

**Call for Papers:
Italian Science Fiction in the Anthropocene**



Dipartimento di Studi Linguistici e Letterari, Università degli Studi di Padova, May 30-31st

Keynote speakers: Danila Cannamela (Colby College), Eleonora Lima (Trinity College Dublin)

Image courtesy of Giacomo Costa (*Ground 1*, 2013)



Contemporary literary criticism has emphasized the importance of science fiction in imagining non-human agency and the future of the planet. As ecocritic Ursula K. Heise wrote, “science fiction has become one of the primary genres in literature and film to address the issues raised by increased public awareness of environmental crisis” (2012, 99). To reprise Darko Suvin’s definition (1979), science fiction is a genre based on realistic speculation and cognitive estrangement generated by readers’ encounters with realities that are different from, and yet coherent with, their empirical world. The estrangement effect created by this imaginative effort is also central to the necessary rethinking of current cultural and epistemological paradigms based on anthropocentrism, human exceptionalism, and ecophobia. The realistic speculation of science fiction allows it to imagine and foresee the consequences of our current relationship with the environment, while its employment of estrangement techniques is essential in portraying non-human agency in ways that anticipate the material turn in ecocriticism. In a wider sense, science fiction, perhaps more than any other genre, is characterized by an attention to the relationship between the characters and their living space and it may be the only genre that, at least potentially, is able to think of the environment on a planetary scale and humanity as a collectivity, as Lawrence Buell (2005, 56-61) and Ursula Heise (2016, 203) have respectively argued.

In terms of the importance of its engagement with environmental issues, Italian science fiction is no exception. A genre that took complex, nuanced, and multilayered forms, Italian science fiction has nevertheless suffered from consistent marginalization in Italian culture and in the Italian literary canon. This is the result not of a lack of texts to investigate, as Italy has a long and rich tradition of science fiction, but rather of intellectuals’ prejudices against a popular genre such as this. Italian science fiction as an editorial genre can be considered to have been born in 1952, when the periodical *Urania* (Italy’s most prestigious and longest-running publication in the field, still in print to this day) was founded, and the word *fantascienza* was coined. Crucially, the starting date of Italian science fiction coincides with the years of the “miracolo economico” (and of the environmental devastation it brought) and, more generally, with the Great Acceleration of the Anthropocene: and it is no coincidence that, among the countless works of science fiction that were produced in Italy in an impressive variety of media, ecological concerns occupy a preeminent role. While prejudices against Italian science fiction led to a lack of scholarly contributions regarding the genre until recent years, Italian science fiction testifies to precise national and historical anxieties during decades marked by urban sprawl, the transformation of urban and natural landscapes, technological development, the increasing presence of digital technologies in everyday life, migrations, and climate change.

This conference aims at putting in dialogue the growing debate on the environmental humanities in Italian Studies with contemporary research on the history of Italian science fiction and its cultural status. We invite contributions about Italian science fiction in literature, cinema, comics, visual arts, theatre, music, and internet culture, in relation to the field of the environmental humanities at large. We especially welcome contributions that cast a light on previously understudied authors, directors, editors, publishers or magazines. Possible topics of the communications thus include, but are not limited to:

- Alieness and anti-anthropocentrism
- Animals and animality
- Atomic energy and radioactivity



- Climate justice and climate migrations
- Eco-dystopias and apocalyptic imaginations of climate change
- Ecofeminism and the ethics of care in the Anthropocene
- Ecophobia
- Environmental changes and consumerism during the “miracolo economico”
- Environmental degradation
- Exoplanets and alien ecosystems
- Interspecies entanglements
- Material ecocriticism and the agency of matter
- Petrocultures
- Pollution and urbanization
- Posthuman imagination
- Solarpunk and the sustainability debate
- Technological hybridizations and the cyborg
- Terraforming and geoengineering
- The “slow violence” of the Anthropocene
- Vegetal life and agency
- Waste and the Wasteocene

Please submit a title, a 250-word abstract and a 100-word bio to the organizing committee at marco.malvestio@unipd.it by February 28th 2023. Submissions are accepted both in English and Italian.

Acceptance will be notified to the authors by March 15th 2023.

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