

## “Anticipating Dark Futures”: New Ideas Submission

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### Abstract:

This New Ideas session emerges from an encounter in the dark. While attending a multidisciplinary conference on "darkness" in the polar night of Svalbard, a philosopher, two architects, a cognitive scientist, a scholar of speculative fiction, a polar historian, and a medievalist walked into a bar, and discovered that beyond their shared scholarly interest in darkness, they also developed, as they shared the ideas, methodologies, and future directions of their disciplines, that feeling of anticipation that accompanies paradigm-shifting encounters with the "others" they had met in each other. The aim of this session is to expand that discussion, centering on how we conceptualize the dark unknown of the future according to our respective fields' concerns, highlighting commonalities and interrogating differences in order to break apart disciplinary divisions. Our hope is that such collaborative, tentacular thinking will help us develop better ways of caring for the future in this current period of anticipation and anxiety, and provide a model for cross-disciplinary approaches to futures. Our brief talks will thus touch on such topics as the human experience of time, the formation of self and community, and meeting the anticipated needs of self and community through a conversation among our varied fields.

Wendy Sloan (philosophy, linguistics) conceptualizes the present moment as being in constant anticipatory tension with the future. Drawing upon the idea of the self as narratively constructed, she suggests that in the moment between anticipating and being in the future, one has an opportunity to deviate from one narrative and redefine one's identity. Becoming conscious of the "future present" tense, Sloan posits, the future becomes dark, but full of possibility, a thing to cultivate and care for. Sarah Pickman and Tess Lanzarotta (historians) likewise invoke themes of time, environment, positionality, and care for the future by bringing to bear perspectives of time held by some North American indigenous peoples. Exploring "indigenous time" vs. "settler time," as laid out by Mark Rifkin, Pickman and Lanzarotta consider how ways of thinking about time that link present life to ancestral and future life can lead us away from the "dark" futures created by Western capitalism. Looking to the past, Daniel Brielmaier (medievalist) examines the poetry of cultural trauma composed in medieval Wales and Ireland, observing that, although the poems anticipate only dark, hopeless futures, the act of composing, performing, and/or hearing such poetry may have provided a communal catharsis akin to funeral lament, an exorcism of the past that keeps it from casting too dark a shadow on the future. Looking to dark futures already anticipated in literature, Sarah Canfield (literature) evaluates speculative fiction's impact on how we (fail to) meet the challenges its authors envisioned; while Ro Spankie (architect, designer) explores design fictions, attempts by architects to anticipate future structural needs by imagining fictional design scenarios as a means of caring for the future. In a complementary vein, fellow architect and designer Cathlyn Newell returns to Sloan's "future present," envisioning designs that inhabit the space between past and present, where those structures that supported the needs of the past can be acknowledged and mourned as they

give way to the anticipated needs of a cared-for future. Finally, Robin Zebrowski (cognitive science) problematizes our various theories of anticipation with cognitive science's notions of how we perceive time in relation to language and culture.

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