18th INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES IN ENGLISH

RECENT APPROACHES TO THE POSTHUMAN:

CULTURAL REFLECTIONS ON THE (POST-)HUMAN CONDITION

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

MAY 15 - 17, 2023
University of Zaragoza

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Plenary Speakers

CALLUS, IVAN

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"Posthumanism and Grace: Literary Pretexts for an Improbable Relation"

There are a number of reasons why only a sense of incongruity could arise from discussing posthumanism in relation to grace, grace in relation to posthumanism. In whichever way either of the two is defined (and the considerable variation in the understanding of both is a factor to be contended with), the lack of correspondence between posthumanism and grace is more intuitive than any perceivable affinity. Yet, as this paper will argue, there are unexpected affinities that are worth identification and exploration, especially in contexts discussing 'the (post-)human condition'. Taking some cues from the work of Jacques Derrida and Alain Badiou (themselves not easily commensurable), and referring throughout to theorisation of the posthuman and to different stances (in vision and practice) concerning grace, the paper looks closely at some literary (pre)texts that can be seen as staging the improbable relation. In another pairing that also looks unlikely, the texts discussed are taken from the Early Modern canon and from 21st-century experimental narrative. Conclusions are drawn about how and why it might be useful to think of posthumanism and grace in relation to the other, and how understanding of the former, in particular, is furthered in the encounter.

Bionote:

Prof. Ivan Callus is Professor of English at the University of Malta. He has published widely within the fields of contemporary fiction, literary theory, comparative literature and posthumanism. His most recent publications include the co-edited *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*, currently in press, and book chapters on the genre of newspaper column and on the resurgence of critical interest in ideas concerning character. He is one of the founding directors of the Critical Posthumanism Network (criticalposthumanism.net) and the general co-editor of *CounterText: A Journal for the Study of the Post-Literary*, published with Edinburgh University Press. He is currently writing a book called *Exploring the Posthuman in Literature.*

FERNÁNDEZ-SANTIAGO, MIRIAM

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"Phenomenal"

In this talk I will be discussing recent literary reflections on the posthuman condition as well as recent developments in the fields of transhumanism, critical posthumanism and the new materialisms. I will be establishing uncanny relations between transhumanism and ecocriticism (such as utilitarianism in the form of social or environmental justice, the will for transcendence, or their apparent hospitality), theocentrism and anthropocentrism (with evidence from Medieval and Renaissance literature in comparison with current posthumanist literary and critical trends), and the ethical and the un-scientific turns of the Fourth Industrial Revolution under the scientific paradigm of Quantum Physics. I will also draw some features of recent literary aesthetical and ethical tendencies (toward simplicity, honesty, truth, morality and closure) that take said relations as their critical and historical background.

Although my approach is undeniably transversed by the post-structuralist perspective that these tendencies tempt (rather than just invite) me to take, for the sake of argumentative coherence my talk will have to be taken as both a theoretical proposal of "phenomenalogy" as a critical instrument and as its performance. What might sound as merely anecdotal material must thus be taken as a methodological requirement of (subjective) accountability, while objects and instruments of analysis (the critical and the literary) intra-act in determining each other. But the most interesting aspect of my proposal perhaps lies in my illustration of iteration (repetition with variation), which instrumentalizes analogy to account for recent developments in transhumanism, critical posthumanism and the new materialisms, if only to make sure we make new (and not old) mistakes when trying to answer old questions. Although the content might be dense, the tone will be light.

Bionote:

Miriam Fernández-Santiago is a senior lecturer and Head of the English and German Department of the University of Granada (Spain), where she currently teaches literary theory, and the cultures and literatures of English-Speaking countries. She the is current Secretary *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* and of the Spanish Association of American Studies. Her early research interests range from Cultural and Intercultural Studies, Critical Theory, and North American Literature, including volumes such as *The (I)logics of Postmodern Humor (*2003), *The Voice and the Void (*2005). She has recently turned to studies in Posthumanism and vulnerability with research projects like "Contemporary North American Narrative and the Fourth Industrial Revolution: Posthumanity, Privation and Social Change" (2020-2023: PID2019-106855GB-I00), "Interfaces: Representing Human Vulnerability in the Fourth Industrial Revolution" (P20_00008) and "Representing Vulnerability as an Element for Social Cohesion or Social Exclusion: Precarity and Disability in Contemporary Fictions in English" (A-HUM22-UGR-20). Her most recent publications include two co-edited volumes with Routledge under the titles *Representing Vulnerabilities in Contemporary Literature* (2022) and *Embodied VulnerAbilities in Literature and Film* (2023).

LAGRANDEUR, KEVIN

New York Institute of Technology

"**Brain-Computer Interface Projects:**
Literature, Reality, and Cultural Implications"

A number of fictional accounts have been written about the possibility of enhancing the human brain through various scientific means. These fictional imaginings are now in the process of being realized via pharmaceutical, genetic, and digital means. In this presentation, I'm going to discuss two particularly new digital methods for brain enhancement: Neural Lace, a type of Brain to Computer Interface (BCI) ultimately meant to speed up human cognition and communication, and a "prosthetic memory" that is being developed by a team at the University of Southern California. I will discuss the promise of these developments. I also want to discuss how these emerging technologies are prefigured in fiction, and how such fiction foreshadows some of the downsides of this kind of technology.

Bionote:

Dr. Kevin LaGrandeur is Professor Emeritus at the New York Institute of Technology (NYIT), Fellow of the Institute for Ethics and Emerging Technology, co-founder of the NY Posthuman Research Group, and Advisory Board Member of the Lifeboat Foundation (which seeks ways to promote safe development of new technology). He specializes in technology and culture, ethics, and education. Dr. LaGrandeur is a member of the founding editorial boards of two journals: *AI and Ethics*, and the *Journal of Posthumanism.* As well, he is on the founding editorial board of the book series Critical Posthuman and Citizenship Studies, by the publisher Rowman and Littlefield. He has published more than 50 articles and media productions, in both professional venues and the popular press, and 2 books: *Artificial Slaves* (2013), which won a 2014 Science Fiction and Technoculture Studies Prize, and *Surviving the Machine Age* (2017), with sociologist James Hughes. Among his current projects, he and his colleague John Misak are developing an Augmented Reality game to help students understand Shakespeare and his world.

VINT, SHERRYL

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"Humanism as Prosthetic: Science Fiction as Ceremony"

Engaging with Sylvia Wynter's work on genre of the human, this paper begins from that premise that we can understand humanism as a prothesis to our species identity. Like the body, something we both *have* and *are*, humanism is both intimate and external to our being. In Wynter's conceptualization, what is unique about homo sapiens is that we are creatures formed of both biology and ideology, of instincts and of story. In an era of globalized modernity, she contends, a single *genre* of the human has been mistaken for our entire species through patterns rooted in projecting Blackness as the Other to human being. Wynter calls for a revolution in our governing modes of figuration, an effort to "consciously alter our modes of self-troping" that she calls "ceremony" ("Ceremony Must" 52). This new system of figuration, which she comes to all a "counter cosmogeny," prompts a transformation which Wynter analogizes to speciation, a Second Emergence of hominid-become-human as "now fully conscious agents in the autopoetic institution and reproduction of a new kind of planetarily extended cum "intercommunal" community" ("Ceremony Found 193). Such a planetary view is necessary to confront species-level problems such as climate change. Wynter looks to poetry as a techne for creating such ceremony, but I turn to science fiction, Looking at Matt Bell's *Appleseed* (2021) and Maja Lund's *The History of Bees* (2017), I will argue that both must extend their realist narratives with sf sections to address the topic of climate change. In so doing, they prompt readers to think beyond human lifespans and at the level of the species, rather than level of the individual protagonist. While neither novel fully offers the new Ceremony that Wynter anticipates, they suggest ways speculative aesthetics provide a techne for the task of self-consciously rather than autonomically becoming through our cultural "programs," something we might theorize as prosthetic autopoiesis.

Bionote:

Sherryl Vint is Professor of Media and Cultural Studies and Chair of the Department of English at the University of California, Riverside, where she directs the Speculative Fictions and Cultures of Science program. She was a founding editor of *Science Fiction Film and Television* and is an editor for the journal *Science Fiction Studies* and the book series *Science in Popular Culture*. She has published widely on science fiction, including, most recently, *Biopolitical Futures in Twenty-First Century Speculative Fiction* (2021) and *Programming the Future: Speculative Television and the End of Democracy* (2022, co-authored with Jonathan Alexander).

Panel Papers

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Session 2A.
"Posthumanism and genre"
Monday, May 15. 15:15-17:00 [Room 1]

"Beyond SF: Reading the Posthuman in Crime Fiction"

Under the Fourth Industrial Revolution, life has become science-fictional. In the age of bioprinting, genetic engineering, and inforgs, our reality is saturated with images that were usually the preserve of science fiction. Consequently, as critics such as Sherryl Vint, Gary K. Wolfe or Istvan Csicsery-Ronay have noted, science fiction has surpassed its generic boundaries, to become a set of tools or vernacular language for comprehending and intervening in a reality that breaches all material, conceptual and ethical thresholds. As science-fictionality grows into the dominant mode of social imagination, the icons and themes historically circumscribed to it have "colonized" other genres. One such case is the current boom of literary works that integrate the icons of the posthuman age – genetics, the cyborg, artificial intelligence – within the stock plots and conventions of crime fiction. This paper seeks to initiate a discussion about the representation of the posthuman in these hybrid texts. Drawing from classic approaches to the crime genre as a repository of social and political anxieties, this paper will argue that the genre's dialectic between chaos and order, disruption and punishment, offers a productive locus for understanding the dreams and nightmares of our exhilarating present, as well as for articulating alternative futures indexed to liberatory conceptualizations of the posthuman.

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Session 7B.
"Trauma, memory and the posthuman"
Wednesday, May 17. 9:45-11:30 [Room 2]

"Attempts at Preemptively Avoiding Trauma through the Posthuman: Don DeLillo's *Zero K* (2016) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021)"

Don DeLillo and Kazuo Ishiguro in *Zero K* (2016) and *Klara and the Sun* (2021), respectively, present possible outcomes on the path toward a future riddled with artificial intelligence as they examine the role posthumanism may embody in future societies. From issues of hierarchical (re)ordering and wealth (re)attribution of rights to the portrayal of characters who attempt to avoid traumatic occurrences through the (ab)use of posthuman

proceedings, both authors reflect on the human need to make sense of the traumatic experience in unprecedented ways.

While in *Zero K* (2016) DeLillo deals with cryonics and the wish to extend consciousness by the use of technological advancements (thus avoiding encounters with death), as Ross Lockhart wishes to undergo the treatment to prevent the possibly traumatic loss of his wife; Ishiguro, in *Klara and the Sun* (2021), showcases how human beings make use of artificial intelligence to ensure coping with the death of loved ones, as he presents a society where 'lifted' children may or may not survive transhuman enhancements, following Josie's mother's journey, as she makes use of "artificial friends" to attempt avoiding (or enduring) the consequent grieving to the (assumed) impending death of her child.

Both authors portray worlds in which human beings tamper with science not yet fully explored, lost as to how to behave and accept the emotional and social changes such science entails. Concurrently, both DeLillo and Ishiguro theorise that humankind may use privilege to avoid suffering and loss, showcasing attempts to avoid emotional turmoil, rather than strictly exploring the wish to extend humankind's life spans (as transhuman/posthuman thought mainly focuses on). Interestingly, both authors show that, in some cases, attempting to avoid trauma may be futile, speculating on the unavoidable nature of the phenomena.

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Session 7B.
"Trauma, memory and the posthuman"
Wednesday, May 17. 9:45-11:30 [Room 2]

"When Trauma and the Posthuman Meet:
Patricia Lockwood's *No One is Talking about This* (2021)"

Trauma studies and posthuman studies are two paradigms that became popular at the end of the 20th century and that have been used to define the culture of our time. They deal with subjectivity, agency, embodiment and the relation with "the other" and both see subjectivity and the self as shattered and fragmented but, whereas trauma studies focuses on the process of acting out and working through to return to a sealed, complete conception of the self, posthuman studies explores the process of adaptation and the space of vulnerability that opens up as a result of the decentralization of human subjectivity in our new technosocial reality of blurred boundaries. In the literary field novels of trauma and novels of the posthuman share similar narrative techniques and an analogous conception of the self as fragmented, unbounded, incomplete and unsealed. In this sense, Patricia Lockwood's *No One is Talking About This* (2021) is an autofictional novel that uses a third-person narrator and trauma-novel narrative techniques such as fragmentation, intrusive images and non-linearity to show the disintegration of the mind caused by the internet and social media in which the sense of self is engulfed by a collective consciousness that emerges from the never-ending scrolling down and the juxtapositions between the important and the shallow. It is a trauma in the real world (the narrator's sister gives birth to a baby girl with a rare genetic disorder) that pulls her out of the virtual world of disembodiment and detachment. From acting out the "eco-technological" trauma of our age of machines (Michael A. Peters, 2020) in part one, the story moves into the acting out of the trauma of

the baby's impending death in part two, to finally achieve a final work though from a perspective that is ambiguously both neohumanist and critical posthumanist and that shows how valuable and necessary embodiment and physical affection still are.

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Session 7A.
"Human-nonhuman entanglements"
Wednesday, May 17. 9:45-11:30 [Room 1]

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"Facing the Other: Posthuman Grief in Ali Smith's *Winter* (2017)"

The second instalment of Ali Smith's Seasonal Quartet, *Winter* (2017), depicts the diversity of posthuman subjects and their consequent emerging relationships through the story of Sophie and a disembodied head. Drawing upon Rosi Braidotti's posthuman framework and her belief that "the posthuman predicament requires even more diversified relational skills" (2019, 46), this novel can be said to reflect the posthuman's "change of paradigm towards transdisciplinary" (Braidotti 2019) through a shape-shifting head that slowly evolves and transforms into a rounded stone, one sculptured by British artist Barbara Hepworth's abstract creations. Concomitantly, in *Frames of War*, Judith Butler reflects on the question of whose lives become grievable, and she highlights Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia", where he "traced the super-ego's function to the internalization and transformation of the lost other as a recriminating voice" (2009). Hence, the disembodied head becomes an ever-changing physical figure that allows Sophia to recover her super-ego's internalized emotional grief and caring for it. As Levinas points out, the Other is a modification of one's ego that mirrors one's own self (qtd. in Bernasconi 2000, 69), and thus the incorporeal head holds a mirror against Sophia's repressed grief. The protagonist's traumatic condition becomes apparent through the sheer disruptions of the novel's chronology with recurrent analepses to her past, therefore her trauma transforms and undertakes an anthropomorphic appearance in order to be recognized as a posthuman grievable subject. Having these premises in mind, this paper focuses on the relationship between Sophia and the mysterious head, the "Other, for whom I can never do enough" (Bernasconi 2000) and a physical representation of the character's emotional trauma, which enables her to recognise it as a subject, therefore acquiring a grievable status that allows her to mourn the past that continues haunting her and the present she feels too scared to face.

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Session 5B.
"Transhuman/posthuman technologies"
Tuesday, May 16. 15:00-16:30 [Room 2]

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"Time via Neocybernetics in the Posthuman Dialectic of *The Overstory*"

My paper explores, through a reading of a subplot in a Richard Powers's *The Overstory*, how both serious and popular-culture interest in contemporary United States concerning India's real and assumed traditions relate to imaginaries of the environmental/ecological and of the digital/technological — both of which imaginaries can be read as constituting a narrative of posthumanism. This subplot in the novel concerns a fictional Indian-American computer programmer in Silicon Valley and his immigrant parents. In my paper, I read the novel as setting up a parallelism between two fantasies of supersession: ecological time as a "dark" hyperobject (Morton 2016) transcending and ultimately superseding the human-scale time of phenomenological experience, on the one hand, and a virtual-reality planetary simulacrum populated by AI agents, developed initially as a game by the Indian-American protagonist of the subplot, on the other. The latter constitutes an automated posthuman and also post-capitalist utopia in which the need for what Marxist geographers would call a "spatial fix" based on mastery has been superseded. With the help of recent theoretical interventions made by Bruce Clarke (2020), I will present a reading of the novel as providing a narratological connection between the two dimensions of time and of value-extraction, shading beyond the human, into a common framework constituted by entropy — in terms of entropy's connection with the thermodynamic arrow of time and its relation to energy-transformations. I will end by discussing how the Spanish translation of this English-language novel has made linguistic choices that may decenter the novel's priorities of localization and universalization.

BOON, MASHYA

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"I are You; *Moon*'s Clonal Remarriage of the Self"

Moon (Jones, 2009) explores questions of subjectivity, identity and humanity through the trope of human cloning. The film raises ethical questions pertaining to clones' moral status, as it envisages its clones as disposable laborers who are unknowingly enslaved by corporate greed. *Moon* also raises existential questions: Who am I, if I am already out there? Who am I, if I am immanently and inescapably faced with myself?

The way we usually understand ourselves is through an accretion of memories and experiences. We have one body that lives through life's experiences and we acquire memories thereof over time; a 'life's sentence' that progresses on a horizontal axis. This intuitive conception of subjectivity can be seen as a syntagmatic relation of the self oriented through a linear temporality. Cloned selves, however, allow a multiplied selfhood, flowing across a range of embodiments. Each multiplied self relates to its cloned companions and 'dethroned' original as alternative dimensions of each other. This paradigmatic relation of the self opens up a potentially infinite depth structure, operating on a vertical axis that is associative rather than causal. The notion of parallel seriality – repeating alternatives of the same – replaces or supplements linear succession – new generations elaborating upon former ones.

Conceptually, cloning's paradigmatic relations overthrow the self's intuitive syntagmatic relation. The clonal relation smears conventional subjectivity out to a point where we no longer can constitute this self as unified and unique; a nimble nexus that simultaneously expands and compresses space and time, and self and other. This paper draws on the notion of 'prosthetic memory' (Landsberg, 1995) to show that *Moon*'s clones share what I call a 'continuous consciousness'. The second part analyzes the clonal relation through the idea of 'the unattained but attainable self' (Cavell, 2004), which fosters a clonal 'remarriage' of the self.

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Session 8B.
"Posthuman Living"
Wednesday, May 17. 15:15-17:00 [Room 2]

"New Directions for New Materialism and Speculative Realism: Towards an Empirical Footing"

New materialist and speculative realist critical inquiry have developed almost exponentially over the last few decades; as a result, they have become key instruments for cultural artefact and discourse analysis in the field of Environmental Humanities. Yet, the two critical frameworks are rarely used in an empirical setting, for instance to support community study.

In this paper, I respond to calls for a more action-oriented use of theory from the Environmental Humanities by suggesting that new materialism and speculative realism offer important conceptual reference points for the empirical study of relationships between human beings and the environment. In return, widening the scope of inquiry of these disciplines creates new pathways to impact for the entire Environmental Humanities. To support this argument, I employ two case studies from Ireland. The first is a mixed-methods study of 'affective engagement' between people and coastal places in south Co. Wicklow. Drawing together the semiotic ('affective') and material ('engagement') dimensions of people-place interactions, this study reached across disciplinary boundaries to understand the cultural significance of the coastal landscape and describe the potential impact of infrastructure change. In the second case study (also mixed-method), perceptions of residents of Dundalk and Clogherhead, Co. Louth of offshore space and marine sediments storing carbon were investigated using a speculative realist lens. This was done to capture imagination-based impressions of these phenomena, reflecting the general inaccessibility of the offshore environment. Findings from community research were subsequently presented to policymakers and other stakeholders for consideration during forthcoming conversations on marine spatial planning in Ireland.

I conclude with a discussion of both the benefits and drawbacks of transdisciplinary empirical study using concepts transposed from new materialism and speculative realism, including in terms of theoretical rigidity, study design, results analysis, and impact.

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Session 8A.
"Human-animal relations"
Wednesday, May 17. 15:15-17:00 [Room 1]

"The Relational Subject and the Dismantling of the Nature-Culture Binary in the Video Game *Fe*"

This presentation relies on Rosi Braidotti's definition of the relational posthuman subject as embodied and embedded, "ecologically interlinked through the multiple interconnections we share within the nature–culture continuum" and "technologically mediated and globally interlinked" at the same time (*Posthuman Knowledge* 47) as the starting point for the analysis of the 2018 video game *Fe* by Zoink!. The game invites players to explore diverse biospheres as a nonhuman animal avatar and learn to communicate with various animals and plants, with the ultimate aim of stopping the Silent Ones, who exploit the forest's inhabitants to gain energy and threaten the harmony of the ecosystem.

It is my contention that the game provides a post-anthropocentric perspective conveyed by means of a non-anthropomorphized animal avatar and, most significantly, by the complete lack of human language in the diegetic game world, which challenge both human-centred meaning making and agency as primarily reserved to human subjects. What is more, the primacy of human intelligence and language in the construction of narratives is also dethroned, as the intentions of the Silent Ones, who use technology and are cut off from sonic communication with the environment by their helmets, and the origin story of the playable character Fe can be deciphered based on over a hundred carved pictograms to be found as the player explores the game world. The presentation will demonstrate how the video game enables the player to enter via their avatar a world that renders the continuum of nature-culture-media ecologies not only visible, but also audible via soundscapes and non-human sonic communication, and ultimately requires them to enter affective assemblages with non-human others, emphasizing the role of relational subjectivity as a means to restore the balance of the ecosystem.

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Session 4A.
"African and Indigenous posthumanism"
Tuesday, May 16. 9:30-11:15 [Room 1]

"Ethico-onto-epistem-ology and Embodied Memories in Rivers Solomon's Fiction"

According to Karen Barad's theory of agential realism, the (re)configuration of the world is a result of cognitive processes being "material practices of intra-acting within and as part of the world" (90). She proposes an "*ethico-onto-epistem-ology* — an appreciation of the

intertwining of ethics, knowing, and being" (185) disclaiming any immanent distinction between "human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse" (185). The approach to reality as discursively-materially constituted brings together critical posthumanism, agential realism and new materialism, which comprise Rosi Braidotti's affirmative ethics and Barad's ethics of knowing — in line with their respective ethics of becoming and ethics of entanglement.

Bearing these premises in mind, this paper will present an analysis of inter-species ethico-onto-epistem-ology in Rivers Solomon's latest fiction works: *The Deep* (2019) and *Sorrowland* (2021). *The Deep* portrays a new species, the *wajinru*, emerging from the entangled intra-action of relata (the unborn children of pregnant black women thrown overboard slave ships) and their medium (the ocean), while the history of the oppressed is presented as discursive-material and embodied: one member of the *wajinru* community, known as the historian, hosts the memories of all their ancestors so that the other *wajinru* are free to forget the traumatic history of their species. In the more explicitly political *Sorrowland*, characterized by generic indefinability and a marked posthuman materialist stance, memories apparently adopt a quasi-gothic haunting quality. However, they are eventually explained as the transcorporeal result of scientific experimentation on an African American sect for the U.S. government's military interests.

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Session 6A.
"Posthuman bodies"
Tuesday, May 16. 18:15-20:00 [Room 1]

"The Fragility of the (Post)human Body: *Altered Carbon* (Netflix 2018-2020)"

The TV series *Altered Carbon* portrays the fragility of both human and posthuman characters in a society in which biotechnologies and certain transhumanist practices have created structural inequities and power abuses. The body is depicted as subjected to manipulation and exposed to exploitation, violence and slavery. Taking into account ideas proposed by transhumanism (Bostrom, Moravec, More, Vinge) and critical posthumanism (Braidotti, Herbrechter, Vint), this contribution deals with the fragility of the posthuman subject as suggested in the series, with a focus on the ethics of body transcendence.

The body in the series becomes a marker of status and privilege that powerful businesspeople (mostly men) can manipulate and process in order to survive the death of the organic body and reach immortality. In the meantime, other characters have an expendable and disposable body and aim at gaining (at least temporarily) a better one that would allow them to avoid being sold, bought or manipulated by people in power. The poorest characters have no body at all and need to wait until one is available and, most of the times, they never get any. The series suggests, then, a power hierarchy based on the characters' ability to get a "good" body.

In this dystopian future, gender, sex, race and age seem to be arbitrary when constructing hierarchies. A new and discriminatory class hierarchy operates in this society where the body becomes the main site of power, a commodity to be disposed by the wealthy at their will. By focusing on the fragility of the body, *Altered Carbon* offers spectators a space for

reflection and criticism from where to consider certain implications of human enhancement on contemporary societies and the dangers of technologies not equally distributed.

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Session 6A.
"Posthuman bodies"
Tuesday, May 16. 18:15-20:00 [Room 1]

"The Posthuman Subject in Joma West's *Face* (2022): Embodiment, Embeddedness and Affect"

Joma West's latest novel, *Face* (2022) is set in a near future where digital faces and digitally engineered babies determine characters' social status and power in an "ontology of visibility" (Citton 2014). Recalling Byung-Chun Han's Society of Transparency (2020), individuals in the novel are mere data that if exposed, are in danger of being besmeared. This data is divided into two types: biological information in the Out and the digital information in the virtual world In. The popularity of these two types are based on the aesthetics of perfection which comes in the form of transhumanist biologically modified individuals (the organic face) and the digital footprint or digitalized "face" in the In. Both worlds, physical boundaries and virtual traces, are represented as subordinations to surveillance and control. Perfunctory social encounters present characters' internal affective sensation that in most cases manifests in the form of depression, anger, disgust or boredom. Paradoxically, through different narrative techniques, readers also discover the entrapment, fear and even ingrained disgust characters feel on the face of close and true contact, either physical or affective. The narrative style brings out questions on the distancing of bodies from the relational and affective standpoint in the urge to reconsider the natural organic and affective response through retrograde historicism and ethical ecology (Herbrechter 2018). Through critical posthumanism, this paper will explore the fragmented narratives, embodiments and relationality to others through different narrators and points of views. *Face* provides a reflexive work towards how embodiment, embeddedness, collectivity and the natural affective response is intertwined with not only an ethical, healthy encounter with the other, but also with establishing one's own subjectivity.

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Session 1A.
"Challenges to the posthuman"
Monday, May 15. 11:45-13:15 [Room 1]

**"The Extension Devours its Maker:
McLuhan, the AI's Wants, and the Cyborg-zombie"**

Warnings about the possibility that human-made artifacts may eventually exceed and overcome their designers have existed since humans were conscious of the possibility of becoming creators by means of art and technology. Not so recently, still in the 1990s, some cultural signs started to warn about the risks of combining human and machine to create a new creature that did not exactly conform to the type of cyborg that had already saturated western culture in the 1980s. By 1989 the scriptwriters of *Star Trek: The New Generation* series had conceived a new type of being, the Borg, characterized by combining the already mixed machine-flesh cyborg with the older but still culturally formidable zombie. This paper proposes a revision of the symbol of the cyborg-zombie, as represented in the Star Trek universe, in the light of Marshall McLuhan's theory of the extensions of man (sic). By focusing on his theories, this work argues that the insufficient attention western societies still pay to McLuhan's warnings is resulting in a world where Artificial Intelligence may become a potentially dangerous extension and turn its creators into dumb creatures devoid of sufficient self-consciousness. The attraction exerted by zombies and cyborg-zombies in the past few decades offer a cultural warning that a substantial part of the population may be starting to be trapped in a condition very distant from the one planned by believers in the transhuman project.

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Session 4A.
"African and Indigenous posthumanism"
Tuesday, May 16. 9:30-11:15 [Room 1]

"The Posthuman Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Africanfuturist Fiction"

While Afropolitanism as celebrated by Achille Mbembe and Taiye Selasi espouses "a critical anti-essentialist outlook" that problematizes and complicates categories of Africa, nation, tradition and identity, through a rejection of absolutist cultural configurations, Africanfuturism enriches such theoretical and artistic endeavors by anchoring their narratives in a future, where the interaction of the technological, the traditional, the human, the animal, the natural and the spiritual culminates in a Posthuman and post-anthropocentric outlook. Through an examination of the works of Nnedi Okorafor, one leading Africanfuturist author, this paper explores the contribution of contemporary Africanfuturists in the rewriting of the science fiction genre by creating narrative worlds that re-root Africa in the future and unthink the colonial, racial and patriarchal politics of western science fiction. While most of western science fiction constructs post-apocalyptic and posthuman narratives, where the machine or the robot control the human as in the film *Mother/Android* (2021) that depicts, a society in which human-looking androids start killing their own masters, African post humanist science fiction narratives such as *Binti* set Africa in a future where the natural non-human is in symbiosis with the human. Hence, the Posthuman African is not "a postindustrial utopian teeming with such artificialities as robots, genetically modified bodies, or military drones," it is instead rooted in indigenous practices and traditions.

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"Glitching the (Post-)Human: Virtual YouTubers' Self-Representation Between Extended and Divided Self"

Virtual and Artificial YouTubers (VTubers) show us how the body becomes technologically embedded. They reveal arising complexities within the interface of digital and analog assemblies, bodies, and virtual environments. Thus, VTubers raise questions that are crucial to the core debate about personhood and the human subject in anthropology as well as critical posthumanism. By reading Feminist Anthropology and Critical Posthumanism dos-à-dos, the thesis engages with the three VTubers AI Angelica, CodeMiko, and Miquela Sousa. To answer the questions (1) how personhood unfolds in the VTubers' self-representation(s), (2) how personhood is negotiated with the recipients, and (3) which aspects of the human subject (e.g., gender, race) are reproduced a methodological framework of Netnography and Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis is applied. The thesis reveals that VTubers' show a form of personhood in which the reflective self appears and speaks apart from the 'I.' This division reflects practices of self-designation in order to navigate between the extended self and the divided self; the content creator and the avatar; between the platform and the VTuber. This way, the self manifests itself simultaneously in the form of overlaps and displacements. Within this form of relationality, the notion of the glitch is reviewed to consider the VTuber's personhood in respect of the discussion between critical posthumanist and humanist perspectives.

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"'Skellig, Seabirds and Monks': Rethinking an Ontology of Entanglements in Emma Donoghue's *Haven* (2022)"

Emma Donoghue's latest novel offers an array of considerations about human and non-human connections and accountability that are substantial for current debates on critical posthumanism. Set in 7th century Ireland, two monks and a priest struggle to retain their humanity in a lofty, isolated and uninhabitable island called Skellig Michael. Theirs is a story of harsh survival in a perilous location where the monks will survive on subsistence gardening, fishing, collecting rainwater and their commune with thousands of seabirds. As a heavily colonized region, controlled by the Celts, Christians, Vikings, Normans and British

across several hundred years, the history of Ireland has been one of constructing the human/nonhuman boundary. Acknowledging such a liminal positionality, this novel provides interesting glimpses into the malleability of these limits.

Under the lenses of new materialism and post-Darwin's theories, my paper scrutinizes this novel as an ethically engaged text attentive to a web of complex relations that invite the reader to transcend the human sphere and enter the collective biosphere. My ultimate aim is to demonstrate how this story problematizes the traditional animal/human binary and makes us reconceive this duality as a single field of interrelations, as a Darwinian web of life that may ensure the well-being of all living things. Moreover, drawing on authors such as Jane Bennett (2010) and Mel Chen (2012) I intend to expand this web of ethical knowledge by examining dead matter such as skellig – an Irish word, *sceillec,* which translates as "small or steep area of rock" – and vegetable welfare – the symbolic rowan tree that grows out of a crevice in the rock. Such an assemblage of organic and inorganic entanglements shifts the centre of altruism as an exclusive human and humanist virtue to a collective consciousness that rethinks an ontology of being and feeling and claims for respect and care towards nonhuman animals, vegetables and dead matter.

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Session 3A.
"Time and the posthuman"
Monday, May 15. 17:30-19:15 [Room 1]

"Childhood, Generation and Futurity in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*"

Set in a future, polluted world where children are genetically 'lifted' to improve their intelligence and 'Artificial Friends' provide companionship and care, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* is a novel with a central interest in the life course and the future – of world and human species. There is a pervasive sense of anxiety about the future in this world, an anxiety that centres around childhood, a stage of life that is in the process of transhuman and posthuman changes. Klara, the AI narrator of the novel, offers a posthuman perspective that foregrounds the precariousness of childhood and by extension, the instability of anthropocentric, age-based generational thinking.

In this paper, I consider the novel in relation to Sherryl Vint's claim that sf is "a posthumanist practice" that "offers a deep archive of ways of thinking about different embodiment, nonhuman agency, and diverse futures, often at scales far beyond a human lifetime, at times beyond the lifetime of our species" (2020: 232). Vint argues that key to sf as a posthumanist practice is its use of "strategies of literalizing metaphor and of defamiliarization, strategies shared by sf writers and posthumanist scholars" (2020: 221). *Klara* defamiliarizes childhood through Klara's narrative to explore the complex dynamics of present/future, self/other and stasis/change wrapped up in generational imaginaries. Ultimately, it suggests the limits of a generational imagination that focuses upon the figure of the child founded upon the sameness of future others. This analysis of *Klara and the Sun* then suggests how fictional speculative modes might both engage with and yet also force us to reflect critically upon that form of future-orientated thinking.

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"Posthuman (D)Evolution(s):
Ontological and Biological Diversity in HBO's *Raised by Wolves*"

In this paper, I examine the representation of an intrinsically diverse posthumanity in HBO's *Raised by Wolves.* Created by Aaron Guzikowski and released between 2020 and 2022, this science fiction series presents a wide variety of ways to be posthuman: from alien creatures to mutant humans, from self-conscious and emotion-driven cyborgs to unemotional AI, from disembodied entities to bioengineered organic-inorganic hybrids. While the two seasons that compose the series clearly address a number of philosophical questions, such as the nature of divinity and its role in shaping both humanity and posthumanity, or the consequences of existence in the Anthropocene, I focus on the use of devolution and evolution to challenge humanist anthropocentrism and offer a vision of alternate ways of being that exist relatively and not oppositionally to one another. Evolution is no longer presented as a two-way road in which each direction—progression or regression—determines the role of individuals and species in the ecosystem, as well as their identification in hierarchical terms. Rather than emphasising the directional prefixes *e-* and *de-*, *Raised By Wolves* stresses the dynamism contained in the lexeme *vol(v)-*: movement and change become a three-dimensional and relational way of defining life, identity and subjectivity. The series revolves around the relationships established between humans, cyborgs, machines, non-human animals, non-animal lifeforms and an alien planet conceived holistically as a living organism itself. Indeed, in my analysis, I concentrate on the narrative and aesthetic strategies whereby the series displays Donna Haraway's concept of kin-making as an ontological (r)evolution, as well as Sarah Kember's critique of reductionist definitions of Alife as disembodied information. In this sense, I argue that the series frames its speculative envisioning of a future beyond the Earth as Gaia and beyond the human as Anthropos within philosophical posthumanism.

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"Made, Not Born: Reproductive Politics in Sarah Gailey's *The Echo Wife*"

The trope of the creation of human beings in the laboratory has a long pedigree, going back at least to the alchemists and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. While Victor Frankenstein created a man, later renderings of the story have him build a woman, as in James Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) or Terence Fisher's *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1967), a version of the narrative that became the dominant one. While in most instances of this trope the creature is an android, including recent narratives of women scientists building robotic creatures such as Marge Piercy's critical dystopia *He, She and It* (1981) and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), the example I will be concerned with here deals with the creation of a fully organic human clone. In Sarah Gailey's *The Echo Wife* (2021) a woman scientist, Evelyn Caldwell, clones her deceased former husband, Nathan, to bring him back to life, with the help of her own clone, Martine, herself created by Nathan and neurologically programmed to be pliant and submissive, with recourse to technology for neurocognitive programming and synthetic amniotic fluid used in ectogestation developed by Evelyn, his former wife. This feminist revisionary take on the Biblical story of creation and the sexual politics of creating life in a laboratory setting introduces a further twist, with Evelyn deciding not to programme Nathan to comply with her own wishes, as he did with her clone, effectively turning her into a "Stepford Wife". While neurocognitive programming, once developed, will someday be used to improve people's health, as a form of human enhancement it can raise multiple ethical questions, including charges of eugenics that would only benefit the most privileged. Even though human cloning technology will come about in the near future, as will ectogenesis and neurocognitive programming, some of the experiments on human subjects Evelyn performs, such as that carried out on Nathan, clearly exceed any legal framework and would need to be better regulated.

Gailey's *The Echo Wife*, in its investigation of gender politics in general and lab politics in particular, can also be read as engaging with Ira Levin's *The Stepford Wives* (1972), Forbes's film *The Stepford Wives* (1975) and Frank Oz's 2004 version, as well as Fay Weldon's *The Cloning of Joanna May* (1989), narratives that examine the politics of male power and domination. These (post)human re-embodiments, entangled in vexed sexual politics of reproduction, power and control, including inside science laboratories, will be examined with recourse to recent work on gender politics and the posthumanist turn.

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Session 5A.
"Representing the human and the non-human"
Tuesday, May 16. 15:00-16:30 [Room 1]

**"Sunaura Taylor and the Question of Posthumanism:
Species Interdependence and Claiming Animality in Sanjay Nigam's
Transplanted Man and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*"**

Disability studies is constantly transforming and leads to opening new ways of thinking about disability and humanness. Its quite recent development is embracing the field people usually try to avoid: where disability and animality meet. The work of American disability rights activist, artist, and writer Sunaura Taylor can be seen as posthumanist or at least

related to posthumanism. In her art and scholarly works, primarily in her book *Beasts of Burden* (2017), she examines the porousness of the human/animal categories and considers the entanglement of disability, animality and humanness. In her emphasis on human and non-human animal interdependence and regarding animals as kin, Taylor rejects anthropocentrism and decenters the human. Although aware of the problems of equating disabled people with animals, she offers a new perspective – she discourages seeing such comparisons as derogatory. Consequently, in her art she does not avoid explicit comparisons between humans with disabilities and animals, focusing rather on their interdependence and kinship. Taylor's ideas can be detected in Sanjay Nigam's *Transplanted Man* (2002) and Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* (2007). The former novel touches upon the subject of human-animal interdependence in the circumstances of debility and laboratory research, whereas Sinha's novel deals with the problem of animalization of people with disabilities, presenting a protagonist who overcomes internalized ableism. Rejection of ableism helps him accept his non-normative embodiment and in the newly gained confidence of his humanness it allows him to claim human animality.

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Session 9B.
"Posthuman otherness"
Wednesday, May 17. 17:30-19:00 [Room 2]

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"The Alien and the Sublime: Posthuman Identities in *Annihilation*"

This proposal seeks to look into Jeff VanderMeer's 2014 novel *Annihilation*, using the framework of posthumanism and ecocriticism, to explore its new configurations of human identity beyond the anthropocentric ideological system, following posthuman theories such as Stefan Herbrechter's argument that posthumanist thinking is at its core post-anthropocentric thinking.

This panel will delve into *Annihilation*'s use of weird nature in order to allow the reader to reach posthuman stages of the sublime, reconfiguring the ways in which the human identity is understood by the book's main character and, therefore, by the readers. *Annihilation*, in contrast to other speculative fictions that have ecocritical and environmental ethics as their overarching themes, uses deep ecology and weird nature in the key of horror as means of sublimating the natural experience and showcasing the embeddedness of humanity and nature through transcendence. While this sublime has the potential to estrange the reader too radically, to the point of alienation, I posit that in *Annihilation* the heightened experience of a challenging alien presence leads to an awakening of an ecocritical consciousness and towards a new perception of humanity, perhaps even in a more efficient way than traditional science fiction's ecological cautionary tales, and ultimately it reveals new ways of understanding the relationship between the human and the nonhuman.

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"Posthuman Perceptions:
the 'Vulture's-Eye-View' and the Ecology of Images in the Russian-Ukraine War"

The paper explores proliferating quadrocopter (drone) footage of the ongoing military conflict as an emerging posthuman gaze but unlike previous commentators of the military-technological scopic regime, I theorize the non-human qualities of this gaze in an ecological context and draw zoological parallels. I propose the phrase "vulture's-eye-view" (a twist on the cinematographic term "bird's-eye-view") to emphasize the quasi-animal agency involved in these images which I differentiate from both embodied helmet-camera shots and traditional reconnaissance imaging. Since drones offer instant connectivity with military headquarters and other weapons systems, I claim that these images are of tactical use that allow us to perceive of the modern, real-time battlefield as a unique ecosystem.

Images captured from the "vulture's-eye-view" are not passive representations of war but active producers of the battlefield, agencies of destruction, of making-dead: they are detached observers of the destruction they themselves have set in motion. I furthermore argue that this non-human gaze is utilized not only for waging wars in actual but also in virtual space. The manner in which media-ecosystems use drone footage for online war-propaganda and disinformation campaigns altogether undermines credible news reporting about the war. In the post-truth media landscape, images of the posthuman and anonymous gaze become a valued resource easily exploited by both sides for the purposes of wearing down enemy morale. From an elaborate zoological characterization of drone footage, my presentation develops an ecosystemic approach to understand the posthuman facets of the unfolding war in Ukraine.

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"It's Always Already Too Late for White Men:
Personified Nature and Personified Corporation, from Melville to *Avatar*"

I argue that the film *Avatar* insinuates that nature was always a virtual posthuman construct. In the age of Halliburton, the military in films such as James Cameron's *Aliens* and *Avatar* is indistinguishable from a corporation. These personified corporations mimic once personified nature, and unexpectedly reveal that nature was always a corporate

commodity. *Avatar* weaves stories about how we can refashion our identities by reconnecting with a "primitive" nature and culture we have wiped out, but the storyteller is a corporation and the identities purely virtual.

Avatar dramatizes the antebellum transcendental premise that the world is a living, sentient being—a conceit American pantheists, like *Avatar*'s writers, developed from aboriginal cultures. Melville depicted a similar entity throughout *Mardi*, whose planet is a collective being, "alive to its axis." Here, the world attains personhood. Yet this form of vitalism has disturbing affinities with the percepts that grant personhood to corporations.

Avatar's Pandora repeats the surprising ulterior message of transcendentalism: nature represents a virtual, and finally corporate, reality. Pandora's natives interact with "nature" as avatars: they plug into it with organic USB cords. In this new-age posthuman fantasy, nature is a cyborg. The electro-chemical connections between trees provide neural nets, through which the Navi "download and upload data." But earthlings can survive this poisonous nature only while using protective suits and virtual technology. *Avatar* also enacts the premise that nature no longer exists on "post-nature" earth, and that it always existed as some virtual corporate construct.

That *Avatar*'s miners seek "Unobtanium"—a recurring science fiction satire that perhaps unwittingly conjures the Lacanian lack of Western ontology—suggests that whites can seek lost spirit only in (a now digitized) primitive world we already destroyed.

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Session 1B.
"Posthuman agencies"
Monday, May 15. 11:45-13:15 [Room 2]
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"Intelligent Sensibility: Human-Machine Agencies Unraveled"

This proposal is an effort to examine the codes of interaction between the carbon-based and the silicon-based, i.e., the human and the machine, notably the shifting agencies addressed by adopting feminist technoscientific and new materialist lenses to grapple with the techno-industrial paradigm shift that has been (dis)figuring the anthropocentric condition. The first part of the paper lays down the qualities of this posthuman emerging ecology while recognizing the importance of human accountability and situatedness by drawing upon Lucy Suchman, N. Katherine Hayles, and Rosi Braidotti's scholarship.

The second part engages with the implications of such a coupling for human and machine embodied sensoria by alluding to Suchman's notion of reconfiguration in order to envisage the qualities of a distributive sensorium that this regenerative agency can put forth. Theorized as a curious intelligent sensibility with clear ethico-onto-epistemologies, this hybrid sensorium is meant to adapt to situated moments, context-specific local conditions, and specific actors with respect to their identities through which sensory human-machine acts of becoming shape the everyday networked interaction with technology-mediated environments.

The goal behind such theorizing is to come to terms with the inevitability of the human-machine intelligent fusion without sidestepping human-centric agency to draw the lines in

specific ways as a refusal to get entangled with uncritical celebration of equalizing pre-social and macro perspectives of networked actors.

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Session 2B.
"Posthumanism and the environment"
Monday, May 15. 15:15-17:00 [Room 2]

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"'Warmth Is Only Ever a Transitory Commodity':
Climate Science Fiction in Jasper Fforde's *Early Riser* (2018)"

Climate change is becoming a tangible issue nowadays. Scientists have already confirmed what the consequences are going to be if we do not alter our relation with the environment immediately. This ecological global problem has been addressed in different media, such as movies, TV shows, and, of course, literature. There are novels that take climate change as the central plot line; however, the novel analysed in the present paper positions climate change as a backdrop: Jasper Fforde's novel *Early Riser* (2018) depicts a possible near future in which humans have to hibernate during winter. The main plot line revolves around oppression, social inequality, and the commodification of health, which is a consequence of the hostile environment that governs this alternate world. Thus, it can be said that Fforde presents climate change not as a "scientific projection" but as a social lived experience that alters society to the core. According to Whiteley, Chiang and Einsiedel, presenting climate change as a cultural concept may trigger the creation of new psychosocial imaginaries that understand this issue both as an individual and collective problem and not as a distant, cold and impersonal scientific discourse (2016, 32, 34, 35). Thus, this novel can be addressed through the lens of Climate Science Fiction since it goes beyond the problem of climate change and delves into its consequences at a societal level, investigating the "potential and complex human reactions under situations of stress and change" (Whiteley, Chiang and Einsiedel 31). In fact, Science Fiction has "the potential value" of dealing with the existing relation between humans and their "changing surroundings and abilities" (Aldiss qtd. in Pak 6). I conclude that the use of climate change as a backdrop within the narrative may alter the readers' psychosocial imaginaries and society's understanding of climate change.

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Session 1B.
"Posthuman agencies"
Monday, May 15. 11:45-13:15 [Room 2]

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"Drifting Away From the Human:
The Human-Machine Combination of the Sentient Spaceship as a
Challenge to Anthropocentrism"

The human-machine combination of the sentient spaceship is the combination of the human or human-derived materials with mechanical parts, which together produce a space-faring entity. Since the first example in James Blish's "Solar Plexus" (1941), the combination has become a platform for the discussion of relations of human and the machine, reflecting both techno-anxious and techno-optimistic trends. Tracing of human-machine sentient spaceships through time witnesses a gradual shift in the role of human in the combination.

The first works featuring the combination concentrate on the human element, making it central to the combination, while later works move human to the periphery, giving an increasingly less weight to this element and foregrounding the technological other, its moral development and emotional journey. The technological other becomes a sentient, agential being who drives the plot and challenges the anthropocentric status quo. The presentation focuses on James Blish's "Solar Plexus," (1941), Anne McCaffrey's Brainship Series (1961-1997), Anne Leckie's Imperial Radch Trilogy (2013-2015), and Aliette de Bodard's The Universe of Xuya (2007-present), showing the shift in the attitude to technology and the changing role of human in the combination.

The presentation relies on the posthumanist thought in its analysis of the human-machine combination of the sentient spaceship, employing works by Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway, and Karen Barad. Haraway's concept of the cyborg, Braidotti's analysis of the challenge to traditional dichotomies, and Barad's theory of agential realism frame the consideration of the relations of human and machine, presented though the human-machine sentient spaceship.

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Session 3B.
"Posthuman subjectivities"
Monday, May 15. 17:30-19:15 [Room 2]

"Posthumanism at the Margins:
***Eden* and Recent Eastern European Visions of the Posthuman"**

My proposed paper explores the recent emergence of posthuman perspectives in Eastern European cinema. My theoretical starting point is the recognition that critical posthumanisms's questioning of the grand narratives of humanism, which can be regarded as one of the de-centering processes of the post-1960's era, is also a discourse articulated from a cultural centre, clearly shaped by that position. This observation becomes particularly relevant when one explores posthuman cultural representations produced at a distance from cultural centres, for example in Eastern Europe, where humanism and its cultural ideals were received, understood and reinterpreted in locally specific ways. Posthumanism, therefore, I will argue, is articulated differently in the Eastern European context, where the emerging cultural representations often bear the marks of a long cultural

history in which the very concept of the human has always already been understood at a distance from the ideals coming from the cultural centres.

This kind of theoretical perspective, which is aware of the location and historicity of cultural and theoretical ideas, may make the analysis of such representations as the recent Hungarian film *Eden* (Ágnes Kocsis, 2020) particularly relevant for a more nuanced understanding of posthumanism today. *Eden*'s story of a woman with multiple chemical sensitivity in Budapest in the near future, living in isolation in an artificial environment, takes the spectator to the margins of the anthropocene, so as to reposition the key questions of humanism and posthumanism in ways informed by Eastern Europe's specific socio-cultural heritage. Therefore, in my talk I connect the theoretical perspectives offered by posthumanism with the local cinematic articulations of posthumanist subjectivity, with a special focus on the ways concepts, ideas and representational strategies established in cultural centres are altered in the film in meaningful ways.

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Session 4A.
"African and Indigenous posthumanism"
Tuesday, May 16. 9:30-11:15 [Room 1]

"Mediating Otherness: The Afrofuturist Planetary Posthuman in *Black Panther*"

Literature and film, as cultural products, have consistently participated in cultural discourses by raising valuable questions pertinent to contemporary historical and cultural moments. Science fiction film and literature, particularly in the 2010s have tackled cultural discourse on the human condition by thematically addressing human relationship with technology and articulating complex theoretical discourse in a way that translates into popular culture. Critical posthumanist theory (N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Bradotti) has addressed the human condition by advocating relationality and a dynamic partnership between humans and technology in its critique of liberal humanism, and the anthropocentric discourses of human superiority over all non-human entities. Studies in the concept of "planetarity" (Amy J. Elias, Christian Moraru, Gayatri Spivak) insists on viewing the world we live in as an interconnected whole and offers itself as the alterity to "globalization" and the "planet" as an ethical, relational and inclusive alternative unit to that of the "globe" which is tainted by the exclusionary trappings and homogenizing tendencies of globalization and the global neoliberal capitalist economy. In my work, I bring planetary and posthuman together in dialogue to conceptualize a planetary posthuman subject – a posthuman subject who can think planetarily, or in other words, a posthuman subjectivity in relation to the planet. In order to provide an embodiment to the planetary posthuman subjectivity, I utilize the concept of the cyborg (Donna Haraway). I explore how science fiction film and literature utilize the theoretical model of the planetary posthuman and contribute to cultural discourse on the human condition in a way that translates into popular culture. My particular focus is on Afrofuturist science fiction and what a "planetary posthuman" would mean in that context and how such an afrofuturist planetary posthuman could contribute to public discourse and to the cultural formation in the United States and North America, where discussions on race and otherness are critical in its current political

and cultural landscape where institutionalized racism is an everyday reality. In my presentation, I would analyze the film *Black Panther* (2019), directed by Ryan Coogler – a commercially successful and groundbreaking work of afrofuturist science fiction, by asking the following question: how does *Black Panther*, as a contemporary Hollywood science fiction film, address cultural discourses on race and otherness while reflecting on discourses on the (post)human condition by creating examples of afrofuturist planetary posthuman subject(s)?

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Session 2B.
"Posthumanism and the environment"
Monday, May 15. 15:15-17:00 [Room 2]

**"Vandermeer's Weird Doubles:
Transforming the Human under Climate Emergency"**

As mitigating climate emergency these next seven years is critical to preserving the earth's ecosystems, we are forced to reckon with the end of the neoliberal idea of the human as unsustainable consumer and to consider alternative ways of being. Jeff Vandermeer's weird *Southern Reach Trilogy* mourns the end of the neoliberal human while, at the same time, reifying a more Chthulucenic human. This transformation, both painful and liberating, is represented by a "weird" doubling of characters in the trilogy. The weird doubles, a reiteration of the more familiar Freudian doppelganger, presents us with a new human that is unknowable and strange. *The Southern Reach Trilogy* compels the reader to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway) and become comfortable with the uncertainty of redefining the human. The weird double does not become less strange over the course of the novels, but rather the reader becomes more familiar with the affect of strangeness, in the end rendering this affect (rather than the double) familiar. Ultimately, the weird double captures the paradoxical experience of horror and relief at letting go of capitalist ideology and embracing the terrifying unknown. In this paper I will discuss how Vandermeer takes the reader through the uncanny to arrive at the weird and transforms the human beyond our recognition in the form of weird doubles. Finally, I'd like to problematize the use of weird aesthetics to represent climate emergency: is there a risk of homogenizing the human in its radical transformation? Does the focus on individual transformation neglect the material conditions which lead to human apocalypse? And perhaps most importantly, can the weird shake us out of our business-as-usual approach to climate change?

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**"Indenture Rights for All:
Challenging the Human Status Quo in Annalee Newitz's *Autonomous*"**

What does it mean to be human? Recently, this age-old question has increased in relevance due to the development of Artificial Intelligence and the impact that the Fourth Industrial Revolution is having on biotechnological research. Donna Haraway's (1991) and N. Katherine Hayles's(1992) ground-breaking works paved the way to our coming to terms with our already posthuman condition, facilitating the emergence of Posthumanism as a response to the necessity of an ethical perspective to configure the posthuman. Science Fiction has been the fictional ground in which these ontological and ethical debates have been fleshed out, problematizing our future cyborg condition. However, even though humanity has been redefined and our anthropocentric view of the world, challenged, most research focus is still the cyborg, forgetting about what robot narratives in the rise of a new artificial intelligence age can contribute to the debate.

This paper examines the different configurations of posthuman subjects depicted in Annalee Newitz's novel *Autonomous* (2017) and their relation to the status quo, focusing on the figure of (bio)bots and their association to trans and nonbinary identities. It analyses how the late capitalist system in which *Autonomous* is inscribed both bonds the 'humans' of the narrative with the inhuman, and sets them against each other. Paying attention to how the narrative presents these union bonds and confrontational points, I explore how *Autonomous* challenges what it means to be human by means of the figure of indentured humans and bots and their relation to the 'humans' of the narrative, bringing to the fore the possibility of human and bots' relations and their implications on the configuration of humanity and identity formation. The theoretical frameworks on which this paper is based are Critical Posthumanism, Queer Theory and the concept of the inhuman and its relation to the queer.

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**"Anthrokynematic Triangle:
The Transformative Relationship of Humans, Dogs and
Paul Fierlinger's Animation Films"**

The unit of dog and man, as Donna Haraway famously argued in *The Companion Species Manifesto*, can serve as a model for a relational ontology since dogs and humans form an intimate co-constitutive relationship due to their millennia-long coevolution as well as their ongoing coexistence. Films portraying the intermingling lives of humans and dogs thus necessarily record the stories of human-canine relationality. Yet, I propose that films not

only portray but – depending on their style, genre, cultural embeddedness, as well as their representational modes and purposes – also shape the mutually transformative relationship between dogs and humans. In other words, cinema expands the unit of man and dog into a three-pointed assemblage in the Deleuzian or Latourian sense, an instance of relations between human, animal and cultural-technological subjects. In my presentation I examine how the works of American animator Paul Fierlinger, namely, *Still Life with Animated Dogs* (2001) – a short film in which he memorialises the dogs who shared his life – and *My Dog, Tulip* (2009) – the film adaptation of the British writer J. R. Ackerley's autobiographical account of his companionship with his dog Queenie – transform concrete human-canine relationships. I argue that the hand-drawn animations, combining anthropomorphising and de-anthropomorphising representational styles, call into being a kind of kinship between humans and dogs which is based on shared and unshared aspects of embodiment as well as gestures of interspecies love and friendship. As such, Fierlinger's films enact relatings between humans, companion animals, and cultural-technological representations, completing the ontological model that accounts for the interrelatedness of human and non-human subjects.

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Session 9B.
"Posthuman otherness"
Wednesday, May 17. 17:30-19:00 [Room 2]

"Reluctantly Human:
A Study of Boundaries and Cyborgs in NK Jemisin's *The Broken Earth*"

As an instance of afrofuturistic fiction, NK Jemisin's trilogy *The Broken Earth* (2015-2017) brings readers a cautiously hopeful future for a world populated by racialised peoples. The uprooted communities in this dystopian world are formed by a ruling class of humans and a subjugated minority of more-than-humans whose role is to keep natural disasters at bay using magic for humanity's sake. Systematically abused, the magical more-than-human peoples in *The Broken Earth* constantly interact with hostile geographical and social boundaries to fulfil their function in society. For these characters living in the margins, materialising a future world where they can thrive means transforming into a fully dehumanised form of life. However, completing the process of dehumanisation does not guarantee the survival of their own kind –only that of their planet. The aim of this paper is to apply the theory of kinetic systems developed by Thomas Nail (2019) to explore the agency of borders as non-human characters which play a crucial role in the existence and transcendence of cyborgs in the trilogy. This paper will use revisited elements of deleuzian New Materialism (Nail 2019) and a decolonialist approach to societal movements (Dussel 2002, 2012) to analyse the social motion towards a transmodern future. It will also bring to the fore the key role of intercultural dialogue (Dussel 2012) between cyborgian communities in Jemisin's trilogy, with the collateral illustration of the impossibility of a future devoid of humanity.

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Session 5A.
"Representing the human and the non-human"
Tuesday, May 16. 15:00-16:30 [Room 1]

"The Cinematic Animal: From Object of Vision in Mainstream American Cinema to Subject of Vision in Contemporary Cinematic Experiences"

The dominant vision of the non-human animal in cinema and other media reflects and perhaps contributes to strengthening the cultural context that has led it to establish itself over time: an anthropocentric vision that has looked at the animal with human eyes.

Our theoretical frameworks will be the theories of ecological posthumanism (Roberto Marchesini and others) and the film studies which have highlighted the presence of stereotypes in the representation of non-human animals.

The purpose of the paper will be precisely to rethink animal representation by comparing American mainstream cinema, in which the anthropocentric gaze is more evident, with experimental cinematic experiences that seek another type of gaze: in the first approach the animal is reduced to a mere object of vision, whereas in the second one, it becomes the subject of vision. In the first part of the paper, the animal representation typical of American entertainment cinema will be exemplified in the two forms of the monster animal and the mirror animal. The monster animal is intended from time to time as an element of disturbance or an object of transgression of limits (always human), of domination (male supremacy), of threat or fear. The mirror animal, on the other hand, is the result of a full anthropomorphization.

In the second part, we will refer to the approach of slow cinema and consider examples of contemporary films that try to offer a posthumanistic representation. These are outside the logic of pure entertainment that place the cinematographic experience at the centre of their research, intended as a multisensory investigation of the existing, attempting a possible enlargement of vision and the opening of a perspective worthy of the non-human animal.

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Session 4A.
"African and Indigenous posthumanism"
Tuesday, May 16. 9:30-11:15 [Room 1]

**"Reassembling Skins and Bones:
Indigenous Posthumanism in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*"**

While, since its inception, the broad field of posthumanism has contributed to questioning the foundations of humanism and the consequent process of exclusion it engendered of all

those diverging from the universal category of 'Man,' numerous scholars have raised critiques directed to this diverse philosophical movement from Indigenous perspectives. In fact, multiple critics suggest a tendency within posthumanist strands of thought to oppose dualistic approaches presenting them as universal without considering the numerous preexisting non-dualistic frameworks articulated by Indigenous scholars, while also appropriating Indigenous epistemes without acknowledging them, running thus the risk of becoming complicit with colonial violence and with what Rauna Kuokkanen has defined 'epistemic ignorance.' For this reason, projects of decolonizing posthumanist scholarship entail engaging with Indigenous studies, fostering a 'multiepistemic literacy,' and establishing a dialogue between the two fields as they share numerous features, including a rejection of anthropocentrism, and an affirmation of nonhuman agency and of the interdependence between human and nonhuman entities. Acknowledging the productive potential of an alliance between Indigenous and posthumanist discourses in reorienting the conversation toward issues of settler colonialism, land sovereignty and Indigenous self-determination, this paper aims to apply an Indigenous posthumanist perspective to Chickasaw author Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms.* In particular, the paper will focus, on the one hand, on representations within the novel of taxidermic practices, deeply tied to colonial violence, that transform animals into posthuman commodified objects, and, on the other, on instances of reassembling skins and bones in acts of regenerative creation, which, unlike taxidermy, acknowledge the need for reciprocity and processes of relational becoming. These new combinations of matter constitute on the part of the protagonist a way of envisioning new modes of being human, relating to the more-than-human, and affirming Indigenous self-determination.

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Session 4B.
"Posthumanism and gender"
Tuesday, May 16. 9:30-11:15 [Room 2]

**"The Posthuman Patriarchal Villain as Absolute Future Threat:
Winston Duarte in *The Expanse* Novel Series"**

The Expanse is a series of nine space opera novels–*Leviathan Wakes* (2011), *Caliban's War* (2012), *Abaddon's Gate* (2013), *Cibola Burn* (2014), *Nemesis Games* (2015), *Babylon's Ashes* (2016), *Persepolis Rising* (2017), *Tiamat's Wrath* (2019) and *Leviathan Falls* (2021)– accompanied by a short fiction collection (*Memory's Legion*, 2022), by American author James S.A. Corey, the penname of Ty Franck and Daniel Abraham. The series, popularized by its SyFy/Amazon adaptation (2013-), narrates how captain James Holden and his crew deflect the threat posed by a protomolecule engineered by an extinct alien civilization.

This protomolecule radically transforms human bodies, which rebel Martian Admiral Winston Duarte (who appears in the last three novels) takes advantage of to enhance his own body and establish a planetary military dictatorship. Duarte's difficulties to remain human and his megalomaniac decision turn humankind into a single entity to defeat a more powerful alien species, are the stuff of pulpish space opera. However, the popularity of

Corey's highly entertaining series means that for many persons the ideas about the posthuman come basically from sf of this type, and not from intellectual debate.

This paper discusses this issue to focus next on how Corey's series is a warning not so much about hostile first contact with aliens but about the difficulties of progressing as long as male patriarchal villainy persists. This warning is manifested not only through Duarte but also through the villains Dresden and Mao, who run Protogen, the corporation illegally experimenting with the protomolecule before Duarte steals it. Following my own work in *Masculinity and Patriarchal Villainy in the British Novel: From Hitler to Voldemort* (2020) and on masculinity and sf, I discuss how posthumanism and transhumanism help enhance patriarchal villainy. Male sf authors lack a clear anti-patriarchal agenda but their anti-posthuman positioning tends to implicitly defend it, as I show.

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Session 8B.
"Posthuman Living"
Wednesday, May 17. 15:15-17:00 [Room 2]
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"Architecture as Myth in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (2019)"

Blade Runner (1982) is still considered as one of the best SF films ever made. Set in 2019 Los Angeles, the film shows how cutting-edge genetic engineering and bionic technology have developed to produce "replicants" "more human than human" (*BR* 1982). Besides the relationship established between humans and replicants, which raises questions about the boundaries of what is ethical, the film offers a deep insight into the future of architecture and urbanism. This architectural aesthetic, sometimes brutal and almost aggressive in its approach, where the buildings have lost any refinement and clarity, is glimpsed in the urban landscapes of *Blade Runner*. The accumulation of "layers" of constructive elements that shape the city has its genesis in one of the prevailing trends in in those years: high tech architecture. But there is also the presence of Louis Kahn, Robert Venturi or Charles Moore who were moving away from the praxis of the International Style.

This paper states that, together with the presence of replicants, who can be manipulated to live forever, the myth of eternity inthefilmappears embodied as well in the eclecticism and accumulation of styles of BR´s city, where we find from high tech to brutalism or cyberpunk. But even if *BR*´s Los Angeles, with tons of neons and advertisements endorsed on the city´s facades laid the foundations for the futuristic dystopian city there are also countless references to the past. And it is this look back and forth in time what helps create the myth of eternity that runs parallel with that of the replicants. In fact, the skillful combination of iconographic elements decontextualized over time is, most probably, what made the film a cult work.

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"Dissolving Borderlands in A.S. Byatt's Onto-Tales"

Byatt's writing is naturally inclusive in that it combines disciplines like literature, philosophy, history, painting, geology, biology, biography, and law. According to Walezak, this "epistemological re-assemblage concurs with the parallel ontological remodelling of the human and the everyday" in Byatt's fiction of the 2000s, which has increasingly shaped "a posthuman subject by delivering 'onto-stories'" (3). In this light, my paper will trace the evolution of Byatt's short fiction towards the "onto-story", or "onto-tale" —terms coined by Jane Bennett (2010) to describe narratives that picture the entanglement of the human and the nonhuman in a way that challenges ontological demarcations. To this aim, I will focus on three short stories: "Arachne" (2000), "A Stone Woman" (2003), and "Sea Story" (2013). The first, a rewriting of the well-known Ovidian fable, will be approached from the perspective of what Italo Calvino called "universal contiguity" (1987), describing thus the poetry of Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as rooted in an intricate system of interrelations between all there is —gods, humans, and nature. As I contend, the same concept can be used, with different emphases, to describe the other two narratives. "A Stone Woman" builds on the classical theme of female petrification to tell a tale of human-mineral fusion where the protagonist's turning into stone celebrates transcorporeal interconnectedness and eventually brings about a new sense of life, instead of the main character's expected death. Lastly, in "Sea Story", the focus turns from the human protagonists to marine debris as the narrative follows the journey, and disintegration, of a plastic bottle at sea. Byatt's most recent exploration of "universal contiguity" will accordingly be discussed as a means to denouncing human beings' alienated relationship to the earth, which accounts for the story acquiring a clear environmentalist dimension.

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"Re-reading Frankenstein in the 21st century: Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*"

Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein* presents a contemporary re-reading of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Winterson's novel includes fragments of Shelley's novel and an imaginary narration of Shelley's process of coming up with the concept of the novel and beginning to write it. Nonetheless, *Frankissstein* takes place in our contemporary society, where

technology has been much more developed. Thus, while *Frankenstein* is a posthuman text that presents an artificially formed body and questions the standard definition of life, *Frankissstein* adds to that discourse and introduces Artificial Intelligence and mechanized bodies, together with topics that are being discussed in current politics and the academic sphere such as ethics, gender, and sexuality. In taking a text such as *Frankenstein* as her starting point, Winterson questions current topics in the same way that Mary Shelley already did at the time she wrote *Frankenstein*. Shelley's novel is deeply present in the text, but Jeanette Winterson's story is not just a re-telling of the 1818 novel; instead, it takes Shelley's core ideas and recontextualizes them in our current society, adding more layers Shelley's discourse. Boundaries —and the questioning of them— are ever-present in Jeanette Winterson's texts, and *Frankissstein* presents them in several of the constructed bodies that are introduced in the text, from transsexual bodies that do not fit the hegemonic standards of gender to very-human-looking sex bots who can engage in conversation with their users. In the questioning of socially-set boundaries, aesthetics are put into play, as well as biological functions and hegemonic standards —both regarding the boundary between the human and the mechanical, and boundaries respecting gender and sexual orientation. Therefore, in questioning the foresaid issues Jeanette Winterson puts ethics to the fore as to how volatile boundaries are respecting ethics when the crossing of them is justified with the discourse of technological development.

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Session 6A.
"Posthuman bodies"
Tuesday, May 16. 18:15-20:00 [Room 1]

**"From the Posthumanism to the Transhumanism:
The Peripheral, Gibson, and Amazon Prime"**

William Gibson's 2014 novel *The Peripheral* represented Gibson's move back to science-fiction proper, following the Blue Ant series, set in present moment. Gibson looked to a future London, following an event known as 'The Jackpot', because it allowed a class of people, the kleptocracy, to strip the economy of assets while the majority of people were wiped out in climate catastrophes and the resulting civil violence. *The Peripheral* engaged with the Anthropocene more than any of Gibson's fiction so far through setting some of the action on the Great Pacific Garbage Patch and, memorably, in the depiction of animated tattoos showing endangered animals moving over the skin of one of its characters. The key plotline, dealing with lifelike, remotely-piloted robots (sometimes operated by people from an alternative timeline), worked in issues about the body familiar to the scholarly discourse on cyberpunk (N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 1999).

While Gibson's work has rarely been brought to the screen, *The Peripheral* (2021-) has become a significant flagship science fiction show for Amazon Prime. This paper will discuss the changes made from the novel to the television series and how these take different perspectives on the issues of the body, the Anthropocene, and the posthuman. I will argue that the move to long form television drama has leant itself to a transhumanist, rather than a posthumanist perspective and that this has implications for disability studies and

posthumanist readings of the work. While the novel engaged with the body as a crucial site for understanding the entanglement of the body with the human and the environment, the series takes a transhumanist perspective that tends to leave the meat behind, playing into cure narratives and the transhumanist ideology favoured by Silicon Valley elites.

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Session 3A.
"Time and the posthuman"
Monday, May 15. 17:30-19:15 [Room 1]

"Wiñaypacha: The Eternity of Aging in the Peruvian Highlands"

The first Peruvian film in the Aymara language, Wiñaypacha [Eternity] (Dir. Oscar Catacora, 2017), tells the story of an old couple (Phaxsi and Willka) of indigenous peasants who live in an isolated and remote area of the Peruvian highlands. The old couple spends their days looking after the animals and the small orchard while waiting for their only son, who has migrated to the city, to return. The film is set entirely in the highlands, where the old couple is shown repeating their daily tasks and talking/hoping for their son's return, a return that will never happen. Their wait is the focus of the film, which is linked to the vanishing of the rural and the indigenous way of life due to globalization (symbolized by their absent son). The slow rhythm of life in the Peruvian highlands, its dilated temporality, offers the visual pleasure of nature but ultimately contrasts with the difficulties the old couple face: the extreme weather, aging, and death. This paper analyses how this film employs slow cinema techniques to explore both the links between aging humans and nature and the crisis of care that the global world has created for some non-globalized communities. For instance, the film constantly shows how the couple moves very slowly through the highlands and shares the screen with dynamic non-human beings, showing the ecological (and social) relationships that Phaxsi and Willka have with the non-humans. These relationships start to deteriorate due to the advanced age of the old couple and symbolize the danger globalization brings to both the older population and nature.

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Session 9A.
"Disaster narratives and the posthuman"
Wednesday, May 17. 17:30-19:00 [Room 1]

"(Post)humanist Cooperation in a Postnatural World:
Mike Carey's Speculative Fiction in the *Rampart* Trilogy"

The *Rampart* trilogy, formed by the novels *The Book of Koli* (2020), *The Trials of Koli* (2020) and *The Fall of Koli* (2021), offers a complex and seemingly contradictory combination of

technological pessimism and hopepunk regarding the future of a United Kingdom that is disintegrating under the effects of anthropogenic climate change and a so-called "Unfinished War". The post-natural environment in the trilogy is the result of scientific-technological intervention, which leads us to interpret the novels as a critique of human behaviour, as the appearance of postnature seems to be an inevitable effect of the anthropogenic ecological crisis. However, Carey does not seem to blame technology in itself but the human error of not aligning rationality and knowledge with empathy towards other beings and the decentralization of human experience. Carey's trilogy addresses technological collapse, the emergence of a new nature and a new ecological order in which human beings are not the apex predator any more. However, instead of proposing a return to nature or a technological "blackout", the *Rampart* trilogy focuses on posthumanism as a key to maintain and improve civilization at a time of climate crisis. This presentation aims to focus on the role of education and cooperation in the *Rampart* trilogy as ways for the posthuman to adapt to a new reality that bears in mind the global impact of the human species on the environment and on other living beings. In order to do so, I will rely on Stacy Alaimo's posthumanist perspective, Sherryl Vint's considerations on science fiction and ecology, and Jededia Purdy's exploration of human responsibility towards the environment.

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Session 7A.
"Human-nonhuman entanglements"
Wednesday, May 17. 9:45-11:30 [Room 1]

"Vegetal Encounters – Nonhuman Agency and Colonizing Affect in *Annihilation* and 'Vaster than Empires and More Slow'"

Ursula K. Le Guin's sf short story "Vaster than Empires and More Slow" (1971) relates the story of human explorers arriving to a distant planet populated exclusively by vegetal life. Following an initial period of observation and catalogisation, the scientists are terrified to learn that they are in fact immersed in an all-encompassing world-mind – a plant-sentience spread planet-wide – which, as soon as it senses the humans' fear, begins to reflect it back at them, its affective emanations nearly driving the crew mad. In a similar vein, Jeff VanderMeer's contemporary weird fiction novel *Annihilation* (2014) follows a group of female scientists venturing into the mysterious 'Area X' – a region of "pristine, empty wilderness" (VanderMeer 55) sealed off by the US government, after a cataclysm of unknown origin results in a series of unexplainable occurrences. "Embedded in Area X" (9), the women experience severe disorientation, and soon encounter "the Crawler", an indescribable being that "creates out of our ecosystem a new world" (191), infecting their bodies and minds with a transformative nonhuman affect. In both works of fiction, human crews approach a mysterious (alien) wilderness with intentions of exploration and knowledge-production; however, they instead end up being colonised by the environment, thwarting efforts at rationalisation and maintaining scientific objectivity. Remaining separate becomes impossible within the entangled, mingled materiality of Le Guin's alien forest-mind and VanderMeer's Area X which intra-act with, channel and transmute humans, exposing them as creaturely and corporeal. Building on the tenets of philosophical

posthumanism and ecocriticism, this paper argues that by foregrounding environments and nonhuman (vegetal) creatures as unnervingly alive and agentic, "Vaster than Empires" and *Annihilation* participate in a non-anthropocentric perspectival revision, experimenting with de-coupling agency from intentionality, sentience from consciousness, and fostering posthuman becomings that are at once monstrous and (re)generative.

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Session 5A.
"Representing the human and the non-human"
Tuesday, May 16. 15:00-16:30 [Room 1]

"The Posthuman Entanglement in Susan Straight's Prose"

Some philosophers name the new condition of experiencing ourselves and the world in the Capitalocene with the term posthuman condition, signaling the need to go beyond the human. In my presentation I focus on the possible post-anthropocentric scenarios in which the human perspective is abandoned to imagine the solutions to the human-provoked and human-designed problem that we are living through. Responding to the need to deconstruct the human / nonhuman distinction, Jacques Derrida points to the common mortality which he calls "the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish" (396), while Rosi Braidotti in *The Posthuman* reminds us that "Finding an adequate language for post-anthropocentrism means that the resources of the imagination, as well as the tools of critical intelligence, need to be enlisted for this task (82). The sixth Great Extinction (the Holocene Extinction) is the species mass-extinction event we are witnessing at the moment; an event that many thinkers claim is caused and perpetuated by our lack of imagination, and as I want to claim, can only be remedied by an increased effort of imagination. The first step would be to focus on the divide between human and nonhuman animals, questioned and rigorously examined in the recent posthumanist writings of such philosophers and critics as Jacque Derrida, Donna Haraway, and Cary Wolfe. Drawing on their insights, I propose a reading of the references to nonhuman animals in Susan Straight's trilogy: *Between Heaven and Here* (2012), *Take One Candle Light A Room* (2010), and *A Million Nightingales* (2006). Uncommonly attentive to the environment, the landscape, the flora and fauna in which human life is immersed, Straight's novels undertake the issue of responsibility for the land, questioning the nature of possession, and in doing so, they portray animal figures that take on the meaning not just of marginal figures or metaphors, but rather, become a reminder of the entanglement between human and nonhuman animals. Straight's novels ask questions about the nature of belonging (especially in the context of Black Americans in California), about human vulnerability, and about what we might call, after Carol J. Adams, the "fused discrimination" of racism, sexism, and speciesism.

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"The Posthuman (Anti)Hero's Journey: An Ecomaterialist Debate"

In the contemporary retelling of epic narrations —seen in many tv or streaming series in digital platforms— there stands a plethora of fictional characters that embody the extremist roles of agents of good and/or evil. Let us consider *The Witcher*, *The Umbrella Academy, Altered States, Shadowhunters*, *Cursed*, *The Shannara Chronicles*, to name only a few. The plots of these stories echo old tales and sagas in which battles, magic, enchantments, journeys and ordeals prevail, favouring, therefore, the protagonists' questioning of their own identities and ethical position in society. The overflow of extraordinary, supernatural and even pataphysical elements serve very well to situate the audiences in a non- (more-than-, other-than-, far-beyond-…) human context in which the possibility of transcending real settings is effective and immediate. Consequently, the suspension of disbelief, intrinsic in them, supports the easy integration of bionic transformation, genetic mutation, cyborg engineering, robotic machinery and other items that facilitate the posthuman dialogue in the discourse. Having this into account, this paper aims at tackling traditional (anti)heroic archetypes –witches, warriors, sorcerers, clairvoyants, and other similar roles— to delve into their transhuman physicality. Using Material Ecocriticism as framework —especially the notions of Alaimo's "transcorporeality," Haraway's "tentacular response-ability" and Tuana's "viscous porosity"— a threefold analysis will be conducted. Firstly, the postmodern modification of their inherent natural behaviours, in their quests for new definite heroic goals. Secondly, the corporeal alteration of their gifted bodies into a new epic postmateriality. And thirdly, their close/distant relationship with the environment, in terms of sustainability and care, or else toxicity and destruction. Finally, these two questions will be left up in the air for the closing debate: have we, human animals, changed our attitude to live response-ably within the planet? And, are these new epic tales changing the paradigm of anthropogenic humanist discourse?

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"'World without end': A Reading of Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army* as a Feminist Environmental Postapocalyptic Fiction"

Sarah Hall's third novel, *The Carhullan Army* (2007), is set in the English North West county of Cumbria in a near future ravaged by environmental disaster, global warfare, political and economic corruption and totalitarian state repression. This postapocalyptic context provides the background to the transcript of the statements made by Sister after her imprisonment under the "Insurgency Prevention (Unrestricted Power) Act" enforced by the Authority. Sister escaped from the official zone to join a group of upland rebels in a women

community led by a charismatic leader, and was caught after participating in an attack on the capital. This description points to the novel as a piece of feminist speculative fiction in line with "Doris Lessing's *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and P. D. James' *The Children of Men* (1992)" (Lea 170). The fact that, after her arrival at Carhullan, Sister was submitted to an atrocious process of dehumanisation and adaptation to wild nature that culminated in her transformation from sexually repressed married woman and submissive factory worker to a sexually assertive and physically powerful member of the Carhullan army, destabilises the temporal linearity of her narration, as the formidable farmer/warrior she becomes evokes both the mythical Amazons and the enhanced transhuman subjects of an eco-feminist future. At the same time, the fact that the transcript is incomplete and that the historical, environmental, political and ideological events set in the future are based on what is already happening in England, disrupts the ontological barriers between fiction and reality depriving the ending of the sense of order, closure and revelation of traditional apocalyptic narratives. This lack of "the sense of an ending" (Kermode) justifies the attempt to read the novel as a piece of environmental postapocalyptic fiction based on an experience of irreversible or unavoidable loss "that is neither nourished by a strong sense of hope, nor of a future disaster, but a sense that the catastrophe is already ongoing" (Cassegård and Thörn 1).

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Session 8A.
"Human-animal relations"
Wednesday, May 17. 15:15-17:00 [Room 1]
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"Mosquitoes' Swarm Literary Voices and AI Hallucinations:
Posthuman Intersections in *The Old Drift* by Namwali Serpell
and *Nature Dreams* by Refik Anadol (2021)"

As Dorion Sagan contends, the signs of Posthuman times are shaped by the "return of the repressed," that is, the humbling awareness of all the living and non-living systems that make human life possible (2011). In tune with this argument, this presentation aims to trace parallelisms between two artistic representations: Namwali Serpell's debut novel —The Old Drift (2019)— and Refik Anadol's digital installation Machine Hallucinations-Nature Dreams (2021). In like manner, each artwork seeks to instantiate historical memories blended with future actualisations through technology. Interestingly, both narratives' random move is articulated by a fluid manifold non-human conscience. On the one hand, The Old Drift is an epic account of Zambian history, from precolonial times into the future. The lives of three family generations crisscross in a nodal-like fashion while the fictional structure is assembled and narrated by a collective mind of mosquitoes —the arthropods evidently altering the human lives they coexist with. On the other hand, the Turkish digital artist combines massive amounts of data gathered from nature with generative adversarial network algorithms (GAN) in order to develop entirely shape-shifting landscapes contingently produced by artificial intelligence and inspired by fluid dynamics. The result renders hypnotic visual connections between the past and the future —allegedly bypassing

human conscious control. Thus, both artistic expressions will be examined in the light of relationality —as propounded by Global South theoreticians such as Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (2018). Along the same lines, the "transcorporeal epistemologies" alluded to by Stacy Alaimo will be explored in tune with "the randomness effect" put forth by Harvey Hix (2019). The aforementioned theoretical assumptions will seek to tease out the crucial role of lateral configurations to envisage ecological (un)imagined realities.

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Session 9A.
"Disaster narratives and the posthuman"
Wednesday, May 17. 17:30-19:00 [Room 1]

"*The Last of Us*: Humans and Post-humans after a Real Pandemic"

The aim of this proposal is to explore the representation of humanity in times of disaster in The Last of Us videogame (2013) and the HBO series (2023), focusing on how the covid-19 pandemic might have affected the adaptation of this dystopian story to the screen. The popularity of apocalyptic and dystopian narratives increases in times of social crisis, as it happened during and after the covid-19. These frequently represent scenarios that move away from the posthuman by depicting a return to pre-industrial archetypes and dynamics, dominated by the white man and his abilities to survive in the wilderness. However, in recent years the resurgence of the end-of-the-world genre has given way to innovations in both the content and the form of these narratives and The Last of Us is a perfect example of such innovations. In terms of format, its videogame mechanics offer unique ways of interacting with the narrative, and the transmedia nature of the franchise offers higher levels of engagement for the users. In terms of content, while the story presents a familiar virus-dystopian setting with some conventional features, such as the infected or the "rebels vs dictatorship" discourse, the diverse identities of the characters and the interaction patters between them challenge traditional representations of these elements. With this paper I will on the one hand contrast the videogame's narrative produced before the covid-19 and the series' narrative produced after, to show the innovations mentioned; and, on the other hand, I will compare The Last of Us dystopian society to other recently successful end-of-the-world narratives, such as The Walking Dead (2003, 2010), to contextualize the development that we are observing in the genre and speculate about its potential future.

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Session 7B.
"Trauma, memory and the posthuman"
Wednesday, May 17. 9:45-11:30 [Room 2]

**"Nomadic Memory in Aleksandar Hemon's *My Parents:*
An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You"**

Bosnian-American author Aleksandar Hemon is a paradigmatic extraterritorial writer in constant exploration of questions of identity, displacement, and remembering. This paper applies Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadic memory to Hemon's approach to his and his family's life stories in his 2019 double memoir, *My Parents: An Introduction / This Does Not Belong to You*. An important element in posthuman thought, nomadic memory is dynamic and creative, allowing to envisage "alternative world orders and more humane and sustainable social systems" (Braidotti 2011: 32). In contrast to dominant politics of mourning and melancholia, Braidotti defends the affective force of remembrance and its capacity to produce generative interconnections and alternative approaches to the past. Her nomad thought relies on a circular time of becoming which facilitates "the active reinvention of a self that is joyfully discontinuous, as opposed to being mournfully consistent" (Braidotti 2013: 167).

Analyzed with the tools provided by critical posthumanism, Hemon's nonfiction becomes an example of remembering in Braidotti's minority-mode. He presents the migrant as a subject-in-becoming, belonging to their community thanks to the workings of a transgenerational, nonlinear memory, operating in a time continuum where stable identities are deterritorialized and creative ways to access an unavailable past are generated. In Hemon's writing, identity is rooted in concentric homelands, and the truth of the memory resides in the affects it provokes and sustains. Opposing any fixed notion of the self, Hemon understands the past as a cultural practice deposited in bodies and rituals, as a home apparently beyond reach to which the migrant reconnects through the resources of the imagination. Ultimately, this paper argues that Hemon's memoiristic writing represents a case study on the value of nomadic memory for the apprehension of diasporic experiences and the transmission of the cultural and political memory of migrant communities.

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Session 3B.
"Posthuman subjectivities"
Monday, May 15. 17:30-19:15 [Room 2]

"Forms of the Post-human in Recent Works by Don DeLillo"

In his latest works, Don DeLillo seems to bring about a complex reflection around the idea of *end* that ranges from an almost mystical idea of withdrawal from the world described in *Point Omega* (2010) to the possibilities of an afterlife in *Zero K* (2016) or a form of complete incommunicability as represented in the latest *The Silence* (2020). While dealing with such themes, DeLillo constantly puts into question the very notion of human being, as well as the relations between humans and technologies or between humans and the world – be it natural or artificial.

In this sense, such an inquiry into the "limits" of the human introduces a discussion that is not just related to the use of technologies as a way to redefine human abilities towards a general notion of post-human, but also presents the traits of an "other-than-human" aesthetics. Such an investigation, in recent works, takes on the form of a constant process of

de-subjectivation or even de-humanization, and is less related to forms of de-realization or simulation that were typical of earliest novels.

This paper, thus, aims at analyzing the ways in which post-humanism induced by technologies activates, within the latest DeLillo's books, an altered representation of subjectivity that is strictly connected to a deep alteration of language – that of the characters as well as that of the narration itself. This altered language, then, moves towards a sort of point of extinction, a pure abstraction, like a de-humanizing and de-subjectivizing force that becomes a disembodied language merging with what is not human or "other-than-human", without connotations.

In this perspective, in the analysis of DeLillo's recent works, I will also take into account the notion of "technological sublime" [*sublime tecnologico*] as developed by the Italian philosopher Mario Costa starting from the '90s in order to define new aesthetic relations between humans and technologies.

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Session 2A.
"Posthumanism and genre"
Monday, May 15. 15:15-17:00 [Room 1]

"(Pre)configurations of the Posthuman Body in the Batman Franchise"

One of the two most popular American superheroes, Batman is known, unlike his brother-in-arms Superman, for not having any superpowers. Instead, he is in possession of several unusual gadgets, some of them he manufactures or repairs himself, i.e. a Batmobile, blast canons, machine guns, grapping hook launchers etc., interpreted by many as extensions of his masculinity, which helps him maintain his grip on the world of evil doers. Without these items, he is just an (average?) man, who also happens to be a millionaire. Thus, the general perception finds it almost impossible to dissociate him from the gadgets he employs, as his body is not "beyond repair." The premises for a post-human body are therefore laid in the comic books, movies and novelizations belonging to the franchise, and that might apply to his side-kicks as well, such as Robin or Batgirl. Still, in what regards the latter, the question would be whether feminine characters can be considered as benefiting from such extensions of masculinity and even if that might act as an obliteration of their femininity in the sense of becoming gender fluid. My paper would focus on more such characters in two novelizations and two movies related to them, *Batman Returns* and *Batman & Robin*. As Batman's opponents, Catwoman and Poison Ivy are assigned less happy roles, the powers in their bodies, unlike in Batman's, being enhanced through freaky environmental accidents. Somehow that places them under the umbrella of both radical and eco- feminism, which does not lessen their positions as subjects of the male gaze, another portal to be open when discussing their condition in the narratives.

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Session 8B.
"Posthuman Living"
Wednesday, May 17. 15:15-17:00 [Room 2]

"Sensing As… From Quorum Sensing to Immersion – a Posthuman Symptomatology"

The presentation will explore the opportunities offered by interdisciplinary posthuman humanities used as methodological approach in the so called hard or royal science including medical humanities and a future philosophy and practice of healthcare. It uses dirty theory, a critical term coined by Hélène Frichot to define the extraction of concepts from mixed disciplines in order to trouble and evoke critical thought and praxis. It furthermore digs and dumps critical and constitutive terms coming from neurobiology, architecture, and literary theories to construct an interdisciplinary anabiosis of posthuman humanities in relation to how life and humanity are understood in a nature-culture continuum, which can lead to new modes of thought that are post-anthropocentric. It uses Steven Shaviro's exploration of the ubiquitous question that surround human life, namely what it means to be human, structuring his book *Discognition* into chapters that start with "thinking as…" followed by terms such as philosopher, alien, killer, avatar, and slime mould, as a prompt to steer a discussion around what lived experience is constituted by. This leads to the question what it means to be human-becoming-animal-becoming environment starting with the prompt "sensing as", prioritising affect over the cogito, following from Antonio Damasio and his famous *Descartes' Error* and exploring a nature-culture continuum. In response, the research contextualises a new human positioning as Anti-Oedipus-Res who presents a symptomatology of immersion, contemplation and their counterparts of aboulia and neurasthenia, with the latter referring to the maladies of modern life articulated in the book *Human Motor* by Anson Rabinbach. Using the theory of the symptom as used by Gilles Deleuze and the concepts of quorum sensing, sentience and qualia, the presentation will offer a space for discussing the neologisms informing medical and architectural humanities as well the broader fields of education, environmental sciences, healthcare, and ecology, through two critical constitutive terms that challenge the canonical human: quorum sensing as environmental affordance and immersion as contemplative, environmental ecstasy.

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Session 8A.
"Human-animal relations"
Wednesday, May 17. 15:15-17:00 [Room 1]

**"'Otherwise Other':
Becoming-animal and Monstrous Bodies in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*"**

Through Braidotti's neo-Deleuzian notion of *becoming* and Haraway's critique of the process of patronymic naming, I analyse the ways representational discourse upholds racist and exploiting binaries. I undertake a close reading of J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*—published amongst the 2000s boom of animal studies—where becoming-animal surpasses representational thought. Throughout the novel David Lurie vacillates between interacting within confessionary discourse—which upholds humanism's racist and sexist self-other binaries—and a post-lingual, bodily, affective becoming. The close of the novel, rather than a rejection of the animal, is a rejection of David's humanist self and telos and the patronymic and hereditary process of naming. David's becoming-animal figures beyond the bounds of David's third-person humanist narrative, such that pluralistic, non-human, ethical relations are shown to be possible in a post-lingual, bodily multiplicity. Such multiplicity destabilises self-other binaries, along with both "top-down" and "bottom-up" models of power in favour of affective becomings. While the narrative of *Disgrace* maintains what Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 168) term the 'loci of resonance' of the face—a fixity which concretises identity and being over nomadic becomings—David's exit from the narrative is an exit from representation toward a becoming-animal.

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Session 6B.
"Posthuman kin-making"
Tuesday, May 16. 18:15-20:00 [Room 2]

"Posthuman Kinship and Environmental Consciousness in Children's Animated Series"

In the last two decades, we have witnessed a growing interest in environmental concerns, reflected by the proliferation of post-apocalyptic scenarios in films and television series. These representations are slowly making their way to children's media as well, serving as an element of world-building that proves crucial to the understanding of the conflicts in these narratives. The purpose of this paper is to explore how children's animated series of the last 5 years transcend the binary oppositions that underlie the Anthropocene, and advocate instead for more fluid and symbiotic ways of viewing our relationship with the human and more-than-human world (Alaimo 2016). This paper aims to be interdisciplinary and intersectional in its use of critical theory, drawing on the burgeoning field of Environmental Humanities, which will serve as the main theoretical framework from which the analysis of human and non-human relationality will be conducted. It will likewise build on other research areas such as critical posthumanism (Braidotti 2013, 2022), as well as postcolonial, queer and gender studies more broadly, which prove particularly relevant when addressing the discourse on the Anthropocene, as it often renders invisible different degrees of responsibility and vulnerability built around colonial and capitalist processes of dispossession (Nixon 2011, Moore 2016). The analysis will center on the narrative and visual elements of contemporary children's animated series with a main focus on *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power* (2019), *The Owl House* (2021), and *Amphibia* (2020). It will examine how they represent a renewed idea of posthuman kinship, and how the representation of their respective worlds and their characters falls in line with the theories

of relationality proposed by Rosi Braidotti (2013) and Donna Haraway (2016) in their reflections on our current environmental and social crisis.

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Session 3A.
"Time and the posthuman"
Monday, May 15. 17:30-19:15 [Room 1]

"The Family, Generations and the Posthuman Future in *Years and Years*"

The kinship family has been central to the conception of the human subject and society in the modern times. In particular, as queer critics such as Edelman and Ahmed have suggested with the notion of "reproductive futurism" (Edelman 20), generational continuity allows humans, metaphorically as well as literally, to overcome the transience of individual lives and secure the future. This presentation will consider the TV series *Years and Years* (BBC and HBO, 2019) to analyse the ways in which the show interrogates the family and generations based on the conception of the human subject and relationality in the Western tradition. The show brings together the genres of the family drama and speculative fiction as it depicts the lives of the members of the Lyon family in Manchester in a dystopian world in 2019 and beyond. This is a world in crisis, a world that is transformed and threatened by technological advancement, populist politics, neoliberal economy, mass migration and environmental destruction. The show depicts the impact of technology as well as the political and economic disorder on the lives of the Lyon family members and in doing so, explores the changing nature of human agency, intimacy and relationality and, in particular, what the family may mean in the posthuman future. Analysing the role of the home and technology in the show, we argue that *Years and Years* seeks to envision the posthuman family, exploring the relationship between the human and the non-human, at the same time as it is pulled towards the nostalgic ideal of the family and the home as a material as well as symbolic location of identity, permanence, and memory.

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Session 2A.
"Posthumanism and genre"
Monday, May 15. 15:15-17:00 [Room 1]

**"Do Androids Dream with Electric Alpacas?
The Influence of Philip K. Dick in Latin American 21st Century Speculative Fiction"**

This paper aims to demonstrate the influence of Philip K. Dick in posthumanist Latin American authors from 21st Century Speculative Fiction. After reviewing the relation between Philip K. Dick and the theoretical framework of posthumanism through the

contributions of Braidotti, Cavallaro, Hayles or Moylan, I will explore how and why Dick's figure has found fruitful developments in current Latin American speculative fiction writers, such as Edmundo Paz Soldán, Andrea Chapela or Michel Nieva using the postulates of Brown, Cordoba, Page and other relevant scholars in the study of speculative fiction in Spanish.

Philip K. Dick speculates on themes such as the slippery definition of an ever-shifting reality or the metastasis of simulacra. His novels are also intertwined with the postmodern undermining of the grand narrative of the humanist subject, as we are presented with androids virtually indistinguishable from human beings. These ontological concerns, born from his understanding that the technological developments could alter what counts as a human, mean that his work constitutes an early approximation to posthumanism. On the other hand, Latin American writers such as Liliana Colanzi, Edmundo Paz Soldan or Michel Nieva have picked up Dick's legacy and used it to criticize the neoliberal human(ist) subject and its notion of progress. These authors question the definition of human in relation to the degradation of the environment. They propose not just a mere representation of (post)human enhancement, but also a (re)definition of that very concept from an ecocritical perspective. They also approach the posthuman from the field of speculative fiction, reflect a change in the literary field as a result of posthumanism and explore the connection between literature and other disciplines, such as History or Anthropology, while bringing forth the political and environmental implications of both the neoliberal notion of progress and the neocolonialist behaviors that lie behind it.

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Session 6B.
"Posthuman kin-making"
Tuesday, May 16. 18:15-20:00 [Room 2]

"The Human and the Matter in Clarice Lispector's Autofiction *Passion According to G.H.*"

This paper engages with the question of the human by bringing the autofiction of Clarice Lispector, *Passion According to G.H.,* in conversation with feminist and new materialist thought - the work of Rosi Braidotti, Nina Lykke, and Michel Serres. The paper first takes Lispector's theorizing on the two dimensions of the (Christianized) Human condition – that of the exteriority of the *self*, directed to the ontological question of what a human is, and that of interiority, the self and identity directed at the ontological question of "who am I" as a subject. In *Passion According to G.H.*, the woman identified as G.H. enters her maid's room to organize it and ends up being organized after killing a cockroach. Through her contemplation over the animal's death, G.H. stays in dialogue with the reader and questions who she is and what it means to be a human.

This article traces human and nonhuman relationality and focuses on how matters function as quasi-objects (Serres 2017) in the G.H.'s nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti 2011). The interrelation between the humans and the nonhumans articulates a compassionate companionship (Lykke 2020) which expands to the relationship between the character and the (in)animate matters, as well as the character and the reader. The death of the cockroach

posits the posthuman understanding of death as a transcendence state (Braidotti 2011). Thus, a new state of the human emerges, which Lispector theorizes as the *state of grace*. Consequently, in *Passion, According to G.H.*, the notions of the (in)animate matter and death are active and vibrant concepts that affect human subjectivity. The article concludes by suggesting situating Lispector as a contemporary posthumanist thinker and invites intertextual analysis on tracing *the state of grace* in Lispector's works.

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Session 3A.
"Time and the posthuman"
Monday, May 15. 17:30-19:15 [Room 1]

**"The Timescape of an Android:
Narrating the Human in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*"**

The Anthropocene puts paradoxical demands on the novel: despite its alleged complicity with the age of the human, the novel is expected to decentre the human. Such decentring occurs in the novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, among others. In *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), he repositions privileged human subjectivity, which undergoes further decentring in *Klara and the Sun* (2021). In the latter, Ishiguro appoints an android as the novel's protagonist, whose homodiegetic narrative furnishes a timescape of its own.

In this paper, I repurpose Barbara Adam's notion of timescape as a convergence of multiple s and replenish it with Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of chronotope as a time-space pertinent to both historical periods and their cultural representation. In Ishiguro's novel, Klara's timescape merits examination from a dual perspective: as manifesting the peculiarities of the Anthropocene time consciousness and its narrative focalization. This perspective allows me to reveal the linear parameters of the protagonist's being in time, her deranged sense of multiple causality, and her unquestioning trust in her own narrativized self. In drawing parallels between Kathy H. from *Never Let Me Go* and Klara, I underscore the two characters' similarity: their lack of concern for their respective artificiality. I contend that Klara's timescape exhibits the features of a narrative prosthesis by which to humanize other-than- and more-than-human realities.

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Session 8B.
"Posthuman Living"
Wednesday, May 17. 15:15-17:00 [Room 2]

**"Overcoming Exceptionalism:
Creative Agency of the Nonhuman and the Problem of Authorship"**

Generative AI technologies, which are increasingly invading the fields of textual, visual and musical production, continue to spark disputes about the creative potential of AI and the authorship of the resulting "artworks". These arguments predominantly unfold in two divergent discourses based on opposing ontological premises. Whereas the first perspective, labeled by McCormack and d'Inverno the dream of "Heroic AI", draws upon the humanist idea of a sovereign, autonomous human creator that AI technologies seek to emulate, the second represents a host of posthumanist approaches aimed at reconfiguring western subjectivity and overcoming human-exceptionalist positioning. Within the latter, the concept of *sympoieis* proposed by Haraway radically inverts the very understanding of creative agency.

This paper considers contributions within the artistic realm in redefining creativity as the outcome of human and non-human assemblage. While techno-centric ideologies entrenched in humanism try to keep the world within habitual strategies of interaction, Contemporary art, increasingly accepting its non-human 'assistants' as collaborators, continues reshaping—on ontological and epistemological levels—public perceptions toward distributed nature of creative agency, thereby undermining the habitual capital-centric logic of appropriation, ownership, plagiarism, making a profit from creative work.

Keeping in mind the rising tension between these two ideological perspectives, I propose speculative investigations into the possible implications of the reconfigualtion of creativity, such as enlivening principles of pre-anthropocentric forms of art productions, with their reliance on common, anonymous, distributed, multi-sourced and constantly evolving process of co-creation.

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Session 9A.
"Disaster narratives and the posthuman"
Wednesday, May 17. 17:30-19:00 [Room 1]

"Posthumanist Lessons from Lear: The Importance of King Lear for 'Our Unstable Environmental Now' (Mentz, 'Break Up the Anthropocene')"

Although 'Hamlet' is Shakespeare's most popular play, most often staged, re-written and adapted, it was 'King Lear' - a powerful political commentary and family drama - that almost took over for a while in a post-Holocaust world. 'King Lear' acquired its urgent relevance in the post-60 world and Cold War reality of nuclear nightmares and totalitarian regimes. Perhaps, nowadays it is again 'a Lear moment', yet this time - it is time for 'King Lear' to demonstrate its posthumanist potential to speak to our anthropocentric times: climacteric and catastrophic in so many ways. In 'King Lear' crises and catastrophes fuel disasters on individual and collective levels. Traditional Shakespearean criticism analyses *King Lear's* world that went into ruin from a humanist perspective. Oftentimes the play has been interpreted in the context of Christian values. The aim of my paper is to make cultural reflections on (post)human condition by learning lessons from Shakespeare's Lear. A posthumanist perspective will shed new light on Lear's tragedies by taking into account for example human(ist) hubris, lack of the Anthropocene anagnorisis and human disconnection from nature. Within the space of the drama it is possible to reconceptualise traditional

humanist values, human role and status among other beings and things. It is worth to use a holistic and non-anthropocentric perspective, offered by posthumanism(s) to analyse and reflect upon: a variety of causes of destabilisation and collapse within the play, a process that led to Lear's identity crisis, an underlying crisis in human and non-human relations. More broadly, my re-reading of 'King Lear' for and in the Anthropocene will pay attention to a planetary crisis of the Earth's ecosystem, its consequences, as well as possible scenarios for humans and non-humans to co-exist and inter-be.

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Session 2B.
"Posthumanism and the environment"
Monday, May 15. 15:15-17:00 [Room 2]

"'The Way it Is in The Stories':
Storytelling as a (Post-)Human Ethic in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* Trilogy"

In his study *On the Origin of Stories* (2009), Brian Boyd uses biology and other sciences to argue for how art and storytelling are a fundamentally human phenomenon. That a number of other authors, e.g., Denis Dutton, and Jonathan Gottschall (cf. Mohr), have made similar arguments seems to indicate that this has become a trend in recent scholarship. Yet, what are the ecological consequences of such a reasoning? In fiction, Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-13) presents storytelling as an essential way for humans to see and structure the world. Set against the backdrop of a corporativist dystopia, Atwood's trilogy suggests that non-anthropocentric ways of being with nature can be pursued by the communal practice of storytelling. Particularly, the final novel in the trilogy, *MaddAddam* (2013), follows Toby and a group of other Homo sapiens survivors as they start a community with a new humanoid species called the Crakers who have been genetically engineered as not to have any negative impact on the environment. Developing against their creator's intentions, the Crakers becomeendowed with reason and the capacity for symbolic thinking. With their special appetite for stories and storytelling, how do the Crakers unsettle our ideas of what it means to be human? This paper argues that Atwood's trilogy challenges us to think about humans and (consequently) post-humans in new ways. Drawing on environmental ethics, it proposes that the speculative exercise conducted in these novels shows how the relationships between humans and other life forms are done and redone by narrative. Rather than searching for a human exceptionalism, in her trilogy, Atwood uses art and storytelling to imagine a new (post-)human ethic of interconnection with and responsibility for nature and the more-than-human.

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"The First Big Spark of Planetary Mind": Anthropocene Entanglements, Sustainability Transitions and Religious Connotations in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (2020)"

In recent years, numerous narratives have engaged, either directly or indirectly, with the consequences of having entered the Anthropocene, a proposed geological epoch characterised by the modification of natural systems by humans. In contrast with the ideologies behind it, such as a disregard for nature when it does not serve human purposes and the continuous search for economic gain in our capitalist societies, Donna Haraway proposes "making kin" as the main strategy for overcoming the Anthropocene and arriving at a more just world. In this fashion, in Kim Stanley Robinson's novel *The Ministry for the Future* (2020), which depicts the transition towards a sustainable society, kinship and collaboration are considered crucial for achieving this desired transformation. The concept of "planetary mind" is used to refer to a change in the cultural consciousness which emphasises the interconnection and dependency of all beings on Earth instead of focusing on the differences delineated by the nation-state.

In this presentation, I will focus on how Robinson characterises his vision of planetary consciousness in *The Ministry for the Future* and its pivotal function in his proposed sustainability transitions. Furthermore, I will explore how this perception of the world is framed in religious terms and the way that influences public engagement. In this way, I hope to highlight the effects that this recognition of the entangled world in which we live may influence change in the way humans interact with the planet and with each other.

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"Ancillary Agency: AI Moral Participation in Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice*"

Artificially intelligent characters are not only well-established in speculative fiction, but have also become influential figures in investigations into the posthuman condition. While posthuman ideals influence debates on AI moral participation, contemporary literary AI narratives provide a platform that enables these philosophical thought experiments to develop and expand, focusing on diverse prospects. To this end, this presentation investigates recent approaches to the posthuman as well as interrogations of AI moral agency in connection to Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* in order to show how moral attributions can no longer be solely determined by humanistic standards such as the elusive human consciousness. Thus, Robert Pepperell's *The Posthuman Condition* and Katherine Hayles' *Unthought* as well as works from the fields of machine and AI ethics are introduced to establish how technological cognizers perform in planetary cognitive ecologies and are

thus able to make decisions with moral and ethical ramifications despite their nonhuman structures. To illustrate the potential of these theories, this presentation investigates how Ann Leckie's novel cautions against applying humanistic approaches to technological debates, showing how we could wrongfully overlook artificial agency on account of biased indeterminate criteria. Not only does Leckie's AI question the adaptability and the confines of the human body, but its dispersed cognitive reach also challenges the human/nonhuman binary. The narrative experiments with how dissimilar bodies can generate distinct mental processes that transcend human experience while still allowing for interspecies interactions. It argues that nonhuman entities, regardless of whether they subscribe to anthropocentric concepts of internal mental states, should be recognized as active agents whose intentionality may be crucial and of moral and ethical consequence in planetary cognitive ecologies.

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Session 1A.
"Challenges to the posthuman"
Monday, May 15. 11:45-13:15 [Room 1]

**"From a Bioengineering Dystopia to the Pandemic Novel:
Challenging the Posthuman in Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story*
and *Our Country Friends* (2022)"**

This paper proposal will discuss two works by contemporary writer Gary Shteyngart, which engage with the posthuman condition in apparently contrasting ways. While in the satiric *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), the writer envisions a dystopian America of biologically-engineered "indefinite life extension" for the wealthy, the very recent *Our Country Friends* (Oct. 2021), inspired in a group's rural self-isolation at the climax of the Covid-19 pandemic, departs from the dystopian logic and moves into the grim reality of a deadly virus that makes no class distinctions, eventually penetrating this highbrow community. Within these radically dissimilar stylistic frameworks, Shteyngart seems to contest the validity of any kind of posthuman answer, always drawing readers towards the inescapability of biological death as an end point. Drawing from a range of cultural critics, philosophers and sociologists (Braidotti, Beck, Bauman, Žižek, Deleuze) and recent approaches to the dystopian and the posthuman in the former novel (Willmetts, Malewitz), along with up-and-coming scholarship on the sociological and psychological implications of self-isolation in *Our Country Friends*, and the Covid pandemic at large, this paper will examine how Shteyngart's two novels foreground how American individualism in the global age challenges, problematizes and commodifies the biological self and the (post)human condition, in turn metonymically invoking the broader organic and systemic crises of the Anthropocene.

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"Not Just Another Piece of Meat: Deconstructing Difference in *Monstress*"

Where definitions of humanness traditionally hierarchise 'human' bodies as natural, active and subjective, nonhuman Others are typically perceived as unnatural, passive and rendered object. However, "the human is not, and has never been, an all inclusive category" (Fuss 1996, qtd. in Rhee 4). In the award-winning comic series, *Monstress* (2015—), writer Marjorie Liu and illustrator Sana Takeda celebrate all the 'not-quite-human' bodies that have been culturally and ontologically ostracised from society for their 'monstrous abjectivity'. By creating "new, fluid models for selfhood and subjectivity-formation" (Chute 161), Liu and Takeda deconstruct the essentialist Euro-American discourse that ascribes privilege to white, cisgender men and condemn the Aristotelian narrative that frames atypical bodies as grotesque abnormalities. Through engaging with Liu and Takeda's core text, this paper explores the pervasive Otherisation of in-between bodies and the profound prejudice subjected to those who are classified as less-than-human. You do not have to be a humanoid cat to encounter the same racial demonisation experienced by Liu and Takeda's protagonist. According to Edward Said, the Orient is the source of the West's "deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (1978, qtd. in Hurley 126). The same monstrous alterity ascribed to the Eastern Oriental can be similarly applied to mixed-race Others in the contemporary world. By facilitating a dialogue about racial discrimination and the importance of female empowerment, *Monstress* (2015—) explores the potential for a post-gendered, post-racial, post*human* and post-patriarchal social world.