

Culture and Global Responsibility: Rethinking Habitability in the Age of the Anthropocene

Conference at the University of Warwick
May 12-14, 2023

Organisers:

Stefano Bellin (University of Warwick)
Guido Bartolini (Ghent University)
Michael Niblett (University of Warwick)

Conference report

Organisational aspects

I co-organised the conference with Guido Bartolini (Ghent University) and Michael Niblett (University of Warwick). We were also lucky to have the support of the Habitability GRP and of the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies. In particular, I would like to thank Leanne Weston and Catherine Constable (Habitability GRP), and Dee Parker (English and Comparative Literary Studies), who helped us with different organisational aspects and administrative duties.

We booked room OC1.06 in the Oculus building and the Faculty of Arts Cinema for a film screening. Both rooms proved perfect for the event. We also held a conference dinner at the Scarman on Saturday 13 May.

When we tried to book an accommodation for the invited speakers and two organisers (Guido Bartolini and I), we were informed that all accommodations on campus were fully booked. We therefore went to the Holiday Inn in Kenilworth which, although it is not on campus, was a good alternative.

A few days before the conference we received the news of train strikes affecting different railway lines in the UK. As a result of the strikes, some speakers were not able to travel to the conference, including two invited speakers – Tiago de Luca and Rashmi Varma – who joined us via Teams. The last-minute strikes generated many disruptions and changes in the programme, but after making some changes in the schedule we were able to reorganise the panels.

On the positive side, the fact that some speakers had to cancel and were not able to join us, gave us more time for the discussion in each panel. We were very pleased to note that there was a lively discussion in each session, and each presenter was asked several questions. Indeed, the room arrangement and the structure of each session created a sort of seminar-like

environment in which all attendees felt comfortable to ask questions, offer some comments, and participate in the discussion. From the feedback that we received, all attendees appreciated the conference environment, the panels, and the conference schedule (see programme attached for further information).

Speakers, panels, key themes

The conference lasted two days and a half. We had two keynote lectures (by Tiago de Luca and Stef Craps), one film screening followed by Q&A (with the Jamaican filmmaker and author Esther Figueroa), and a roundtable with three distinguished speakers, Martin Crowley, Emily Baker, and Rashmi Varma. These sessions and the other panels allowed us to explore the questions of 'habitability' and 'global responsibility' from a variety of angles and disciplinary perspectives, including literature, film studies, philosophy, critical race theory, migration study, and environmental humanities. The key questions discussed in the panels were:

- The boundaries of global responsibility
- What makes the Earth habitable, and how human culture, action and neglect might affect habitability
- To what extent and in what sense we are responsible for making the Earth a place where different forms of human and nonhuman life can live and thrive
- How different cultural texts and artistic media can help us to develop our political imagination and sense of responsibility
- How ongoing patterns of violence, injustice, and accumulation affect habitability and life's capacity to flourish

Outcomes

The conference allowed us to successfully explore and discuss all the key questions listed in the CFP. A defining element of the conference was its interdisciplinarity. We had speakers and attendees from a range of different disciplines, including modern languages and literatures, film studies, philosophy, communication studies, urban planning, environmental humanities, and migration studies. The conference participants were from different career stages, and we had a mix of UK and International attendees, from countries such as the US, Morocco, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. We would like to put together an edited volume that develops a selection of the papers presented in the conference. We are planning to work on a book proposal for the 'Warwick Series in the Humanities', but since all three organisers currently have different commitments, this might happen in later in 2024.