

Death, Dying and the Undead abstract submission

Title: *Death and the M(AI)den*

This paper explores the complex and troubling relationship between death and gender in a range of contemporary films and texts about artificial intelligence, focusing most explicitly on Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2015). In particular, this paper explores the ways Garland's film frames and addresses questions about how to distinguish between the living and the not-living/dead, between the human and the machine endowed with consciousness. The paper draws on the iconic work of Frank Jackson, whose 'Mary's Room' thought experiment about strong artificial intelligence is referenced in Garland's film, and on Alan Turing's test for strong artificial intelligence (the imitation game), in exploring the ways that gendered and sexualised AI throw into focus a particular set of ideas and anxieties about the relationship between death and desire.

The paper also explores the implications of *Ex Machina's* persistent references to Wittgenstein's blue book, especially in terms of Wittgenstein's early exploration, in that text, of language games: of language as a game.

In playing some games of its own, the paper moves from the *blue book* (and the character Nathan's beard) to *bluebeard*, and to the ways in which the film's iconography echoes and complicates the old French tale's images of gender, sex, desire, and death.

References

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Brief Bio Note:

Dr Nike Sulway is a writer and academic. She is the author of several novels, including *Rupetta*, which—in 2014—was the first work by an Australian writer to win the James Tiptree, Jr Award. The award, founded in 1991 by Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler, is an annual award for a work of “science fiction or fantasy that expands or explores our understanding of gender”. Her new novel, *Dying in the First Person*, will be published through Transit Lounge in 2016. She teaches creative writing at the University of Southern Queensland.