



Humanities for the Anthropocene: Book of Abstracts

7 May 2021, UCC

Introduction and Welcome

Welcome to 'Humanities for the Anthropocene'.

This online research snapshot and dialogue day brings together scholars from across Ireland who are working in environmental humanities, from ecocritical and related perspectives.

The rapidly destabilising ecological context demands new ways of conceiving humanities research. Through this event, we want to help strengthen connections between researchers across the arts and humanities disciplines at all HEIs on the island of Ireland whose research is concerned with the societal and cultural dimensions of climate breakdown, environmental destruction, biodiversity loss, and the wider issues associated with the Anthropocene. In a day of open discussions and selected brief snapshot presentations, we aim to share new critical perspectives and methodologies; incubate new research partnerships; develop effective outreach, engagement and activism strategies; and initiate discussions on implications for pedagogy.

The Humanities for the Anthropocene initiative sees itself as part of the wider global effort to bring the critical and creative energies of humanities research to bear on the pressing contemporary concerns of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss and ecological degradation; to explore the extent to which environmental / climate crisis is also a crisis of values, ideologies, and symbolic systems; and to foster new and daring rethinks of 'local/global', 'online/offline' relationships in imagining just transition.

By the end of the event, we hope that a new research network will be emerging, and we encourage all participants to envision next steps for such a network, including possible research collaborations, suggestions for public-facing events in 2022, innovations in research and teaching, and identification of possible resource streams and large-scale funding bids that participants might pursue together in smaller groups.

We wish all participants a thought-provoking and inspiring day of discussion and exchange, and are very grateful to you for joining us.

Sincerely,

Professor Caitríona Ní Dhúill, Dr Seán Hewitt, Dr Tim Stott (concept)

Dr Aoife Corcoran, Dr Mel Farrell (organisation)

Programme for the day:

Friday 7 May 2021

Start time 10 am, finish time 4 pm (all times IST)

Zoom link provided in advance to all participants, please contact aoife.corcoran@ucc.ie
For participant details and affiliations please see page 32

10.00-10.15: Welcome and introduction: Prof. Caitriona Ní Dhúill (Department of German, UCC); Prof. Chris Williams (College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, UCC); Prof. Sarah Culloty (Environmental Research Institute, UCC); Dr Niamh NicGhabhann, Irish Humanities Association)

10.15-11.15: Plenary session, featuring short presentations: 'Earth Writings' (Gerry Kearns, Nessa Cronin, Karen Till), 'UCD Environmental Humanities Strand' (Sharae Deckard), followed by open discussion

11.15-11.30: Coffee break / screen break

11.30-12.45: Themed breakout sessions I*

12.45-13.30: Lunch / screen break

13.30-14.00: Gathering session (plenary)**

14.00-14.55: Themed breakout sessions II*

14.55-10.05: Short screen break

15.05-15.45: Plenary session, featuring short presentations: 'Peatlands' (Katja Bruisch, Lily Toomey, Maureen O'Connor, Ben Gearey), 'Speaking the Predicament' (Caitriona Ní Dhúill, Emma-Jayne Geraghty), followed by open discussion and closing remarks

* Themes for moderated break-out sessions (participants choose which session to attend):

a. Building a lexicon: key terms across fields and disciplines

(moderators: Sharae Deckard am, Tim Stott pm)

b. Locating our research: rethinking local/global, online/offline relationships

(moderators: Caitriona Ní Dhúill am, Silvia Ross pm)

c. Teaching the Anthropocene: implications for pedagogy (UG and PG)

(moderators: Seán Hewitt pm)

d. Beyond the university: partnerships for research and action

(moderators: Marc Caball am, Caitriona Ní Dhúill pm)

e. Creative practice, performance and poetics for the Anthropocene

(moderators: Sandra Joyce am, Giuliano Campo pm)

** Gathering session = a slot where the findings or impetus from the morning breakout sessions can be shared / pooled; a space for reflection across themes.

List of Speakers:

Welcome and Introduction

Prof. Caitríona Ní Dhúill (Department of German, UCC)

Prof. Chris Williams (Head of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, UCC)

Prof. Sarah Culloty (Director of the Environmental Research Institute, UCC)

Dr Niamh NicGhabhann (Irish Humanities Association, Department of History, UL)

10.15 Plenary session

'Earth Writings'

Earth Writings is a collaborative project of artists, academics, and activists. It brings global environmental change home and asks about Irish responsibility in the face of the related crises of climate change and biodiversity destruction. It frames these crises and responsibilities through the kaleidoscope of diverse Irish landscapes and ecologies. Action is required at many scales but in some ways stewardship must begin at home.

How we learn to care for local landscapes is at once a matter of science and of craft, but also of culture. We have to understand the historical and cultural contexts that have long shaped a fragile and contested relationship to landscapes, waterscapes and seascapes in Ireland. From Ireland, we might, in particular, highlight the place of 'small languages' in maintaining a vital connection to traditional and indigenous environmental knowledges.

The craft of living as well as we can during the crisis might learn from feminist and indigenous understandings of ecologies, places, bodies, and worlds, to develop a place-based ethics of care. Eco-social projects that convene communities of artists, activists and practitioners to 'stay with the trouble' might yet prefigure ways to imagine and enact more healthy futures. Earth Writings begins an inventory of these alternatives.

A sense of responsibility might also be cultivated by asking ourselves: in what ways is there an Irish Anthropocene? We must look from the local to the global and vice versa, from the present to the past and vice versa, to see our current geography of wounded landscapes as a distinctive legacy from which we must begin.

Earthwritings.ie

Dr Nessa Cronin (Centre for Irish Studies, and Associate Director of the Moore Institute, NUI Galway)

Professor Gerry Kearns (Head of the Department of Geography, NUI Maynooth)

Professor Karen Till (Department of Geography, Head of the Postgraduate School, NUI Maynooth)

'UCD Environmental Humanities Strand'

In an era of climate emergency, questions relating to food, energy, water, land, and environment have become ever more urgent, as humans interrogate their relation to the rest of nature and seek to imagine more emancipatory organizations of nature-society. The UCD Environmental Humanities research strand, led by Dr. Sharae Deckard, brings humanistic modes of inquiry and creative praxis to bear on environmental challenges, with an emphasis on the capacity of cultural critique to illuminate ethical and political questions relating to ecological crises. In particular, UCD Environmental Humanities aims to resist polarized understandings of 'nature' and 'culture', and to bridge disciplinary divides between the 'two cultures' of the sciences and the humanities, exploring how environment-making is always entangled in social questions.

Our group of scholars considers research questions on diverse geographical and chronological scales across history, and in various cultural settings, both exploring how ideas and histories of 'nature,' 'the non-human', 'environment', 'ecology', 'landscape', 'waterscape', 'place', 'infrastructure', or 'resources' change over time, and interrogating new imaginaries of future transformations, such as energy transition and environmental remediation. Strand members work across the UCD College of Arts & Humanities in a number of intersecting sub-fields, with particular strengths in blue humanities, postcolonial ecocriticism and the environmental history of empire, resource cultures and extractivism, studies of biodiversity, the microbiome, and the intersection of medical and environmental humanities, research on built environments and infrastructures, study of environments in antiquity, and more.

The strand currently runs a weekly online seminar during term-time with invited international speakers on interdisciplinary topics, "UCD Environmental Humanities Virtual Talks," and in 2020 we also ran a mini-series of talks on the "Culture and Ecology of Pandemics." To join the contact list for the Virtual Talks series, please email ucdenvhums@gmail.com, follow us on Twitter [@ucd_envhum](https://twitter.com/ucd_envhum), or join our Facebook page.

We are excited for our next big event on 1-2 July 2021, when Megan Kuster and Sarah Comyn will be leading a special symposium, "Empire and Ecologies," highlighting the research of our strand. The event will feature panels organized by strand members with invited speakers on topics including resource criticism and commodity frontiers, biodiversity and Indigenous studies, creative praxis and eco-poetics, ancient nature and modern imagination. A plenary roundtable on extractivism and empire will feature invited speakers including Professor Jennifer Wenzel (Columbia), Dr Katayoun Shafiee (Warwick), Professor Madhu Krishnan (Bristol), Dr Simon Jackson (Birmingham), and Professor Sukanya Banerjee (Berkeley). For more information on how to attend this event or view the digital resources produced for it, please contact megan.kuster@ucd.ie and sarah.comyn@ucd.ie

Dr. Sharae Deckard (Associate Professor in World Literature, School of English, Drama and Film, UCD)

13.05 Plenary session

Peatlands and the Popular Imagination

Peatlands account for c.20% of Ireland's land area, and now occupy a critical position within climate change mitigation policy, also representing a remarkable intersection and entangling of research in the arts, humanities, and sciences. These ecosystems are significantly impacted by drainage, agriculture, peat cutting, and other anthropogenic interventions that threaten the 'ecosystem services' provided by healthy peatlands. The 'bog' is also central to literary, artistic, and other cultural forms of production in Ireland and is embedded in different formulations of Irish identity; certain of which might be considered 'contested', for example, the right to cut peat as a component of intangible cultural heritage. The perception of these landscapes as essentially 'functionless', aside from their value as sources of fuel, dominates many debates and inhibits attempts to influence public and hence political opinion in terms of 'wise use' of these ecosystems/environments. The history, perception, and mistreatment of peatlands in Ireland can be seen as a microcosm of wider problems facing national and global society in terms of the pressing importance of altering perceptions, as essential precursors to ecosystem restoration and recovery. Communicating the science behind peatland growth, development, and function is therefore an essential precursor to better conveying the unique ecological role of peatlands. To this end, Drs Benjamin Gearey and Maureen O'Connor have been collaborating with poets, writers, filmmakers, visual artists, scientists and humanities scholars from across Ireland and internationally, in conjunction with the Glucksman Gallery, to organise symposia, workshops, and conferences on the theme of peatlands, events attended by a number of stakeholders, including local educators and activist groups, and featuring input from Bord na Mona and SIPTU representation.

Dr Maureen O'Connor (School of English and Digital Humanities, UCC)

Dr Ben Gearey (School of English and Digital Humanities, UCC)

Rosie Everett (School of Life Sciences, University of Warwick)

Peatlands research at the Trinity Centre for Environmental Humanities

Peatlands have recently received a lot of attention for their role as carbon stores and sinks, as habitat and as recreational spaces. Taking a historical perspective, it is evident, that this however, this positive image of peatlands is a rather recent phenomenon. Our research on peat-mining in 20th century Ireland and Russia highlights the importance of environmental history to situate and address contemporary environmental challenges. Drawing upon a constructivist approach to “natural resources”, we trace how cultural perceptions of nature, national development strategies and economic interests contributed to the unsustainable use of peatlands in the recent past. We argue that we need to integrate the case of peat fuel more systematically into our historical narrative about the fossil fuel age to account for the different national and regional pathways leading to the rise of industrial energy regimes and related environmental problems, such as the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. Our research also shows that in the past, different people have valued peat and peatlands in different ways and for different reasons. As we are currently concerned about transitioning to a low-carbon energy regime and land-use patterns that prevent further peatland degradation, understanding the historically conditioned sensibilities around peatlands, which often are an expression of very local specifics, will be crucial for building support for peatland restoration and preservation. Enhancing our knowledge about human-induced geological change, the study of peatlands offers an opportunity to develop a more nuanced understanding of the current human and more-than-human condition, or, the Anthropocene.

Dr Katja Bruisch (Ussher Assistant Professor in Environmental History, Trinity Centre for Environmental Humanities, Department of History, TCD)

Lily Toomey (Trinity Centre for Environmental Humanities, Department of History, TCD)

'Speaking the Predicament: Words and Stories for the Anthropocene'

This project, funded by IRC New Foundations and UCC's Centre for Advanced Studies in Languages and Cultures, is a collaboration between UCC's Department of German and Friends of the Earth Ireland. In a series of reading groups, film screenings and public talks, we focus on the cultural, social and ethical implications of the Anthropocene. Prof. Caitríona Ní Dhúill, together with Dr Hanna Bingel-Jones, will work with Friends of the Earth Ireland to explore the roles languages, literatures, poetry and shared reading can play in empowering reflection, dialogue and action on environmental challenges.

Professor Caitríona Ní Dhúill (Department of German, UCC)

Emma-Jayne Geraghty (Friends of the Earth Ireland)

Abstracts

Dr Crystal Addey

Department of Classics, UCC

My research focuses on ancient Graeco-Roman philosophical and religious approaches towards animals, the natural world and the environment, and their possible relevance to contemporary environmental crisis and concerns, including climate change, biodiversity loss, the treatment of animals, and ecological degradation. My research has several major strands: (1) the examination of ancient religious and philosophical cosmologies, ontologies, metaphysics and worldviews (which often present a view of the world as an interconnected, living whole) especially within Platonism from the classical period through to the theurgic ritual practices pioneered by late antique Neoplatonist philosophers, and comparative study of possible parallels/points of contact with indigenous traditions and cultures who are often at the forefront of contemporary environmental activism; (2) research on the relationality and participatory dimension of ancient philosophy (evident within the Platonic tradition), particularly as embedded within the depiction of philosophers as rooted in place and landscape – these relational and participatory dimensions of ancient philosophy are largely unacknowledged in scholarship to date; (3) research on ancient virtue ethics (particularly associated with Plato, Aristotle and Neoplatonism) and possible applications relating to what we might call the ethics of contemporary environmental crises – the ways in which environmental/climate crisis is also a crisis of ethics, values and symbolic systems; and (4) ancient philosophical and religious approaches towards the moral and ontological status – and treatment - of (non-human) animals, including ideas of the kinship of all living beings. My research is interdisciplinary, engaging with anthropology, the study of religions and postcolonial scholarship, and attempts to emphasise the relevance of ancient worldviews, practices and ideas to contemporary environmental debates, issues and activism.

Bárbara Bastos Sérgio Do Nascimento

Faculty of Political Science, University of Pisa, Italy

I believe that my research interests match with the proposal of the event, especially because I work with transdisciplinary literature related to the Anthropocene (such as Anna Tsing, Isabelle Stengers, Donna Haraway, and so on) crossing social disparities and environmental challenges of our time. I drive special attention to the differences between the Global North and the Global South tackling those questions. I also intend to develop new methodologies to approach socioenvironmental issues. Altogether, I believe that our meeting could be a fruitful opportunity for us to share visions and proposal.

Dr Julie Bates, Assistant Professor in Irish Writing

School of English, TCD

Living Locally: Erica Van Horn

I am currently writing a book that examines the dynamic between place and practice in the work of the American artist and writer Erica Van Horn, who runs Coracle Press with the poet Simon Cutts from their home in rural Tipperary. Coracle is a small press that publishes Van Horn and Cutts's own work and that of a network of fellow artists, editors, poets and writers, with a particular focus on ephemeral works like postcards, and artists' books (artworks using the book as medium). Internationally acclaimed for her artists' books, Van Horn is little known in Ireland. She has maintained an online journal, 'some words for living locally', since 2007, to which she contributes acutely attentive observations and responses to the daily rhythms of her life in Tipperary, in a register that is at times epiphanic and at others sardonic. Van Horn draws on her journal for standalone publications. Her book *Living Locally* (Uniformbooks, 2014), reprinted in 2019, collects some of the entries over the years. More thematically coherent publications that also draw on the journal include *BUS* (Coracle, 2014), and an updated version of the same concept, *By Bus* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2021). This most recent text was described by Ross Hair as 'a compelling panorama of modern life as it is witnessed among the rhythms, odours, phone conversations, and evanescent idiosyncrasies of the bus journey.' Another recent publication, *Too Raucous For a Chorus* (Coracle, 2018), presents some of Van Horn's extensive writings on birds, and was published in translation as *Nous avons de pluie assez eu* by Héros-Limite in 2020. The climate crisis is not an explicit thematic preoccupation of Van Horn's work, but the observational nature and emphasis on materiality and habit in her work mean that it is attentive to issues including the seasonal appearance or not of animals, changes in farming practices and human activities including house-building, shopping, commuting, and - above all - conversing. Van Horn frequently identifies the repetitive processes that make up her own creative practice with nonhuman creative activities and other patterns of human behaviour, a move that elegantly undermines the privileged perspective conventionally granted to artist and human alike. The book I am writing explores the ways in which Van Horn's work offers a sustained examination of the entanglement and networks of relationships between human and nonhuman inhabitants, and the relationship between creative practice and the ongoing process of habitation, of 'living locally'.

Dr Hanna Bingel-Jones

Department of German, UCC

Un/Reading the book of nature. Apophatic aesthetics and poetological self-reflexivity in Christian Lehnert's religious poetry

In his theory of Literature as Cultural Ecology (2016) Hubert Zapf considers imaginary texts as a "sensorium" for destructive forms of modern civilization, while they also function as a productive space "of constant cultural renewal". Starting from this position the research examines Christian Lehnert's experimental poetry and its distinctive aesthetics of nature which allows both for a deepened awareness of what has gone lost as well as a re-cultivation of a Platonic 'wonder' evoked by the objects in nature themselves. Lehnert's poetics does so by meticulous descriptions of often microcosmic phenomena that are remindful of Jakob Böhme's speculative 'language of nature' that conceptualises natural phenomena as carriers of signs that somehow speak to us. In a similar fashion, Lehnert's poetic experiments lead deep into nature, and in this immersion unheard voices from a silent 'other' emerge. While in Lehnert's poetry the boundaries between human and nonhuman, physics and spirit, the subject and object often dissolve, his poetics is concurrently highly autoreflexive; They trigger irritation and unexpected semantic changes. Lehnert's unsettling aesthetics draws inspiration from apophatic religious practice that sets out to express that which finally eludes linguistic expressions. Nature, by this kind of apophatic conceptual poetics, turns into something ineffable, while the boundaries of what can be understood from it, if at all, are constantly shifting. Focussing on the poems' linguistic complexity, their tendency towards hermetic imagery, and a high degree of self-referentiality the research proposes an ecological reading of Lehnert's apophatic aesthetics within the context of negative theology, German mysticism, and nature philosophy, and argues that the experimental quality of his religious poetry explores grounds for making valuable ethical appeals to nature in times of ecological precarity.

Dr Hannah Boast, Lecturer/Assistant Professor (Ad Astra Fellow)

School of English, Drama and Film, UCD

I research the relationship between how water is imagined and how it is managed. I am particularly interested in hydro-politics, from Israel's 'designed destruction' of Palestinian water infrastructure to climate change-induced flooding in the UK. My first book, *Hydrofictions*, maps the roles of water in Israeli and Palestinian national environmental imaginaries through readings of contemporary literature, looking at representations of swamps, the Mediterranean Sea, the River Jordan, and water infrastructure. I foreground the cultural and ideological dimensions of environmental crisis in Israel/Palestine and bring Israeli and Palestinian writing onto the environmental humanities agenda. My current project widens this lens to consider literature from countries including Canada, Finland, South Africa, Zambia, the UK and the United States. This project analyses the flows of technology,

expertise, capital and aesthetic form between different contexts of water crisis, and draws histories of water in the core and periphery into dialogue. My research fits with the workshop aim of rethinking local/global connections. It typically takes a critical view on the notion of the 'Anthropocene', foregrounding the disparities in responsibility for environmental harms and the intersections between environmental crisis, capitalism and colonialism. This approach is informed by my background in Geography, particularly political ecology. I have wider interests in queer ecology and animal studies that have become an increasing theme of my research. My recent work in this area covers topics including chemical contamination, the environmental politics of the far right, and popular environmental culture, from gay frog memes to *Tiger King*.

Dr Rebecca Boyd

Department of Archaeology, School of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, UCC

To me, the emergence of towns is an incredibly exciting phenomenon where people consciously chose to adapt how they lived, moving from rural settlements to urban centres. My specialism is the Viking town – a densely occupied, organic town, primarily built of timber, which decayed so rapidly that its houses were replaced every three decades. The constant renewal of houses, boundaries and urban fabric represents mass consumer behaviour and resonates with contemporary environmental discussions around adaptation, sustainability and resilience. I connect these contemporary concepts with archaeological investigations of human-driven environmental change in Viking-Age towns like Dublin and York. The archaeological and chronological depth of these towns as settlements offers the chance to connect via place-making. Together, these concepts will act as a 'bridge' between the research and its impact, offering new opportunities to create effective outreach strategies to publicise the relevance of humanities research to the Anthropocene. My connection to Anthropocene research is at an early stage, driven by my concerns for invisible archaeological heritage – below-ground archaeology endangered by climate change, flood resilience schemes, and extreme weather events. Much attention is paid to coastal erosion – sites falling into the sea – but archaeology enjoys a unique position between hard sciences and humanities, with widespread public popularity. Archaeological perspectives bring time-depth, connections to place and awareness of resilience. I think archaeology should play an important role in raising awareness of the historic dimension of global changes – that we have faced change before and adapted and survived.

Dr Eddie Brennan

School of Media, TU Dublin

Media, Emotion and Ecology

This work explores relationships between media, ecology and everyday life. Media, and our related habits, are inseparable from climate breakdown and biodiversity loss. With ever-growing content, the endless production of devices and data centres, media impose a grave physical cost on the natural world through carbon emissions, mineral extraction, pollution, habitat destruction and so on. The second element of this work examines less apparent emotional and psychological costs. Experiencing the world through screens, for example, we may lose sight of our connection with, and dependence upon, the living world. Media business models depend on the manipulation of narrative, mythology and human emotion. Media tend to tell stories that reinforce destructive perspectives, emotions and politics. There is an affinity between alienation, distrust, social pessimism, social comparison and our consumer capitalist orthodoxy. However, today's media are not the cause of, or potential cure for, all of our problems. We need to consider long-term historic relationships between media-related behaviours and constructions of loneliness, anger, fear and sentimentality. Our emotions and our media-related behaviours are the long-term products of modernity. Finally, the work will aim to identify solutions. Our media-related habits, and intertwined emotional constellations, are part of a long-established, total way of living. Less materially and psychologically costly habits of attention and storytelling might contribute to new ways of organising, producing and surviving.

Tomas Buitendijk,

School of English, DCU

My recently submitted PhD thesis *Whales and Wind Farms. Towards a Poetics for the Sea in the Twenty-First Century* describes changing representations of contemporary seascapes under the pressures of anthropogenic climate change, with the aim of developing a 'poetics' of the modern sea. The thesis draws inspiration from a number of leading ecocritics, including but not limited to Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour, and Anna L. Tsing. The poetics ultimately capture a new paradigm for human-sea engagements (the 'multispecies marine society'), one that is chiefly characterised by a departure from the anthropocentric viewpoint and a commitment to more-than-human modes of being. This includes inviting expressions of non-human (marine) agency, following the logic that the other-than-human has the capacity to 'shock' humanity into a profoundly new manner of relating to the world. Such a shift in focus is particularly relevant in the context of issues like coastal landscape reconfiguration, resource exhaustion, and human adaptation to a changing climate, as it suggests radical new ways of framing environmental concerns. Simply put, the time has come for human beings to listen to and follow their non-human kin when charting a course for a better (by definition multispecies) tomorrow, rather than insist on leading the way.

Ashley Cahillane

School of English and Creative Arts, NUI Galway

Writing Water Justice in the Twenty First Century: Embodiment, Privatisation and Hydrofiction

My PhD research analyses twenty-first century literary representations of freshwater crisis. It focuses on novels which challenge reigning capitalist, colonial and patriarchal environmental attitudes and practices through critical representations of drought, flood and water pollution. Using postcolonial and ecofeminist approaches, I consider the hydrocritical position of such novels in relation to the human-nature binary which underlines local and global ecological degradation in the Anthropocene. I find that writers depict the biological and social significance of water to disrupt the human-nature binary without disregarding the human altogether: freshwater is the substance that humans drink, and when it becomes scarce both environmental and social injustices are more fiercely visible.

Many 21st century water-oriented novels, or hydrofictions (Boast 2020; Deckard 2019), are conducive to environmental justice aims because (i) they theorise human-nonhuman interconnectedness as mediated through power-relations (ii) they dramatise the concept of 'water is life' to create an immediacy which makes the reader feel more directly implicated in ecological crises on individual and communal levels (iii) and they indicate that solutions to ecological crises involve social and political transformation rather than purely scientific or technological advancement. The novels under study emerge from a range of national contexts to show continuity and difference in terms of how water crisis is represented and felt across the world. These texts include: Karen Jayes's *For the Mercy of Water* (South Africa); Claire Vaye Watkins's *Gold Fame Citrus* (United States); Natasha Carthew's *All Rivers Run Free* (England); Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (India); Mike McCormack's *Solar Bones* (Ireland); and Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* (Australia).

Dr Jane Suzanne Carroll, Ussher Assistant Professor in Children's Literature

School of English, TCD

My research centres on the role and representation of space in children's fiction. I am interested in the development of nature writing for young readers and in the ways that adults seek to present, manage, and frame children's interactions with and experiences of nature. My current project examines ideas of loss in children's nature writing, considering images of children lost or displaced within wild spaces as well as other kinds of loss: loss of habitat and biodiversity, and the loss of a functional language for nature that haunts children's literature in the 20th and 21st centuries. Springing from this project I have developed a new undergraduate module, *Writing Nature in the Anthropocene* which focuses on the interrelation of people and nature in fiction and non-fiction,

with an emphasis on texts for children. My first piece of nature writing was published by Channel in 2020.

Dr Eugene Costello

Department of Archaeology, UCC

I study livestock rearing and the impacts of a changing farming *mentalité* on rural environments in northern Europe. For my PhD, I examined the once-widespread practice of transhumance or seasonal human-livestock migration (1550-1940), giving new insights on the “values, ideologies” and environmental knowledge of pre-modern farmers. For example, I showed how the ‘otherness’ of upland pastures engendered respect for these common-pool resources and gave women a limited amount of seasonal autonomy as herders and dairymaids of cattle.

I am now launching a periphery-centred project on the role of livestock-rearing communities in feeding the emergence of major urban-industrial centres in northern Europe (c.1350-1850), i.e. as producers of dairy, meat and hides. I am asking what social and environmental feedbacks ‘peripheries’ experienced due to interaction with the wider world, and to what extent they actively participated or resisted. I therefore hope to provide a long-term perspective on globalisation. Bridging that gap between local and global is a fascinating challenge. A lot of research in the humanities can be country- or language-specific, yet many of the problems we face today in the Anthropocene are global.

Research into past land use and community structures may also help the humanities to contribute to sustainable farming schemes and mitigate “ecological degradation” in the Anthropocene. First of all, the human history of uplands can help to win farmers and communities over to nature-friendly schemes, reassuring them they have a stake. Secondly, while the past can never be recreated, it can act as a source of analogy for land management and societal understandings of the environment.

Dr Laurence Davis

Department of Government and Politics, UCC

The concept of utopia is from the moment of its inception umbilically tied to modern conceptions of progress and perfectibility that have legitimized settler colonialism, the genocide of Indigenous peoples, racial slavery, the violent subordination of women and sexual and gender non-conformity, ecocide, and a ‘grow or die’ form of civilization that is now threatening the very existence of all life on the planet. In my research I aim to challenge the common association between utopia and culturally dominant ideas of progress, and to develop a temporally and spatially grounded

alternative approach to the study of utopias suitable to a post-anthropocentric world. The aims of the analysis are at once scholarly and practical: scholarly, inasmuch as I aspire to fashion conceptual tools conducive to fresh interpretations of utopian texts and practices; and practical, in that I hope to vitalize utopian thought, imagination and action by illuminating hitherto obscure aspects of utopianism's transformative potential.

Dr Treasa De Loughry

School of English, Drama and Film, UCD

My research and teaching intersects world literature, postcolonial studies and environmental criticism, with a focus on waste, energy, and food. My first monograph, *The Global Novel and Capitalism in Crisis - Contemporary Literary Narratives* (2020) examines contemporary global novels from the UK, India and the US and their registration of intersecting and compound economic and ecological crises such as climate change and 'strange weathers'. An in-progress book project focuses on cultural registrations of waste work, particularly experimental visual, poetic and novelistic responses to the uneven impact or slow violence of hazardous informal repair labour in texts from West Africa and South Asia. It will also consider representations of the legacy or 'afterlives' of toxic materials in the Anthropocene. I have already published articles on global transmedial responses to plastic pollution and oil extraction.

In next year I will be co-organising two British Academy-Royal Irish Academy Knowledge Frontiers funded events: an interdisciplinary seminar series on "Rights, Rivers, and Nature" featuring speakers from history, law, literature, and classics; and a workshop on "Plastic Pollution, Global Trade: Cross-Disciplinary Implications." I also have an abiding interest in formal mediations (gothic, documentary realism, short stories etc) of global transformations in local ecologies and foodways, from South and South East Asia from the 1970s onwards in response to eco-modernization programmes, or the 'Green Revolution.'

Daniel Finch-Race

Center for the Humanities and Social Change at Ca' Foscari, University of Venice

Dan Finch-Race focusses on creative representations of environmental change in French and Italian culture since the mid-1800s. For the best part of a decade, he has been thinking with ecocriticism to address physical and emotional aspects of pollution around the time of the Industrial Revolution. His latest research seeks to offer a means of overcoming the macroscale problem of our climate crisis through a microscale engagement with depictions of fuming factories in the vicinity of major cities like Rouen and Venice, as expressed in an array of creative works and non-fictional texts conceived for widely varying audiences, including Edgard Hément's *Histoire d'un morceau de charbon* (1868), Alberto Errera's *Storia e statistica delle industrie venete* (1870), Berthe Morisot's

Un percher de blanchisseuse (1875), and Ada Negri's 'Fin ch'io viva e più in là' (1895). This undertaking has correspondences with human geography and the natural sciences in terms of how ecology entwines with quality of life all over Earth, which has been a matter of insufficient appreciation and action for too long. Indeed, an interdisciplinary effort will be vital to mobilising people's capacity to respond to the increasingly pressing dangers of the climate crisis close to home and further afield, which constitutes a fundamental motivation for his participation in 'Humanities for the Anthropocene'.

Prof. Noel Fitzpatrick,

Dean GradCAM, College of Arts and Tourism, TU Dublin

Bifurcate, there is no alternative

This presentation will explore the work of a collective (of which I am a member) which was instigated by the French Philosopher Bernard Stiegler and the international curator Hans Ullrich Obrist at the Serpentine Gallery in London in 2019, the Work Marathon. The original impetus for the group was in relation to the questions about the future of work and the 4th industrial revolution, however, after the event in the Serpentine it was decided to launch an international network looking at questions of the Anthropocene and this led to the development of the manifesto for an inter|nation (<https://internation.world/>). The internation collective was made up of philosophers, sociologists, scientists, and artists. In Jan 2020 the collective held a press conference at the United Nations to launch the propositions of the Internation. The propositions included the refoundation of the political economy based upon know-hows and practices which are local scaled up to macro-economic circuits, this is done through the development of an economy of contribution, contributory research and territorial experimentation. From this the collective went on to publish in 2020 a collective text *Bifurquer ,Il n'y a pas d'alternative* which sets out 10 propositions for overcoming the anthropocene. Getting beyond the Anthropocene can be achieved by, firstly, understanding the evolution of technology and the planetary impacts of technical systems (inorganic organisms). The conceptualisation of the entropy as the root of the development of technology and hence the Anthropocene. I will demonstrate that entropy as four forms, entropy of physics and thermodynamics, entropy of biology (Life as a form of negative entropy), entropy from information systems and finally anthropy which is the current state of the Anthropos, anthropic processes. I will also present two territorial experiments which are Marie Curie projects which I am coordinating 1) Real Smart Cities (realsms.eu) 2) Networking Ecologically Smart Territories.

Dr Lachlan Fleetwood

IRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow, School of History, UCD

Habitability, Uninhabitability and the Anthropocene

My current IRC project examines imperial attempts to measure and define the limits of habitability across Central Asia, Persia and Mesopotamia in the long nineteenth century. In particular, I am interested in how surveyors, naturalists and administrators sought to impose global norms on environmental and geographical categories, and the ways these were contested. By tracing a diverse range of historical actors across imperial networks, this project draws together insights from global history, the history of science, historical geography and environmental humanities to show how scientific attempts to define these environments remained incomplete, even as they shaped imperial imaginations and policies. Here I consider suggestions that habitability was differential (i.e. not the same for all groups of people at all times), that habitability was understood as limited (either by environmental extremes or resource constraints), and the various way that habitability was recognised as not being static (as new understandings of environmental change over both short and long time scales emerged in relation to geological notions of deep time and anthropogenic modification). This research thus offers new ways to examine the reconfiguration and legacies of pervasive forms of imperial environmental and climatic determinism, and their relationship to current Anthropocene debates around the overlap between human and earth history. More broadly, this project aims to develop habitability and uninhabitability as interdisciplinary categories by considering how they can help us to think through the consequences for geopolitics, society and the environment at moments when the limits of the 'habitable globe' change.

Patricia Gibson

School of Communications and Media, UU

A Posthuman Response to A Global Pandemic: 'We are all in this together, but we are not one and the same' (Braidotti, 2019)

What does it mean to be human in the world today? Humans face sustained threat from the technological mediations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the environmental catastrophe of the Sixth Extinction. Moreover, these opposing political forces are unethical, unsustainable and generate negative, reactive responses borne through fear: Will I become a robot? Will I become extinct? I present Critical Posthuman Theory by Rosi Braidotti (2019) as a theoretical framework that functions to better understand this complex predicament. Posthumanism is a philosophical movement that critiques the humanist ideal of man as the centre of all things. It contests human superiority to nature and rejects hierarchical dualisms, such as human/nature or male/female. COVID-19 positions the human male, once the universal point of reference for what it means to be human, as the most vulnerable to infection; while rendering children, animals, plants, technology and material matter as largely immune. Thus, it could be argued that COVID-19 supports post anthropomorphism by contesting the supremacist notion of the universal male; and supports post anthropocentrism through its subversion of our position at the top of the species hierarchy. The need for a conceptual shift in who we are in relation to the material world around us becomes imperative. So, a neo-materialist epistemological philosophy frames the metaphorical figurations of who we are in the form of a 'posthuman subject' (2019).

Emily Hesse

Belfast School of Art, UU

Design as reclaiming - towards a cosmology of clay

Archeological research suggests that clay as ‘earth matter,’ could in pre-history have been perceived as a physical appendage of the human being. The perception of earth matter as a substance which was indivisible from the matter which formed human beings, indicates a former way of being where inter-matter relationships existed as standard. This current research focuses on how practices of ontological design as artistic interpretation, can reframe our relationship with clay and land use in the discipline of ceramics.

Dr Gert Hofmann

Department of German, UCC

Poetics of the Body: The corporeal subject and the end of the Anthropocene

Poetics of the Body is a poetic philosophy that aims at understanding the basic conditions of human awareness in an approach that focuses on the corporeal prior to the intellectual qualities of human subjectivity. The act of writing performs the human condition as a manifestation and reflection of the individual’s corporeal presence, which is experienced as a *touch* of the world.

Looking at the body as the subject and agent of writing implies a critique of our conventional, science-driven understanding which suggests that only the human intellect, availing of a toolbox of conceptual knowledge, is the true agent of writing: writing thus constitutes an *anthropocentric* act of inscribing abstract meaning into the body of the world, as well as into the bodies of self and other as objects of our cognitive powers. However, focusing on the body as writing agent, discredits the cognitive presumptions of an intellectually pre-existing symbolic and conceptual system of meaning which empowers the cognitive takeover of the world. Instead, “writing the body” (Nancy) suggests an ongoing *emergence* (instead of pre-existence) of meaning out of an *anthropo-ex-centric* nucleus of “sympathetic imagination” (Coetzee) in an ever-expansive event of merely “touching upon sense” (Jacques Derrida).

Poetics of the Body traces an apocryphal tradition of body-focused thinking – from Hölderlin to Coetzee – pointing out the intrinsic conflicts of a cognitive human intelligence that relates to the world as a mere *environment* for human intellectual self-realisation. *Poetics of the Body* thus projects the end of the *Anthropocene* in philosophy and literature.

Dr Ellen Howley

School of English, DCU

I am a lecturer in the School of English at DCU with a strong interest in the Blue Humanities. In particular, my research is interested in poetic depictions of and interactions with the sea. I have recently completed my PhD, a comparative study of Irish and Caribbean poetry. This work examined how poets from both regions turn to the sea to think through questions of the nation, gender, history and myth, and the act of writing itself. I have published on the place of the sea in Seamus Heaney's poetry and in doing so contributed to a growing body of work that nuances the poet's responses to his environment by shifting focus away from the land and the bog in Heaney's poetry. I have also published on poetic representations of the *Zong* Massacre in Caribbean poetry, focusing on how the sea becomes the site of memory of the 132 African people thrown overboard for David Dabydeen and NourbeSe Philip.

The concerns of this conference align with these research interests, as well as the concerns of the 2019, IRC-funded "Planet Ocean" conference, of which I was a co-organiser. As with "Humanities for the Anthropocene", "Planet Ocean" brought into dialogue research from across disciplines to confront issues about the sea and ocean. I have an interest in the values ascribed to the environment and how that impacts upon attitudes towards and action on climate change. Notably, the Caribbean is a region where environmental change occurs as the result of both local tourism and global exploits. These are some of the issues I hope to examine within the conference.

Dr Yairen Jerez Columbié

Social Sciences and Humanities Postdoctoral Researcher, MaREI Centre, UCC

Although the arts and the humanities are vital for connecting diverse types of knowledge and bringing forward intersectional perspectives to support inclusion and epistemological nuance in interdisciplinary research, humanities experts still occupy a marginal position within environmental studies. This is one of the consequences of most funding bodies' focus on technical solutions to environmental challenges, which translates in insufficient funding for Humanities-led environmental research. In this light, I will discuss the vital role of the Humanities in addressing the climate crisis, through specific examples, and I will highlight how studying the arts, philosophies and experiential knowledge of vulnerable communities can contribute to decolonise understandings of the environment and to co-develop more fair and ethical solutions. I am currently exploring how Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) scholars can integrate perspectives and methodologies from intersectional ecofeminism, postcolonial and decolonial studies, intercultural communication and other (post-) humanistic approaches into EU and nationally funded interdisciplinary projects. Finding avenues to a greater presence of these perspectives in environmental studies is also important for creating a more favourable framework for Humanities-led environmental research. In order to address these challenges, I will draw upon both my research on subaltern epistemologies

and my experience as a SSH researcher working at a Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics-led research centre.

Dr Sandra Joyce

The Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, UL

Irish traditional song is a complex and diverse art form. Like any song practice, meaning is subjective – it is created, negotiated and communicated individually and collectively, and is influenced by many factors, including performance context and audience expectations. Societally relevant meaning, with connections to land, sea and other aspects of nature, is often reflected in nature-based metaphors, as are community contexts and social relationships. A glance at the text of any of the most popular songs reflects this – whether it is the seasonal details of animals, plants and insects in ‘Samhradh Samhradh’ (‘Summer Summer’), the rural idyll presented in the love song ‘The Flower of Magherally’, or the descriptions of seafaring in ‘Ten Thousand Miles Away’. A consideration of metaphorical meaning in songs reveals that human behaviours and relationships can often be framed in terms of natural imagery, further connecting the human characterisations in the songs to nature. Although the repertoire is regarded as largely historical, the performance of traditional song is very much a contemporary practice where ideas of traditionality, legacy and meaning are constantly being negotiated between performer and audience. The mapping of the changing contexts for traditional song, including the interrogation of meaning in different timeframes and cultural contexts, is of central importance to current research in this area. Performance is integral to these processes. These songs contain a wealth of knowledge on biodiversity and the relationships of humans to their environment, issues which have particular resonance with the current climate crisis. My research serves to interrogate this knowledge in terms of past and current practice, in order to gain an understanding on how this repertoire can contribute to our understanding of environmental issues, as well as the communicating of this knowledge through performance.

Prof. Patrick Lonergan, MRIA

Drama and Theatre Studies, NUI Galway

My current research focusses on theatre histories and the Anthropocene. If dated to the Orbis Spike of 1610, the Anthropocene epoch can be seen to overlap with the emergence of early modern theatre; my suggestion, therefore, is that theatre history can partially explain the origins of the Anthropocene – and that studying the Anthropocene can cast new light on the development of western theatre too.

Theatre has been part of the fossil economy since at least the 1500s; it might therefore be fair to say that today’s weather was caused, if only in a very small way, by theatre from the past. We know that theatre-makers burned fossil fuels when they illuminated stages or transported productions

from place to place – but we also know that theatre has mirrored and shaped attitudes towards the environment, the climate, other living beings, time and its relationship to human agency, and indeed fossil fuels too.

It has also shaped our understanding of the real. If theatre has contributed to the ‘great derangement’ of the climate crisis, then perhaps it can be instructive to consider what dramatists meant when they wrote about the ‘real world’ – and indeed what they meant when they wrote about nature, the seasons, animals, the weather, the oceans, energy, and human agency. Theatre studies and theatre practice can provide understanding of the past and inspiration for future activity.

Kevin McNally

Music Department, UL

My research starts with a simple question: what if we took sound as a basis for our ways of knowing and being? In a world of economic rationality, human subjects impose their will on inert matter, shaping all that is nonhuman into objects to suit human desires. If our engagement with the world is instead conceived of as an act of tuning in to the other, the subject-object divide is blurred, and we recognise the agency of the nonhuman. Sound is always mediated by its environment, and always draws listeners and sounding objects into complex confederacies of contagious resonance. As such, thinking through sound helps us recognise the kind of radical hospitality that ecological awareness calls for. Furthermore, ensemble music crystallises this notion into intention and as such is an excellent way to model hospitality and entanglement. I am developing an ecologically-centred creative practice in the field of community music, using a community gamelan orchestra as a case study. A gamelan is an orchestra of tuned bronze percussion instruments, originating in central Java, Indonesia. Since COVID restrictions have prevented any in-person ensemble, I have instead turned to the instruments themselves as creative partners, material with agency that can still dialogue with the human members of the orchestra.

Dr Laoighseach Ní Choistealbha

IRC Laureate Scholar, Moore Institute, NUI Galway

In *An Ghaeilge agus an Éiceolaíocht/Irish and Ecology* (2019), the literary and translation scholar, Professor Michael Cronin, advocated for a return to the Irish language as a method of understanding the ongoing environmental damage being wrought upon the Irish landscape. In arguing for the necessity of the language for appreciating the inherent worth of the biosphere through toponyms, he states: ‘these forms of reconnection are not an idle pastime [...] but are a vital survival skill for reimagining a different kind of environmental future.’ Further to the centrality of the Irish language for engaging with the Irish Anthropocene, is the important role of world literature, and in particular,

poetry, for ‘providing significant modes of interrogating and inhabiting the Anthropocene’, in the words of humanities scholar, Sam Solnick (2016). Complementary to this, the literary scholar Eóin Flannery has conducted valuable research in *Ireland and Ecocriticism* (2015) which examines the eco-critical literature of numerous Anglophone Irish writers and poets, such as Derek Mahon, Paula Meehan, Tim Robinson, and Moya Cannon.

In accordance with Cronin’s reflections on the centrality of the Irish language to the understanding of Irish landscape and nature, and building upon my research on human rights and modern Irish poetry as part of the *Republic of Conscience: Human Rights and Modern Irish Poetry* project, my current research focuses on contemporary poetry in the Irish language as a means of interrogating the era of the Anthropocene. By critically examining this poetry, written in a minoritized language, I hope to elucidate common themes, motifs, and literary techniques used by poets in the Irish language, which yield novel and valuable methods for exploring the realities of the Anthropocene era, both internationally and at home in Ireland.

Dr Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh

Department of Modern Irish, UCC

Irish-language poetry and the Climate Crisis

While the notion of extinction is primarily an ecological phenomenon, it can also be used in a metaphorical sense to denote language shift (Müller and Püsse 2018, 8). It has been argued that there is a direct link between the environmental threats posed by humans and the threat to the Irish language (Denvir 2018, Ó Laoire 2018). In his dual-language book *An Ghaeilge agus an Éiceolaíocht/ Irish and Ecology* (2019), Michael Cronin asserted that the (Irish) language issue is fundamentally an ecological one. I am particularly interested in applying some of these ideas to my analysis of poems by Gaeltacht-dwelling poets which respond to the local linguistic crisis and the global environmental crisis. The interconnectedness of everything on the earth, of the interdependence between people and the environment is a cornerstone of ecological thinking. This idea is present in the ancient Gaelic belief in the sovereignty goddess whereby the rightful king was wedded to the goddess of the land. A disruption to the natural world would have a negative impact on the political system and the life of the community. Bríd Ní Mhóráin’s poem, ‘Slabhra na Beatha’ [The Chain of Life] suggests how disorder in nature resulted in the current global pandemic. Invoking Naomi Klein, Cronin states that Gaeltacht areas in Ireland often functioned as our own sacrifice zones (Cronin 2019, 13) The poet Proinsias Mac a’Bhaird, a native of Árainn Mhór off the Donegal coast, sees a similar extractivist approach in relation to the Gaeltacht in the bitter poem ‘Langán’ (2010, 59).

Dr Anaïs Nony

Department of French, UCC

Care as Invention in the Anthropocene

The question of the Anthropocene has been widely debated in the humanities, with scholars such as Jason Moore and Donna Haraway arguing for a specific temporal understanding of the power dynamics at stake in today's ecological crisis (Moore, 2016; Haraway, 2016). However, these perspectives have not adequately addressed the issue of technology and its impact on forms of living. My paper analyzes the notion of invention with special attention to care. Specifically, I will be looking at the philosophy of technique and technology in order to show that to care is to invent a new relation to localities and singularities. To overcome the routinizing and synchronizing tendencies of what he later calls soft or fluid capitalism, Stiegler's philosophy embraced a "rhythmic attitude"^[1] that is necessarily an intermittent force. This force admits that an individual is a being in tension: their capacity to act, care, think, heal, share is always fluctuating according to everchanging sets of internal and external limitations. Contrary to the increasingly cybernetic governance of our living practices, the *voûç* is a pilot that is not ruled by computational machines and technologies of control but by techniques of care. Only care, as an intersectional practice of overcoming hegemonic power, can guide the making of new significations and new singularities. During this discussion, I will engage the work of Bernard Stiegler and Gilbert Simondon and place them in dialogue with critical race theory and anti-colonial critique, to reveal the previously underestimated connections between technique, healing and inventing practices of care.

[1] Souleymane Bachir Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy*. Senghor, Bergson and the Idea of Negritude, trans. Chike Jeffers, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2011, p.84

Kara O'Brien

Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, UL

My research explores the intersection of history and oral culture through the medium of Irish hunting songs. Many of these songs depict changing landscapes and the destruction of the natural environment, and provide a unique perspective on people's connection to the natural world. Part of my work seeks to understand how the meanings of these songs have changed over the last two hundred years, and what this tells us about our changing relationship with nature and the environment. By exploring ideologies, values and symbols inherent in these songs, this research can help us to better understand the origins of current mindsets, and offers insights into how to inspire connection with nature and bridge the urban/rural divide. Oral culture is an important reflection of how communities experience the world, and what their priorities are. As the fragility of the natural world becomes a focal point of humanity, the image of the fleeing hare with dogs and huntsman in

full pursuit has become an increasingly poignant metaphor, a fact attested to by many hare hunting songs being recently recorded by popular Irish trad artists such as Daoirí Farrell and Ye Vagabonds. Although the context of these performances has changed dramatically from their earlier iterations (often as post-hunt pub songs), the continuity of the songs suggests a common ground between ourselves and our past, and underscores the commonalities between us all. The songs are reinvented to meet the needs of new singers and listeners. The story changes, but the songs remain the same.

Dónal Ó Céilleachair

Department of Critical & Contextual Studies, LSAD

HOME - an exploration of narrative possibilities for engaging with the ecological crisis.

In these pivotal times we live in we find ourselves facing “the greatest challenge of our species”¹ with the unfolding ecological crisis. According to author and Jungian analyst Andrew Fellows this crisis has resulted from our “dysfunctional relationship” with “both inner and outer Nature”²

For cultural historian Thomas Berry this dysfunctional relationship comes from a crisis of narrative: We are in trouble now because we are in between stories. The Old Story is (no longer functioning) and we have (yet to fully articulate) the New Story³

The evolving narrative of this ‘New Story’ is inspiring new movements right across the spectrum of human experience to radically re-imagine what Buddhist scholar Joanna Macy describes as “a whole new relationship to our world, to ourselves, and to each other”⁴ This project will survey, document and contextualise this evolving narrative by means of a Creative Practice PhD that combines:

- A thesis elucidating the narrative basis of our dominating anthropogenic consciousness (and the resulting ecological crisis) and exploring what frameworks we have for transforming this narrative and for moving towards an ecological consciousness.
- A creative practice treatment for a feature length film - with the working title HOME – that will synthesise this exploration of evolving narratives in compelling film form.

www.anupictures.com

1 Lovejoy, Thomas (2012) The Greatest Challenge of Our Species (New York Times Op-Ed, April 2012)

2 Fellows, Andrew (2019) Gaia, Psyche and Deep Ecology - Navigating Climate Change in the Anthropocene (Routledge; 1st edition)

3 Berry, Thomas (1988) The Dream of the Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1988; reprint Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2015)

4 Macy, Joanna (1998) The Great Turning (Wild Duck Review, Vol. IV, No. 1, Winter 1998, p. 14)

Prof. Patrick O'Donovan

Department of French, UCC

I am interested in writing in France that has an ecological emphasis, with a particular focus in my recent work on poetry (from the nineteenth century to the present) and on anthropology. While I am drawn to these as distinct areas, I also explore the connections between them. One such common locus is the issue of form as an aspect of the relationship between the non-human and the human: thus, the 'generative logic' (Eduardo Kohn) of form is harnessed by human and non-human beings alike. Or the image, considered as one manifestation of form, is an occasion for critical thinking: it is an outlet for the pressing question of the sufficiency of the 'means of expression' (Philippe Descola) on which we depend in the face of global warming. Form is also a factor in the figurative projection of space and by extension in our relationship with our environments. The poet Michel Deguy says as much when he declares that ecology is a poetics: poetry is a mode of thought through which we can begin to discern the non-visible, what is not yet visible. I work on the impact of modernization, of a world of 'bustle and commotion' where the 'power of socialization' is in play (T. W. Adorno), on nineteenth-century poetry, and in turn on how agency comes to be understood in an extended temporal framework marked in particular by the emergence of an increasingly troubled ecological awareness. I am also interested in the treatment of environmental risk in the work of French thinkers today, including Descola and Bruno Latour, and here again in the connections that can be drawn between these sources and the work of contemporary poets.

'Against nature? Vigny's stones', *Dix-Neuf*, 23:3-4 (2019), 196-207

'Certeau's landscapes: what can images do?', in *What Forms Can Do: The Work of Form in 20th- and 21st-Century French Literature and Thought*, ed. by Patrick Crowley and Shirley Jordan (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 255-69

Dr Róisín O'Gorman

Department of Theatre, UCC

Creative approaches to Water: Moving with/in and alongside bodies

For the conference gathering I will discuss embodied approaches to research in environmental humanities, with particular reference to an ongoing project connecting local and global bodies of water. In Cork I've been involved in the local iteration of an international event focussed on dancing for safe water for everyone: Global Water Dances (<http://globalwaterdances.org/>). The event allowed us (a collective of children, teens, students, artists and academics) to express our concerns about water rights which began in response to particular protests around austerity and water rights current in Ireland but also allowed us to connect this water-rich and overflowing country to global water rights issues. Our aim was to think and move with water and each other and to contribute to

a shifting sensibility about water as central to issues of social justice as much as an issue of environmental concern. Thinking through movement as a fundamental quality of water and using images and accounts of a direct experiences of water from somatic training and practices, this research seeks out the dynamics of fluid bodies on the move. This liquid framework shifts understandings of the ways in which communities are integrated or disintegrated with processes in need of ongoing regeneration and re-invention. In attending to how we move together in time, how we dare a mingling of selves and others, local and global, this paper aims at re-framing our understanding of age, time and place allowing for a playful remembering of our responsibility to our environments and each other.

Dr Tina Pusse

School of Languages, Literatures & Cultures, NUIG,

My current research investigates methods to communicate complex environmental objects such as climate change, habitation, or the human body as a structurally open spaces inhabited by microscopic life forms in competition or symbiosis with non-living objects. In addition, nano-processes are being offered as solutions for large-scale geoengineering of the planet for climate mitigation, such as nano-particles to reduce the Earth's albedo, or in human enhancement discourses. I engage with the ideological load of popular narratives, such as right-wing cultures of preparation (i.e. providing a historical perspective of why people build shelters, bunkers and other provisional escape places), religiously motivated discourses of separation or cohabitation with other species (transcorporeality), or the effects of hygiene management on forms of habitation.

Framing environmental objects poses extreme narrative challenges with regard to scale, for example, in the case of large objects such as climate change, its unboundedness, incalculability, and unthinkability, but also, at microscopic level, in the case of thinking the human as a the community of other life forms. In both cases actions are required that exceed the scale in which we are used to operate, at institutional, infrastructural, interpersonal and organisational level. Part of this ongoing and pressing task is to abstain from imposing worn out labels onto the delicate process of conceiving environmental continuities of texts, beings and ecosystems, which might in an underhanded way continue to inscribe traditional divisions and impositions.

Dr Silvia Ross

Department of Italian, School of Languages, Literatures and Cultures, UCC

My research concerns the textual representation of space in modern and contemporary Italian literature, often harnessing ecocritical and ecofeminist approaches to the novel and short story. A recent example is an article I published in an issue of *Annali d'Italianistica* (2019) on 'Urban Space and the Body', centred on *Acciaio* (2010) by Silvia Avallone. Avallone's debut novel, *Acciaio* (literally

Steel, but translated as *Swimming to Elba*), set at the turn of the 21st century, explores the intimate lives of Anna and Francesca, two teenage girls living in the disenfranchised outskirts of the Tuscan coastal city of Piombino. My article examines the text's reliance on spatial tropes to depict the inequality of the girls' and their peers' situation, with the squalid high-rise flats in which they live and the steel factory encapsulating their sense of entrapment. Avallone's novel portrays a series of placeless places (Relph) which exist in symbiosis with the girls' corporeality, thus dismantling standardized notions of the Tuscan idyll and endowing the girls with a degree of agency. My examination of the novel's industrial setting avails of eco-feminist (Plumwood, Gaard), and spatial theory (Cresswell), as it investigates the relationship between the female subject and her surroundings in what might seem a relatively lesser-known and unlikely location: the steel industry and the working-class 'ghetto' of Piombino. I argue that an eco-feminist reading is necessary to understanding the environmental and corporeal dynamics portrayed in Avallone's powerful novel.

In addition, in my role as co-convenor of the 'Rethinking Spatial Humanities' Research Cluster of CASiLaC, UCC, I foster collaboration on spatial and environmental humanities research. We have recently established a collaboration between the cluster and the 'Center for the Humanities and Social Change' at the University of Venice, Ca' Foscari, on the topic of 'Cities and Water'. Our first joint event was held on 26 April 2021, on the topic of 'Cities and Flooding: Cork and Venice', which highlighted the environmental fragility of both cities, as demonstrated by two activists from the 'We Are Here Venice' and 'Save Cork City' campaigns.

Dr Rory Rowan

School of Geography, TCD

This paper argues that the Anthropocene – the so-called 'Geologic Age of Man' – not only concerns 'planetary' change but is an extra-planetary phenomenon extending beyond the bounds of the Earth's atmosphere into outer space. The vast array of human-made matter sent into orbit over the last half century – functional satellites and 'space junk' alike – constitutes a prosthetic strata extending the boundaries of Earth system change, and hence the Anthropocene, into outer space. Indeed, anthropogenic environmental impacts off-Earth are not limited to this planet's orbit but are smeared out into the solar system in the form of probes, rovers and their traces on other planets, moons, asteroids, comets with scientific instruments even reaching into interstellar space. Hence considering the Anthropocene from an extra-planetary perspective reconfigures the 'what' and the 'where' of anthropogenic environmental change and the spatial and temporal boundaries of the Anthropocene. However, this paper argues that such a perspective is also important because outer space is fast becoming a new frontier for capital accumulation and colonial ventures by states, corporations and supposedly visionary billionaires. The emerging shift from space exploration to space exploitation has far-reaching cultural, political and economic consequences on Earth as well as off. This paper explores how artists and activists are engaging with the expansion of both the Anthropocene and capitalist dynamics into outer space as a way to counter the colonial practices

and imaginaries of powerful state and corporate actors and explore the possibilities of an extra-planetary environmentalism.

Dr Martin Schauss

School of English, Drama and Film, UCD

The New Ecological Imaginary: Contemporary Experimental Poetics and the Environmental Humanities

The convergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement has pushed imagined futures into public discourse at a speed unthinkable not long ago. This convergence shows how inseparable racial oppression and colonial dispossession are from global ecologies and climate change; why the geographer Kathryn Yusoff talks of the “racial blindness” of White Geology and the Anthropocene. As with all accelerated temporalities, we can trace shifts and transformations that led up to the present “crisis” by paying close attention to emergent cultural forms. But it’s here that the thriving Environmental Humanities miss a trick, their literary perspectives disproportionately skewed towards fiction (“cli-fi,” petrofiction) and ecopoetry (especially ecocriticism concerned with “nature” content). The premise that ecopoetics describes less a generic, aesthetic category than a mode of reading concerned with literary, artistic, and performative production is often neglected. As a result, we find little reference in environmental literature surveys to writers who experiment with form and mediation (materiality, language, image, sound, page, body) and fundamentally challenge the idea of a linear relationship between literary expression and ecological content. And yet it is exactly such experimental forms that seek most radically to reorganise calls for social justice as part of a cultural front attuned to issues of race, class and gender, and to reorient our ecological grammars and political energies. In response, the present IRC-funded research explores experimental, cross-generic and intermedial attempts to rewrite the lexical, semiotic and formal registers of neoliberal climate governance, focusing on contemporary prose poets like Lisa Robertson, Claudia Rankine, Caroline Bergvall, and Renee Gladman.

Dr James L. Smith

School of English and Digital Humanities, UCC

My interest in participating in the *Humanities for the Anthropocene* event stems from a variety of relevant research competencies and activities. My research background places me at an intersection of multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary topics that span temporal and geographical explorations of Anthropocene themes, ecologies and interactions. I am co-organiser of a forthcoming ‘Interdisciplinary Coastal Humanities’ collection in the *Anthropocenes* journal, a committee member for the Coastal History network, the convenor of a forthcoming ‘Coastal Connections’ webinar

series, and have published on a wide range of water-related environmental humanities themes. In addition, I am currently employed on the *Ports, Past and Present* project at UCC, funded by the European Regional Development Fund through the Ireland Wales Initiative. My current book project, based on my recent IRC-funded postdoctoral work, will be entitled *Deep Maps of Lough Derg*.

In 2021 I will be putting together an ERC Starting Grant application entitled 'Hydrolects' drawing on my track record and experience. It will explore the intersection between surveying of and meta-research on blue humanities research and practice—disciplinarity, cooperation, alignment around societal challenges, workflows; iterative design and design thinking in the digital humanities; scholarly publishing and open scholarship. As a result, the event will help me to take the pulse of the environmental humanities and the challenges that it faces in the Anthropocene. It will also help to get a more comprehensive sense of the Irish landscape prior to the preparation of the application.

Dr Ciara Thompson

Irish World Academy of Music and Dance, UL

Technology vs. Tradition: The Sustainability of Lulling

Lullabies are some of our first musical and social experiences, transmitted through generations. These songs contain deep cultural knowledge and hold valuable information of one's surrounding environment. Singing lullabies can be a calming and salubrious act of expression and bonding for both the cared for and the caregiver. Foundational relationships between self, direct listeners, society, and environment can be strengthened, as well as challenged through their lyrics. Furthermore, they are an easy access point for layered linguistic, cultural, and musical exchange, and can act as a pressure valve for caregivers to release intense emotions. The intimate practice of singing a child to sleep is therefore a beneficial and sustainable means of relationship building, education, and cultural transmission.

Technology and the digital age have brought trailblazing innovation to lulling practices through parenting styles, access to repertoire, products, and resources. Such innovations are a double-edged sword, however, and can potentially have adverse cultural and societal, and environmental effects. The more we rely on technologies to lull, the more energy we use and waste we accumulate, and the less we engage with primary relationships and musical traditions. However, such risks of cultural, social, and energy-based depletion through unsustainable or unmindful practices can be impactfully reformed for a more viable, culturally vibrant future through fostering critical engagement, awareness, outreach, and inclusivity. We can therefore consider how we might strike a balance between innovation and tradition regarding lullabies and sleep technology, in order to appreciate and employ the value of both.

Jacopo Turini

Department of Italian, UCC

Along the rail-tracks. Environments of the Swiss-Italian border in the poems of Fabio Pusterla. One of the most peculiar border areas in Italy is probably the one between Lombardy and Ticino, in Italian-speaking Switzerland. Canton Ticino is relatively close to cities as Como and Milan, and thus can be seen as a part of the 'Padanian megalopolis' (Turri 2001), the huge industrial network of Northern Italy. In fact, the landscape of this political border is strongly characterised by the presence of a large commercial railway network – just a few miles from the Alpine environment. Among the authors I focus on in my project on contemporary Italian literature from Alpine frontier areas, the Swiss Italian poet Fabio Pusterla is extremely sensitive to the environmental dynamics of such territory. Pusterla is fascinated by those hybrid areas where nature and material remains of such an industrial landscape overlap. In his poetry, the representation of the landscape is similar to what Gilles Clément called the 'Third Landscape'. Pusterla's is a poetic of remains and the waste, of life in a derelict environment. His conception of poetry identifies in such fragments, in those elements of the environment that are symbols of resistance, in line with the Swiss botanist Ernesto Schick's study, *Flora Ferroviaria* (1980), on the tenacious flora that survives around the tracks of the Italian-Swiss commercial railway, and may soon take over. The first chapter of my project, in fact, focuses on representations of Swiss Italian border, within a mainly Geocritical and Ecocritical approach. My interest is not only on the representations of the environment, but also on the ways in which literature actively deals with ecological issues.

Xandra van der Eijk

Artist and designer connecting art, ecology, and activism

My doctoral research is developed through a collaboration with the Department of Environmental Sciences and the Belfast School of Art of Ulster University. The shared goal is to centralise ongoing scientific evidence on the impact of past and present environmental change (and its broad network of cause and effect) as knowledge production in artistic research and transdisciplinary artworks. At an unprecedented pace, the planet is currently undergoing drastic changes as a result of human-induced climate change (IPCC, Stocker et al., 2014). Understanding the importance of scientific evidence of climate (and, as a result, environmental) change requires careful contextualisation and storytelling, competently capable of interpreting scientific data, which produces tangible forms to often intangible and abstract concepts. Combining the specialism of the involved departmental scientists with an artistic research methodology that extends connections beyond the disciplinary realms of science and art, one that interrelates philosophy, anthropology, and sociology, an opportunity is created to produce another, hybrid type of evidence and practice-based knowledge that will contribute to creating a sense of urgency for today's environmental crises. This project therefore not only focuses on the scientific, but equally on the cultural dimensions of environmental change, and on how artistic practice can give both access to knowledge and drive actions relevant

for environmental transformations. Finally, the research aims to connect deep time processes underlying environmental change to the phenomenon known as “The Great Acceleration” (Steffen et al., 2004), unpacking the many feedback loops that create entanglements of climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological degradation.

Matt York

Department of Government and Politics, UCC

I have recently completed my doctoral research which was grounded in a collective visioning process exploring the thoughts, feelings, ideas and imaginings of a global cross section of ecological, anti-capitalist, feminist, indigenous and anti-racist activists from South Africa, Mexico, Trouwunna (Tasmania, Australia), Ireland, UK, Syria, Uganda, Germany, Italy, Canada, the Netherlands, Turkey, USA and Jordan. Building on this work, I am now in the initial stages of a new project entitled *The Deep Commons: Cultivating ecologies of solidarity and care beyond the state*. The central problem it takes as its starting point is the nature of our current political utopias – that they are transcendental rather than grounded, or put another way – rather than here-and-now they are nowhere – in an ever-receding future/past, or otherwise in an alternate reality altogether. They are impossible. By extending popular conceptions of the commons to include our more-than-human psycho-socio-material relations, this *Deep Commons* is proposed as a ground through which new social and political (inter)subjectivities might manifest. This ongoing co-enquiry will explore these conditions of empathic entanglement that act as the basis for societal formation, and the practices of solidarity and care which underpin many contemporary ecological, anti-capitalist, feminist, indigenous and anti-racist struggles. To facilitate this process, I’m currently preparing an online hub which will aim to foster dialogue across and between a diversity of movements and philosophies which might resonate with this theme, with a view to organising a conference later this year or in early 2022.

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