

Caribbean Speculative Ecologies: Environment, Epistemologies, and World-Making

Online Symposium | Date: 22 February 2027 | Deadline for Abstracts: 15 November 2026

How might speculation transform the ways we understand ecological relations in and through the Caribbean? Rather than merely analyzing representations of global ecological crises, this online symposium examines how speculative modes produce distinct ways of imagining, narrating, and knowing ecological transformations in and through Caribbean cultural production. This inquiry grounds the speculative in the region's violent history as a "commodity frontier" (Niblett 2015), where colonial exploitation, resource extraction, and capitalist accumulation have historically intersected and reshaped environments and communities.

Against this backdrop, we approach the speculative both as a critical perspective and an epistemological practice. Responding to Debra Providence's observation that scholarship on Caribbean Speculative Fiction is still in its "nascent stages" and that Caribbean speculative texts are often subsumed into broader formations such as Afrofuturism (2019, I–II), the symposium seeks to contribute to the further development of the field by foregrounding the region's specific contexts and intellectual traditions. Rather than restricting speculation to a discrete genre or imagined futures, we understand it broadly as a cultural and formal mode across science fiction, fantasy, magical realism, the Eco-Gothic, and related forms. Following Karen Lord, who describes speculative fiction as an "umbrella term" for explorations of "improbable what-ifs" (2016, 7), we examine the operations performed by such "what-ifs": their capacity to extrapolate, estrange, rearrange, and imagine established relations among bodies, environments, technologies, economies, and forms of knowledge otherwise.

This understanding resonates with Darko Suvin's conception of estrangement as a means of transforming existing realities (1979), as well as with approaches that mobilize speculation to unsettle dominant epistemologies and temporalities, such as Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation" (2008) and Kodwo Eshun's work on chronopolitics (2003). In the Caribbean context, Schuyler Esprit's reflections on Caribbean futurism in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Erika and Hurricane Maria further underscore the potential of speculative approaches for confronting the environmental and social realities of climate change (2021, i9–i14). Together, these perspectives frame speculative operations as formal and epistemological strategies that can counter imperial archives, disrupt linear temporalities, and open up alternative practices of world-making.

We ask what happens when ecology itself becomes speculative: when environments haunt, mutate, remember, resist, or exceed human attempts to know and control them; when ecological forces and extra-human actors acquire unfamiliar forms of agency; when past ecological formations disrupt and persist within imagined futures; and when familiar distinctions between the natural and supernatural, human and nonhuman, organism and technology, material environment and cultural imagination become unstable.

We are especially interested in the cultural, political, and epistemological work of these speculative operations: How might speculative modes render perceptible relations obscured by dominant environmental narratives, genres, and modes and challenge established forms of knowledge production and world-making? How do they connect transformations of soil, water, and air to histories of colonialism, energy regimes, and technological change to produce alternative temporalities and futures? We invite contributions that explore speculative engagements with Caribbean ecologies across literary, visual, cinematic, performative, digital, and other cultural forms. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- **Climate futures, disaster, and environmental transformation**, e.g., speculative responses to hurricanes, sea-level rise, toxicity, and other forms of ecological disruption
- **Elemental ecologies and material agency**, e.g., speculative engagements with soil, water, air, and fire; atmospheric toxicity, oceanic abysses, and combustion regimes
- **Plantation ecologies and colonial afterlives**, e.g., ecological imperialism, alimentary imperialism, monoculture, arboreal imaginaries, and horti-countercultures
- **Extraction, petroculture, and energy regimes**, e.g., fossil fuels, petro-monstrosity, infrastructures, and energy imaginaries
- **Oceanic, archipelagic, and more-than-human worlds**, e.g., tidalectics, liquidity, island ecologies, abyssal geographies, and marine environments
- **Tourism and commodified landscapes**, e.g., tropicity, exoticism, paradise imaginaries, and infrastructural ruins
- **Cosmologies, animisms, and plural ontologies**, e.g., Indigenous and diasporic ecological knowledge, spirituality, cosmology, and non-binary ontologies

Contributions from a broad range of disciplines and critical perspectives are welcome. We particularly call for approaches that consider what the speculative mode makes **knowable, imaginable, perceptible, or possible in relation to Caribbean ecologies**. Papers might especially engage with questions of alternative (nonlinear) temporalities and ecological afterlives, monstrous and haunted ecologies, and the intersections of form, genre, and speculative epistemologies.

Submission Guidelines: Please submit a 300-word abstract and a short bio (100–150 words) by **15 November 2026** to the organizers: Dr. Carmen Dext (University of Regensburg) and Dr. Silvia Gerlsbeck Premet (RPTU Kaiserslautern-Landau), via email to CaribbeanSpeculativeEcologies@gmail.com

References

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