

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

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.

Laura Doyle is Professor of English at University of Massachusetts-Amherst and co-convenor of the World Studies Interdisciplinary Project. Her research focuses on the intersections of literary culture and geopolitical economy, combining long-historical frameworks and decolonial, intersectional theory. In 2015-17, Doyle was the Principal Investigator for a Mellon Foundation Grant for a series of Sawyer Seminars, “Beyond Medieval and Modern: Rethinking Global Paradigms of Political Economy and Culture,” under the auspices of the World Studies Interdisciplinary Project. Her books include *Bordering on the Body: The Racial Matrix of Modern Fiction and Culture* (1994); *Freedom’s Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640-1940* (2008).

Friday **13** Sep

Keynote Lecture

15:15 - 17:00

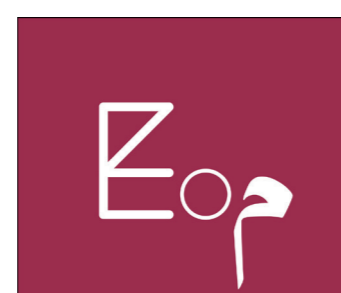
Mark Bould (University of the West of England, Bristol)
“Revenant, Repetition, Road Block: Foreclosed Futures in Late-Anthropocene SF”

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.

Mark Bould is Reader in Film and Literature at UWE, Bristol. He is the recipient of the 2016 SFRA Pilgrim Lifetime Achievement Award for Critical Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy and the 2019 IAFA Distinguished Scholarship Award. The founding editor of the journal *Science Fiction Film and Television* and the monograph series *Studies in Global Science Fiction*, his most recent books are *Africa SF* (2013), *SF Now* (2014), *Solaris* (2014) and *M. John Harrison: Critical Essays* (2019). He is currently writing *The Anthropocene Unconscious* (2020) and *Climate Parapraxes* (2021).



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