

Call for Papers PCAoF¹ International Conference

October 9 - 11, 2024

University of La Rochelle

**“Climate Emergency: When Popular Cultures Cry
Ecological Awakening.”**

It was primarily in the nineteenth century, during the profound technological, social, and economic changes of the Industrial Revolution, that the foundations were laid for what would become the environmental movement, of which various branches developed from the 1960s onward. At the same time, popular culture began to express concern for the environment, producing works of fiction in which authors questioned the preservation of the planet and the consequences of our lifestyles. These stories highlight the disastrous effects that human societies can have on ecosystems, while also imagining alternative ways of living. Frank Herbert’s 1965 novel *Dune* is a well-known example of a science fiction story that deals with the devastating effects of natural resource exploitation and advocates for the preservation of ecosystems. However, it is not the only one. As early as 1929, J.D. Beresford, in his short story “The Man Who Hated Flies” (in *The Meeting Place and Other Stories*), imagined that the discovery of a powerful insecticide would lead to the destruction of pollinators and thus to a wider ecological catastrophe. In 1962, J.G. Ballard’s *The Drowned World* tackled the problem of global warming and its consequences. Similarly, Richard Fleischer’s 1973 film *Soylent Green* presented a strangely prophetic vision of a world in 2022 where the oceans have been ravaged by the greenhouse effect, resulting in permanent heat and humidity pollution, resource depletion, poverty, and overpopulation. Obviously, the problems associated with the destruction of ecosystems have been highlighted in popular cultures for some time.

After two international colloquia organized at the University of La Rochelle in 2019 and 2022 to study the use of popular cultures as a tool of expression and politics, and then at the University of Strasbourg in 2023 on the construction of marginalized popular cultures in the face of the process of cultural polycentrism, the *PCAoF* association intends to continue its investigations by addressing the issue of climate emergency through the lens of popular cultures.

The purpose of this symposium is to assess the presence/prevalence and representation of this issue and to explore the potential of popular cultures to inspire civic and political change, as demonstrated by James Craig Holte in *Climate Change in Popular Culture: A Warming World in the American Imagination* (2022); or Sherryl Vint in *Science Fiction - A Century of Science Fiction That Changed How We Think About the Environment* (2021).

Because they are accessible to a wide audience, popular cultures (in all their formats and media) serve as the perfect basis for scientific mediation, if the latter is understood as a two-way exchange and discussion with non-expert audiences. Media supports for this exchange are numerous – including comic books, genre films, children’s literature, web series, TV series, and social networks among others– to approach the study of science

¹ <https://pcaof.hypotheses.org/>

mediation. Some researchers even claim to use them to communicate with the public, such as Alessandro Pignocchi, a former cognitive scientist turned comic book author (*Petit traité d'écologie sauvage*, 2017) and Philippe Descola, a French anthropologist, (*Anent: News from the Jivaro Indians*, 2016, in collaboration with Alessandro Pignocchi). Similarly, in *World Without End*, the cartoonist Christophe Blain interviews and illustrates the energy and climate expert Jean-Marc Jancovici. Some artists, aware of their impact as popular public and media figures, are openly campaigning for ecological responsibility (such as the French rock band Shaka Ponk, who decided to suspend their activities to devote themselves to this cause, and *The Freaks*², a collective of more than sixty French artists and personalities).

Mass media are not only a tool for explaining complex scientific theories to a wide audience, but they also have the power to capture social imaginations (for example, see the works of Andrew Milner & J. R. Burgmann, *Science Fiction and Climate Change: A Sociological Approach*, or Theodore Jacob Vincent & James F. Hamilton, *Narrativizing Climate Change through Popular Culture*) and shape tomorrow's world through stories and images. Canadian sociologist Guy Rocher used the concept of the "social imaginary" in the 1980s³, as did Paul Ricoeur the French sociologist in 1985⁴ 'to refer to societal initiatives, future visions, social aspirations, and political ambitions which can lead to the formation of ideologies, utopias, and social myths⁵.' Régine Robin⁶, following Jean-Charles Falardeau's theories⁷, suggests that the novel should be viewed as a "second narrative" that plays a crucial role in fixing, in the form of narrative models, and circulating those imaginaries (the primary narratives) that have the creative potential to innovate and unleash forces that describe the world and can also carry the hope of changing it. Thus science fiction stories and films –such as *The Day After Tomorrow* by Roland Emmerich (2004), which is a disaster film based on IPCC⁸ reports–, as well as TV shows –like *Extrapolation* on Apple TV (2023), which features scenarios of the future based on IPCC reports as well–, children's literature (such as Vincent Villeminot's *Nous sommes l'étincelle*), and genre literature (Scali Bertil and De Andreis Raphaël's *Mer*⁹, or Jean-Pierre Goux's saga *Siècle bleu*¹⁰ that both describe the realistic and scientifically proven effects of climate change), provide a corpus for the study of often catastrophist imaginations that generate eco-anxiety but also have the virtue of alerting us. In a recent study by ADEME¹¹, 65% of respondents stated that fiction increases awareness and motivates them to take action. These stories are a powerful tool for driving change, highlighting the importance of such reflection.

Proposals for papers can cover a wide range of fields and combine them (for instance sociology, anthropology, political studies, history, literature, economics, media, journalism, linguistics, etc.). They may also explore various countries and all areas of popular cultures (such as visual arts – TV, internet series, films, graphic novels and comic books, You Tube videos and channels–, different genres of fiction – such as science

² The Freaks is a group of artists and individuals dedicated to adopting new behaviors to combat overconsumption, pollution, global warming, and protect biodiversity. This list of behaviors is the result of extensive work carried out with the Nicolas Hulot Foundation for Nature and Man and ADEME. Visit <https://www.the-freaks.fr/collectif/> for more information.

³ In his article "Le droit à l'imaginaire social" published in *Recherches sociographiques*, volume n°23, number 1-2, 1982, Guy Rocher discusses the importance of social imagination.

⁴ Paul Ricoeur also explores this topic in his book "Dialogue sur l'histoire et l'imaginaire social" (2016).

⁵ Rocher's work is referenced again in this context (op. cit., p.62).

⁶ Additionally, Régine Robin's article 'Pour une socio-poétique de l'imaginaire social' provides further insight into the subject of social imagination. *Enjeux sociocritiques*, 1993.

⁷ Jean-Charles Falardeau's *Imaginaire social et littérature* (1974).

⁸ IPCC Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

⁹ *Mer* is an ecological crime novel set in an underwater Bordeaux in 2050.

¹⁰ *Siècle bleu* is an ecological and geopolitical thriller that questions our times and our intentions for the world.

¹¹ For more information, visit <https://librairie.ademe.fr/consommer-autrement/5585-des-recits-et-des-actes.html>

fiction, fantasy, horror, detective fiction, and pulp fiction—, as well as sports, music, collectables, cultural and media practices, games (role-playing games, video games, and board games), toys, literature, and so on.

Papers can be submitted in either French or English on the following topics:

- the role and development of the environment, particularly the current climate crisis, in popular cultures;
- the examination of popular cultures as a means of scientific mediation;
- the presentation and analysis of new environmental social imaginaries created by popular cultures (cinema, series, comic books, etc.)
- the pitfalls of optimistic, techno-solutionist, and catastrophist narratives,
- the impact and/or place of environmental social imaginaries in society.

To submit proposals for papers, please send the title and a 300-word abstract along with a brief biography to pcaofrance@gmail.com by **April 19, 2024**. The committee will provide a response and pre-program by mid-June.

Organizing Committee: Danièle André (US Civilizational and Cultural Studies, research unit PoLiCÉMIÉS), Annabel Audureau (comparative literature, research unit PoLiCÉMIÉS), Philippe Coulaud (Computing and Digital Eco-responsibility).

Indicative Bibliography, Filmography and Mediagraphy

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