



Posthuman Aesthetics, Aarhus University, presents:

## **Aesthetics, Ethics and Biopolitics of the Posthuman**

**Conference 10 – 11 December 2015, Aarhus University, Denmark**

Aarhus Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS)  
Buildings 1630-1632  
Høegh-Guldbergs Gade 6B  
DK-8000, Aarhus Denmark

## **Abstracts**

Arranged by session

(May be subject to minor changes)

**Dr. Iwona Janicka**

British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow  
French Studies, University of Warwick

## **POLITICS AS AESTHETICS: THE POTENTIAL OF JACQUES RANCIÈRE'S AESTHETIC TURN FOR POSTHUMANISM**

In the last two decades posthuman theories have attracted growing attention from scholars in a wide range of fields. Despite their interdisciplinary output, the question of the relation between posthuman theories and politics has been to a large extent evaded. This is somewhat understandable considering that the concept of politics is a highly anthropocentric term that sits uneasily with posthuman ontology. However, is there a way to conceptualize something like posthuman politics? If yes, what would such posthuman politics exactly consist in? And if no, what would that mean for posthumanism and its limits as a theoretical movement?

In order to explore this question and the question of posthuman politics I turn to contemporary French philosopher Jacques Rancière. In his relatively recent turn to aesthetics he transposes Michel Foucault's archaeological mode of analysis onto visual arts and literary texts and examines the ruptures in the regimes of art. The concrete analyses of the works of art allow him to propose a concept of politics as aesthetics. Rancière rethinks the link between aesthetics and politics, reclaiming aesthetics from the narrow confines it is often restricted to. He reveals the inherent connection between the two by analysing what they have in common, that is, the delimitation of the intelligible and the unintelligible in the world. He defines politics as a procedure, where the previously invisible entities become visible and the inaudible becomes audible. Both art and politics constitute a discontinuity in the register of visibility and reveal a new order of things. For Rancière such a reconfiguration of the sensible is a truly political act.

This paper will explore the potential of Rancière's claims on politics and aesthetics for posthumanism. I will investigate the limits of the concept of politics as it is currently conceptualized in the field of posthuman studies and attempt to propose an alternative formulation with Rancière. The aim is to explore in more detail the key theoretical hurdles in proposing 'posthuman politics' and examine the possible solutions. By exploring non-posthumanist texts and, specifically, turning to this contemporary French philosopher it is possible to shift the perspective from which the intersection of politics and posthumanism is usually considered. This in turn can help us solve some of the theoretical impasses in posthuman politics.

## Frida Beckman

Associate Professor, Department of English, Stockholm University

### Forget the Posthuman

As contemporary debates show, the question of where and how to position posthumanism in relation to humanism is clearly fraught with difficulties as well as disagreements that also and inevitably refer back to the question of the human as that which knows itself and its own finitude. It is also closely linked to the possibility of narrativizing history and mortality. Crucially, we need to differentiate between the posthuman as a discourse that comes after humanism, that is, an epistemic one, and the posthuman as a development in the nature of being itself, that is, an ontological one. Do we question conceptions of subjectivity as separable from the body, the human as separable from the animal and so on because we believe they have always been wrong or because we think that they are no longer right? Depending on our starting point, our narratives and how we need to interrogate them differ in a rather fundamental way. We can either analyze the narrative of how the “different versions of the posthuman *continue to evolve* in conjunction with intelligent machines” and how a binary distinction between disembodied information and embodied human life is “*no longer sufficient*,” in other words, narratives of human development, or, if we resist the idea that we have ever been human in the humanist sense, we could analyze what kind of thinking has shaped the concept of the human and, indeed, the posthuman, in the first place. This paper is primarily interested in the latter. It tries out a two-step model to see if there is a way in which thinking about life could take alternative routes to those commonly defined as posthumanism. The first step consists in claiming a particular aspect of Arendt’s work that tends to be neglected in discourses on posthumanism. But while Arendt’s thought is useful, it still relies so heavily on the specifically human that a second step is required. In order make Arendt’s notion of action as relying on plurality useful also beyond her humanist framework, the paper puts it in dialogue with theories of animality and idiocy as articulated by Derrida and Deleuze. This move, from human life to life as immanence, enables us to revisit the usefulness of “posthumanism” as a concept.

Alexander Wilson

Postdoc fellow, School of Communication and Culture – Art History, Aarhus University

### **Bootstrapping the Human: Retroactive Causality and the Posthuman Narrative**

As many have shown, a certain nihilism, disengagement and discouragement characterizes the zeitgeist of the anthropocene. Bernard Stiegler has highlighted this by showing how anthropocene films are typically pessimistic, such as, for example, Lars Von Trier's *Melancholia*. In the same spirit, I would like to talk about the inverse of this pessimistic symptom of the age, a complementary aspect that corresponds to a strange instrumentalization of *optimism*. We find it represented in another anthropocene film: Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*. Here again the protagonists are faced with the final horizon of hominization. Here we have a world lacking a future, dying under the retroactive effects of the human's exploitation of nature, and a *Gaia* who wants revenge. But instead of the mantra '*Enjoy it while it lasts*', a kind of moral for *Melancholia*—which incidentally is now repeated by James Lovelock with regard to the ecological catastrophe that looms over us—in *Interstellar* an opposing moral is ceaselessly repeated: '*Don't go gentle into that good night, rage, rage against the dying of the light*.' Dylan Thomas' famous poem exalts the insatiable self-preservation of the living before an impending finality. In *Interstellar*, Thomas' adage mobilizes a promethean optimism that declares: the death of the earth will not mean the end of human life; the human will surpass all the limits of the ecosystem, its biology, and even the constraints of space-time itself; the human will transcend the organic embodiment of life to become pure cosmic, hyperdimensional intelligence. The film is thus a testament to a strange promethean optimism in the possibility of conditioning of the future, as if the superstitious attitude, love, faith, or hope as such could have an effect on the unraveling of history. The film's entire plot is an unfolding of the future human's self-creation, and we come to learn that the posthuman was somehow bootstrapping its human past toward its own satisfaction, all along. With this strange loop in time, the future will have chosen its past. The mechanism of this retroactive self-fulfilment of the posthuman will have been a blind faith, an optimistic confidence in the destiny of technological determinism. By considering Leibniz's principle of compossibility and the inescapability of observation selection biases, we will assess the philosophical implications of such an instrumentalized optimism in the human future.

**Carole Guesse**

Doctoral student, University of Liège, Belgium

### **The Modification, Enhancement and Hybridization of the Human in Recent Science-Fiction Literature**

The recent and intense shift of academic interest towards the posthuman has mainly occurred in the fields of philosophy and cultural studies. Many foundational tropes of posthumanism, however, were originally born in the minds of science-fiction writers. This paper explores recent literary developments of the posthuman, with a special emphasis on recent novels such as Andri Snær Magnason's *Lovestar* (2002), Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* trilogy (2003-2009-2013) and Michel Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island* (2005).

This paper dwells on the types of modification of the human imagined – or foreseen – by the authors and their impact on the posthuman characters' inner lives, on their strategies of socialization as well as on broader contexts such as culture, society and the environment. It highlights the recurrence of a particular motif of hybridization of the human with the natural as evidenced in different forms of enhancements inspired by nature, *i.e.* the animal, the vegetal and even the mineral.

This study also returns to the distinction between transhumanism – which “promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of technology”<sup>1</sup> – and the posthuman. Instead of regarding them as separate, well-defined categories, these two terms can often be linked by correlation, causality or continuity until they become so closely intertwined that they are virtually undistinguishable from one another.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bostrom, Nick. « Transhumanist Values », in *Ethical Issues for the 21st Century*, ed. Frederick Adams. Charlottesville: Philosophical Documentation Center Press, 2003. 3-14.  
<<http://www.nickbostrom.com/ethics/values.pdf>> [Consulted 15/06/2015].

**Dr. Jacob Wamberg**

Professor, School of Communication and Culture – Art History, Aarhus University

**Exit from the iron cage of rationality? The monolith as posthuman gate in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey***

A central ethical dilemma of *2001: A Space Odyssey* is the entanglement of intelligence and aggression. The cognitive leap forward brought about when the alien monolith appears among the African humanoids has the same ambivalence as the one exerted by the Tree of Knowledge in the biblical Fall. Becoming *homo faber* means turning into carnivore and murderer of fellow species members. This aggression has seemingly disappeared, when we meet the humanoids' modern descendants in outer space, anonymous mannequins who behave just as controlled, polished and unemotionally as the bones-turned-into machines, Weberian iron cages of rationality, which they now inhabit. However, as the malfunction of the computer HAL 9000 implies, aggression is more displaced than done away with, the former weapon against animals and human enemies now becoming an automated weapon against humans themselves. This threat could flesh out Heidegger's notion of danger in modern technological *Enframing*, an all-encompassing apparatus turning nature, including human beings, into *Standing Reserve*.

In this paper I will ask if the exit from this self-destructive tendency of advanced technology is implied by the same figure that originally led into it: the black monolith. It is through the monolith as gate that the dying Bowman is led into his posthuman rebirth as a cosmic embryo. If the monolith overall has a status as the absolutely alien that guides human beings in their evolutionary path, this alienness might thus take on the character of rationality's repressed, a Jungian shadow that must be reabsorbed in order to properly leave the human condition. In any case, the form of the monolith is echoed throughout the film – for instance as frame for HAL's red eye and as self-reflective *mise-en-abyme* in the cinematic screen itself. And simultaneously with the production of *2001*, a parallel confrontation with Cartesian rationality was staged in minimalism and Earth Art through similar hard geometric volumes and their interventions in deserted surroundings reminiscent of those in *2001*

## Dr. Sophie Wennerscheid

Professor, Department of Literary Studies (Scandinavian Studies), Ghent University, Belgium

### The aesthetics of transhuman love affairs

Since Pygmalion succeeded in artificially creating the perfect lover the idea of intimate and sexual relationships between humans and non-, trans- or posthumans has become more and more popular in the 20th and 21st century. Increased technological possibilities enable us to create artificial intelligence and interact with it. In literature and film we are confronted with cyborgs, androids, replicants and other nonhuman beings almost indistinguishable from humans claiming their rights as sentient beings. They fall in love with humans and humans fall in love with them. But can man's relationship with machines translate into real-life intimacy? And where is the border between man and machine to be drawn? What does it mean to be human, today and in the future? How does the human body of tomorrow look like? And what does it mean to love transhuman? Does transhumanity open up new possibilities for transgender and multisexual experiences beyond traditional gender binaries? Or is it to ban as one of the world's most dangerous ideas? (Fukuyama 2009)

In my talk I wish to explore how transhuman love affairs are presented in modern literature and film. Starting with some early (fantasy) texts as for example Danish Louis Jensen's "Insektmanden" (1983), I will focus on contemporary Scandinavian and British/American literature and film to analyse the aesthetics of human-transhuman relationship. How are the characters presented? How do they look like? Why are most cyborgs presented as very attractive, young and beautiful women? Is this a new kind of masculine 'woman fantasy'? And what happens when a woman falls in love with the replicant of her dead husband (as in *Be Right back*, 2013)? Is bodily attractiveness of equal importance here? And what when the beloved transhuman does not even has a body, as in Spike Jones *Her* (2013), where the male character falls in love with the voice of his operating system?

But not only love affairs are to be examined. Also the more aggressive version of human-transhuman relationship is of interest here. In the Swedish series *Äkta människor / Real Humans* (2012) as also in the movie *Ex machina* (2015) the humanoid robots seem to have developed free will, desires and aggressions independent from their programming. Oppressed as sentient beings they start to revolt against the humans.

Exploring the complex relationship between humans and transhumans presented in contemporary film will thus help to discuss the special nature of intimate human relations. Is the bedrock of love being recognized by an independent other, or is the idea of an adaptive lover, following your intimate wishes without fundamental opposition, more preferable?

## ROCA panel (Robot Culture and Aesthetics)

Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen

### Robotic Art for Animals: Hands-On Knowledge through Art-Science Collaboration

*A panel of 5 presentations from ROCA (Robot Culture and Aesthetics) research group based at University of Copenhagen.*

This panel provides reflections on art-science collaboration and presents various methodologies connected to a practice-based workshop on Art and Robots. The workshop was a collaboration between ROCA research group, and artist/roboticist Ian Ingram. Ingram's robotic works question the intricate relationship between humans, animals, and machines. During an Artist in Residency Ingram created an original artwork and developed the artistic framework for workshop activities. The panel will discuss various methodologies connected with collaborations between art and research, including reflections on the workshop format as a practice-based research method and what new types of knowledge production such methods bring forth.

Based on her research on art and robotics, **Bojana Romić** will focus on how artists address a robot as a cultural figure, and how they tackle technological as well as social imaginations of robots. Her presentation will argue why art is important to the field of robotics.

**Gunhild Borggreen** will introduce the art works of Ian Ingram as a specific case of robotic art that has relevance for the study of art-science collaborations and for the field of human-robot interaction. The artist may provide insights into the core elements of robots (and perhaps of the posthuman condition in general): abstract digital coding as representations of technology in interaction with materiality and bodily presence.

Following a short video presentation of workshop documentation, **Signe Juhl Møller** will present the procedures of interaction-based video observation and video data collected during the workshop. Based on theoretical foundations of interpretation, a condensation of the video data was produced and examined to identify moments of crisis and creativity, followed by an analyses of the strategies interactants put into play. Such analyses enables the researcher to better reflect on aspects of practice-based research, including insight of how transgressions of traditions can be made to produce new knowledge.

**Jonas Jørgensen's** presentation centres on *Doctor Maggotty is Anxious about the End* – the artwork produced by Ian Ingram during his collaboration with ROCA. The final work as well as aspects of its production process are presented in an effort to articulate its decentering of the human through human-animal interactions and technological mediations.

**Stina Hasse** will talk about the dissemination of knowledge produced through art-science collaborations. The focus will be on the collaboration between ROCA and



Nikolaj Kunsthal in connection to the exhibition and catalogue about Ingram's art work *Doctor Maggotty is Anxious about the End*. The exhibition and the catalogue are discussed as boundary objects that connects both artists, curators and the researchers in a shared interest of machine artworks.

**About the panel participants:** (in order of appearance)

**Bojana Romic** (bojana\_romic@yahoo.com) is an art theory and media researcher, currently based at CBIT, Roskilde University. She has been a member of ROCA (Robot Culture and Aesthetics Group) group since 2013. She is also a member of CEDAR - Consortium on Emerging Directions in Audience Research, an international network that gathers early-career European academics focused on 21st century media audience practices.

**Gunhild Borggreen** (gunhild@hum.ku.dk) is Associate Professor at Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen, and the co-founder and project manager of ROCA. She focuses in her research on the intersection of art, technology, and society in contemporary Japanese art and visual culture. Gunhild has published in journals such as *Performance Research* and *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies*, and is co-editor of and contributor to *Performing Archives / Archives of Performance* (Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013).

**Signe Juhl Møller** (signejm@gmail.com), PhD and External Lecturer at the Department of Psychology, University of Copenhagen, her research lies within developmental psychology with a special interest in the development of creative imagination. Her vision is to overcome what may be experienced as a gap between practice and academia through practice based theoretical psychology.

**Jonas Jørgensen** (zwc790@alumni.ku.dk) is an art historian with a background in physics and electrical engineering. He currently teaches fine arts, physics and digital aesthetics at Espergærde Gymnasium and the IT University of Copenhagen.

**Stina Hasse** (stinahasse@gmail.com) is a PhD student at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen, where she is researching our relationships with machines, specifically in relation to the sound of robots. Stina has published articles on art, technology and sound in journals such as *Seismograf*, *Body, Space & Technology Journal* and *Cultural Analysis*. Stina is also an active member of Lovelace - a Scandinavian network for women working with digital technology and art, where she is curating exhibitions and workshops.

**Michael Sean Bolton, Ph.D.**

Assistant Professor, American University in Dubai

### **Zombie Apocalypse and the Conundrum of Post-humanity in David Wong's Novels**

The problem of post-humanity in a zombie apocalypse does not actually concern zombies. We pretty much know what the zombies are or, at least, are not: they are decidedly not human. Again and again characters advise each other, "That is not your sister/mother/wife, etc. She is dead, that is something else." What else *that* is may vary. What is certain is that it is no longer human but has changed irreversibly into the monstrous other. The real issue of the zombie apocalypse is that of how the uninfected retain their "humanity" in the face of the chaos that their world has become. In recent movies and television programs such as *28 Days Later* and *The Walking Dead*, the dramatic tension arises less from the fight for survival and more from confronting changes to human values and the resultant changes to human behavior—those things that define our humanity. But what, exactly, are these essential values? Which transgressive behaviors signal the crossing from human to monster? What is the essential human quality that must be retained to resist this crossing? Does such a quality exist at all? These are questions that reside at the center of David Wong's novels, *John Dies at the End* and *This Book Is Full of Spiders*.

I have suggested elsewhere that posthuman Gothic works distinguish themselves by generating dread from the processes transformation that occur as human subjects interface and/or interact with the monstrous other.<sup>2</sup> These works often raise questions concerning what remains beyond the transformation and at which point the change becomes irreversible and humanity is lost. The novel *John Dies at the End* and the film based upon it both open with a variation on the metaphysical problem of The Ship of Theseus, a problem dealing with such issues of identity and transformation. My paper will utilize this problem as a touch point for the various issues concerning the posthuman transformations of characters in both novels. This paper will draw upon recent zombie and Gothic scholarship—e.g. Sarah Juliet Lauro, Deborah Christie, and Kyle William Bishop—and posthuman theory—e.g. Stefan Herbrechter, Ivan Callus, and Pramod K. Nayar—in order to address the issues of post-humanity in the midst of the zombie apocalypse as presented in Wong's novels.

---

<sup>2</sup> See "Monstrous Machinery: Defining Posthuman Gothic," *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies*, 1:1 (June 2014), 1-15.

## **Mads Rosendahl Thomsen**

Associate Professor, School of Communication and Culture – Comparative Literature,  
Aarhus University

### **Enhancement, Imperfection and Normality**

Discourses on human change are often centered on issues of therapy and enhancement. While therapy can take on radical measures, it is less controversial than ventures into less needed hopes for enhancement of the human body and mind. In this presentation, with the help of examples from 20th century literature and art, I will argue that imperfection permeates both visual and narrative expressions of values that make ideas of enhancement much less straightforward than some transhumanist discourses pertain. Conversely, the idea of the normal, which is the goal of therapy, is in many ways an overlooked driver of human change that can be just as controversial as desires for enhancement.

**Sabine Schönfellner**

PhD Student, University of Graz and the University of Gießen

**Beyond Growing Old: Life Extension and Gerontocracies in Rufin's *Globalia*, Sterling's *Holy Fire* and Nielsen's *Den Danske Borgerkrig 2018-24***

The general life expectancy of human beings is going to rise in the future, maybe even dramatically, due to current and expected developments in biotechnology and medicine – supporters and critics of transhumanist and posthumanist concepts can agree on that. But what will be the consequences of extended lives, for the individual human being as well as for society?

Three current novels – Rufin's *Globalia*, Sterling's *Holy Fire* and Nielsen's *Den Danske Borgerkrig 2018-24* – present so-called 'gerontocracies', in which a significant number of people have access to technologies of life extension. I am going to analyze in how far these novels depict self-reliant scenarios by incorporating current discourses and developing them further by narrative means.

Central questions concerning the extension of life expectancy that are discussed by philosophers and literary scholars and are also addressed in these novels are e.g.: Is a longer, healthy life possible for human beings (Knell/Weber 2009: 8)? How might this change central dispositions of 'human nature' (Heilinger 2010: 242)? If access to technologies of life extension was restricted to a small number of people, how would that effect societal cohesion (Thomsen/Wamberg/Lippert-Rasmussen 2012: 11f.)? Would social and cultural change slow down in an ageing society (Fukuyama 2003: 67)? What are the consequences for identity concepts – might long-living human beings have several succeeding identities (Harris 2009: 195)?

Of the three novels analyzed, *Globalia* combines the topic with the most conventional storyline – I intend to show how the narrative development is burdened by addressing several issues at the same time. In contrast to that, *Holy Fire* focusses on the question of the development or succession of identities, its central focus lies on the relationship between artistic and posthuman development. The most elaborated presentation of a posthuman being can be found in Nielsen's *Den Danske Borgerkrig 2018-24*. I am going to analyze how this novel questions the boundaries of fiction by playing with metalepses and clichéd storylines and thereby discusses how life extension might lead to a new understanding of storytelling and fictionality in relation to human identity.

By analyzing these three novels, I intend to argue that they develop their own scenarios about the future of humanity that integrate and further develop current discourses. By developing self-reliant scenarios, these literary texts offer alternate cultural narratives for the future of human beings.

**Malgorzata Myk, PhD**

Assistant Professor, Department of American Literature, University of Lodz, Poland

**'If not a woman if not a man, an insect': Human-Animal Cyborg-Objects in Carla Harryman's Posthumanist Poetics**

Avant-garde poet, playwright, and essayist associated with the protocols of Language writing, Carla Harryman has played a major role in the creation of American experimental literary scene. In this essay I focus on the concept of recalcitrant subjectivity in Harryman's writings, situating it in the contradictory space at the intersection of poststructuralism and posthumanism. I argue that Harryman's complex language-oriented poetics articulates a truly posthumanist desire to both explode and expand the present-day idea of the subject. Her inter-genre hybrid texts hinge on the utopian impulse to refigure the narrative and character beyond their coded, gendered, genre-, meaning-, representation-, and identity-oriented protocols. The posthumanist perspective present in Harryman's work emerges as a radical reconceptualization of the ideological underpinnings of discourse and politics of identification in Western late-capitalist societies. Examining Harryman's writing as a thoroughgoing critique of identity politics, I argue that her work must be considered in the context of critical posthumanism as a radical rethinking of subjectivity in terms of a conceptual territory where misrecognitions based upon a broad spectrum of hegemonic assumptions about gender identity, sexuality, and the body are exposed and transformed according to different parameters. The human-animal cyborg figures that populate Harryman's texts are notoriously contradictory and improbable, yet perversely erotic. They occupy impure intermediary zones outside the realm of aesthetics, slipping in between genres, genders, as well as human/nonhuman and subject/object positions, interrogating perilous states of subjection, commodification, as well as extreme objectification. They are never conventionally figured characters, but rather subject-/object- effects, functions of space, figures of speech, modes of being, and unformed creatures presented as potentialities rather than protagonists endowed with stable identities. They are human-animal Harawayan cyborg-objects in need of connection and in pursuit of a new sense of posthumanist ethics. In my talk I will address Harryman's earlier work *Animal Instincts*, her later writings *Baby* and *Gardener of Stars*, the collaborative project *The Wide Road*, written by Harryman and poet Lyn Hejinian, as well as her recent *W-/M-*.

**Matthew Lerberg**

Adjunct, University of Texas at Arlington

**Presence in Absence: The Aesthetics, Ethics, and Biopolitics of Place in Allison Hunter's "New Animals"**

In *Untitled #3* an eerily beautiful tan and white-spotted deer calls out from the bottom left-hand corner of a large photograph. The hazy, colored background highlights the animal's body, while the starkness of the backdrop disassociates the deer from its habitat, a void that unsettles human spectators. The animal is both close in proximity and undeniably distant—a deer without a herd or a place to roam. The work derives from artist Allison Hunter's 2005 digital chromogenic print series called "New Animals." The series offers a reply to John Berger's question "why look at animals?" because in an era of rapid species extinction, environmental upheaval, and stagnant views toward nonhumans we must look before these animals cease to exist, before they are only memories, dioramas in a museum, or images on gallery walls. Her work establishes an avowal of the lack of "place" of animals in human thought and material culture by severing her subjects from any identifiable place. Through a collision of ethics and aesthetics, her work also indicates the biopolitical predicament for nonhuman animals under current anthropocentric paradigms—this "new place," an unidentifiable washed environment, remains devoid of place and the material inter-connections between nonhumans and their habitats. The crisis of such a move signals the inability for humans to rethink their relationships with nonhumans under current consumer practices. Place becomes apparently present in its absence. The ethical and aesthetical importance of her project rests on a material-semiotic understanding of place and the nonhumans who inhabit it.

Examining Hunter's work through theories of materiality, place, aesthetics, and semiotics illustrates the crucial ethical importance of the biopolitical relationships between humans and nonhumans in shared places. The absence of place via erasure signals not only the impending future for humans, nonhumans, and shared environments, but also the influence of the past on the present and the future. The reverberation of material and cultural practices of the past become intermeshed via the material semiotic theories of Donna Haraway, the posthumanist theories of Cary Wolfe, and the current and future biopolitical issues facing scholars and activists. Eroding overly tired and problematic binaries in favor of assemblages per Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory better situates the convergence of aesthetics, ethics, place for biopolitical considerations relating to humans and nonhumans.

Carol-Ann Galego

Doctoral Candidate, Memorial University of Newfoundland

***Can They Suffer? : Resolving the 'Biopolitical Paradox' with the 'Question Concerning Animals'***

Biopolitics, the political management of life at the level of the population, is beset by a tragic paradox: the ability to regulate the vitality of a population has been historically linked to an increasingly sophisticated administration of death. In view of the particular violence associated with administering life at the level of the population, I locate the potential for a life-giving politics amidst the multiplicity of individuals. And yet, it is through the process of individuation that power establishes contact with life, manipulates bodies, and populates a life force with which to execute its economic-political agendas. As the work of Giorgio Agamben demonstrates, the ways in which we designate life often expose a derivative kind of 'bare life' to potential violence. What, then, is the basis for distinguishing between life-giving modes of individuation and ones that perpetuate biopolitical violence?

Demonstrating the depth of this problem, Agamben argues that the privative structure of Aristotle's phrase, "born with regard to life, but existing with regard to the good life," is structurally identical to Aristotle's identification of political life with the transition from voice to language. That is, the biopolitical production of 'the living being who has language' exposes the life of beings without language to an unclassified sphere of violence, namely, the space that falls outside of 'the good life.' By refusing to accept this classical distinction as a natural given and considering alternative approaches to animality, Agamben introduces a productive horizon for ushering in a radically new politics of life: the question concerning animals.

Following this trajectory further, I turn to Jacques Derrida's reintroduction of Jeremy Bentham's question concerning animals: the first and decisive question is not whether or not animals have speech or reason, but whether or not they can suffer. I argue that, by privileging our response to animal suffering over the particular nuances of the human-animal distinction, we need not ignore the rupture between those who say 'we humans' and those 'we humans' call 'animals.' In this way, the question concerning animals suggests a way to prioritize the multiplicity of individuals that neither homogenizes nor delineates them in potentially violent ways. When we truly encounter suffering, we are not yet implicated in a discursive way of thinking and so are free to relate to others in distinctly non-privative ways. In the face of suffering, we do not designate *this* life, and *not* this life, is worthy of response. We simply designate life – this life – in a way that enables us to respond.

## **Pernille Leth-Espensen**

Postdoc fellow, PhD, School of Communication and Culture – Art History, Aarhus University

### **Dis/Interested: Engagement, Autonomy and Critique in Art and Science Projects**

Within the last 20 years, an increasing number of artists have taken an interest in the natural sciences and are working with fields such as cell biology, molecular biology, neurobiology, and nanotechnology. Artworks in this field thus employ scientific tools and many artists are also preoccupied with ethical questions. Does that entail that the boundaries between art, science, and ethics are completely dissolved? Are the artworks interesting from a scientific perspective, and do they have to be? If the boundaries are dissolved does art then lose its autonomy and critical potential?

In order to discuss these questions this paper will first look at how the relation between art, science and ethics has developed through history. Today, art and science are usually considered to be two distinct realms. But as several art theorists have argued, our modern concept of art has only existed for the last 200 years. From Ancient Greece up to the end of the eighteenth century, the boundaries between art, technology, science, and ethics were less pronounced than they are today. However, during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, science and technology, ethics, and art became polarized into separate domains. In *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), the philosopher Immanuel Kant explicitly defines the aesthetic judgment in opposition to science and ethics, because it is *disinterested* and *purposive without a purpose*. The past hundred years, however, there have been various attempts to liberate art from its autonomous position and make it part of life praxis, and the relation between art and politics and between art and ethics has thus been a hot topic in art theoretical discussions. This debate becomes even more pertinent when discussing art-science projects, because art is not only related to politics and ethics, but also to science. With the aid of the philosopher Jacques Rancière, this paper will argue that the artworks in the art-science field are both autonomous and heteronomous. Most of the artworks occupy a paradoxical position where they are involved in science but from an autonomous position. The paper will argue that in many art and science projects the boundaries between art, science and ethics are in some ways blurred, but not in a way where they simply merge, but instead in a manner in which productive tensions are created.



## Timo Menke & Nils Agdler

Timo Menke: Artist/Filmmaker

Nils Agdler: Photographer/Artist

### Gifted Men: Dealing with anonymous sperm donation

The collaborative film project **Gifted Men** (2015, 67 min) deals with the commercial distribution of semen in Denmark from the perspective of anonymous donors and is the result of a multidisciplinary research-based artistic project on donation practices. Donations are often regarded as selfless good deeds, and are expected to be voluntary, free and anonymous. Danish legislation allows for anonymous sperm donations, leading to increasing fertility tourism from other European countries. Sperm banks operate in a complex grey area on several levels, marketing human sperm as a processed product. Special attention has been given to issues relating to masculinity and fatherhood, and how masculinity is manifested at the sperm banks and clinics. The project is based on personal interviews conducted with anonymous sperm donors and clinic managers in Copenhagen, Odense and Aarhus in Denmark.

Stine Adrian, Associate Professor of Techno-Anthropological Studies at Aalborg University, has mentored the project, and her doctoral thesis has been very influential for the project.<sup>3</sup> Applying a feminist ethnological perspective, she has conducted comparative field studies at insemination clinics in Sweden and Denmark. Sebastian Mohr, Assistant Professor of Educational Sociology at Aarhus University, has further enriched the project with his essay "Portraying donors – donating semen, masculinity, and regulation"<sup>4</sup>.

Some of the questions raised in interviews with anonymous donors are: What motivated you to become a donor? How do you relate to the children you will never meet? How would you react if one of "your" children succeeded in finding out that you are his/her biological father? How do you reflect on a future scenario where more men choose to donate and more women select anonymous fathers for their children?

Gifted Men is visually composed of city views, sperm transport scenes, interior scenes at clinics, and interviews with donors and clinic managers. The montage of interrelated film channels across multiple screens makes it possible to relate different stories to each other. Based on the multichannel editing, the managers' (fathers') stories are set against the donors' (the sons') stories. Many aspects of the project's overall logic are based on donation, in content, form and concept. Gifted Men also comes with a conceptual framework for a donation ceremony: every venue, institution, or space where the work is exhibited is offered a special donation of the film in a personally designed, unique ceremonial event.

In their artistic practice Nils Agdler and Timo Menke share a common interest in contemporary social phenomena, storytelling and history. Based on a previous collaboration on electricity and electrical hypersensitivity (Fugitives from the Fields), Gifted Men is a collaborative project.

---

<sup>3</sup> Adrian, Stine, *Nye skabelsesberetninger om æg, sæd og embryoner: Et etnografisk studie af skabelser på sædbanker og fertilitetsklinikker*. Linköping: Linköping University Electronic Press, 2006. , 452 p. <http://www.divaportal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A22551>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.kalmarkonstmuseum.se/wpcontent/uploads/2015/02/>

**Bioart as biopolitics: resisting biopower in the post-biological age**

Is it possible to effectively resist the biopower? This question becomes especially important at the time when regimes of biopower are carried out indirectly and the power-machine operates silently and invisibly in the background of everyday human activity. Being aware of the modern trends to re-establish the sovereign authoritarian forms of biopower (Agamben, Bauman), I suggest that equally dangerous are those manifestations of biopower which, under the cover of neo-liberal ideology of "care for life" lead to the establishment of the new form of "soft" normative dictatorship of self-governance and self-responsibility. In the contemporary neo-liberal societies this amorphous biopower-machine takes the form of pastoral biopolitics (Rose). Oppressive coercion is replaced by gentle forms of influence that manifest themselves in the promotion of desirable and appropriate modes of "life-style". Simultaneously the ideology that defines not only the social and individual forms of human existence, but also specifies possible ways of understanding life itself is implicitly inscribed in modern projects of "care for life". This fact is particularly important in the era of biological revolution which challenges the notion of "life as we know it". We live in a world that makes it impossible to define such categories as life, nature, and ecosystem and last but not least subject in an unambiguous way. In this framework, pastoral biopower appears as an ideological tool for silencing controversial issues and taming problems that demand open and profound cultural analysis. The initial question raised in this context requires reformulation. Can we imagine the resistance to biopower, which would be based on development of critical, non-dogmatic, non-authoritarian ways of interpreting the challenges posed by the post-naturalistic biology, biotechnology and biomedicine?

I argue that this kind of reflexive engagement is crucial to bio art. I refer to selected projects of Art Orienté Objet, The Tissue Culture&Art Project, Paul Vanouse, Adam Zaretsky, Critical Art Ensemble, among others, which I consider to be examples of bottom-up resistance to the "soft" regimes of pastoral biopower. I will focus on these practices that intensify the experience of fluidity and liminality of life itself and question taken for granted universalities of pastoral biopolitics. However, these art projects offer no definitive answers or easy solutions. Instead, they stress the sense of uncertainty, anxiety, and non-obviousness in the face of processes that we experience on a daily basis, that affect our perceptions of the world and ourselves, and that represent a radical challenge to ontological and epistemological status quo. The core of these activities is transgression and subversion of biopolitical mythology, which often produces a simplified, reductive and reactionary vision of subjectivity, the body and the life itself. It is the art of action, in which direct experience of biological processes triggers ethical and political reflection. I understand them as a form of "nomadic politics" (Braidotti) and philosophy in action, which aim is to destabilize the cognitive dogmas of (bio)political correctness and to enhance critical awareness of mechanisms and technologies of biopower in the age of post-natural biology.

## Peter Mortensen

Associate Professor, School of Communication and Culture – Department of English,  
Aarhus University

### **“The Grass Was me . . . the Distant Invisible Mountains Were Me, the Tired Oxen Were Me”: Karen Blixen, Critical Posthumanism, and the Anthropocene**

In this presentation I pick up, critique and develop the ecocritical reading of Danish writer Karen Blixen that was first launched by Thorkild Bjørnvig in his 1982 article entitled “Karen Blixen og forsøgsdyrene” (“Karen Blixen and the Laboratory Animals”). An ecopoet and ecocritic *avant la lettre*, Bjørnvig frames his eco-centered approach to Blixen in terms of wilderness, conservationist and animal rights discourses, all of which would come to play important roles in the emergence of nature-oriented literary studies from around 1990. In this essay I will seek to outline an alternative ecocritical approach to Blixen, which is grounded in third-wave ecocriticism, cyborg studies, human-animal studies, critical plant studies and especially in current critical posthumanist thinking. As defined by Cary Wolfe and others, the primary concern of critical posthumanism is less the what comes after the human – say, a new race of genetically modified multicolored humanoids, as in Margaret Atwood’s novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003) – than the designation of a certain mode of critical reflection on humanism directed at critiquing the ontological foundations of the Cartesian cogito or Enlightenment subject, historicizing the emergence of a particular notion of the liberal subjectivity, and delineating the world-historical effects and implications of humanism.

My discussion revolves around Blixen’s *Out of Africa* (1937), a generically multiplicitous and indeterminate text that has held center stage in a series of contracted and contested debates about language, race, gender, species and subjectivity. Borrowing the rough structure of Donna Haraway’s epochal “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985), I organize my essay around three “crucial boundary breakdowns” – between humans and machines, humans and animals, and humans and plants – that I see happening in the text. *Out of Africa* deserves a prominent place in the Danish/Scandinavian ecocritical canon, I argue, less because it shows how Blixen learned to care for animals and wild nature than because it is a text of “leaky distinctions” (Haraway 151) that defamiliarizes the familiar and makes the human appear strange to itself. Thus, if the challenges arising with our environmental predicaments in what geologists have begun to call the “Anthropocene age” call on us to imagine our humanity non- or post-anthropocentrically, then Blixen is one Scandinavian writer who can help us think beyond the human and consider our species in relation to other forms of life.

## **Sissel Olander & Tau Ulv Lenskjold**

Sissel Olander: Postdoctoral fellow, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Design.

Tau Ulv Lenskjold: Postdoctoral fellow, PhD, University of Southern Denmark

### **Speculative prototypes and alien ethnographies: Experimenting with relations beyond the human**

The main focus of this article concerns the role of speculative design prototypes as a means of intervention into everyday life contexts in order to explore, and possibly enable, new kinds of relations between humans and non-human beings. By addressing a human de-centering through design, we want to quarry what kind of new possibilities might arise when design speculation meets a practice of doing what we will call an 'alien ethnography'.

In this regard the aim of the proposed article is twofold: First, we discuss a turn towards interspecies relations in collaborative design explored through a recent design project entitled *Urban Animals and Us*. The project was developed in cooperation with a Danish retirement home in the city of Elsinore over an eight months period. Through different forms of design interventions and collaborative events with residents and staff, the project set out to explore the potentials of forging new interspecies relations between wild animals, like magpies and gulls, living in the park and neighbourhoods surrounding the retirement home, and fragile seniors residents - many of whom were suffering from dementia. Secondly, we consider an ontological trajectory in anthropology that seeks to explore an anthropological move "beyond the human" (Haraway 2008, Helmreich 2008, Kohn 2013, 2014). These aims are bundled together by an overarching agenda concerning how to augment and enrich speculative design interventions with an ethnographic framework that envisions the world as seen from the perspective of multiple entities, in order to enable a different vantage point from which to understand and premise further design actions. We will tentatively term such an ethnographic approach "alien", in the sense that it experimentally places humans on equal ontological footing with other non-human beings and thus seeks out a perspective "beyond the human" from where to inquire and engage the world by means of design prototypes as probing devices. In this regard, we consider the designed artefacts as sensibility-engendering devices that "create their own heterogeneous arrangements for relating" (Law and Evelyn 2013). This strategy of engagements is inspired both by recent developments in continental philosophy that goes by the umbrella term "object-oriented ontology" (OOO) (e.g., Harman 2005, Bryant 2011, Bogost 2012) as well as accounts of animal perspectives - or "umwelten" - in the work of Jacob von Uexküll (2010), the founder of modern ethology.

## **Brian Bloomfield & Karen Dale**

Brian Bloomfield: Professor, Department of Organisation, Work and Technology, Lancaster University, UK

Karen Dale: Senior Lecturer, Department of Organisation, Work and Technology, Lancaster University, UK

### **Posthuman Performances: The Aesthetics and Ethics of the Enhanced Labouring Body**

This paper considers how a growing aestheticization of organisational life (Hancock 2003) links to a pervasive idea(l) of 'performance' that itself feeds into trends towards a potentially 'posthuman' employee: one who can go 'beyond the norm', whose performance is, through technological enhancement, 'better than human'. A concern with how organisations are 'putting aesthetics to work' (Hancock and Carr 2003: 137) is not simply about marketing activities, but recognising the increasing (in)corporation of aesthetics in a number of ways. Brand culture has turned 'inwards' onto corporate culture which employees must enact, the design of the workplace to facilitate the greater engagement of employees who are now expected to 'live the brand', managing their embodiment and emotions as a required part of the employment contract ('aesthetic labour'), and 'performing' the part of the ideal employee who identifies with the organisation. Thus 'performance' in the modern organisation is not solely about productivity or efficiency, but about *how* work is done, *how* the employee engages with the organization. The performance of performance is key, as Feldman and Klich note: "Merit alone is insufficient for advancement in organisations. Creating the appearance of being a winner, or looking 'promotable' is as important" (1991: 68).

Performance, and the assessment of performance, is but one aspect of neoliberal governmentality that characterises the contemporary biopolitical terrain (Munro 2012). The increased pressure to perform and visibility on the part of employees is coupled with an increased emphasis on achievement, personal development and realising one's potential; constituted and evaluated through all too frequent management appraisals/performance reviews. When set against a background of work intensification and the increasing erosion of home/work boundaries it is hardly surprising that some employees would respond to the seeming allure of a technological fix that might enable them to excel, to go beyond the norm for them; or at least keep up with the pace and volume of work.

The requirements of economic production have long integrated human embodiment with technology in order to harness if not subordinate the individual capabilities of the worker to the system. There has been an aesthetics to this (both supportive and oppositional), as might be illustrated by Diego Rivera's frescos depicting workers at Ford's River Rouge plant, questioning the relationship between human and machine. Similarly, there is an aesthetic built into this emphasis on performance that feeds into a particular engagement with technological enhancement, which is currently gaining impetus, one might argue through mundane, everyday, indeed workaday, processes. Whether it is a pharmaceutical that might help you to stay focussed and awake for longer, put you at ease for a job interview or cope with the next ap-

praisal, make it easier for you to be sociable in a teamwork setting or interact with clients, technology might seem to offer a means to self-manage performance. Critically, the possibility that commonplace human behaviours in the workplace become rendered as objects of pharmacological management augers a shift from a narrative of therapeutic repair and restoration to one of enhancement and at the same time opens up new forms of subjectivity and (self)regulation (e.g. neurochemical selves, Rose 2007).

Moreover, we argue that there can be no aesthetics to the enhancement of work performance without an ethical response. Developing from Welsch's (1997) notion of the relation of aesthetics to 'an-aesthetics', we consider how the very aesthetization of organisational life and performance obscures the biopolitical questions that adhere in the 'posthuman' project. In this we take a relational approach to ethics, recognising the entanglement of the human and non-human materialities involved in the enhanced posthuman employee.

**Blake Re-Reading Lavater: The (Post)human Divine of *An Island in the Moon***

In 1772 Johann Kaspar Lavater published his four-volume work entitled *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnise und Menschenliebe*, in which he develops a basic classification of people into personality types based on their physiognomy. In other words this work developed a science of interpreting (*gnomis*) the essential nature (*physis*) of character via facial reading. Lavater's work was translated into French and English and was enormously popular across Europe. The development of his ideas by Gall and Spurzheim into the science of phrenology gave further impetus to the popularity of physiognomy in the nineteenth century, and was enormously influential on the development of nineteenth-century psychiatry and neuropsychology. The science of reading the face in the *Physiognomische Fragmente* had as its primary aim the recovery of the divine in the human and the promotion of a love of the human. Yet Lavater's British contemporary, William Blake, who not only annotated a copy of Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* but who provided four engravings for the English translation of Lavater's *Physiognomy*, can be seen to refigure the hierarchy of creaturely existence found in Lavater's story of the perfectly proportioned human face as an expression of divine spiritual being. Blake's unfinished satire entitled *An Island in the Moon* includes a curious sketch that depicts a human face surrounded by the faces of various animals, most of whom are gazing intently ahead. The work itself is a confusion of voices with nonsensical characters and oblique references to science, mathematics, religion and the law such that the confusion itself enacts a curious field of modulating becomings across a world that disrupts the neat teleologies of Lavater's pseudo-science. I will argue that Blake's field of modulating becomings gestures towards a creaturely existence that is intrinsically posthuman in its destabilisation of the categories underwriting anthropocentrism, so that the divine humanism of Lavater's *Physiognomy* becomes the (post)human divine grace of the Blakean immortal spirit.

**“Blood in the Sink”: The Aesthetics of the Human Animal**

In a review of *The Island of Doctor Moreau* in 1896, Chalmers Mitchell lamented that H. G. Wells's new book, contrary to his debut *The Time Machine* a year earlier, was too much invested in the horrific imagery of “blood in the sink,” the details of vivisection, and “the insistence upon the terror and pains of animals” to be considered a work that presents a fair depiction of scientific practice. Begging Wells to make “a return to his sane transmutations of the dull conceptions of science into the living and magical beauty” of before, Mitchell closes his review by remarking that the combination of “living material from different creatures” is not even scientifically possible – a comment that today resounds as a vain attempt to ward off an anxiety that is intensely real. Ever since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), texts of fiction have engaged with revolutionary reconfigurations of what it means to be human; taking up the possibilities of techno-scientific modernity and grafting their own imaginative power into them. Breaching the boundaries of the human is oftentimes represented in these texts by the quintessential appeal to the empathetic response: pain, horror, and terror are the immediate effects of (de)humanization processes; and their intensities testify to the intimate – and more often than not hugely problematic – connection in modernity between ethical codes and ‘human’ subjectivity. These negotiations of future possibility in fiction writing are as real today as they were a hundred and two hundred years ago, witnessing an editorial in the journal *Nature* in 2011 entitled “The Legacy of Doctor Moreau,” in which it is warned that “instinctive revulsion [to new technologies that might result in “mixing species”] should not automatically block future research that will undoubtedly pave the way for therapies for currently incurable diseases.” This paper will primarily engage with Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau* to focus on such moments of horror not as the culprits responsible for a legacy of “instinctive revulsion,” but as the imaginative heritage of the constant reconceptualizations of the human that were provoked by new scientific theories (evolution) as well as new emerging technologies (bioengineering, surveillance). The particular emphasis lies on the modes of contact (torture, vivisection) that are figured to establish the terror of reaching beyond the limits of human selves, and more specifically, how these scenes seek to achieve new forms of the aesthetic.



## Fatma Aykanat

Lecturer, Bülent Ecevit University, Faculty of Science and Letters, English Language and Literature Department, Zonguldak, Turkey

Ph.D. candidate, Hacettepe University, Faculty of Letters, English Language and Literature Department; British Cultural Studies Doctoral Programme, Ankara, Turkey

### **Psychological/Emotional Recovery of Human Beings through Intelligent Machines: The Use of Intelligent Machines in Literary and Visual Media as Alternative Solutions for Human Being's Unfulfilled Desires and Deferred Dreams**

Intelligent machines have been rapidly making their ways into everyday life. Given the emerging popularity of the concept of the Posthuman in literary and visual media, this paper aims to discuss the implications of our technologically re-shaped lives through examples from different genres and it will explore how the recent proliferation of technological developments reshape the human beings' methods of coping with everyday problems and their emotional/ psychological outcomes. Maggie Gee's Cli-Fi novel *The Ice People* (1998), Charlie Brooker's dark, futuristic TV series *Black Mirror* (2011-), and Disney's animated movie *Big Hero 6* (2014) illustrate those emerging ways of using intelligent machines in everyday life by exploring the re-definitions of the role of intelligent machines in human life as well as the reconfiguration of the boundaries between human and machine.

*The Ice People*, for example, concentrates on human-nonhuman interactions in a dystrophic Anthropocene setting. Delving into the interactions between the human and the robotic bodies, Gee portrays technologically reshaped sexualities in a climatically changed world and highlights the emotional attachment between organic and mechanic bodies enabling humans to adapt into the new conditions of climate change. In the novel, the Doves, which are high-tech robotic designs with their ability to mimic human behaviours, are used by men to fill the emotional gap created by their misandric companions; the female members of the society. Similarly, *Big Hero 6* portrays the emotional recovery of a depressed little boy, Hiro, who suffer from the loss of his brother, through a robot called "Baymax" which is designed to act as a personal health care companion for human beings. The mechanical companion in the animated movie is portrayed as the support system, for human beings, or as personal therapist who encourage them to follow their dreams deferred after emotional crises. In certain episodes of *Black Mirror*, intelligent machines are similarly portrayed as providing technologically enhanced consolation services for human beings after the loss of a life partner. By giving an opportunity for the person, who tries to cope with the emotional pain of loss, to interact and communicate with the deceased loved one, based on the data loaded on the system of an intelligent machine covered in the synthetic body of a human. *Black Mirror* also holds up a mirror to the possibility of bodily incorporations of human and machine through, for instance, a memory implant enabling human beings to store everything they see/hear etc. By this way, it opens a discussion on the ethical dimensions of technological enhancement of the basic sensual perceptions and memory of human beings.

## Dr. Gabriella Calchi-Novati

Lecturer in Performance Studies & Critical Theory, Doctoral Researcher, Institute of Philosophy, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana

### Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's "*Bio-installations*"

*It wouldn't be possible to cross certain thresholds in the control and manipulation of bodies without entering a new bio-political era [...] Electronic filing of finger and retina prints, subcutaneous tattooing [...] are elements that contribute towards defining this threshold.*<sup>5</sup>

- Giorgio Agamben

Philosopher and computer scientist Jaron Lanier, in his 2010 *You Are Not a Gadget. A Manifesto*, expresses his doubts about the concrete democratic potential of contemporary technologies. He claims that 'persons' have become 'rarities' in the twenty-first century 'lifeless world of pure information' where 'the widespread practice of fragmentary, impersonal communication has demeaned interpersonal interactions'.<sup>6</sup> Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben seems to echo Lanier's concerns when he states that 'the historical experience of our time is that of an *original participation* [...] that has no appropriation to accomplish, a sending that has no message, a destiny that does not originate in any foundation.'<sup>7</sup> What we are experiencing right now is a performance that, paradoxically, does not have anything to be performed, and yet keeps being performed. It is through Agamben's theoretical stand on biopolitics that I interrogate what I call the "bio-installations" of Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, in which a critical engagement with biometric systems of identification and sophisticated surveillance systems is instigated. While in *Wavefunction*, presented at the 2007 Venice Biennale, Lozano-Hemmer places some fifty Eames molded chairs in a series of rows, so that as soon as a viewer approaches them, a surveillance system detects the human presence and automatically lifts the chairs off the ground, creating the crest of a wave that then spreads over the whole room; in *Pulse Tank*, *Pulse Spiral* (both 2008), *Pulse Index* (2010), and *Voice Array* (2011), the participants' heartbeats, fingerprints or voices are detected, recorded and physically manifested, in real time, resulting in a cumulative performance of the visitors' physical traces in their very absence. Each newly recorded heartbeat, fingerprint or sound, in fact, pushes the visual signs of the previous ones one position down on the flashing display that encompasses the whole exhibition environment. Lozano-Hemmer's work presents us with a provoking way of re-thinking the technological means of surveillance that have become normalized via the vir(tu)ally intrusive hegemonic ideological apparatuses of biopolitics. These "bio-installations" as ephemeral artifacts have the potential to show the ways in which, in our contemporary hybrid times<sup>8</sup> - which I refer to as *biopolitics 2.0* - anybody is eventually turned into "nobody", that is, into the negation of "body" as such.

---

<sup>5</sup> Giorgio Agamben, "No to Biopolitical Tattooing," *Le Monde* (10 January 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget. A Manifesto*, (London: Penguin Books 2010), ix; 4.

<sup>7</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities. Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Heller-Roazen, trans. Daniel Heller-

Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 112 (*emphasis* in the original)

<sup>8</sup> New technologies such as biometric systems of identification have allowed for a dangerous intertwining of the biological

and virtual dimensions. The virtual, which should be the dimension of representation only, has been replaced by what I have

called the 'bio-virtual'. See Gabriella Calchi-Novati & Matthew Causey, "'ID/entity: the Subject's Own Taking Place'," in

*Performance, Identity and the Neo-Political Subject*, ed. Causey Matthew and Fintan Walsh, (Routledge, 2013): 33-48.

## **Mette-Marie Zacher Sørensen**

Postdoctoral fellow, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen

### **The Human Face as an Archive**

One can understand the human face as a kind of archive, storage of time and memories. A potential that according to Bernard Stiegler is impossible in many contemporary real-time media. Paradoxically, the beauty industry's anti-aging products try to change the facial archive status. The Australian media artist and theorist Grayson Cooke has studied how the beauty industry has become a multidisciplinary enterprise, with 'high end' techno science such as stem-cell research, gene therapy and nanotechnology, cosmetic surgery and cosmeceuticals. Contemporary cosmeceuticals play rhetorically on an aura of biotechnology and techno science with their content of *active* ingredients that *affect* the skin's structure. Thus we have an interesting conflict between the temporal effect on facial skin as a privileged and authentic trace and biotechnological attempts to regulate this temporality. In my paper I will discuss existential issues on temporality and the human face with reference to contemporary artworks as well as Internet-memes, i.e. "Predict-Your-Future-Face"-applications, exploiting the temporality of 21st Century Media.

## Megan Conley

Visual artist

### The Skin as a Mask: A Temporary Conceal versus an Unapologetic Reveal

This paper will analyze the skin as a mask, born of my experiences in dealing with facial and dental deformity and the ensuing correction processes, which have lasted ten years of my life, and are still ongoing. Currently, twenty-five plates and screws that will keep everything intact for the rest of my life hold my mouth, chin, jaw and gums together. The changes in the skull mediate the skin and reveal its plasticity. This allows me to think of the skin as an object, because of its ability to adjust and become manipulated. My skull has lived the life of two different people: one that once repulsed others and another that is now more desirable. That experience of rejection based on my appearance has compelled me to make mixed media portrait installations (masks) that raise awareness of the ongoing issues towards women, relating to ideas of beauty, the grotesque, and cultural pressure in a society obsessed with beauty standards. "*The Skin as a Mask: A Temporary Conceal versus an Unapologetic Reveal*", takes as a point of departure the artist Orlan and her use of her skin (face) as artistic medium, as well as her own body as a 'ready-made.' I interrogate the violence inherent in Orlan's work, especially claims that celebrate the deconstruction of her own, and in extension, other women's bodies. The term 'carnal art' and its meaning to Orlan, the authorship of her body, anesthesia, and the doctors who now refuse to continue to operate, will be featured in my analysis of her work. As an artist who experienced the reconstruction of my face due to serious medical reasons, not by choice, my insight into the concept of plastic surgery as art differs dramatically. Two of my current works, *Mapping #1* and *Layers Revealed (Mapping #1)*, address the reconstruction of my skull, the mapping of my face, and examine how these invasive surgeries have affected the formation of my identity. When Orlan permanently changes her body she problematizes the gaze, but her work also falls within what Kristine Stiles has coined the "Culture of Trauma." I will examine specifically the repetitious violence against her body, what Stiles cautions against. As such, I develop a new framework for understanding the implications of the skin as a mask: as masking and perpetuating violence in the history of representation; especially of women, and argue to its ability to both conceal and unapologetically reveal identity.

## Jennifer Heusel & Jeremy Gordon

Jennifer Heusel: Assistant Professor of Communication, Department of Communication, Language and Literature, Coker College

Jeremy Gordon: Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies, University of South Florida

### **Aesthetics of the Genome in *Orphan Black*: Constituting Posthuman Ethics by Affirming and Morphing the "Human"**

You're on the subway platform waiting for the next train, due to arrive any second. You look to your left and see a woman calmly take off her shoes, fold her jacket, and set them on the floor next to her purse. She walks towards the ledge of the platform, and turns her head toward you. Your eyes meet and it's like looking into a mirror. Before you can register surprise, she walks off the ledge and is hit by a train. Thus opens the BBC's *Orphan Black*, a part cyberpunk, part science fiction television series that imagines encounters amongst genetic copies, or clones. The show is about the biology of cloning and becoming something posthuman, processes that are aestheticized in ways that accent slippages between nature and nurture, science and myth, religious ritual and positivist methodology, technology and subjectivity, the normal and the perfect. Although the biotechnology of cloning is central, much of the series struggles with ongoing human apprehensions about self-determination, individuality, and ultimately what it looks like to become posthuman – inside (i.e. DNA strains) and out (i.e. art).

In this presentation, we explore the nascent aesthetics of the genome in *Orphan Black* and the available posthuman ethics thus constituted. Specifically, we explore several posthuman styles, styles that are shaped and maneuvered around biopolitical collectives presented in the series such as clone club or "sestras", Project Leda and Project Castor, the Proletheans, Neolutionists, and the Dyad Institute. These collectives manifest a range of stylistics that inform contingent and improvisational posthuman "technologies of the self" (Foucault). The various stylistics animate a substantial rivalry amongst the collectives, illustrated by the symbiotic relationships between characters and the sensibilities of the biopolitical groups. In our work, we will show how the different collectives in the series are stylistically grounded in human ethical categories (family, science, religion, militarization, industry), and how they perform these categories in unfamiliar ways in order to constitute technologies of self and posthuman life. As an audience of (post)humans we are asked to engage with these ethical sensibilities differently and in ways that complicate yet reinforce what it means to be (post)human. The genomic stylistics in *Orphan Black* thus ultimately affirm the "human" as the foundation for imperfect posthuman belonging, encounters, and orientations, but in ways that expand and morph how it might mean to become human - inside and out.

### **The Leviathan's Eyes: Terror, Television and Sovereign Spectatorship**

In *Leviathan* (1651), Thomas Hobbes constructs the sovereign as an 'Artificial Animal' constituted by its human subjects, who must obediently sacrifice their lives to protect the machine-sovereign-state in times of war. The sovereign hence appears as the posthuman entity *par excellence*, combining machine, man and animal in its indefinite body. The sovereign has reemerged in governmentality under the 'Wars on Terror,' as Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler have argued drawing on Michel Foucault. If sovereignty is today defined by the tactical use of the law and by machines such as drones, then we are witnessing the resurgence of the Artificial Animal, or 'Automaton,' Hobbes theorized; a multifaceted entity capable of killing outside the rule of law through unlawful contracts concluded with its agents. In this paper, I argue that a new form of sovereign spectatorship arises from the conjoined use of drones and their representation in contemporary American television series. My wager is that the sovereign gaze of the drone is reproduced through the televisual apparatus, and that this gaze operates with impunity in an attempt to shore national identity at the expense of ethics. As Marc Redfield and Judith Butler have argued, aesthetics and terrorism have entered into a paradigmatic relationship under the War on Terror, as the "shock and awe" doctrine of the Bush administration was relayed by news broadcasters, and reformulated in multiple televisual fictions. More than any other visual support, television has become the medium of terror following the September 11 attacks, and the same can be said of the recent attacks in Paris. The resurgence of Hobbes' Artificial Animal, and its interactions with the televisual medium, needs to be subjected to critique if we are to resist the erasure of the ethical and political dimensions of drone warfare and the reiterated performance of sovereign power through a gaze endowed with the capacity to kill. To this effect, I offer a reading of an episode of the American television series *Homeland* titled, "The Drone Queen" so as to inquire into the construction and critique of a sovereign spectatorship in the post September 11 American television and the narratives of unaccountability which seem inherent to such fictions.

## **Johannes Korsholm Poulsen**

PhD fellow, School of Communication and Culture – Comparative Literature, Aarhus University

### **New Adventures in the Anthropocene: Comic Book Heroes and the Posthuman Horizon**

Ever since Stan Lee and Jack Kirby brought the superhero comic back from the dead in 1961 with titles such as *The Fantastic Four* and *The Uncanny X-Men*, characters transcending the limits of the human have been a cornerstone of comic book storytelling. Genetic mutants and biomechanically enhanced superhuman geniuses were presented as strange and inhuman, but they were also always champions of humanity in the sense that they worked to preserve human society and humanistic values.

But what happens to these heroes in a world where readers are increasingly aware that they live on a planet that suffers *because* of human society and its ambitions? Can the true hero keep saving humanity even if it leads to the destruction of everything else? And, as the advancement of technology heralds the end of human unity both in comic book folklore and in society at large, can the tale of the individual hero as the “ultimate human” saving the day keep making sense as a point of identification and consolation for readers and storytellers?

In this presentation I will compare attitudes toward the limits of humanity in early Marvel superhero comics to some of the most popular comic book universes of the present day. I will argue that the dual challenges of coming to terms with the weight of Anthropocene guilt and the ambiguous promise of posthuman possibility is an all-pervasive theme, both in contemporary mainstream superhero comics and in the less editorially constricted creator-owned comics made by many of Marvel’s writers and artists. I will analyze creative efforts to move the comics medium away from its inherent anthropocentrism in order to reforge the genre conventions of comic book heroism to better suit a new attitude toward the relationship between humanity, technology and the planet.

I will demonstrate how many of the contemporary stories draw their inspiration specifically from Jack Kirby’s work in the sixties and that his fusion of science fiction and fantasy, leading to his sense of what Kirby scholar Charles Hatfield has called the Technological Sublime, lead the way for what has now become a medium with a preference for telling stories about the beginning of the end of The Age of Man.

**Ilana Morgan, PhD**

Assistant Professor, Department of Dance, Texas Woman's University

**The New Aesthetics of Skin: Touch, Closeness, and Connectedness via an Extended Technological Internet Corporeality**

This presentation outlines the findings of a study in which undergraduate college dance students were asked to describe their online experiences of communicating and connecting to others via social media. This inquiry connects interview data from 16 undergraduate female dancers together with established posthuman, embodied cognition, and feminist theory—theories that challenge and destabilize our definition of corporeality in relationship to use of internet technology. Participants' descriptions of their online experiences were rich with embodied metaphors of touch, closeness, and movement through space and time in a manner that disrupts the dichotomies of the real versus virtual and the human versus computing machine. As a result, the participants' descriptions of self and the body create a new aesthetic understanding of the skin, or edges of self: a contemporary kinesthetic and sensorimotor experience at the intersection of the human body and cyberspace. These students' perceptions and understanding of time, space, touch, and movement enliven posthuman theory through lived experiences of a young generation. This presentation illuminates the collaboration between the body and technology at play in everyday life and highlights the value in viewing the body and computing as a malleable and transfusive delineation. To conceptualize the skin and self as aesthetically in bloom with its environment requires new perceptions of subjectivity, identity, edges of the body, and life itself as a new form of extension and scaffolding with the internet environment.

This presentation outlines the parameters of this study, students' descriptions of their internet usage in relationship to their sense of self and corporeality, and new questions to consider when reconceptualizing the body, its agency, its form, and the space in which it exists by way of our digital world. This presentation/paper outlining new aesthetics of skin and self leans on the work of Judith Butler, Andy Clark, Katherine Hayles, Lakoff and Johnson, Deleuze and Guattari, and Brian Massumi in its analysis.



## Rosemary Lee

Artist, researcher

### Bioinformatic Poetry

At the intersections of biology, information technology, and language, cross-disciplinary research and collaboration is generating new ways of understanding connections between bioinformatics and poetry. Analysing key projects merging bioinformatic and poetic practices, from art/science collaborations such as Nick Goldman and Charlotte Jarvis's collaborations in DNA data storage to poet Christian Bök's *Xenotext Experiment*, this paper takes an overview of major themes emerging from this development. What do genetic code and language have in common? What is the poetic potential of biological processes? Can an organism generate poetry by living? What is the status of such a being? Posing questions such as these, pioneers in this area of interest are not only bridging the bounds of disciplinarity to produce new forms of art and scientific techniques, but they also present new ways of envisioning and interacting with life processes. That it is possible to inscribe and decode messages in the biological data of a living organism gives new meaning to communication and to writing, as well as opening the way for many questions as to the future potential, potential consequences, aesthetic sensibilities, and ethical implications. Biopoetry challenges us to redefine our relationship to language and to non-human beings through a writing which speaks in the language of life.

**Stina Marie Hasse Jørgensen**

PhD Student, Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, University of Copenhagen

**The aesthetics of NAO:** *Unexpected interactions and functional glitch*

This paper will discuss how the glitches and unpredictable behaviours of seven NAO robots, small humanoid robots made by Aldebaran Robotics, has been used in the aesthetical dimension of the live production ROBOT by Blanca Li Dance Company.

The incorporation of seven NAO robots as dancers in the performance is a challenge due to Blanca Li (Furfaro 2015, Laurent and Magali 2015). The robots fall, move too slow, make noises, and bump into each other when they are not supposed to. Why use the robots when they are so bad at coordinating their steps and moving their bodies in time with the dancers on stage? Why use robots that are not functioning, as they should?

These questions will be discussed in relation to Rosa Menkman's theory of glitch in her book *The glitch moment(um)* from 2011. Here Menkman defines glitch to be "an unexpected occurrence, unintended result, or break or disruption in a system" (Menkman 2011: 26). In Menkman's optic the glitch can both be understood as a technological malfunction as well as a symbolic connotation of breaking flows.

Drawing on interviews with dancers, programmers and choreographers involved in the production, this paper focusses on how the glitches of the NAO robots has been incorporated and used as part of the aesthetics in the performance. The glitches of the NAO robots will be discusses as technological malfunctions and symbolic connotations, where the errors and unexpected actions of the NAO robots provide a specific aesthetics in the ROBOT performance.