

# Money Talks: Futures for the Economic Humanities

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## Abstracts and Bios

### *Keynote 1*

*Asking my Boyfriend for Money (To See How He Reacts)*

Rachel O'Dwyer (National College of Art and Design, Dublin)

In moments of economic instability, women and marginalised people increasingly rely on what Arlie Hochschild has called "other values"—invisible resources that include things like charm, emotional labour, and sexual attraction. These values often act as currency for those who lack clout in the formal economy, especially today, when pathways to financial security or ‘the good life’ feel more fragile.

This talk will trace the history of gifting practices, focusing first on the early 1900s when working-class women first entered the workforce en-masse but lacked access to their own cash and used gifts and ‘treating’ as a way to augment their income. These practices led to a commercialization of intimate life and established unspoken ideas about give-and-take in romantic relationships. Today, while women are fully integrated into the cash economy, the breakdown of stable financial options means that more and more people are reliant on other forms of labour: the side hustle, multiple precarious gigs and even grey-area treating, now facilitated by digital platforms for camming, streaming, and OnlyFans. The internet has created new forms of exchange between the cash economy and these "other values," raising questions about the role of romantic love, the fantasy of the gift, and how these practices both empower and limit women.

Rachel O'Dwyer is a writer and senior lecturer at NCAD, Dublin. Her book *Tokens: The Future of Money* (Verso, 2023) was longlisted for the *Financial Times* Book of the Year and named a best book of 2023 by *GQ*, *Wired*, and the *LA Times*. A regular columnist for *The Irish Times*, her writing also appears in the *LRB*, *Aeon*, *Bloomberg*, *LitHub*, and elsewhere. Her current book, *Disaster Girls*, explores how young women manage their finances and negotiate hope amid ongoing crisis.

### *Keynote 2*

*The Study of Money in the Study of Religion*

Devin Singh (Dartmouth College)

This lecture argues for a reorientation in the study of religion: taking money not merely as a contextual factor or material concern, but as a constitutive element of religious life and thought. Money, I contend, warrants recognition as a central category within the study of religion—both as

an institution entangled with religious practice and as a conceptual resource shaping theological and ethical reflection. Religious traditions are preoccupied with money—warning against its dangers, prescribing its use, or advocating its renunciation. Yet beyond these normative claims, money functions as a metaphorical and structural partner in religious thought. From redemption and sacrifice to divine value and human worth, monetary language and logic permeate religious discourse. Monetary exchange, moreover, resembles ritual practice in its formalization, repetition, performativity, prescribed roles, and symbolic efficacy—structuring social relations, conferring meaning, and reinforcing moral order. This paper explores how monetary theory illuminates religious forms and functions, just as religious studies helps decode the ethical, symbolic, and ritual dimensions of money. As a case study, this inquiry offers a model for how the economic humanities might proceed: by tracing the generative intersections between money and specific domains of human meaning. I invite those in other fields to consider similar interfaces, exploring what money reveals about their own disciplinary objects and concerns.

Devin Singh is Associate Professor of Religion at Dartmouth College, where he teaches on modern religious thought in the West, social ethics, and philosophy of religion. His research focuses on the intersections of Christian thought and practice with money, debt, and the corporate form. He is the author of *Divine Currency: The Theological Power of Money in the West* (Stanford UP, 2018) and *Economy and Modern Christian Thought* (Brill, 2022). Singh is finishing a book titled *Sacred Debt*, exploring the power of debt in society and its longstanding uses in religion. His work has appeared in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, *Implicit Religion*, *Harvard Theological Review*, *Political Theology*, and *Religions*.

### *Panel Session 1*

#### **The Politics of the Digital Economy**

*The General Opinion: Finance, Value, and the Political Aesthetics of Online Reputation*  
Emily Rosamond (Goldsmiths, University of London)

Online platforms are theatres of reputation. Reviews, engagement metrics and comments allow users to observe reputations shifting in real time. Such shifts are highly consequential for everyday users, gig economy workers, marketers, trolls, PR professionals, influencers, content creators, cultural workers, politicians and public figures alike. What is the exact nature of that consequence, and how does online reputation relate to financial value? In this paper, I examine events in which online reputation has clear financial consequences, to test how financial and reputational value are linked: Silicon Valley Bank's social-media-fuelled collapse, Redditors' attempt to gazump Wall Street short sellers by increasing GameStop stock prices, and Elon Musk's alleged use of Twitter to boost the value of Dogecoin. These events, I argue, demand a hybrid analysis, combining economics with cultural studies approaches to aestheticization. Reputation has long been proximate to financial value, credit money, and markets; social media platforms make reputation volatility newly observable. They also 'evolve' and extend financial market volatility protocols, by uncoupling ratings from prices. Thus, online reputations can fluctuate wildly, separately from price; sometimes, these fluctuations are large enough to produce direct monetary effects. This, in part, depends on a political-aesthetic reading effect produced by social media platforms: that it becomes possible to observe the general opinion (a platformed, post-financial complement to Marx's general intellect) of public figures and entities, updating in real time. The aestheticization of public opinion as the general opinion is newly productive within platformized capitalism.

Emily Rosamond is Senior Lecturer in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, and Editor of *Finance and Society*. Her research explores the assetization of reputation, character, and personality within online platforms.

*On the Poetics of Refusal: Can Language Resist Digital Capitalism?*

Pip Thornton (University of Edinburgh)

In his 2012 book *The Uprising: On Poetry and Finance*, Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi makes a series of assertions about the relationship between language and the economy in an era of ‘semio-capitalism’. Recognising the power of poetry as an “excess of language” that “exceeds economic exchange”, Berardi evokes the revolutionary potential of a poetic language that insists on both financial and linguistic insolvency. According to Berardi, through a resistance to the forces of semio-capitalism, language that maintains the potency of irony, the power of enunciation, and avoids reduction to “semiotic debt”, can “create a new world”.

While artistic and poetic critiques seem at first to follow Berardi’s faith in the power of poetry, I argue that ‘artificially intelligent’ systems of digital capitalism are now far too embedded in political and social discourse to be useful tools of resistance. Indeed, as more and more lived spaces, as well as online spaces, become sites of textual exploitation through IoT and Generative AI technologies such as ChatGPT, Berardi’s reliance on ‘enunciation’ and ‘voice’ lose their impact as acts of solidarity, refusal and resistance.

Using Berardi as well as some speculative fiction from Alan Damasio and examples of my own creative interventions into linguistic capitalism and control in both pre and ‘post’ digital spaces, this paper develops as well as challenges Berardi’s hypotheses on poetry and finance.

Pip Thornton is a Chancellor’s Fellow in Geosciences at the University of Edinburgh and a research fellow on the AHRC funded BRAID (Bridging Responsible AI Divides) project. Her most recent project, ‘Writing The Wrongs of AI’ partnered with the Edinburgh International Book Festival to address how Generative AI systems threaten writers and the publishing industry.

*Money that Makes a Difference: Social Infrastructure and the Production of Meaning in the Crowdfunding Platform Economy*

Rebecca Bramall (University of the Arts London)

In the wake of the global financial crisis, the rise of crowdfunding and other digital fundraising tools introduced new mechanisms through which informal groups in civil society could be prompted to participate in the organisation and delivery of social projects. Decades of neoliberal influence on fiscal and welfare policymaking has severely constrained the redistributive uses of public spending (Cooper 2024), and citizens have been forced to take on some of the centralizing or ‘pooling’ functions of the state: raising money for social causes, (re)distributing those funds, and reporting back to donors about how funds were spent.

Drawing on interviews with platform CEOs and civil society fundraisers, this paper explores how meanings about money are constructed in the social cause crowdfunding economy. In the imaginaries of ‘tech for good’ professionals, crowdfunding resolves a concrete set of problems associated with the ‘flow’ of money ‘to people’. Digital tools make it ‘easier and faster and frictionless’ for communities to ‘take agency over where they live’. These imaginaries are materialized in the design of crowdfunding platforms, and must be navigated by users positioned

as conduits for community decision-making and managers of money that is going to ‘make a difference’.

Drawing attention to the ways in which these two groups of actors are differently positioned in relation to the material and social infrastructures (O’Dwyer 2015) of crowdfunding, my paper attends to the articulation of money’s meanings to ideas about contribution, responsibility and transparency, and points towards the ideological function of these meanings in platform capitalism (Langley and Leyshon 2017).

Rebecca Bramall is Reader in Cultural Politics at University of the Arts London and Project Leader and Principal Investigator (UK) of Redistributive Imaginaries: Digitalization, Culture and Prosocial Contribution (2022-25, CHANSE/Horizon).

### **Screening Money and Finance**

*Money on Screen: Money Culture and Social Change in Contemporary China*  
Yuda Feng (King’s College London)

The PRC’s historical turn to the market economy has given rise to a newly emerged money culture. While money has taken an important role in the cultures of everyday life and cinema has witnessed increasingly conspicuous images of money on screen, no systematic study has ever focused on money culture and its mediations in the contemporary PRC. My study asks how we can account for the various experiences of money that have become prominent in contemporary Chinese cinema.

In this paper, I focus on the spectacles of money and money squandering in a popular Chinese movie, *Hello Mr. Billionaire* (2018), which is a Chinese adaptation of a Hollywood comedy, *Brewster’s Millions* (1985). This film narrates a story of a money-spending challenge that the impoverished protagonist must spend one billion yuan in a month to inherit 10 billion. With this case study, I will present my methodology of studying money in film studies through my conceptual framework on the movement, affects and appearances of money. The premise of my study underlines money as expressive and affective objects shaping and shaped by culture, instead of understanding it as the transparent instrument of the market. For screen studies in particular, I argue money on screen is not only a representation of money experienced in social reality, but the image of money itself also carries the momentum and sensations of social change. With my case study, I argue money on screen reveals a new cultural logic, in which the spectre of discontent is haunting the spectacles of wealth, in contemporary China.

Yuda Feng is a third-year PhD candidate at King’s College London. His research project, ‘Money on Screen: Money Culture and Social Change in Contemporary China’, studies how money and social change are experienced cinematically through film analysis.

*Carnival of Financial Souls: Yella (Christian Petzold, 2007), Speculation, and Spectrality*  
Alasdair King (Queen Mary University of London)

Christian Petzold’s haunting thriller, *Yella* (2007), has been critically acclaimed for its enigmatic depiction of the journey of a young east German migrant to the affluent west and to a job in the arcane sector of venture capitalism. Petzold’s film constructs a world that, according to the director, ‘has existed alongside us for years, but which still doesn’t have a narrative form.’ This paper examines Petzold’s creation of new images appropriate to our increasingly financialised

world. Petzold has claimed that ‘modern capitalism has to have something sexy about it. [...] However, we still represent this world in old images and caricatures. We don’t have any images for it or narrative forms.’ With *Yella*, Petzold refuses a straightforward linear temporality, utilizing instead a film form that relies on doubling, repetition, and ‘hauntings’ from other films.

In exploring Petzold’s narrative form, I employ political economist Martijn Konings’ (2018) concept of ‘leverage’. Konings argues that to understand finance, we have to take into account money’s groundless signification. As a value without foundation, money is forced under financialization to always look forward and to promise an unachievable endpoint. As La Berge (2018) has argued about Konings’ work, ‘to be a creature of modernity one is forced to leverage what one has. [...] One cannot get outside of a leveraged world’. This forward-oriented, foundationless subjectivity is personified by Yella, caught up in the instigation of financial transactions that increasingly slip her grasp.

Alasdair King is Reader in Film at QMUL. His new monograph, *The Financial Image: Finance, Philosophy, and Contemporary Film* (Palgrave, 2024) addresses how the moving image has registered systems of finance capital and derivatives. He has written recently for *Images Secondes*, *Les presses du réel*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, *Archiv für Mediengeschichte*, *Finance and Society*, and *Weird Economies*.

“Time is Money”: Temporal Currency, Class Mobility, and the Politics of Resistance in *In Time* (2011)

Yidan Hu (University of Edinburgh)

This research analyses time as currency as the key mechanism for labour control and class stratification in *In Time* (2011), through an autonomist approach. It first draws on Maurizio Lazzarato’s thoughts on debt to examine how the film constructs the marketisation of time as a temporal economy. From daily commodities and transportation to loans and interest payments, all transactions are priced in life-time in the story. This system transforms life into an ongoing repayment of debt, where individuals are disciplined not only by the need to work but by the imperative to sustain their biological existence. This study then engages with Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi’s analysis of precarity and the politics of time. In the film, the spatial division into time zones materializes social stratification, where the working class is trapped in a cycle of time scarcity, forced into constant acceleration and daily survival, while the wealthy accumulate temporal surplus. This precarious existence limits not only class mobility but the very capacity to imagine alternative futures. The final section reflects on the protagonists’ attempt to redistribute temporal currency. While this gesture resembles Hardt and Negri’s concept of the ‘multitude’, I argue that the film ultimately leaves the problem unresolved, exposing the complexity of post-capitalism. By connecting *In Time* to autonomist debates on debt, precarity, and resistance, this research reconsiders the role of time in the politics of labour and social inequality.

Yidan HU is a PhD candidate in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, whose research programme concerns the issue of affective economies in science fiction. She is a member of the British Science Fiction Association, the British Society for Literature and Science, and the British Association of Film, Television and Screen.

## **Economic Agnosticism: Doubting Economic Knowledge in 19th-Century Literature and Sociology**

*What Can We Learn About Money from the Ways it is Doubted?*

Andreas Langenohl (Justus Liebig University Giessen)

This paper makes an argument for a utilization of the concept of doubt to elucidate the meaning of money in a given cultural, societal and political context. How doubt in money is articulated and which particular aspects of money are mistrusted bears important insights into money's respective cultural, social and political significance and validity. The paper exemplifies this argument through visiting two important forms of doubt in money which have been prominent sites of cultural inquiry: doubt in the value of money (for instance, inflation) and doubt in the realness of money (for instance, counterfeit money). The paper then addresses the contemporary moment which is characterized by digitized forms of money like cryptocurrencies and central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), arguing that what is doubted in digital money is the effectiveness of monetary transactions. Thus, the project of a digital Euro is politically framed as a measure to make Euro payments independent from processing through U.S. dominated financial institutions, like the SWIFT system or credit card companies. In turn, Bitcoin as the world's first cryptocurrency was launched with the aim to solve the so-called 'double-spending problem', which refers to doubts in the irreversibility of a digital money transaction. The current digitization of money thus rests on a 'securitization' of doubts in the effectiveness of monetary transactions. The paper concludes that cultural imaginaries of money, articulated through doubt, invoke contextually and historically specific notions of the political and its amalgamation with the nature of money.

Andreas Langenohl is professor of Sociology and Head of Graduate Studies at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture (GCSC) at Justus Liebig University Giessen. His fields of research and teaching include social and cultural theory, political public communication, economic sociology and the sociology of finance, transnationalism, and epistemology of the social sciences.

*Money, Doubt, and the Stories They Tell: The Case of Flaubert, Gyp, and Edith Wharton*

Kirsten von Hagen (Justus Liebig University Giessen)

This paper follows on from Andreas Langenohl's reflections and examines the productivity of doubt in the context of economic transactions. It focuses in particular on 19th-century texts that repeatedly emphasise the importance of money in the pursuit of happiness and social recognition, while at the same time constantly questioning it. Especially in texts in which women are staged in the context of economic agency and social participation, the doubt about money as a currency and guarantor of advancement becomes narratively productive. Examples of this can be found in Flaubert, but also in modernist women writers such as Gyp [Sibylle Riquetti de Mirabeau] or Edith Wharton. At the same time, as a negative foil to the logic of speculation, the figure of the usurer, to whom economic knowledge is attributed but who is also characterized as a type of arriviste, partly with anti-Semitic colouring, is recurrently staged. The aim of this paper is to focus on money and doubts about the laws of speculation in the long 19th century and to discuss how literature makes this doubt about the value of money narratively productive and which forms are central to this. It is no coincidence that Flaubert, for example, is considered as a promoter of literary modernism who, in a deliberate style of narrative brevity, also reflects whether and to what extent the value of a literary commodity can be represented by money. Later female authors such as Gyp or Edith Wharton, who found a new spiritual home in Paris, linked such considerations with a striving for female autonomy. The discourse of autonomy is

negotiated in a central way through doubts about the economic knowledge of the time and the question of books as commodities, with forms of the novel reflecting these speculations, as the paper shows.

Kirsten von Hagen is professor of Romance Literature and Romance Cultural Studies at the University of Giessen. Her research interests include intermedial storytelling, postcolonial aesthetics, literature and economics, and inter- and transcultural dynamics. She has published numerous articles on the relation between economics and literature.

*“Le salut social est à ce prix”: Daniel-Lesueur’s Female-Coded Doubt in Economic Knowledge at the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition*

Marie-Theres Stickel (Justus Liebig University Giessen)

This paper follows on from Kirsten von Hagen’s reflections on women writers: As women’s experiences are (still) often marginalised in literary economic research, the (economic) knowledge they have codified in their works remains largely unexplored. Thus, one can observe a serious absence of women thinkers in the canon of economic theory and research. This paper examines the 1900 ‘Exposition Universelle’ in Paris as an early, female-coded and feminist ‘scene of economic knowledge’ where doubt in (hegemonic) economic knowledge was articulated and staged. The virulent feminist congress business around the 19th-century World’s Fairs figures as a dynamic ‘think tank’, imagining new cultural and economic practices by sparking major societal debates and raising troubling questions about shifting economic gender roles and transformations in labour issues. Informed by the field of ‘narrative ethics’, which foregrounds the complex intersections of narrative and moral values, the paper studies the journalistic-activist work of the French women writer Daniel-Lesueur (1854–1921). Its notion as ethical and imaginative textual resources is emphasised by working through ethical economic dilemmas, addressing messy, entangled, daily economic life. Lesueur opens up the perspective of a ‘travail social’ that brings literary production close to an economic social imaginary. As a crucial social intervention, her work encourages the dismantling of ‘imaginary barriers’ that can be observed in the antagonistic relationship between literary and economic writing established throughout the 19th century. Focusing on the two guiding economic categories of ‘work’ and ‘money’, or rather ‘cooperation’ and ‘remuneration’, this paper analyses Lesueur’s work as an expression of doubt in hegemonic economic doctrines, thereby imagining new (economic) forms of coexistence.

Marie Stickel is a PhD student and research assistant at the Chair of French Literature and Cultural Studies of Prof Dr Kirsten von Hagen (Justus Liebig University Giessen), and a member of the research project ‘Economic Agnosticism’ (Kirsten von Hagen/Andreas Langenohl, JLU). She studied English, and Romance Studies, business economics and comparative literature in Giessen (GER) and Dijon (FR).

## **Personal Finance and Everyday Economies**

*FIRE (Financial Independence, Retire Early) and the History of Financial Self-Help: Cultures of Capitalism c. 1875–2025*

Charlotte Nilsson (Lund University and Copenhagen Business School)

The purpose of the research project is to understand the rationales, practices and possible implications of the FIRE (financial independence, retire early) movement in Sweden and place them into a longer historical development of financial self-help in industrial capitalism. While the desire to skip the ‘rat race’ has emerged in various contexts throughout modern history, the

technique for ‘ordinary’ wage earners to strive for financial independence through stock market investments has not been seen before.

FIRE followers’ beliefs and endeavours seem to result in a paradoxical moral economy of, on the one hand, resisting cornerstones of capitalist society – salaried work, over-consumption and household debt – while, on the other, consenting to the power of the financial markets and relying completely on the continued growth of capital invested in it. Earlier research on the Anglo-American context proposed to understand this contradictory encounter as the financialization of anti-capitalism (Taylor & Davies, 2021).

How can we understand the development of the Swedish FIRE movement, given the nation-specific sociopolitical history? Which are the main actors and stakeholders? And, assuming that FIRE is just as influential as circulating imaginary for the many as it is lived experience for the few, what dominating narratives on the role of the citizen, financial institutions and society do the movement produce?

Charlotte Nilsson is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Arts and Cultural Sciences, Lund University and the Department of Business Humanities and Law, Copenhagen Business School. Her research deals with the history of the Swedish savings and investment culture, with an empirical focus on financial education and financial self-help from the mid-1900s onwards.

*The Aesthetics of Feminised Finance: Examining Women’s Financial Self-help in Australia*  
Marnie Cruickshank and Barbara Pini (both Griffith University)

This paper presents the findings of a feminist multimodal discourse analysis of the peritexts of 19 Australian women’s financial self-help (WFSH) books published from 2014 to 2024. Data are presented in three sections which reflect the sequence in which a potential reader would most likely engage with the books if browsing in a store or online. First, analysis of the front cover designs details how postfeminist motifs from the colour palettes to the fonts construct WFSH as fun, girly and playful, interpellating a normatively feminine, heterosexual, white, middle-class reader. Second, turning the book over, we focus on how strategically deployed peritextual devices, such as rhetorical questions, invite women to see themselves as (financially) defective, even as they are reassured through book summaries and author biographies that financial transformation is straightforward and that girlfriendly expert help is available. Third, as the potential women reader opens the book, or clicks through to browse a sample of the text, peritextual features such as chapter headings and prefaces gesture to some of the discursive strategies used by authors as they navigate the tensions of financial inequality and inclusion. The paper makes two contributions to the conference, demonstrating that, despite often being overlooked, peritexts are a powerful representational force shaping the feminisation of financialisation and that adopting multimodal discourse analysis broadens and enriches the methodological focus of humanities inflected economic research beyond the textual.

Marnie Cruickshank is an Adjunct Research Fellow at Griffith University. Marnie completed her PhD on gendered geographies of financialisation through researching Australian women’s financial self-help cultures in 2023. Her research interests continue to be feminist theorising on the affective and embodied geographies of finance and the asset economy.



*Silicon Suburbia: Growth and Maintaining the American Dream*  
Michelle Venetucci (Yale University)

Silicon Valley has often served as an exemplar of the post-Fordist flexible economy, both in championing new corporate practices and in enabling a broader adoption of flexibilization through the production of new technologies. As anthropologists have highlighted how the economic and social are co-constituted, depictions of industry actors as dedicated to new entrepreneurial subjectivities and risk-taking behaviors reinforce this idea of new forms of capitalist practice that reconfigure social and domestic life. And yet, Silicon Valley has continually reproduced structural inequalities, revealing continuities with socialities past rather than new horizons of possibility. This paper interrogates how cross-generational hauntings shape the expansionary impulses of Silicon Valley, engaging with the suburban infrastructure that birthed the industry and the Fordist middle class practices of the tech workforce. By ethnographically tracing how risk-averse aspirations for stable domestic life undergird flexible economic scale projects, I show how the industry's global expansion is reproduced through local familial attachments to more modest economic growth. As workplace subjectivities are shaped by newer economic models as well as familial practices grounded in histories of westward expansion, this paper illustrates how future-focused regimes of flexible accumulation in Silicon Valley are facilitated by domestic contexts that stretch back across generations.

Michelle Venetucci is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Anthropology at Yale University, with an emphasis in the anthropology of finance and venture capital. Her dissertation explores social and structural conditions that shape corporate environments in Silicon Valley, working at the intersection of speculative finance, middle class domesticity, and new technologies.

*Panel Session 2*

**Theorising Money**

*On Money's Nature, Economic Value, and Measurement Instruments: Between Tony Lawson and Geoffrey Ingham*  
Felipe Rodrigues Sousa (University of Coimbra)

Many authors claimed to have solved the puzzling question regarding money's nature. Orthodox economics' "functionalist view" locates it in market transactions and the physical embodiment of different monies, oftentimes metallic ones. Others see it differently. They say that money "is memory" or "language"; others say that it "is power". As can be seen, we are far from any consensual answer levelled against the orthodoxy dominance. Two important additions to the literature came from Ingham in his "The Nature of Money" (2004) and Lawson's many papers, among which we could cite "Social Positioning and the Nature of Money" (2016).

The decade-long debate between these authors and others (Searle, for example) has matured into a fairly complex set of arguments spanning from philosophical considerations to quasi-historical accounts of specific instances in which money emerged or was transformed. In this communication, I aim to offer an appreciation of their position and question Lawson's argument that Social Position Theory (SPT) allowed him to find the nature of money. To that end, I shall deploy an analogy between Money and Space as the measured essence and money and rulers as the measuring devices. If this analogy holds, then what SPT allowed Lawson to find was the nature of the ruler, not that of Space. The nature of Money, I shall argue, was better grasped by

Ingham and lies in (or is pure) abstract economic value, or as Massó (2023) argued, money is the “human cognitive ability” to institutionalise abstract economic value.

Felipe Rodrigues Sousa is a PhD candidate at the University of Coimbra, working on the intersections of economics, sociology, and philosophy of money, focusing on theoretical questions and the socio-political dimensions of monetary phenomena, while adopting an explicit ontological perspective.

### *Money as Symbol and Allegory via Poe and Benjamin*

Ben Moore (University of Amsterdam)

Money under nineteenth-century capitalism has often been analysed through one of several dichotomous pairings, such as paper vs gold (Marc Shell), real vs fictitious capital (Anna Kornbluh, following Marx), or material vs sublime bodies (Matthew Rowlinson, following Žižek). This sense of money is useful, but risks perpetuating a binary opposition that does not fully capture the dynamic and dialectical sense of money that we find in much literature of the period. I propose a new theoretical approach which interprets money through Walter Benjamin’s account of symbol and allegory, as developed in *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (1928). If money – especially in its literary and cultural dimensions – is understood as an unstable meeting point between symbol and allegory, this places a new emphasis on the conditions (including historical, spatial and affective orientations) which allow it to be seen in one or the other light. It also provides a new way of reading money’s capacity to generate multiple, overlapping and sometimes conflicting narratives, as an eruption of allegory. I illustrate this account of money through a reading of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Gold-Bug* (1843). In the different characters’ perspectives towards the gold-bug, Poe’s tale offers a schema of money’s symbolic and allegorical dimensions. I further suggest, drawing on Denise Ferreira da Silva’s concept of unpayable debt, that money’s allegories extend beyond the tale’s bounds to speak to the condition of manumitted (but still dispossessed) former slaves, represented by the character Jupiter. I conclude by reflecting on the wider implications of this approach, beyond nineteenth-century literature.

Ben Moore is Assistant Professor in English Literature at the University of Amsterdam. His work focuses mainly on nineteenth-century literature, including a current project on money from which this paper is taken. He is the author of *Human Tissue in the Realist Novel, 1850–1895* (2023) and *Invisible Architecture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: Rethinking Urban Modernity* (2024), as well as various articles and book chapters on topics such as cities, modernity and childhood.

### **Monetary Histories and Metaphors**

#### *Thinking with the Ruble: Economic Humanities at the United Nations*

Elizabeth Banks (University of Edinburgh)

This paper offers a creative economic history of the United Nations (UN) centred around officials’ dramatic efforts to spend Soviet rubles, the infamously inconvertible currency of the world’s second superpower. As historians have turned towards greater investigation of international institutions in recent years, work tends to focus on policies, the lived experience of international workers, and the movement of ideas and ideals. Less attention has been given to the economic infrastructures that underpinned the international organization system. Where money has been explored, the dollar has been the star; scholars have shown how American politics and funders’

preferences have shaped projects around the world, in the past as in the present. In this paper, I flip the dominance of the dollar around to trace the effects of the second largest contribution to the institution – that given in Soviet rubles. The Soviet ruble is usually considered a weak currency, since it could not be spent or converted overseas. Indeed, this feature usually limited the scope of the Soviet state and its officials. Drawing on research in UN archives, I show that this same inconvertibility drove officials to complex methods that allowed them to extract value from the ruble by prioritizing Soviet training and equipment in their programming for developing countries, creating a new space of interaction between global “East” and global “South”. More theoretically, the ruble shows that following currencies other than the dollar can reveal alternative vectors of money and power that similarly affected the expression of ideals, and points to the conceptual and practical challenges of international cooperation among wildly unequal economies still with us today.

Elizabeth (Betty) Banks is a global historian of the USSR and twentieth century Africa with thematic interests in gender, economics, and environment. Her first book will examine connections between the USSR and Mozambique from the 1960s through the fall of socialism in both states. She is beginning a new project examining Soviet industrial fishing and other uses of the oceans during the Cold War.

*Decolonising Economic Metaphors: Ethnographic Vernacular Reimagination of Economic Concepts*

Tanushree Kaushal (Geneva Graduate Institute)

Economics as a discipline has long staked its claim as a ‘rational’ social science, with neoclassical economics deriving much of its methodological weightage from the use of mathematical models, quantitative data and numerical abstractions. Even so, this reliance on quantitative techniques is accompanied with widespread use of metaphors to describe the economy and economic thinking. For instance, concepts of fiscal deficit and surplus are described and understood in terms of a household economy, wherein the nation (analogous to the family) must “live within its means” (as stated by former British PM David Cameron, among others) or where former German Chancellor Angela Merkel chastises Southern Europeans for taking “lots of vacation time” and being a burden on the North. These references to a household economy or hierarchised notions of laziness carry material effects in austerity reforms, budget cuts and increased debt burdens, wherein metaphors co-constitute economic materialities and imaginations of economic possibilities. This paper starts with showing that such metaphors are gendered and colonial, and then proposes a way of decolonising such metaphors. Drawing upon 1 year of fieldwork with microfinance borrowers in the state of West Bengal in India, I engage with borrowers’ vernaculars of economic life to theorise economic concepts from the ground up. I present vernacular uses and circulation of concepts of financial risk, credit and the notion of ‘consumption smoothing’ to decolonise dominant economic concepts by offering alternative metaphors for imagining different economic possibilities and futures.

Tanushree Kaushal is a PhD candidate at the Geneva Graduate Institute. Her research focuses on intersections of gender, state transformations and finance, particularly at how credit co-constitutes state authority and gendered citizenship. Her research is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and bridges anthropology, political economy and feminist international relations.

## Economic Fictions, Nineteenth-Century and Now

*Late Nineteenth-Century Recession and British Literary Naturalism: Economic Narratives in Gissing's The Whirlpool*

Asher Gibbens (University of Edinburgh)

This paper examines how British Literary Naturalism mutated from Realism under late nineteenth-century economic conditions. Economic literary criticism has largely focused on High Victorian Realism, overlooking the distinct context that shaped Naturalism. During this period, Britain's economic hegemony was challenged by industrial downturns, volatile global financial markets, intensifying imperial competition, the decline of the landed gentry, and a prolonged depression (1873–1896). Amid critiques of capitalism and the emergence of business cycle theory, British Naturalism emerged as a literary mode that exposed the brutal realities of financial precarity and impersonal economic forces. Focusing on George Gissing's *The Whirlpool* (1897), this paper explores how the novel represents financial instability and economic decline as manifest in social behaviour and individual psychology. The novel also reflects anxieties over Britain's waning economic dominance and how speculative finance reconfigures the social order. My research in the economic humanities challenges disciplinary silos that privilege quantitative over artistic analysis, advocating literature as a vital medium for conceptualising and understanding financial crises, recessions, and economic change. *The Whirlpool* exemplifies how fiction in the late nineteenth century navigated a period of unprecedented global expansion in economic interconnectedness. In doing so, it reveals the legacy of literature to illuminate the lived experience of capitalism and the cultural narratives that shape economic understanding.

Asher is a PhD candidate in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh, funded by the AHRC. His research explores the intersections of literature and economic history, examining how late nineteenth-century recession and financialisation shaped British Naturalist literature as an aesthetic critical response.

*Economic Criticism from a Gender Perspective: Imagining Female Economic Agency in Hester (1883) and Equity (2016)*

Barbara Straumann (University of Zurich)

This paper addresses the intersection between economic life and gender. How do the economy and gender intersect in the cultural imagination? And what does it mean to engage in economic criticism from a gender perspective? Despite the androcentric bias in much economic thought, women have featured in economic life in a number of ways: a) as thinkers and writers contributing to discussions about economic questions, b) as players engaging in economic practices in the domestic sphere and thus expanding notions of what counts as economic, and c) as participants in finance as a male-dominated area. Reflecting on the gendering of economic issues, it is important to realize how economic practices and gender roles are co-constructed. Economic roles can either reinforce or subvert traditional gender norms, and gendered identities can open and/or close economic opportunities. As a literary scholar, I am interested in cultural narratives that shape the economic imaginary through the ways in which they link economic agency and gender identity. Using two fictional narratives about women bankers – Margaret Oliphant's late Victorian novel *Hester* (1883) and the contemporary financial thriller *Equity* (2016) – as my examples, I will demonstrate how economic criticism from a gender perspective allows us to bring questions concerning the socio-economic agency of gendered identities into focus. How does the participation of women bankers in the masculine sphere of finance both challenge and

affirm gender norms? How do their gendered identities limit and/or enable their economic agency? Does their individual empowerment involve a larger argument for systemic equality, or does it rest on the exploitation of other disadvantaged identities?

Barbara Straumann is Professor of English Literature at the University of Zurich. Her research interests include the long nineteenth century, gender, intermediality, celebrity culture, and economic criticism. Her current projects deal with debt and gender in nineteenth-century fiction. She is also currently working on a primary source collection on celebrity in the long nineteenth century.

*Home Economics: Intimate Aspirations in Maggie Armstrong*  
Orlaith Darling (University College Dublin)

As social reproduction theory has shown, the family is indispensable to capitalist development: charged with absorbing and mitigating the worst excesses of accumulation and surplus value extraction, it props up the viability of the capitalist project. In this paper, I use post-crash fiction by Irish women writers to consider how “the institutions of heterosexual love provide normative locations” for imagining a “feminine good life” reiterative of capitalist norms (Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, p. 171). I read Maggie Armstrong’s debut short story collection, *Old Romantics* (2024), through the lens of “negative liberty”, arguing that the issue faced by Armstrong’s millennial characters is how to attain any sort of domesticity as they struggle to carve out a life in an era of retrenchment and rent seeking. Armstrong is alive to how contemporary Irish women have inherited a certain liberal feminist ideal which is nevertheless impeded by neoliberal political economy; technically freed from the gendered burden of emotional and domestic labour borne by previous generations of Irish women, Armstrong’s millennials experience choice – who to be, how to live, and with whom – as an entirely negative phenomenon. I argue that, for Armstrong’s characters, the types of desire – for domestic stability and homeownership, for instance – that were previously encouraged and magnetised by capitalism are now precluded by it. More, I argue that capital delegitimises this desire, once so normal, by means of external discourses (like feminism), and repackages its loss as freedom – to make different, and more, choices.

Orlaith Darling is a Research Ireland postdoctoral fellow at UCD. Previously, she held postdoctoral and teaching positions at Justus-Liebig University, Giessen, and Goethe University Frankfurt. She completed her PhD in the School of English, Trinity College Dublin, in 2023, and her first monograph *Contemporary Irish Women’s Short Fiction: Neoliberalism, Affect, Desire* is under contract with Liverpool University Press.

### *Panel Session 3*

#### **Legal and Social Dimensions of Money and Finance**

*Money Law: Time Has Come for Talking About a Distinct Area of Legal Research, Education, and Policymaking*

Valentino Cattelan (Birmingham City University) and Gabriella Gimigliano (University of Siena)

Money, law and institutions; banking law; financial law; law, money and politics; ... are common examples of research fields where a connection between money and the law is made.

This paper argues that these traditional labels are grounded on an out-of-date representation of money that perpetuates a partial understanding of contemporary economic phenomena and risks leading to inefficient regulatory policies. To make up for this, a new area of legal research should be fostered in higher education: that of ‘money law.’ In fact, challenging how money is represented in legal studies, more attention should be addressed to the radical transformation that money has experienced from the start of the XXI century through a multiplication and pluralisation of ‘monetary languages.’ In this light, the paper highlights both (a) how the digital economy has re-shaped money, multiplying monetary systems (e.g., cryptocurrencies; digital money); and (b) how the re-emergence of community values beyond the nation state is fostering complementary currencies and alternative economic models (e.g., local currencies; Islamic finance). Accordingly, aspects of social analysis, the cultural nature of economic phenomena, religious assumptions, globalisation ... must be embedded in the study of law and money and, for this purpose, a new area of legal studies must still be coherently framed. In brief, by replacing the classic functional idea of money in vernacular economic knowledge (medium of exchange; system of payment; reserve of value; unit of account), time has come for talking about ‘money law’ as a distinct field of research, education, and policymaking.

Valentino Cattelan is Lecturer in Law at Birmingham City University. He specialises in comparative law; Islamic law, economics, and finance; law & religion; and money law. He is the author of *Religion and Contract Law in Islam: From Medieval Trade to Global Finance* (2023) and editor (with G. Gimigliano) of *Money Law, Capital, and the Changing Identity of the European Union* (2022).

*The Margins of Change: Financialization, Money, and Voluntary Disengagement from the Conventional Economy*  
Inês Faria and Eduardo Ferraciolli (both University of Lisbon)

Our paper proposal is a work in progress based on research within the project FINOUT, hosted at the University of Lisbon, and focusing on people living outside/or partly outside conventional finance on a voluntary, or forced, basis. The data come from 22 semi-structured interviews and complementary participant observation and the results and analysis comes from a combination of the authors’ backgrounds in economics, sociology and anthropology. More specifically, our proposal examines diverse experiments with monetary and economic alternatives, primarily in Europe and the United States. We categorize these experiments into four modes of individual or collective engagement with conventional money: exit, reform, abolition, and accumulation. Through a novel (and experimental) analytical lens combining concepts of anthropological margins, socio-economic membranes, and alternative provisioning systems, we investigate the conditions that enable these projects, their varying degrees of autonomy from the conventional economy, and the increased reliance on relational and productive work – and often, paradoxically, money – that they require. Our findings may contribute to ongoing debates in interdisciplinary monetary theory, revealing the simultaneously constraining and enabling role of money for attempted socio-economic transformation.

Inês Faria is a researcher and invited lecturer at ISEG, University of Lisbon, developing research financial uses of blockchain technology, grassroots projects for social and cooperative economic alternatives, and gender, entrepreneurship and digital financial inclusion in low-income settings (Southern Africa).

*Investing in Pollution: Valuations of Harm with the Third-Party Litigation Funding Industry*  
Hannah Tubman (University of Edinburgh)

The Broken Hill mine in Kabwe, Zambia became a site of resource extraction, upon the discovery of lead-zinc deposits in 1902. Today, with mineral reprocessing, toxic mining waste is transformed into a resource in the mine area. Just as toxicity is commodified with reprocessing, toxicity is commodified with environmental litigation. In 2020, a lawsuit was filed against Anglo American South Africa, a former owner of the mine, to address lead pollution in Kabwe. The lawsuit, created by lawyers from the United Kingdom and South Africa with third-party litigation funding, is presented as a pathway for remediation. The case also presents a financial opportunity. When pleading a compensation claim in court, experiences of harm, like lead poisoning, are quantified through the estimation of costs for medical treatments or loss of earnings. Experiences of harm are also evaluated as investment opportunities. With third-party litigation, actors, otherwise uninvolved in the lawsuit, provide the finances for the case with the expectation of a return on their investment through a share of the compensation award. Litigation funding, a multi-billion dollar industry, provides the opportunity for cases to go to court, and third parties would not invest in litigation unless they had an opportunity for financial gain. However, according to the funding agreement for the Kabwe lawsuit, funding can be revoked if the case is no longer ‘commercially viable.’ This paper explores how experiences of harm are valued as commodities with third-party litigation funding, and the ethics and implications of pursuing commercially viable environmental justice.

Hannah Tubman is completing her PhD at the University of Edinburgh in the Social Anthropology department. Her research, at the intersection of economic, environmental, and legal anthropology, explores how the consequences of extraction are being commodified with mineral waste reprocessing and third party litigation funding. Her work focuses on the toxic legacy of lead pollution from mining in Kabwe, Zambia.

## **The Meaning of Monetary Innovation**

*Collective Meaning-Making and Alternative Currencies*  
Michelle Chihara (Whittier College)

Since at least sometime before the first Trump presidency, critics have been grappling with morphing popular relationships to facts and facticity. In 2016, the legacy media and the World Economic Forum both expressed concern about rising authoritarianism and “post-truth politics” (Suiter). In 2025, the Trump administration has become not only increasingly unconcerned with facts, but also increasingly devoted to memes and cryptocurrency. The president and his wife both launched a memecoin on the eve of his inauguration. He was skeptical of Bitcoin in his first administration. Now, he has announced that he will turn the US into “the crypto capital of the planet” (Yaffe-Bellany).

The conspiracist right has been questioning and threatening the Federal Reserve chair’s independence since Trump appointed Jerome Powell. This destabilizing bid for control is often ideologically justified by a populist attack on the authority of central banks. These attacks share a social critique with the justifications for cryptocurrency, which promise to disintermediate the money process, cutting out banks of all kinds. But even if, as Olivier Jutel writes, “one can cast aside the staggering environmental impact,” Bitcoin has thus far failed to function “for its purported purpose as money.”

Crypto has unquestionably been disruptive, but primarily with “the advent of a crypto-oligarchy, or crypto ‘Whales,’ more fraudulent than the financial system it intended to replace” (Jutel 2). Memecoins rise as speculative commodities. Crypto lobbies have insisted that they should not be regulated as financial instruments because cryptocurrencies “are like Beanie Babies,” especially when the SEC has attempted to regulate them. At the same time, the utopian promise of crypto lies in its ostensibly distributed and global security as a universal money form. Bitcoin influencers insist in viral YouTube videos that Bitcoin will soon replace the US dollar as the global reserve currency (Layah Heilpern).

Crypto’s status is both semantically and financially unstable. Surplus data entails interpretation. In their argument that raw data is an oxymoron, Lisa Gitelman and Virginia Jackson insist that data “need to be imagined as data to exist and function as such, and the imagination of data entails an interpretive base” (Gitelman Jackson 3). And Jeffrey Kirkwood argues that Bitcoin, as a cryptographic hashing algorithm that operates through “proof of work,” fundamentally shifts the relationship between work and value: “It employs cryptographic tasks of escalating difficulty that are not intended to secure and protect meaning... but to destroy it in processes of computational excess.” Bitcoin’s “escalating inefficiencies... simultaneously work against traditional economic aspirations toward efficiency and the humanistic desire for meaning and comprehension.” (363-4)

Crypto, memecoins, and the Anarcapulco festival emerged in a time of relative global chaos for financial markets, fiat money, and facticity. The crises of faith in the dollar and in facts are related. But could they be made to relate differently? Alternative currencies, digital or analog, might take advantage of these breaks and fissures. In analyzing the conditions of possibility and the social production of meaning and value for Ithaca Hours, time banks, babysitting collectives, and the ART.COOP, and by relating those social conditions to the rise of crypto, this paper redescribes the contemporary moment as an opportunity, a line of flight for a potentially different money-world.

Michelle Chihara is Associate Professor of English at Whittier College and adjunct in Media Studies at the University of Southern California. Publications include chapters in *Money and American Literature* and *Los Angeles, A Literary History* (CUP). She served as editor of *Econ and Finance* and Editor-in-Chief at *Los Angeles Review of Books*. Her book, *Behave! The science of influence in American culture*, is under representation at Massie McQuilkin.

*Money as an Interface - A Tale of Everyday Financial Hacking*  
Belén Barros Pena (City St. George’s, University of London)

With finance digitising at speed, the study of the nature of money is breaking loose from its traditional disciplinary boundaries. New answers to the question “what is money?” are being proposed outside of economics and sociology, for instance by anthropologists and media scholars. But since money is becoming digital, shouldn’t Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) have a say on the matter?

HCI is an interdisciplinary field that studies the intersection between humans and digital information technologies. This presentation proposes an HCI perspective on the nature of money anchored on two key concepts: 1) the “interface”, understood as any artifact that mediates human relations; and 2) the idea of “moneywork”, i.e. the often hidden labour we must undertake in order to make money work for us. Since HCI is a design-related discipline, its ideas on money come accompanied by a set of alternative principles to help us reimagine the way we produce money technologies.



The HCI perspective on the nature of money is grounded on research at the intersection of financial difficulty, mental illness, and informal care. It is inspired not by big technological trends or breakthroughs, but by the mundane things we do with and through money technologies, particularly the unexpected and “deviant” behaviours that we deploy to enable financial collaboration. In short: our everyday financial hacks.

Belen Barros Pena is a lecturer in Human-Computer Interaction at City St. George's, University of London. Before starting her academic career, she worked as a designer in the software industry for 15 years. As a researcher, she specialises in financial technologies, and in engaging marginalised populations through participatory design practices.

*Future Money: Cryptonomicon, Cryptocurrency, and the Writing of Value*  
Paul Crosthwaite (University of Edinburgh)

This talk considers a recent chapter in an extended history of efforts to shape the society of the future by revolutionizing its money, and the important role of imaginative writing in this history. Modernist authors – most notably the poets Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams – were among the leading early twentieth-century proponents of a transformation in the social organization of money. Where these writers' favoured programmes of monetary reform were – albeit far from unproblematically – collectivist and communitarian in ideological orientation, the dominant visions that succeeded them, beginning in the 1970s, tended toward libertarian, individualistic, and free-market positions. In this talk, I'll focus on an especially prominent example – a novel that is by common consensus the most significant work of literature dealing with digital currencies: Neal Stephenson's 1999 technothriller *Cryptonomicon*. Stephenson's imagining of a future form of money immune from governmental regulation or oversight has assumed proleptic status in various regards, not least in the ways it has become peculiarly entangled with the actual development of cryptocurrencies and other online monetary systems in the decades since its publication. I'll suggest, though, that the novel speaks most powerfully to our age of Bitcoin and other forms of digital money in the profound contradictions at its core – contradictions concerning questions of abstraction, materiality, trust, value, and inscription that have haunted the long history of monetary reform movements, and continue to shape debates over the future of money today.

Paul Crosthwaite is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature at the University of Edinburgh. His books include *Speculative Time: American Literature in an Age of Crisis* (Oxford UP, 2024), *The Market Logics of Contemporary Fiction* (Cambridge UP, 2019), and, as coauthor, *Invested: How Three Centuries of Stock Market Advice Reshaped Our Money, Markets, and Minds* (U of Chicago P, 2022).

## **Data, Design, and Infrastructure in the Economy**

*The Value and Role of Design Research for the Economic Humanities*  
Chris Elsden (University of Edinburgh)

This paper will explore the value of Design research, as a set of methods, creative practices and ways of knowing about money and economic systems. Design research may be used: to critique and explore emerging technologies (e.g. Pierce et al. 2015, Gaver 2022); for innovation through 'design thinking' (Brown & Katz, 2011); to involve end-users directly in a design process (Simonsen & Robertson, 2013); or as practice-led way to know through doing and making

(Frayling, 1994). Crucially, Design research is applied. It goes beyond observation, critique and theory; and instead seeks to intervene, to make cuts, and treat money itself as a material for design (Speed et al., 2022) to explore and enact alternative value systems and preferable economic futures. Design researchers may begin by studying the user experiences and design of products and services – such as credit cards, tip jars, virtual currencies, contactless payments, online checkouts and pocket-money apps – but then turn to creative practice, often alongside others, to design and envision alternatives. Two recent projects demonstrate the value of this approach. ‘FTML: Financial Transaction Mark-Up Language’ (Elsden et al., 2024), employs speculative methods and designerly hacking of a PoS card-reading device to consider how transactional data could be used to represent not only economic value, but ecological values. The Secret Lives of Children’s Digital Money employs a participatory, cultural probe approach (Gaver, 1999), to engage children aged 7–12 as ‘Money Detectives’ and understand their contemporary experiences of digital money.

Chris Elsden is a Chancellor’s Fellow in Service Design, in the Institute for Design Informatics, working across the Edinburgh Futures Institute and Edinburgh College of Art. He is a sociologically-oriented design researcher, based in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), most recently exploring design of, and with, FinTech, Money Systems, DLTs and Transactional Data.

*Is (Digital) Money Still the Purest Tool? Simmel, Agency, and Resistance in the Emergence of Neobanks*

Yuening Li (National University of Ireland, Maynooth), Aphra Kerr (University College Dublin), and Linzi Ryan (National University of Ireland, Maynooth)

Simmel conceptualises money as a medium that bridges people with each other and with material objects. It is therefore the purest tool and a social institution (Simmel, 2011). The emergence of neobanks, exemplified by Revolut, Monzo, and Starling Bank UK, shifts the focus of payment studies from money itself to the design of apps. This paper reintroduces classic economic sociology with a social construction of technology approach, examining conflict, exclusion, and resistance in the emergence of neobanks through user agency. Connecting neobanks to the origins and evolution of money and viewing the design of neobanks as a medium to access and use money, we ask: a) what social imaginaries of money are reflected in the emergence and design of neobanks? and b) how do neobanks shape user agency in the process of creation, distribution, and stabilisation?

This paper employs a qualitative multi-method approach of app walkthrough (Light, Burgess and Duguay, 2018) and semi-structured interviews with both developers and users. It argues that money is a socially constructed artefact (Dodd, 2016) and has various and constantly changing forms. Inherently, neobanks are co-constructed by users and developers. While providers strategise the design of neobanks as technological innovations, neobanks reflect a strong prioritisation of the exchanging functionality, presenting as the purest tool (Simmel, 2011), conceptualised as the transactional imaginary. The findings reveal the responsibilisation of users, with increasing requirements of user initiative and self-navigation and identifies the nuances of resistance through user-led disruptive use and vernacular knowledge-making practices.

Yuening Li is a PhD researcher in Sociology at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, funded by Research Ireland ADVANCE. She submitted her PhD thesis in March 2025, titled Platformisation of Banking in Ireland: App Designs, Changing Imaginaries, and Emergent Barriers.

Her research explores the conceptualisation of money, social inequalities and financial inclusion, and financial literacy.

*What Makes Money “Real” for Children in a Data-Driven Digital Economy?*

Valentina Andries, Harvey Everson, Caroline McKinley, Cara Wilson, and Chris Elsdén (all University of Edinburgh)

Money is changing, and becoming represented primarily in digital forms and as data, transforming into "New Money" (Swartz, 2020). While cash use declines, a growing plurality of representations of money has emerged, including mobile banking apps, cryptocurrencies, platform currencies and various ‘tokens’ (O’Dwyer, 2023). Virtual and platform currencies, such as those used on streaming platforms like Twitch (Elsden & Speed, 2022) or as a means of pay-to-play (and earn) in games like Roblox, often resemble traditional money in function and perhaps appearance but differ significantly in other respects, such as regulation or value. This shift raises fundamental questions about the nature of money itself: what constitutes "real" money in an era of digital financial diversity and transformation? Our research focuses on how children aged 7–12 experience and understand this increasingly plural financial landscape. For many children, these digital currencies have real value in their daily lives, allowing them to experience and learn about money. Despite the complexity of the financial landscape, children often appear to develop fluency in understanding and utilising these systems, as well as their worth. However, concerns have been raised about potential risks, such as exploitative monetisation mechanisms like loot boxes and the lack of transferability of platform-specific currencies (Hardwick et al., 2025). This raises broader questions: Is money "real" because it feels real and facilitates meaningful transactions for children? Or does its legitimacy stem from characteristics it shares with traditional fiat currency? Understanding these distinctions is crucial for shaping financial education and regulatory approaches.

Valentina Andries is currently working as a researcher on a project exploring the “Secret Lives of Children’s Digital Monies”. This mapping project is a collaboration between the University of Edinburgh and NatWest banking Group, and its aim is to explore how children and families currently interact with (digital) money, and what children envisage the future of money could look like.

Caroline McKinley is a visiting researcher at the University of Edinburgh, and a Lead UX Researcher at Natwest Group.

Chris Elsdén is a Chancellor’s Fellow in Service Design, in the Institute for Design Informatics, working across the Edinburgh Futures Institute and Edinburgh College of Art. He is a sociologically-oriented design researcher, based in the field of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), most recently exploring design of, and with, FinTech, Money Systems, DLTs and Transactional Data.

### Panel Session 4

#### Capitalism, Crisis, and Right-Wing Extremism

##### *Cycles of Fascism?: Gramsci, Conjunctures, and the Situational Analysis*

Stephen Shapiro (University of Warwick)

The 1970s saw an overlapping production of concerns about new literary forms (“postmodernism”), the crisis of military Keynesianism, and a debate over the definition of fascism (lampooned as “Hitler Studies” in DeLillo’s *White Noise*). Given the analogous concerns about the tenability or metamorphosis of neoliberalism, the rise of far-right politics in Western polities, and new media forms, I want to review another product of the 1970s—Gramscian Cultural Studies and Stuart Hall’s promulgation of a “conjunctural analysis” as a mode of social analysis and inquiry into cultural forms.

The argument in this talk is relatively straightforward. Using a reading of the oft-quoted sections from *The Prison Notebooks*, I will argue that almost entirely, contemporary uses of “the conjuncture” is a misreading of the passage. Gramsci instead raises the question of what he calls a “situational analysis” as the complex of the organic and the conjunctural. The organic doesn’t mean the authentic or transcendental, since Marxists took their use of the word from nineteenth-century organic chemistry, seen as the revolutionary science producing new material forms in rejection of ancient regime, para-alchemical studies. Similarly, the “conjunctural” doesn’t mean a sort of “woke” systemic analysis, but is taken from left-wing discussions of the business cycle, begun by Lasalle in the 1860s, but renewed in the debates over the rise of fascism and whether it is akin to cyclical downturns or if it stands as new structure as a whole. I’ll argue for the former and claim Gramsci did as well.

Stephen Shapiro teaches in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. Their work on Cultural Studies and the Capitalist World-System includes *The Culture and Commerce of the Early American Novel: Reading the World-System* (2008) and *Tracking Capital: World-Systems, World-Ecology, World-Culture* (with Sharae Deckard and Michael Niblett) (SUNY Press, 2024).

##### *The Interwar Dystopias and Early Welfare Economics*

Signe Leth Gammelgaard (Lund University)

In this presentation I will discuss the early welfare economics in relation to the interwar anti-totalitarian narratives in literature. Based on my current project, I will outline the changes that took place in economic thinking and the discipline of economics during the first decades of the twentieth century and relate it to the development of statistics and econometrics as tools for population management and statecraft. Using this as the context, I will then suggest interpreting the prevalence of the interwar dystopia as a response to these changes in economic tools and

methods, and I will outline in particular the critiques they voice and the alternative value systems or philosophies that they propose.

My approach is comparative, and I will thus discuss examples from three different literary texts, namely Rose Macaulay's *What Not*, Karin Boye's *Kallockain*, and Ayn Rand's *Anthem*. Addressing developments in three different states during this period, these novels engage with various variants of welfare programs from socialist planning to market-oriented welfare states. In all three cases, however, thinking in the discipline of economics was influenced by how to use and develop statistics and econometrics to shape a population fit for an expanded state. Thus, the effect is twofold: it changes the statecraft according to the needs of the population, but it also changes the population according to the needs of the state. Therefore, the visions and ideals for a well-lived human life, that are at work in this period's thinking, is well worth examining.

Signe Leth Gammelgaard is postdoc at Lund University whose research focuses on the intersection between literary and economic history. Prior work explored the shift from realism to decadence in the nineteenth-century novel as related to economic changes, and her current project examines the literary interwar dystopias in a comparative perspective.

#### *Apocalyptic Futures of the Economy – Thinking After the “Red Pill”*

Philip Roscoe (University of St Andrews)

Economic action of all kinds is future facing, based on promises, narratives and expectations (Beckert, 2016). The economies of neoliberalism have relied upon a consistent imaginary: the instrumentally rational homo oeconomicus of economic theory, at the centre of a perpetually benevolent, self-organizing market (Roscoe, 2014). But these futures are exhausted (Beckert, 2020) and now we encounter “post neoliberalism” (Davies & Gane, 2021). In place of Smith's benevolent exchange stands Girard's (2011) mimetic desire and scapegoating: the eschatological discourse of ‘founder as victim, founder as god’, in the words of Peter Thiel (Ibled, 2025). Voice (Hirschman, 1977) is forgotten, exit the only true right. Digital technologies offer modes of communication and tribalism (and ‘red pilling’, a performative disavowal of the intellectual and institutional establishment) but also a sociotechnical expression of new narrative futures: AI, cryptocurrency, space colonies, and marine cities. This future is a place of darkness and collapse, an apocalyptic expectation of the rapture via ecological collapse, a self-annihilating technological singularity, or societal breakdown and zombie apocalypse, the ‘TEOTWAWKI’ and ‘WTSHTF’ of bunker ‘preppers’. Through an ongoing secondary reading of the intellectual histories of the new right, this paper seeks to offer an account of the promissory expectations and socio-technical imaginaries of the economy after neoliberalism, and to consider how these might perform (Callon, 1998) actually existing markets. It asks what values, rationalities, and beliefs can be constructed in the economy when the end of it all is just around the corner. What does economic action mean, once you have been ‘red pillled’?

Philip Roscoe is Professor of Management at the University of St Andrews. His research takes a sociological approach to markets: he has researched and written on financial markets, online dating, Santa's Lapland hideaway, and many other topics. He has published in leading sociology and management journals and is Co-Editor in Chief of *Journal of Cultural Economy*.

## Institutions of Financialization

### *The Darkening Moves of Institutional Investment: Suburban Malls, Town Centres, Internet Logistics, and Railway Arches*

Liz McFall (University of Edinburgh)

While asset managers are a new kind of financial intermediary, the institutional practice of managing financial assets is not. Insurance operates through structures of ownership and investment extending across time and space in patterns that have had dramatic consequences on the built environment and the social infrastructures of everyday life. Life insurers have allocated assets, mobilized funds and made investment decisions for as long as they have sold insurance. For over a century insurance assets have been invested internationally with a few companies building and developing property assets on a scale that defined the shape of commercial real estate, the appearance of suburban malls and provincial town centres in the second half of the twentieth century. In the 21st century insurance companies and pension funds are the primary institutional investors that fuel the ‘age of asset management’. Yet their role is increasingly opaque, threaded and rethreaded through the third-party structures and practices of the giant global assets managers including Blackstone, Brookfield and Macquarie. Some of the insurers most involved in commercial real estate are now immersed in ‘alternative asset’ investment, orchestrating the social, material and carbon consequences of the core infrastructures, including retail media, logistics and data warehouses, of the digital economy.

The paper explores these issues by investigating how former life insurers, moved from small scale investment in property assets to urban development projects to alternative asset investment strategies over time. It exposes how deeply these investments influenced the material form of retail environments.

Liz McFall is Personal Chair in the Sociology of Markets and Director of Data Civics Observatory at Edinburgh Futures Institute. Her interdisciplinary research interests cross the social studies of insurance, cultural economy and market studies. Liz is joint EiC of the *Journal of Cultural Economy*, author/editor of *Devising Consumption: cultural economies of insurance, credit and spending* (2014), *Markets and the Arts of Attachment* (2017), *Advertising: a cultural economy* (2004) and publishes in journals including *British Journal of Sociology*, *Economy and Society* and *Big Data and Society*.

### *The Rise of the Creditor State: Authoritative Financialisation in the UK's Higher Education Sector*

Tamar Nir (University of Warwick)

This paper introduces the concept of authoritative financialisation to describe how financialised states increasingly use debt as a tool of governance. It argues that financialisation should be applied to explain the dismantling of the welfare state – not as evidence of state withdrawal, but as an expansion of state power through financial tools and logics in public goods provision.

Building on literature that positions the state as central to financialisation, I argue that authoritative financialisation is distinct in its use of debt as a disciplinary mechanism rather than a profit generating asset. In this framework, the state embeds financial logics into public policy to shift responsibility for funding and maintaining public goods onto individuals. This shift reconfigures state power rather than diminishing it. By embedding financial norms into public policy, the state retains control over the provision and regulation of public goods while transferring the financial risk to individual borrowers.

To illustrate this, I examine the 2012 UK higher education reforms, which replaced tuition fees with government-backed income-contingent repayment (ICR) loans. I argue that the state's creditor role reflects a fundamental shift in its relationship with public services and society. The unique terms of these loans show not only the incorporation of financial logic into policymaking but also how ICR loans enable the government to control the public deficit, aligning with the disciplinary role of debt in authoritative financialisation.

Tamar Nir is a Teaching Fellow in International Political Economy at the University of Warwick, with a PhD in Cultural Economy from King's College London. Their interdisciplinary research draws on economic sociology, political economy, and cultural economy to explore government-backed loans, market making, and financialised economies.

*Pension Funds as Change Agents? Exploring the Limited Agency of Pension Funds in Driving Fossil Fuel Phaseout*

Clara McDonnell (University of Amsterdam)

Since the signing of the Paris Agreement, there has been a growing expectation and perception that finance will rise to the challenge of addressing climate change. Efforts to do so have often been led by large public pension funds with a clear interest in protecting the future for their beneficiaries. However, in the decade that has since passed, these promises have largely fallen short. This paper asks, how can we expect pension funds to act as agents of change for phasing out fossil fuels? Drawing on interview data as well as analysis of pension and industry publications, I examine the strategies adopted by pension funds, the ways that these strategies are framed by pension funds, and the barriers to effectiveness identified. While not underplaying the massive influence held by large institutional investors, this paper aims to contribute to a more clear-eyed understanding of both the opportunities and limits of pension fund agency for climate mitigation and where other interventions will be necessary.

Clara McDonnell is a PhD candidate at the University of Amsterdam, where she also received her MSc in International Development Studies. Her research is part of an ERC funded project on climate change and fossil fuels and focuses on the role of pension funds and institutional investors in phasing out fossil fuels.

## **Economies of Faith, Belief, and Enchantment**

*Disagreements about Enchantment: An Exploration of Diverging Historiographic Commitments*

Samuel O'Connor Perks (University of Manchester)

Recent historiography covering the interaction between Christianity and capitalism in modernity is divided over whether enchantment still plays a role in market civilisation. Although most historians seem to agree that political economy and faith became increasingly separate from the early nineteenth century onwards, some scholars have argued that vestiges of earlier religious conviction continued to hold sway. For example, Eugene McCarraher's 2019 book *The Enchantments of Mammon* argues that, in contrast to Max Weber, despite the many variations of capitalist cultures across the last two hundred years, our relation to money and commodities is still of an enchanted nature. By contrast, while historians such as A. M. C. Waterman acknowledge that remnants of theology were at play in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and that Thomas Robert Malthus had inherited William Paley's theodicy within his *Essay on*

*Population*, all traces of religious essence appear to have dissipated in the contemporary world. McCarraher and Waterman's respective positions are exemplary of a broader fault line within historiography as to whether economic activity remains bound to a position of faith or belief. This paper will initially offer an overview of some of the key recent interventions in the historiography of Christianity and capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, before further unpacking the philosophical implications of these differing standpoints.

Samuel O'Connor Perks is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at the University of Manchester. He is an intellectual historian with research interests at the intersection of religion, politics and culture, primarily in the twentieth century. His first book, titled *Off-Modern Catholic Aesthetics*, was published by Brill earlier this year.

*Believing in Characters: Homo Economicus and the "Truth" Function of Character Licensing*  
Dario Lolli (Durham University)

What does it mean to believe in fictional characters? And what are the economic implications of such 'believing'? Media consumers are often said to 'believe' in characters, as certain truth-making practices are required to attribute personalities to composite mixes of graphic images and voice acting. Yet, despite cultural consumption being recognised as productive, believing in characters is frequently dismissed as childish or even pathological. This assumption underpins the notion of the adult, liberal individual as a rational and intentional subject vis-à-vis the childlike and emotional media fan, allegedly unable to distinguish reality from fiction. This paper challenges this assumption through a focus on licensing trade shows, the cyclical professional events that punctuate the global flow of merchandise goods, promotions, and events based on leased intellectual property. Within these contexts, certainties regarding the superior rationality of the 'homo economicus' begin to blur, as creatives and IP managers also appear to 'believe' in characters, all the more so because they invest in and monetise them as intellectual property. Adopting a visual culture approach to licensing trade, this paper illustrates how seemingly natural and frictionless economic operations are contingently mediated by heterogeneous assemblages of data, goods, architectures, and repeatable technical standards. In these settings, animated characters come to act as 'market devices', revealing the sensorial and affective dispositions underpinning 'rational' business operations. Instead of taking character licensing as an eminently juridical or economic function, this paper thus invites us to reconsider it as a 'truth' function not unlike that of fans: believing in characters.

Dario Lolli is Assistant Professor in Japanese and Visual Culture at Durham University. His in-progress monograph investigates transnational licensing across the formal distribution, unauthorized appropriation, and counterfeiting of Japanese media franchises. A Leverhulme International Fellow, he is further extending this framework by considering licensing practices beyond the media industries.

*Sacred Excess: Money Between Fraud and Forgiveness*  
Joshua Ramey (Haverford College)

Disagreements over what money is, can be, and should be, tend to play out between two dreams. On the one hand, the dream of a fiat currency that would be entirely a creature of law, and whose value would lie entirely within social and political debate. On the other, the dream of a store of value that would somehow be given beyond all such debate. Yet there seems to be no money without the disappointment of both dreams. The deep tension seemingly sustained in money



between a spiritual (immaterial, political) dimension, and a physical (material, apolitical) feature has animated philosophical debates at least since the early Greeks (Seaford 2004). Money's paradoxical ontology has inspired entire theologies (Goodchild 2009) and has been studied as a complex tool of sacred-cum-secular power by my collaborator Devin Singh (2018). In this presentation I will focus on the irreducibly surplus dimension of money (Kordela 2012), its excessive, wasteful, and even toxic dimensions (Dodd 2014). This is that dimension of money that once led Norman O. Brown (1985) to associate money closely with the Freudian death drive, and even with excrement. The question here is how to grapple with a negativity that both defies politics and requires continuous repoliticization (Deleuze and Guattari 2009). In this paper I examine the contributions to this debate of an underdiscussed work by the French philosopher and bioethicist Henri Atlan, *Fraud: The World of Ona'ah*. Atlan argues that the seemingly ungovernable aspects of money (and the ever-present potential for fraud) are not unique to it, but reflect limitations on human discourse that make our evaluations both subject to fraud (foreclosing some futures in advance) but sites of forgiveness (where futures can begin again).

Joshua Ramey is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Peace, Justice, and Human Rights at Haverford College in Philadelphia. He is the author, among other works, of *Politics of Divination: Neoliberal Endgame and the Religion of Contingency*. His most recent publication "Elemental: Denise Ferreira da Silva's Raw Materialist Justice," appears in a *Religions* special issue, *Religion in Extractive Zones*.

## Literature, Language, and Economics

*Literary Economics, Economic Criticism, and the Economic Humanities: Branding Economic-Literary-Cultural Research in the 21st Century*  
Joanna Rostek (Justus Liebig University Giessen)

This paper will represent a contribution from a research network funded by the German Research Foundation DFG, titled "Methodologies of Economic Criticism" ([www.economic-criticism.com](http://www.economic-criticism.com)). The aim of our network, which unites academics from English Studies, has been to get an overview and systematise the various approaches to analysing the money, finance, and the economy with the methods of literary, cultural, and media studies, but also to analysing literature, culture, and the media using tools and ideas borrowed from economics.

In my paper, I will present a selection of our preliminary results. In particular, I shall comment on three overlapping endeavours to put literary-economic and cultural-economic considerations more firmly on the map of 21st-century literary and cultural studies: Literary Economics (Balint and Zilles); Economic Criticism (Rostek, Pleßke, and Grünkemeier); and the Economic Humanities (Crosthwaite, Knight, and Marsh). I will discuss the points of convergence as well as the differences between these projects and raise the question of their success in terms of 'academic branding'.

Joanna Rostek is supernumerary professor of English Literary and Cultural Studies at the University of Giessen. She is the author of the prize-winning monograph, *Women's Economic Thought in the Romantic Age: Towards a Transdisciplinary Herstory of Economic Thought* and principal investigator of the research network, "Methodologies of Economic Criticism", funded by the German Research Foundation.

*“Eating Money”: How Money Metaphors Can Convey Critiques of Consumption*

Rachel E. Smith (University of Aberdeen)

This paper draws on ethnographic data, including from my own fieldwork in Vanuatu, as well as interdisciplinary approaches to economic metaphors, to focus on a form of ‘money talk’. Specifically, I argue that attention to such metaphors helps uncover assumptions embedded in economic models, as well as alternative vernacular economic principles, often entwined with moral, political, and religious ideas. Ethnographic accounts from around the world show that idioms of ‘eating’ (and related metaphors such as ‘burning’ or ‘killing’ money) are widespread. While these vernacular tropes lend themselves to comparison with economic concepts of ‘consumption’, they also convey deeply moral and spiritual meanings and values. They thus reveal vernacular spatio-temporal and social principles that offer grounds for critique of individualistic economic behaviours; critiques that could be extended to assumptions underpinning some mainstream economic theories.

Rachel E. Smith is an anthropologist at University of Aberdeen. Her research focuses on local moral economic perspectives on development and social change in Vanuatu (Western Pacific). She examines themes of work, consumption, investment, and value, in relation to both overseas labour migration and the production of kava, a ritually significant plant, and now Vanuatu’s main export commodity.

*“Splenetic Indifference” Curves: The Literary Origins of Modern Microeconomics*

Dominic Walker (University of Cambridge)

Money talks, but economists and humanities scholars seldom do. Seeking common ground in the literary origins of foundational economic ideas, this paper is part of a project to reintroduce two fields. It focuses on Léon Walras (1834–1910), whose *Elements of Pure Economics* (1874) was one of the first texts to formulate a theory of ‘marginal utility’, without which there could be no modern mathematical economics. After that, Walras set about wrestling his simultaneous equations into a procrustean semblance of the economy as a whole, now known as ‘General Equilibrium’ theory. Variants such as ‘Computed General Equilibrium’ (CGE) remain the preferred ‘tools’ of the UK’s Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR 2025, Web). Walras’ economic innovations can be traced to his development as a literary writer. *Francis Sauveur* (1858) is a dated but respectable imitation of Balzac, who Walras once named as his favourite novelist. It involves a somewhat caddish, Rastignac-like protagonist falling in and out of love with women and politics, before withdrawing ‘to place of solitude where the world cannot reach [him] and [he] can remain faithful to [his] dream’ (Walras 1858, qu. Jaffé 1983, 19). It is fine. *La lettre* (1859) is much better. Where Francis Sauveur trails off, Walras’ final nouvelle writes past the renunciation of material concerns, accelerating towards the timelier themes of ‘ennui’ and ‘splenetic indifference’, a direct quotation from Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1840–1857). One of Walras’ biographers even notices that the protagonist, Henri (ennui?), might be modelling ‘marginalism in embryo’ some fifteen years before the publication of the *Elements* (Jaffé 1983 [1977], 110). The paper will do its best not to conclude with the same shrugging indifference as that biographer.

Dominic Walker is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Cambridge University. His research aims to convince economists to engage with scholars in the humanities, whose work has long been regarded as hopelessly ideographic and inimical to economic science. His current project therefore shows that the modern discipline of Economics was founded on ideas developed in the literary writing of a dozen major economists.

## Panel Session 5

### Forecasting, Financialization, and Futurity

#### *From Pluvius Policies to Wildfire Markets: A History of Weather Gambling and the Financialization of Catastrophe*

Jamie Pietruska (Rutgers University-New Brunswick)

In the past five years, the twin crises of the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate emergency have accelerated the financialization of catastrophe – and revealed its limits. The start of the pandemic in 2020 saw the resurgence of weather gambling when professional sports leagues shut down, and the intensification of extreme weather and natural hazards has led to increased volumes of weather derivatives and catastrophe bonds. But insurance experts now question whether catastrophe bonds accurately price climate risk, and major private insurers have begun to pull out of US regions with high wildfire and flooding risk. And in a ghoulish example of speculation on death and destruction, the crypto betting site Polymarket offered event markets on the LA wildfires in January 2025. At first glance, these phenomena can be understood as the culmination of the late-20th-century acceleration of global warming and the sharp increase in billion-dollar disasters in US and global insurance and reinsurance markets. But reaching back further to the late 19th and early 20th centuries to consider a longer history of speculating on the weather reveals a different and more complex relationship between weather gambling and the financialization of catastrophe. This paper will consider earlier examples of speculative weather markets – including monsoon betting in late 19th-century India, speculation on rain insurance (“Pluvius”) policies in early 20th-century Europe and the US, and weather gambling syndicates in mid-20th-century US cities – that show how 21st-century catastrophe markets have individualized formerly collective forms of weather-related risk.

Jamie Pietruska is a historian of knowledge production in economic life in the modern US. Her first book, *Looking Forward: Prediction and Uncertainty in Modern America*, explains how Americans came to believe in the promise and accept the limitations of forecasting. Her current research project is “Weather Capitalism: Speculating on the Weather from Rainfall Lotteries to Wildfire Markets.”

#### *Modelling Sustainable Futures in Literary and Economic Narrative*

Stefanie Mueller (Freie Universität Berlin)

Sustainability is a famously controversial term, and yet it dominates the official discourse of what societies can hope for, even should aspire to, in times of climate change and environmental degradation. While much of the criticism that the term has received is fully justified, it does present a vision of the future that offers a counterweight to the uncertainty by which the future in times of climate change is actually beset. In fact, it offers a vision of the future in which uncertainty is managed and in which, quite often, a balance is achieved. In this presentation, I will look at two narratives in which models of sustainable futures are presented: one is the most recent report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the other is a novelette by Andrew Dana Hudson, *Our Shared Storm*. In fact, Hudson’s piece of speculative fiction is based on the Shared Socio-Economic Pathways, five scenario narratives, that are included in the report for the first time.

My talk will focus first on how narrative modelling works in the SSP scenarios and in the literary text: the SSP scenarios already provide narrativization of the Integrated Assessment Models, while Hudson's novelette can be said to further develop those narratives, pull them deeper into literariness proper. This gradual movement from abstract model to concrete narrative provides a unique opportunity to analyze how economics and literature respectively model sustainable futures. While this inquiry is the primary goal of this talk, a secondary but related one emerges. As I will argue in conclusion, the use of scenarios as a futures methodology raises the important question of how each discourse – the economic and the literary – approaches the management of uncertainty.

Stefanie Mueller is the chair of Literature at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin, Germany. Her research interests combine the legal, economic, and environmental humanities in projects that address climate change and the social affordances of literature, indigenous poetry & lyrical challenges to US law, and the aesthetics of literary & economic modelling.

### *Futures of Work: Storytelling and Scenario Thinking in the Workplace*

James Dorson (Freie Universität Berlin)

This paper examines the use of scenario analysis in forecasting futures of work. Ever since corporate strategists during the 1970s adopted scenario thinking from Cold War military planning, economic forecasters have turned increasingly to fictional scenarios for exploring uncertain futures and developing strategic foresight. Under the motto "learning from the future," futurists have used geopolitical turbulence and accelerated technological disruption as a reason for endorsing speculative storytelling methods in addition to data-based economic modeling. This paper inquires into the affordances and functions of the scenario form for navigating futures of work. I analyze two recent reports issued by the World Economic Forum that use scenarios to model futures of work. I compare these institutional futures with more "literary" scenarios about future work collected in two volumes of sf stories commissioned by private think tanks. Based on these readings, I propose to understand scenarios as not merely descriptions of possible worlds, but as prescriptive tools. Addressed to "decision-makers" and biased toward market solutions centered around agile governance, I argue that futures of work scenarios are used to restructure workplaces and disempower labor movements. Finally, I look at recent novels about digital labor and automation in order to contrast the scenario form with novelistic futures of work.

James Dorson is assistant professor of literature at the John F. Kennedy Institute for North American Studies, Freie Universität Berlin. Among his publications are *Counternarrative Possibilities: Virgin Land, Homeland, and Cormac McCarthy's Westerns* (Campus 2016) and the coedited volume *Fictions of Management: Efficiency and Control in American Literature and Culture* (Winter 2019).

### **Theory, Philosophy, and Economy**

#### *Nihilism – Philosophical, Economic, Financial*

Amin Samman (City St George's, University of London)

Contemporary economics tends to wave off the kind of philosophical discourse associated with nihilism. What purchase could it possibly provide on the logic of markets, trade, and investment? Yet economic history is full of encounters with the premonition that nothing is something worth

taking seriously. Indeed, the historical development of economy presents economic thought with all the problems that philosophy collects under the rubric of nihilism. This is perhaps most obvious in connection with financial themes, which have risen to prominence in economic discourse alongside the ascent of money, banking, and finance. This paper develops a broad account of economic and financial nihilism in three steps. First, it locates modern nihilism at the crossroads of philosophy and economics. It then connects the historical development of nihilism to the so-called financialization of capitalism. Finally, it distinguishes the theory and philosophy of financial nihilism as I am pursuing it here from the discourse on nihilism emerging in contemporary financial commentary.

Amin Samman is Reader in International Political Economy at City St George's, University of London. His research explores the temporal, historical, and existential aspects of contemporary finance. He is founder and editor-in-chief of the journal *Finance and Society*, author of *History in Financial Times*, and editor of *Clickbait Capitalism*. His forthcoming book is titled *Currency of Nihilism*.

*Feminism, Marxism, Commoning: An Argument against Confusion in Contemporary Art*  
Angela Dimitrakaki (University of Edinburgh)

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the confusion that often arises in socially engaged art practice between feminist economics focused on 'commoning' and the integrated economy as understood through Marxist feminism. Commoning practices are now normative in art, often featured and documented in major exhibitions as counter-hegemonic examples. Although such art practices tend to be critical of capitalism (or at least of its social effects), they do not provide nor begin from a systematic analysis of what capital is and how it generates and propagates the system called 'capitalism'. It is precisely this that allows such practices to conflate two distinct and mutually exclusive understandings of the economy: one that accepts the parallel existence of capitalist and non-capitalist economies, as seen in the postmodern practice of J.K. Gibson-Graham, and one, closer to Silvia Federici's autonomist Marxist feminism, that sees capitalism as imbricating all labour into the totality of exploitation and extractivism. This paper argues for a careful differentiation between the two approaches that might enable more effective (revolutionary) planning against the reality of the capitalist economy.

Angela Dimitrakaki is Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory at the University of Edinburgh. Her forthcoming books are *Feminism, Art, Capitalism* (Pluto Press 2025) and *Depression Era: A Collective Lens in the Age of Crisis* (co-edited with A. Strecker, K8 2025). In 2025 Angela was awarded a Leverhulme Research Fellowship for Family as Metaphor in Art and Photography.

*Uprising Marks: Inflation and Bare Life*  
Kieran Brown (University of Oxford) and Wayne Stables (University of South Africa)

This paper attempts to understand inflation, particularly the Weimar Hyperinflation, in its affective dimension. Interested in the ways money relates to, and constitutes, the bodies of those under its influence, we suggest that, even though the kind of inflation we experience today has only been around since Richard Nixon's abandonment of the gold standard in 1972, capitalism has always in some sense been inflationary. While neoclassical economics understands inflation in terms of money's relation to commodities (more money is required to buy less goods), we contend that the real referent of inflation is labour and the body. Using the writings of Walter

Benjamin as a frame, this paper suggests that the latter's notion of "bare life" must be understood as an inflationary category – something prefigured in Marx's labour theory of value. This is a far cry from Giorgio Agamben's refunctioning of that term in *Homo Sacer* (where he emphasises bare life's link to "guilt" rather than "debt"). Benjamin's conception of "bare life," on the contrary, suggests that capitalism only gets off the ground once it has dematerialised our means of subsistence. Labour itself is retroactively abstracted into capital. (Indeed, this retroactivity hints at money's hidden temporal structure). Such an understanding not only opens new ways of theorising inflation's effects, it also allows us to salvage a different kind of political possibility, one that requires we stay alert to the medium – money itself – that turns our lives into labour power.

Kieran Brown just completed his PhD in English at the University of Oxford. His research focusses primarily on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature, critical theory and economics. He is currently working on an edited collection, "Inflationary Modernities," that offers new ways to understand inflation as a cultural, literary and economic concept.

Wayne Stables is Associate Professor in Theory of Literature at the University of South Africa and author of numerous articles on literature and philosophy, including "K.'s Debt: The Economy of 'The Trial'" (*New Centennial Review*), and most recently, "As if the Humanities Were Dead: Remembering the University" (*Angelaki*). Wayne is co-editor with Kieran Brown of the forthcoming edited collection: "Inflationary Modernities" (Palgrave).

### **The Political Economy of Gender, Sexuality, and the Family**

*The Sex of Economics: Beauty Contests, Masculine Oversight, and the Subject of Value*  
Laurine Lièvremont and Fabian Muniesa (Mines Paris – PSL)

That economic knowledge is cluttered with metaphors (of health and disease, of salvation, of circulating fluids, of energy, of information and computation) is a well-established fact. That such metaphors have political traction (they delineate perimeters of inclusion and exclusion, they define who the economic subject can or cannot be) constitutes, also, a well-researched reality. What is perhaps less clear is how "sex" works as a constitutive template in economics. There is an emerging body of work on the meaning of economic masculinity that opens that path: not towards a consideration of women within the field of economics (e.g., female scholarship) or of women as economic agents from the perspective of economics (e.g., gender inequality), but rather towards the examination of the ascendancy of masculine (or masculinist) imagination in economic language. The "Keynesian beauty contest" (a device offered by John Maynard Keynes in his 1936 *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* to make sense of the emergence of a convention of economic valuation needed in order to prompt an "inducement to invest") is a most notorious element of the economic common sense, both mainstream and critical. It carries palpable connotations of eroticism, sexism, voyeurism and fetishism: the image of a manly brotherhood of investors assessing the value of an asset, considered not as a common object of desire (a female model) but rather as the spectacle of their own enticement. This metaphor, we claim, largely controls the dominant meaning of economic value (and of who watches over it).

Laurine Lièvremont, a doctoral student at the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation, Mines Paris – PSL (France), is carrying out research on gendered metaphors in computational macroeconomic modelling.

Fabian Muniesa, a researcher at the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation, Mines Paris – PSL (France), is the author of *The Provoked Economy* (Routledge, 2014) and *Paranoid Finance* (Polity, 2024).

*Women, Economic Inequalities, and the Narratives that Shape their Understanding*  
Sophie Knowles (Middlesex University)

A series of economic crises, and policies that have focused on austerity measures, have reversed women's economic participation and opportunities, creating a gap that will take 267 years to close. However, news coverage on the economy is arguably gendered, as few women feature as expert sources, and when they are featured as subjects of news stories women are in domestic roles with little agency or power. A paucity of research has analysed how women learn about the economy, or how their opinions about the economy may be driven by media narratives and news stories. To address this gap, this research takes an inclusive approach to the recruitment of women from low income and ethnic minority backgrounds in North London – a group acutely impacted by the pandemic. The research design moved across four months at the height of the cost-of-living-crisis in 2022, conducting in-depth interviews, open discussions, informative sessions with the charity Economy, and creative workshops to co-curate stories about the economy. The results demonstrate the reliance that women have on their community, family, and social media as sources they use frequently to understand economic developments. In contrast, they expressed cynicism around traditional news, and they do not trust the UK's most well-known brands such as the *Guardian* or BBC. Participants expressed both awareness and apathy about inequalities in their community, and little understanding about the structural reasons that explain them. These results provide some useful recommendations for policy and practitioners.

Sophie is an Associate Professor in journalism. She researches the reporting of economic crisis and policy and considers implications for disadvantaged audiences. She has been exploring the gendered production of economic news and is project lead on #myeconomytoo, an AHRC funded project.

*"The Future Lies in Children": Commodifying Childbearing and the Discursive Construction of "Ideal Families" Through Family Policy in Hungary*  
Jorge Andres Quintero-Sanchez (University of Bristol) and Eirini Ktori (University of Edinburgh)

Trumpeted as the future, finance has served as a political haven for the past two decades. Instead of financing social needs, families face market pressures via mortgages, debt, and financing, making credit and risk household norms that push families to the periphery of financial capitalism. Despite extensive literature on gendered welfare (Fraser, 1994; Orloff, 1992; Sainsbury, 2008), the relationship between the state and financialising households is understudied. It is crucial to examine how households interact with the state and how male-designed welfare policies reinforce women's role in reproduction, sustaining capitalism via unpaid labour but also reproducing the nation. However, this necessitates reflection on race and class (Williams, 1999; 2001; Yuval-Davis, 1999). In this paper, we explore family policy changes and its gradual expansion since 2010 under Orbán's premiership. By bringing novel insights from radio speeches over time we examine how live discourse is part of the government's pro-natal economic agenda. We focus on the role and function of Hungary's family housing subsidy scheme, CSOK, examining how it has been leveraged as a tool for social exclusion. Specifically, we explore how the scheme favours married, heteronormative, Christian couples with stable formal employment. The construction of the "ideal" household and native families, we argue,

boosts sectors like construction and work-based welfare. This state policy turns households into financial investment units. Financial incentives shape reproduction as economic acts. Under Orbán, wombs become economic assets that drive the economy.

Jorge Andres Quintero-Sanchez is a Political Economist studying the process of financial expansion in Emerging Capitalist Economies with particular interest in Latin America. His interest in these issues is through the use of institutional discourse analysis in macroeconomic policy. He focuses on the politics of Macrofinance in Central Banks with additional interest in International Financial Institutions and Corporate finance.

Eirini Ktori is a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh whose research examines how language is used in Hungarian family policy to induce gender norms. Eirini's research takes a Discourse Historical Approach and focuses on the mediation of family policies under the Fidesz conservative government. It is rooted in interpretive approaches seeking to deconstruct public radio speeches from 2014 onwards.

### **Literature and Planetary Economic Visions**

*At the Limits of Capital: Globalizing Libidinal Economies and the Deterritorialization of Desire in Hermann Broch and Leslie Marmon Silko*  
Alwin Franke (Stetson University)

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels describe how the creation of a world market is tied to the emergence of “new wants [*Bedürfnisse*], requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes.” Taking up the insight that capitalism requires specific libidinal operations for its emergence and functioning, my project argues that the “world literature” that arises from capital’s cosmopolitan drive must be understood as both an agent and an archive of this process of globalizing desire. Weaving together recent debates on World Literature (Apter, Damrosch, Spivak) and Universal History (Arrighi, Buck-Morss, Christian), my current book project envisions a literary history of capital focusing on the processes of metamorphosis that are unleashed at its geographical, temporal, and imaginary limits. Part of this broader project, the paper I propose for the conference “Money Talks” will analyze the libidinal economy of capital in two novels that serve as case studies of two distinct “limits” of capital: first, Broch’s 1930–32 trilogy *The Sleepwalkers*, which traces the metamorphoses of capital and desire in the period of financialization between 1888–1918 from the vantage point of the direct aftermath of the Great Crash of 1929; second, Silko’s 1991 *Almanac of the Dead*, which chronicles the 500-year-long conjunction of capital, violence, and desire at the colonial frontiers of the Americas at the eve of the Columbus Quincentenary. My paper shows how, in the novelistic prose of Silko and Broch, both watershed moments offer unique perspectives and different temporalities on the deterritorialization of desire that operates “the cycles of accumulation” (Arrighi) from within.

Alwin Franke is Assistant Professor of German in the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Stetson University. Trained in comparative literature, philosophy and history at Freie Universität Berlin, Alwin received his PhD from Columbia University. He specializes in German literature and critical thought with particular focus on their epistemic contexts in the sciences, media and the social.



*World Literature, a planned economy of*

Sándor Hites (HUN-REN Research Center for the Humanities, Budapest)

In the past twenty-five years, the concept of “world literature” has been passionately debated in comparative literature. In the wake of explorations of a “world literary system” alongside a systemic world-economy (Casanova 1999, Moretti 2004), it has increasingly become a truism that the transnational circulation of texts is wedded to the operations of global capitalism and thereby share its complicity in entwining economic exploitation with cultural appropriation (Apter 2013, Cheah 2016, Mani 2017, Mufti 2016, Warwick 2015).

I argue that with this routinized identification of world literature as the cultural manifestation of modern capitalism per se, we are losing sight of an important historical and theoretical dynamic. Early nineteenth-century conceptualizations of cross-cultural exchange—by J. W. Goethe, Thomas Carlyle, J. G. Fichte, Friedrich List, or Karl Marx—show a remarkable conceptual variability in economic modeling that offers to be rendered in five patterns: 1) free trade, 2) the gift, 3) planned exchange, 4) protectionism, 5) common possessiveness.

In the paper I focus on the third pattern, based on the blueprint of Fichte’s 1800 treatise *Der geschlossene Handelsstaat*, in which he advocated for supervised intellectual exchanges between otherwise insular states with centrally directed, self-sufficient economies. I will argue that as much as it harked back to early-modern East Asian models of “closed kingdoms,” Fichte’s design also prefigured the most formidable counter-system of capitalist globalization, namely the command economy of socialist internationalism in the Soviet Republic of Letters. More recently, it became newly familiar during the 2020–22 pandemic, when, as in Fichte’s world, the circulation of cultural goods (in digitized form) went on even if cross-border economic flows and the physical movement of people came to a halt.

Sándor Hites is Senior Research Fellow at the Research Center for the Humanities, Institute for Literary Studies in Budapest, Hungary. Between 2019 and 2024 he was the principal researcher of the Lendület Research Group “The political economy of Hungarian literature in the Nineteenth Century” housed at the Institute. His monographic book *Five Economies of World Literature* is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press in 2025.

*Apocalyptic Capitalism: The Capitalocene in Octavia Butler’s Parable of the Sower*

Elsa Bouet (Edinburgh Napier University)

In 1994, Fredric Jameson wrote that ‘It seems to be easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism,’ which he revised in 2003, suggesting we have ‘to imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world.’ We can thus understand Jason Moore’s concept of the capitalocene as both a limitation to creative imaginings of political alternatives and the cause of environmental collapse. While Octavia Butler’s *Parable of the Sower* has been read as a response to slavery, religion, capitalism, and environmental concerns, my aim is to offer new readings which show the novel frames the capitalocene as apocalyptic. In the novel, Lauren and her family struggle to survive in their walled-off community near Los Angeles, protecting a dying middle-class way of life. As food becomes scarce and inequalities increase, Lauren’s community is destroyed and, as she travels north, she witnesses the extent of environmental destruction. The narrative exposes the ways in which capitalism has historically cheapened nature and imagines how an ever-growing deregulation leads to corporations gaining ownership of towns and to profiting from the exploitation of the few remaining resources, including humans. While the novel frames

neoliberalism, deregulation and money as destructive to the planet and ourselves, it also offers hope in the form of altruistic, non-transactional relations.

Elsa Bouet is a lecturer in English at Edinburgh Napier University. Her research area is in dystopian fiction, and her current research focuses on decolonising utopian fiction. Her most recent publication, “New Weird Technologies: Subverting Neoliberal Globalisation through Hybridity” appears in *The Edinburgh Companion to Globalgothic*.

### **Additional Delegates**

Simedele Dosekun is an assistant professor in Media and Communications at LSE. Simedele’s research centres African women to explore questions of gender, race, subjectivity, and power. With a colleague, Simedele is currently exploring how African and other women are using popular media technologies, platforms and genres to offer financial literacy and advice to other women as a kind of feminist act.

Alex Freer is Lecturer in Romanticism in the School of Literatures, Languages, and Cultures at Edinburgh. He is finishing a book on lyric poetry and social theory, and beginning a project on aesthetic and financial forms.

Peter Knight is a professor of American Studies at the University of Manchester. He is the author of *Reading the Market* (2019) and co-author of *Invested: How Three Centuries of Stock Market Advice Reshaped Our Money, Markets, and Minds* (2022). Together with Paul Crosthwaite and Nicky Marsh, he curated the “Show Me the Money” exhibition, and edits the book series Palgrave Studies in Literature, Culture, and Economics.

Helena Lyhme is a PhD student at City St George’s, University of London. Her research is about Reinventing the Future of Financial Technologies with Autistic Adults. She worked in the IT industry for 6 years, and has a background in anthropology, computer science and science and technology studies. In her dissertations she looked at the value(s) in volunteer work and free & open source software.

Alicia Mendonca-Richards is a PhD student in the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh, working on the significance of mysticism for economic thought.