror, climate fiction, fabulation, counter-myth, speculative non-fiction, research-creation, and speculative pedagogy. When speculative work circulates in academic and policy settings, it is often flattened into metaphor, allegory, or a creativity add-on. This stream keeps speculation in play as practice, taking seriously what speculative methods do to feeling, relation, and the uneven politics of the “what if?”

Papers might take up questions such as:

- In which ways does speculative fictioning operate as an affective method, in research, pedagogy, activism, or artmaking, and what ethical obligations follow from storjng wisely?
- In which ways does “what if?” open onto liveable otherwise-worlds, and in which ways does it operate as anticipatory capture that sorts, targets, and forecloses futures?
- In which ways do Indigenous futurisms rework speculative fictioning as method, as relation, and as world-making practice?
- How do Black studies and Black futurity rework speculative method as a practice of possibility, critique, and otherwise-worlding?
- How do Queer and Trans theories rework the futures speculation reaches for, including its norms of the family and the human?
- How does crip theory rework speculative futures, especially the promise of cure, the fantasy of independence, and the demand to be made “normal”?
- What affects, including hope, dread, grief, rage, numbness, desire, and care, organize speculative scenes of world-ending and world-beginning, and how are these affects unevenly distributed?
- How do corporate, state, and institutional counter-speculations mobilize affect to commodify imagination, secure extractive futures, and make harm feel inevitable?
- In which ways do speculative texts and methods make infrastructures of feeling and control visible, and what do they reveal about who is made possible, curable, or disposable?