

RISKING THE FUTURE

Vulnerability, Resistance, Hope



12 - 13 JULY 2016

**St. John's College
Durham University**



ABOUT THE CONFERENCE

Risking the Future seeks to expose a tension at the heart of contemporary thinking around risk and its effects, and in particular the role of risk in either blocking or facilitating access to possible futures. On the one hand, the phrase is cautionary, a reminder that the future is at risk and that risks have to be calculated and managed to avoid or learn to live within catastrophic circumstances. On the other hand, the phrase is hopeful, a recognition that a certain type of risk is necessary to generate a speculative opening to a future worth living. In this way, although risk manifests in complex historical and contemporary patterns across the economic, legal, ecological, social, cultural, aesthetic and political spheres, it is most urgently felt where the exercise and effects of power are tied to potential loss and gain, and where these losses and gains shape the lives of those least able to resist them.

In this light, rethinking the relation of risk and futurity suggests a tension between the calculation, management and adoption of risk on one hand, and what it actually means to live a life at risk on the other. For those living in fragile circumstances – situations in which race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion and poverty intersect in ways that render existence itself radically vulnerable; situations in which it is increasingly difficult to avoid or resist political instability, conflict, economic precarity, health crises, and ecological catastrophe – the question of risk exists at a very different intensity, and has very different implications than it does for individuals, groups and even whole societies who regard risk principally in terms of its calculation, distribution and management undertaken to guarantee continued flourishing, often in the very systems that place the vulnerable at risk.

We seek to bring these two paradigms of risk – of calculation and precarity – into conversation, perhaps necessarily into conflict, in order to challenge existing discourses regarding risk and its relation to the future. We seek to explore the ways in which thought might take risks in order to realign itself with those most at risk. We seek to open new and risky avenues for speculative, interdisciplinary research, reimagining the way in which risk thinking might turn an increasingly threatening vision of the future towards a politics of hope.

Please direct any queries or comments to the organisers at Durham University:

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DAY 1: 12 JULY 2016

- 08h30 – 08h45** **Registration**
- 08h45 – 09h00** **Welcome**
- 09h00 – 10h45** **Panel 1: Narratives of Risk**
Paul Crosthwaite (Edinburgh) – ‘A System to Care for You: Zadie Smith’s *NW* and the Ethics of Abstraction’
Brantley Nicholson (Georgia College) – ‘Fragile Centers of Literary Capital, the Perspective from Contemporary Latin America’
Aleksandr Prigozhin (Chicago) – ‘Media of Uncertainty: Communication Breakdown in Henry Green’s *Party Going*’
David Watson (Uppsala) – ‘The Security Imaginary: Speculation and Risk in the Contemporary American Novel’
- 10h45 – 11h00** **Tea**
- 11h00 – 12h30** **Panel 2: Displacement, Movement, Migration**
Alice Feldman (University College Dublin) and Vukasin Nedeljkovic (Dublin Institute of Technology) – ‘*No People Were Harmed in the Making of this Art: The Reflexive Imperative of a Decolonial (Aesthetic-Epistemological) Praxis*’
Noa Roei (Amsterdam) – ‘Precarious Encounters: On the Work of Arkadi Zaidés’
Modisa Motsomi (KwaZulu-Natal) – ‘Serge Alin Nitegeka, Corporeal Cargo’
- 12h30 – 13h15** **Lunch**
- 13h15 – 14h30** **Keynote Lecture: Walter Dignolo (Duke)**
‘The irresistible shift to the Eastern Hemisphere and its political, economic and subjective consequences’
- 14h30 – 16h00** **Panel 3: Decoloniality, Commitment, Hope**
Mark Jackson (Bristol) – ‘Decolonising critique, risk, and the political subject of hope’
Richard Rosa (Duke) – ‘“Que te coge el holandés:” Accounting, Rhetoric and Risk in Puerto Rico, USA’
Francisco-J. Hernández Adrián (Durham) – ‘Islanded Lives: Envisioning the Tourist as Migrant’
- 16h00 – 16h30** **Tea**



16h30 – 18h00 Roundtable Discussion: Futures of/at Risk

Brad Evans (Bristol)
Ewald Frie (Tübingen)
Janet Stewart (Durham)
Patricia Waugh (Durham)

18h00 – 19h30 Panel 4: Embodiments and Ecologies of Risk

Alix Rübsaam (Amsterdam) – ‘The Risk of Artificial Intelligence and How to Explain the Human’

Marc Botha (Durham) – ‘Visceral Risk: Weak Redemption and the Thanatography of the Exception in Rob Halpern’s *Common Place*’

Fionnghuala Sweeney (Newcastle) – ‘Embodying tragedy: Paul Robeson’s risky heroes and revolutionary imaging’

19h30 Wine Reception followed by Conference Dinner

DAY 2: 13 JULY 2016

09h00 – 10h15 Keynote Lecture: Simon During (Queensland)

‘Neoliberalism, risk and freedom: a contemporary reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Victory* (1916)’

10h15 – 10h45 Tea

10h45 – 12h15 Panel 5: Histories of Risk

Michael Conrad (Free University Berlin) – ‘A jump into the open: Franciscan theory of free will and risk in the late 13th century’

Marc Schachter (Durham) – ‘Libertarian, Anarchist, or Anti-Semite?: La Boétie Against the State’

Tyson Leuchter (Chicago) – ‘The Honest Speculator: Debt, Finance and the Bounds of Law in Restoration France’

12h15 – 13h00 Lunch



13h00 – 14.30

Panel 6: Fragility and Resilience

Rob Cover (Western Australia) – ‘Identity, Digital Media, Resilience: The Use of Digital Media in Fostering Healthy Subjectivities Among Sexually-Diverse and Gender-Diverse Young People’

Trenholme Junghans (Cambridge) – ‘Managing or Obviating Risk?: Contrasting Knowledge/Time Paradigms in Genomic Medicine’

Arthur Rose (Durham) – ‘The Fragile Thereafter of Warren Zevon’s *The Wind*’

14.30 – 15h00

Tea

15h00 – 16h45

Panel 7: Futures and Futurity

Dariusz Gafijczuk (Newcastle) – ‘Ruins and the Crisis of Temporal Hesitation’

Jenny Terry (Durham) – ‘Counter and Critical Futures: Space Travel in African American Literature and Visual Arts’

Samuel Tranter (Durham) – ‘Risky theological thought generating practices of hope: considering eschatology’

Jules Sturm (Amsterdam) – ‘Risky Imaginations of Posthuman Reproductive Futures’

16h45 – 17h00

Short Recess

17h00 – 18h15

Keynote Lecture: Michaeline Crichlow (Duke)

‘Bare Life, Peripheral Migrants and Caribbean Moderns’

18h15 – 18h30

Closing Remarks



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People

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Sculpture and image, Modisa Motsomi (used with permission)



ABOUT THE MATARIKI RISK HUMANITIES NETWORK

Risking the Future is the launch event for a new research network, formed across the Matariki Network of Universities, but outward-facing and inclusive in its scope and aims. Recognizing that risk remains a central aspect of contemporary life and an important subject of academic discourse, the Matariki Risk Humanities Network proposes to critically examine risk in its transhistorical and transcultural dimensions by stimulating an interdisciplinary conversation centred in the strong tradition of critique historically prevalent in the Humanities, but open to a range of methodologies and approaches. The contemporary understanding of risk is habitually articulated in relation to a complex constellation of concepts, including crisis, threat, security, contingency, fragility, vulnerability, precarity, resilience and trust.

Responding creatively but critically to these concepts, the Matariki Risk Humanities Network will address many of the assumptions regarding risk which apply to areas such as ecology and climate change; gender and sexuality; critical race studies; literature, visual arts, music and modes of cultural production; technological and scientific innovation; peace, conflict, and security studies; law, human rights and justice; political and economic freedom and equality; cultural memory and historical studies.

Its aim is thus to stimulate debate on risk and its related spheres as they manifest in concrete social, cultural and political situations, in an outward-facing dialogue within the academy, with partners in the public and private sector, and with a broad social demographic.

The network comprises a core group of researchers from the seven universities which constitute the network – Dartmouth College, Durham University, University of Otago, Queen's University, Tübingen University, Uppsala University, and the University of Western Australia – working in close collaboration with external partners, both academic and in the public and private sectors. The broad goal of the Matariki Risk Humanities Network is to connect individual researchers as well as existing research projects, to encourage new avenues of collaborative research and publication, to foster cooperation in grant capture, and to explore how the Humanities are able to contribute proactively to policy-making in the broad field of risk.

