






Narratives of the Future II

📅	Friday 12 June	🕒	13:30 - 15:30
📍	IASH Seminar Room, first floor, 2 Hope Park Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9NW and online via Teams		

Moderator: Dr Emrah Atasoy
Speakers: Prof Siân Bayne | Dr Emily Sullivan
 Dr Elsa Bouet | Prof Volker Stümke


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Please register on [Eventbrite](#) for in person or online attendance.

This panel brings together four speakers to explore how we imagine the future and the different approaches that shape our visions of tomorrow. Focusing on interdisciplinary perspectives from literary studies, cultural studies, philosophy, digital education, and political theory, the panel will explore what these fields can contribute to discussions about the future and the challenges we experience in the world today.

The panel features:

Chair: Dr [Emrah Atasoy](#) (The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh)

1. Professor [Siân Bayne](#) (Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh): ***The Contested Futures of Education***
2. Dr [Emily Sullivan](#) (Department of Philosophy, University of Edinburgh): ***Rejecting the Futuristic 'Agent' Narrative of Large Language Models***
3. Dr [Elsa Bouet](#) (Department of English, Edinburgh Napier University): ***'The Fiction of Diplomacy in Science Fiction, or the Futures of Sustained Extractivism'***
4. Prof [Volker Stümke](#) (The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh): ***Reimagining Christian Eschatology for Modern Futures: 'Hell is Empty and All the Devils are Here'***

Together, these talks will open an interdisciplinary dialogue on how the future is imagined, interpreted, and represented across literary and cultural narratives, and how such visions shape our understanding of contemporary global complexities.

Schedule:

13: 30 - 14: 40: Opening Remarks and Presentations

14: 40 - 15: 00: Tea & Coffee Break

15: 00 – 15: 30: Q&A & Closing Remarks

Optional: Drinks at [Summerhall](#)

This interdisciplinary panel is organised by Dr [Emrah Atasoy](#), and hosted by the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh. Tea, coffee, and juice will be provided.

*For any further inquiries, please email Dr Atasoy at Emrah.Atasoy@ed.ac.uk.

ABSTRACTS:

1. Professor [Siân Bayne](#) (Moray House School of Education and Sport, University of Edinburgh): ***The Contested Futures of Education***

This talk will consider the question of education futures by looking at the various approaches to 'futuring' that have shaped it in theory, practice and policy. It will explore in particular the intersections of education and technology, considering the imaginaries, promises and extractions that define these intersections, and looking at what they mean for the ways in which we understand educational purpose.

2. Dr [Emily Sullivan](#) (Department of Philosophy, University of Edinburgh): ***Rejecting the Futuristic 'Agent' Narrative of Large Language Models***

In this talk, I push back against the paradigm that AI models, like large language models should be viewed as agents. I describe what this paradigm entails. Furthermore, I argue that we should hold on to what I call, a model paradigm, where LLMs are model artefacts.

3. Dr [Elsa Bouet](#) (Department of English, Edinburgh Napier University): ***The Fiction of Diplomacy in Science Fiction, or the Futures of Sustained Extractivism'***

Science fiction narratives have a complex relationship with dystopian fiction in that it is not always possible to distinguish between the two. Whether it is space opera, postapocalyptic narratives, alien invasion, or cyberpunk narratives, it is also impossible not to notice elements pertaining to a critique of dystopian neoliberal globalisation. This talk will be framed around de Souza Santos's comment that globalisation is not a 'spontaneous, automatic, unavoidable and irreversible process which intensifies and advances according to an inner logic and dynamism strong enough to impose themselves on any external interferences' (2006, 395) but rather is the result of a set of political decisions. As such, inequality is structured and it is possible to see diplomacy as structured from above, and as such imperialistic and exploitative. I will therefore exemplify through selected texts from Octavia Butler the ways in which diplomacy itself is represented as a fiction, one removes consent and which domineering powers deploy to maintain a neocolonial hegemony allowing for extraction of resources, which includes human labour.

4. Prof [Volker Stumke](#) (The Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh): ***Reimagining Christian Eschatology for Modern Futures: 'Hell is Empty and All the Devils are Here'***

Christian eschatology takes a dual approach to the future. On one hand, it speaks of the Kingdom of God, of eternal salvation and of paradisiacal conditions that await believers after their death, because they have been redeemed from their sins through Jesus Christ. On the other hand, it warns against the devil, who 'roams about like a roaring lion', thereby addressing the present suffering of Christians who are persecuted for their religion and ensuring it is not trivialised. I would like to illustrate how these two poles have related to one another in terms of their historical impact, and which central message I believe should be theologically emphasised today, by referring to a well-known Shakespeare quote.

BIOS:

Professor Siân Bayne

Siân Bayne is Professor of Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh, where she is Director of the Centre for Research in Digital Education and leads on Education Futures in her role as University Assistant Principal. Her research is critical and interdisciplinary, currently focused on higher education futures, utopia and the impacts of artificial intelligence on education. More information about her work is available on her web site at: <http://sianbayne.net>.

Dr Emily Sullivan

Emily Sullivan is Senior Lecturer at the University of Edinburgh's Department of Philosophy. She is the Co-Director of the [Centre for Technomoral Futures in the Edinburgh Futures Institute](#) and an Associate Editor for *The British Journal of Philosophy of Science*. In 2025 she was awarded the Herbert A. Simon Award from the International Association of Computing and Philosophy (IACAP) for outstanding research in computing and philosophy. She is currently the PI on an ERC Starting Grant (2025-2030) that conceptualizes and evaluates machine learning models across science and society as a type of toy model. In this project, she bridges epistemic and ethical issues in simple computational models with complex modern day machine learning models.

Dr Elsa Bouet

Dr Elsa Bouet received her PhD in English Literature from the University of Edinburgh. She is now a lecturer in English and Film at Edinburgh Napier University where she teaches on science fiction and dystopia. Her current research focuses on representation of resource extraction in science fiction.

Prof Volker Stumke

Volker Stümke is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology, specialising in the ethics of peace. He taught at the German Armed Forces Command and Staff College in Hamburg and at the University of Rostock. His research focuses on the ambivalence of (Christian) religion, which manifests itself both as a driver of war and as a promoter of peace; see his most recent publications "Die Ambivalenz der Religionen" (in: *Theologische Rundschau* 90, Tübingen 2025, 82–148, 231–272 & 318–392) and "Orientierung in der Zeitenwende Ein kritischer Blick auf die neue Friedensdenkschrift der EKD" (in: *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 70, Berlin 2026, 1-15). Research trips to Jerusalem (2020), Leeds (2022), Kigali (2023) and Jakarta (2024) have supported the international and interfaith networking of this project.

This is a free event, which means we overbook to allow for no-shows and to avoid empty seats. While we generally do not have to turn people away, this does mean we cannot guarantee everyone a place. Admission is on a first-come, first-served basis.

You can also attend virtually - please click [here to register for Teams Webinar](#).

Accessibility:

This event will take place at IASH, 2 Hope Park Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9NW. Please see a map here: <https://www.iash.ed.ac.uk/location>

The Seminar Room is on the first floor, and unfortunately IASH does not have a lift. If you have mobility issues and would like to discuss access, please contact iash@ed.ac.uk as soon as possible.