

# Facing the Strategic Sublime: Scenario Planning as Gothic Narrative

Matt Finch and Marie Mahon

The earth is split open. A vast, blazing pit disgorges luminous gas over a barren landscape. The sky is deep blue, pale at the horizon; it could be dawn or dusk. From our vantage point, the fire could be bottomless. Look carefully: at the edge of the pit, a tiny human figure stands, palms raised to the heat.

Julian Bell, *Darvaza*, 2010<sup>1</sup>



This is Julian Bell's 2010 painting *Darvaza*. It depicts a site the artist visited in Turkmenistan; its name, in Persian, means "the door to hell" (Garzemi & Garsanti, 2019). As Bell (2013) recounts, the blazing pit was inadvertently created by Soviet engineers in 1971 while seeking oil drilling sites. Striking a gas-filled cavity, the engineers chose to burn its contents, only to find the resulting inferno beyond their control.

Bell locates his painting in a tradition of artists seeking to convey a sense of the sublime, an intense aesthetic experience in which "the self becomes a mere ingredient in the landscape, feeling insignificant, overwhelmed and humbled by nature" (Brady 2013, p.199).

Yet this hellish phenomenon was created by human, technocratic actions, and *Darvaza* also serves as an example of what Ramírez and Ravetz (2011) have called "feral futures". Drawing an analogy to domesticated animals that revert to the wild, Ramírez and Ravetz describe how "human intervention create[s] an unwanted unfolding situation that could not have occurred in the wild" (p. 480), offering examples such as the nuclear incident at Three Mile Island and the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

The idea of the "feral future" is useful in helping us understand how wicked, complex problems can stem from our own actions. In the Anthropocene, feral futures are increasingly prevalent. Even the impact of something as apparently "wild" as COVID-19 has feral aspects, entwined as the pandemic is with globalisation, urbanisation, and wide variations in response by governments, institutions, and communities.

In this paper, we explore scenario planning as a tool for coping with the "strategic sublime" in feral situations characterised by turbulence, uncertainty, novelty, and ambiguity. Scenarios are not forecasts, but plausible stories of the futures which we may face. We argue that such stories enable us to appreciate powerful forces which are framed out of our current mental model, just as Bell's painting enables appreciation of *Darvaza's* sublime force. In making this claim, we draw on Emily Brady's (2013) argument for the contemporary relevance of the sublime as a philosophical concept.

Scenarios do not provide privileged access to the future, but enable us to reframe our current understanding of the world around us; to the extent that they are stories of times to come, we argue that scenarios are a speculative genre, and that their closest literary kin might be the Gothic narrative, which also offers an aesthetic "means of working through the discomfort of a changing world through the safety of fiction" (Taylor, p.66). Both scenarios and Gothic tales give form to troubling forces, allowing us to appreciate and evaluate them anew.

We live in times when turbulence and uncertainty are rife, and frequently caused or exacerbated by humanity's own systems, structures, and deeds. Rather than fruitlessly seek to re-tame such situations through calculation, prediction, and control, we propose an alternative approach: to recognise the narrative power of the stories we tell ourselves about the future, and the ways in which they can be used to face the forces and factors which lurk in our blindspots today.

## Scenarios and the sublime: one lineage

Scenario planning originated in the Cold War, when the threat of nuclear conflict challenged American strategists to plan for situations without precedent. Herman Kahn and colleagues at the Rand Corporation pioneered the approach of using imagined futures, or scenarios, as "strange aids to thought" providing "ersatz experience" and "artificial case histories" when decisions could not be based on prior experience (Scoblic 2020).

As Kahn and Wiener defined them in 1967, scenarios were "attempts to describe in some detail a hypothetical sequence of events that could lead plausibly to the situation envisaged [...] Some scenarios may explore and emphasize an element of a larger problem [...] Other scenarios can be used to produce, perhaps in impressionistic tones, the future development of the world as a whole, a culture, a nation, or some group or class."

Scenario planning subsequently entered the corporate sector, championed by the Royal Dutch Shell executive Pierre Wack among others. Wack adapted the approach to oblige decision makers "to question their assumptions about how their business world works, and lead them to change and reorganize their inner models of reality" (Wack 1985b).

In the early 1970s, Shell trialled scenarios as "a potentially better framework for thinking about the future than forecasts—which were now perceived as a dangerous substitute for real thinking in times of uncertainty and potential discontinuity" (Wack 1985a). The futures presented by Wack's team challenged complacency around the future of the oil trade and left Shell better placed than its rivals to navigate the shocks which followed the Six Day War and the subsequent oil embargo by OPEC.

As Ramírez and Ravetz (2011, p.484) put it, "The legendary scenarios built by Wack involved the price [of] \$10 a barrel for oil. Such a price broke all the expectations and rules of the industry, and managers could no more comprehend it than they could hear the sound of one hand clapping." When the "unthinkable contingency" arrived, it was not merely that Wack's team had anticipated its occurrence; rather, the scenario users had been able to let go of their existing frame of reference and recognise new patterns in their environment.

Wack's work inaugurated a tradition of planning which rejected preferred or probable futures in favour of plausible scenarios which enabled decision makers to re-perceive their strategic situation (Spaniol & Rowland, 2019).

<sup>1</sup> From Bell, Julian. (2013). *Contemporary Art and the Sublime*. Tate Gallery. [www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/julian-bell-contemporary-art-and-the-sublime-r1108499](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/julian-bell-contemporary-art-and-the-sublime-r1108499).

For Ramírez and Wilkinson (2016), creators of the Oxford Scenario Planning Approach, such scenarios invite “explicit consideration and contrast of alternative future possibilities to frame and reframe a situation” (p. 27), with imagined futures providing a unique vantage point on present circumstances.

For users of scenarios, Ramírez and Wilkinson distinguish the immediate “transactional environment”, which one can influence through one’s own actions, from a broader “contextual environment” which lies beyond the direct or indirect influence of a given actor. In this approach, the interplay of contextual uncertainties is explored to develop future transactional environments which stretch scenario users’ sense of what is going on around them and what is yet to transpire. They advocate for scenarios to be used under conditions of turbulence, uncertainty, novelty, and ambiguity - including Ramírez and Ravetz’s “feral futures”.

Burt and Nair (2020) further argue that the benefits of such “strategic reframing” lie not solely in what is learned, but what is “unlearned” in the scenario planning process: “letting go or relaxing the rigidities of previously held assumptions and beliefs, rather than forgetting them” (p. 12). Looking at the present from the perspective of plausible futures exposes blindspots and hidden assumptions; the speculative and fictional quality of scenarios allows us to relax or temporarily suspend even the most closely held beliefs without fear of erasing them.

This process of reframing may include addressing what Tor Nørretranders (1998) calls “exformation”, or “explicitly discarded information”. Nørretranders argues that in almost all human communications there are “many considerations—thoughts, feelings, and facts—which are not present but nevertheless are. Information that is not there yet nevertheless is” (p. 92). If we collect our child from school on the day of an important exam and simply ask as they emerge from the school gates, “How did it go?”, context makes clear what we are referring to; the additional material needed to make sense of our question is *exformation*.

“Exformation is about the mental work we do in order to make what we say sayable” (Nørretranders, p.95). We establish a frame of reference in which things can go unsaid, because we take for granted a common understanding. Yet, as Nazir (2020) and Hara (2018) argue, exformation is more than just implicit context. It is also the basis for encryption, visual and verbal puns, the design of mazes and puzzles, the editing process, and even the suspense we experience when waiting to see how Wile E. Coyote’s latest plot to catch the Road Runner

will fail. For Nazir, exformation also encompasses the “universe of knowledge which we have yet to discover”, the place to which our curiosity calls us.

That which goes unspoken, which is taken for granted, limits our common frames of reference, so we develop blindspots and habits of thought that render us vulnerable to uncertainty. When the assumptions we rely on no longer fit our circumstances, or unprecedented factors destabilise them, the map no longer fits the territory. When external forces buffet our constructed understanding of the world, we must reframe to accommodate them. As Nørretranders puts it, “Information is visible. Exformation becomes visible only in a context” (p. 122). Scenarios, by offering alternative future contexts for our situation, shine new light on hidden exformation.

The creation of exformation is perhaps inevitable; in almost everything we do, “an enormous amount of information and experience is processed; far more than consciousness can control” (Nørretranders, p.414). Experience must be filtered, even at the most fundamental level. Feldman Barrett (2020) argues that the human brain’s most important job is “body budgeting”: “rationality means spending or saving resources to succeed in your immediate environment” (p. 26). Inevitably, this budgeting requires our brains to employ cognitive short-cuts and other economising measures.

Normally, as Feldman Barrett points out, the best source of information for predicting organisms’ future needs comes from the past:

If a past action brought benefits, such as a successful escape or a tasty meal, they’re likely to repeat that action. [...] The movement should be *worth the effort*, economically speaking. *That* is a prediction, based on past experience, to prepare a body for action.

(p. 8)

However, when past experience no longer provides the most useful map for what lies ahead, and cognitive short-cuts cause us to exclude vital information from our understanding of a situation, we may be forced to look beyond habit and custom. This experience can be shocking and overwhelming, as well as instructive and necessary to our survival. For Nørretranders, this is the sublime:

The sublime experience is one where we draw on our entire apparatus for experiencing and dare to mark the world as it really is: chaotic

and contradictory, dread-provoking and menacing, painful and merry [...] daring to experience what is, even if it is unpleasant. (p. 415)

### The Relevance of the Sublime

Within the limits of a short article, it’s hard to do justice to a concept that is millennia old, undergoing interpretation and reinterpretation, falling in and out of philosophical favour until, as Brady argues in *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature*, the concept has “perhaps become too broad for its own good, losing its central meaning through its various transformations over the centuries and from treatment by so many different perspectives.” (Brady 2013, p.1).

This history extends through thinkers such as Burke and Kant to the treatise *Peri hypsous* or *On the Sublime*, which dates back two thousand years. This mutable, contested term has “stood, variously, for the effect of grandeur in speech and poetry; for a sense of the divine; for the contrast between the limitations of human perception and the overwhelming majesty of nature; as proof of the triumph of reason over nature and imagination and, most recently, as a signifier for that which exceeds the grasp of reason.” (Shaw 2017, p.5).

Still, a few key aspects of philosophical discussion around the sublime highlight its relevance to the kind of future-oriented strategic reframing practised by scenario planners. For Brady,

In aesthetic situations marked by sublimity, imagination and the senses are challenged, and there are limits to what we can take in and grasp. [...] Science can provide us with the reasons why we ought to admire great natural phenomena, but we can perhaps get a real sense of this greatness only when it is presented to us through the immediacy and intensity of sublime aesthetic experience.

(p. 197)

This experience, like Bell’s at Darvaza, offers not just immediacy and intensity, but also a degree of safety that is fundamental to the sublime encounter. “As a baseline,” Brady argues, “actual physical safety from a lightning storm or erupting volcano is crucial for enjoying the spectacle” (p. 156). She draws on Kant’s claim that when

facing the sublime, “we do not experience real fear, but fear in response to imagining or entertaining the thought of being in some situation where nature harms us”:

We could not engage in aesthetic disinterestedness if we were not in some position of safety or the equivalent, where we can give proper attention (e.g., we are not running away). But we cannot feel *too* safe either. While we might feel some sort of excitement in a safe place, we need to feel sufficiently close to the action, as it were, to experience the strong negative emotions associated with the sublime. (pp. 155-6).

The sublime is entwined with uncertainty: were it fully predictable, we could master it, and the sublime would become tame. Brady writes that the “unpredictability of nature means that we cannot turn the sublime on and off” (p. 128). Her comment resonates with that of Millbank (2004): “the unknown is not simply that which cannot be represented, but is also that which arrives, which ceaselessly but imperfectly makes itself known again in every new event” (p. 217). In this sense, the uncertainty of the future is, itself, sublime.

Plausible future scenarios, by offering Kahn’s “ersatz experience”, share the sublime encounter’s qualities of immediacy and intensity with the safety of distance: futures we may not have wanted to face, which lie beyond our current framing and may now seem overwhelming, are “only” fictional, set in the future, and therefore cannot hurt us. We are close enough to them that we can perceive their unsettling impact, without feeling that the mere act of reading them will send us running for the hills. This is true whether the uncertainties we face are wild—“volcanic eruptions, huge waves, rock slides, avalanches, stampeding elephants, tornadoes, and so on” (Brady 2013, p. 127)—or feral, in Ramírez and Ravetz’s sense.

While Brady argues that art can be sublime only in a secondary sense to the natural world, restricted by its “artefactuality” in comparison to the “unpredictability and indeterminate character of the natural sublime” (p. 134), she acknowledges that the arts can convey sublimity.

We have seen, for example, Julian Bell communicating the power of Darvaza visually, in a way that resonates with depictions of hell; yet, to the extent that scenarios are narrative depictions of times yet to come, they are *literary* artefacts. Perhaps their closest aesthetic kin can be found in a narrative genre: the Gothic.

## The Gothic and the Sublime: Genres on the Edge of a Nervous Breakdown?

The idea for this article came when we read *Darkly*, Leila Taylor's 2019 book on "Black history and America's Gothic soul". Taylor explores the confluences of Gothic culture and African-American experience, writing that "Gothic narratives were (and still are) a means of working through the discomfort of a changing world through the safety of fiction" (p. 66). This is not a unique or novel argument, but the context of her book, and the urgency of contemporary calls for racial justice in the United States and elsewhere, remind us that the Gothic is still doing this work today, long after its literary heyday.

It also reminds us that Gothic narratives, like scenarios, help people process "the discomfort of a changing world through the safety of fiction", and that there might be a kinship between scenarios and Gothic tales. That kinship lies, we would argue, in their entanglement with the sublime.

Botting (2014), who traces the origins of the Gothic in part to a philosophical fascination with displeasing aesthetic experiences, writes that:

In contrast to beauty, which formed the standard and ideal of artistic creation and involved a pleasing balance between harmonious natural forms and subjective feelings of love and tenderness, the sublime resulted from a disrupted sense of order and a discombobulation of reason, imagination and feeling: intensities, magnitudes and violent contrasts overwhelmed mental faculties—evoking terror, awe, wonder—and threatened the eclipse of any subjective unity. (p. 7)

For Botting, the encounter with the sublime may permit "the move from an experience of threatened limitations to a reinvigorated idea of mental capacities: a shocking or thrilling experience [...] a dynamic process that involves both loss and recovery" (p. 7).

Gothic narratives allow us to vicariously experience shocking, transgressive encounters and discoveries: dark magic, "mad science", the exposure of shameful family secrets, and visits to places where "reality's frames have ceded to supernatural forces or to powers of hallucination or unconscious desire", giving the sense that "the contours of the world in which one defines oneself seem to have changed radically" (Botting, p. 8).

Such narratives may be set in the past, present, or future. The protagonists of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* face an ancient evil, but deploy modern technology (blood



From Bell, James. (Ed.) (2014). *Sci-Fi: Days of fear and wonder*. British Film Institute.

transfusions) in their battle against the vampire, arguably rendering Stoker the father of the techno-thriller genre practised by the likes of Michael Crichton. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, too, owes a debt to the Gothic (Cook, 2018): the genre is present at the very birth of modern science fiction.

Fantastic futures have proven as valuable and powerful a staging-ground for Gothic tales as any other; new media technologies and screen cultures have opened new vistas onto the sublime, captured in the title of the British Film Institute's 2014 science fiction season "Days of Fear and Wonder" (Bell 2014). That season was promoted with a still from the movie *Alien*, depicting its hero Ripley about to confront the monster at the movie's climax.

Gothic monsters—from the ghost in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (widely considered to be the first Gothic novel in English) to *Alien*'s "xenomorph", woken from the ruins of an ancient spacecraft to prowl the corridors of a far-future human ship—"give shape [...] to obscure fears or anxieties" and "contain an amorphous and unrepresentable threat in a single image" (Botting, p.8-9).



IMAJINE: Scenarios for the Future of European Spatial Justice. (2021). IMAJINE Project.

Scenarios similarly condense and make apprehensible forces and uncertainties that have not yet played out. Stories of the futures we may one day inhabit allow for reframing, unlearning, and the unsettling of fundamental assumptions that can be "reconfigured through an imaginative and active process", just as Botting (p. 8) suggests for Gothic fiction's encounters with the sublime.

This process echoes Julian Bell's artistic feat in communicating his experience at Darvaza. It also aligns with Ramírez and Ravetz's proposed remedy to the challenge of feral futures: turning to aesthetic appreciation, rather than reasoning, to make sense of them.

"What one feels about something", they write, "[...] is the beginning of what one knows" (p. 483). They go on to argue that "an aesthetic appreciation thus invites us to drop our established labels and to consider what we feel anew, establishing new connections [...]. If feral futures are expected to produce ugly outcomes, aesthetics invites new connections that enable alternative perceptions to transcend such categories" (p. 484). These alternative perceptions can form the basis for strategy.

## Adventures in the Strategic Sublime: Scenarios at Work

When people, communities, and organizations face difficult decisions, as the strategist Richard Rumelt (2011, p. 61) notes, "Serious strategy work [...] may not take place until the wolf is actually at the door—or even until the wolf's claws actually scratch on the door—because good strategy is very hard work."

Scenarios, by presenting decision-makers with imagined futures that challenge their assumptions and in which "the contours of the world in which they define themselves seem to have changed radically" (Botting, p.8), allow us to summon Rumelt's wolf early and apprehend its power before it reaches our door, just as Gothic narratives provide us with vicarious thrills, and sublime vistas move us without making us feel we are in immediate danger.

For an example of scenario planning in action, we turn to the IMAJINE scenarios for the future of European regional inequality (IMAJINE 2021). These visions of Europe in 2048 were devised to allow policymakers and other stakeholders to explore questions of spatial justice and territorial inequality. They use plausible imagined futures to explore whether EU citizens will have equal rights and responsibilities regardless of where they live, and what notions of fairness will be applied to the differences and inequalities between European regions.

The four scenarios suggest different ways in which the future might play out based on the degree of solidarity in European policymaking and on whether the overall goal of European society is economic prosperity or some other notion of wellbeing. The visions that emerged from an iterative process with stakeholders and experts offered access to “days of fear and wonder” in which the very nature of the European Union was transformed.

In the *Silver Citadel* scenario, the EU had achieved its goals of economic equality between regions through a strict state capitalism in which the equitable distribution of wealth was guided by centralized machine intelligence. European culture had been reshaped by years of migration from Islamic countries, while the rise of the EU as a geopolitical bloc, expanding to incorporate Belarus and the Ukraine, had created new tensions with its neighbours to the east, and a perpetual Cold War.

In *Green Guardian*, climate catastrophe triggered a flight from disease-ridden cities and drowned coastlines to once-marginalized rural and upland areas. A new postcapitalist world order arose, repudiating the wasteful ways of Western consumerism, as shaped by Chinese hegemony as the post-1945 settlement was by the Allies of the Second World War.

The *Silicon Scaffold* scenario presented a future dominated by corporate city-states in which citizenship resembled today’s software subscriptions, and citizens living thousands of kilometres from their digital “home” could trade their rights and responsibilities online, with the “haves” and “have-nots” divided by restrictions on their access to virtual space.

Finally, *Patchwork Rainbow* depicted a Europe fragmented by the inability to agree on common values, with wildly diverging societies forming around conflicting notions of identity, gender, wellbeing, and even truth. In some parts of the resulting patchwork, conditions had grown so poor that the traditional flow of migration had reversed and Europeans now fled south for the promise of a better life in a thriving African “Silicon Savannah”.

Not one of these scenarios was preferred or considered more probable, but each tested policymakers’ assumptions about the landscape within which they might have to operate. Policy decisions made today, and even our current sense of identity and loyalty to an institution, region, or nation, were challenged by each scenario; in Brady’s words, when we encounter the sublime, “we also see ourselves differently, as deeply struck by it all, but also handling it, synthesizing it, and gaining some new sense of how we fit into a picture much larger than us” (p. 199).

By offering future visions in narrative form, sharing stories rather than projections or formal reports, and emphasising the elements that challenged contemporary understandings, IMAJINE sought to create what Pierre Wack (1985b) described as:

a creative experience that generates a heartfelt “Aha!” [...] and leads to strategic insights beyond the mind’s previous reach. [...] It does not simply leap at you when you’ve presented all the possible alternatives, no matter how eloquent your expression or how beautifully drawn your charts. It happens when your message reaches the microcosms of decision makers, obliges them to question their assumptions about how their business world works, and leads them to change and reorganize their inner models of reality.

Each IMAJINE scenario showed a future European landscape as unsettling to policymakers’ assumptions as the sight of Darvaza was to Julian Bell. *Patchwork Rainbow’s* desperate European migrants fleeing south across the Mediterranean, *Green Guardian’s* postcapitalist citizens rejecting consumerism, *Silver Citadel’s* EU war machines defending Ukraine and Belarus, and *Silicon Scaffold’s* loyal residents of the “city-state of Tesla-Brandenburg” all evoked the creative experience Wack described. This experience also resonated with the shock effect Brady diagnoses in “the sublime expression”, which

doesn’t spell out the changes in mental habits it requires, but packs them in as a pre-supposed punch, so that they are manifest in the consciousness of the victim rather as an unidentified sense or feeling of portentous implications than as recognized invitations to change [one’s] modes of thought. (Brady 2013, p.199).

As policymakers and other stakeholders responded to the scenarios, discussing them in workshops, teasing out their implications, reflecting on their discomforts and the options each scenario might engender, they experienced collective learning:

The sublime, then, becomes a form of illuminating aesthetic experience which can feed into the development of self-knowledge. It is worth pointing out, too, that this is not a

subjective experience, but one that we can imagine many people sharing, that is, to feel one’s insignificance, yet also one’s positioning, with respect to the environments that grip us. (Brady 2013, p. 199).

## Conclusion

The twenty-first century has already shown us that the future is capable of upsetting expectations. From the 9/11 attacks through the global financial crisis, the results of the 2016 US presidential election and the Brexit referendum, COVID-19 and the increasing impacts of anthropogenic climate change, uncertainty—much of it of the kind diagnosed by Ramírez and Ravetz as “feral”—seems always close to hand.

Under such circumstances, the desire to “tame” future uncertainty and reduce it to forecasts, projections, or algorithms, forms that can be calculated and controlled, is strong. Here, however, we propose another approach: to recognise the narrative power of the stories we tell ourselves about the future, and the ways in which they can be used to examine the forces and factors we have framed out as “exformation”, part of our background assumptions. Scenarios do not provide privileged access to the times that await us; rather, they are aesthetic depictions of plausible futures that enable us to reframe our current understanding of our environment, appreciating the power of uncertainty and its capacity to inspire fear and wonder.

Such depictions may be valuable above all in the recognition of the drastic ways in which climate change may reshape how we live. For Brady (2013), “aesthetic experience of this kind can bring home some of the ways we cannot place ourselves over and above nature” (p. 197); “the kind of distanced fear we find in the sublime prepares the way and presents a valuable ground for a moral attitude toward nature” (p. 205).

The scenario planning approach also usefully complicates the notion of “preferred” or normative futures, design fictions, and other utopian projects through which communities and organisations imagine and advocate for whatever they consider to be a better world. The scenario as Gothic fiction restores both our humility with regard to external forces that seemed almost unbearable to face, and the troubling sense that our own desires may not be pure or uncomplicated; Botting (2014) links his discussion of the Gothic and the sublime to Freud’s explorations of the sense that “Strangeness lies within as much as without” (p. 8).

This is not to say that scenario planning renders us passive or helpless. Rather, as Brady (2013) writes, citing Thomas Hill, “Learning humility goes hand in hand with valuing things for their own sake and ‘learning to feel that something matters besides what will affect oneself and one’s circle of associates’” (p. 202) She goes on to argue that “in the sublime we find a distinctive kind of aesthetic judgment grounded in tremendous qualities, complex emotions, and an active, expanded imagination” (p. 206); precisely the quality of judgment which Ramírez and Ravetz propose is required in “feral” situations.

Far beyond mere contingency planning, this strategic encounter with the sublime “invites us to reacquaint ourselves with deeper insights into unspoken and indeed unselfconscious assumptions—the very ones we use to make important decisions such as whom to marry or whether we ought to move into a new house.” (Ramírez & Ravetz 2011, p. 485).

As Brady (2013) reminds us, “Intentionally placing oneself in a sublime situation need not alter or weaken the intensity of the experience—consider the experience of storm chasers” (p. 201). By choosing to develop scenarios which challenge assumptions and bring about an encounter with the strategic sublime, decisionmakers become storm chasers. Bearing witness to plausible futures which border on the overwhelming, they are enabled to re-perceive the world around them, unlearning old assumptions and developing a new appreciation of how the future might unfold.

## References

- Bell, J. (2013). *Contemporary Art and the Sublime*. Tate Gallery. London. [www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/julian-bell-contemporary-art-and-the-sublime-r1108499](http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/julian-bell-contemporary-art-and-the-sublime-r1108499)
- Bell, James. (Ed.) (2014). *Sci-Fi: Days of fear and wonder*. British Film Institute. London.
- Botting, F. (2017). *Gothic*. Routledge. UK.
- Brady, E. (2013). *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Nature*. Cambridge University Press: UK
- Cook, D. (2018). *Frankenstein and the Gothic novel*. School of Advanced Study, University of London. [livingliterature.blogs.sas.ac.uk/frankenstein-and-the-gothic-novel/](http://livingliterature.blogs.sas.ac.uk/frankenstein-and-the-gothic-novel/)
- Ghassemi, M.R., & Garzanti, E. (2019). Geology and geomorphology of Turkmenistan: a review. *Geopersia* 9 (1), 125-140.
- Hara, K. (2018). *Ex-formation*. Lars Muller Publishers. Zurich.
- IMAJINE: *Scenarios for the Future of European Spatial Justice*. (2021). IMAJINE Project. [imagine-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IMAJINE-Scenarios-with-expert-responses.pdf](http://imagine-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/IMAJINE-Scenarios-with-expert-responses.pdf)

Kahn, H., & Wiener, A.J. (1967). *The use of scenarios*. The Hudson Institute. Washington, USA. [www.hudson.org/research/2214-the-use-of-scenarios](http://www.hudson.org/research/2214-the-use-of-scenarios).

Milbank, J. (2004). *Sublimity: the modern transcendent*. In R. Schwartz (Ed.), *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*. Routledge. UK.

Nazir, C. (2020). IAC 2020 Keynote: Architecting Exformation. [Video]. [vimeo.com/408704024](https://vimeo.com/408704024).

Nørretranders, T. (1998). *The User Illusion: Cutting consciousness down to size*. (J. Sydenham, Trans.) Penguin. UK. (Original work published 1991).

Ramírez, R., & Ravetz, J. (2011). *Feral futures: Zen and aesthetics*. *Futures*, 43 (4), 478-487.

Ramírez, R., & Wilkinson, A. (2016). *Strategic Reframing: The Oxford Scenario Planning Approach*. Oxford University Press. Oxford

Rumelt, R. (2011). *Good strategy/bad strategy*. Profile Books. London.

Scoblic, J.P. (2020). Strategic foresight as dynamic capability: a new lens on Knightian uncertainty. *Harvard Business School Working Paper No. 20-093*. [www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=57819](http://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=57819).

Shaw, P. (2017). *The Sublime*. Routledge. UK.

Spaniol, M.J., & Rowland, N.J. (2019). Defining scenario. *Futures Foresight Science*, 1, e3. [doi.org/10.1002/ffo2.3](https://doi.org/10.1002/ffo2.3).

Taylor, L. (2019). *Darkly: Black History and America's Gothic Soul*. Repeater. UK.

Wack, P. (1985a) Scenarios: Uncharted waters ahead.. *Harvard Business Review*, 63(5). [hbr.org/1985/09/scenarios-uncharted-waters-ahead](http://hbr.org/1985/09/scenarios-uncharted-waters-ahead).

Wack, P. (1985b) Scenarios: Shooting the rapids. *Harvard Business Review*, 63(6). [hbr.org/1985/11/scenarios-shooting-the-rapids](http://hbr.org/1985/11/scenarios-shooting-the-rapids).

---

**MATT FINCH** IS AN ASSOCIATE FELLOW OF THE SAÏD BUSINESS SCHOOL, WHERE HE TEACHES SCENARIO PLANNING AND IS LEAD FACILITATOR OF THE AWARD-WINNING OXFORD SCENARIOS PROGRAMME. HE IS ALSO AN ADJUNCT RESEARCH FELLOW OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND, AND A CONSULTANT TO THE IMAJINE PROJECT. SEE MORE AT [MECHANICALDOLPHIN.COM](http://MECHANICALDOLPHIN.COM).

---

**MARIE MAHON** IS SENIOR LECTURER IN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND, GALWAY, WHERE SHE IS LEADER OF THE MA IN RURAL FUTURES, PLANNING, AND INNOVATION. MARIE'S RESEARCH INTERESTS FOCUS ON URBAN-RURAL CHANGE & DEVELOPMENT, AND ON PROCESSES OF CHANGE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES. SHE IS LEADER OF SCENARIO PLANNING FOR THE IMAJINE PROJECT.

