

## UCD Humanities Institute

### 'From Modern Crisis to Permacrisis & Polycrisis: Epistemological Perspectives & Interventions' Symposium Dublin, 22-24 May 2025

#### Abstracts & Bios

Ailbhe Smyth (former academic, feminist, and LGBTQ activist), 'Perma / Poly Crisis and Violence Against Women: "Every Day is Crisis Day"'

Abstract:

*Every hour of every day more than five women are killed by intimate partners or family.*

*Around one in 3 women globally has experienced physical or sexual violence in adulthood.*

In this short talk I will be arguing that violence against women, and gender-based violence more broadly, must be recognised as an integral component of perma/polycrisis. Despite its deep-rooted global prevalence, appalling and far-reaching damage, and its implacable resistance to eradication, it is astonishing that violence against women is typically ignored or marginalised in discussions of that (shifting) confluence of interconnected systemic crises considered to constitute 'the polycrisis'. Violence against women is not a 'standalone' problem. These intertwined crises create an environment where violence against women flourishes, and where women's oppression and inequality are reinforced and intensified. By highlighting this shocking everyday reality, I am advocating for the urgent need for a gender-aware response to analysing and addressing the polycrisis.

Bio: Ailbhe Smyth is a high-level campaigner and former academic, with long-standing strategic, political and organisational experience, and wide involvement in the NGO and Community sectors. She was the Co-Director of the 'Together for Yes' referendum campaign, the Co-founder and Convenor of the Coalition to Repeal the 8th Amendment, and Strategic Advisory for the 2015 Marriage Equality referendum. Currently, Ailbhe is Chair of Women's Aid and Chair of Ballyfermot STAR Addiction Services; Board Member of Age Action and Board member of the Women's Global Health Network; Patron of Women's Collective Ireland; and on the Steering Group of Le Cheile: Diversity Not Division. Ailbhe was a UCD senior academic for 40 years, and the founding Head of Women's Studies (WERRC) at UCD. Awards include: conferral with the Freedom of the City of Dublin in 2022; an Honorary doctorate in laws (University of Galway); a GALAS Lifetime Award for service to the LGBTQ+ Community; and inclusion in Time Magazine's '100 Most Influential People' in 2019.

## Aleida Assmann (Konstanz), 'Changing Concepts of the Future'

**Abstract:** It is not easy to speak about the future without immediately falling into either an acceleration mode or adopting an apocalyptic tone. I would like to avoid both. Therefore, I am not asking how much future we still have, but rather how we can create future. I call this 'doing future': future can emerge where we do something for it and invest in it. Secondly, I will ask "which futures?" in order to find out how future is imagined in our society. It turns out that there is not just one concept of future available, but several futures that we relate to. They belong to different time regimes. By shifting the word from singular to plural, I will present three meanings of future that are well known, but never discussed together because they partly contradict or compete with each other. Nevertheless, they are all in use and we need them all. By switching from future to futures, I hope to expand our frame of thinking about the future and to open up new perspectives.

**Bio:** Aleida Assmann is emerita Professor of English Literature at the University of Konstanz. Her research on cultural memory, its forms and functions has been path-breaking, as manifest in her global recognition. Related areas of her research are: the history of media, the history and theory of reading. In 2014, she received the Heineken Prize for History by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2017, she was awarded the Balzan Prize for Collective Memory together with her late husband, the Egyptologist Jan Assmann. In 2018, Aleida and Jan were awarded the prestigious Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels, honouring their work for "sustainable peace". Since 2020, Assmann has been a member of the order Pour le Mérite for Sciences and Arts. In 2021 she was elected a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy. Her work has been translated into many languages. Publications in English include: *Memory in a Global Age. Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (ed. with Sebastian Conrad, 2010), *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (2012), *Shadows of Trauma. Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity* (2016). *Is the Time Out of Joint? On the Rise and Fall of the Modern Time Regime* (2020).

## Alexander Kondakov (UCD), 'Queer Dystopia: Constructive Predictions of the End of the World'

**Abstract:** This presentation takes as a point of departure the transformation of social institutions after the crisis of modernity. While contemporary crisis scholarship highlights the destabilisation of long-standing institutions of European modernity (law, nation-state, democracy, sexuality, etc.), it offers little insight into what follows. Utopian studies, on the other hand, assume that a positive attitude towards the future paves the way for progress, yet fail to account for the uncertainty of what lies ahead. Bridging these gaps, my project explores the implications of embracing institutional decline, arguing that preparing for the dystopian apocalypse allows for the development of innovative solutions. Employing dystopia as a method of analysis, the paper critically examines the social, political, and material conditions shaping an increasingly fragmented world. This dystopian methodology focuses on power reconfigurations that alter the frameworks, vocabularies, and practices

underpinning social institutions. The presentation sketches my initial ideas of the queer dystopia as a method.

Bio: Alexander Sasha Kondakov, PhD, is an assistant professor at the School of Sociology, University College Dublin, Ireland. Alexander's work is primarily focused on law and sexuality studies, more specifically on queer sexualities. His latest research on anti-queer violence concluded with an open-access book "Violent Affections: Queer sexuality, techniques of power, and law in Russia".

Ana Ivasiuc (University College Dublin), 'Polycrisis: Keywords of the far-right: towards an anthropology of polycrisis'

Abstract: "People are *exasperated* around here", the leader of the far-right neighbourhood patrol cried. If he wanted – he explained – he could mobilise two-three thousand inhabitants of his small neighbourhood and burn down the nearby Roma camp. *Disorder, decay, impunity. The irresponsibility of good-doer politicians. Abandonment. EU authoritarianism. Migration floods, invasion, pillage.* Grounding my paper in ethnographic fieldwork carried out in the peripheries of Rome, I aim at a bottom-up unpacking of the keywords of polycrisis as seen by my far-right interlocutors. I discuss how and why the far-right constitutes an apt lens for the study of polycrisis – perceived, constructed, and acted upon. I address the temporalities of polycrisis that mix nostalgia for a fascist past which brought order with concern for a chaotic present, and action to secure a national future. Finally, I propose pointers for a future anthropology of polycrisis.

Bio: Ana Ivasiuc is a social anthropologist currently holding a teaching fellowship at the School of Sociology, University College Dublin. Her work focuses on formal and informal policing of Roma, migrants, urban insecurity, far-right practices. Ana published extensively on these topics, as well as on Roma activism. Between 2023 and 2025, she served as president of the European Association of Social Anthropologists, an association that she now serves as vice-president.

Anne Fuchs (UCD), 'Against "End Times Fascism:" Liveable Futures and Aesthetic Precariousness in the Anthropocene'

Abstract: At the end of the twentieth century the Anthropocene emerged as modernity's unruly offspring, precipitating a profound crisis of modern time and of the modern crisis narrative which promised the successful management of dangerous tipping points and the return to a state of stability. The Anthropocene as the era in which – to quote Timothy Clark – the domain of the natural is "becoming dangerously out of bounds", has revived and adapted the premodern Apocalyptic expectation of the imminence of the end of the world. My paper sketches and critiques the revival of the Apocalyptic template in the imaginary of the Anthropocene. Spanning the entire spectrum of popular science, cinema, gaming, fiction, journalism and even the eco-critical debates in the humanities, I want to show that these end times fantasies embrace what Naomi Klein and Astra Talyor have aptly called a "darkly festive fatalism" which celebrates the extinction of the

many and worships racism, sexism and ableism. Against this background I will touch on the special contribution of the critical humanities to salvaging liveable futures for future generations. The experience of aesthetic precariousness fosters modes of attention and practices of attentiveness which reveal the kind of non-transactional correspondences that are vectors of open-ended emergences and of hope.

Bio: Anne Fuchs is Professor of Modern German Literature and Culture and Director of the Humanities Institute at University College Dublin. She has published widely on German cultural memory, modernist and contemporary German literature, theories of time and temporality and on crisis narratives. Her latest publications include *Precarious Times: Temporality and History in Modern German Culture* (Cornell University Press, 2019); the co-edited double special issue (with Mary Cosgrove) *The Politics and Aesthetics of Relationality in Contemporary German, Literature, Culture, and Film. Oxford German Studies* 53/1 and 53/4 (2024); *Framing Ageing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Shared Experience* (with Julia Langbein and Mary Cosgrove, Bloomsbury 2024). Publications on crisis and relationality: 'Introduction: Manifesto for a Relational Turn'. *Oxford German Studies* 53/1 (2024): 1-12; 'On Futures and Endings: Narratological Reflections on Contemporary Forms of Crises'. *History & Theory. Studies in the Philosophy of History* 62/3 (2023): 337-355. She is a member of the Royal Irish Academy and a Fellow of the British Academy.

Bianca Cataldi (Galway), 'Narrating Crisis: Igiaba Scego and the Legacy of Italian Colonialism in Somalia'

Abstract: Contemporary transnational Italian literature engages deeply with histories of crisis, displacement, and trauma, offering narratives that move beyond singular moments of catastrophe to depict an ongoing state of permacrisis. This flash-talk explores how Igiaba Scego's *Adua* (2015) constructs a narrative of crisis that transcends national and temporal boundaries. The novel interrogates the legacies of colonial violence, migration, and cultural alienation through the intertwined stories of an Italian-Somali woman and her father, a former interpreter under Fascist rule. By shifting between Italy and Somalia, past and present, *Adua* reveals how historical violence remains an unresolved condition that continues to shape identities and political realities. Scego's novel challenges linear understandings of crisis, showing instead how trauma is inherited, reactivated, and transformed across generations. Through this analysis, the talk considers how transnational Italian literature functions as a space for rethinking crisis narratives, resisting amnesia, and addressing the ethical imperative of remembrance in an era of perpetual instability.

Bio: Bianca Rita Cataldi is a Lecturer in Italian at the University of Galway. Her current work explores transnational Italian literature, migration narratives, motherhood narratives, and women's writing. She has published extensively, including the monograph *Industrial Literature and Authors: Labor, Factory Utopias and Testimonial Intent* (Routledge, 2024). She is currently a collaborator of the project "TRAIN – Transnational Research and Interdisciplinary Networks", funded by

UCD Research Culture and Wellcome Trust.

Caitríona Ní Dhúill (Salzburg), 'Thinking, unplugged: Cognitive autonomy as resistance / resilience / resource in polycrisis contexts'

Abstract: How does it feel to look at the all-pervading infrastructure of the digital, at the exponentially increasing power of generative AI, at the ever more immersive 'worlds' to which our ubiquitous devices are gateways...and to say, with Melville's *Bartleby, I prefer not to*? This flashtalk considers the decision to resist digitality as a form of cognitive resistance. Discourses of 'screen sabbaticals' and 'digital detox' have already been co-opted for marketable wellness before they have even begun to unleash their emancipatory-critical potential, but that is no reason simply to capitulate to the digital default. Instead, 'unplugged thinking' allows consideration of some interlocking drivers of polycrisis: the ecological cost of data centres and digital infrastructure; the demands devices make on social interaction; the atrophying of embodied cognition; the amplification of socio-political polarization; and the legitimization narratives of profit-driven techno-feudalism. -- The flashtalk communicates its ideas interactively, spurring participants to practical action.

Bio: Caitríona Ní Dhúill is professor of modern German literature at the University of Salzburg. She studied German and Music at Trinity College Dublin and has taught at the universities of St Andrews, Durham, Vienna and Cork. She has published on utopian fiction and theory, biography as literature, and ecological consciousness. She founded the Centre for Culture and Ecology (Durham 2018) and the Eco-Humanities Research Group (Cork 2021), and is currently developing [The Philology Garden](#).

Caroline Levine (Cornell), 'Collective Continuance: Forms for the Future'

Abstract: Scholars and artists for more than a century have been skeptical of desires for security, stability, and predictability. But in a historical moment where crisis has become ordinary, and basic necessities like food, water, and shelter are increasingly rare and under threat, Levine will argue that continuity should be a political priority on the left. She draws on Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Whyte's term "collective continuance." For Whyte, it's unjust to disrupt the ways that different communities thrive and maintain themselves over time, including access to clean water and sustainable food systems. This concept allows him to launch a powerful critique of settler colonialism. But it also upends the usual logic of arguments for the arts, which routinely valorize ruptures, gaps, and innovations—discontinuity over predictability. What would it mean for studies of the arts to shift our focus toward collective continuance? This paper turns to formalism for its answer.

Bio: Caroline Levine is David and Kathleen Ryan Professor of the Humanities at Cornell University. She is the author of four books: *The Activist Humanist: Form and Method in the Climate Crisis* (2023), *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (2015), *Provoking Democracy: Why We Need the Arts* (2007), and *The Serious*

*Pleasures of Suspense* (2003).

Charlotte Wrigley (University of Stavanger), 'From permafrost to eternally frozen: temperature and temporality in the climate crisis'

Abstract: Arctic permafrost is thawing due to climate change. As the Arctic heats four times as fast as the rest of the planet, the Inuk activist Sheila Watt-Cloutier's call for 'the right to be cold' becomes ever more critical. The permafrost's degrading has coincided with a rise in human-maintained cold storage systems that preserve things threatened by rising temperatures: seeds, data, DNA, and even whole bodies are kept in cryobanks that seek to extend the time within them indefinitely. The most extreme example is the cryonics industry: the privately funded arm of experimental science that freezes human bodies after death in the hope of resurrecting them one day. Cryonics is largely the domain of the super-rich and, at its core, is a promise of immortality for those that have the means to pay for it. Who gets to be cold on a heating planet, therefore, is configured by power, but also by a temporal shift that constructs eternity inside the cryobank, whilst those outside it experience the temporal quickening of crisis.

Bio: Charlotte Wrigley is a research fellow at the Greenhouse Centre for Environmental Humanities at the University of Stavanger. Her research sits at the intersection between human geography, environmental humanities and more-than-human studies, with a particular emphasis on the Arctic and northern environments. She is currently the principal investigator of 'Good Fire', a study into prescribed burning and fire ecologies in boreal landscapes

Denise Polaczuk (Salzburg), 'Crisis narratives and apocalypticism between legitimization and compensation strategies in right-wing extremism'

Abstract: At least since the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing outbreaks of war, terms such as poly- or even permacrisis are trending not only in the media, but also in academic research. In both, special attention was attracted by the subsequent reactions of right-wing populist parties and conspiracy ideologists. In my paper, I will not only interpret right-wing extremist crisis narratives as reactions, as compensation strategies of crises – tools for regaining orientation and sense in a world that is felt as highly contingent –, but furthermore take a closer look at how certain narrations of poly-/permacrises are used as legitimization strategies: presenting the narrator as the only saviour out of the crisis. Including a short comparison with apocalyptic literature in the history of religion, I will analyse and interpret one recent right-wing extremist crisis narration, exemplarily uncovering both the self-stabilising, orientation-providing and the polarising and manipulative power of crisis narratives in contemporary political discursive practices. By this, my paper will contribute to the conference a critical perspective on a specific group of increasingly powerful agents within Western crisis discourses and their role in shifting understandings of crisis.

Bio: Denise Polaczuk, M.A., is a PhD student in Religious Studies at the



Paris-Lodron-University of Salzburg, Austria. She is interested in the role of religion in contemporary global politics and the respective historical backgrounds, with a special research focus on current conspiracy ideologies and anti-Islamic trends in right-wing extremism, frequently applying interdisciplinary approaches from the field of Semiotics as well as from Queer and Gender Studies.

Dirk Oschmann (Leipzig), 'The Question of Belonging in Germany'

**Abstract:** The lecture would deal with the problem of belonging: Who belongs to a society, to a country, to a group? Who feels they belong, who doesn't? Who decides? In Germany, for example, the question of whether Islam belongs to Germany is highly controversial. Those who belong have more rights, more opportunities to participate and help shape society, and ultimately they have more opportunities in life. Belonging constitutes a community and therefore functions as a factor of social stabilisation and democratisation. Conversely, the impression of not belonging reinforces polarisation tendencies and threatens democratic coexistence. This could be observed in the USA after Donald Trump's first election as well as after the Brexit decision in the UK, when some people in both countries expressed their views: Not my country anymore. Based on these general considerations, the lecture would deal with the question with regard to the specific German situation since the GDR joined the FRG, insofar as it becomes apparent here that although the East Germans are formally politically equal and thus belong, the concrete realities of life in the individual areas of society convey a completely different picture, which exacerbates the already crisis-ridden situation of the country immensely.

**Bio:** Dirk Oschmann, born in 1967 in Gotha, pursued his education in German, English, and American Studies in Jena and Buffalo, USA, earning his Ph.D. in Jena in 1998. As a Feodor Lynen Fellow at the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, he furthered his studies in Madison, USA, in 2001/2002. After his habilitation in Jena in 2006, he then served as a Junior Professor for Modern German Literature (2005-2011) and has been a Professor at Leipzig University since 2011. His career has featured guest professorships and lectureships at institutions like Canterbury, UK (2009), UC Davis, USA (2006), University of Notre Dame, USA (2010), and Brown University, USA (2013). His works include »Auszug aus der Innerlichkeit« (1999, tr: Extract from Inwardness), »Bewegliche Dichtung« (2007, tr: Movable Poetry), »Friedrich Schiller« (2009) and »Freiheit und Fremdheit. Kafkas Romane« (2021, tr: Freedom and Foreignness: Kafka's Novels). He edited or co-edited books as: »Literatur & Lebenswelt« (2012, tr: Literature & Environment), »Schillers Zeitbegriffe« (2018, tr: Schiller's Concepts of Time), and others. In his book »Der ›Osten‹: eine westdeutsche Erfindung« (2023, tr: The ›East‹: a West German Invention), which caused a great stir in public circles, he criticizes the great divide between the Germans in the Federal Republic, which still and again divides the country into East and West. Oschmann lives in Leipzig.

Donncha Kavanagh (UCD), "Times in crisis: Temporal frames, epochs and purviews"

Abstract: At the risk of generalisation, when historiography conceptualises the past, present and future, it doesn't usually distinguish between the mythical past, the distant past, the recent past, the present, the near future, the distant future or eternity. To an extent, Braudel's notion of *longue durée* does so, but that doesn't capture the relative importance a temporal frame – which, drawing on Ricoeur, we can infer from narratives – gives to different *temporal epochs*. I refer to this property of a temporal frame as its *temporal purview*. Being able to talk and think about the distant future is especially important in the context of polycrisis and permacrisis. Moreover, the distant (or mythical) past is what animates much of the populist rhetoric of Orban, Putin, Trump, Erdoğan et al, which people are perhaps turning to as a counter to thinking about the polycrises. This session will focus on the three concepts of *temporal frame*, *temporal epoch* and *temporal purview*.

Bio: Donncha Kavanagh is Full Professor of Information & Organisation in the College of Business at University College Dublin, Ireland. His research interests include the sociology of knowledge and technology, the history and philosophy of management thought, futures studies, money, play and ethics. He has published widely in the fields of information and organization, management, marketing, and organization studies. Website: <https://people.ucd.ie/donncha.kavanagh>

Féile Butler (architect), 'The 'HeART of Gaza' exhibition of children's art: a collaborative project'

Abstract: Soon after the genocide began, my Instagram (@feile\_illustrator) filled up with Palestinian content. That's how Mohammed found me and we started talking. As time went on, we shared more and more about our lives, our families and friends. One day, I asked my daughter to send some art to Mohammed's nieces and nephew, to cheer them up. They loved it.

It wasn't long before the WhatsApp was pinging with creativity flying in both directions. Initially, the subject matter was regular enough – a day at the beach ... a birthday cake.

Then two images arrived that stopped me in my tracks.

The artists were 7 and 3 years old. I knew this intimate insight into some of the most vulnerable and voiceless victims of this genocide had to be shared with the world.

I said it to Mohammed. We need to put on an art exhibition.

So we did ... It was just over 4 weeks from that first text to our inaugural opening in a gallery in Sligo. Talk about intense!

But what a positive experience, for the team in Gaza – of Mohammed, Qamar, Misk and Hassan, and in Ireland, with me and Fia, Caoimhe and Clíona, and amazing support from the North West Mothers for Social Justice. And from this project, the Artists' Tent, a dedicated space for children's art workshops has been set up in



central Gaza.

In Sligo, children drew their response to what they saw. These artworks will be sent to Gaza, kicking off a living 2-way conversation unhindered by language or borders.

When our first workshop kicked off, I sent a photo to Mohammed. Within seconds he responded with this image:

The synchronicity of it was beautiful! Children in Sligo and Deir al Balah making art together at the exact same moment in time.



Mohammed and I hope you are moved by HeART of Gaza. And if you are moved, that you will take action to end this genocide. Talk to us for ideas about what you can do.

Bio: Owner of Roots Architecture, Féile Butler is a conservation architect with a passion for Ireland's vernacular, specialising in earthen construction. In 2024, she co-founded *HeART of Gaza: Children's Art from the Genocide* with her friend, Mohammed Timraz (based in Deir al Balah, Gaza). The Irish Tour takes in venues from Derry to Kerry. Capturing imaginations worldwide, *HeART of Gaza* has been exhibited in over 90 venues in 9 countries spanning 2 continents.

Gillian Pye (UCD), 'Happiness within permacrisis?'

Abstract: This flash-presentation asks the question: how can we think about happiness if we live in permacrisis? Is it even relevant to consider what it means to 'feel good', when climate change has passed a point of no return and when so many people lack the conditions to sustain any life, let alone what might be described as a 'good', life? I argue that contemporary concepts of happiness are inseparable from the modern idea of crisis. Both concepts draw on fantasies of stability, risk management and individual agency. Both are defined against the threat of disruption to expectations of stability and continuity. Where there is crisis, happiness can exist only as exception. However, not only does the experience of crisis feed the human desire for happiness, but this desire may also be instrumentalised to construct crisis. Furthermore, as Lauren Berlant and others have argued, contemporary concepts of happiness may also serve as a block to the development of a broader understanding of crisis, an understanding which could create the potential for a more sustainable happiness founded in – rather than against – the processual, precarious, relational nature of human existence. In this mini-paper, I argue that by rendering affect visible as embodied and historical, experience, but also by exposing feeling as narratively constructed, literary texts have a unique capacity to explore what it feels like to live with, and within, permacrisis.

Bio: Gillian Pye is Associate Professor in German in the School of Languages Cultures and Linguistics, University College Dublin. Her research focuses on contemporary German literature and she is currently working on the poetics and

politics of happiness.

Jeanne Riou (UCD), "Permacrisis, Epochal Threshold and the Problem of Time"

*Jeanne Riou abstract tbc*

*Jeanne Riou bio tbc*

John Barry (Queens), 'Fluxed Futures or "Barbarism if we're lucky:" Radical Hope and the Responsibility of Intellectuals'

Abstract:

"Th' whole worl's in a terrible state o'chassis" (Captain Boyle, *Juno and the Paycock*)

A spectre is haunting our world and worldbuilding imaginaries in the twenty-first century – the spectre of the collapse of the life supporting systems of a habitable earth. That we live in increasingly turbulent and destabilising times is both a truism and an underestimation. Perhaps what we are witnessing is not the 'new normal' at all, and that the 'new normal' will be much worse...welcome to our fluxed futures.

This paper will start with surveying the contemporary turbulent worlds of, *inter alia*, increasing political division, 'truth decay' and 'post-truth' politics, rising xenophobia, toxic masculinity and geopolitical conflicts, rearmament, militarism and the drumbeats of war. The doubling down on techno-fixes for the polycrisis should be understood not simply as apolitical and anti-political responses to the polycrisis (though they are that too). They are also attempts at institutionalising anti-fragility, i.e. the greening, digitisation and decarbonising 'business as usual', and the poly or permacrisis functioning as a new mode of accumulation and imperial governance.

The presentation then moves to examine what can be called the ecocide-genocide nexus as a new mode of imperial governance in a climate and geopolitically destabilised and destabilising world. This is most visible in the annihilation of the Palestinian people by Israel and the USA, with the support of other neo-colonial powers such as the EU. But it is also in the clear eco-apartheid that is an inevitable and intrinsic part of the green transition pathways and strategies of the minority world, such as the EU Green Deal.

Where do we find hope in such times as these? Is hope even the appropriate object of desire and motivation for agency? Do we need 'courage without hope'? Stoicism? 'Transformative adaptation' in accepting it's too late to avert climate and ecological catastrophe, and 'let go' of techno fixes or hopes for political solutions, in order to 'move on' to prepare for the 'world to come'? Counterintuitively, might it be in István Mészáros' response to Rosa Luxemburg's confident assertion that the choice was between 'Socialism or Barbarism', when he stated, 'Barbarism if we're lucky'. Can hope be cultivated in reading him *apocalyptically* as urging people to 'wake up' and get active, not as inviting people to a wake and passively 'bear witness'?

A final set of considerations concern the psychological and emotional impact of knowledge production around the polycrisis. For those of us within institutions of

learning, researching, writing and teaching on these topics, where do we acknowledge the emotional toil and psychological distress involve in contemplating the end of the world, or the end of the world as we know it? And what is our 'duty of care' to our students in teaching them in a world on fire? Related to that complex of issues, issues that are not mainstreamed or normalised in our profession, what is the role of our role as academics and academic institutions in a world on fire? What is our role and duty as intellectuals in the face of the polycrisis and its transmutation into a permacrisis? Can we continue in a 'business as usual' manner as the life supporting systems of the planet unravel? Is it enough to continue to teach, write and research as normal in these demonstrably abnormal times? Beyond 'bearing witness' and accurately describing and documenting the causes, consequences and impacts of the polycrisis, do we need to get more politically active? And why are not more of us standing up and stepping out? Do we performatively throw up our hand in despair and/or or roll up our sleeves and act 'as if we are in the early years of building better societies', to paraphrase Alasdair Gray and work with others within and outside the academy seeking to take not ask for the supply to mean our 'most modest demands' as James Connolly aptly put it, that 'we only want the earth'?

Bio: John Barry is a father, a political activist, recovering politician, trades unionist and Professor of Green Political Economy in the Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action at Queens University Belfast. What keeps him awake at night is the life opportunities and future wellbeing of his and other children in this age of the planetary emergency and intersecting social and economic injustices within and between countries. What also keeps him awake at night is the following question: why it is easier for most people to believe in the end of the world than the end of capitalism and economic growth? His areas of academic-activist research include post-growth and heterodox political economy; decarbonisation and decolonisation; the politics, policy and political economy of climate breakdown and climate resilience; socio-technical analyses of low carbon just energy and sustainability transitions; climate injustice-based nonviolent direct action and social mobilisation; and the overlap between conflict transformation and these sustainability and energy transformations. His forthcoming book is provisionally entitled, 'Practicing What You Teach: Anti-Capitalist and Post-Growth Tales of Failing (Forward) from the Molehills of Power and Disciplinary Margin's (2025, Agenda Publishers).

Katherine Fama (University College Dublin), 'Crafting against Crises' (with Sarah Comyn)

Abstract: Our flash talk will respond to the rise of craftivism (craft as a form of activism, see for example the crochet activism of Professor Hinda Mandell or the mapping and recycled sewing work of Professor Kirin Makker). Comyn and Fama will discuss how they have turned to craft as an answer to the extended experience of polycrisis: in climate change and sustainability; motherhood in academia; the rise of global fascism; and the crisis of student disengagement. Asking hard questions about the role of both their research and their pedagogy, this paper demonstrates how practices of craft can create generative research and rejuvenated teaching

spaces that build community and develop practices of care beyond the confines of academia.

Bio: Katherine Fama teaches in English, Drama, and Film at University College Dublin, where she researches the role of architecture, emotion, and singleness in the modern American novel. She uses crafting practices to teach narrative structure and material and literary histories. She is the co-editor of *Single Lives: Modern Women in Literature, Culture, and Film* (2022) and has published recently in *MELUS*, *Studies in American Naturalism*, and *Emotions: History, Society, Culture*.

Kieran Keohane (UCC), 'Patterns within the Polycrisis: "Schismogenesis" and "Contagious" Mimesis"'

Abstract: This flash-talk will outline two theoretical frames that will (I hope) help us to identify patterns within the otherwise seemingly chaotic proliferation of symptoms of polycrisis, namely (i) Gregory Bateson's theory of 'schismogenesis' and (ii) Rene Girard's theory of 'contagious mimesis.'

'Schismogenesis' means the genealogy of pathological 'schisms' in social & bodies politic, and the patterns of the escalation of social schisms into violence, as formulated by Gregory Bateson in his studies of tribal warfare in Polynesia in the 1930s, which was Bateson's proxy for analysing Fascism and Communism in Europe and the clash of Japanese and American empires in the Pacific, escalating towards wars of extermination and mutual annihilation. Symmetrical schismogenesis -is a pattern of antagonism and rivalry between more or less equal parties, where each move by one party is met with a similar and ever-increasing move by the other competing party, as is the pattern in a trade war and an arms race. Complementary schismogenesis is a pattern of rivalry and antagonism amongst more-or-less unequal social groups, for example gender, racial and class divisions. In relations of complimentary schismogenesis any sign of accommodation, conciliation and compliance by the weaker party leads to ever increasing aggression, subordination, humiliation and domination by the stronger, such as can be seen in social relations of colonization and enslavement, in the technological domination of nature, in misogyny and coercive control, for example. In Bateson's time, as in ours, both symmetrical and complementary schismogenesis can occur simultaneously, and become recursive and mutually amplifying.

Schismogenesis can be restrained, or at least moderated, Bateson says, by (i) structural interventions that ameliorate tensions (Social Welfare, today everywhere being cut back) or temporary, occasional and even playful inversions of antagonistic relations (displayed in the performative styles of populist authoritarians and in the ubiquity of 'sports' and 'carnivals'); (ii) by identifying, creating and pillorying 'external' [or 'internal'] enemies (historically 'Jews', today 'migrants' 'feminists', LGBTQ, 'trans' 'woke'...) And (iii) schismogenesis can be controlled by interventions of an external 'third power', a transcendent authority -the 'Rule of Law' (UN, Climate Agreements, International Criminal Court... today all being systematically undermined). As the infrastructures that would ordinarily ameliorate latent and overt

schismogenesis are usurped and disassembled, proliferating and escalating forms of schismogenesis become characteristic central patterns of the polycrisis.

Writing at the same time as Bateson but with a very different political vision & horizon Carl Schmitt sought to accelerate and exacerbate schisms: politics, Schmitt says, is about making and amping-up sharp and clear distinctions between 'friends' vs 'enemies' as a means to enable strong leaders to make sovereign decisions, and Schmitt's books *The Concept of the Political* and *Political Theology* are amongst the foundational texts of the Heritage Foundation's *Project for a New American Century* and *Project 2025*. The other keystone source of theoretical ideas -ideas that can help us to perceive and to understand central patterns in the polycrisis, and how those patterns are sustained and even quite deliberately driven to accelerate the crisis to apotheosis and apocalypse- is Rene Girard's *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. In *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World* Girard argues how Lucifer's hubris dissolves the cosmic order built on the authority of the Father, making everyone equally a god unto himself and a rival to others, unleashing a spiral of envy, conflict, and scapegoating violence. Girard's eschatology echoes Plato's critique of democracy in *Republic*: that Liberty and Equality pave the way for Tyranny. Plato's solution is the society of limits governed by the enlightened despotism of philosopher Kings and their caste of Guardians. Girard's is similar: mimetic rivalry's propensity for violence can be limited by elevating a Subject(s) a great distance above other subjects: an external mediator, who cannot be envied, only revered, quells mimetic rivalry and restores order. In the Girardian paradigm, during the interregnum between a [purportedly] 'decadent' democracy and the restoration of a [purportedly] 'enlightened' despotic neo-monarchism mimetic rivalry between those who are formally equal but substantively un-equal intensifies, and the contemporary epoch becomes a neo-Hobbesian war of all against all in a 'perpetual and restless pursuit of power after power, ceasing only in death.' The endgame for Girard and those who see the polycrisis through his prism is a neo-monarchist Restoration, achieved by creating an insurmountable gulf of material and symbolic social inequality between a new oligarchy of a hyper wealthy elite and the masses; a gulf maintained by a military authoritarian caste of Guardians, who will be as dogs to the flock of sheep that they will keep in order, equipped with the latest high-tech surveillance military & security apparatus.

A grim prognosis for the polycrisis, certainly! But just as Gregory Bateson formulates antidotes and social prophylactics against the social pathologies of schismogenesis, so too there are countermeasures and quarantines and inoculations that can be promoted against the contemporary pandemics of contagious mimetic violence that characterize the polycrisis, and I will try to identify these, in some old ideas from Marcel Mauss, and in some new formulae distilled by Nidesh Lawtoo.

Bio: Kieran Keohane is a Professor in the Department of Sociology & Criminology at University College Cork, Ireland. A Sociologist, who [tries to be] inter / transdisciplinary, within and across Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, Cultural Studies, Literature, Politics, Environment, Public Health & Medicine, and presently

focused on the cascading political, moral, and ecological crises and the social pathologies of late modern civilization and the Anthropocene.

Marek Tamm (Tallinn)

Bio: Marek Tamm is Professor of Cultural History in Tallinn University, Estonia. His primary research fields are cultural history of medieval Europe, theory and methodology of history, and cultural memory studies. He has recently published *Breakthroughs in Cultural Psychology* (ed. with Jaan Valsiner; Tallinn University Press, 2024), *The Fabric of Historical Time* (co-authored with Zoltán Boldizsár Simon; Cambridge University Press, 2023), *The Companion to Juri Lotman: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (ed. with Peeter Torop; Bloomsbury, 2022), and *A Cultural History of Memory in the Early Modern Age* (ed. with Alessandro Arcangeli; Bloomsbury, 2020).

Marek Wasilewski (Magdalena Abakanowicz University of the Arts, Municipal Gallery Arsenal, Poznań), 'Can art save the world? - Aesthetics of migrant polycrisis'

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to discuss strategies of artistic actions developed in the face of humanitarian crises, such as forced migrations for war or economic reasons and increasing violence by state and non-state structures. It will explain how contemporary art practices produce tools and methods to shape consciousness, create independent information circuits, and finally how they form new social relations at the individual and political levels. As examples of such practices implemented through artistic methods I will present the projects exhibited in recent years at the Arsenal Municipal Gallery in Poznań, these are realizations of Krzysztof Wodiczko, Luz Maria Sanchez, Lia Dostlieva, Andrii Dostliev and Michael Kurzweili. These examples illustrate the deepening interventionist structure of the described activities, especially on the field of new media and performance practices - from awakening awareness by creating conscious speakers and listeners, through the creation of cross-border and transnational identities.

Bio: Marek Wasilewski, artist, author of texts on art. He is a professor at the Magdalena Abakanowicz University of Arts in Poznań. Since 2017, he has been the director of Arsenal Municipal Gallery in Poznań. He has published in such journals as *Art Monthly*, *International Journal of Education through Art*, *Springer*, *Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education*. He recently published a chapter in the book *Interrogative Design* (MIT 2024).

Mary Cosgrove (Trinity College Dublin), 'Relational Poetics as Response to Perma- and Polycrisis'

Abstract: In our turbulent times of climate crisis, technological upheaval, and war, it is evident that life on this planet is fundamentally fragile and endangered. New imaginaries are urgently needed to overcome the paralysis of living in perma- and polycrisis and its attendant ideological impasses. This paper proposes that literary language, understood as *poeisis*, that is, as a 'bringing forth' of something new, has



the power to engender alternative imaginaries for how to be in the world. We might call this engendering 'relational poetics' which reactivate in and through literature 'the existential mandate of care' (Escobar et al., 2024, p.197) that for centuries has been so neglected in Western thought. The terms 'relation', 'relational' and 'relationality' refer to all modes of co-dependence between humans and humans, humans and animals, humans and nature, humans and technology, and humans and matter. It is an established concept in sociology and anthropology but has not yet been fleshed out for literary theory. This paper sets out some initial thoughts in this space, referring to contemporary German-language literature along the way.

Bio: Mary Cosgrove (FTCD, MRIA) is Professor and Head of the Department of German in the School of Languages, Literatures and Cultural Studies, Trinity College Dublin. She is also Co-chair of the TCD Medical and Health Humanities network. She has published widely on post-war and contemporary literature, including the monographs *Born under Auschwitz: Melancholy Traditions in Postwar German Literature* (2014) and *Grotesque Ambivalence: Melancholy and Mourning in the Prose Work of Albert Drach* (2004). Her current research centres on developing a poetics of relationality for literary language. Recent publications include the co-edited volume *Framing Ageing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives for Humanities and Social Sciences Research* (Bloomsbury 2024, with Anne Fuchs and Julia Langbein), and a double special issue of *Oxford German Studies: 'Relationality in Contemporary German Literature and Culture'* (also 2024, with Anne Fuchs).

Mary Gallagher (UCD), 'From the globalism to planetarity, from postcolonialism to decoloniality: a UCD Journey'

Abstract: In 2008, the author of a book that has been credited with having 22,000 citations, Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) offered a chapter entitled 'Planetary Longings: Sitting in the Light of the Solar TV' for publication in *World Writing: Poetics, Ethics, Globalization*, which appeared with University of Toronto Press in 2008. This book was published with the support of the PRTL funding accorded to the Humanities Institute of UCD. As it was in gestation, University College Dublin was in the process of being re-structured along globalist lines. About fifteen years after the publication of *World Writing*, in 2022 Mary Louise Pratt expanded her chapter into a book with the same main title as that of her 2008 article: *Planetary Longings*. This new book registers epistemological shifts not just in relation to the temporal inscription of crisis and knowledge but also in relation to the nature of the entangled crises that are prioritised within the academy. What are the implications of these shifts from *globalism* to *planetarity* and from *postcolonialism* to *decoloniality* and how do they relate to a sense of crisis not just within the academy as exemplified by the organisation that sponsored the embryonic foretaste of Mary Louise Pratt's 2022 book, but also for all lifeforms on the planet and for the planet itself?

Bio: Mary Gallagher is Professor of French and Francophone Studies at University College Dublin. She studies the memorialization of European imperialism, especially

European settler colonialism in life-writing in French. Her first books focused on Saint-John Perse—*La Créolité de Saint-John Perse* (Gallimard, 1998)—and on French Caribbean Writing since 1950 (OUP, 2002). She published thereafter on the legacy of colonialism and the poet(h)ics of postcolonial globalization as treated by a range of authors including Charles Baudelaire, Lafcadio Hearn, Paul Morand, Édouard Glissant, Emmanuel Levinas, Nancy Huston, Colette Fellous and Dany Laferrière.

Megan Kuster (UCD), 'Narrating mining and crisis in contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit writing'

Abstract: Across the planet, the industrial extraction of minerals is deepening preexisting polycrises disproportionately impacting the Global South, Indigenous groups, and small island nations—from acute water crises faced by the Atacama people in Chile caused by intensive lithium mining and on the island of Palawan the ancestral land of the Pala'wan people in the Philippines due to nickel mining, to the cascade of changes in reindeer ecology linked to iron mining in Kaunisvaara, Sweden posing direct threats to traditional Sami culture... the list goes on. The technocratic crisis narrative contends that the intensification of minerals extraction is necessary for the energy transition, and that without the energy transition those who are already most vulnerable to the climate crisis will be devastated by it; thus the technocratic crisis narrative turns places into "slow, green sacrifice zones." My paper asks: what roles might writers play in reconciling the tension between the demands of the energy transition and the rights of Indigenous groups and those most marginalised? In the first part of the paper I consider transhistorical frameworks for analysing crisis from Black feminist theory and critical Indigenous studies. Engaging with some recent fiction and memoir by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit writers in Canada, the second part of the paper considers resource mining in the context of polycrisis in *This House is Not a Home* by Katljà (Dene, Cree and Métis), *Moon of the Turning Leaves* by Waubgeshig Rice (Anishinaabe), and *I Will Live for Both of Us* by Joan Scottie (Inuk). In critiquing the technocratic crisis narrative, I ask not just how these Indigenous writers narrate mining within the polycrisis but also why the insights in their work are significant for shaping responses to the contemporary polycrisis that value relationality, art, imagination, creativity, situated and embodied knowledge, alongside intellectual critique.

Bio: Megan Kuster is a literary studies scholar and currently the Research Lead in the Humanities Institute at University College Dublin. Her main research interests are the study of environmental humanities in nineteenth- and twentieth-century settler colonial and postcolonial literature, especially around issues of global natural history, mining, and labour; and contemporary collaborative creativity, particularly around practices of regeneration. She has published articles on Katherine Mansfield, and natural history collecting in nineteenth-century New Zealand in *Tinakori: Critical Journal of the Katherine Mansfield Society* and the *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*.

Monika Bakke (Adam Mickiewicz), 'The Urban Noise Crisis: Multispecies Strategies for Liveable Urban Soundscapes'

Abstract: Noise pollution has become a defining feature of urban life, contributing to what can be described as a permacrisis—a continuous, unresolved environmental and public health challenge. The relentless rise in urban noise affects not only human well-being but also the sensory worlds of animals and plants. As cities grow louder, quiet spaces are becoming rare and increasingly valuable. Addressing this issue requires more than just noise reduction—it calls for a shift in urban planning that actively shapes soundscapes to support both people and the ecosystems they inhabit. Urban planners, policymakers, public health professionals, and artists must collaborate to create cities where soundscape quality contributes to well-being rather than eroding it. This paper examines the efforts to establish a Quiet Park in Poznań, transforming the former Edmund Szyk Municipal Stadium into a refuge from urban noise. Drawing on the idea of fourth nature, I explore how neglected spaces can be reimagined as places of quiet. By fostering awareness of soundscape quality and embracing more inclusive planning, we can begin to address the ongoing permacrisis of noise pollution and create urban environments that are not just livable but truly regenerative.

Bio: Monika Bakke is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and the director of the Environmental Humanities Center at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poland. Her writing focuses on contemporary art and aesthetics, particularly from posthumanist, transspecies, and gender perspectives. Her current research and curatorial work explore nonlife agency and new articulations of mineral affinities with life in contemporary art.

Quân Nguyen (UCD), 'Pessimism as a Response to Interlocking Crises'

Abstract: In the face of multiple interlocking crises, pessimism as a moral stance can be grounds for collective solidarity. Philosophical pessimism describes two views:

1. *value-oriented pessimism*: life for many is not worth living
2. *future-oriented pessimism*: we shouldn't have expectations of progress and narratives about change.

Pessimism builds collective solidarity in the face of crisis: pessimism helps us empathise with the suffering of others, avoiding the optimistic drive to explain away suffering by appealing to deeper meanings behind it. Secondly, pessimism helps avoiding resentment: focusing too much on how hopeful or optimistic someone is can make us resent those who suffer but do not show the same hopefulness or optimism. Thereby, pessimists can build a collective „community of fellow sufferers“ (Schopenhauer 1859). I illustrate this with the cases of Afropessimism and climate pessimism, where in both cases, a pessimist standpoint can better recognise suffering and oppression to create collective solidarity.

Quân Nguyen bio tbc

Rubén Flores (UCD), 'Illuminating our path amidst crisis claims: *phos* and the challenge of implication'

Abstract: If crisis is "a distinction that secures a 'world' for observation" (Janet Roitman), who is the observer? And what are their blindspots? Following philosopher Andrew Haas, this paper will answer the first question by recalling an ancient Greek name for human beings: *phos*, which hints at the way we illuminate the world. Amidst claims to polycrisis/permacrisis, we may wish to "illuminate the possible roads ahead" (Michael J. Albert); dive into the deep past in search for inspiration to imagine more egalitarian futures (Graeber and Wengrow; Black Trowel Collective); or seek to shed new light on ourselves in a way that highlights our interdependence and our caring dispositions (e.g. Tronto's *homines curans*; Thich Nhat Hanh's interbeing). Yet *phos* faces a challenge when seeking to illuminate that which is neither present nor absent, but only implied. Which is a dilemma not only if the future and past are implied, but if being itself is an implication, as Haas contends. The paper will thus reflect on how metaphysics, the study of being qua being, may be relevant for thinking about, and in the midst of, the multiple crises (claims) around us.

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Bio: Rubén Flores is an occasional lecturer in the UCD School of Sociology. His interests include the dialogue between the sciences, the humanities and the arts (particularly poetry), contemplative inquiry, and the search for constructive responses to the planetary crisis (e.g. degrowth).

Sarah Comyn (University College Dublin), 'Crafting against Crises' (with Katherine Fama)

Abstract: Our flash talk will respond to the rise of craftivism (craft as a form of activism, see for example the crochet activism of Professor Hinda Mandell or the mapping and recycled sewing work of Professor Kirin Makker). Comyn and Fama will discuss how they have turned to craft as an answer to the extended experience of polycrisis: in climate change and sustainability; motherhood in academia; the rise of global fascism; and the crisis of student disengagement. Asking hard questions about the role of both their research and their pedagogy, this paper demonstrates how practices of craft can create generative research and rejuvenated teaching spaces that build community and develop practices of care beyond the confines of academia.

Bio: Sarah Comyn is an Assistant Professor in School of English, Drama and Film at University College Dublin. She is the PI of the Research Ireland-funded project, Minerals, which is investigating the impact of the extractive mineral industries on the developing Anglophone literary cultures of the British settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa in the period 1842–1910. She has collaborated with artists across a number of different projects exploring the legacies of extractivism globally. Recent publications include: *Political Economy* (Routledge, 2024) and *Worlding the South* (Manchester, 2021; ed. with Porscha Fermanis).

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