

Mark Dery Lecture

Agenda

Date: April 12, 2023

Time: 5pm

Location: Atkinson Hall Auditorium

Hosts: Professors Jordan Crandall, Ricardo Dominguez

In the Late Anthropocene, we're all castaways on a soon-to-be-desert island earth. Global weirding is here to stay. Eco-pocalypse looms. Existential dread is the new normal. Philosophy has taken a "nonhuman turn," away from the anthropocentric worldview of classic humanism. Philosophers like Eugene Thacker, cultural theorists like the late Mark Fisher, and writers of New Weird cli-fi like Jeff Vandermeer (*Annihilation*) conjure an *anti-anthropocentric*, even *post-anthropocentric* worldview: a mythology of *the world without us*.

J.G. Ballard got there first. "Earth," he said, "is the alien planet." In novels like *Crash*, *High Rise*, *Concrete Island*, and *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Ballard mapped a new, posthuman psychology that de-centers not only the self but the species, too, in preparation for the day, not long off, when as Nietzsche puts it in *Human, All Too Human*, the earth is but the "gleaming and floating gravesite of humanity."

In "Earth is the Alien Planet," cultural critic, essayist, and book author Mark Dery considers the ways in which Ballard and his descendants problematize "the human" and humanism, auguring a post-anthropocentric fiction for a post-Anthropocene planet. In the course of this illustrated talk, Dery will explore the anti-anthropocentric underpinnings of the philosopher Eugene Thacker's "cosmic pessimism," the post-Lovecraftian misanthropy of the novelist Thomas Ligotti, the "flat ontologies" of philosophers and legal scholars arguing for the personhood of forests and rivers, and the "Afro-pessimist" and "Black nihilist" takes on critical race theory promulgated by Frank B. Wilderson III and Devon Johnson, both of whom mount a full front assault not just humanism but on the very notion of The Human.

Dery is the author of four books: [Escape Velocity](#), a critique of the libertarian-bro ideology behind the Digital Revolution; [The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium](#), an intellectual "dark ride" through the American mythologies (and pathologies) that foretold America's unraveling in the Age of Trump, from the Heaven's Gate cult to the Unabomber; the essay collection [I Must Not Think Bad Thoughts](#); and, most recently, a biography, [Born To Be Posthumous: The Eccentric Life and Mysterious Genius of Edward Gorey](#). Dery popularized the concept of "culture jamming" and, in his 1993 essay "Black to the Future," coined the term "Afrofuturism."

RSVP to galleryqi@ucsd.edu.