

Calgary Institute for the Humanities

NEWSLETTER

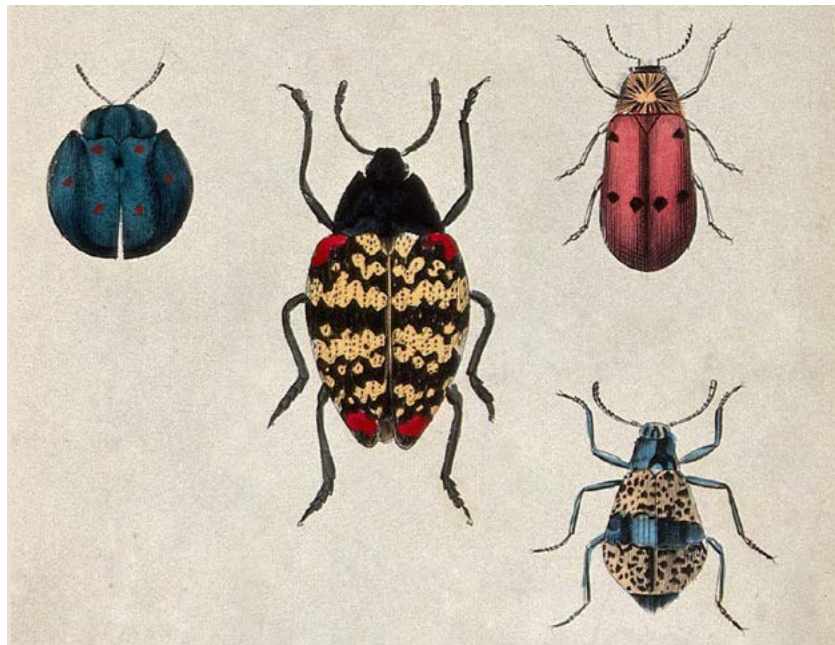
Spring 2023



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

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Director's Report

The newsletter is a little later than usual, owing to the higher-than-normal number of activities at the Institute this year. In addition to our usual suite of public lectures and events, we also played host to a couple of conferences at the Banff Centre for the Arts, and we're looking forward to another conference here in Calgary this summer that will explore the legacy of Chinese-Canadian novelist and screenwriter Winnifred Eaton Reeve (and namesake of the Reeve Theatre). The Calgary Atlas Project has continued to receive lots of attention, with a few new maps appearing this year, and a couple of presentations on the new "Animals Guide to the Calgary" to the Chinook County Historical Society and the Calgary Association of Lifelong Learners. One of the Banff conferences was the annual meeting of the Western Humanities Alliance, an organization comprised of humanities centres in the western states and provinces. CIH co-hosted the meeting this year with the University of Alberta's Kule Institute for Advanced Studies. The theme of the conference was "Energy Security, Energy Sovereignty and Energy Justice," topics which resonate across the region served by the WHA. At the conclusion of the meeting, the CIH agreed to take on the presidency of this venerable organization for the next couple of years.

We've been active out in the community, but as you'll see in



the pages that follow, it's been a fascinating year inside the Institute as well. This year we hosted an exceptionally talented and highly engaged group of scholars: four resident fellows, our graduate fellow, a postdoctoral associate, our scholar-in-residence, and a visiting scholar from the UK. You can read about their research in this newsletter. Every couple of weeks we gathered to talk about the progress of their work and to hear a presentation by one of the fellows on their current project. In spite of the wide range of research interests, from medieval women preachers to revolutionary Algerian cinema to cybernet fictions, the conversations were always energetic, surprising, and above all, collegial. The intellectual community that formed across these weeks was both stimulating and inspiring: we saw

the best of what academia can be in these moments.

And we were once again honored and overwhelmed by the continued generosity of people in our community who believe in the work of the CIH and who want to help support it. In this year's UCalgary Giving Day campaign, the CIH received the most it ever has, much of which will go into the endowment that supports the graduate fellowship. Thanks to the generosity of Ian and Heather Bourne and over thirty other donors, the endowment now fully funds the award for our graduate fellow, ensuring this opportunity for outstanding doctoral students will continue for years to come. Now begins the campaign for a second graduate fellowship, to continue to expand our community and our support for groundbreaking humanities research!

INSECT APOCALYPSE

2023 ANNUAL COMMUNITY FORUM

APRIL 28, 2023

The 42nd Calgary Institute for the Humanities (CIH) Annual Community Forum in Spring 2023 was hosted on the theme of the Insect Apocalypse. There has been much in the news late of alarming reports about the disappearance of insects. The declining numbers of bees and monarch butterflies have been in our consciousness for some time (e.g., colony collapses of bees in the USA in 2006 and 2015) but the problem is much more widespread, so much so that the phrase 'insect apocalypse' is now not infrequently heard. There is no one cause behind the losses but rather multiple factors, the common denominator of which usually can be traced back to man (pesticides, monoculture of crops, climate change, etc.).

Life on earth as we know it, however, is not possible without the millions of different insect species who cohabit this planet with us, and who in fact have inhabited it for far longer than us (c. 400 million years) and whose infinite variety we still do not have a good grip on. Yet they pollinate our crops, act as biocontrol agents, breakdown organic matter including dung and animal carcasses (and thus recycle valuable nutrients back into the environment), aerate the soil,

are food for manifold other species including ourselves, have medicinal properties, transmit diseases, etc. They also play a cultural role which is perhaps less vital but not less rich and meaningful. They appear in art, music, folklore, myth, as religious symbols, as pets, and as oracles.

The seminar explored our relationship with insects from multiple angles, in order to understand how our thinking about insects may have contributed to their decline, and how looking more closely at our relations with our fellow creatures may help to ameliorate this situation.

View the recording of this event, as well as recordings of other CIH lectures and seminars on our YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@humanitiesyyc>

The forum featured a screening of ***all roses sleep (inviolat light) (2022)*** by **ALANA BARTOL** and **BRYCE KRYNSKI**. An olfactory video that blends how bees and humans experience and use the land around us. Shot using ultraviolet video, visitors are invited to see the prairie landscape from a bee's point of view and a scratch and sniff card expands on the pleasant and pungent experience of pumpjacks, grazing cattle, prairie grasses and wildflowers. As the solitary bee searches and dreams of a rose, the work is meant to conjure questions about our shared future.



INVITED GUEST SPEAKERS

MAYA EVENDEN, PhD
Professor of Biological Sciences
University of Alberta

Dr. Evenden received an NSERC University Faculty Award to join the University of Alberta in 2003. Her research interests focus on the chemical and behavioural ecology of insects considered to be pests of agriculture, forestry and horticulture in western Canada. The research in her laboratory contributes to the development of sustainable pest management systems. At the University of Alberta, Dr. Evenden teaches Insect Biology, Insects in Managed Ecosystems, and Chemical Ecology. She served as the President of the Entomological Societies of Alberta (2006) and Canada (2010), the International Branch of the Entomological Society of America (2018), and she is currently a member of the editorial boards of five scientific journals.

VERONICA BRISEÑO CASTREJON
PhD Candidate, School of Architecture
Planning and Landscape, UCalgary
CIH 2022-23 Honorary Graduate Student Fellow

Veronica Briseño Castrejon spent several years living in the Quintana Roo state of Mexico and formed relationships with several Maya beekeeping families. She is currently doing ethnographic and ethnoecological research on the ancient tradition of beekeeping. She founded and led Aula Verde A. C., a non-profit organization in Mexico that generates positive environmental proposals through community engagement. She was subsequently awarded a University of Calgary Graduate Student Sustainability Award for this work.

ERIC BROWN, PhD
Professor of English

University of Maine at Farmington

Dr. Brown has written previously about insects and eschatology in Edmund Spenser's "Muiopotmos". Dr. Brown is also the editor of *Insect Poetics*, the first book to comprehensively explore the cultural and textual meanings of bugs. Though literally woven into the fabric of human affairs, insects are considered alien from the human world. Animal studies and rights have become a fecund field, but for the most part scant attention has been paid to the relationship between insects and humans. *Insect Poetics* redresses that imbalance by welcoming insects into the world of letters and cultural debate.

SHERRYL VINT, PhD
Professor of Media and Cultural Studies
University of California, Riverside

Dr. Vint is the author of *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction* (2007), and *Science Fiction: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2014), coauthor of the *Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* (2011), and coeditor of *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009). She has recently completed *Science Fiction* (2021) for MIT Press's Essential Knowledge series, and *Biopolitical Futures in Twenty-First Century Speculative Fiction* (2021), which theorizes how speculative fiction interrogates a number of sites where bodies intersect with biotechnology in the marketplace (e.g., cryonics, transplant surgery, IVF, clinical drug trials, and synthetic biology).

Image: A flowering branch of medlar (*Mespilus germanica*) with butterfly, chrysalis and caterpillar of a *Papilio* species. Coloured engraving by J. Pass, c. 1816. Wellcome Collection.

The Calgary Institute for the Humanities is pleased to announce the results of the 2023-2024 Fellowship Competition.



MUSHEGH ASATRYAN

RESIDENT FELLOW
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES, LITERATURES,
LINGUISTICS AND CULTURES

Sages, Sceptics, and Pietists: The Culture of Debate in the Abbasid Empire (750-1258)

I propose to study the culture of debate in the Abbasid empire as a cultural, social and literary phenomenon, and to produce either two articles or an article and a monograph. Thematically, I will study the culture of debate from two perspectives. First, I will explore it as a cultural and social phenomenon and I will try to answer the following questions: What were the historical possibilities for the rise of the culture of debate? What was its place within the broader social fabric? How were debates conducted? What does all of this teach us about class, cultural expression, patronage, and approaches to knowledge in the Abbasid empire? Secondly, I will study the descriptions of debates found in primary sources as literary artefacts, in order to study the formal characteristics of these descriptions and the values which they articulated. These two approaches will complement and illuminate each other.



ANASTASIIA GUSHCHINA

GRADUATE STUDENT FELLOW
PHD CANDIDATE
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION,
MEDIA AND FILM

“The Stuff of Reality”: Towards a Materialist Theory of Animated Documentary

My research focuses on artisanal animation techniques used in independent animated documentaries (anidocs) of the 2000s. I explore how material-based animation practices, such as stop-motion animation, along with the processes of painting on glass and tracing over live-action footage affect the representation of ‘invisible’ aspects of human reality. In the last two decades, cinema scholars have noted the proliferation of documentary animation—a film genre that presents factual content in a fictional form. Animated documentaries are most often produced by independent filmmakers and work with narratives absent from conventional non-fiction cinema (e.g., representation of mental health conditions, traumatic experiences, and stories of vulnerable populations). I intend to examine Canadian and international production practices of contemporary documentary animation by asking the question: how do material-based animation techniques affect the interpretation of the topics that the films address?



CHRIS FRAMARIN

RESIDENT FELLOW
PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

The Joyful Sage: Renunciation and the Good Life in the Mahābhārata

This book project investigates the apparent tension between renunciation and the good life in the Sanskrit epic the *Mahābhārata*. The good life, in this sense, is a life that is intrinsically good for the person whose life it is. It is a life high in welfare value. In abandoning worldly pleasures, desire satisfactions, and the pursuit of worldly goals more generally, the renunciates of the *Mahābhārata* seem to forsake their own welfare. The *Mahābhārata* allows that a renunciate might live the good life after all, however, so long as they enjoy the world without wanting it and act in the world without desire. This project is aligned with some of the earliest discussions of the status of the renunciate in South Asian literature. It invokes the distinction between the good life and the moral life to clarify and advance current debates about the contemporary relevance of renunciation.



COURTNAY KONSHUH

WAYNE O. MCCREARY FELLOW
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Norman Consolidation and Communication in Kent

Normanization of the English landscape after the Conquest of 1066 included a widespread building program, destroying Anglo-Saxon cathedrals and replacing them with dominating Norman structures. This development has been studied as a vehicle of colonisation and legitimation on a grand scale; however, the same rebuilding can be seen on a more thorough level across the countryside with the rebuilding of parish churches at all nodes in the transportation and communication network. This made Norman rulership omnipresent at the local level. This development can still be seen in the rural churches in the bishopric of Rochester, many of which were rebuilt during the episcopacy of Gundulf, the first Norman bishop there. This study aims to recover the range of local landscape control in the bishopric of Rochester, thereby piloting a local history study with national implications for England and possibly for other areas of Norman dominance such as the medieval Mediterranean.



AGNES TAM

RESIDENT FELLOW IN APPLIED ETHICS
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

Telling a Better Story of Who We Are: A New Ontology and Ethic of We-Agency

The collective agent “we” are who make or break the world. *We* are a force of unity and solidarity, mobilizing progressive movements and inspiring sacrifices in times of crisis. Yet, *we* can be a force of exclusion and division, animating xenophobia and tribalism. Even though *we* are central to political life, the individualistic orientation of Western philosophy has impoverished our understanding of who we are, and how *we* can improve. To correct this anomaly, this project will bridge the cross-disciplinary scholarship on narratology, social ontology, and political philosophy, and develop a novel narrative theory of *we*-agency. Ontologically, it will show that stories and storytelling practices are what make and shape *us*. Ethically, it will articulate a new theory of joint narration, called *we*-reasoning, to guide *we*-agents to tell and enact better stories of who we are. *We*-reasoning will reframe political problems of populism, reconciliation, and migration and narrate new solutions.




MARTIN WAGNER

NAOMI LACEY RESIDENT FELLOW
PROFESSOR
SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES, LITERATURES,
LINGUISTICS AND CULTURES

The Emergence of the Modern Writer and the Shifting Semantics of Obedience, 1750-1850

The decades around 1800 mark a crucial period in the emergence of the modern literary writer in German culture. A market for literature developed that allowed writers to live independent of traditional patronage. This independence began to include also women writers, who gained a significant foothold in this period. Additionally, through the prominent debates on artistic genius, an image of the writer as independent from traditional precepts took hold. Yet this simple narrative fails to consider both the longevity of some of the old forms of authority under which writers operated (such as poetic rules), as well as the new forms of authority that came to replace the old (such as market pressures and audience expectations). This project, therefore, focuses on the shifting pressures of authority under which writers worked. Moreover, by investigating how writers defined their own practice through their relative submission to—or transgression of—the existing demands, this project explores the pressures of authority not only as a burden to the artist, but also as a formative force.



Listening to medieval women preach

Dr. Carolyn Muessig
Professor and Chair of Christian Thought
Department of Classics and Religion
CIH 2023-24 Naomi Lacey Fellow

The European medieval period is often understood in our contemporary imagination as being a dark time. The scholar Erasmus of Rotterdam (c.1466–1536) called medieval monks and theologians barbarians because he believed they were not well educated. Protestant Reformers often categorized the entire medieval Church as corrupt and barbaric. Thinkers of the so-called Age of Enlightenment, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, tended to look down on religion, mocking especially the Middle Ages as a superstitious era. The word medieval itself is often considered pejorative, used to describe things thought to be archaic, brutal, and repressive. But every era is dark, light, and full of grey areas. The Middle Ages was no different, it had good and bad, and lots of in between. However, my current project focuses on a place of light in the medieval world: that is, examples of women who were recognized as remarkable teachers and preachers.

My research challenges the frequent assumption that the place of women in the medieval Church was negligible. This assumption is based on one Christian tradition dating back to late antiquity that persistently underlined the exclusion

“ Hildegard of Bingen preached to men and women throughout Germany in monasteries and in cathedrals. Her pastoral themes, which directed priests to take care of their flocks and to condemn heretics, dovetailed with the reforming aspirations and concerns of the Catholic church, which supported her preaching.

of women from religious teaching and preaching. For example, the theologian Ambrose of Milan (d. 397) argued that women were not permitted to speak in church. Some sections of Canon law explicitly forbade women to preach

in public. Medieval scholastic theologians like Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) validated this discourse. To show that the long arm of biblical authority pushed women off the pedagogical lecterns and pastoral pulpits of medieval Europe, Aquinas and other scholastics invoked 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 — “Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak but to be subject, as also the law says.” — and 1 Timothy 2: 12 — “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to use authority over the man; but to be in silence.” Furthermore, scholastic theologians understood and defined preaching as a

sacerdotal office that meant only those ordained to the priesthood could give sermons. This made female preachers an impossibility because women were not permitted to be ordained as priests.

Despite these persistent prescriptive pronouncements against female preaching there were other perspectives



on the matter. In other words, the prescriptive examples do not define the medieval view, they only present one standpoint because women did preach and teach publicly in the Middle Ages. Even a cursory investigation of women and pastoral leadership in the medieval era quickly turns up the nun Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179). Hildegard preached to men and women throughout Germany in monasteries and in cathedrals. Her pastoral themes, which directed priests to take care of their flocks and to condemn heretics, dovetailed with the reforming aspirations and concerns of the Catholic church, which supported her preaching.

Although Hildegard's high-profile preaching is remarkable, she was not the only female preacher in the medieval world. There were a number who preached in their monasteries to their sisters, in small groups to men and women, and sometimes even in public to large groups. Domenica da Paradiso (1473-1553) is just one of the notable examples of women who preached. Domenica da Paradiso did not come from a privileged background. She was the fifth of seven children born to gardeners based in the suburb of Paradiso outside of Florence. During her youth, Domenica worked as a gardener too and was under pressure

from her family to marry. She, however, was disposed to a religious way of life and in 1499 moved to Florence to study the Bible. Between 1504 and 1506 she had as her spiritual director the outstanding biblical scholar and Dominican friar Sante Pagnini (d. 1541). He was a gifted biblical interpreter and philologist with an excellent knowledge of Hebrew. Domenica, hungry to learn, no doubt absorbed some of Pagnini's erudition. Domenica herself attracted a community of like-minded men and women in Florence interested in her biblical interpretations. Although profoundly dedicated to religious learning,

Domenica never became a nun but was recognized by her supporters as a woman of great holiness.

In 1511, Domenica oversaw the creation and construction of a small convent in Florence called La Crocetta, which was made possible through her fund raising and fiscal astuteness. Although not a nun, she nonetheless became the head (prioress) of her new convent owing to her religious learning and moral way of life. The nuns of her convent along with one of her supporters, the priest Father Francesco da Castiglione (1463–1542), copied down her sermons. It is thanks to their attention to Domenica's preaching many of these sermons survive to this day.

In some of her sermons, Domenica da Paradiso challenged traditional arguments used to discredit women's place to speak forthrightly about the New Testament and other religious teachings. On 4 July 1507 she preached to her followers on the meaning of Paul of Tarsus's words in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: "Let women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted them to speak but to be subject, as also the law says." Domenica turned the established interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 on its head. She explained that these biblical verses were meant for the Corinthian women alone; these women had become so engrossed by Paul's preaching that they kept calling out to him asking if they could preach there and then in response to what Paul was saying to them. It was in this context that Paul admonished them to



be quiet. However, he did not mean that they or any other women be silent thereafter, just until after he finished speaking on that occasion. The only people who should be prohibited from preaching, Domenica continued, are those who had no respect for God. Paraphrasing another biblical verse (1 Corinthians 1: 27-29), she said that God had not chosen knowledge or

riches, but kindness and simplicity to confound the proud. She added that many women in the past who had preached about Christian doctrine were celebrated in the Catholic Church; their souls were in heaven because they preached no error but did the will of God.

Domenica's defence of a woman's right to preach publicly is notable for many

reasons. It challenged the arguments against female public teaching, including the twelfth-century assertion by the influential canon lawyer, Gratian, who indicated that women no matter how holy or saintly should not presume to teach men. Domenica's frustration with such attitudes that argued men were the sole authorities of the Bible and that women had no place in such teaching is articulated in her sermon:

"Woe, therefore, to those [male] preachers who on the day of judgement will be disgraced by their evil workings in comparison to the little old ladies who barely knew the Hail Mary. Then it will be shown to these preachers that they knew nothing at all and that in these little old ladies, who did not seek the world's honour but God's love, there is true knowledge and true wisdom. These women are those whom the Lord causes to speak, to preach, and to prophesy, because in Him there is the will and the power." [*I sermoni di Domenica da Paradiso*, p. 159.]

It is worth noting that Domenica did not tone down her preaching as the years went on. In 1519, 12 years after her sermon on 1 Corinthians 14:34-3, the records show that Father Francesco da Castiglione defended Domenica against accusations of inaccurate biblical interpretations waged against her by a few disgruntled churchmen. They were particularly unhappy that Domenica aspired to follow an active apostolate, something they perceived only to belong to certain men. They accused her of

transgressing the boundaries of what was permitted to women, arguing that her actions defied church law and biblical precepts. However, whenever Domenica was brought before these men to address their complaints, she would explain that there was nothing wrong with her speaking the word of God. She argued that this was every Christian's responsibility as the word

““ Woe, therefore, to those [male] preachers who on the day of judgement will be disgraced by their evil workings in comparison to the little old ladies who barely knew the Hail Mary. [I]n these little old ladies, who did not seek the world's honour but God's love, there is true knowledge and true wisdom.

of God was like bread that should be shared with everyone. Therefore, to keep silent would be wrong. Her training and education as well as support from priests and bishops who agreed with her, enabled Domenica to avoid punishment throughout her life and continue as the leader of her convent until her death.

Domenica challenged the foundations of legal restrictions on female

preaching by offering different interpretations of biblical verses that had been traditionally viewed as injunctions against a woman's right to speak in public. Indeed, her bold reconstruction of Paul into an advocate of public female teachers is a notable development in women's history. Domenica's story is only one of the several women who preached in between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries, and whose drive to preach was intricately bound to a desire to educate. Domenica's stance, moreover, was not just her own viewpoint, it represented her followers and those clerics who believed that she had the right to speak out and teach publicly.

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“Neural Netfics”

Science Fiction Stories for Your Posthuman Family

Dr. Anthony Camara
Associate Professor
Department of English
CIH 2023-24 Resident Fellow

Tesla’s self-driving cars; Aibo, the robot dog; and Alexa, your personal home assistant: machine learning (ML) has wrought profound effects upon the socio-techno-cultural networks in which we live, and science fiction (SF) writers have taken note. My CIH fellowship project investigates depictions of neural networks (NN) in contemporary SF within literary works that I am calling “Neural Netfics” due to their keen interest in said technology and its diverse effects, be they social, economic, or ethical in nature. NNs refer to connectionist-style computing systems that use simulations of biological neurons to process and learn from data. While NNs are an increasingly pervasive and effective form of ML, their depiction in popular SF remains relatively understudied. This project argues that Neural Netfics converse with the path-breaking ideas of Alan Turing, who pioneered the field of ML (and computer science as a whole) and made several under-recognized contributions to the area of neural computation.

Image: Computer Simulated Pyramidal Neurons. Dr. Hermann Cuntz & Prof. Michael Häusser, UCL, Wellcome Collection (CC BY-NC 4.0).

Specifically, I show that Neural Netfics adopt an important conceptual figure featured in Turing's writings—namely, the so-called “child-machine”—to speculatively explore the possibilities emerging from Turing's work, foremost among them the prospect that NNs might give rise to robust artificial intelligences (AI) that necessitate new conceptions of kinship, family, and ethics.

My project begins with a discussion of Turing's famous manifesto, “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” (1950). In the first part of this work, Turing describes his eponymous test to determine if a computer can be said to think. In the somewhat neglected concluding section of the paper, titled “Learning Machines,” Turing formulates the central insight around which neural computing takes shape: “instead of trying to produce a program to simulate the adult mind, why not rather try to produce one that simulates the child's? If this were then subjected to an appropriate course of education one would obtain the adult brain” (460). Turing's insight here is to program a simulation of the unorganized infantile brain that bears the capacity to learn—a “child-programme” or “child-machine” that can be subjected to educatory training to produce the neural pathways of the adult brain. This approach bypasses the infeasibly colossal endeavor of attempting to program all the

complex mechanisms of the adult brain. Notably, the concept of the child-machine follows from a prior Turing paper titled “Intelligent Machinery” (1948). There, Turing conceives of the “A-type unorganized machine,” a network of units connected by input and output terminals processing information in binary code. Turing states that “A-type unorganized machines are of interest as being about the simplest model of a nervous

LL Instead of trying to produce a program to simulate the adult mind, why not rather try to produce one that simulates the child's? If this were then subjected to an appropriate course of education one would obtain the adult brain.

system with a random arrangement of neurons” (417), stressing how an A-type unorganized machine simulates the electro-chemical processing of neuronal cells in the brain. These propagate signals along their dendrites (input terminals) and axons (output terminals) and then across synaptic junctions (transmission to the input terminal of another unit). By simulating the brain's neural architecture, the

A-type unorganized machine—supplemented by B-type machines that regulate information flow—can learn like human and nonhuman animals do via the formation of neural memory circuits.

What does all this have to do with contemporary SF? My project argues that current SF authors writing Neural Netfics adopt Turing's child-machines and other NNs as fictional characters that enable them to explore the far-reaching consequences of Turing's landmark ideas as they shape our present and future and impact our notions of kinship and ethics. Take for example Ted Chiang's 2010 novella, *The Lifecycle of Software Objects*. This tale recounts the creation of “Digients,” Tamagotchi-like, NN-based artificial pets whose burgeoning intelligence and sense of selfhood render them virtual children (read: child-machines) whose powers of thought and emotion pose urgent questions. While this story follows the trajectory of Turing's ideas by charting the development of complex intelligences from NNs, I argue that it also departs from said trajectory by insisting that the Digient is not a child-machine as much as a machine-child, that is, an actual child who happens to be a machine as opposed to merely a machine simulating a child, as Turing would have it. Consequently, *The Lifecycle of Software Objects* raises a host of ethical questions—about Digients both giving and receiving moral consideration, if not rights—that are beyond the scope of Turing's investigations. Furthermore, this story discovers in NNs a space

for speculation about humanity's posthuman evolutionary descendants, thereby challenging traditional kinship structures rooted in nuclear family and heterosexuality. As a neuronal mode of relatedness emerges in the tale, human kinship networks expand into the realms of AI and animality, rendering family post-nuclear, post-biological, posthuman, and queer.

My fascination with this project stems from classifying the multitude of ways Neural Netfics deconstruct, transform, and reconstitute both our ideological conceptions of family as well as its material-technological reality. For instance, Hannu Rajaniemi's "Elegy for a Young Elk" (2010) recounts how a post-apocalyptic hunter tries to kill a nanotechnology-enhanced, NN-running super-being who turns out to be the hunter's lost son. This story essentially inverts Chiang's, finding in NNs the hidden possibility for reconstructing severed family ties and broken relationships. Elizabeth Bear's "Tideline" (2007) depicts an arguably even stranger family. In this post-World War III survival tale, a combat robot outfitted with neuro-plastic adaptability learns how to mother a young boy, forming a symbiotic association with him that suggests a distinctly ecological vision of family. One sees a similar innovation in Catherynne Valente's *Silently and Very Fast* (2011), but with an endosymbiotic twist: this text features an AI, Elefsis, implanted in the brain of its human user, enabling them to share a mind and jointly create a virtual reality therein which they call "The Interior," an electronic dreamscape teeming with fantastic lifeforms. Still other Neural Netfics question, if not eschew, familial formations. One could describe Rachel



Swirsky's *Eros, Philia, Agape* (2009) as a robot divorce story that stresses how, for many, family is synonymous with brokenness, pain, and exclusion. Despite their differences, Neural Netfics are powerful textual sites wherein we can envision posthuman beings, strange families, and hitherto unimagined associations both abstruse and familiar, alien and intimate.

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The Calgary Atlas Project

is an **ART** project of

The Calgary Institute for the Humanities

With your support, we can continue to engage local artists and writers to document forgotten and lesser-known stories from Calgary's history.

The Calgary Atlas Project is producing a series of historical maps that uncover crucial stories about Calgary's past that illuminate, in surprising ways, the character of the city. Each map starts by documenting 30-40 sites in the city; this information is then interpreted by a Calgary artist to produce a new vision of the geography of the city.

These maps illustrate the diversity of Calgary's past and present, showing how the city is more than just a collection of buildings and people in a geographical location. They show how different communities interacted with and shaped the landscape and the built environment that emerged over the years. The Calgary Atlas Project recognizes that our city is at once one community and many. By researching and sharing the stories of the diverse communities within our city, we hope to show how this diversity contributes to our shared history.

The first two maps produced showcased Calgary's LGBTQ2S+ history and First Nations participation with the Calgary Stampede. Newly completed maps explore the history of alternative art movements, labour activism, Calgary's lost cinemas, our architectural heritage, and the story of the 1920s literary scene.

Our most recent phase of the Calgary Atlas Project was supported by a generous grant from the Calgary Foundation. We now need your support to complete the next series of maps in this project. To support the next phase of the Calgary Atlas Project, the CIH is raising \$46,000 to produce its next four maps that will illustrate immigration waves (as reflected in ethnic groceries and restaurants of International Avenue), Calgary's Jewish history, alternative energies, and sports and diversity.



To learn more or to give, please contact:

Shannon Katusa

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The Clear Arabic Qur'ān:

Discovering Classical Islamic Ways of Understanding the Language of the Qur'ān

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The Qur'ān is the holy scripture that is central to Islam, the religion of almost a quarter of the world's population—a sacred text that is in various ways important, foundational, and holy to two billion people from different cultures and backgrounds. In Islamic thought, the

Qur'ān is considered to be the direct word of God, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel in 7th century CE Arabia. The Qur'ān positions itself as being a message from God to humanity in the same line as previous Scriptures such as the Torah and the Gospels.

The Qur'ān announces itself as being 'in a clear Arabic tongue' (Q 26:195). The precise Arabic form of the Qur'ān, with its specific wording and arrangement, is seen in the Islamic tradition as being of utmost significance and excellence. Indeed, a set of Qur'ānic verses that have come to be known as the

Challenge Verses have been understood to rhetorically assert the idea that the Qur'ān's eloquent and magnificent use of language is superior to anything that humans could create. Classical Islamic theology developed the idea that the Qur'ān's superlative use of Arabic language to express its sublime meanings is an important aspect of the Qur'ān's status as miracle—and as such, its very linguistic form stands as proof that the Qur'ān is a revelation from the Divine.

This does not mean, however, that there has always been agreement among interpreters about how to understand the content of the Qur'ān's verses. Historical texts about the Qur'ān's language tell us that some members of the early Muslim community hesitated to try to interpret words and phrases about whose meaning they were uncertain, out of fear that they would err. And among those who have undertaken explanation of all the Qur'ān's verses, there have been a variety of different ways of understanding any given verse. Indeed, this interpretive diversity is a prominent characteristic of the Islamic exegetical tradition. Some Islamic interpretive communities have prioritized spiritual and allegorical meanings of the Qur'ān, while others have focused on plain readings of verses (which may still include metaphorical readings and other types of figurative meaning). These different communities have also had different views about who could access the Qur'ān's meanings and what qualities or qualifications such interpreters must have. Divergent methods of accessing the Qur'ān's meanings have resulted in interpretations that can sometimes differ greatly from one another.

The implications of such different approaches to, and results of, efforts to understand and interpret the Qur'ān are quite significant. Within the Islamic tradition, understanding the Qur'ān's verses has been important on a variety of levels: not only is the Qur'ān a central source of legal,

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theological, and ethical discourse, but it is also the direct word of God, and thus a preeminent source of divine knowledge. Because understanding the Qur'ān has been of such pressing significance, many realms of Islamic thought have engaged in sustained and complex ways with questions of how a reader or listener ought to interpret the Qur'ān.

My project at the CIH investigates the writings of a major Islamic thinker who was deeply occupied with these questions of how to access the Qur'ān's meanings; in this project, I aim to illuminate this thinker's perspective on this issue and the implications of reading and interpreting the Qur'ān according to his views. This thinker, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013 CE), is one of the giants of classical Sunni Islamic thought. Considered to be one of the formative voices in major schools of theology and law (specifically, the Ash'arite school of theology and the Mālikī school of law), he was also an emissary dispatched to the Byzantine Empire and a tutor to the son of the ruler of the Buyid dynasty under whose governance he lived. Al-Bāqillānī authored influential books of Islamic theology, legal theory, and polemics, as well as a treatise on the status of the Qur'ān as miracle, in which he engages deeply with the literary features of the Qur'ān, drawing this field into dialogue with literary criticism and thought on rhetoric more broadly.

Much scholarly attention has been devoted to al-Bāqillānī's books over the millennium since they were composed. Research on these texts can be characterized broadly as being intradisciplinary: scholars of literature have devoted attention to al-Bāqillānī's work on the literary features of the Qur'ān and his literary criticism in this connection, while scholars of Islamic jurisprudence have written about the contribution that al-Bāqillānī's legal theory makes, and research on the history of Islamic theology has focused on the role of al-Bāqillānī's theological writings.

My project brings together thought on al-Bāqillānī's writings across his scholarly oeuvre. What initially piqued my interest in this area of inquiry was a curiosity about whether there was a unifying theme or set of concerns that lies behind al-Bāqillānī's writings in the various fields to which he contributed—a theme or argument that is perceptible to an audience who reads his oeuvre comprehensively. Reading his writings interdisciplinarily, it becomes apparent that there is indeed a significant theme that emerges over and over: an insistence on construing the entire Qur'ān as being clear and accessible to human understanding through its Arabic-language medium. This idea appears in al-Bāqillānī's work

on legal theory, his theological writings, and most prominently in his book about the status of the Qur'ān as a miracle. In writing about the Qur'ān's sublime eloquence, al-Bāqillānī connects the literary-rhetorical aspect of the miracle with the Qur'ān's conveying of meaning in the clearest and most effective ways through its specific ways of using the Arabic language. In writing about categories of Qur'ānic language that were sometimes considered to be ambiguous or opaque—or that some claimed require specialized spiritual knowledge in order to understand—al-Bāqillānī reframes them so as to construe them as clear in their use of the Arabic language, even going so far as to insist that they are precisely

self-referential announcements of the Qur'ān being in clear Arabic.

This striking claim is worthy of investigation, particularly as al-Bāqillānī's work has been so influential in the subsequent development of Sunni Islamic thought. My project explores the ways in which al-Bāqillānī articulates his argument that the Qur'ān's meanings are clear and accessible through its Arabic-language medium. Al-Bāqillānī weaves this idea into several different discussions at different points in his works, rather than devoting a single section of a book to this thesis, and so one part of my project is devoted to identifying and explicating these junctures in his writings. Another part of the project explores the ways in which



Image: Bāhīya Palace in Marrakech, Morocco. Photo by Rachel Friedman.

this argument is situated historically, drawing on research about the social, religious, and political milieu in which al-Bāqillānī lived. Finally, the project reflects on the implications of seeing the Qur’ān’s language in the way that al-Bāqillānī proposes. Following the logic of his argument, is knowledge of the Arabic language the key to becoming a qualified reader of the Qur’ān? Should this stance be understood as a reaction to the practices of contemporaneous interpretive communities who took a privileged spiritual status to be the most important criterion for interpreting the Qur’ān? These questions lead us to reflect, with al-Bāqillānī, on the bases of interpretive authority within a religious community—and the means by which readers can access the holy Scripture generation after generation.

It is a great privilege to hold the Wayne O. McCready fellowship at the CIH this year. This opportunity has allowed me to devote focused time and energy to my project and to benefit from the wonderful resources of the CIH, including exciting and dynamic interdisciplinary conversations with colleagues.



Image: Zāwīya of Moulay Idrīs II in Fes, Morocco. Photo by Rachel Friedman.



Cinema Against State Terror:

Documentary Aesthetics and the Algerian Revolution

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In 1968, Amílcar Cabral, the leader of Guinea-Bissau's anti-colonial war of independence, famously declared, "Muslims go to pilgrimage in Mecca, Christians go to the Vatican, and national liberation movements go to Algiers." Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Algeria acted as a pilot state for the Third World project, which

demanding an alternative to Cold War geopolitics by fostering militant solidarity across the colonized and neo-colonized nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Algeria's political party, the Front de Liberation Nationale (F.L.N.), played a critical role in the establishment of internationalist coalitions, such as the Non-Aligned

Movement and the Organization of African Unity, provided military training and arms to insurgent states, including Vietnam, Palestine, and Angola, and acted as an ideological haven to dissidents from around the world. My CIH resident fellowship will situate this critical moment in the development of the Third World Left in view of a largely

under-theorized body of documentary cinema, which gave critical focus and tangible expression to Algeria's role as the "Mecca of revolution."

My aim is to expand upon a body of scholarship within film and media studies that is actively retracing the radical "third cinemas" of the anticolonial era in their internationalist dimensions and their resonances with the visual cultures of the contemporary Global South. Toward this end, I will examine the work of three documentary filmmakers—Ahmed Rachedi, William Klein, and Santiago Alvarez—whose films prismatically open the "third world capital" onto Indigenous, European, and Latin American perspectives, respectively. I will demonstrate how all three of these directors rendered key events, exchanges, and cultural texts in the history of Algerian coalition-building, and facilitated the meeting between distinct yet adjacent nationalist struggles. I will also show how their films captured Algeria as a site for the collision of ideological orientations, ranging from Pan-Africanism to Tri-Continentalism. These exchanges have significant consequences for Film and Media Studies, I argue, insofar as Algeria in the late 1960s and early 1970s functioned as a laboratory for the cross-pollination of radical film and documentary modes. My project will thus destabilize an area studies approach to radical film history and offer new inroads into the genealogy of anticolonial cinema. Through an interdisciplinary combination of close film analysis, discourse analysis of contemporaneous film theoretical debates, and a broader historical engagement with Algeria's role within global politics, my research at the CIH

will examine three specific case studies.

Case 1: Ahmed Rachedi's *L'Aube des damnés* (1965)

Ahmed Rachedi's pamphlet-collage film, *L'Aube des damnés* (1965) is the first film to render revolutionary Algeria as a hub of Third-Worldist struggle. Rachedi began his directorial career under the film unit of the F.L.N., working with René Vautier on the Fanonian-inspired, agit-prop documentary, *Le peuple en marche* (1963). In *L'Aube des damnés*, Rachedi extends this Fanonian orientation by

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attempting to reimagine the arguments of *The Wretched of the Earth* through the history of documentary film. Composed of archival footage obtained by the newly formed Centre National du Cinéma Algérien, the film dilates from an initial analysis of the Algerian War of Independence to a rousing call to arms against ongoing colonial domination in nations across the Global South: from Mozambique, to South Africa, to Namibia. My analysis of Rachedi's film will demonstrate how *L'Aube des damnés* represents a key, yet under-theorized, film in the

history of militant cinema, fusing Soviet methods of dialectical montage with an anti-colonial thematic emphasis on the muscular liberation of the colonized masses.

Case 2: William Klein's *Festival panafricain d'Alger* 1969 (1969)

Following his career as an internationally renowned American street photographer, William Klein became immersed in the cinematic culture of the politically oriented Left Bank group in the late 1960s. In 1967, Klein collaborated with Chris Marker, Agnès Varda, and Jean-Luc Godard on the omnibus, anti-imperial documentary, *Loin du Vietnam*. Based on the strength of his contribution to the project, Klein was commissioned by Algeria's National Office for Cinematographic Trade and Industry to document the 1960 Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers, an event that the government envisioned as a grand opera of the Third World. Klein's film captures debates between key Third World revolutionaries and black liberation activists, including Amilcar Cabral, Robert Mugabe, and Stokely Carmichael, and performances by Nina Simone and Archie Shepp, which he intermingles with a range of archival photographs, posters, and previous anti-colonial films. For Olivier Hadouchi, Klein's documentary is at once a cultural document and an "amalgam of a group of films that together constitute a little-known history of cinema associated with the liberation of Africa". However, insofar as the film was intended to make Algerian foreign policy legible to an international audience, it also represented a clash of aesthetic and political sensibilities. Klein's essayistic form, jarring and probing in its Brechtian collision of

images and materials, proved alienating to the Algerian government, who rejected the documentary as work of propaganda. Accordingly, my analysis of the Festival panafricain d'Alger 1969 is invested in how the film both cultivated internationalist solidarity while testing the horizons of Third World diplomacy.

Case 3: Santiago Alvarez's ...*Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto* (1974)

Throughout its evolution as a revolutionary party, the F.L.N. looked to Cuba as a conceptual portal, and aspired to make Algeria the "Cuba of Africa". As Jeffrey James Byrne notes, the fraternity between the F.L.N. and the Communist Party of Cuba was not based on "religious, linguistic, or imperial commonalities" but on an impressionistic and affective response to one another that was atypical of other movements. Members of the F.L.N. went so far as to emulate Cuban soldiers by smoking cigars and wearing patrol caps. This fascinating entanglement of sensibilities is captured by Santiago's epic, but little

known, documentary, *Y el cielo fue tomado por asalto*, which traces Fidel Castro's trip to Algeria in 1972. Alvarez's cinema formalized what Anne Garland Mahler identifies as the politics of the Tricontinental movement, which promoted "lateral solidarity among liberation struggles" and "conceived of a global, inclusionary, and nonracially deterministic resistant subjectivity but which still kept racism and the image of global capitalism as a racializing apparatus in the spotlight." Indeed, Alvarez mobilizes Castro's visit to Algeria to make a broader argument about the unity of Tri-continental subjectivity, but also documents how neo-colonial economic pressures from France and the United States worked to complicate Algerian-Cuban solidarity.

Conclusion

Within both Film and Media studies and the broader humanities, the period encompassing Algeria's post-independence has been largely defined through a Eurocentric lens that focuses on the nation's relationship with France

and its peripheral function in Cold War geopolitics. Accordingly, my work at the CIH will examine the growing body of historical literature on Algeria's role in the cultivation of Third World Internationalism as well as the writings of the anti-colonial philosophers and F.L.N. insiders who directly influenced the nation's multilateral political platform. Indeed, the F.L.N. worked strategically to leverage the conflicts between more powerful nation states to its own benefit, and to form alignments that would promote its vision of Fanonian-inspired socialism. In developing a rigorous understanding of these developments, I will bring an informed perspective to the debates, events, and cultural texts examined by Rachedi, Klein, and Alvarez. Moreover, in offering a rigorous account of how the documentaries under consideration present globe-spanning models of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial aesthetics, my project will make a significant contribution to the politicization of the category of "World Cinema", a methodology that seeks to de-center the West and examine film history in its forms of inter-connectedness.



Image: Still from Ahmed Rachedi's *L'Aube des damnés* (1965)

ENERGY SECURITY, ENERGY SOVEREIGNTY AND ENERGY JUSTICE

In April 2023 the Calgary Institute for the Humanities (CIH) co-hosted, along with the Kule Institute for Advanced Studies (KIAS), the Western Humanities Alliance Annual Conference. The conference and related activities provided a humanist perspective on pressing energy challenges, a dimension which is often neglected in current discussions on energy transition and decarbonization of economies.

As public discourse on the current energy crisis and climate action are dominated by the search for technological solutions and formulation of policy responses, more sophisticated understandings of the social and cultural factors of our energy problems remain in the background. With this conference, Alberta-based humanities centres CIH and KIAS tap into cutting-edge research in the energy humanities and social sciences to disseminate important insights that will benefit other researchers as well as society at large while training the next generation of energy scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

Supported by a SSHRC Connection Grant, the activities included a two-day international academic conference at the Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity (21-23 April 2023), and will include future public events in Calgary in fall 2023, and a special issue of the Western Humanities Review (manuscript by 31 December 2023).

The academic conference brought together leading humanities and social sciences scholars to discuss the various human dimensions of energy security including energy justice and energy sovereignty. All three themes were covered by separate panels with three speakers each, including graduate students, emerging and senior scholars. The themes were also be addressed by three keynote speakers: Sheena Wilson, University of Alberta, who spoke on Energy Justice; Kirsten Westphal, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, on Energy Security; and, Raylene Whitford (Canative Energy, Edmonton), on Indigenous Energy Sovereignty.

The goals of the conference, public events, and the publication of a themed special issue of the Western Humanities Review are: 1) to create critical and humanist knowledge around the concepts of energy security, energy sovereignty and energy justice for an academic audience; 2) to engage with the public

in discussions on these concepts and highlight the social and cultural origins and meanings of these terms which are used by politicians and decision-makers to justify wide-sweeping energy policies; 3) to introduce graduate students and emerging scholars into research networks and train them in collaborative humanities and social sciences research, as well as partnership building, networking, conference organization and editorial work; and, 4) to consolidate existing collaboration between KIAS and CIH on energy research in the humanities and social sciences.



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Front cover: A flowering fuchsia (*Fuchsia coccinea*) and a planthopper insect (*Fulgora diadema*) in both pupal and adult state. Coloured etching by J. Pass, c. 1805, after J. Ihle. (Wellcome Collection 25492i.)

Back cover: A flowering branch of medlar (*Mespilus germanica*) with butterfly, chrysalis and caterpillar of a *Papilio* species. Coloured engraving by J. Pass, c. 1816. (Wellcome Collection 25522i.)