

Conference, University of Southern Denmark, May 28–29, 2020

Utopia & Dystopia Conference on the Fantastic in Media Entertainment

Venue: University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Denmark

Proposal Deadline: December 10, 2019

Call for Presentations

Today, genres of the fantastic reign supreme in all media entertainment – film, television, games, toys, theme parks, haunted houses. We are surrounded by superheroes, fantastic beasts, courageous princess, battles in dystopian futures, and quests to discover utopian dreams. Intriguingly, the more secularized societies become, the more infatuated we are with the fantastic. In terms of revenue and fan interest, fantastic genres are the most popular the world over. *The Shape of Water* (2017), an adult fairy tale, won four Oscars. The *Star Wars* trilogy (2015–), *Wonder Woman* (2017), and *Captain Marvel* (2019) herald female protagonists in the blockbuster format. *Black Panther* (2017) featured an African-American protagonist, and created the fictional country of Wakanda, which has since become an emblem for race equality. And shows like *The Walking Dead* (2011–) and *Game of Thrones* (2011–2019) have made adult fantastic television the new black. The fantastic, once considered the domain of children, has become respected for its ability to break existing boundaries of normality and imagine the impossible and the unknown.

This conference invites new research in the fantastic. Why is the fantastic more popular than ever? What theories – or bundle of theories – capture the specific nature of the fantastic? What purposes do fantastic genres serve in terms of evolution, adaptation, sensory pleasures, and cognitive as well as social uses? How do we create fantastic stories across media platforms and in different aesthetic forms? How is worldbuilding used to create transmedia stories of the fantastic? How do new technologies and media aesthetics affect the fantastic in terms of production, distribution, and fan uses? How do themes of utopia and dystopia figure in the universes of fantastic media?

The conference welcomes multiple theoretical approaches and perspectives. The aim is to understand the use, function, and role of the fantastic today; to engage with its various expressions across media; and to ask what powers and appeal all its genres hold, from fantasy and fairy tales to science fiction and supernatural horror. We believe the fantastic is especially suited to ask questions about human existence, pressing questions in times of today's ecological crisis, and with this call we want to ask those questions.

Greek *phantastikos* means producing mental images, and the *OED* defines fantastic as “existing only in imagination . . . fabulous, imaginary, unreal.” But the fantastic has been defined multiple ways. A *broad definition* sees it a supergenre with subgenres that break with the laws of nature: sci-fi, fantasy, fairy tale, supernatural horror, and superheroes. A *narrow definition* targets singular elements, for example, a reader's hesitation between a natural or a supernatural explanation of events (Todorov). We use a broad definition of the fantastic and welcome paper proposals on all subgenres of the fantastic and its expressions in practice, film, tv, games, digital media, theme parks, haunted houses, fan studies, and more.

Suggested Themes

- Play and the fantastic
- Cognitive and evolutionary approaches to the fantastic
- The fantastic as live entertainment (haunted attractions such as haunted houses, escape rooms, zombie runs)
- Genre mashup and new mixing

- The precariat in the fantastic
- Women in the fantastic
- Indigenous fantastic
- Transnational and global fantastic
- Fantastic beasts – imaginary animals in the fantastic
- Auteurs in the fantastic
- Fan tourism and the fantastic
- Designing and creating fantastic spaces
- Subgenres of the fantastic – all subgenres are welcome

Keynotes Speakers – More Keynote Speakers to be Announced

Professor Cristina Bacchilega, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa

Professor Angela Ndalians, Swinburne University of Technology

We invite submissions of research papers of 20 minutes as well as pre-constituted panels of three or four people. Proposals of 300 words and 150-word bio should be sent to Rikke Schubart, schubart@sdu.dk by December 10, 2019, as should any queries.

Conference Steering Committee

Assoc. Prof. Rikke Schubart, University of Southern Denmark, schubart@sdu.dk

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Assoc. Prof. Mathias Clasen, Aarhus University, mc@cc.au.dk

The conference is arranged by the Danish IRFD research network [*Imagining the impossible: The Fantastic as Media Entertainment and Play*](#) and by the Institute for the Study of Culture, SDU.

“In this world only play, play as artists and children engage in it, exhibits coming-to-be and passing away, structuring and destroying, without any moral additive, in forever equal innocence. And as children and artists play, so plays the ever-living fire.”

Friedrich Nietzsche (1873)