

# MIDLANDS CONFERENCE IN CRITICAL THOUGHT 2026

University of Warwick

May 21<sup>st</sup> to May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026

## Call for Presentations – deadline January 21<sup>st</sup> 2026

The Call for Presentation Proposals is now open for the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual *Midlands Conference in Critical Thought* (MCCT), which will be hosted and supported by the University of Warwick on May 21<sup>st</sup> and May 22<sup>nd</sup> 2026.

The MCCT is an annual interdisciplinary conference that provides a forum for emergent critical scholarship, broadly construed. **The conference is free for all to attend** and follows a non-hierarchical model that seeks to foster opportunities for intellectual critical exchanges where all are treated equally regardless of affiliation or seniority. There are no plenaries, and the conference is envisaged as a space for those who share intellectual approaches and interests but who may find themselves at the margins of their academic department or discipline. The MCCT is an offshoot of the London Conference in Critical Thought (LCCT) and shares its approach and ethos.

There is no pre-determined theme for the MCCT. The intellectual content and thematic foci of the conference have been determined by the streams outlined in this document. Please look through the streams to see where your presentation submission will best fit, we welcome presentation proposals via a 500 word abstract – **PLEASE SUBMIT VIA A WORD DOCUMENT** to [midlandscritical@gmail.com](mailto:midlandscritical@gmail.com). Past programmes of the LCCT, MCCT and examples of stream outlines can be found on the website: <http://londoncritical.org>.

The accepted presentations will configure the panels that constitute the streams outlined in this document. For more information about the ethos and structure of the conference please visit <http://londoncritical.org>, and if you have any questions please email us at [midlandscritical@gmail.com](mailto:midlandscritical@gmail.com).

The deadline for presentation submissions is **Wednesday January 21<sup>st</sup> 2026**. Abstracts to be submitted via word and should not exceed **500 words** and should be sent to: [midlandscritical@gmail.com](mailto:midlandscritical@gmail.com)

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## 1. Creative Health. Can the Arts Aid Health?

Susan Hogan, University of Derby, University of Nottingham

In a historical moment of 'poly-crisis' (Pink 2025) - (multiple crises converging: war, climate instability, an aggressive model of Capitalism which exacerbates inequality and is premised on an impossible model of perpetual 'growth' causing environmental destruction and unprecedented species extinction, coupled with the revival of fascism and fears over run-away technologies), can the arts therapies be more than the handmaiden of neoliberal capitalism, ameliorating the lot of those less able to adapt to precarity? Or, alternatively, will the arts in health be increasingly called upon to provide a sort of disaster relief, mopping up after the destruction caused by neoliberal regimes? (Hogan 2026).

Can the arts help us to think more critically about healthcare practices? Critical questions might be to think about the systemic problems of healthcare and how the arts may help to elucidate these. Iatrogenic illness is that caused by a physician or medical regime. Practices and procedures which can be counterproductive and illness-inducing form part of professional repertoires of behaviour.

Possible questions:

- How can the arts help to elucidate systemic problems of healthcare?
- How can the arts aid health and healthcare practices?
- Practices and procedures which can be counterproductive and illness-inducing form part of professional repertoires of behaviour. Can the arts make a difference in highlighting iatrogenic practices?
- How can the arts support public health endeavours - explore examples?
- A critical analysis of representations of health and illness across cultures is enlightening for health-care reform in what ways?
- Whilst health is a universal concern, the way that different populations relate to their health via the arts and humanities is less well-known – elucidate?
- We talk about 'creative health' but what does 'good' look like?
- How can arts engagement help health-care professionals to reflect productively in their practice?

## 2. Critical Praxes and Black Feminist Thought

Erkan Gursel, University of Cambridge

Faustine Petron-Daniels, University of Warwick

This stream explores the many ways Black feminist thought offers a radical, adaptable, and above all critical praxis for interrogating power, marginality, and resistance across diverse social, political, and intellectual contexts, while drawing attention to both structures of domination and possibilities of liberation.

At its core, Black feminist theory positions lived experience as central to knowledge production. Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 265) argues that emotion can serve as an indicator of the validity and credibility of an argument, challenging the conventional view of the academy that emotion is something inherently negative that undermines the conduct of "good" or "unbiased" sociological research. According to Hill Collins, what distinguishes wisdom from knowledge is lived experience, as those who have 'lived through experiences are considered more credible than those who have only read or thought about them' (Hill Collins, 1990, 257). In proposing this stream as an Afro-Arab queer woman and an Arab queer man, we emphasise that researchers' lived experiences are both academically rigorous and politically vital forms of knowledge and therefore encourage proposals that place lived experience at the centre of critical inquiry.

Black feminist epistemology's valuation of lived experience poses a challenge to positivist traditions and the 'white logic' (Bonilla-Silva, 2007) that continues to dominate research in elite institutions in the United Kingdom, a harmful logic we hope to unsettle within this stream. Black feminist theory encompasses 'theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it' (Hill Collins, 2000, 381). Black feminist theory focuses on agency, resistance and justice for Black women and other marginalised groups. While it is a body of knowledge produced by and for Black women, it is intellectually mobile and not exclusive to them, meaning that its insights are valuable in understanding the struggles and resistance efforts of other marginalised groups. Crucially, as a form of critical social theory, Black feminist thought seeks to identify ways to 'escape from, survive in, and/or oppose prevailing social and economic injustice' (Hill Collins, 1990, 9), rendering it useful as a critical framework for analysing issues far beyond its original grounding.

From abolitionist feminist struggles to queer and trans liberation, to migrant survival and ecological justice, Black feminist thought is capable of travelling across contexts while retaining its radical edge. At the same time, this mobility requires care. Scholars such as Mohanty (2013) and Salem (2018) remind us that theories risk dilution when abstracted from their roots. Yet, as Edward Said argued, travelling theories can also unlock new radical potential when applied attentively. This stream takes that tension seriously, welcoming contributions that both deploy and/or extend Black feminist frameworks across disciplines and movements.

We welcome contributions that explore:

- Black feminist epistemologies and methodologies in activism, scholarship, and beyond
- Intersectionality and the politics of marginalised knowledge
- Reflexive accounts of positionality/lived experience in research
- Cross-disciplinary applications of Black feminist theory in understanding contemporary social issues (e.g. carcerality and abolition, gender-based violence, migration and borders, queer and trans struggles, disability justice

### 3. Cultivating Critical Thought in Children and Youth - Art, Creativity and Ethics in Education.

Irina Katz-Mazilu, Artist, member of the House of Artists, Paris, France

Arts Therapist, Trainer, Supervisor, member of the European Federation of Art Therapy and of the Syndicat Français des Arts-Thérapeutes.

Our children are so amazing, curious, peppy, creative, rebellious, exhausting, we love them. But what is a child, actually?

Historical perspectives show a great diversity of socio-cultural approaches to education, from best to worst. We need to explore the field and support research on innovative ways to help children, adolescents and young adults preserve and develop their capabilities for thinking. Trying to elaborate, define and implement a 'good enough' education is challenging for many reasons. Climatic, social and political conditions are so determinant that often families and education are only allowed to focus on survival. Yet, in any condition a young human needs help for survival - as well as for fostering a resilient way of thinking. Cultivating critical thought is fundamental for autonomy and resilience - which are built on a powerful and balanced self.

Recent research in crossed multidisciplinary approaches - with neuroscience meeting arts, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychotherapies and ethics - contributes to foster complex and critical thought on multilayers of the human condition. At the era of digital communication and AI development, it is more than ever time to consider education as a crucial element for humans' future.

Many questions wait for complex critical answers. Exploring and responding will enable us to transcend the epistemic paradox and the contemporary challenges. Children and youth need and deserve careful attention and affectionate relationships in fostering and education. Reviewing the human experience with education, planting seeds of hope and innovation, harvest powerful results will enable our critical thought to spread broadly, to deepen current knowledge and to offer a positive perspective to humans' future.

Possible questions:

- How can art making and creative process' exploration contribute to foster critical thought?
- How does aesthetic experience contribute to thinking?
- How can we melt rational, scientific, analytic thinking with emotional experiences?
- Does complex thinking contribute to enhance critical thinking?
- Is critical thought a mostly individual capability or does it hatch out of interpersonal relationships and social interactions?
- How do children think? Is the process similar to adult thinking?
- How do adolescents think?
- How does critical thought join ethics?
- How can we face the apparent paradox between a socializing and an individualizing education?
- What are the main ingredients to find and cultivate for implementing and developing critical thought?

#### 4. Beyond the nature/culture divide: Posthuman and New Materialist explorations

Victoria Cluley, University of Nottingham

Nick Fox, University of Huddersfield

Alida Payson, Cardiff University

Katie Powell, University of Sheffield

Posthuman and new materialist inquiry calls into question the binaries of humanist thought. One such binary is the nature/culture divide whereby nature and humans are considered separate and distinct, with humans assuming dominance. This position within the nature/culture divide has been critiqued from a range of perspectives. New materialist and posthuman perspectives re-construct this division, addressing materiality across the divide. From this perspective, matter includes a diverse array of elements inclusive of things associated with both nature and culture. Physical things, spaces, places, organic bodies and material forces such as time and gravity are all considered matter. Additionally, all matter is considered to be relational and imbued with the potential for change. Importantly, the human is de-centred, ever present yet considered equal to other non-human matter.

In this stream we are interested in exploring the relationality of matter, challenging the distinct boundary between nature and culture and the dominance of human centred approaches. Examples of why this approach is important include the interactions between human activity and the climate, the growing impact of pharmaceuticals and street drugs, and our ambivalent relationships with household and everyday objects as part of a throw away society.

We invite talks from thinkers, practitioners, artists, academics, and activists across all disciplines to take part in this stream. We encourage the submission of abstracts using posthuman and new materialist inspired approaches to challenge the nature/culture divide across a broad range of issues, including but not limited to:

- Climate crisis
- Health and inequality
- Intersectionality
- Race
- Social justice
- Capitalism
- Feminism and care ethics
- Place, space, and time
- Objects and waste
- Substance harms

## 5. Studio-ing as Critical, Creative and Interdisciplinary Pedagogy

Andrew Bracey, University of Lincoln  
Joanne Lee, Sheffield Hallam University  
Danica Maier, Nottingham Trent University  
Laura Onions, University of Wolverhampton  
Maggie Ayliffe, Liverpool John Moores University

Smatterings is a collective of UK-based artist-educators committed to exploring Fine Art pedagogy through participatory research and critical reflection. In this stream, we invite participants to investigate the potential of live, ongoing creative and critical practice made possible through 'studio-ing'.

'Studio-ing' is the active, process-led practice of learning, thinking, and making within—and beyond—the traditional fine art studio. It describes an unfolding, situated methodology through which creative practitioners engage with materials, ideas, themselves and others. As a verb, 'studio-ing' encompasses a constellation of actions—testing, speculating, failing, drifting, conversing, resting, resisting, returning. It values presence and attention, recognises tacit and embodied knowledge, and invites risk, mess, and not-knowing as vital components of learning.

While our roots are in Fine Art, this stream is deliberately interdisciplinary. We propose 'studio-ing' as a provocation. We ask: can this way of working exist in other disciplines? Is it welcomed, resisted, or misunderstood (productively or otherwise)? Can 'studio-ing' offer a genuine avenue for collaboration across fields—between artists, scientists, educators, technologists, and theorists? Or are there disciplinary boundaries that inhibit such shared agency?

We invite contributions that explore studio-ing through five interrelated themes:

### 1. Time and Space: Conditions for Attention and Creativity

What are the temporal and spatial conditions that allow for deep, creative engagement across disciplines? How could institutional structures support or constrain this?

### 2. Co-Learning: Shared Agency in Knowledge Production

How can 'studio-ing' foster horizontal learning relationships and shared inquiry across disciplinary divides? What does it mean to 'let learn' in different contexts?

### 3. Quality: Fit-for-Purpose Environments for Creative Learning

What infrastructures—material, social, pedagogic—are needed to support 'studio-ing' in diverse disciplines? How do we define quality beyond metrics?

### 4. Inclusion: Access as a Creative Prerequisite

Who gets 'to studio'? What barriers exist across disciplines, and how might 'studio-ing' offer inclusive, equitable modes of participation?

### 5. Valuing the Process: Embracing Uncertainty and Speculation

How do different disciplines engage with uncertainty, failure, and speculation? Can 'studio-ing' help us reframe these as strengths rather than weaknesses?

This stream actively welcomes alternative conference presentation formats including, but not limited to: workshops, provocations, and participatory dialogue. We aim to foster cross-disciplinary conversations that reimagine the studio not as a bounded space, but as a methodology for creative, critical learning and collective transformation.

## 6. Buzzwords and Beyond: Navigating the Terrain Between Individualism and Collectivism

Saaliha Lone, University of Bristol

The collective or the individual?

Across both social and academic discourse, these terms are strewn around. This generation is more individualistic; people are more individualistic. It's a word I've caught myself both hearing and saying. Whilst there are still collectivist efforts bridging gaps between state and society, there remains nostalgia for a bygone era of "collectivism" a time when front doors would never be locked and communities looked after one another.

In contemporary society, these buzzwords have reached new heights. As groceries become astronomical and families decide between turning on the heating or feeding their children, we might ask: what does it mean to live between individualism and collectivism today?

There are times when we operate purely within our own interests, yet that does not make us selfish; within other contexts, we selflessly contribute to the bigger picture. Values within both ideologies are simultaneously facing amplification and erosion. Personal autonomy is celebrated autonomy of what we can think, wear, say, and how we use our bodies. Meanwhile, foodbanks and homeless shelters exemplify collectivism: a sense of shared responsibility that community groups and local organisations have assumed to support society's most vulnerable.

These ideologies also carry symbolic demographics. Millennials and Gen Z are often labelled as individualistic, protecting self-interest over community, while collectivism is associated with Gen X and Baby Boomers, who "had one another" to rely on. Yet the question that arises is simple: are we shifting toward one ideology, or are these recurring tensions between younger and older generations that re-emerge in every decade of history?

### Aim and Scope of the Stream

This question sits at the core of this stream. The discussion between individualism and collectivism is prevalent across multiple academic subjects: history, sociology, gender studies, anthropology, economics, policy, and politics.

This stream aims to facilitate open, interdisciplinary dialogue exploring how the primary concepts surrounding this topic: collectivism, individualism, identity politics, neoliberalism, and feminism intersect and shape contemporary social and political realities. It invites contributors to consider how these dynamics play out in different contexts, and how they inform broader questions of power: where are we more powerful as individuals, and where does power reside in the collective? Also, how do social actors negotiate and maintain balance between the two?

### Contribution to the MCCT Ethos

This stream invites proposals that go beyond simple dichotomies and explore what it means to live between these two worlds. It encourages open-ended, interdisciplinary abstracts that consider how social actors navigate the balance between individual and collective existence.

**7. *Hegemonies, Counter-Hegemonies, Anti-Hegemonies: The Theory and Politics of Social Control and Resistance***

Phil Burton-Cartledge, University of Derby

In an age marked by climate breakdown, stagnating living standards, and capitalist resilience, what does philosophy and social theory have to say about social stasis and social change? Is the 19th century revolutionary project outlined by Marx and elaborated by the tradition that bears his name exhausted? To the new social movements that emerged in the 1960s still retain their radical force? Has radical politics since been blunted/incorporated by a capitalism of total subsumption that recuperates resistance and repurposes critique as fuel for sign systems, as per the provocations of Jean Baudrillard. Do we live after critical theory, or at this moment of seeming triumph for billionaires, oligarchs, and the states and institutions that serve them, is their system brittle and at the risk of breakdown?

The nature of our conjuncture, of a world where the old are always dying and the new are struggling to be born requires us to constantly ask questions about power and resistance. Especially as our civilisation is menaced by existential risks, environmental challenges, and an oligarchical ruling class uninterested in social peace and human sustainability. If not this, then what?

MCCT 2026 offers an opportunity for activists and thinkers from an array of traditions and research interests to address the question of social change, what a better society might look like, what resources and tendencies are already present that point in this direction, and how we could get there.

This panel welcomes contributions from philosophy, social and political theory, sociology and political science, international relations and social policy, as well as reflections from outside of academia. Papers that engage with the configurations of social control, such as the operation of hegemony, the workings of ideology, the inertia of social momentum and the compulsion of “necessity”, the constitution of governance strategies, and work around social reproduction theory and radical care have a home in this stream. As do contributions on the political economy of class and capital in the age of AI hype, the changing character of party systems, the possibility of cultural and political breakthroughs, capitalist mutations and systemic adaptation, appropriations of radical energies, and engagements within and between different theoretical traditions that grapple with these questions.

## 8. Crime and the Media

Hannah Marshall, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick

Silvia Gomes, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick

Research within criminology and related disciplines has often highlighted the role that the media plays in entrenching punitive attitudes towards crime. This occurs in a variety of ways, including: sensationalised depictions of crime, over-representation of the prevalence of serious offences; reporting that unduly heightens fear of crime; the creation of 'moral panics' and other forms of reporting that demonise marginalised groups; and the stigmatisation and scrutiny of victims of crime. A well-established body of research relating to these areas has examined the media as a force for punitivism, but this has overshadowed other explorations of the role that the media does or could play in relation to crime. In particular, comparatively little attention has been paid to the ways in which the media can and does encourage critical, reformist or abolitionist attitudes towards crime and the criminal legal system. This stream will invite contributions from researchers, activists, and artists who seek to address this gap.

We invite proposals for papers that consider how media representations of crime, justice and the legal system can challenge punitive attitudes and encourage critical reflection on future possibilities, including reformist and abolitionist perspectives. Topics could include, but are by no means limited to, activism against media narratives that stigmatise specific groups as the perpetrators of crime, reflections on pieces of media that advance critical, reformist and/or abolitionist narratives, the role of media in abolitionist organising, or reflections on media representations of 'lived experience' of victimisation and criminalisation.

We conceive the term 'media representations' very broadly, including print, broadcasting and internet media. We welcome reflections on any type of media, from podcasts and social media networks, film and television, to newspapers and books. We are open to a range of different presentation formats from across all disciplines, from more 'traditional' academic presentations to presentations of devised media pieces that explore and encourage critical approaches to crime and justice.

## 9. (trickle, river, flood, wadi) Post-Anthropocene Scenes

Andrew Fergus Wilson, University of Derby

Popular environmental discourse refers to cascading effects and events that take us continually over tipping points, crescendo after crescendo without fulfilment, a state of being continually on the verge of the ecstasy of annihilation. In this deferred apocalypse there is a diminution of risk. "There have always been changes to climate." "Everything is fine." "Drill, baby, drill." The number of humans on the planet continues to grow and passed 8bn in 2022 (UN); meanwhile, in the last fifty years freshwater wildlife numbers have fallen by 85%, terrestrial non-human wildlife numbers by 69% and marine life by 56% (WWF). There is a catastrophic end occurring around us but it is largely unseen and unacknowledged. In England, as of 10th October 2025, Cumbria & Lancashire; Greater Manchester Merseyside & Cheshire; Yorkshire; East Midlands; West Midlands; and parts of Sussex in the South East Water region were all in drought (Environment Agency). Simultaneously, rising seas levels erode English coasts whilst lapping over and drowning Pacific islands: slow violence. The climate crisis is typically understood in human terms and security is frequently framed as the measure of existential risk to humans and human dignity but what does the agonism of a theory of ecological immaterial labour sound like to the Thracian Shad, pushed into extinction by pollution, extraction, and canalisation, and its all too countable counterparts?

This call for papers asks how the unseen and unacknowledged can be heard, seen, or otherwise represented. It asks for papers that consider resisting anthropocentrism; representing the non-human; extra-human communication; natural scenes that are post-anthropocene; or alternative histories, present, and future fictions that imagine 'the Real of "nature"'. This raises epistemological and ontological challenges that question anthropocentric traditions in critical thought so approaches to, or ellipses into, post-anthropocentric theories – if they are at all possible – are also welcome: it asks how theory can incorporate the non-human. The call is open to innovative approaches or the considered application of established theoretical frameworks and traditions. Reflections on the production of art – whatever kind of creative production is understood by that term – may be key and are also welcome here. Similar calls have been made and the work grows ever more pressing.

Papers might consider:

- The 'personhood' and rights of rivers and other natural bodies
- The permeability of 'bodies' and the interconnectedness of being(s)
- The voices of lost species
- Future species
- Nature as hyperobject
- Causality and affect in climate denialism
- Degrowth
- Unstable theory in chaotic systems
- Chaotic theory in unstable systems
- Necropolitics and the anthropocene
- Desertification in a drowning world and other metaphors of human exceptionalism
- Other-than-human social complexity

## **10. Critical Perspectives on Diversity in Science - Resistance, Paradigm Shifts, and the Power of Critical Thinking**

Camila Infanger, University of São Paulo  
Jaquelyne Rosatto, University of São Paulo

Through an apparent academic landscape that has been striving for greater epistemological diversity, a strong and deeply rooted ontology remains repellent to changes in the face of science, in nuances of scientific knowledge and variations in the profile of who makes science. Amidst the new entrees in the institution of science, in spite robust ancestrality and grounding in traditional, and community-based knowledges, are Indigenous and native populations alongside groups similarly marginalized by the mainstream knowledge validation structures of science, such as women, racialized groups in general and members of peripheral academic communities. The decolonial approach to scientific production is an urgent matter, whichever angle it is looked through, including the positivist/ productivist perspective: diversity is good for science(Fehr, 2011; Swartz et al.,2019; Potvin et al.,2018), is all interpretations this argument may incur. Equally urgent is to challenge the pillars of privilege that still prevent expansions in knowledge production, in diversity of peoples represented in science making and, moreover, in achievement of effective transformation as result of efforts made from the margins.

We therefore propose an explicitly interdisciplinary stream dedicated to promote the exchange of experiences that emerge from the margins drawn by scientific discourse itself.

Our efforts to promote these exchanges are geared in the direction of causing intentional fissures in the totalitarian surface of science as we know it. In other words, we provoke the tension on the dynamics of articulation and production from the various positions where epistemologies may arise from. We truly believe that science benefits from diversity and from a broader open end range of perspectives and epistemologies.

This stream welcomes contributions that critically reflect on the role of contemporary science, particularly through decolonial and identity-based lenses — including race, gender, disability, sexuality, traditional knowledges and geographic vulnerability.

We invite both theoretical reflections and practical accounts of local initiatives that foster diversity in science: affirmative action initiatives, quota systems, partnerships between communities and universities, interfaces between activism and public policy, and other forms of resistance from those situated at the edges of disciplines or institutions. We are also interested in interventions that expose the tension between inclusion and colonial epistemology. We welcome works that interrogate the historical inequalities that shape both the subjects and the knowledges they produce, as well as reflections on how to confront and overcome these asymmetries.

Finally, this stream seeks to foster interdisciplinary dialogues on how science truly reshapes when seen from what is left at its margins — not as an act of benevolent inclusion, but as a collective reconfiguration of what counts as knowledge with scientific value.

## 11. Work and career in the Neoliberal Edu-factory: Systemic Pressures and Inequities

Ricky Gee, Nottingham Trent University  
Daniele Bruno Garancini, University of Salzburg  
Anastasia Fjodorova, University of Stirling  
Ranier Abengana, University College Dublin  
Ylva Gustafsson, Åbo Akademi University  
Tristram Hooley, University of Derby  
Dr Miranda Ridgeway, Nottingham Trent University  
Tom Stuanton, University of Derby

We live in alarmingly precarious times: the Anthropocene, the spectre of a new Cold War, economic instability, and the rise of AI likely to result in mass unemployment. The rise of authoritarian populism continues to intensify a marketized, credentialised and atomising education sector informed by neoliberal and colonial logic. Such a context blunts the critical function of education where policy diverts funding away from collective solutions that are so important to address the many crises we face. Educators become stuck in a doom loop of endeavouring to meet metrics to justify market position, where metrics, provide a 'violent quantification of reality' (Gee, 2020), reducing pedagogy to lustful percentages of 'satisfaction', research to star status – mirroring the aspirations of a McDonald's 'Diningroom Server' – and the outcome of education toward the narrow vista of 'high skill' destinations in a precarious labour market (Gee et al, 2023).

As precarious work within educational settings increases and continues its trajectory towards normalisation, there is a continued need for critique and resistance. This includes an acknowledgement of some of its more 'hidden' impacts. While precarity is typically associated with younger academic/education workers or those who are early in their career, there is a need to account for the experiences of long-term precarity. Some of the impacts of precarity, as well as the labour of academic/education workers, can often be invisible. This includes fears of being perceived as unemployable if speaking out against exploitative practices. O'Keefe and Courtois contend that those academics who do speak out about their experiences of precarity risk possible retaliation, as they are "in effect, whistle-blowers on their institutions" (2025: 1143). They also emphasise that even when an individual is no longer 'precarious', having secured a permanent position, the impacts of "hindered career progression" and the damage to "health and finances" can be long-lasting, if not life-long (O'Keefe and Courtois 2025: 1148).

This stream welcomes submissions examining and/or resisting academic/education precarity and its multitude of impacts, including but not limited to impact on workers' mental health and well-being; impact on workers' sense of self and wider lifeworld; intersections of precarity with race, gender, class, care, disability, migrant status/citizenship, etc.; impact on teaching and learning; as well as resistances and practices of anti-precarity.

In particular we especially welcome submissions that go beyond analysing the problems of the education system and attempt to make proposals on how to solve these problems. All too often, criticisms of neoliberalism go into great depth to show the harm that this economic model causes but are then superficial when it comes to offering alternatives—Marx, for one, did not lay out a concrete plan to realise his vision. We welcome contributions that do not follow this trend and instead make proposals on how to concretely improve the status quo. Examples of such contributions include policy proposals, outlines for community projects, and programmes for grassroot activism. We also wish to explore what people can do, either individually or collectively, to survive within neoliberalism, expand the critique of it and develop forms of resistance and counter-logics. This might include individual practices, forms of collective and political action and professional interventions and experiments which seek to foster critical consciousness and build people's capacity to challenge the system.

**12. 'Beneath the remains': A critical exploration under and beyond the blinkered rationalities of contemporary civilisational decay.**

Romain Chenet, University of Warwick;  
Andrew Fergus Wilson, University of Derby.

Against the university staffing cuts that assault our sector and embed toxic rationalities into our professional and personal lives, this panel prioritises the mythical, magical, and ephemeral as central to exploring worlds beyond the castrated managerialist logics of neoliberal fetishism. Our inspirations are manifold and hope to build on the subtle promise of Fjodorova's (2025) view to unbinding our critical (and potentially emancipatory) thought and practice: 'if imagining the end of capitalism becomes delusion, then perhaps all that is left as resistance is a form of "madness" in which you're invited to take off the mask and stop performing'.

As alienating violences of dry and soulless bureaucracy continue to be enacted upon us in the name of progress, we invite papers riddled with subjectivities and uncertainty – even in-progress work and imperfect argumentation. The core theme for this panel is thus a willingness to showcase tentative contributions along the following indicative keywords and themes. We are also keen on many additional ideas and suggestions and urge you to consider submitting a paper if you independently feel that your contribution could align into our open explorations.

Panel themes (indicative): myths, magic, death, decay, rebirth, hauntology, Noosphere, weaponised demonism, disaster capitalism, collective consciousness, collapse/rebirth, supernatural, folklore, culture (inc. music / visual media), horror, arcana, paganism, voodoo, gore / cannibal capitalism, esoterica, futurism, fiction, imagination, perversion, transgression, subversion, revolution.

Theoretical, conceptual, and philosophical interventions are also welcomed, whereas wider themes and discussion nodes not noted above remain warmly invited for consideration.

### 13. Bodies in Flux: Reimagining the Human Form in Contemporary Culture

Michael Rees, Nottingham Trent University

In contemporary society, the body is a constant site of attention, regulation, and transformation. From wellness trends and cosmetic interventions to algorithm-driven beauty standards and wearable tech, our bodies are increasingly shaped by cultural, political, and technological forces. Media influencers dictate ideals of appearance and performance, while public discourse scrutinizes the bodies of women, racialized individuals, and trans people – often reducing them to symbols in broader ideological battles. Meanwhile, transhumanist visions of bodily transcendence suggest that the physical form may soon be obsolete, replaced by digital consciousness or enhanced through biotechnology.

Amid these tensions, the body emerges as both a contested terrain and a site of resistance (e.g. Foucault). Critical thinkers and activists are interrogating how norms around embodiment reinforce exclusion and marginalization. Queer, trans, disabled, and racialized bodies are central to these conversations, challenging dominant narratives and expanding the possibilities of representation and agency.

This stream invites interdisciplinary engagement with the body as a dynamic, politicized, and culturally mediated entity. We welcome contributions that explore how embodiment is experienced, constructed, and contested across diverse contexts. Submissions may draw from disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, media and cultural studies, gender studies, psychology, performance, and the arts. We particularly encourage experimental formats – performances, workshops, demonstrations – as well as traditional papers. Please note that sessions will take place in university classrooms, so spatial limitations should be considered.

Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- Embodiment and identity in contested terrains Considerations of how bodies become sites of ideological struggle, particularly in relation to race, gender, and sexuality, and how identity is shaped through embodied experience.
- Surveillance, regulation, and the political body How bodies are monitored, disciplined, and controlled through technologies, media, and state apparatuses (e.g. via contemporary (self) surveillance culture).
- Digital technologies and algorithmic aesthetics Examining how social media, AI, and algorithm-driven platforms shape bodily ideals, influence self-presentation, and reinforce or disrupt normative standards of beauty and behaviour.
- Health, wellness, and the commodification of (dis)ability Critiquing wellness cultures, medicalization, and the intersections of health, capitalism, and ableism in shaping bodily norms and exclusions.
- Performance, protest, and embodied resistance Considering how bodies are used in performance, activism, and everyday life to resist (or maybe conform to) normative expectations and assert agency.
- Trauma, memory, and the somatic archive How is trauma inscribed on and through the body? How is memory embodied?
- Gender, sexuality, and bodily autonomy under scrutiny Addressing how bodily autonomy is contested in public discourse, especially for women, trans, and non-binary individuals, and how these bodies challenge dominant narratives.
- Posthumanism, transhumanism, and the future of the body Is the body as obsolete? What are the enhanced, digitized, and/or ethical implications of technological futures?

This proposal was developed with the assistance of generative AI to support idea generation and drafting.

#### 14. "Artistic Practice in the Age of Technology: Fatigue, Failure, and Resistance"

Renia Korma, Vienna Contemporary Art Space

Patrick Loan, Vienna Contemporary Art Space

Abby Brown, Vienna Contemporary Art Space

"I use technology in order to hate it properly. You have to become familiar with something before you can develop a genuine antagonism."

— Nam June Paik, interview with Calvin Tomkins, 1975

This stream explores how emerging technologies reshape creative practice, artistic production, and aesthetic experience. From digital tools and immersive media to collaborative software and networked systems, technology increasingly mediates how artists conceive, create, and circulate their work. These developments raise pressing questions about originality, imagination, and innovation in an age when human creativity is increasingly entangled with technological infrastructures.

Platform aesthetics, standardized toolkits, and algorithmically managed workflows carry the risk of creative homogenization, creating patterns of creative fatigue and normalized practice that may constrain experimentality. At the same time, our deepening involvement with digital technologies also defines the context in which creativity takes place. While the internet offers access to endless sources of inspiration, the incessant stimulation, connectivity, and habitual scrolling of contemporary life mean we rarely sit with our own minds and lose the unstructured, spontaneous moments when flashes of creativity happen. Yet, gamification, data-driven design, and technological collaboration platforms also introduce new types of creative work. Technology, then, both unsettles and expands ideas of authenticity, identity, and cultural perception in creative practice today, as well as challenging inherited models of authorship, work, and value.

This stream calls for contributions that challenge both the potential and the perils of technology for creative work. We aim to bring performances, participatory formats, workshops, and traditional scholarship into shared conversation, inviting cross-disciplinary responses that explore how technological systems are reshaping the creation, circulation, and cultural value of creative work.

Potential submission topics:

- What new art forms have emerged as a result of new technologies and platforms, and how do these new aesthetics fit within our cultural landscape?
- How do contemporary technologies reshape originality, imagination, identity, authorship, and cultural value in creative practice?
- With phones giving us access to instant entertainment in our pockets, boredom is a thing of the past. How does this constant stimulation affect our capacity for creative and innovative thinking?
- Digital platforms are increasingly flooded with "AI slop". How does this affect our cultural landscape, and how can artists respond?
- How does automation and AI in creative practice navigate the tension between expanding human capabilities and the potential for deskilling by outsourcing essential creative and critical thinking processes?
- Is the glitch the last space where the human can still be felt? Can error, friction, noise, and malfunction still mark human presence—or has the machine taken away those too?
- How might artists and designers resist or reinterpret the homogenization, fatigue, or formulaic workflows produced by digital systems as opportunities for experimentation and renewal?
- What ethical responsibilities do artists, institutions, and audiences have in technologically mediated creative production?
- How can slow, reflective, or embodied approaches serve as resistance to efficiency- or metric-driven creation?

By situating technology within broader debates about contemporary creativity, this stream encourages critical reflection on both the challenges and possibilities of technologically mediated artistic practice.

## **15. Autoethnography as Critical Praxis – Lived Experience, Reflexivity, and Identity**

Cat Brice, St George's University of London

Denzin (2014: 22) describes autoethnography as “reflexively writing the self into and through the ethnographic text; isolating that space where memory, history, performance and meaning intersect.” This stream proposes to explore autoethnography as both a method and a methodology that values lived experience as knowledge, embraces vulnerability, and opens spaces for reciprocal dialogue between the researcher and researched.

My own PhD research examines the lived experiences of British Chinese adoptees. By using autoethnography, I have placed my positionality as an adoptee at the centre of my work, using it to contextualise the literature showing how personal experiences intersect with broader discourses. It has also helped me build rapport and trust amongst my participants who have trusted me with their own experiences. Throughout my research this approach has highlighted the complexities of identity negotiation, belonging, and cultural difference, whilst also challenging traditional positivist paradigms that privilege “objectivity” over subjectivity. Drawing inspiration from Ellis and Bochner’s (2000) notion of systematic sociological introspection and Ngunjiri’s et al’s (2010: 10) claim that autoethnography becomes an “invisible but inseparable” part of research, I have found that autoethnographic reflection not only informs my fieldwork design and analysis, but also enriches the depth of engagement with participants. In practice, my vulnerabilities and disclosures often opened space for reciprocal sharing, facilitating a richer collective dialogue around adoption, race, and identity.

I propose a stream which centres this lens at MCCT for 2026 because I feel that it’s impact fits well with the conference’s theme and objectives. Autoethnography brings theory to life, situating the personal as political which generates nuance and stimulates critical thought and reflection. To acknowledge one’s feelings and to reflect upon one’s own positionality during research is so important as it strengthens critical thought by revealing how personal perspectives and power dynamics shape interpretation and knowledge production. It creates opportunities for researchers to resist generalisations and foreground transparency, whilst recognising and respecting the power and responsibility they hold.

I invite contributions that use autoethnography to:

- Engage reflexively with identity, race, culture, gender, migration, or other aspects of lived experience.
- Demonstrate how autoethnography can shape research design, analysis, and representation.
- Explore the tensions between vulnerability, reciprocity, and knowledge production.
- Experiment with narrative to highlight the intersections of personal and political.

In bringing together scholars who use autoethnography, this stream will highlight how lived experiences can serve as a vital lens for understanding and critiquing broader social worlds.