

Digital Identity in Times of Crisis

Speculative Fiction Track

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How might we envision better engagements with digital identity/identification in the future? In this track we will use speculative fiction to explore engagements across multiple possible futures.

But first, what *is* speculative fiction? Speculative fiction is a broad category of writing that encompasses science fiction and fantasy as well as their various subgenres and kin, such as alternate history, magical realism, weird fiction, etc. Fundamentally, speculative fiction focuses on imagining otherwise—other possible worlds, realities, selves. But as with all fiction, we write speculative fiction in the present; thus it also reflects where we are now and who we are now.

For this sprint we will be focusing on speculative fiction with strong positive elements, but recognition of negative elements as well. The aim isn't utopian fiction, but rather hopepunk. Hopepunk, so named by Alexandra Rowland in 2017, aligns with longer traditions of optimistic science fiction and visionary speculative fiction; it prioritizes care and community and recognizes the mess involved in building better (more just, more equitable, more joyous) societies—and that building better societies is an ongoing process rather than a static endpoint.

Speculative fiction broadly—and hopepunk in particular—helps us take big sociotechnical issues like digital identity/identification and break them down into scales that we, as individuals and communities, can envision, investigate, and act upon. But speculative fiction is more than its translational functions, it's an art. Writing (and reading) speculative fiction offers pleasure and play, and in this track we will be pursuing both of those as well.

Goals

- Experiment with creative methodological approaches to large sociotechnical issues;
- Generate a collection of keywords describing the people, contexts, and symbols of digital ID around the world;
- Develop personal creative writing practices;
- Write and finish at least one short-form piece (drabble or microfiction);
- Learn and practice healthy workshopping and feedback;
- Pull apart and reimagine assumptions about how digital ID can/should function;
- Write, revise, and finish a short story between 2000–5000 words;
- Explore intersections of digital ID systems in plural;
- Create an anthology.

Outputs

Drabble/microfiction

As an early writing exercise, participants will write and workshop either a drabble (a short story of exactly 100 words, no more, no fewer) or a piece of microfiction (for these purposes 150–250 words) exploring digital ID in times of crisis. This will be an opportunity for folks to jump right into storytelling—getting to know each other’s interests in the process. We’ll kick off workshopping with these as well, focusing on providing useful feedback that doesn’t de-energize. With such short lengths involved, this may sound easy, but writing short can be surprisingly difficult!

Short story

Every participant will write a speculative short story of 2000–5000 words, themed around better engagements with digital ID in times of crisis. Before we get to this point, we’ll first be assembling an assortment of building blocks: microfiction, prompt writing, character sketches, and collective brainstorming. These may offer characters or ideas to explore at greater length. They will certainly help establish a creative practice that will serve as a foundation. Each participant will share a story proposal. Story proposals may take different forms for different people and stories—we’ll discuss what that will entail as we get closer to starting stories. We’ll be supporting writing the stories through guided cowriting together, and all of the stories will be workshopped and then revised.

Stories can be of any speculative variety. So, a story could be set in the near future, maybe imagining digital ID five or ten years hence and how it intersects with/serves as a backdrop in people’s lives. A story could be set in the distant future, on a very different Earth, on another planet altogether, or somewhere in between. It could be set in what’s called a *secondary world*, or a world that resembles our own in some ways, but may have significantly different properties (magic? non-Newtonian physics? ____?) and histories than our own. It could involve humans. And it could involve nonhumans in any of their many varieties, natural, supernatural, or otherwise. And it could follow different structures: coming of age, unexpected visitor, journey, mystery, romance, spy thriller, biography, family saga, etc.

Fundamentally, story choices should support the stories that participants want to tell. The base requirements are simply word count (2000–5000 words) and exploring better engagements with digital ID in times of crisis in some way.

Author interview

Each participant will interview another participant about their story, giving authors—and their colleagues—an opportunity to reflect on the motivations behind the story, the writing process, and what responses they hope it generates. These will serve as companion pieces to the stories themselves.

The anthology

The anthology will be our track's major textual output, bringing together participants' short stories and author interviews. It may also include a selection of drabbles/microfiction or prompt responses, if participants desire. In its simplest form, the anthology will collect the various stories. However, we will also use it as a prompt to brainstorm ways that we can tease out connections across the stories, so that we can investigate digital identity/identification systems in plural. So, for example, we may consider the different relationships that characters across stories have with each, or how the different story moments may exist across time and place, etc.

Project timeline

Session Dates	Output Meeting Activity	Output Assignments
		Drabble, keywords, reading (see Slack channel for weekly assignments) Due by output meeting Group A: Oct 17 Group B: Oct 19
Week 3 Group A: Oct 17, 8 AM ET Group B: Oct 19, 9 AM ET	Digital ID Refracted / Rescaled Discussion & prompt writing	First workshop feedback; character sketches; prompts for other tracks; reading. Due 24 hours before output meeting Group A: Oct 23 Group B: Oct 25
Week 4 Group A: Oct 24, 8 AM ET Group B: Oct 26, 9 AM ET	Digital ID Refracted / Rescaled Discussion & prompt writing	Workshop feedback; story proposal; reading. Due 24 hours before output meeting Group A: Oct 30 Group B: Nov 1
Week 5 Group A: Oct 31, 8 AM ET Group B: Nov 2, 9 AM ET	Digital ID in Context, in Relationship Proposal meetings & cowriting	Writing update; reading. Due by output meeting Group A: Nov 7 Group B: Nov 9
Week 6 Group A: Nov 7, 8 AM ET Group B: Nov 9, 9 AM ET	Digital ID in Context, in Relationship Discussion & cowriting	Story draft Due by output meeting Group A: Nov 14 Group B: Nov 16

Week 7 Group A: Nov 14, 8 AM ET Group B: Nov 16, 9 AM ET	Digital ID in Context, in Relationship Discussion & cowriting	Workshop feedback, reading. Both groups due: Nov 22
Asynchronous-only week		Revisions
Week 8 Group A: Nov 28, 8 AM ET Group B: Nov 30, 9 AM ET	Digital ID in Plural Brainstorming intersections	Revisions Read all stories Due 24 hours before output meeting Group A: Dec 4 Group B: Dec 6
Week 9 Group A: Dec 5, 8 AM ET Group B: Dec 7, 9 AM ET	Digital ID in Plural Discussion & collective organization	Finalized stories, author interviews. Both groups due: Dec 13
Week 10	Reimaginings Public Event	