

Panel Abstracts and Bios: UCD Humanities Institute PhD Conference, 1 March 2024
Cannibal Consumption: Culture, Capitalism, Critique

PANEL 1- 9:30-11:00: Cannibalism and Genre: Horror and Ecogothic

Apoorva Tripathi and Balagopal Menon, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi (online)

Title: Children, Chickens, and Cannibals: Untangling the myths of *Makdee*

Abstract: Released in 2002, Vishal Bharadwaj's directorial debut, *Makdee*, is set in an unspecified village that seems to stand in as a microcosm of India. At the time of its release, India was experiencing optimistic economic growth, while the cultural and social conflicts of economic liberalisation were also emergent. Within this context, we read the setting of *Makdee* as crucial to its narrative, important aspects of which are the conflict between the national and local, the supernatural and rational, the residual old order, and the promising new one.

Makdee's protagonists are two children who find themselves both vulnerable and agential. They grapple with the indifference of the adult world towards their anxieties and desires while also trying to act upon their own insightful understanding of what is happening around them – in the end, being vindicated and saving the village. The proposed paper would argue that this is, in a sense, an allegory for the new India that was being envisioned at this historical juncture as we read the figure of the child alongside the myth of the new nation.

There is a widespread vilification of various forms of meat-eating in contemporary Indian political discourse. The film takes an ambivalent position – meat-eating (and selling) is presented as an economic necessity for the Muslim butcher, who is an antagonist, but it is still associated with monstrosity. The villagers' fear of the cannibalistic witch is grounded in myth, but it is revealed that the witch-figure is not literally eating the bodies of her victims, but in fact, keeping them barely alive in order to extract maximum value from their labour power – a new form of cannibalism that speaks to the anxieties of the specific historical moment.

The proposed paper will attempt to examine the web of childhood, meat-eating, and cannibalism to understand the ways in which horror or supernatural narratives signal the anxieties and fears of a developing nation.

Bios:

Apoorva Tripathi is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at the Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi. Her work is on Hindi-language horror films from the 1990s-2000s, and she focuses on the ways in which social imaginaries of gender, monstrosity, and violence work in filmic horror narratives.

Balagopal S Menon is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Delhi. He completed his Bachelor's and Master's in English Literature from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. He was also a Project Assistant at the Centre for Advanced Studies, Department of English, Jadavpur University.

Bushra Mahzabeen, University of Warwick (online)

Title: "After all, since the world began, we've been eating each other": Corrosive Capitalism and Necrotic Consumption in *Tender is the Flesh*

Abstract: The abundant declensionist narratives of the modern Capitalocene (Moore 2016) visibilise how capital accumulation is "not only productive; it is necrotic, unfolding a slow violence," and how in its wake capitalism leaves "the disappearance of species, languages, cultures, and peoples. It seeks the planned

obsolescence of all life” (McBrien 116). Agustina Bazterrica’s dystopian-horror novel *Tender is the Flesh* (trans. 2020) is one such text that reveals the trauma of slow violence in a dystopian Argentine society. In the narrative, when a global epidemic spread through animals - making them fatal for humans to keep or consume - people start to eat each other, starting with “Immigrants, the marginalised, the poor”. The text indicates that in many countries, cannibalism was soon legalised because “in the end, meat is meat, it doesn’t matter where it’s from” (14). The horrifying human condition in the novel is symptomatic of over-consumption and over-commodification in modern capitalist cultures, where “to be alive means to be “meat on legs” (McFarland 866) since people themselves have turned into both consumers and commodities. Through the interactions of the protagonist Marcos and a female “head” Jasmine, who is bred as meat for consumption, human cruelty and their capacity for violence is uncovered. In this light, Bazterrica’s novel forces the readers to “reconsider the absolute division of oppositional binaries like human/nonhuman, self/other, or civilized “us” and a savage “them” (McFarland 866). Building upon critical works on corrosive capitalism and cannibal consumption - by scholars like Jason W. Moore, Justin McBrien, Sarah E. McFarland, and Rob Nixon - this paper aims to address the horrors of the Capitalocene which is pushing both human and non-human nature towards an inevitable erasure and multispecies extinction.

Bio: Bushra Mahzabeen is a PhD student in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick, UK. She is an Assistant Professor at the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Her research is broadly focused on the geopolitical implications of oil as a commodity and the petro-capitalist exploitation of labor.

Jane Gill, University of Hertfordshire (in-person)

Title: The Consumption of Culture by Nature in William Hope Hodgson’s Nautical Gothic Stories

Abstract: Cannibalism ‘can be understood as both a literal or a metaphorical act of consumption, appropriation, and transformation that can involve the boundaries between self and other, nonhuman and human, culture and nature, bodies and texts, and so on’ (Maggie Kilgour, 1992). In addition to this, cannibalism can be discussed in terms of its role in environmental degradation of ‘exploitation and subjugation that can be described as cannibalistic’ (Nancy Fraser, 2022). Building on these ideas, I would like to focus my paper on the ways in which the nautical gothic stories of William Hope Hodgson are used to convey the idea of the consumption of culture by nature, and of human animals by non-human animals and plants. My central argument is that, in these narratives of consumption, it is homo sapiens that are presented, in subtle ways, as the monsters from an ecocritical perspective. In ‘The Derelict’ (1912), Hodgson focuses on the idea of the consumption of a ship by huge mold formations. Mold itself is a hybrid when viewed through an eco-critical lens. I would argue that this represents both the decay of culture and its consumption by wild nature. In Hodgson’s ‘The Voice in the Night’ (1907), the narrator of the tale gives an eye-witness account of the sighting of a human-fungus hybrid. The narrative goes into the back story of how the hubris of the hybrid creature led to him being literally consumed by fungus, which is of course in itself an animal-plant hybrid.

Bio: Jane Gill is a doctoral student at the University of Hertfordshire. Her Ph.D. examines the monstrous feminine from an Eco-Gothic perspective, focusing on the female vampire. She is extending her oeuvre to include mermaid and fairy archetypes in nineteenth-century literature and visual art. Her research interests include nautical Gothic, botanical Gothic, gender in the nineteenth century, and the Eco-Gothic. She is in receipt of a bursary that sees her affiliated with the Open Graves, Open Minds Project (OGOM) led by Sam George and Bill Hughes. The Project extends to all narratives of the fantastic, the folkloric, and the magical, emphasizing that sense of Gothic as enchantment rather than simply horror. Through this, OGOM is articulating an ethical Gothic, cultivating moral agency and creating empathy for the marginalized, monstrous,

or othered, including the disenchanting natural world. Jane will be contributing via symposia and events and by writing research posts on aspects of nautical and botanical gothic.

PANEL 2 - 11:10-12:40: Cannibalism, Colonialism and Transnationalism

Chiara Mastronardo, Trinity College Dublin (in-person)

Title: Consuming the island: the subjugation of the Other in *Skerrett* by Liam O’Flaherty

Abstract: The island is often analyzed as a contested space, with complex power dynamics between mainland and island unfolding in unexpected ways. While the island has been extensively researched as an entity of its own (Hache: 1998; Peckham: 2003; Gillis: 2004; Carroll: 2015; McMahon: 2016), it seems less attention has been given to its literary representation. This study explores how the island is perceived as a resource to consume, a commodity to exploit, highlighting the “multiple significances of consumption” (Warner: 1998). Through a literary analysis of *Skerrett* by Liam O’Flaherty, this work unravels the layers of cannibal relationship that consume Nara, the novel’s fictional offshore Irish island, and the rest of Ireland.

This paper represents a case study to understand the process of commodification of islands by mainland powers, and the resulting impact on Ireland’s socio-cultural fabric. Central focus is on the analysis of hunger and power dynamics, and the mainland’s will to subjugate the Other, represented by the intricate relationship between the protagonist Skerrett, and Father Moclair. By examining their interactions, this paper sheds light on how hunger becomes a metaphor for both physical and metaphorical consumption, and reveals the power structures at play in the way in which the island is narrativized.

Using an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary analysis and Island Studies, this research contributes to better understanding the interconnectedness between power, hunger, and environmental change, drawing on the island’s site as an Other-space (Soja: 1996). The exploration of the islands of Nara and Ireland in O’Flaherty’s novel will ultimately offer new insights into reclaiming island narratives from the perspective of consumption, and as such contribute to the broader discourse of Island Studies.

Bio: Chiara Mastronardo is a PhD Candidate in Trinity College Dublin, School of English, under the supervision of Professor Christopher Morash. As an early career researcher, she was awarded a scholarship to study at the 國立臺灣師範大 National Taiwan Normal University in 2014, and studied at 北京大学 Peking University in 2017 while pursuing an M.Phil. in Chinese Studies at the Trinity Centre for Asian Studies. Chiara’s current research focuses on islands’ literature in comparative perspective, and unfolds against the backdrop of global archipelagic connections. Her research aims to bridge the diverse literary landscapes between the islands of Ireland, Iceland, Taiwan, Singapore, and Cuba, analyzing specific texts with a multi-faceted tidalectic approach.

Gina Lyle, University of Glasgow (in-person)

Title: Complicating Cannibalism in Contemporary Scottish Fiction

Abstract: This paper explores non-realist representations of cannibalism in recent fiction by Scottish writers. Applying theory on cannibalism, including Jennifer Brown’s *Cannibalism in Literature and Film* (2013), to Scottish writing, I consider depictions of cannibalism which are ‘complicated’ by magical or surreal elements (such as bodies eaten whole and consumers who are monstrously transformed while eating human flesh). This investigation reveals how cannibalism’s meanings are shaped by the specifics of its deployment and illustrates the key ways contemporary Scottish writers are approaching this motif.

I begin by providing a definition of cannibalism and establishing its most common literary uses in Scottish writing, including the representation of colonial conquest, all-consuming passion, and critiques of capitalism. Introducing examples of complicated cannibalism, I suggest how more fantastical approaches challenge

conventional understandings of cannibalism in fiction and adapt and expand its established connotations and meanings.

Investigating texts including Kirsty Logan's *Things We Say in the Dark* (2019), Helen McClory's *Mayhem & Death* (2018), and Heather Parry's *This is My Body, Given for You* (2023), this paper centers on scenes of non-realist cannibalism which articulate and explore interpersonal relationships. As cannibalism is employed in undertakings as varied as providing loving nourishment to children, enacting revenge against abusers, and socially conforming among friends, these selected examples demonstrate the range of non-realist cannibalism's applications. The ambiguity of the motif is emphasized in its employment for opposing purposes, such as representing oppressive systems and an individual's retaliation against these systems. I demonstrate how complicated cannibalism offers writers a rich motif for examining social relationships.

I locate these fictions with other global writings which similarly utilize cannibalism to establish Scottish fiction within an international context and suggest the creative potential for further shifts in cannibalism's depictions in future writing.

Bio: Gina Lyle recently completed her PhD in Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow, where her thesis analyzed the uses of 'meat' in contemporary Scottish fiction with a focus on gender and class. Her research interests include food in fiction, the body, and providing critical engagement with under-examined women's writing. You can read about Gina's research on the body as meat in eSharp, and her writing on Scottish women writers and their work on *Scottish Women Writers on the Web* and *The Bottle Imp*. Gina is the Scottish Writing and Culture Post-45 editor for *The Literary Encyclopedia*, a Level One tutor for Scottish Literature at Glasgow, and a web manager for the Universities Committee for Scottish Literature.

Jinan Ashraf, Dublin City University (online)

Title: Carceral Imaginary, James Joyce's *Magdalens*, and Prison as Metaphor

Abstract: As Margaret MacCurtain and Donncha O'Corrain note in *Women in Irish History* (1979), "The Irish woman presents one of the enigmas of twentieth-century Ireland. Her public face is that of wife and mother, enshrined in the 1937 Constitution as guardian of public morals and repository of the State's regard for family life. Her private face is that of one who has been...hidden from history." This paper proposes to examine how colonial and imperial state projects in Ireland and India were actively involved in the detention and rehabilitation of classes of "fallen women" whose lives were subject to penitentiary movements, which "fed" on fears of female sexuality and were approved of through state support.

Through a study of the structuration of the *object* in representations of loathing of food, waste, filth, and dung in James Joyce and early colonial Indian modernist texts, I attempt to think through the ways in which the colonial modernist text not only depicts female lives consumed by penitentiary movements but also is actively complicit in *soliciting* the very services of the women who were further entrapped in carceral systems. Through an examination of the penitentiary systems in twentieth-century Ireland and India, I demonstrate how modernists across transnational contexts depicted, even as they were complicit in, textuality as a cannibalistic practice.

Bio: Jinan Ashraf is the recipient of the Laura Bassi Scholarship Summer 2021 for research on neglected literary traditions broadly construed and Ireland India Institute PhD Fellow at Dublin City University. Her doctoral study situates itself in the comparative colonial contexts of Irish and Indian Modernisms, focusing on James Joyce, the body, and the domestic novel. Her articles are published in *Joyce Studies in Italy*, the *James Joyce Broadsheet*, *The Modernist Review*, and *English Teachers' Accounts*, a Routledge publication on English

Studies in India (ed. Nandana Dutta).

PANEL 3 - 13:40-15:10: Cannibalism and Queerness: Consuming Desire and Identity in Contemporary Media

Nicole Hamilton, Ulster University (in-person)

Title: Consum(mat)ing your Love: The Queer Romance of the Cannibal

Abstract: When we think of the act of eating another person, most of us react with an expression of revulsion, physically recoiling at the thought. And yet, stories like *Twilight* (dir. Catherine Hardwicke, 2008), in which a vampire must continually fend off the bloodlust he feels for his lover, continue to compel us time and time again. There is, it seems, a romanticism in a partner who wants to consume us but actively chooses not to. However, what of the narratives in which our partner does give in to that temptation?

This paper seeks to interrogate two examples of this trope, Jean Rollin's *The Living Dead Girl* (1982) and *Bones and All* (dir. Luca Guadagnino, 2022). Notably, both examples contain a queer element, merging the taboo of cannibalism with queer sexuality. With this in mind, this paper will explore the inherent queer romanticism of consuming your lover, particularly considering how this narrative is perceived through the lens of the zombie (a literal monster) versus the cannibal (a monstrous human).

In doing so, I hope to highlight a recent shift in the cultural perception of cannibals from a figure of unspeakable horror to a dark romantic lead, as seen in the aforementioned *Bones and All* and NBC's *Hannibal* (2013-2015). Using the examples listed above, this paper will then provide an understanding of why these themes appeal to queer viewers in particular, contextualizing these themes within *The Living Dead Girl* and *Bones and All*. This paper will seek to provide an understanding, then, of how the cannibal sits comfortably alongside literal monsters as an apt metaphor for queer romance.

Bio: Dr Nicole Hamilton (she/her) is a graduate of Ulster University where she recently completed her doctoral thesis on queer representation in Young Adult Fantasy Fiction. She has contributed to *Aeternum* and *The Irish Journal of Gothic and Horror Studies* and has a chapter in the upcoming edited collection *Critical Readings on Hammer Horror Films*. When she isn't researching, she can be found watching *Real Housewives* or playing *Zelda*.

Caitlin Brown, Lancaster University, (in-person)

Title: "Meat's back on the menu": A critical analysis of dirtiness in relation to queer cannibalism in *Hannibal* and *DAHMER*

Abstract: For a discipline often labeled as 'cannibalistic,' criminology fails to acknowledge the importance of researching human cannibalism. Many pieces of ethnographic research into cannibalism were conducted in the 1900s into the far-away tribes of the New World and Oceania, but since these cultures are now bordering on extinction, it seems to be widely agreed that cannibalism is no longer a point of interest within academia. A behavior described as a 'total abandonment of civilization' has no place in our modern, civilized world, as represented by cannibalism being left out of many criminal legislations. Although, one place cannibalism has not been forgotten about is fictional media, in the form of television shows and films.

Two recent examples of cannibalism being used as a tool in fictional media are in NBC's *Hannibal* and Netflix's *DAHMER*. Both of these shows include a character that is an interpretation of an 'iconic' character, one being Thomas Harris' Hannibal Lecter and real-life cannibalistic murderer Jeffrey Dahmer. To compare the role of cannibalism in relation to these two characters, I will be discussing the influence of perceived dirtiness when intersecting with cannibalism and male sexuality. For the purpose of this work, I will be using the concept of

dirtiness as a social construction, a result of European Christianity and the use of purity versus sinfulness as a mapping of morally good versus bad. Using this framework, I will analyze different parts of Lecter's and Dahmer's identities in relation to dirtiness and queerness to form their overall cannibal identity as either 'clean' or 'dirty'.

Bio: Caitlin Brown is a current master's student at Lancaster University, studying criminology and social research methods. They are hoping to carry on to a PhD at Lancaster University to research further into queer cannibalism and stigmatization. Their first-class undergraduate dissertation focused on queer cannibalism and how the social construction of hygiene culture intersects with taboo consumption. Their queer identity and existence as someone known for being interested in 'weird' things inspire much of their work. Approaching cannibalism from a unique perspective, utilizing queer and cultural criminological approaches to bring taboo behavior often disregarded in the modern era into criminology today.

Sreya Mukherjee, The English and Foreign Languages University (online)

Title: Tasting Taboos: Exploring Cannibalism and Cultural Commentary in Contemporary Popular Culture

Abstract: This research critically examines the recent resurgence of cannibalistic themes in popular films and television series, specifically focusing on works such as *Bones and All*, *Fresh*, *Dahmer – Monster*, *House of Hammer*, and *Yellowjackets*. The paper seeks to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of cannibalism in pop culture, transcending traditional notions of body horror. In Luca Guadagnino's movie *Bones and All*, the tragic narrative of cannibal lovers becomes a central exploration. This study analyses how cannibalism serves as a metaphor for connection and solace in lives marked by marginalisation, abandonment, and trauma. By scrutinising the nuances of this metaphorical consumption, the research aims to elucidate the deeper sociocultural and psychological implications embedded in cannibalistic narratives. The paper further delves into the representation of cannibalism as a symbolic expression of extreme wealth and privilege in contemporary works like *Fresh*, *House of Hammer*, and *Dahmer – Monster*. Through these narratives, the research seeks to uncover the underlying socio-political commentaries on class disparities and the exploitation of the less privileged within a capitalist framework. Beyond the thematic exploration, the study addresses societal reactions to cannibalistic narratives, emphasising their intersection with sexuality, desire, and the portrayal of marginalised identities. Specifically, it examines the role of cannibalistic themes in providing a unique lens for the expression of desire and autonomy, particularly within the LGBTQ community. The research also sheds light on historical and contemporary instances where cannibalism accusations have been utilised as tools for discrimination and to advance fascist agendas. By exploring these narratives, the study aims to contribute to the broader conversation surrounding the implications of using cannibalism as a metaphor in contemporary storytelling. Ultimately, this research contends that cannibalism in pop culture acts as a powerful narrative tool, prompting audiences to engage with complex moral dilemmas and encouraging critical reflections on societal power structures, marginalised identities, and the intricate interplay between fiction and reality.

Bio: Sreya Mukherjee is a Junior Research Fellow at the Department of Indian and World Literatures in English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She is working on the representation of motherhoods in the Indian epics for her doctoral research. Her areas of interest are mythology, women's writing, translation studies and postcolonial literature. She did her M.A. in English Literature from English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She completed her B.A. in English Literature from Banaras Hindu University.

Panel 4 - 15:20-16:50: Conceiving Cannibalism through theory and art

Anne Diestelkamp, independent scholar (online)

Title: Toward a Trans-corporeal Aesthetic in Expanded Cinema. Reflections on Flesh, Meat and Becoming-Edible in Pauline Curnier Jardin's *Fat to Ashes* and Mika Rottenberg's *Dough*

Abstract: Expanded cinema since the 2000s has explored new ways of figuring human matter as edible: as microbes, as flesh and meat, or as breastmilk. Cannibalistic or para-cannibalistic riffing abounds. This paper is an inquiry into the possibilities of a *trans-corporeal aesthetic* in expanded cinema. It will consider two works of art in order to illuminate a philosophical predicament and to anatomize aesthetic practices. The works are two video installations: *Dough* (2006) by Argentinian artist Mika Rottenberg and *Fat to Ashes* (2021), by French artist Pauline Curnier Jardin.

In *Dough*, four women in a mock-bread-factory knead an endless pile of dough, working their sweat, snot and tears into it to accelerate the leavening. *Fat to Ashes* likewise juxtaposes the cannibalistic and the Eucharistic. Documentary footage lingers on the breast cakes (Minni di Virgine) that traditionally attend the Sicilian procession in honor of the Christian martyr Saint Agatha. Reenactments of Agatha's mutilation are paired with scenes of animal slaughter and butchery.

Fat to Ashes and *Dough* thus cannily register ideological and philosophical currents germane to this conference. Anthropophagy is ambient, implied, though never explicit. By rendering the feminized body as meaty, fleshy, and edible, they mark it as a site of extraction, as slaughter-able, and even rape-able. They also challenge the notion of the autonomous, contained subject, and dovetail with theoretical currents such as Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "becoming animal", Carol Adam's ecofeminist "sexual politics of meat", Stacy Alaimo's concept of trans corporeality or Irina Aristarkhova's conceptualization of "eating the mother".

Both of these works are instances of what I call a *trans-corporeal aesthetic*, particularly a *trans-corporeal sublime*. Their foregrounding of the materiality of the body—its fleshiness and meatiness—lends itself to close reading and visual analysis, à la Laura Marks's concept of "haptic visuality". This paper will thus reflect on the forms the edible body can take in expanded cinema today.

Bio: Anne Diestelkamp is a freelance curator, researcher and cultural worker. She holds a research MA in Cultural Analysis from the University of Amsterdam and a BA in Art and Visual History from Humboldt University in Berlin. Her research focuses on contemporary art, affect theory, new materialism, and animal studies, with a particular interest in trans-corporeality, sickness, embodiment, and abjection. She has curated and co-curated several interdisciplinary festivals such as the OSTEN Festival in Bitterfeld-Wolfen, Germany (2022, 2023, 2024) and Berliner Herbstsalon at Maxim Gorki Theater in Berlin (2019). Upcoming publications include "On Care, Porosity and Trans-corporeal Artistic Practices: An Interview with Artist Alanna Lynch" in *Soapbox Journal for Cultural Analysis*. She is based between Amsterdam and Berlin.

Michael Sutton, University of Leeds (in-person)

Title: A Call to Cannibalism: Neanderthal Communication and the Creative Act

Abstract: One of the first archeologically agreed-upon instances of human cannibalism dates back 100,000 years to the Moula-Guercy Cave in late-Pleistocene France, where studies show evidence of exocannibalism. The initial aim of my paper will be to ascertain the rationale behind the Moula Guercy case, analysing the archaeological and cultural-historical evidence to consider and compare two distinct categories of cannibalism, ritual and subsistence, in order to better understand the possible cultural and communicative

imperatives amongst this particular Neanderthal community and forward the question: If — as I will argue — the process of eating is ‘sublinguistic’, yet still a subtle act of communication, then what exactly is being communicated between human-living and human-dead in the cannibalistic deed?

To approach this core question, I will contrast Neanderthal cannibalism with European examples of ‘commercialised’ and ‘medicinal’ cannibalism from the Middle Ages and Early Modern period to explore how the incorporation of capitalistic structures distorts the ‘cannibal discourse’. Here, it will be vital to integrate the colonial contexts of cannibalism — particularly in relation to the European colonisation of the Americas — to analyse the contradiction of cannibalism as an ‘exotic taboo’ in light of the fact that, as Bowdler notes, ‘It is certainly possible that Europeans were consuming more human flesh at this time than people in the New World.’

These abovementioned inconsistencies mark cannibalism as an enigmatic differend between cultures which has perplexed and inspired artists and academics throughout history, from Jonathan Swift to Sherod Santos — whose *A Poetics of Cannibalism* attempts to reframe anthropophagy as a ‘creative act’. My paper will build along this line of thought to speculate upon how, through the dual lenses of Neanderthal subjectivity and decommercialisation, we can conceptualise a creative metaphor of cannibalism to spawn radical new modes of communication.

Bio: Michael Sutton is a British poet, writer and artist based in Leeds. He has published five books of poetry, the most recent of which is *Unwelcome Combine* (Paper View Books, 2023). He also edits *Overground Underground* journal and press. He is currently completing a practice-based PhD at the University of Leeds, researching and responding to Neanderthal language and art.

Sara Corsaro, University of Macerata (in-person)

Title: Human, Technology and Time in Han Song’s “Red Ocean”

Abstract: *Red Ocean* (2004), by acclaimed Chinese sci-fi writer Han Song, is the story of a humanity at its (post-apocalyptic) end and, at the same time, of a humanity at the origins, that is, not yet “human”. The events narrated by Han’s highly imaginative mind resemble the events of a myth, that is, the only possible way to tell the (impossible) origin and end of humanity. The humanoids who inhabit, together with other monstrous creatures, the gloomy red ocean evoke a confused and distant (pre)anthropological imaginary, imbued of violence and cannibalism. They live in the (timeless) moments of terror caused by predators, of mating frenzy, of the feeling of insatiable hunger, which is satisfied several times and systematically with various forms of more or less “institutionalized” cannibalism. Why is the humanity of *Red Ocean* not yet (or post) human? And why does *Red Ocean*, in asking this question, also turn out to be a sort of horror novel questioning our times?

The first part of the novel will be read through the reflection of philosopher of technology Bernard Stiegler on the entanglement of the human, technology and time. The temporal disorientation affecting the characters (and the reader) is a disorientation of a pre-technological (and, therefore, more animal than human, that is, pre-cultural) memory. In the *Red Ocean*, children can constitute at the same time nourishment and future of the species and civilization is understood as the acknowledgement of this demarcating but coexisting division. According to Stiegler, the fundamental phenomenon of time

is the future and civilization, which is nothing other than the who and what of man and technology together, consists in projecting humanity into the future. Does *Red Ocean* describe where humanity is projected to?

Bio: I am a second-year PhD student in Global Studies at the University of Macerata (Italy). My research project focuses on the evolution of citizenship in contemporary China through an analysis of the interplay

between the evolving technologies of subjectification, the narratives about modernization and the re-invention of tradition. It aims to shed light on the entanglement of philosophical tradition and modernization shaping the Chinese citizen while addressing the relation between technology and the political space in contemporary China. The research is guided by the works of philosophers of technology Bernard Stiegler and Yuk Hui. The expected results aim to contribute to the understanding of the impact of technology on citizenship in China and globally.
