

## **Call for Papers: The 44<sup>th</sup> Annual CLAROC Convention 2022**

Organizer: Comparative Literature Association of the Republic of China (CLAROC)

Host institution: Department of English, National Taiwan Normal University

Conference Date: June 15, 2022

Conference Venue: College of Liberal Arts, National Taiwan Normal University (162 Heping East Road Section 1, Daan District, Taipei City, Taiwan, R.O.C.)

### **Speed Shambles**

In February 2020, as COVID-19 began ravaging Europe, leftist thinkers including Giorgio Agamben, Jean-Luc Nancy, Roberto Esposito, and Slavoj Žižek offered critiques of pandemic measures, instigating a biopolitical debate. A year later, with no sign of the pandemic's abating, we must still adhere to emergency pandemic protocols, normalizing in our daily lives the "state of exception" comprising elements such as masks, alcohol sanitizers, and social distancing. We have come to exist in a spatiotemporally confused spiritual malaise of simultaneous exception and normality, anxiety and repose, acceleration and furious deceleration.

Compared with other viruses, the novel coronavirus seems to be more invasive, more likely to insinuate itself into our bodily organs, to reproduce, thrive, and suspend or subvert our daily routines; and measures such as quarantine and lockdown have similarly unfolded a suspended, abstracted temporality: The weird logic of viral contagion that has subsumed our lives is also a state of viscosity and unpredictable acceleration. We can draw on the research of University of Toronto East Asian Studies professor Eric Cazdyn to link the temporality of COVID-19 to that of chronic illness; diseases such as cancer and autoimmune diseases have become more prevalent, their diagnoses less certain, and their prognoses less assured. The interminable temporality of chronic illness has lost its linear segmentation, becoming flattened and thinned out. Perhaps, as the pandemic rages, our continuing discussions and anticipations of its end merely throw into stark relief our inability to imagine a real end or future. Might this be a contemporary spiritual malaise that we ought to fathom? At the intersection of the virus's rapid spread and the interminability of chronic illness, in the face of the various global disasters wrought by the fast and the slow, how can the humanities and comparative literature in Taiwan and even Asia represent disaster and pandemic trauma? Can we develop a prosthetic for comprehension in an age of coronavirus? How can we respond to this spiritual malaise of our time and reflect on our (inter)disciplinarity? This conference hopes to respond to these questions from a wide variety of perspectives.

Contemporary French philosopher Paul Virilio sees speed as what separates modern from premodern society, and acceleration as a prominent political phenomenon of the former. To understand the history and technological engine of modern society, we cannot neglect "accidents"

that are closely related to speed and acceleration. In his early *Speed and Politics* (1977), Virilio traces the fascination of modernity with speed and progress to the French Revolution. Virilio is particularly interested in the relation between speed and war; the history of modernity is the history of speed, involving the railroading of obstacles and limitations using martial technologies of violence or terrorism. Speed is akin to the utopian principle of the West, one might say the only principle of (hyper/post)modernity, whereupon stasis symbolizes death and decay. The “integral accident” is the other focus of Virilio’s work, constituting the un/subconscious of the politics of speed, suppressed yet always ready to strike. Hyperlinked information and communications technology allow anything, including accidents, to appear anywhere with unpredictable speed—the “hyper-present” is thus a temporality of accidents. Our inability to anticipate, let alone control, this temporality has caused modernity’s uncontrollable affect or crisis of the spirit. To Virilio, the integral accident has revealed the pursuit of movement, speed, and progress at the core of modernity; disaster is but the result of the headlong rush of the “empire of speed” into the fantasy of utopian progress. Disaster accompanies ubiquitous acceleration.

University of Melbourne researcher Robert Hassan writes in *Empires of Speed: Time and the Acceleration of Politics and Society* (2009), “Speed is of the essence, and through it, the global economy, along with its culture and society more generally, are pulled into the orbit of acceleration—a temporal *hyper now*—wherein humans (error-prone individuals) tend to cope imperfectly” (97). We even see an addiction to speed, or “speed mania” (99, 101). Neither the market economy, nor occasional buying and selling, nor climate change seem amenable to prediction and rationalization. Moreover, English scholar Benjamin Noys has proposed the term “accelerationism” to explore the impact of the temporality of contemporary capitalism and technology on the mental state of the subject. His *Malign Velocities: Acceleration and Capitalism* (2014) sets out broadly and critically his understanding of accelerationism, encompassing Italian Futurism, Marxism, TINA (Margaret Thatcher’s “There Is No Alternative”), cyberpunk, and Nick Land, among other elements.

Of the many theorists to comprehend our current spiritual malaise in light of accelerationism, Italian philosopher Franco “Bifo” Berardi writes in *Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy* (2009) that post-Fordism or “semio-capital” uses the control, distribution, and networking of labor by digital technology to turn soul, language, and creativity into the main means of value production. This system of production distorts and casts into spiritual malaise the laborer’s bodily rhythms, aesthetic sensibilities, social behavior, and psychological functions, generating symptoms such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, and panic attacks. These symptoms, taken together with the frustrations and guilt of the hypercompetitive environment, show the institution of neoliberalism to be a massive “factory of unhappiness.” At the same time, we see an ideology of self-fulfillment and pursuit of happiness predominate, resulting in the prevalence and abuse of psychotropic substances, what Berardi calls a “Prozac-economy.”

In addition, Swiss-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han writes in *The Burnout Society* (2015) that the self-protective measures taken by bodies and governments in response to crises, prioritizing denial or removal, are no longer valid in contemporary society. The transition from a

disciplinary society to an achievement (*Leistung*) society is a transition to a world without the other (horizons), a world of the violence of positivity. The pressure to achieve and to enhance productivity has become the highest priority, giving rise to self-exploitation and -criticism. French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, who passed away in the midst of the pandemic in August 2020, proposes the concept of the “disaffected individual” to highlight how the individual’s affect and connection to the other is suppressed by contemporary capitalist technologies, the control society, and consumer culture. The flip side of disaffection is a narcissistic subjectivity that subcontracts affect to products, losing the passion for life knowledge (*Lebenswissen*), art, language, and love, as well as the connection to the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*). Stiegler calls this “symbolic misery,” a provocation to reflect on the uncontrollable speed and proliferating disasters of our globalized society.

This conference takes as its theme “Speed Shambles” and welcomes exploration of any and all discourses that help to complicate the temporal trajectory of psychopolitics—be it acceleration, deceleration, stagnation, laziness, return, subversion, fold, or rift—and its concomitant spiritual malaises. We also welcome discussions of technology, speed and time, and body and evolution from various theoretical perspectives to think what post/trans/nonhuman forms of life are brought about by our technological reality, in which everything is accelerating out of control, and whether or how therefrom to open up to the vistas of critical life studies and the disciplinary reflections of comparative literature and the (post)humanities. We cordially invite scholars and lovers of literature from all over to explore the translations and extensions of speed in literature, culture, and realms of thought from the perspectives of accelerationism, slow living, and the deconstruction of speed. Suggested topics include, but are not limited to:

- COVID-19, globalization, biopolitics
- COVID-19, ecology, and species
- the post-pandemic (postapocalyptic) imaginary
- the post/trans/nonhuman lifeworld
- critical life studies
- COVID-19, disaster, the (inter)disciplinarity of comparative literature and the (post)humanities
- narratives of contagion
- spiritual malaises: mania, panic, world-weariness, fatigue, depression, disaffection, etc.
- capitalism and speed
- technology (science fiction) and speed
- representations of disaster in literature and film
- disaster and salvation
- emotional capitalism
- therapeutic culture
- the culture of addiction
- the slow living economy
- “tang ping” culture
- labor and spiritual malaise

- the economy of (un)happiness

**Proposals for papers in English or Mandarin Chinese are accepted (presenters must present in the language in which the paper is written).** Proposals for three-person panels are also welcome. Please email proposals as MS Word (.docx) attachments before **Monday, January 24, 2022**. Proposals for single papers should be accompanied by an abstract (250 words) and a cover sheet including the presenter's education and employment history, current institutional affiliation, brief list of representative works, and email address. Panel proposals should be accompanied by a panel abstract (under 250 words), an abstract (250 words) for each paper, and a cover sheet including the aforementioned information for each panelist. Please send your email to:

Ms. Lin Yu-chi

Email: [2022claroc@gmail.com](mailto:2022claroc@gmail.com)

Subject line: Proposal for the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual CLAROC Convention 2022

Mail address: Department of English, National Taiwan Normal University, 162 Heping East Road Section 1, Daan District, Taipei City 10610, Taiwan, R.O.C.)

The conference committee will send out acceptance emails by the **end of March 2022**. Accepted presenters must submit a full manuscript by **May 15, 2022**, and must become a member of CLAROC before the conference schedule is finalized. For membership application details, please see the CLAROC website: <http://claroc.tw/join>.

### **Important dates**

**Deadline for proposals: January 24, 2022 (February 1 is Chinese New Year's Day)**

**Acceptance emails sent: End of March 2022**

**Deadline for full manuscript: May 15, 2022**

**Deadline to join CLAROC: May 15, 2022**

**Conference date: June 15, 2022**