

Science Fiction, Critical Utopia, and Narratives of Resilience:

Ursula K. Le Guin, Kim Stanley Robinson and Transformative Environmentalism

Guest lecturer: *Prof. Sylvia Mayer (University of Bayreuth)*

The talk discusses how science fiction – understood with Ursula K. Le Guin as thought-experiments in (inter-)planetary world-building that center on the present and explore “what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel” – has responded to ecological crisis by reimagining utopia through the lens of *resilience*. Focusing on theoretical and fictional works by Le Guin and on Kim Stanley Robinson’s *The Ministry for the Future*, it shows how science fiction can articulate adaptive, relational, and transformative responses to environmental disruption and planetary crisis. Building on recent discussions of *climate resilience narratives* and *planetaryity*, it explores how both writers employ narrative form and ethical imagination to envision modes of coexistence that move beyond dystopian despair.

Le Guin’s *critical utopias*, and Robinson’s *near-future climate fiction* offer distinct yet interrelated perspectives on what resilience might mean in an age of multiple crises: not as a return to an imagined stability, but as an ongoing process of adaptation, cooperation, and planetary responsibility. By tracing the intersections of science fiction, critical utopia, and environmental ethics, the talk argues that literary texts can play an active role in *transformative environmentalism*, a cultural project that seeks to imagine sustainable futures, while confronting the political, social, and moral complexities of planetary, socio-ecological change.

About the speaker

Sylvia Mayer is Professor of American Studies and Anglophone Literatures and Cultures at the University of Bayreuth. Her major research areas are Ecocriticism, environmentally oriented literary and cultural studies, and African American Studies. Her ecocritical work has focused on the literary and cultural imagination of (planetary) environmental risk, most importantly, on the study of climate change fiction as environmental risk narratives. More recently, this focus has been complemented by an additional focus on issues of (environmental) resilience building.



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