

## Title: **Outsider Prose: Ithell Colquhoun and the Surrealist Novel as Immersive Practice**

All present systems can reasonably be considered to be nothing but tools on the carpenter's workbench. This carpenter is *you*.

[Breton, Prolegomena to a Third Manifesto, 1942]

Exploring Ithell Colquhoun's prose through the lens of Surrealism-as-praxis, this paper will argue that her staging of the encounter between the practices of Surrealism and various esoteric systems within her prose fiction – *Goose of Hermogenes*, *I Saw Water* and *Destination Limbo* – represents a unique immersive approach to textual production which simultaneously commits to the constraints of surrealist methodology whilst exceeding its operational limits, in the process widening its delimitations.

It will alternate its analysis with a reflective discussion of the influence of Colquhoun's engagement with Surrealism on this writer's own experiment in surrealist prose, *The Cinema Beneath the Lake*, tracing the impact of her strategies and preoccupations on its development.

It will consider the way her totalising perennialist commitment to the pursuit of the 'New Myth' - through a collage of automatism, objective chance and dream - works with the materiality of the novel to produce a new kind of psycho-spiritual topography. The resulting virtual machine combines in turn with the rigidity of esoteric systems in new formulations, transforming the value and nature of both.

It argues, moreover, that each work is best considered first and foremost as experimental practice, an alembic in which to manifest on each occasion a new ritual - rather than as a novel building on literary traditions. It will furthermore reflect on the notion that Colquhoun's own marginalisation both culturally and spiritually means that these works may be seen as collaborations without collaborators, a form of outsider prose contributing to the 'Unceasing Work'.

### **Speaker Biography:**

Dr Stephen Sunderland is an academic and writer. His AHRC funded practice-led PhD, 'Diving to The Cinema Beneath the Lake: a novel as immersive, synthetic-magical exploration of the surrealist prose of Claude Cahun, Ithell Colquhoun and Leonora Carrington' was completed in July 2022. His interests lie at the intersection of avant-garde creative practices with creative therapies, anti-psychiatry and affect theory. He is currently working towards the completion of his first post-doctoral research project, entitled '*The Everyday Marvellous*': Collaborative Surrealist Methods for Creative Therapy, funded by The University of Salford. Recent creative publications include the visual poetry collections *Eye Movement* (Steel Incisors, 2022), *Oneiroscope* (Kingston University Press, 2023) and *Refrains* (Steel Incisors, 2023).