**Digital Ecologies II: Fiction Machines**

**Tuesday 16 July, 2019 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM**

**Commons CM107 and 108
Bath Spa University
Newton Park, Newton St Loe, Bath, BA2 9BN**

**Keynote speakers**

* Professor Simon O’Sullivan, Professor of Art, Theory and Practice, Goldsmiths College, London
* Dr Tony David-Sampson, Reader in Digital Media Culture and Communication, University of East London

**Other confirmed participants include:**

Ami Clarke, Jennet Thomas, Rod Dickinson, Charlie Tweed, Andy Weir, Harry Meadows, Ada Hao, Ramon Bloomberg, Bjørn erik Haugen, Hugh Frost, Garfield Benjamin, John Wild, Alberto Micali, Maud Craigie, Michelle Atherton, Rebecca Smith, Stephanie Moran and Alex Hogan and Teodora Fartan.

**About the conference**

In the introduction to his book *Fiction as Method* (2017) Jon K Shaw identifies a fictional place called ‘Null Island’, a fiction that is located at a point in the centre of the earth where no one can travel to, set amongst the lava.

"From this unreal centre the machines can tag our photos to map our memories and images onto the material world, can align our satellites to coordinate and connect us across the planet. Whenever we perform one of these actions, we pass through this fiction. We are transported home via the fictional island."

Our vision of the earth and of each other is increasingly filtered through the operations of a complex assemblage of networked computational writing machines and, as Shaw implies, these exist at the centre of our world and our daily experience. As a result the planet itself is increasingly becoming computational, Nigel Thrift describes how the ‘real’ as we know it is the result of multiple simultaneous ‘writing machines’ using a continuous looping process of algorithms.

Humans now exist within complex informational spaces that produce affects, simulate, analyse and respond to user and environmental data. Within these conditions fiction and reality become increasingly blurred, machine and human voices difficult to distinguish.

These machines allow for the generation of complex webs of fabulation which exist in a plethora of contexts from corporate identities to labyrinthine brand stories, to political propaganda and the operations of the derivatives market.

Furthermore our understanding of the ecological is itself increasingly filtered through multiple layers of networked technologies, sensors, algorithms and data visualisations. Jennifer Gabrys discusses the notion of ‘planetary scale computerisation’ and how this leads to the generation of ‘new living conditions, subjectivities, and imaginaries’. (Gabrys, 2016)

Within this context new fictional strategies within creative practice emerge as important weapons for critique, intervention, speculation and change. As Simon O’Sullivan notes: fiction can be used not as a matter of ‘make believe’ but rather in a Ranciere sense of forging the real to better approximate historical and contemporary experience.

In the symposium we ask how fictional methods are being employed to rethink and renegotiate our relationship with current and future technologies; how such methods can be used from activist and political perspectives; how they can address and critique post-truth conditions; how they can reveal forgotten histories and non-human perspectives; and how they can be used to speculate on, and design, new futures.

As Benjamin Bratton notes: ‘Our shared design project will require both different relationships to machines (carbon based machines and otherwise) and a more promiscuous figurative imagination.’

**Symposium strands**

1. Activist fictions - responses that employ fiction as a political or social method for recuperation/change/intervention
2. Speculative design fictions - responses that utilise fiction to reimagine social, environmental and technological futures
3. Non-human fictions – responses that employ fiction to bring non-human perspectives and voices into view
4. Post-truth - responses that critique and subvert the mechanisms and mediation of post-truth.