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Transhuman Enhancement in 21st Century Storytelling

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Program and Book of Abstracts

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PLENARY SPEAKERS



ALEXANDRA GLAVANAKOVA

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“New Modes of Reading Literature Online”

The subtitle of this talk is *Literary Reading in the Age of Distraction*. My aim is to initiate a discussion on reading literary texts online as a complicated process, which involves writing, and especially creative writing, mainly to investigate how the intertwining of the two can affect reading literacy. I will explore the boundaries of traditional literary study in the digital era, and what the benefits of utilizing digital tools in the teaching and studying of literature in higher education could be.

Reading habits change, as portable digital devices encourage us to browse, skim, tap, click, rather than read in depth; search for information, rather than go into deep reading of continuous prose, especially long-form texts as fiction. The online reading experience emphasizes speed and immediacy at the expense of the length, complexity and density of texts, which affects the “plastic reading circuit” (Wolf 2018). Reading onscreen emerges as the new normal, one in which memory and especially concentration are proving more challenging. Researchers and educators express the concern that these developments can stump the expert reading brain.

The main questions posited in reading research are: How does digital media, which help foster “continuous partial attention” (Stone 1998), decreased working memory (Baron 2015), multi-tasking, high levels of stimulation, low-level threshold for boredom, and the addiction to novelty, affect the reading process? How does this shift from page to screen affect literacy development and humanities research? What are, in particular, the repercussions of the new media ecology on the reading and study of literature in an academic environment? The most significant goal of research done in this area for me is to establish what specific training and what strategies of reading need to be applied in order to foster the bi-literate brain (Wolf 2018): one equally conversant in both digital tabular reading and long-form linear reading.

My interest in this area grows out of the real challenges I face every day in the literature seminar room in discussions of texts by American writers, when students come to class with the excuse “tl/dr”: too long / didn’t read. The questions posited here grow out of my own experience as a university professor doing a lot of reading – as a reviewer and editor of my own work for academic publications, as a colleague, as a teacher. My combined interests in American literature and culture on the one hand, and digital culture, on the other, despite being so diverse as subjects, eventually blended in what I teach and in how I teach it, and became also the focus of my critical inquiry.

My talk will build on research on new reading modes of fictional texts recently carried out by the national Reading Practices in Bulgaria Project (2018-2019) – The Online Reading Strategies Working Group, which I supervise, as well as on the findings of several cross-national European projects: ARFIS (2014-2017), E-READ (2014-2018), READ-IT (2018-2020). Significant contribution made by the work of American researchers in the field will also be incorporated: N. Katherine Hayles, Mark Algee-Hewitt, Jessica Pressman, Andrew Stauffer, Lisa Guernsey and Michael Levine, Naomi Baron, Marianne Wolf, to mention just a few.

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“Before Humanity”

The phrase “before humanity” is ambiguous, it refers to pastness, but also to presence and future. In doing so, it seems to encapsulate the current “posthumanist” climate in which the question

of what it means to be human is being asked again with great urgency, in the context of new threats and “opportunities”. Posthumanism refers to, on the one hand, the rush for ever “smarter” technologies that increasingly think with and for humans and, on the other hand, to the ever more urgent discussion about climate change, extinction angst, exoplanets, biopolitics and speciesism. In short, one could say that posthumanism labels the “mess” that arises once “traditional” humanist answers to the question of “what does it mean to be human?” are giving way to the uncertainty about what “humanity” should do next. As the proliferating ideas and visions of our “posthumanity” are reaching a wider public and are circulating in the traditional mass media and increasingly of course in the so-called new, digital or social media, the transformative potential of posthumanism (usually confused with *transhumanism*) is becoming undeniable – for better or for worse. In this context, what I have been referring to as “critical posthumanism” is aimed at evaluating, contextualising and historicising but also appreciating the resistance to the posthuman, posthumanisation, posthumanism or post-humanity. The idea is to “read” the anxieties and desires at work when dealing with concepts of the human, posthuman and nonhuman and to also look at prefigurations, genealogies, disavowals and alternative futures. “Before humanity” is part of this ongoing project which challenges posthumanist futurists and techno-utopians by recalling prefigurations, genealogies and disavowals of the posthuman. Focusing on the ambiguity of “before” implies a kind of reverse thinking and an imagining of a time of and before “our” origins. It goes against the predominant strain of posthumanism which tends to focus on (and maybe even hasten) what comes *after* humanity.

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“Capital Reproduction: Maternity and Productivity”

I argue that biotechnology is remaking our concept of life in ways that undermine the security of the political subject of Western modernity. Life and subjectivity are now both conceptualized through economic logics, as theorized by Foucault in his work on entrepreneurial subjectivity in *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Yet as Melinda Cooper and Catherine Waldby have shown in *Clinical Labor*, the reinvention of work under neoliberalism in the context of biotechnology goes beyond this changed relationship from selling one’s labor power to acting as a manager who maximizes the investment of one’s capacities and energies, as theorized by Foucault. In addition, they note ways that an increasing number of subjects are required to sell not their labor-power or their affective and intellectual capacities, but rather the very biological processes of their bodies. In contexts such as serving as test subjects in pharmaceutical trials; donating replenishable bodily materials such as bone marrow, blood gametes, and breast milk; or in serving as surrogates to gestate babies who will be raised by other families, human biological capacities become part of the bioeconomy. These new conditions for labor and new kinds of extraction of surplus value are predicated on understanding the processes of biological body, not simply its labor power, as the site of capitalist extraction.

My paper will elucidate this shifting regime of vitality as part of a larger transition that I argue reflects the real subsumption of biology under capital. Engaging with this regime through the example of biotechnological maternity in recent SF works, I argue for the usefulness of posthuman theory for understanding the contemporary reality these texts emblemize. This crisis of how to understand the subject speaks to a larger crisis of political representation, such that an increasing number of people fall outside the civic status that “humanity” as a concept was meant to protect from traumas such as being exploited as mere biological resource. Drawing on the films *Splice* (Natali 2009) and *Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve 2018), as well as the novels *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* (Meg Ellison) and *The Testament of Jessie Lamb* (Jane Rogers), I will theorize what it means for contemporary biopolitics when human social reproduction becomes not merely a support for capitalism but a marketable commodity. This context, I argue, suggests why so many dystopias about infertility are appearing now, a moment when overpopulation is a larger crisis.

PANEL PAPERS



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"Digital Storytelling in the Global Social Context"

This paper examines the additional complexity that technology adds to the discussion surrounding narratives as a communal space. Beginning with Walter Benjamin's critique of the novel in the essay "The Storyteller" – the loss of communal experience that comes with moving away from storytelling as a physical, community-based phenomenon – I interrogate the notions of loss and gain that technology has afforded narrativity. I begin with Benjamin's argument that the novel – the result of printing press technology – reduced the communal experience once had by the teller and audience to an isolating event of solitary writing and reading, then move through attempts in the 20th and 21st century to reclaim this communal experience in the novel via "club stories," framed narratives, and other allusions to orality. I focus primarily, however, on new attempts to use the affordances of technology, like stories shared via social media such as Twitter and Reddit and told via podcasts like *The Moth* and *This is American Life*, to reconnect publics to storytellers. I challenge the current critique of the screen as a mediating – and therefore alienating – factor in public storytelling. Rather than mourn the loss of "authenticity" (a residual notion of Benjamin's other most infamous essay, "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction") considered to be removed by the screen's mediation, I explore the possibilities that technology affords to create new communal spaces, suggesting we have more possibility than ever to narrate across linguistic, national, and cultural borders. I do not mean to naively suggest, of course, that technology itself is the key – but instead argue that we should acknowledge that humans have built new tools for our own narrative use, and that traditional notions of narrative possibilities can and should be redefined. By focusing on the physical form that digital narratives take, this project allows me to illuminate the presumption that the "medium is the message" and shift the ways in which we understand the value of narratives in the global social context.

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"Accountability and the Cyber-Enhanced Body in 21st Century Cinema: Sanders' *Ghost in the Shell* (2017)"

Taking as a starting point the idea that in our contemporary societies, biosciences and informatics have the possibility to enhance the human body and to encourage the evolution of the human into something superior to our critical condition, this paper seeks to analyze the willingness (or lack of it) to accept responsibility or to account for the consequences carried out by bodies that transcend our (so far) known limits. For this purpose, and taking into account ideas proposed by transhumanism (Brostrom, Horavec, Moore, Vinge) and critical posthumanism (Braidotti, Herberchter, Vint) I will look at cyber-enhanced bodies as they are depicted in contemporary popular cinema, with a focus on the ethics and gender implications of body transcendence.

In this sense, Sanders' *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) stands as a popular text from where to consider the implications of human enhancement on contemporary societies. The film features a cyber-enhanced female cyborg (Johansson) that discovers how her life was stolen in the past to create a perfect soldier capable of ending up with the world's most dangerous criminals. Major Mira has a human brain in an artificially enhanced body, which eventually problematizes her (posthuman) subjectivity and troubles her identity. The film makes us consider the following issues: who is responsible for the (sometimes destructive, "immoral", or sinful) behavior of these transhuman characters? Which

are the moral and ethical implications of such actions? Do these created entities have responsibilities over “our” world? What are the consequences when societies are more concerned about *what* can we transcend than about *how*, *why* and *at what costs*? As it will be argued here, the representation of cyber-enhanced bodies on screen allow us to reconsider our responsibilities with the world we live in, while providing with a space for reflection and criticism.

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“The Posthuman Lens in *Infinite Jest* and the Transhuman View from the Natural/Biological Eye”

The use of lenses and the eye has been extensively used and discussed in the representation of post/transhuman bodies in multiple contemporary narratives. The search for meaning and understanding of the scientific and technological influence upon individuals has given rise to many representations of fragmented individuals and communication stances. This can be observed in David Foster Wallace’s novel *Infinite Jest* (1996) where there are many instances of characters using various lenses/eyes as a way to reach an epistemological and ontological sense of “I” in a technologically constituted space and where communication mostly occurs (and if it is ever effective) through the screen of entertainment.

The use of the technological and entertainment-driven lenses is translated into monstrous, deformed and prothesized identities as a reflection of an uncanny posthuman object/subject. By formulating the need for the use of a lens in their existence, I will expose the annularity and possible consequence of this artificiality entrapment behind the technological and entertainment image.

Even though it was written in the late-twentieth century, Wallace’s work seems to forecast the transhuman gestalt perspective of the self (including the body and mind binary transformation). In the novel, there appears to be an inability to distance oneself from the addiction of technology entertainment that results in a lack of satisfaction. I will suggest that *Infinite Jest*’s argument, among other things, is to show how this posthuman dystopian vision reflects upon the critical eye/I the human being needs to hold over technology while accepting the inevitable influence it has upon the human. That is, this paper will demonstrate through various theories how transhuman self awareness is connected to the natural eye in the process of observing and accepting how the technology of entertainment determines part of what we are.

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“Patterns of Transhuman Numbness in “The Belonging Kind” and *The Circle*

At the beginning of his collection of essays *Understanding Media*, McLuhan states the following: “Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man – the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media.” In “The Gadget Lover: Narcissus as Narcosis,” he warned again that acquiring a new extension brings about a process of numbness. Narcissus became numb when watching his reflective extension in the water and, as a result, he died. In his analysis of the Greek myth, McLuhan concludes that Narcissus did not drown because he was in love with himself but because he was not aware the reflection was his own image, lack of self-awareness thus being a gate leading to our numbness: Self-amputation forbids self-recognition (42). What follows in his essay on narcosis is his well-known notion of the principle of self-amputation: any technological extension demands “new ratios or equilibriums among the other organs and extensions of the body” (45). Images of the new

humans as empty shells or living-dead have proliferated in written and audio-visual narratives of the last decades, as symbolic icons of the process of ultimate auto-amputation. Shirley and Gibson's short story "The Belonging Kind" offers a symbolic reading of humanity as being in the process of becoming totally self-amputated for the benefit of a capitalist system that works as a circle to subdue its subjects who, thus, eventually become its slaves. In 2013, Eggers fictionalized in *The Circle* the ideological implications that the completion of the circle of knowledge would have when it might be extended "collectively and corporately ... to the whole of human society." This presentation proposes a contrastive analysis of these two fictional narratives as reflections of the limits that McLuhan's theory of self-amputation imposes on any optimistic notion of transhumanism.

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"Transhumanism in Canadian Literature"

This paper aims to give an overview of the state of transhumanism in Canadian literature. Although now undergoing a surge in interest thanks to the popularisation of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), Canadian literature has often been overlooked, and more so when it comes to theoretical formulations that have only recently gained momentum, such as transhumanist theory. One of the reasons for Canada having been comparatively overlooked is because of its proximity to the United States, which has usually taken the spotlight with regards both to the technoscientific research that is central to the posthuman moment and to the acknowledgement of its national cultural products. At the same time, however, this the de-centrality of Canada has meant its enjoyment of a privileged spot from which Canadian writers are able to witness first-hand and assess from a distance the development and heights of many of the problems incumbent to the transhuman moment, such as technical and scientific developments, the push of liberalism and capitalism, etc., which makes the assessment of the transhumanist Canadian scene particularly interesting – a scene which, of course, encompasses Margaret Atwood but also many other authors who have not yet been met with the amount of recognition that Atwood has, and who contribute to making the transhumanist Canadian landscape so much more diverse and inclusive, coming from a place of hybridity that is central to Canadian writing in general. Aside from outlining how transhumanism is being represented in current Canadian writing, this paper shows how the concerns that have occupied and still occupy Canadian literature, such as (de-)colonisation, racial issues, etc. can and do intersect with transhuman criticism, and offers an analysis of these intersections with regards to hybrid Canadian speculative fiction such as that of Nalo Hopkinson and Larissa Lai.

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"This writing around the edges of things': Transhumanism, *Annihilation*, and Interdisciplinarity"

Jeff VanderMeer's 2014 novel *Annihilation* imagines a transhuman future where an unknown but growing phenomenon called Area X has begun to modify the genetic and ontological diversity within its geographical reach. As Area X grows, human interdisciplinary research expeditions investigate Area X's changes to the environment and biodiversity. Within the phenomenon, the researchers undergo bizarre individual transformations, encounter an amorphous biotext-generating creature, and discover the journals of previously disappeared researchers. According to Finola Anne Prendergast, the novel's concerns with transhumanism and ecological catastrophe engage with nonhuman ethics to establish VanderMeer's fiction as a significant contribution to the growing field of Weird Science Fiction.

Drawing upon VanderMeer's novel and the films of Alex Garland (who adapted the novel for the screen in 2018), this paper will argue that these artists' works represent the requisite interdisciplinary approaches to climate change as outlined by complex system theory advocated by climate

researchers. Specifically, while many SF narratives often work between polarized visions of the utopian/dystopian future as either technological or biological, *Annihilation* foregrounds the unconscious human influences within Area X. Rather than seeing Area X as a primarily alien or nonhuman force, VanderMeer and Garland both invoke the often indirect nature of science fictional engagements with overtly political materials; that is, SF engages politics as “this writing around the edges of things” (VanderMeer 75), as a means to delineate, through relief, the novel’s political concerns with ecological catastrophe. By foregrounding the production, reception, and interpretation of written texts across multiple disciplines, *Annihilation* self-reflexively returns the speculative transhuman experience to the immediately human experiences of textual analysis and political action. In short, if salvation is to be found in the transhuman future, *Annihilation* suggests it may begin with our human texts.

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“From Utilitarianism to Transhumanism: A Critical Approach”

When Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), the father of Utilitarianism, coined the ethical and philosophical doctrine of “the greatest happiness for the greatest number”, he was aligned with the liberal promise of the Enlightenment that insisted in the improvement and modernisation of society through a sole focus on utility and self-interest. The doctrine of utilitarianism was best illustrated in the fields of economy and education. In the former, an excessive reliance on figures, statistics and numbers was praised as the successful outcome of progress and profitability, leaving aside poignant questions related to the harsh and dangerous labour conditions of the working-classes in an incipient industrial revolution that was to drastically change the lives of its people forever. In the latter, the relegation of critical thinking and open-mindedness and the denial of values such as sympathy, compassion and altruism, gave way to the utilitarian trust in a sterile reason as the most efficient tool to achieve progress: “facts, facts, facts, teach these boys and girls nothing but facts”, reminds us Mr Gradgrind in *Hard Times* (1858), a novel in which Dickens satirizes about the futile attempts to educate the children at school under the scope of utilitarianism.

Keeping in mind these basic ideas, I would like to draw an analogy between Utilitarianism and Transhumanism in that both seek to improve human nature and to enhance the development of the self by means of technology. Admittedly, they also aim at a reevaluation of values through scientific enquiry and of the disputing notions of “freedom” and “self-improvement”. For my purpose, I will pay attention to some counter-discourses that contest the myth of human self-transformation and the world’s self-congratulatory progress by reliance on technology. More specifically, I will explore how some of these narratives enact an alternative path of enquiry to interrogate the alleged prevalence of “better and happier people” as the main exponent of both, Utilitarianism and Transhumanism, since they claim for critical thinking and self-transformation as necessary assets in the development of who we are. And yet, the transhumanist ethos of cognitive, intellectual and emotional self-improvement through new technologies proves to promote an enslaving system of epistemology and pedagogy which, far from positing freedom of choice, unquestioningly homogenize us all at the cost of emptiness and shallow knowledge. My pessimistic stance is faithful to the decadence of our work in the humanities and it vigorously contests the transhumanist tautological promise of self-improvement through technology when applied to education, as information has supplanted thought and knowledge.

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“The Cyborg in the Brothel: Posthumanity and Gender De(con)struction in *Westworld*”

This paper addresses gender configurations as representations of the process of self-construction of both human and non-human characters in Jonathan Nolan’s and Lisa Joy’s series *Westworld*,

produced by HBO and first launched in 2016. In particular, I shall explore the extent to which the process of genderisation is deployed as a *locus* of hybridisation, agency and subversion, as human and non-human identities merge into a post-human reality that is both material and virtual.

As far as non-human characters are concerned, their gender is configured as both a performance designed to appeal to the human guests of the eponymous Frontier-themed amusement park, and as a codified feature of their core configuration, which, in turn, is meant to enslave the non-human hosts of *Westworld* to the various narrative loops created by humans in order to keep this artificial microcosm under strict control. Likewise, human characters construct their gender identities performatively in an effort to conform to the standards of the socio-cultural system they inhabit, while they also deploy gender as a conventional language through which personal and collective narratives are displayed upon the body. In other words, both cyborgs and humans understand gender as embodiment, enactment, repetition and codified communication. Yet, both sets of characters will eventually face a process of disembodiment that challenges the very nature of identity in general and gender identity in particular.

Playing this digitalisation of human identity against Donna Haraway's cyborg theory and Judith Butler's citational approach to gender identification, a question emerges, which neither Cultural nor Gender Studies can ignore: can gender identities survive a process of disembodiment? Such, indeed, is the scenario portrayed in *Westworld*: a world in which, to rephrase Butler, bodies do not matter, and gender seems capable of both acquiring a new symbolic value and morphing into something hitherto unencountered.

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“*Split*. A Dystopian Vision of Transhuman Enhancement”

The advocates of Transhumanism typically present it as an evolutionary enhancement of the human species through the use of technological prosthesis. Its Enlightened anthropocentric agenda premises a reason-based value system that qualifies technological development as a human enhancement in evolutionary terms, which is paradoxically justified by the fact that technologically enhanced humans would better adapt to an increasingly technological environment. However, Transhumanist logic presents bare humanity as an underdeveloped state in human evolution that would qualify as disability from a transhumanist perspective. However, the prosthetic “nature” of transhuman individuals already indicates their presumed disability, pointing at the fact, that the prosthesis is supplementing some loss or absence in the transhuman self.

James McAvoy's *Split* (2017) renders a dystopian vision of transhumanity as the result of this imposed label of disability on a pathologised human identity that is viewed as fragmentary and dysfunctional. The transhumanist interpellation to evolve from this physically and psychologically incomplete, merely human condition results, in McAvoy's film, into a Transhuman superhumanity that is dystopically portrayed as a monstrous by revealing the violent, savage drive in transhumanist evolutionary logic.

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“The Brain Feels No Pain’: Trauma and the Posthuman in Pat Cadigan's *Synners*”

Over the past few years, there has been a great deal of interest within cultural theory in two related notions, cyberspace and the cyborg. They are particularly apt figures for the times that we live in, characterized by a simultaneous fascination with, and anxiety about, the rapid changes produced by the new information and biotechnologies (Wolmark 1). These changes have facilitated the dissolution of traditional boundaries such as organism vs. machine, physical vs. non-physical, real vs. virtual and

transcendence vs. immanence, leading to the emergence of new consciousnesses. Science fiction literature in general, and the subgenre of cyberpunk in particular, have long resorted to these metaphors to explore radical notions of identity and to understand our relationships to technoscience.

This paper will approach Pat Cadigan's celebrated novel *Synners* (1991), using the strategically powerful perspectives of trauma studies and the discourses around the figure of the posthuman. A cyberpunk story with a twist, the novel centers on a new technology, so called "sockets," that allows for direct neural interfacing, addressing notions of embodiment, ethics and cyborg subjectivities. The main issue at play in Cadigan's cyberpunk story, it will be contended, is an exploration of the category of the human in cyberspace under the sign of trauma.

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"Spacetime mattering in Alexis Wright's"

In their race for human progress transhumanists often overlook the fact that humans are not individuals living in a vacuum, but rather embodied beings defined by their mutual codependency with the environment and countless nonhuman others. In an age characterised by environmental destruction and the displacement of peoples and nonhuman animals, we can no longer deny the damages brought about by the racial Capitalocene.

Cyborg stories such as *The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright, are increasingly mirroring these traumatic dispossessions by breaking with the classical ontology of time-being through their exploration of the enfoldings of spacetime mattering. Karen Barad defines spacetime mattering as 'a dynamic ongoing reconfiguring of a field of relationalities among "moments," "places," and "things" (in their inseparability), where scale is iteratively (re)made in intra-action.'

Although set in the future, *The Swan Book* merges Australia's colonial past and the devastation of climate change affecting already marginalised and silenced others to uncover the open-ended potentialities of matter. Weaving Western and Eastern stories about swans with Australian Indigenous cosmology, Wright's broken narrative collapses time and place by 'connecting together the spirits, people and place of all times into one.' Hailed by Jane Gleeson-White as 'perhaps the first truly planetary novel,' *The Swan Book* entwines multiple realities to explore what it means to be human in an uncertain world brimming with transformative posthuman becomings.

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"Stories of Human Enhancement in Contemporary North American Science Fiction"

The subject of human enhancement has gained traction across media: including scientific journals, popular magazines, TED talks or science fiction. Cultural and literary texts actively shape the discourse on human enhancement on a global level. This paper argues that the narrative of enhancement relies on a science fictional "sense of wonder" (Sawyer) while imagining the human future. TED talks are a newly emergent genre (Ludewig) where transhumanist ideas may thrive. Transhumanist talks (Kurzweil, Bostrom, Gruber, Herr) create a "sense of wonder" by relying on at least two formal features: first, they rely on a geologic time-scale to inspire "awe at the vastness of space and time" (Hartwell) and focus on the future progress of humanity. Second, they favor the cognitive abilities of the 'mind' over the biological limitations of the 'body' which is why they also encompass a sense of "conceptual breakthrough." Furthermore, I argue that contemporary North American science fiction novels since the mid-1980s challenge these features (and thus, implicitly, the conventions of the genre itself, i.e. the prophetic and visionary-cognitive functions) by animating an 'affect of aliveness' in their 'survival scenes.' Rather than relying on verisimilitude (as the 'ultimate' science fictional technique), these scenes make use of literary synesthesia. I argue that these scenes evoke a different

kind of temporality and a distinct self-awareness that are less anthropocentric and more akin to critical posthumanist ideas of “embodied awareness” (Hayles) and a “democracy of objects” (Bryant). They implicitly criticize the transhumanist ‘wonder’ by considering the relevance of the present and the significance of bodily experience. I argue that besides the cautionary or dystopian plots, these scenes hold the greatest critical and ethical potential of the novels. And they also make an argument about the role of literature itself – not as a mimetic device, but as an expressive medium that may raise awareness.

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“Visualising Traumatized Cyber-Men – Or: How Futuristic Technology Constructs Trauma and Gendered Bodies in Contemporary US-Science-Fiction-Cinema”

As some authors have pointed out, there has been an increasing interest in trauma and memory in contemporary US-science-fiction-cinema. While the articulation of trauma within the genre has been a common sight at least since Kurt Vonnegut’s seminal novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969), the specifics have changed drastically by visualising the traumatic experience with the help of futuristic technology. The genre used to be utilized, in the case of Vonnegut’s text, to construct the traumatic temporality as a psychedelic flow of consciousness or, in the case of alien abduction narratives analysed by Roger Luckhurst, to literally displace the traumatic experience in the extra-terrestrial sphere. In contrast, movies like *Source Code*, *Iron Man 3*, and *RoboCop* shifted their interest away from this focus on inexplicable events to translating the trauma with the help of futuristic though failing technology. So, for example, when Alex Murphy tries to remember / access his (near-)death experience in *RoboCop*, his mind / CPU crashes. Albeit, at first, this shift reinforces the notion of trauma as non-communicable experience by emphasising the incapability of technology to make sense of trauma, in the end, this visualization aid constructs the mind as a mechanical entity able to be disciplined. At the same time, this offers the white male leads a possibility to reclaim a hegemonic notion of masculinity by working through trauma in the vein of the “curative time” discussed by Allison Kafer instead of acting the trauma out, and, considering the importance of (amputee) veterans in these films, to racialize and gender the popular militaristic discourse. Therefore, I propose a historically and culturally contextualized film analysis to examine how technology is utilized to gender and construct traumatized minds and one’s reaction to trauma.

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“The Use of the Posthuman as a Tool for the Advancement of Neoliberalism in *Sorry to Bother You* (Boots Riley, 2018)”

This paper argues that the film *Sorry to Bother You* (Boots Riley, 2018) draws attention to the neoliberal appropriation of posthuman possibilities through a two-stage process of dehumanization. Such a process is based, first, on the creation of a highly precarious and profitable mass of people and, second, on the posthuman transformation of this group of people with the aim of increasing the revenue they generate. *Sorry to Bother You* (*STBY*) imagines a new mode of life made possible by the Worryfree corporation. This company offers people a lifetime contract through which they can enjoy shared accommodation at the corporation’s facilities and ‘free’ meals in exchange for their labor. As the film progresses, Worryfree further develops this business model by attempting to turn its labor force into what they call “equisapiens”: stronger and more efficient half human-half horse beings. As Stefan Herbrechter notes, one of the key tasks for critical posthumanism is to identify the motivations behind “posthumanizing” processes and their origins (2018: 94). In this sense, *STBY* offers remarkable critical potential as it allows to track the development of the equisapiens project and its neoliberal

roots. Apart from this, the black, working-class protagonist in *STBY* provides a unique opportunity to look beyond widespread images of white, bourgeois technologically-altered bodies (Vint 2007: 184). My analysis of the aforementioned issues will primarily rely on secondary sources that explore the relationship between the posthuman and neoliberal capitalism (e.g. Vint 2007, 2013; Hassler-Forest 2016; Zizek 2017, 2018; Narkunas 2018).

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“The Murder Gene and the Transhuman: The Consequences of Genetic Engineering in Veronica Roth’s *Allegiant*”

Today, the idea that many of our personal characteristics could be shaped by our genetic heritage is not only widely discussed in scientific circles, but it is also fashionable with the general public. Often, people declare that a person is exactly like his or her mother - this must lie in the genes. Since the 1990s, biologists search for the genetic codes that trigger feelings like joy, anger or violence which ultimately influence human behavior. And though investigation is still in its fledgling stage and much discussed in the scientific field, scientists eventually want to find out if there is e.g. a murder gene and how to alter it, so that crimes like those committed by Jeffrey Dahmer (the “Milwaukee Cannibal”) might never happen again (Kraus, 2013). This idea of genetic engineering on the human genome in order to create a better society is one of the main ideas expressed in transhumanism. Human nature is seen as “a work-in-progress” where through genetic engineering “healthier, wittier, happier people may be able to reach new levels culturally” (Bostrom, 2003). By analyzing Veronica Roth’s *Allegiant* I intend to show the possible outcome of such an experiment and to examine the extent to which the result is the consequence of a fallacy rather than of genetic engineering. Roth paints a dark image of a dystopian United States that had been devastated after failed genetic experiments on human beings: People with damaged genes started a civil war against people with pure genes, the Purity Wars, which resulted in the death of half of the US population. After the war, the US government established gigantic laboratories in some of the devastated cities in order to “rebreed” the pure human genome. The question that has to be answered here is whether it was truly the failed genetic experiments that led to the war and to the further events described in the book or whether other circumstances influenced the outcome of these fictional experiments.

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“Brainships, Posthumanities and Neuronal Plasticity: Reading Cyborgs with Catherine Malabou”

The influence of the material basis of “consciousness” or, rather less metaphysically, “thought” has long been a staple of science fiction, from Anne McCaffrey’s seminal *The Ship Who Sang*, and its sequels, through Jean-François Lyotard’s musings on “thought without a body” (1993) up to *Dark Matter* and *Black Mirror*’s plays on questions of augmented and/or destroyed memory. Oddly, the effects on the brain itself – as an organ for thinking and feeling (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1994) – of the integration or disintegration of technological supplements have rarely been seriously interrogated.

In Catherine Malabou’s two most significant works on neuroscience and psychoanalysis, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (2008) and *The New Wounded* (2012) she argues for a new understanding of trauma based on what she calls “cerebrality”. This relates to a distinction akin to Freud’s between sex and sexuality, allowing Malabou to discuss “psychic events” not just in terms of sexual etiology but also in terms of cerebral etiology (2012: 4–5). Like Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (2009), Malabou wishes to go beyond Freudian sexuality as the foundation of all psychic life. She aims to do this by interrogating the status of neuronally traumatic “accidents”: stroke, lesions, brain tumours, and interrogating what effect these may have on the psyche. For Malabou, “cerebrality”

denotes the effects of these psychic-cerebral events which cannot be integrated into the previous identity.

This, allied to Malabou's interpretation of neuronal plasticities and Deleuze and Guattari's challenge to naïve reformulations of Cartesian duality (1994), offers a way into rethinking the obsession with PTSD in McCaffrey *et al.*'s Brainship novels, and the ways in which technological integration may reform not just the body but the assemblage of body, brain and technology in post-Fordist capitalism.

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“Frankenstein Redivivus: New Shades of (Post)Human Monstrosity in Victor LaValle’s *Destroyer* (2017)”

Victor LaValle's fiction has grown increasingly popular this last decade and earned him a number of important awards. Unlike his earlier works, which mostly dealt with the struggles of Blacks and Latinos in inner-city environments, his most recent novels (*The Ballad of Black Tom* [2016] and *The Changeling* [2017]) intertwine elements of traditional folktales and horror stories with contemporary social issues—such as, mental illness, child vulnerability, everyday racism, the (mis)use of technologies, etc.—that should concern most readers. In *Destroyer* (2017), a comic mini-series later published in book form, LaValle deploys to great effect that inventive mixture of myth, horror, sci-fi and social critique that has become the recognizable trademark of his art. According to Vincent Haddad, this visual narrative “reimagines Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in the context of the Black Lives Matter Movement.” Of course, a significant dose of audacity is necessary to bring together Shelley’s critique of scientific progress and human hubris, and LaValle’s political commentary on race in America. Although the two may seem at first rather unlikely partners, it soon becomes evident that LaValle’s narrative skills and Dietrich Smith’s illustrations do manage to show the relevance of science-technology and monstrosity to current racial anxieties. While the book opens with the return of the original monster from Antarctica, ready to take revenge on humankind for the violence they have inflicted on him and on the planet, the focus soon shifts towards Dr. Josephine Baker, an African-American scientist, who has been working on a top-secret revivification project funded by the government. When Dr. Baker loses her young son, Akai, in a police shooting, she decides to bring him back to life as a postmodern cyborg to carry out her revenge. Predictably, all kinds of interesting questions come up as we move on with the story: Who are the monsters in the story? What makes them so? Can we really speak of protagonist(s) and antagonist(s) in the book? Are characters moved by justice or just animalistic vengeance? My paper will delve into the intricacies and possible contradictions of using science and new technologies as a means to overcome human constraints (both physical and ethical). Likewise, I will consider the adequacy of new narrative formats and aesthetics (in this case, that of the comic) as a more convenient way to represent the posthuman.

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“The Improvement of Human Species in the Narratives by Mary Shelley, Olaf Stapledon and Richard Morgan”

Over centuries humanity has been dreaming of improving human life and human body, defeating the deceases and death forever, reaching eternal life and happiness. Literature has been faithfully depicting these dreams.

Frankenstein by Mary Shelley has influenced many important writers and has forever changed the emerging genre of science fiction. It will forever remain one of the first most daring tentatives to overcome death and limitations of the human nature. “If I could banish decease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any if violent death! [...] A new species would bless me as

its creator and source; many happy and excellent creatures would owe their being to me,” thought Victor Frankenstein rejoicing. Unfortunately, the best intentions of Dr Frankenstein led to terrible consequences for himself and the Creature. Mary Shelley meticulously analysed the transformation of the utopian dream into the dystopia nightmare. As I demonstrated elsewhere, Olaf Stapledon took Shelley’s endeavours in creating new life and improving the human species even further in *Sirius Last and First Man* and *Star Maker*. As a professional philosopher, Stapledon put solid ethical philosophical and spiritual principles at the basis of his transhumanism. His important concepts of spirit, personality-in-community, realization of the highest potential of the human species, etc. are always the guiding stars in the transformation of human species, as in the case of *Great Brains*, *Fifth Men*, *Last Men*, etc. It is exactly these sound principles that are missing from the dystopian world of *Altered Carbon* by Richard Morgan, and this fact makes us wonder whether the possibility to change bodies, transferring life experiences from one body to another one is a long awaited breakthrough to eternal life and utopia or an inevitable descent into the dystopian nightmare. The paper studies the narratives by Stapledon, *Frankenstein* by Shelley and *Altered Carbon* by Morgan and analyses the authors’ views on the improving of the human species within the frame of transhumanism and posthumanism.

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“Augs Lives Matter: The Cyborg as a Mediator in the *Deus Ex* Prequel Series”

The cyborg is a mediator. At least according to feminist and postmodernist scholar Donna Haraway: since the cyborg is a hybrid being occupying spaces in multiple realms, it could translate the respective code of these realms and enable communication between them. Its political agenda heavily breaches the conceptual boundaries between naturalness and artificiality, and additionally allows for a reevaluation of the mind to body dichotomy. Due to its multiple space occupancy, the cybernetic organism could be utilized as a projection surface in both politically and ideologically charged discourses. Its nature as a transgressive figure transforms the cyborg into a posthuman archetype enabling the definition of identity beyond archaic structures such as the *conditio humana*.

This boundary transgression is also the central theme in the prequel series of the cyberpunk action role-playing video game franchise *Deus Ex*. Much in line with Homo Bhabha’s concept of stereotyping, the *Deus Ex* narrative depicts transhuman enhancement as the single visible feature separating one from the other. In light of the aforementioned background, I aim to analyze the mediating role of cyborg protagonist Adam Jensen in terms of his agency, ideology and socio-politics, and whether these aspects aid in bridging this gap. I will take a closer look at whether his actions resonate with the proposed role of a mediator. While his principal nature as a cybernetic organism socio-politically and ideologically enables communication, I argue that his actual agency negates mediation. The portrayal of the cyborg organism in the *Deus Ex* prequel series corresponds with Haraway’s criticism towards modern feminism: it is bound by the system it set out to overcome.

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“From Yuppies to Hippies (and Back Again) – Libertarian Genetic Modification of People in *Madd-Adam* Trilogy by Margaret Atwood”

Development of genetic engineering in recent years has raised the possibility of germline (inheritable) genetic modification of people, at the same time mounting pressure for provision of safeguards against misuse of the technology. Advocates of this kind of genetic modification usually dispel negative associations between the technology and the notorious programme of eugenics in Nazi Germany by underlining their commitment to libertarianism, which rejects any state control in favour of the freedom of the individual. Libertarian approach to human genetic engineering leaves

the decision about modification to the discretion of parents, who, it is presumed, always want the best for their children. In my paper I will argue that in *MaddAddam* Atwood indicates potential consequences of two, differently motivated, uses of libertarian genetic modification, each occurring in a different socio-economic situation. One of them, focusing primarily on the enhancement of a child's skills to increase his or her career prospects, seems very probable in the extreme form of neoliberal society represented in the first two volumes of the trilogy, in which the gap between the haves and the have-nots has reached outrageous dimensions. In this kind of socio-economic situation it seems that the best solution for a child is to equip him or her with what could be called "yuppie mentality" – and skills to match it.

In a more egalitarian liberal society, however, one could imagine a wider variety of genetic modifications. In the paper I will argue that the situation of the Crakers – benign and compassionate post-humans living among human survivors of a killer plague – could be figuratively seen as indicating probable consequences of genetic modification aiming at a type of mentality that is usually associated with an all-loving hippie.

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"Don DeLillo's *Zero K* (2016): A Critical Posthumanist Approach on the Ethics of Cryonics"

The possibility of reversing aging and, ultimately, overcoming death are two of the most widely discussed subjects in transhumanist circles. Although slowing down the aging process still remains a long way off, Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom keeps his hope and believes that someday anti-aging medicine will become a real possibility. Meanwhile, he argues, "cryonic suspension should be made available as an option for those who desire it" (10). Companies such as Alcor Life Extension Foundation or KrioRus already offer customers the possibility of having their bodies cryopreserved for a couple thousand dollars—albeit with no guarantees. In the "Frequently Asked Questions" section of Alcor's website, the foundation states that "cryonics procedures should ideally begin within the first one or two minutes after the heart stops" and that, under current law, cryopreserving a body that is not legally dead is "a crime regardless of what that person's wishes may be." This makes one wonder what would happen if future laws allowed freedom of choice in this matter, which is precisely one of DeLillo's main concerns in his 2016 novel *Zero K*. This paper aims to demonstrate that, in the novel, DeLillo takes the role of a "critical posthumanist, or a critical observer of the current redefinition of the human" (Herbretcher 5), providing readers with a more balanced perspective that takes into account not only the possibilities opened up by life extension technologies but also the more nefarious consequences of suspending our present lives with the uncertain hope of being brought back to life in the future.

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"Representations of (Post?)Human Subjects in *Love in Creative Control* (2015) and *Operator* (2016)"

The paper examines representations of love relationships involving posthuman entities in two recent films: *Creative Control* (dir. Benjamin Dickinson) and *Operator* (dir. Logan Kibens).

The paper puts forward the thesis that love relationships between (post?)human entities, portrayed in mentioned films, reflect the changing concepts of subjectivity. The films discussed in the paper show the possibilities of transition from the paradigm of human subjectivity understood in essentialist terms as uniquely human and as standing in opposition to the object (Cartesian subjectivity) to the paradigm of posthuman subjectivity, which no longer emphasizes the opposition of "human subject" vs. "non-human object" but instead points to the mutual affective relation between them.

In both films, the protagonists are men who create their ideal women using the latest digital technologies – the main character of *Creative Control* uses Augmenta glasses to expand reality and create the ideal female avatar, and the hero of *Operator* falls in love with a voice of bodiless medical line virtual assistant. The films protagonists are, therefore, successors of men known from the countless texts of culture, who built their female ideals using various materials, but always in accordance with the “paradigm of a perfect woman” (recognized by Julie Wosk in her book *My Fair Ladies*).

On the one hand, the film protagonists may recognize in their technological love partners the evidence of posthuman subjectivity, however, on the other hand, they often deny the possibility of falling in love with a machine, thus refusing to grant the right to subjectivity to the technological “other”. Male protagonists cling to their human phallogocentric subjectivity, distancing themselves from the significance of relationship with female digital non-human entity, by either sincerely believing that they love an actual, physical woman, not an avatar (*Creative Control*) or by diminution their feelings toward non-human object (*Operator*).

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“Hard Man, Hard Wired: Patriarchal Transhumanism and Disempowered Masculinity in Richard Morgan’s *Thin Air* (2018)”

In the science fiction of English author Richard K. Morgan all the panoply of advanced science and technology is applied mainly to transform ordinary male human bodies into post-human soldiers, usually mercenaries. The transhumanist urge to improve human anatomy is presented as a process heavily manipulated by patriarchal corporate and political interests, which are in practice equivalent. As his best-known novel, *Altered Carbon* (2002) shows, Morgan occupies an anti-transhumanist position because of the deep divisions that bodily modifications only affordable by the very rich might bring. His male protagonists are, in contrast, disenfranchised men who have basically sold the rights over their bodies to survive as post-human workers at the service of concerns employing the intense violence they have been hard-wired to generate.

In *Thin Air* (2018), Morgan’s most recent novel and the focus of my paper, the same pattern appears. A stand-alone novel, though connected with a previous work (*Black Man*, 2007), *Thin Air* narrates a crime investigation on Mars, here a colony peopled by modified humans. The protagonist Hakan Veil, a hybernoid, was heavily modified already in his mother’s womb to be decades later dismissed and deprived of part of his bodily enhancement when his employer/owner found fault with his behaviour. Veil survives as he can, adopting a hard man persona in his work as private investigator, though as he tells another character he is, rather, hard wired. Veil’s view of his masculinity as an element dependent on what others have done to his body shows that gender issues need to be integrated into the study of the post-human. As an essentially patriarchal project of male empowerment run by a small group of extremely powerful white men, transhumanism already affects negatively not only women and non-white minorities but, as Morgan shows, men with no power over their own bodies.

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“Subjects of the Modern World: Writing ‘U.’ in Tom McCarthy’s *Satin Island*”

The steady foundations of Western capitalist credos are disintegrating in face of the rhythm of techno-scientific developments. These, along with the process of globalization, the increasing prominence of emergent economies and the ever-presence of the Internet generate what is known by ‘the symptom of the 2000s’: a sense of generalised disarrangement that implies a fresh reconfiguration of what ‘human’ really means. Posthumanism arises in the midst of such millennial sensibility to map

a world of kaleidoscopic opportunities for human enhancement as well as to account for new ways of representation. In this light, metamodern writings synchronize individuals and harmonize contemporary dilemmas in a desire to reroute communities toward brighter horizons.

The British author Tom McCarthy is preoccupied with global interconnectivity and borderless relations in his novel *Satin Island* (2015). In it, he invites the reader to meet U., a punctilious corporate anthropologist who navigates the niches of the net in an attempt to write The Great Report, the ultimate codex of our age. By being concerned specifically with the Internet, the novel offers a vivacious and yet sharp reflection on the importance of writing the networked present and presence of the human in this canvas of immanent instantaneity.

The objective of this paper is precisely to examine how McCarthy recasts subjectivity in U. by conceiving him as a 'dividual,' a relational being who stems from the embrace of techno-scientific developments. Furthermore, in inscribing the protagonist also as a writer, the analysis tackles new modes of creativity that emerge from metamodern philosophies. Literature stands as a buffer-zone, a site that both gathers postmodern anxieties and pauses our timeless world to make U. and you active listeners of all current transmissions.

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"*Ecce Deus Ex: Posthumanity between Theology and Technology*"

Among the distinctive features for which Ion Storm's videogame *Deus Ex* (2000) has been widely acclaimed is the implementation of a multiple ending where the hero (JC Denton) needs to make an ethical choice between three incompatible scenarios: fusing with an advanced AI and thus becoming a technologically all-powerful machine-god imposing a benevolent dictatorship; ruling with an invisible hand as one of the Illuminati in an enlightened oligarchy; or reverting to a proto-human anarchic state of civilization by destroying all global means of communication and plunging the world into a new dark age. Himself the experimental product of a non-human prototype gestation, 'JC' can acquire a range of technological advancements through skill points and canisters of nano-augmentation. Tensions between an older versus upgraded type of nano-modification run throughout this dystopian universe set in 2052 and populated with recombinant transgenics, when the world is facing a global crisis caused by a politically engineered nano-virus (the Gray Death), and in which the view of a technologically augmented posthumanity seems fraught with catastrophic risks of dehumanization.

Taking as its cue Jacques Derrida's idea of a complicity between the religious and the technological in 'Faith and Knowledge...', this paper proposes to examine the roles of nano-technology and bio-genetic engineering in the game's construction. It will link these thematics to Nietzsche's 'post-religious' conception of the Overman and self-overcoming as humanity's goal in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, with an awareness of recent debates concerning Nietzsche's alleged anticipation of a transhumanist agenda. This paradoxical linkage with Nietzsche's 'amoral' philosophy will enable us, through the privileged lens of *Deus Ex* and the ethical dilemmas it poses, to articulate a wider theological dimension to posthumanism and transhumanism not limited to issues of post-secularism and transcendence.

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"*Creating a Monster: Frankenstein's Creature on Film and Television in the Twenty-First Century*"

Frankenstein's creature is undoubtedly one of the most cinematically represented figures of all time. To date, he has been name-checked in the titles of more than thirty different feature films, spanning a historical period of over 100 years, whilst also appearing as an incidental character in countless others. In this paper, I will explore the seemingly inexhaustible interest that the creature's

transhuman identity continues to wield in post-millennium television and cinema. Particular attention will be given to the recent adaptations of the Frankenstein myths that were directed by Nispel (2004), Mercurio (2007), and Rose (2015), as well as to *The Frankenstein Theory* (Weiner, 2013), *Frankenstein's Army* (Raaphorst, 2013), and *I, Frankenstein* (Beattie, 2014). By commenting on the extent to which these works reinterpret the original context and content of Shelley's ground-breaking text, I will discuss how *Frankenstein* has become a gothic palimpsest upon which to explore contemporary anxieties about human identity. I will evaluate how the concept of transhuman monstrosity is used as a heuristic device to explore a range of issues that connects Shelley's world to that of our own: from concerns about the outcome of unfettered scientific experimentation, and the ambiguous potentiality of eugenics, to explorations of Otherness in its many forms. In doing so, the paper will evaluate how Frankenstein's creature helps us to understand the importance of transhumanism in twenty-first century cultural life.

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"On Edge: Decentering Human Materiality in William Gibson's *The Peripheral*"

William Gibson's 2017 novel *The Peripheral* imagines a form of time travel enabled by technologies which untether human consciousness from embodied reality, allowing an elite group of high-tech kleptocrats to manipulate the past and populate the future with cyborgian entities remotely controlled by distant minds. This access to posthuman embodiment entails various material and political costs, however: like much of Gibson's work, *The Peripheral* depends on the idea that capital itself might be the ultimate posthuman entity. Insofar as it rebounds to the notion that the posthuman must always depend, structurally or conceptually, on a quantum residue of the human, that residue resides only in the gothic unease which both the novel's characters and its readers experience as the novel lays out its vision of future time. This is noticeable in Gibson's strategy, especially marked in the novel's early chapters, of withholding narrative clarity from the reader, who can only understand events in retrospect; this mirrors the characters' compromised agency within the uncanny text which contains them. Thus, the novel's form expresses and embodies its theme of temporal contingency. With the onset of time-travelling capital and networked consciousness, any sense of linear consequence has been replaced by a twisted skein of contradictory timelines and abandoned historical 'stubs' whose futurity has been torn away by competing iterations of the now.

This paper reads the disrupted temporality of *The Peripheral* in the light of Rosi Braidotti's definition of the posthuman as a discursive protocol which 'force[s] a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems' (Braidotti 2013, 89). Gibson's novel adds a further disrupted binary to Braidotti's list: past and future. His vision of posthumanity complicates the meaning of 'post' as a positional term: here, the human has not only been temporally superannuated, but spatially marginalised – made 'peripheral' to the post-capitalist concerns of the post-anthropocene.

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"*MaddAddam*, Whose Voice? Human and Posthuman Voices"

In her essay "Towards a Posthumanist Methodology. A Statement," Ferrando wittingly remarks that posthumanism calls for the overcoming of dualisms, and this should also include the "traditional divide between theory and practice" (9); therefore, she tries to find a new methodology—posthumanist—that should accommodate the diversity of human experience in its complete range, as well as non-human experience and knowledge (13). *MaddAddam*—published in 2013 and the last novel of

the trilogy with the same name that Margaret Atwood started ten years before—makes an attempt to incorporate Ferrando's debate about "the difficulty of including non-human voices" (1). If Toby's account can be considered a 'last woman narrative' because she is the only pure human still writing on Earth, what she is rendering is not yet a post-Anthropocene narrative depicting the total apocalypse/human extinction because, as Callus affirms, "The most literal posthuman state, humanlessness, is unavailable to representation" (299). Toby is unable then to describe a future without humans, but my contention is that given that the last voice, the ultimate narrator in the novel, is not a human being but a Craker—part of a highly ecological humanoid species created in a laboratory by Glenn/Crake to take over the human race—the novel is a posthuman narrative praxis, an attempt to overcome the difficulty to imagine the world without us, through the voice of a new inhabitant of the Earth, neither human nor animal but a hybrid, a new species. *MaddAddam* employs narratological strategies to give voice to the Crakers, the new inhabitants of the Earth after human extinction. The narrative novelty that *MaddAddam* presents in contrast with its predecessors is that the human voice/focalizer and narrator progressively gives the baton to the posthuman one in an exercise of imagination aimed to ultimately decentralize the human being and to affirmatively portray life after the Anthropocene.

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"*I Am Legend* as Posthuman Gothic: from Richard Matheson's Novel to Francis Lawrence's Film Adaptation"

In 1954, Richard Matheson published *I Am Legend*, a minor science-fiction novel that with the passing of time has come to be described as an enduring American myth, showing its long-lasting influence on a wide range of fictions and films. Taking Gothic conventions as the point of departure, Matheson's narrative portrays a post-apocalyptic world populated by vampiric creatures that threaten to infect and kill its protagonist, who has become the last human on earth. The paper comparatively discusses Matheson's novel and the latest film adaptation of it (Francis Lawrence, 2007) in the light of Gothic and posthuman notions, highlighting the social and historical contexts that inspired these texts and the ideological issues conveyed through the treatment of race, class and gender. Just as the effects of World War II, the atomic bomb and the Cold War prefigure Matheson's text, so Lawrence's film echoes the anxieties associated with the 9/11 attacks and the risks involved in scientific experimentation. The paper foregrounds the radical blurring of boundaries inherent in the posthuman: in *I Am Legend*, dread does not only come from external causes or from the threat of extinction, but especially from the alien within. In their focus on the polyvalence of the human, these texts evoke the uncertainty about what we may become, and what may be left of us after the change.

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"Memory, Technofuture and Posthuman Agency in the Novels of Richard Powers and Paolo Bacigalupi"

My paper examines the ways in which memory and methods of carrying the memories are addressed and problematized in new forms of speculative fiction, developed by Richard Powers and Paolo Bacigalupi.

Powers's pseudo-autobiographical novel *Galatea 2.2* (1995) is the complex reworking of the Galatea myth through an encounter of narrative models of memory with artificial intelligence. Diagnostically, Richard Powers explores the concerns of literature and imagination in the age of technologically 'enhanced' human condition by addressing the contradictions around the role of memory in creating and sustaining a posthuman self.

In his biopunk debut novel *The Wind-up Girl* (2009) Paolo Bacigalupi deals with the matters of biotechnology and the effects of climate-changed world on human condition and *humanity*. In Bacigalupi's future world of genetic manipulation, the *memoria technica* of energy storage devices in the environment of windups (genetically modified humans) could be interpreted as a dystopic parable of media and memories in the contemporary regime of techno-neoliberalism.

Both writers turn to speculating over cultural memories for re-reading the historical contexts of the humanist imaginaries, to apprehend the unfolding epoch of Anthropocene, with its primacy of humanity's catastrophic agency. Both novels as new forms of speculative fiction speak of a possibility, if any, to re-imagine posthuman experiences and the faculty of memory beyond capitalist biotechnological petro-age. Both authors invite their readers to think about a posthuman conceptualisation of memory and models of memory writing in relation to the broader challenges to humanities, literature, narrative and representation.

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"The Paradoxical Anti-Humanism of Tom McCarthy's *C*: Traumatic Secrets and the Waning of Affects in the Technological Society"

In *The Perfect Crime* (1995), Jean Baudrillard argued that the murder of reality and the extermination of the vital illusion of the world brought about by the development of the new technologies has given rise to a "new victim order" characterised by violence and mourning, general indifference, profound disaffection and a phobic relationship with an artificial other, idealised by hatred. This definition of the technological society provides the cultural background for Tom McCarthy's third novel, *C* (2010). The novel offers an accurate representation of the birth and development of the technological society from the invention of the telegraph to the First World War. Its protagonist, Serge Carrefax, is obsessed by all the new media technologies of his time, especially by radio and Morse. In keeping with McCarthy's profound anti-liberal humanist stance, the novel challenges the traditional reliance on psychological realism by refusing to grant his character any psychological depth, empathy or capacity for affect. For this reason, *C* has been considered an emblematic example of post-humanist fiction. However, at the centre of Serge's apathetic and mechanical behaviour lies a traumatic secret whose perception by readers provides an unexpected psychological ground for his obsessive death drive.

BEATRIZ ORIA

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"When Harry Met Siri: Transhuman Romance in *Her* (2013)"

This presentation analyzes Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) as a case study of the way in which contemporary romantic comedy is currently diversifying its scope through the deployment of new elements and genres. *Her* uses a sci-fi backdrop to address thornier issues than is customary in the rom-com through a posthuman utopia that explores the viability of a romantic relationship between a human being and a disembodied, highly advanced artificial intelligence. The world depicted in *Her* illustrates what Luciano Floridi terms the "fourth revolution" (2014), which entails – among other things – the blurring of the distinctions between human and machine, reality and virtuality. In this world, we become informational entities (inforgs) living in an essentially informational environment (infosphere) that we share with smart technologies. The film explores this complex relationship between humans and technology, addressing metaphysical questions typically present in science fiction about what defines the human essence, while trying to delineate the nature of romantic love in a posthuman scenario. It wonders about the "authenticity" of the kind of love these enhanced subjectivities could be capable of, only to reject the possibility of transhuman romance by the end, thus reverting to more conventional ideas of monogamous couplehood and human connection. Despite this, *Her*

constitutes a paradigmatic example of the ways in which romantic comedy is re-inventing itself in the so-called “post-romantic age,” a context defined by a cynical attitude toward romance that has rendered the traditional romantic plot increasingly suspect for media-savvy Millennials.

THALIA OSTENDORF

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“Transhumanism and Cyborgification: Prosthetics and the Narrative ‘I’”

The Trans- in transhumanism can be seen as the evolution from the prefix Post- to posthumanism. Where posthumanism can mean two things; the move from humanist thought to a worldview and philosophy after (post-) humanism, while on the other the much more radical objective of bringing the human beyond itself (Herbrechter). Beyond the human tends to mean beyond ‘the human condition’, beyond its capabilities, but mostly its restrictions and limits (both mental and physical). Around the world the questions and possibilities arouse interest and discussion, inspiring transhuman communities.

Cyborg theory involves itself with the interface between man and machine and the possibilities of these (embodied) changes of the human being through its technical components. It is relevant here these two distinctions come from the same root but might become very different in practice once they leave the purely theoretical – thus opposing Donna Haraway’s ‘Cyborg Manifesto’.

Through this transhumanist lens, this paper will investigate the effect on narration and the ‘narrative I,’ specifically, Harry Parker’s novel *Anatomy of a Soldier*. The novel is narrated in its entirety by 45 objects that surround the protagonist shortly before, during, and after the impact of the IED that causes the soldier to lose both his legs. As one of the few autofictional war novels that explicitly engages with lasting physical trauma in its protagonist, it places itself on the intersection of discussions on fiction and cyborg theory. This will be analysed alongside Jillian Weise’s non-fiction piece ‘Common Cyborg’ (Granta) will provide a personal perspective that shows societal and, more prominently, theoretical gaps in our understanding of both transhumanism and cyborg theory.

ELLEN PEEL

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“Frankenggenre 1.5: Taking Constructed Bodies for Granted (Almost)”

Some of the most compelling constructed body narratives constitute Frankenggenre 1.5, which flourished early in our century. These overlap with both 1.0 and 2.0 but have more complexity and ambivalence, especially when the constructed bodies simultaneously do and do not share identities with ordinary humans. “Frankenggenre” is my term for narratives that involve artificially building a human or humanoid body: either modifying a body--often a transhumanist project--or creating one from scratch--often producing an object of posthumanist concern.

If *Frankenstein* (1819) exemplifies 1.0, our century is approaching 2.0. Constructed bodies still appear, but they are more taken for granted--by implied readers, the storyworld’s society, or both. There are multiple constructed bodies; there are multiple types; the narrative does not show the creation process; the technology is not new in the storyworld; and/or the bodies have integrated into society.

I focus on two examples. Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) employs two kinds of construction--human clones are created to provide organs to be harvested for other humans. While most of society takes this practice for granted and the clones do not rebel, the narrative, told from their point of view, strikes implied readers as horrific. And the harvested body’s semi-identity to its original raises disturbing ethical conundrums.

In Brin’s *Kin People* (2002), humans can create duplicates of themselves by imprinting on a clay body, which then does things in place of the original. The “ditto” disintegrates in 24 hours, yet sur-

vives by giving the original its memories. For the originals, dittos offer transhumanist enhancement; for the dittos, their bondage deserves posthumanist critique. The originals' semi-identity with the dittos again raises strange ethical paradoxes.

Frankengene 1.5 thus highlights the poignancy and ethical dilemmas that underlie all constructed body narratives.

JUSTUS POETZSCH

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"The Call of Anthropocene: Resituating the Human through Trans- & Posthumanism: Notes of Otherness in Works of Jeff VanderMeer and Cixin Liu"

Since Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer coined the term Anthropocene for our current geological epoch, they also provoked a redefinition of the relation of nature and culture in social and literary sciences, which were already struggling to find new concepts for dealing with the constant emergence of multiple other, non-human or post-human entities. In that sense, narratives around the Anthropocene (Gabriele Dürbeck) represent an ongoing process of redefining what it means to be human, since science and technology are bringing the existence and agency of non-human microbes, bio-chemical substances as well as technological artifacts, digital realms, but also climate and the earth as a reactive system to light and life.

This emergence of hybrids, as Bruno Latour described, is a paradoxical result of modernity to differentiate between natural and cultural entities, but which instead reveals the collective and distributed power of also non-human actants in shaping our inhabited world. Accordingly, the 'other than human' has become a prominent figure of contemporary writings and philosophy.

By trying to deal with this now surprisingly overpopulated world of human and post-human entities, Transhuman enhancement seems to represent a suitable way of regaining power and re-establishing the human dominance in an exponentially accelerating and vastly growing reality (Nick Bostrom, Ray Kurzweil). Critical Posthumanism, on the other hand, identifies human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism as the modern misconceptions, while pleading for an embedded, embodied and relational narration of our world (Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti).

By using the trilogies of Cixin Liu *Remembrance of Earth's Past* and Jeff Vandermeer *Southern Reach*, concepts of transhuman persistence in contrast to the irreducible otherness of posthuman existence shall be demonstrated in this paper.

DAVID M. RIEDER

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"Everting the Real as an Approach to Interactive Storytelling and Rhetorical Engagement"

My submission for *Representation in the Time of the Posthuman* contributes to one or both of the following two topics in the call for papers: 1) changes in the traditional roles of the writer, reader, or the text, itself; and 2) new sensory engagements.

In my presentation, I will focus on the ways in which smart, interactive, sensory-based technologies radically change our approach to both storytelling and rhetorical engagement with audiences, and I will relate that to the discourse of the posthuman. I will briefly outline a specific approach to producing compelling 'experiences' based on the affordances of these new technologies, and I will end with a digital humanities project on which I'm currently working, which is about the migrant/refugee boat crisis in the Mediterranean sea.

Compared to desk- and laptop computers (personal computers or PCs), which for over 30 years enculturated its users to a computational realm separate and distinct from the 'real world,' the new post-PC era of popular computing that is fast replacing it *everts* those distinctions. Eversion is a term that the American literary writer William Gibson introduced in the following quote: "Cyberspace, not

so long ago, was a specific elsewhere, one we visited periodically, peering into it from the familiar physical world. Now cyberspace has everted. Turned itself inside out.” Gibson is alluding to the way in which the virtual realm of the computer has broken through the looking glass of the screen and bled into the real world. What Gibson doesn’t say is that this is due to the growing range of micro-technologies that are embedded in our everyday lives, with which we engage in increasingly natural ways.

As I’ll explain in my presentation, eversion is an important basis for the cultural and communicational shifts to which posthuman discourses are related. The excitement – both positive and negative – related to many of the shifts in what it means to be human can be traced to post-PC technologies. And for digital humanists and –rhetors who are exploring new ways of engaging with their audiences, it is essential to understand how eversion works, and how it can be achieved.

MEIKE ROBAARD

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“Don’t Shoot the Messenger!': Horrific Embodiment, Technological Mediation, and Sexual Violence in David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983)”

Canadian film director David Cronenberg’s works, influenced by science-fiction authors such as William S. Burroughs and J.G. Ballard, as well as by philosophers such as Baudrillard and McLuhan, have certainly not been neglected by scholars. Yet, as Adam Lowenstein notes, Cronenberg remains “an incompletely understood [director]” whose “work demands renewed attention” (130), especially, as I will argue, in the realm of biopolitics and technological mediation of the body. Particularly in his 1983 film *Videodrome*, Cronenberg, rather than dehumanizing technology, seeks to understand how technology mediates our physical embodiment, echoing a McLuhanian understanding of “technology as an extension of man” where “the medium is the message” whilst physically extending this perspective by maintaining that more than anything, “it is an extension of [the] neurological system”. Cronenberg consequentially introduces us to his vision of the interaction of body and technology not as the technologization of nature, but rather as the cause for the birth of the bionic “new flesh” (01:24:40). Although *Videodrome* has often been read as a technophobic text, in this paper I will suggest an alternative reading of this narrative not as a tale of morality, but rather as cyborgian manifesto and visual exploration of the blurring of boundaries between body and technology; the film quite literally comes to embody a cyborgian hybridity in which technology does not function just as the extension of the physical body, but rather where the body in turn becomes an extension and mediator of technology. Toying with what I argue is a visualized particular notion of the Baudrillardian “hyperreal” body, Cronenberg introduces us to a fleshy kind of cyborg that we were not culturally familiar with yet. Through the “horrific” and seemingly post-humanist alterations that protagonist Max undergoes in *Videodrome*, it is Max’s often sexual and violent body that plays the leading role: in doing so, Cronenberg thus reminds us that despite technological inventions, the body is, at least to some extent, inescapable.

JERIKA SANDERSON

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“Technology’s ‘troubled dreams’: Nonlinear Narratives and Posthuman Perspectives in HBO’s *Westworld*”

In HBO’s television show *Westworld* (2016), the android “hosts” of an amusement park each follow a specific “loop,” or storyline, which resets once it has been completed or the host has been “killed” by a human guest. These loops continue indefinitely until the hosts are repurposed for new storylines: their minds can be reprogrammed and their character can be rewritten at any point by the human staff. This constant cycle of resetting and overwriting host minds becomes problematic

when a system update allows certain androids to recall memories of past events. Some hosts, like Dolores and Teddy, begin to recall events that had occurred in previous loops of their current storylines, while another host, Maeve, begins to recall memories from when she had been programmed to play an entirely different character role. The disjointed experience of the hosts is reflected in the narrative of the show itself. While the separate storylines initially appear to follow a straightforward trajectory, as the series progresses, it becomes apparent that the events depicted in the show are not necessarily occurring in chronological order. The storylines depicted in *Westworld* are further complicated by the fact that the androids do not appear to age, thus making it difficult for the audience to recognize that some scenes with the same android hosts are taking place across the span of several decades. This paper will argue that *Westworld's* fragmented and nonlinear narrative style reflects the disjointed experience of the android hosts as they begin to recall fragments of former events. This narrative style thereby draws attention to the complexities of the perspectives of the hosts as they attempt to navigate the inconsistencies not only in their memories, but also in their own identities.

WILLIAM F. SMITH II

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“Transhuman Productions”

Is the production of human not a natural one? If human is not natural then, what are we? If there is nothing natural about human, then is there human nature? Kant asked, what does it mean to be human? What is virtual, and what is a virtual human? We may think of temporality or simulation, however, an object's essence is virtual too. If human production were artificial, then would the virtual human be the event of that production? Under these circumstances, the virtual human would be the reality of its virtual, the *unknown future*. Historically, we have encountered artificial humans in the fantasies of art, cinema, literature, and popular culture including some of the more commonly known: *Golem*—Jewish mythology; Pygmalion's living sculpture; E.T.A. Hoffman's uncanny doll—Olympia, in *Der Sandmann*; Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*; Fritz's Lang's Maria—the female robot in *Metropolis*; and Ridley Scott's Replicants in *Blade Runner*. Our long tradition with fantasies of artificial life out of living continue with sex dolls, which can be designed to reflect our personal choices in sex partners, fetishes, ethnicities, body types, and other attributes. Transhuman production is completely immaterial with endless communications flows of transmissions and receptions between human-machine or machine-human; mental processes and translations of informational flows create an aesthetic experience through its distributed cognitive network of social relations and digital machines. Are our realities not also fantasies performed inside the spaces of images? A technological organism endowed with life by mobilizing technological capabilities through the identity of the human mind. Are we not primarily performing art-(ificial) living out of life at the intersections where apparatuses, technologies, and image converge, or cross-over?

MONICA SOUSA

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“Am I a person?": Biotech Animals and Posthuman Empathy in Jeff VanderMeer's *Borne*”

Jeff VanderMeer's latest novel, *Borne* (2017), is a biotech apocalyptic novel that discusses human connection with the nonhuman body and human interaction with biotechnology. *Borne* follows a scavenger, Rachel, in the ruins of a nameless future city who finds a sea anemone shaped creature that she names Borne. Throughout the novel, Borne's body and mental capabilities rapidly evolve, resulting in Rachel blurring the boundaries between plant, animal, and person. *Borne* depicts what VanderMeer calls “life in the broken places”: a ruined city, inhabited by human and nonhuman artificial creatures who hunt each other, get dissected and reassembled, and continue to live their life.

N. Katherine Hayles writes that “the posthuman offers resources for rethinking the articulation of humans with intelligent machines” (287). I argue that the relationship between technology and (human and nonhuman) biology in Borne outlines the mandatory duality of the term “posthumanism”: characters transcend what it means to be human in a biological sense and in an ethical sense they accept a compassionate way of thinking that removes the human from the center.

This paper will explore the mandatory duality of posthumanism by considering the presence of hybridity and folding – in the novel, humans are folded into animals and vice versa. The titular character will also be a primary focus; Borne’s rapidly changing shape and his philosophical musings and empathetic curiosity reveal how even beings that may be “mere” operating systems can be charismatic. Borne’s inability to evolve beyond his “monstrous” impulses (killing and consuming other beings) and his attitude towards death will also be considered. Furthermore, Borne’s decision to name the biotech creatures out in the wild and his stubborn love for Rachel, his mother-figure, are important factors when considering his search for his own potential “humanity” and what it means to be a person.

EWELINA TWARDOCH-RAŚ

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“Somatic Self’: Self-Tracking Activities in Post-Media Projects as the New Kind of Biometric Auto-Ethnography and Bio-Digital Extension of the Body”

My presentation proposes to investigate the problem of enhancement and development of the human body in some artistic projects, combining art and science, which are based on biotechnological experiments and biometrics. All of the projects use specific quasi-medical tools (usually self-constructed devices and software) and methods (methods of diagnosis, therapy and of sensory-motor body functions’ improvement) to show complex processes of body extension and development. They therefore are created in reference to the Quantified-Self movement, a relative new trend (2008), based on the regular measurement of one’s vital functions for diagnostic, self-cognitive and enhancement purposes. In my presentation I would like to consider two possible dimensions of such practices in reference to the post-literary and trans-textual practices.

1. New forms of auto-ethnography that are based on regular measurement of vital functions of one’s organism to better understand, control and optimize the body’s condition and efficiency. Such kind of transhumanist auto-ethnography’s practices develop American artists Laurie Frick and Stephen Cartwright in their transmedia projects (“Walking”, “Sleep patterns”, “Chromatic data oscillator”). Such projects negotiate the meaning of traditional literary auto-narrations (as journals or diaries) and show new contexts of creating narrative identities – based on transhumanistic connections with technologies.

2. Enhancement of the body’s functions in trans-literature projects that directly include biological, affective reactions of the organism as an important and necessary part of the narratives. In projects such as the novel *Breathing Wall* created by Kate Pullinger and the game *Nevermind* created by Erin Reynolds we can approach a next level of the story or solve the mystery only when we can control our physiological reactions (with the help of specific tools and software) and use them in the process of biofeedback. These projects therefore are also testing and negotiating the boundaries of the medium and genre, created so called physio-cyber-texts or biometric playable artifacts – works of art that depend on the improvement of the body’s functions.

The theoretical context of my considerations will be Michel Foucault’s thesis of the so-called techniques of the self (as activities originating from antiquity and realized in the paradigm of “self-cultivation”). I will also refer to the concept of the etopolitics of Nicolas Rose (ethos of health, individual necessity of self-optimization and self-supervision) and self-invigilation (Thomas Lemke) as a binary opposition that constitutes contemporary, dissonant biopolitical thinking of the body’s developing in reference to transhumanist ideas. I will show how post-media projects, based on trans-literary narratives reshape, embody and co-create many problems raised by this socio-cultural paradigm.

INES VEAUTHIER

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“The Other Human: Exploring Identities”

Trying to become a better human being may be seen as a common enough ambition among many educated people, even if the terms “better” and “human” are hard to define. Technological modifications might be interpreted as improving an individual, yet the protagonists of *The Fault in our Stars* notice that people in general view them as defective because they have to rely on an oxygen tank to breathe or a prosthetic leg to walk. In fact, all too often the individual and his or her personality seem to be replaced by the disease itself (Green 32). This leads to the question of whether sick people are robbed of their identity and of the very essence of what makes them human.

In *The Circle* by Dave Eggers, technological variations are meant to foster perfect harmony, true love, and total understanding. Anyone doubting or rejecting this approach would be deemed unworthy of being called “human,” thus leaving no room for developing any true personality.

These examples of contemporary American fiction discuss questions of creating or negotiating one’s identity from the viewpoint of an individual, yet the implications of collective identity clearly resonate. Researchers emphasize that identity is not fixed, but flexible or “mobile” (Frith 109) and the same holds true for collective cultural memory. However, defining what constitutes human, non-human, less than human, or superhuman qualities entails investigating the underlying aspects of power and hierarchy.

The analysis will show the subtle ways in which the criteria are interconnected and in which their importance and meaning are both subject to negotiation and to possible change. This interdisciplinary approach will integrate aspects of cultural studies and sociology to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of identity and alterity within a certain cultural context

JUSTYNA WŁODARCZYK

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“Posthuman/Postanimal? Producing the More-than-Animal Dog in David Wroblewski’s *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*”

David Wroblewski’s *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle* (2009), a re-staging of Shakespeare’s Hamlet among Wisconsin dog breeders, has so far been a challenge for literary critics. The book has received largely positive reviews; it secured a place on the *New York Times* bestseller list, but few scholars have given it serious consideration. Using posthumanist and transhumanist methodologies to analyze the quest to produce a “superdog” seems a promising approach, and this is exactly what this paper attempts to do. An important side-plot in the novel is the Sawtelle family’s multi-generational canine breeding project aimed at producing a dog whose qualities would exceed those of a “regular” canine. The novel includes fictional correspondence between Sawtelle and Elliot Humphrey, real life co-author of *Working Dogs* (1934) and the founder of the Fortunate Fields breeding program, the first ever breeding program of guide dogs for the blind. The fictionalized exchange of letters presents the conflict between two understandings of the purpose of canine breeding and training. Humphrey is an advocate of closed gene pools and breed purity. Sawtelle wants to create a dog whose capabilities exceed what is seen as the limitations of animality. To achieve that goal, he does not focus on breed purity but mates exceptional animals about whose “superpowers” he reads in the media; for example, importing a descendant of Hachiko from Japan. In the novel, Sawtelle’s program proves superior to the dominant approach. By reading the actual text of Humphrey’s *Working Dogs* and Sawtelle’s ideas from the novel through a posthumanist perspective, this paper tries to unpack the tensions between the two perspectives and re-frame Sawtelle’s project as one that challenges the human/animal divide through the use of the technology of selective breeding.

PROGRAM



WEDNESDAY, 29 MAY

9:00 **Registration**

9:30–10:00 **Opening Ceremony.** Salón de Actos

10:00–11:30 **Plenary Lecture** [Salón de Actos]

Stephan Herbrechter (Coventry University, UK and Heidelberg University, Germany).
“Before Humanity”

11:30–12:00 **Coffee Break**

12:00–13:30 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.3

THE POSTHUMAN IN CONTEMPORARY U.S. FICTION

Chair: Francisco Collado Rodríguez

- ❖ **LISA MULLEN** (Worcester College, Oxford, UK)
“On Edge: Decentering Human Materiality in William Gibson’s *The Peripheral*”
- ❖ **INES E. VEAUTHIER** (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz, Germany)
“The Other Human: Exploring Identities”
- ❖ **FRANCISCO COLLADO RODRÍGUEZ** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)
“Patterns of Transhuman Numbleness in ‘The Belonging Kind’ and *The Circle*”

12:00–13:30 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.4

TRANSHUMAN PROGRESS: ETHICAL CHALLENGES

Chair: Maite Escudero-Alías

- ❖ **LOREDANA FILIP** (Friedrich-Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany).
“Stories of Human Enhancement in Contemporary North American Science Fiction”
- ❖ **ANA CHAPMAN** (Universidad de Málaga, Spain)
“The Posthuman Lens in *Infinite Jest* and the Transhuman View from the Natural/Biological Eye”
- ❖ **MAITE ESCUDERO-ALÍAS** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)
“From Utilitarianism to Transhumanism: A Critical Approach”

13:30–15:30 **Lunch Break**

15:30–17:00 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.3

TRANSHUMAN CANADIAN FICTION: ATWOOD AND BEYOND

Chair: Esther Muñoz González

- ❖ **LIDIA MARÍA CUADRADO PAYERAS** (Universidad de Salamanca, Spain)
“Representation in the Time of the Posthuman: Transhumanism in Canadian Literature”
- ❖ **SŁAWOMIR KOZIOŁ** (University of Rzeszów, Poland)
“From Yuppies to Hippies (and Back Again) – Libertarian Genetic Modification of People in *MaddAddam* Trilogy by Margaret Atwood”
- ❖ **ESTHER MUÑOZ GONZÁLEZ** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)
“*MaddAddam*, Whose Voice? Human and Posthuman Voices”

15:30–17:00 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.4

SCIENCE FICTION: JEFF VANDERMEER

Chair: Roger Davis

- ❖ **JUSTUS POETZSCH** (Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz, Germany)
“The Call of Anthropocene: Resituating the Human Through Trans- & Posthumanism. Notes of Otherness in Works of Jeff VanderMeer and Cixin Liu”

❖ **MONICA SOUSA** (York University, Toronto, Ontario, Canada)
“‘Am I a person?’: Biotech Animals and Posthumanist Empathy in Jeff VanderMeer’s *Borne*”

❖ **ROGER DAVIS** (Red Deer College, Canada).
“‘This writing around the edges of things’: Transhumanism, Annihilation, and Interdisciplinarity”

17:00-17:30 **Coffee Break**

17:30-19:30 **Parallel Session. Aula 1.3**

TELEVISUAL AND DIGITAL STORYTELLING

Chair: Amaya Fernández Menicucci

❖ **GRETCHEN BUSL** (Texas Woman’s University).
“Digital Storytelling in the Global Social Context”

❖ **DAVID M. RIEDER** (North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC, USA)
“Everting the Real as an Approach to Interactive Storytelling and Rhetorical Engagement”

❖ **JERIKA SANDERSON** (Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada)
“Technology’s ‘troubled dreams’: Nonlinear Narratives and Posthuman Perspectives in HBO’s *Westworld*”

❖ **AMAYA FERNÁNDEZ MENICUCCI** (Universidad del País Vasco, Spain)
“The Cyborg in the Brothel: Posthumanity and Gender De(con)struction in *Westworld*”

17:30-19:00 **Parallel Session. Aula 1.4**

TRANSHUMAN VIOLENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Chair: Miriam Fernández Santiago

❖ **DÖRTE HOFMANN** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain).
“The Murder Gene and the Transhuman: The Consequences of Genetic Engineering in Veronica Roth’s *Allegiant*”

❖ **MEIKE ROBAARD** (University of Groningen, The Netherlands)
“Don’t Shoot the Messenger!’: Horrific Embodiment, Technological Mediation, and Sexual Violence in David Cronenberg’s *Videodrome* (1983)”

❖ **MIRIAM FERNÁNDEZ SANTIAGO** (Universidad de Granada, Spain)
“*Split*. A Dystopian Vision of Transhuman Enhancement”

20:30 **Welcome Reception. Paraninfo**

THURSDAY, 30 MAY

9:30-11:00 **Parallel Session. Aula 1.3**

POSTHUMAN SUBJECTIVITY IN BRITISH FICTION

Chair: Susana Onega Jaén

❖ **MARGALIDA MASSANET ANDREU** (Universitat de les Illes Balears, Spain)
“Subjects of the Modern World: Writing ‘U.’ in Tom McCarthy’s *Satin Island*”

❖ **THALIA OSTENDORF** (University of St Andrews, UK)
“Transhumanism and Cyborgification: Prosthetics and the Narrative ‘I’”

❖ **SUSANA ONEGA JAÉN** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)
“The Paradoxical Anti-Humanism of Tom McCarthy’s *C*: Traumatic Secrets and the Waning of Affects in the Technological Society”

9:30-11:00 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.4

TRANSHUMAN AND OTHER SPECIES

Chair: Sara Martín Alegre

- ❖ **JUSTYNA WŁODARCZYK** (University of Warsaw, Poland)
“Posthuman/Postanimal? Producing the More-than-animal Dog in David Wroblewski’s *The Story of Edgar Sawtelle*”
- ❖ **BOYARKINA IREN** (Tuscia University, Viterbo, Italy).
“The Improvement of Human Species in the Narratives by Mary Shelley, Olaf Stapledon and Richard Morgan”
- ❖ **SARA MARTÍN ALEGRE** (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain)
“Hard Man, Hard Wired: Patriarchal Transhumanism and Disempowered Masculinity in Richard Morgan’s *Thin Air* (2018)”

11:00-11:30 **Coffee Break**

11:30-13:00 **Plenary Lecture.** Salón de Actos

- ❖ **ALEXANDRA GLAVANAKOVA** (St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, Bulgaria).
“New Modes of Reading Literature Online”

13:00-15:00 **Lunch Break**

15:00-16:30 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.3

CRITICAL POSTHUMANISM AND THE HUMAN BRAIN

Chair: Carmen Laguarda Bueno

- ❖ **ALEXANDER HOPE** (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain)
“Brainships, Posthumanities and Neuronal Plasticity: Reading Cyborgs with Catherine Malabou”
- ❖ **IRINA NOVIKOVA** (University of Latvia, Latvia)
“Memory, Technofuture and Posthuman Agency in the Novels of Richard Powers and Paolo Bacigalupi”
- ❖ **CARMEN LAGUARTA BUENO** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)
“Don DeLillo’s Zero K (2016): A Critical Posthumanist Approach on the Ethics of Cryonics”

15:00-16:30 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.4

FANTASIES OF ARTIFICIAL LIFE AND LOVE

Chair: Beatriz Oría Gómez

- ❖ **JOANNA ŁAPIŃSKA** (Independent Researcher)
“Representations of (Post?)Human Subjects in Love in *Creative Control* (2015) and *Operator* (2016)”
- ❖ **WILLIAM F. SMITH II** (University of Wollongong Dubai, U.A.E.)
“Transhuman Productions”
- ❖ **BEATRIZ ORIA GÓMEZ** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)
“When Harry Met Siri: Transhuman Romance in *Her* (2013)”

16:30-17:00 **Coffee Break**

17:00-18:30 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.3

FRANKENSTEIN’S LEGACY

Chair: Aitor Ibarrola-Armendáriz

- ❖ **PAUL MITCHELL** (Universidad Católica de Valencia San Vicente Mártir, Spain)
“Creating a Monster: Frankenstein’s Creature on Film and Television in the Twenty-First Century”

- ❖ **ELLEN PEEL** (San Francisco State University, CA, USA)
“Frankenggenre 1.5: Taking Constructed Bodies for Granted (Almost)”
- ❖ **AITOR IBARROLA-ARMENDÁRIZ** (Universidad de Deusto, Bilbao, Spain).
“Frankenstein Redivivus: New Shades of (Post)Human Monstrosity in Victor LaValle’s *Destroyer* (2017)”

17:00-18:30 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.4
VIDEOGAMES AND MEDIA
Chair: Laurent Milesi

- ❖ **EWELINA TWARDOCH-RAŚ** (Jagiellonian University, Poland)
“‘Somatic Self’: Self-Tracking Activities in Post-Media Projects as the New Kind of Biometric Auto-Ethnography and Bio-Digital Extension of the Body”
- ❖ **SASCHA JOSEPH** (University of Cologne, Germany)
“Augs Lives Matter: The Cyborg as a Mediator in the *Deus Ex* Prequel Series”
- ❖ **LAURENT MILESI** (Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China)
“*Ecce Deus Ex*: Posthumanity between Theology and Technology”

21:00h **Conference** Dinner Restaurant “Novodabo”

FRIDAY, 31 MAY

10:00-11:30 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.3
TRANSHUMANISM AND TRAUMA
Chair: María Ferrández San Miguel

- ❖ **MARLENE FERREIRA SIMOES** (University of Aberdeen, UK)
“Spacetimemattering in Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book*”
- ❖ **SEBASTIAN FITZ-KLAUSNER** (University of Koblenz-Landau, Germany)
“Visualising Traumatized Cyber-men – Or: How Futuristic Technology Constructs Trauma and Gendered Bodies in Contemporary US-Science-Fiction-Cinema”
- ❖ **MARÍA FERRÁNDEZ SAN MIGUEL** (Centro Universitario de la Defensa, Zaragoza, Spain)
“‘The Brain Feels No Pain’: Trauma and the Posthuman in Pat Cadigan’s *Synners*”

10:00-11:30 **Parallel Session.** Aula 1.4
TRANSHUMAN DYSTOPIAS IN FILM
Chair: Marita Nadal Blasco

- ❖ **PABLO GÓMEZ MUÑOZ** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)
“The Use of the Posthuman as a Tool for the Advancement of Neoliberalism in *Sorry to Bother You* (Boots Riley, 2018)”
- ❖ **ROCÍO CARRASCO CARRASCO** (Universidad de Huelva, Spain)
“Accountability and the Cyber-Enhanced Body in 21st Century Cinema: Sanders’ *Ghost In The Shell* (2017)”
- ❖ **MARITA NADAL BLASCO** (Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain)
“*I Am Legend* as Posthuman Gothic: from Richard Matheson’s novel to Francis Lawrence’s film adaptation”

11:30-12:00 **Coffee Break**

12:00-13:30 **Plenary Lecture.** Salón de Actos

- ❖ **SHERRYL VINT** (University of California, Riverside, USA)
“Capital Reproduction: Maternity and Productivity”

13:30 **Closing Ceremony.** Salón de Actos



Research Project: Trauma,
Culture and Posthumanity



Research Group: Contemporary
Narrative in English

Organised by:

Sonia Baelo Allué and Mónica Calvo Pascual

Colaboran



Facultad de
Filosofía y Letras
Universidad Zaragoza



Facultad de Educación
Universidad Zaragoza



Patrocinan

