**Conference of SLSAeu  
European Society for Literature, Science and the Arts  
and ELINAS Research Center for Literature and Natural Science**

Interdisciplinary Panel: Literature and the Public Sphere – Epistemic Functions of

Fiction, organized by Prof. Dr. Karin Höpker, Dr. Antonia Villinger

To observe our world and describe reality, we have developed a set of cultural techniques. We use metaphors, simulations, and models to produce renditions and make comprehensible what otherwise – due to its complexity, scale, radicality, or otherness – eludes representation, cognitive grasp, our scope of experience, or also our affective access. Cultural productions engage with phenomena of the ungraspable such as death, environmental disaster, global warming, late capitalism etc. and explore how they become often charged with utopian hopes and dystopian fears and anxieties. Fiction and narration, we argue in this panel, as techniques of imagination, societal self-reflection, and intervention into public discourse, offer spaces of engagement and of exploration for the indetermined and uncertain. They allow us to creatively engage with futures, alternative life worlds, and spaces of the inaccessible other.

We use a set of case studies across various media and disciplines to explore a selection of such topics and investigate aesthetic and narrative strategies that illustrate forms of alternative knowledge. All contributions address cultural and literary forms of knowledge production in relation to sciences and technological innovation. We aim to examine questions such as: What's the function of literature? To what extent does it work as a seismograph of social and environmental change, technological innovation, and scientific paradigm shifts? To what extent does fiction function as a laboratory space and a realm of imagining the what-ifs? To what extent does it offer a space of intervention into epistemic orders as they are subject to power struggles and processes of transformation?

**Saturday 20th May 2023**

**10:45 – 12:15  PANEL I: Literature and the Public Sphere**

Antje Kley (American Studies, University Erlangen-Nürnberg): Where Reason Fails: Literary Epistemologies of Death in the 21st Century

Karin Hoepker (American Studies, University Erlangen-Nürnberg): Future Responsibilities and Affordances: Class, Catastrophe, and Ownership in Science Fiction

Kundu, Arunima (American Studies, University Erlangen-Nürnberg): Mediating Blackness. The Afrofuturist Planetary Posthuman in Black Panther

**14:00 – 15:30  PANEL II: Literature and the Public Sphere**

Ruxandra Teodorescu (American Studies, University Erlangen-Nürnberg): Beyond Binary – AI, SF, and the Moral Imagination

Antonia Villinger (German Literature, University Erlangen-Nürnberg): Post-Petro Imaginary and Utopian Social Enclave in Theresia Enzenberger’s “Auf See” (2022)

Elisabeth Reichel (American Studies, Osnabrück University): Modeling Libertarian Collectives

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