

Sun 20 Mar
1.30-2.45pm

Speculative Fiction, Speculative Economics

**Bahar Noorizadeh and Ama Josephine B. Johnstone,
moderated by Manuel Ángel Macía**

Live transcript

While every effort has been made to provide an accurate written record of this event, some errors may exist in this transcript.

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SPEAKERS

Canan Batur, Manuel Ángel Macia, Bahar Noorizadeh, Ama Josephine B. Johnstone

00:00 Canan Batur

I hope you had a lovely lunch break. I mean, we're very excited to have you with us and hopefully you feel similar. In this segment, speculative fiction and speculative economics our two speakers come from different fields, but both are very highly interested in the interdisciplinary and questions of sustainability, our shared geographies and planetary resources, as well as trying to move socially and scientifically forward. Imagining how we can design future possibilities. We will have first Bahar's presentation, and then it will be followed by Ama's presentation. So the conversation will be moderated by Manuel, and now I invite Manuel to the stage.

01:18 Manuel Ángel Macia

Great, thank you very much, I want to especially thank Theo, Canan, Helen, and everyone at Nottingham Contemporary for hosting these brilliant events and for inviting me. And it's a pleasure for me to introduce the panel. I want to start building on yesterday's and today's discussion, which presented a range of different visions for transition beyond growth, both from the global north with notions of degrowth, and economy, but also with perspectives from the global south to include post-development transitions to post-extractivism, and so

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on and so forth. And one of the key things is was the key turn towards, you know, framing economies as a site for intervention. I'm really, really happy to be introducing this panel, titled Speculative Fiction Speculative Economics, which signals this turn towards speculation, fiction and economy as sites for critical activation. So I'm delighted to introduce our two speakers today, Bahar Noorizadeh and Ama Josephine B. Johnstone. The first speaker is Bahar, who is an artist, writer and filmmaker. Her research examines historical events of speculative activity and its derivative politics in art, urban life, finance and economics. Bahar is a PhD candidate in art, at Goldsmiths, University of London, and her work has appeared at the German pavilion, Venice architecture biennale, Tate Modern Artist SEMA in programme, Transmediale festival, among many others. Bahar is the founder of Weird Economies, an online art platform the traces economic imaginaries, extraordinary financial arrangements of our time. Bahar will present the project and elaborate a bit on financial efficacy. Our second speaker is Ama Josephine B Johnstone, who is a scholar, speculative writer, artist, and pleasure activist, whose work navigates intimate explorations of race, art, ecology and feminism. Ama is a PhD candidate in psychosocial studies at Birkbeck, University of London, Quarter fellow with Contemporary Art Finland and EVA International Limerick, and was the 2020-21 Keith Haring fellow in art and activism at Bard college New York. Ama's research takes a queer decolonial approach to speculating and archiving independent pleasurable, like climate change futures in Ghana, across the Black diaspora. Her wide practice things through sustainable economies and ecologies of care and survival for BIPOC woman in the arts and academia. It's a pleasure for me to introduce the speakers and I give the floor to Bahar.

04:19 Bahar Noorizadeh

Hello and thanks for the invitation, Canan, Theo, everyone who worked on the symposium and happy spring equinox, it's the northern celebration of the beginning of spring, which actually is very relevant to the theme today. So I'm just gonna call it maybe we can have the Weird Economies homepage in the background. I'm just gonna talk through some conceptual ideas that are underlying Weird Economies, mainly the concept of the weird, which I've been given developing over the past few years through reading many other theorists, practitioners, activists,

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organisers who've been dealing with, you know, either quite literally with the concept of the weird or I kind of tried to find their voice as weird, but admittedly, I have to maybe set the tone in advance, it's going to be pretty abstract and conceptual discussion. So *Weird Economies* is a post disciplinary experimental site and knowledge platform focused on unorthodox and radical economic practices. And I will discuss three ways in which finance capitalism, and the debt regime are weird, in keeping with the three wayward or weird sister method, which is actually one of the original cases where the word weird kind of appeared. Understanding the weird temporalities and agencies animating finance, helps to locate dislocated politics and modes of financial activism, that are separate from or take advantage of instruments currently in the service of predatory practices of future extraction. Ultimately, this presentation attempts to weave in Randy Martin's notion of mutual indebtedness into the unpayable debts of past historical injustice as one way of leveraging avoiding modes of interaction which are risky and taking on a social debt. If, as Kate Soper writes, a degrowth understanding committed to social justice, and a fair distribution of environmental resources, requires a more complex narrative on the old-new divide, a transcendence of the current binary opposition between uncritical progressivism and elegiac nostalgia. This presentation will offer the weird as a techno conceptual device and weirding as a procedure to reinsert justice back into our economy, which is something that I think Kathrin was kind of hinting towards also in her practice. So, without further ado. One, so out of the three, three ways that I want to put forward, one, Mark Fisher describes the allure of the weird and the eerie to be a fascination for the outside. Over the course of modernism, two entities become the perfect reference for fascination with the outside of time, finance and art. Economics in the past couple centuries has embarked on a perverse quest to capture and control this exteriority. At the frontiers of the Enlightenment subjects Promethean project that seeks to capture and seize everything is the colonisation of realms beyond the present. The question of time at the centre of economic information was augmented in Hayek's later work until it reached its occult status. It was not knowledge but the absence of knowledge, the ontological impossibility of accessing this knowledge in advance that underlies economic activity. The Hayekian knowledge/ non knowledge dichotomy then, making a transition from the realm of

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epistemology to ontology was no more concerned with economic psychology as was previously theorised in the work of his antecedents. The Economist who took this challenge to heart emerged primarily out of the Cowles commission based at the University of Chicago. Cowles' economists strongly opposed Hayek's cognitive theories and for the same reason, we're committed to overruling this metaphysics of the market with more enhanced information pragmatism. It was in Chicago that the neoclassical science of economy, popular at the time in the US, was married to the new liberalism of Hayek and ilk, through a subtle appendage. The introduction of advanced probability theory and Bayesian statistics through the emerging field of game theory, that the shadow of the future surfaced into economics as a numerical type that has directly to do with the chaotic feuds of the Hayekian market unconscious. This unholy alliance between American econometrics, itself an uncanny twin of cybernetics and social cybernetics process, with the everyday neoliberal philosophy resulted in the contemporary monster child called neoliberalism. A mishmash of idealist battles over information. The early day market theories were far more mystical and esoteric than today's industries of the future, insurance, hedging, forecasting, etc. The sciences of calculation of the future, borrowing their formulas from orthodox thermodynamics and classical physics, as many have noted before, are bereft of nature itself as the primary input of their forms of calculus. The rituals of measurement act as self fulfilling prophecies, congealing and totalising the future as a reality, as something here and now rather than placed within the territory of the unknowable. To loop something into existence is the shared modality of rituals and derivative instruments alike. The recursive movements between debt and credit, via the constant flows of liquidity, spanning the gift and ritually organised societies to the present. The weird is also another word for looping. Timothy Morton writes, Weird from the Old Norse Urth, meaning twisted in a loop. The Norse entwined a level of space with itself. In the term weird there flickers a dark pathway between causality and aesthetic dimension, between doing and appearing, a pathway that dominates Western philosophy has blocked and suppressed. Two, Fisher further elaborates on the weird as a particular kind of anxiety. It involves a sensation of wrongness, a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least it should not exist here. Yet if the entity or object is here, then

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the categories which we have up until now, used to make sense of the world cannot be valid. The weird in this sense, creates a rift in the models of thought or in categories of the old. Massive financial crises of the past decade shaped the grounds of our forecasting models to reveal that they only apply as long as the context they arise from remains identical, or as Elia Ayache says, they are a change of context, and that is only relative to a given context, that we can make causal predictions at all. In other words, capturing the end of the undead capital in a fugitive glimpse at the moment of the stock market crash signals a change of context from one reality setting to another. As the threat of an imminent and immense illiquidity event is unleashed, the invisible infrastructures of circulation are writ large. Marina Vishmidt writes, crisis makes circulation visible, when circulation freezes, it becomes visible. And lastly, number three, the weird as a sense of being haunted by a foreign agency. Who or what is it that cannot or will not explain what it is doing or why it is doing it? Or as Martijn Konings says, Why do we keep doing this? Why do we keep offering up our surplus? The absence of the puppet master that works through us turns us into ruins. Discussing the ruins of the colony and the function of memory, Achille Mbembe writes, In certain canonical Black texts, the colony appears almost as a cycle of loss, which in turn makes it possible to demand that the ex-coloniser, pay a debt to the ex-colonised. The weird is a glitch, a form of hauntology required to bring us into the waking life of our bodies as reserves of debt. So these three descriptions of the weird helped me locate derivative politics that are separate from or take advantage of instruments currently in the service of predatory practices of future extraction, that are exemplified by finance. If the end of capital cannot be imagined before the end of the world, as many have cited and repeated, maybe we should imagine the end of the world as a precondition for the end of capital. The climate catastrophe is that communal limited experience that can orient us towards modes of financial activism that can go along other strategies of refusal or compromise. What's at stake is pursuing forms of justice seeking activism that work through our current economic systems, trying to forge a politics of mutual indebtedness with the shift from the individual to the dividual subject of finance. The dividual I will explain here is related to, as to how it is dissected and reassembled into a bundle of collateral debt obligations, a body and it's cognitive capacities is

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dissected and partitioned into part time job obligations. So we have moved from the individual subject to the whole territory. As sociologist and dancer Randy Martin says, creating the morning the image of commodities made it possible to imagine what it would mean to take collective possession of the means of production. Recognising the world crafted through the operations of derivatives, leads towards the entangled constitution of mutual indebtedness, of the ways that we are social together, even if we never fuse as one. This is the essence of what we are trying to exercise at Weird Economies, as I said, in admittedly very abstract terms, as much as it can be condensed in a short presentation. We are still I think an infant of a project, in Silicon Valley terms, still a beta version. But in the spirit of indebtedness, I will end on sharing a few of our inspirations in thinking about the politics of debt and forms of financial activism that can be relevant for all our practices. Recent financial philosophies and radical practices have pointed out possibilities to use the techniques of finance to subvert and reverse finance's own tendency to widen the accumulative effects of past racial, colonial and economic injustice. In regards to the formation of new political subjectivities Michel Feher describes practices of counter-speculation or speculative insurgency in the current reputational regime. More specifically, he describes this programme to be the political voice of investing and raising the credit worthiness of this discredited subjects and forms of knowledge. In a social realm, entirely predicated on a reputation of regime and political credibility, how can the art system lend itself to social experimentations around theories of financial justice? A campaign like Strike MoMa, or similar cases as they happen in the UK, targets the toxic philanthropy of the museum's leadership is a good case in point of such investee activism in the field of art. Building on the past instances of museum boycotts and strike campaigns in the US, and elsewhere, Strike MoMa works on changing the image of what's previously taken as reputable and critical engagement with art institutions. Or as Feher says, far from sacrificing substance to symbolism or concentrating on symptoms, to the detriment of structural inequalities, these movements reckon with the fact that the allocation of moral, social and financial credit has become the decisive state of social struggles. Robert Meister's theorisation of historical justice and reparations as a financial option is another option. He writes, capitalism is an injustice-compounding machine that must be

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reprogrammed in order to channel its virtualised form of wealth into social value, which is currently held hostage the maintenance of the machine itself. We must thus reverse the discipline of payments by exacting, by exacting a price from finance for the injustice it perpetuates. The price of justice is at times of economic crisis, according to Meister, is the price of the liquidity premium that governments pay to bail financial institutions, that is to delay the option of revolution. I'll just pause here for the Q+A part, Thankyou.

19:25 Ama Josephine B. Johnstone

So one of the great things that's happened during pandemic is doing things on Zoom for two years is I think our level of comfort has gone up because you know, I should be at home. I can, you know, not have shoes on, I can turn my camera off and go make tea and pat my dog when I'm stressed out etcetera. So now I'm demanding different light. Thank you very much Tom and team, thankyou very much the amazing team at Nottingham Contemporary, thankyou for all the negotiations that we underwent in order for me to be here, which are a big part of my practice. So I'm going to read, gonna read something from a new work that's coming out in this book. This book is amazing, *The Material Kinship Reader*, edited by Kris Dettel and Clementine Edwards, which is coming out next month, which considers material beyond extraction and kinship beyond the nuclear family, published by Onomatopoe press next month and available for pre order now and available in Britain in all good UK bookshops next month. Alongside this story that I'm going to share from this beautiful publication which features text by my heroes and inspirations, such as Robin Wall Kimmerer, Michelle Murphy and Ursula K LeGuin and many more. And I'm really honoured to be counted amongst these authors, as well as to share some of this work with you today. So the text consists of a speculative story, and then an author's note about the speculative story. And I'll talk more about that format later in the q&a, but today I'm only going to read you a short extract of the story, and then focus more on the author's note and we can talk about that. So the story, *What We Stay For*, thinks with a future offworld colony, there is two colonies on the planet, two kind of factions from this Earth have gone off and created these two colonies on this planet and they don't speak to each other and the colonies were began with completely different ontological founding principles or different kinds

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of demographics of worlds. The colony that I will read from is called Sumud, and the second colony, which I will not read from, but we'll talk is Autopoiesis. The story kind of flips between these two protagonists, Merherzia who is in Autopoiesis, and Kusuat who lives in Sumud, and they don't really talk about each other apart from occasionally at the other colony. But they do talk about their life, really their life and what they strive for and what they believe in. Kusuat, Sumud I absolutely loathe sweeping time. Although it symbolises a physical action, it's really become more like a season. And even though everyone's got to do it always feels personal. This year, sweeping time coincides with my moon time, and a deep ache or a throbbing through my flimsy biceps from yesterday's sweeping is being echoed in my abdomen and in my upper thighs. But no one gets out of it. We do it together as a community. And that's not negotiable. To make matters worse, Lehaley, my sister is giggling stupidly and making eyes at Petrana across the street, as though this is some kind of ancient courting ritual rather than a pre-emptive precaution to, and reminder of, genocide. Every time I look at her, all I can hear is the thump thump moan moan of them having sex yesterday, and it's not helping my cramps. I'd give anything to be tucked up in my warm sleep bunk at home, just me and my ambidextrous left hand. It's always something like this. The ash brings bad luck.

19:34 Manuel Ángel Macia

Thankyou very much Bahar, I'll give the floor to you Ama.

24:00 Ama Josephine B. Johnstone

When Sumud was seeded two generations ago, the ash storms were a thing of novelty. We didn't even know what they were, our people just assumed some kind of natural phenomena. We understood so little about the planet then. The other colony had only been around 100 years, not that we've ever had any contact. We came here following a different dream, one that unlike theirs does not preclude our survival. Our ancestors knew the ash wasn't snow because it wasn't cold and it didn't melt and the test came back saying there were no water compounds. And by the end of winter, it had started to fall black. As Sumud has seasons so similar to the more extreme regions of Earth, they assumed that spring rains would simply wash the ash away. So the people left it where it lay, coating the streets and houses and tools and bicycles,

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window frames and door hinges. That's how my Baba told us, just like that. When the sun returned one year, she would say, making her eyes wide and tickling the air in a parody of dawn. All in a moment, the ash began to soften, becoming springy and gelatinous to the touch. Lehaley and I were gathered closer, lifting our faces to sense the familiar story. That night, winter have one last breath of defiance and frost all over the land in a silent bone-aching rush. In the morning, when the callers came to open up their windows, or the risers tried to leave their homes, they found the ash frozen into a hard lacquer as thin as my hand but harder than space iron. Here my mother would pause for dramatic effect. No one could get out. When I was little, I was so scared I almost cried and had to be pulled into the safety of Baba's lap and assured of a thousand colours. Shh she would hush. Even as the story went on, unwinding ribbons of sorrow, gently teaching me that comfort doesn't end the pain of truth, only makes it a little more bearable. People were locked in their rooms and compounds, she whispered, and had to be broken out by melting the strange evil substance with very hot tongues of flame. But in their anger, the fire too became enraged by the fight against the melting ash and several houses caught alight and could not be put out. Others died years later from inhaling the fumes of the blaze. Sometimes Baba would cough dramatically at this point. And when I was really small, I cried, thinking she too would be stolen away by this silent invisible killer. Worst of all, Babe went on, even over my muffled sobs, when almost everyone had been saved and were climbing out of their windows or squeezing through the gaps of drawers they couldn't close, everything else in the city began to die. Unlike a natural ash that vitalises land and brings life, this ash settled and got into everything. When it melted, it st§§uck. And when it froze, it became impenetrable, so that all the plants died, and nothing could be grown or harvested. Life tends towards life. Reciprocity. Balance. Life is concerned with the inside, with how we live together. And the ash has offered us nothing but death. It killed our land, my Baba lamented and that's the heart of our people. So eventually, we had to leave. Here she trailed off, to her own fire burning as low as a story. We had to leave our home. And leaving is not a thing our people do readily, especially not here when we have forsaken the homeland. Then my mother would tell Baba that was enough and she should sit back and drink some tea. But I never got tired of her stories. I wish she was here now, she'd slap Lehelay silly for nonsense and maybe even roll me up

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some of her special dried leaves, which she smoked when her bones ached too much. Afterwards she would spend the rest of the night wide eyed, dreaming. Now we live here in the second Sumud. Here, even further from the hinterland, between us and the other city, the ash doesn't fall so heavily. Sometimes I look out there towards the western horizon and imagine I can see the jagged skeleton of my recent ancestors' home. Baba always remembered it, and her memories have kept the fear alive in my heart every year when the ash storm comes and we tried to sweep them away. I still hate sweeping time, even though everyone comes out towards the end of winter, to brush the ashes to the edge of each community and finally to the outskirts of the city. There they say, for I haven't seen it, a wall is slowly forming of the treacherous dust. I wonder if it is keeping something out or keeping us in. I wonder if it hates us the way the other city must hate us, for they must know we are here. And maybe it's even worse than that. Maybe they just don't care. So throughout the story, we see and I'm just gonna kind of talk a little bit about Autopoiesis. I'm not going to read from it. Autopoiesis is this utopic, post-everything city right, so we're kind of in a post-capitalist, post-gender, post-racial utopic space where everything is built up with this material called neoplastic and the people are really obsessed with this neoplastic when they eat it, it's medicine, it's their architecture. They've even named their pronouns after this neoplastic, kind of become this godlike material. And Meherzia is a neoplastics ergonomic scientist and its plaz's, their pronoun, it's plaz's job to try and think about how to grow this city. And the city was set off with this finite amount of neoplastic - how much you've got that's it, you're on your own, there's no coming back to Earth, you don't know about the store here. This is it, and these neoplastics were built with the intention that the city will grow to a certain size and then it will be stuck. Meherzia says the site of the Earth was so traumatised by what this massive growth capitalist world had done and how we killed the earth that they were like humans can't be trusted with growth. So we have to give them a finite amount and they have to make it work. Of course, in this in this post growth colony, people still want more, people are in love with this world they believe they've kind of overcome all oppression. And they've kind of yes, thought beyond the needs that some have to sacrifice for the plentiful few, right, so now it's plentiful for everyone, and I think there's nothing else here on this planet. They some of them know about the

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other colony, some of them don't. So she's, plaz is trying to find a way to kind of trick the makeup of these neoplastics to expand. And you know, I have so much love for Meherzia and Autopoeisis, this pro pleasurable place, there's this gorgeous spice market. And there are just beautiful, kind of like intimate sexual like parlours where they go and they have these inebriating neoplastic shots of like jelly drugs that take you into super amazing psychotic spaces, they have neoplastic augmentation, it's amazing. But I remain very questioning of this idea that there can be this utopic space without there being a backlash. And of course, the backlash in this story is that the ashes that is falling on this other colony is coming off off the neoplastics, which have broken into this ash which is with blowing to faraway from Autopoeisis and they believe it's been dissolved into harmless particles, but actually it's accumulating and has destroyed an entire city and is still kind of contaminating the lungs and livelihood chances of this other colony. So I've wrote this author's note, I'm going to read it. Author's Note, the term Autopoeisis from the Greek, auto, self, and poeisis, creation, production, refers to a system capable of reproducing and maintaining itself by creating its own path and eventually further components. Quote, if we don't demand radical change, we are headed for a whole world of people searching for a home that no longer exists. Edward Said helps us imagine what that might look like. He helps to popularise the Arabic word Sumud, to stay put, to hold on. That steadfast refusal to leave one's land, despite the most desperate eviction attempts, and even when surrounded by continuous danger. The thing about fossil fuels is they are so inherently dirty and toxic, that they require sacrificial people and places, people whose lungs and bodies can be sacrificed to work in the coal mines, people whose land and water can be sacrificed to open pit mining and oil spills. End quote, that's from Naomi Klein's Edward Said lecture, which I really recommend, if you haven't seen it, you can watch it online, or read the transcript. What we stay for is in many ways a result of my grappling with certain queer reclamation and engagement with plastic and plasticity, particularly within canons of post humanism, queer theory and feminist academics thought and writing. These theoretical and lab based experiments into colour rebalancing and proponents of or invitations to think through plastic and kin in a new feminist cyborg embodied society, or post-racialised, post-gender, post-binary reproductive society have always felt to me at once enticing, like a world

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or a future from dreams or an Ursula K Leguin novel I'm still trying to understand. Yet, what I'm decidedly excluded from, I've spent several years and months in the lead up to writing this piece more intensively thinking through where that sense of exclusion comes from. The simple answer is that my strongest most intimate and embodied relationships with plastic are being surrounded by, drinking from, reliant on, immersed in and infiltrated by its burning scent in a crash during my childhood. The caustic vibrations of that city make it feel in many ways, like it's run on and even been built on plastic bags, they clog up gutters and drains, they burn and heap on every street corner and field and are dumped not only in the Atlantic Oceans, with every beach with almost as much plastic as sand, but also in the vast micro cities of scrap, plastic and e-waste, on which an underage hustlers scavenge and repurpose copper wiring, and the plastic throw aways of neoliberal technological and capitalist progress. The original recycling plant and much of our recycling still ends up in those micro cities. In other words, I have yet to read an engagement with the potentiality of plastics that was able to exceed that which Naomi Klein calls the sacrificial zoning of climate colonialism normally, nor do these engagements exceed an anthropocentric white saviour complex that views the racialised body as always, already other, always already animal. And I really want to, I'd love to, I want to buy into the fantasy of a plasticity neither concerned with my survival nor predicated on my debt. These notions are further complicated, by what I experienced as a truly heartfelt attempt at, and belief in the potential for these features to do precisely the opposite. These, let's call them theoretical posthumanist world builders are like Meherzia true believers in a dream I could get behind if it wasn't quite so shiny. In Accra, and in many globalising and gentrifying sites, and remain problematic with the word globalising. And if any of the globalising and gentrifying sites Blackness navigate, shiny often means skyscrapers filled with washing machines and dishwashers for expats, and upper classes in a city without consistent running water are endless. It means Apple mac computer that's three times market price with copper wiring and backup in our micro city and stolen iPhones with aluminum components are extracted by means of ecocidal dams, which plague Black and indigenous communities across the Atlantic. It means a dream we are being sold on the back of our oppression, a dream that I would argue was never meant for us, racialised, colonised, sacrificial

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people. It was only meant to keep us busy. And of course, this is the dream of growth, of capitalism. Of course, these sacrificial specialities, like chemical toxicities themselves do not play by the rules of colonial borders, these sacrificial zones and peoples unique in London, as well as other cities across the world across Western Europe and North America. Traffic dense highways, airports additional runways and chemical production, storage facilities are built in locations largely populated by racialised and migrant peoples, increasing the mental and physical health risks among the communities least resourced and supported by the state and society at large. White middle and upper class and gentrifying areas are cleaned up to protect the bodies minds and children of colonial legacy. So, while plastic remains in some ways, an inescapable reality across our species, we know now that micro and nano plastic particles are to be found in human organs all over the world, in breast milk, everywhere, in water. That reality does not hit us all the same, and not all of our lives and deaths matter. That is to say that the technologies through which Black life often encounters and engages with plastic are ones of toxicity, refuse and sacrifice. What's more, this fascination with the queer potentialities of plastics, much like feminist coverings of cyborgs and post human features seem to unknowingly gesture toward utopias predicated on the continued disavowal of violent colonial histories and the cosmologies that attempted to eradicate, as well as the continued sacrifice of Black bodies. In particular, this turn toward unknowing or unseeing, or that consistently turning away, even while dialects of intersectionality and decolonisation sate the tongues of our allies that renders a neoliberal white feminist fascination with plastic futures so pervasive, enticing and deadly, like plastics themselves, a silent killer, all shining brightly coloured, and trussed up in a bow. I might gesture instead towards Zakiyyah Iman Jackson's work on the plasticity of Blackness, or visual ideation of more than human assemblages that might indeed include plastics. Michelle Murphy's decolonial thought on cancer cells and plastic refuse, or to Vanessa Agard-Jones' work on the queer hormonal relation of bodies and sand in post colonial Martinique, or even to D A Czone Spire's, Parasito plastics, which imagines a future in which plastic particles in the ocean have found one another and become conscious. In the speculative work above, I tried to think with the possibility of plastics, even while contesting the violent processes and categorisation that the

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human was formulated upon. And I keep going back and back to this in my work, even though in many ways, it's a 1980s throwback, for to think this idea or this truth, that how we think about the human, how many of us think about the human is very much a formulated concept that has served very particular economic, social and political roles in the social consciousness of post enlightenment thought. The process of post humanism, about using anti-essentialism, cannot be disposed of, outgrown or left behind, until we are able and willing to truly deconstruct and disassemble the colonial global political systems, that bore it into being the sole purpose of power over whatever the cost of profit, whatever the sacrifice, that humans cannot be disposed off until we're not willing to leave this land, and understand that we cannot save it. Until we focus not only on the molecular deconstruction of the material, seemingly cannot be unmade, but on the violent molecular deconstruction of a system, and a people that made it and lead always towards more, without wondering what more might mean. So the reason why I chose to read from the author's notes, and a little bit of the story rather than reading from just the story, you know I'm a science fiction writer, I'm incredibly invested in the medium and mode of story as both a kind of more accessible I think, than academic writing way of engaging political, social, ontological, cosmological ideas and ways of being. So the most, both more accessible and in some ways, I think, more capacious. I think you can tell more complex and nuanced stories sometimes through storytelling, than you can through article writing, academic writing. But this kind of interesting trend that I suppose we'll be researching is something that's new, are leaning into the speculative, whether that's an Afrofuturism, indigenous futurism, Asian futurism or speculative futurism, etc, etc. To kind of project our consciousness into the future has become a little bit to safe, for me, particularly in the contemporary art world. I received, I mean, I've created about seven different worlds, over the course of 2020 into early 2021, in response to that way, or platform as a protest was quick, let's get lots of Black artists to think about the future. Right, let's pay them to think about the future. And in some ways, you know, that was great. It was great to get those commissions. It was great to be thinking about the future. But it also became increasingly problematic, it was the itch under my skin because it felt like a way to avoid thinking about the present, a way to avoid doing the work in the present that was about moving us towards those futures

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that me and some of my colleagues who work on speculative thinking, were trying to think about manifesting. So, in this after growth, post capitalist imaginary symposium, it felt really important to return to the work and return to kind of questioning what are leaning in towards I suppose, like thinking post, right thinking and imagining post is, and to think about those kind of what those impulses in us, what makes it so difficult to stay with the present. We know what makes it difficult to stay that the present, right to keep talking about it, to keep talking about our complicity, to keep talking about our entanglement, to keep looking back at the past, and the history that has still not been acknowledged, or discussed or disseminated, you know, adequately, or at all in many parts of this country. But to kind of stay with that, and to use some of these speculative tools to help us stay with that and to think of that, yeah, thank you very much.

45:52 Manuel Ángel Macia

Well, I want to thank you both for absolutely brilliant presentations, incredibly rich and complex, and, you know, amazing ways of thinking about speculation, fiction, the future and giving possibilities, intervening in the economy. I wanted to perhaps start by asking a question and going back to Bahar's presentation. And just to kind of recap a little bit quickly, your work on *Weird Economies*, that reformulate, rethink the economy in a wider, within a wider framework, a broader kind of notion that overlaps with neoliberalism, most of speculation, and future making, you know, allows us to produce that fiction as well. And I was very much intrigued by one part of your presentation, where you talked about the economy as a site of dispossession and loss, building on Mbembe's articulation which required a different type of economic engagement. So the economy kind of differs this process, then we need a different mode of thinking about death. And I wanted to ask you, how would you leave that part like that kind of necro politics that is involved in financial capitalism and neoliberalism, with the what you what you'd call the dividual with, you know, this part of our contemporary beings, or bodies, that is not only bodies, but our capacities that are split into different modes that can be can become sites of extraction for extractivism, so maybe I want to ask you about those two relationships.

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47:43 Bahar Noorizadeh

Thanks Manuel very much, and I'll just try to take a stab at it. I'm not sure if I can fully develop a great answer. But I'm very much indebted in thinking about connectedness to a group of radical thinkers, philosophers like Randy Martin, who they developed this you know, idea of the individual, in our political imaginary has to stop seclude impasse, that's, you know, that's the individual type of practice. And just the dividual allows for that connectivity while, you know, maintaining the separateness but, you know, I think it's more and more becoming obvious that we require this kind of more of a complex political, cognitive understanding of the world. And it's also like related to the, you know, the knowing history of thinking about identity and non identity and how political formation can happen, as you know, as a type of identity, that's not essential. Essentially. I think this is generally the zone that I'm trying to move forward towards, and I know, quite a lot of people who are thinking towards as how you maintain in this regime that's completely put you know, all speculative experimental potentialities into exploitative extractive mechanisms. How can you maintain something that open something that's not that's not essential? And, you know, we have like great inheritance of feminist queer that you know, that Ama was discussing that, also that aren't thinking about non essential and non essential forms of thinking about political life today was it's very, it's pretty much take any move to the zone of economics and economic thoughts. It seems like you know, those conversations haven't really happened yet. And specifically in the 2008 crisis, the first figure that, you know, put on the pedestal is speculation itself. So there's this space of those, you know, counter-speculative, counter-speculative in a very kind of like broad and general sense of understanding, financialisation that's become the kind of modus operandi of financial activism. So these figures are trying to research something on an idea of a non essentialist thinking of economy of value, that are present in many other forms of thinking, that have to be, you know, inserted back into the system. I didn't quite answer to the quote, maybe it's enough on and I'll go back.

51:00 Manuel Ángel Macia

Yeah, thanks a lot. Ama I'm about to ask you a question now. And maybe we can pick up on that, because it may relate to this question. So I mean, as we've talked and argued for vulnerable writing, which elaborates

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an effective and queer engagement in the face of environmental catastrophe. And it is really state of view, the fragments that you wrote, there's a range of different elements, that kind of intrude in a weird way, weird manner, the kind of presence of the colony, that planetary colony such as the snow, the ash, and all of these, they're existing in the backdrop of genocide, somehow right? And that kind of relationship is always there and thinking about Mbembe's book, but I wanted to ask you in relation to these frameworks of genocide, and that, you know, like climate colonialism, and somehow projecting onto the global south in very uneven manner. I wanted to ask you, what the role of fiction is in relation to these, and what you know, because if speculation is both the material of finance and fiction, how did we, how do you deal with this within your work? That's a bit more about

52:30 Ama Josephine B. Johnstone

Good question. Yeah, one I'm asking a lot, I think it's always it's a question about positionality, right? Because I'm British. I was born here. And my father's Ghanaian, so I spent much of my childhood in Ghana, moving back and forth. But I am diasporic. And I have a privileged job, a British passport. And I currently live and work anyway, in the UK and in the British Academy artspace, right. So there's kind of there's a new wave of oh, we need to really help people across like the global south and think about especially think about their future, right? Because they're not doing it because they are stuck in the present because they're impoverished. You know, like, I mean, for example, in Ghana, we might talk about shop today culture, which means I'm thinking about how I might feed my family today. Right. But then that's oversimplifies in the west. They think, Oh, well, Ghanaians are only ever thinking about or Africans or Black people are only thinking about what they're going to eat tonight. They don't have imagination. So we need to like build framework so they could speculate. So I think what I love about this story, is I tried to think of speculation differently across the different temporal framework, right? So when we're talking about, like moving away from progress and growth, we immediately if this if you're in reading, kind of people writing on this in relation to climate change, you start hearing about nonlinear temporalities right, circular temporality. So this idea that many peoples across the world have and still do not think about time linearly, right? Not necessarily think about a past that

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has happened, the present that is now and the future. And think about time and in a more circular, more interdependent way, you can think about that as kind of slack time, indigenous time, etc. So I think in this text, the colony of Sumud understand that in order to survive, it needs to hold on to and cherish its past. They have not moved this offworld colony in order to create a post colonial society right, one in which they've been freed from the systems of colonialism, they want to kind of hold on to everything, all the trauma and retain what they were. And but that's not all of it right? Like, still like messing around doing this kind of solemn event like her lover and so you know they have sex and they have to deal with sibling rivalries and all that stuff I mean, life's a lot, right? So I think I tried to hold together that different way of thinking about the speculative, which is not projecting into a future that is separate from the present and the past. And that, for me is an African way of thinking about the future. And then in contrast, you have this kind of, I think it's fear. I think it's a deep, desperate fear of reckoning with our past, as British people, English people as white people as still colonial people, colonising people. And a kind of desperate running towards the speculative, right. So I think in that way, it's also for me, at least while I'm here, to work with how the speculative can function as a decolonial tool and to shift how we think about time and think about accountability. And to sit with those discrepancies or like things that don't make sense that still work together, right, these cognitive dissonances. So I think in the way that speculative allows us to think, hold those difficult things together. But we don't necessarily have the languages and the rituals to do particularly in this country, because we don't like difficult things at all, let alone together. I hope that answers the question, or at least an attempt to thinking about the question.

56:57 Manuel Ángel Macia

Thankyou so much, I have more questions, perhaps we wanted to open up to see if anyone wants to ask any questions in public. Does anyone have any burning questions?

57:12 Audience member

Thanks very much for those stimulating thoughts. Thinking, I got involved with a group of people who are speculative engineers. So they worked for a company called Lucas aerospace, and they were tasked

with making missiles, and aircraft parts. And they were all going to be sacked, because they were no longer useful. So they, organising in the trade unions, got together and speculated on an alternative future, as engineers, practicing engineers. And they came up with a whole set of different things that they could do with their skills. So they came up with the notion, so they ended up with a theory, they were actually involved in socially useful production. So instead of blowing the world up, we're gonna rebuild the world, to allow people to live, I think in the process of doing that they weren't aware of their creative faculties, they were looking to save their jobs. It's only 40 years on, and the same people look back at what they did, they realise that they gained some deep insight into the creative world, in which we all live, and they're still burning with the passion, this insight, and this is self actualisation, this actually, you know, they've become theoreticians, philosophers, but from an engineering background, and it's got me thinking, that sort of speculative engineering with the sorts of creative art ideas that you you're putting forward, that can be a really powerful force for bringing this different world after growth, a livable after growth, one that could work, if that makes any sense. But thanks.

59:24 Ama Josephine B. Johnstone

Was that a question or more of a contribution

59:29 Audience member

I should have put a question on that, maybe it was a contribution.

59:32 Bahar Noorizadeh

I mean, just to expand, which is that I think this is also why I think it's important to insist on you know, positionality at this time in terms of what creativity means, but it's definitely not only the professional artistic that in the good or in a bad way as a human creative, so I see quite a lot of interesting, radical political projects, like starting in places that you wouldn't have imagined, like, you know, maybe 40-50 years ago that would be thinking through this question. Yeah, I mean, I just maybe.

1:00:21 Ama Josephine B. Johnstone

I'm also like remembering, that, like everything, the right to speculate still somehow also becomes like an elite thing that only, you know,

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whether it's artists or its politicians or its economic specialists, that they have the right to speculate and everybody else has been speculating all the time. It's also the people who have got nothing in the fridge are speculating all the time about how they can try it and do a meal, or that they can do this, I can do that. How would that work? And, you know, like, I think it's also about kind of declassing and de-eliting the idea of speculation and new logic, there's so many amazing models everywhere, on how to speculate because the aftergrowth is happening. Not everybody's living in growth, many people are living in decline. Many people as we saw, you know, in the amazing presentation yesterday about the city of Gary, many people are living in places where everybody has left, where their economies are in decline or have ended, are living after growth, already, like that's happening in the present. And they're modeling how to solve that and how to rebuild and rewrite that over time.

1:01:33 Manuel Ángel Macia
Does anyone have any questions?

1:01:47 Audience member
Hello, I asked this question previously, but I work in an art school as a lecturer. So I'd be really interested in both of your views on the role of the educational institution in speculating. And whether we do that well at the moment or not. I know where I sit, but I'd be really interested to hear your views on the role of the educational institution in speculating in the course you were talking about?

1:02:24 Ama Josephine B. Johnstone
Well, I'm gonna speak from a kind of, I mean, I teach at universities and I run workshops, with all kinds of folks. And I have some amazing colleagues run workshops with young, very, very young and young people. So I think there is a consistent intervention and interruption into let's call it institutional education, to physical education institutions, which so often discourage speculation. I mean, these are things like so often discourage questioning, so often discourage imagination. And not always, you know, I had a couple of phenomenal teachers who really shaped me, and there are so many amazing people who are doing that work. I would say, I definitely feel like I'm battling my university

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institutions quite a lot to fight for the right for my students to be able to write differently, think differently, submit, like, submit work differently. But I also have students who are like challenging me all the time being like, this isn't enough. You know, like, you're still like pandering to the system in these ways. And we're already like, 10 times ahead of you on this radical change. So I think it's, I think, again, I think it's happening all the time. I think it's it's happening in unsupported and isolated situations, right? It's one teacher or a couple of teachers or it's, you know, one after school club. And it's not usually not state resource. And they're not in touch with each other. Because those of us who are trying to interrupt, to do this interrupting work are consistently burned out and isolated, and depressed, which leads to just depressing and we can't always do what we want to do for our students. And that's depressing, or for ourselves. So I think that there's a lot of work to be done around the kind of care work and the kind of economies and ecologies of care and how we're connected, how we're talking to each other, how we're sharing resources and models. And how we're challenging each other because it's hard when you're always being challenged by the institution to continue challenging yourself, right, and learning and growing because everything feels like a fight. So I think building those kind of soft economies, care economies in intersectional and accessible but critical and challenging ways. There's a lot of work to be done around resourcing really.

1:04:56 Bahar Noorizadeh

Oh, yeah, I mean, I have more of a broad answer maybe, my practice has been engaged with like pedagogy for many, many years. I think it's kind of quintessential to everything, but at the same time I moved to London, for this PhD years ago. So I'm quite new to the context of educational institutions here, but what I observed, like maybe it's not only related to speculation or the imagination as a content that can be inserted into education here. But this distinction between content versus economy of anything that is, which is very much related to everything we talked about, you know, what is the economic infrastructure of all these practices, all these critical practices, critical thought, like, what was happening with privatisation with the universities, for example, or even broadly, in the hostile immigration policies, everything that, if you really want to think imaginatively about education in the UK, I was

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take it completely, you know, you, which I wished it would be realistic is the colony has to return, you know, resources to the colonised, there shouldn't be any fee on students who want to come, there shouldn't be these astronomical international student fees for you know, foreign students from certain countries. So you see, what, you know, is slowly kind of seeping into education here. So we are dealing with a very compromised system already. And on top of that, we still need to like rescue this system, kind of like NHS is the best we have, but it's compromised. But yeah, I don't even know like when we think about in that sense, where to begin. So it's very much as badly structured what I'm observing in the teaching and the experience.

1:07:20 Manuel Ángel Macia

Thank you very much. I think we are kind of approaching the end, perhaps we have time for one more question in the audience. Because there's one question. Thank you.

1:07:37 Audience member

Thank you both for your really enlightening talks, I thought it was interesting how both of you are sort of challenging these deep paradigms in society, you're working with them. It's quite different what you were both doing. I guess my question is, regarding the colonialism, and I know that, Ama touched on the creation of care economies and things like that, which are a source of the grassroots way, the value changing, the values of its people, I guess my question is something that I grapple with a lot is to what extent does this sort of bottom up power, to what extent does this make a difference in the world where we are situated, you know a big British company goes to Africa and sets up an oil pipeline, as they still do, in what respect do we also need to pick politically, I mean, I think my question is to what extent do you have a say in these processes, a politician who has to compromise in order to get the order to grab the reins of power? Now we are waiting to, a terrible question um, so the question

1:09:06 Bahar Noorizadeh

I didn't get

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1:09:09 Manuel Ángel Macia

So yeah, so basically, so it was about I guess, do we need to somehow compromise in the way in which the engagement practices I guess, right, in relation to colonialism, neocolonialism the way in which we are contributing also, personally to neocolonialism, please correct me if I'm wrong,

1:09:40 Ama Josephine B. Johnstone

But part of the question was like, can you go in and can be like, can we change the system from inside right, like a follow-up question like the age-old question was, you know, there's an answer, like, some people need to be inside and some people need to be outside. But like, I suppose it's also about scale, your question and at what scale are we affecting change? Even though when thinking about continental systems change? In some ways we're working on small, working in small scale and I mean, I believe it's small scale so. Whereas the example was a British oil company can still go anywhere in the world, pretty much they want, so that pipeline, which has a huge implication, is that yeah, sure. Do you want to? I think okay, I want to stress the care economies, because care economies are a lot of different things. Yes, in some ways they're about ground up, right, they're about organising our own childcare and having physical meetings at family dinners, as opposed to looking after the kids while the people who are not caregiving go off and have political meetings and politicising care, the family care, but for me, in my practice, care economies are also top down. They're also about demanding care from the institutions, a lot of the work that I do, like to be Black and LGBTQI+, POC and Black and indigenous, all this is around how much are you getting paid, did they pick you up from the airport, from the station, is your hotel in, you know, I was once dropped off it was it wasn't a proper hotel, I was told to go to this hotel, it was super far right like EDL area in Manchester. And I had no idea until my sister who was in Manchester was like, you cannot stay there, you know, like, I need to send someone to come and get you and some horrendous things happened to me during that stay that endangered my life. And it was absolutely terrifying. And nobody had thought about what it meant, what that meant. So for me that care economy is also practical. And it's about saying this is not best practice, this is basic practice, I'm going to bring this artist in and I work in the arts but this is true across the board with

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international speakers and everything you do will bring this person in, can you take care of them, and that care extends beyond to their water on the table when they talk, right. So I think, and I think that actually the scale was ephemeral in a lot of the work that we do, the scale will remain ephemeral, in some ways that's important because it's not about ticking boxes and proving to the Arts Council, well 500 people came to my event and therefore 500 lives have changed, right? Sometimes it's about five people came, and maybe 500 lives were changed, you know, I don't know over the course of time. Whilst the kind of scale of our work or at least my work, but I feel this from your work as well can be more ephemeral in how we measure the outcome, how we measure value and success, there is something important about staying with the sustainable change that comes from making sure people are cared for because they are able to still be here and I came to this work because suddenly, when I turned 28,29, and I reached a certain place in my career, I was being spoken to as if I was some kind of elder in this field. And that is because of the shocking numbers of Black women artists that are still present in the British art scene. And when I say present, I mean either they're still working, or I mean, they're still alive. Because there is a huge amount of lost Black women artists in the British scene, both in terms of life, both in terms of presence in the art world, and I had to reckon with how am I still going to be her in 30-40 years? Because I can't keep engaging with institutions in that way. It's making me ill. Right. So like in that way, I think that scale ramifications of measuring that kind of care and measuring that kind of work that space to think casually together, spaced to imagine casually together. We don't have to like demand that you have the right pronouns on the doors, we can even get into the book, which means that why would you be there, thinking about pleasurable futures together? Like I think the ramifications of the scale and measuring that progress can, if you think differently about value and time, be just as effective as like working in BP until you're able to like maybe stop a pipeline from being installed or change the like labour value distribution of how that pipeline is set up.

1:14:40 Manuel Ángel Macia

That's a brilliant way of framing conversation. Yeah, absolutely incredible. I want to thank both of our speakers.

Colophon

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