



## **Expressions and Images of the Posthuman**

Inaugural Workshop  
Posthumanism Research Network  
April 14-15, 2018, Plaza 600F  
Brock University

We acknowledge the support of the following at Brock University for making the workshop possible: BSIG – HRI – PhD in Interdisciplinary Humanities – Ma in Studies in Comparative Literatures and Arts – the departments of Communication, Popular Culture, and Film; Dramatic Arts; English; and Philosophy.

This research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

**Canada**

## Saturday, April 14, 2018

10:00 – Opening remarks

10:15 – Panel 1

David H. Fleming (Stirling) “The Backwash of Becoming Chthulhu: Or, Alien Encounters with Tentacular Time and Temporality”

Lukas Brasiskis (New York) “Eco-Cinema Beyond Point of View: Affective Images of Hyperobjects and Ontological Po(e/li)tics”

Terrance H. McDonald (Brock) “Mystical Images: The Posthuman Cinematic Forms of Herzog and Kunuk”

12:00 – Lunch

13:45 – Panel 2

Martin Boucher (Laurentian) “Technology at the Intersection of Progress and Inclusion”

Mickey Vallee and Marie-Josée Beaulieu (Athabasca) “Intimacy in an Era of Ubiquitous Listening”

Nandita Biswas Mellamphy (Western) “Hacking the Data Body: A Political Physiology of the Posthuman World”

15:30 – Break

**16:00 – Keynote address – Dr. William Brown (Roehampton)**

**“Chthulucinema, or the Cine-Squid from Hell”**

18:00– Reception

19:30 – Dinner (on your own)

## Sunday, April 15, 2018

9:00– Panel 3

Anna Mirzayan (Western) “Towards Post-Human Embodiment and Labor”  
Russell Kilbourn (WLU) “Posthuman Memory?—from *Austerlitz* to *Blade Runner 2049*”

10:15 – Break

10:30 – Panel 4

Caitlin Heppner “Becoming Worthy: Cosmic Horror and Gilles Deleuze”  
Karen Houle “Healing in the Anthropocene: Better Late than Never”  
Anders Bergstrom “Ethics, Value, and Perception in *Arrival* and ‘Story of Your Life’”

12:15 – Lunch

14:00 – Panel 5

Doug Halls “Singing the Vegetal in Aristotle’s EN I.13 and Plato’s *Charmides*”  
Alain Beaulieu “What science can and cannot say about exobiolife? A Deleuzo-Guattarian answer”  
Olga Cielemecka “Thinking plants: Human-vegetal histories of coexistence and survival”

15:45 – Closing remarks

## **PRN Workshop 2018 – List of Abstracts**

### **Alain Beaulieu, What science can and cannot say about exobiology? A Deleuzo-Guattarian answer**

The search for extraterrestrial life took a new turn with the relatively recent scientific confirmation of the existence of exoplanets. A hundred-million-dollar program led by multiple scientists including Stephen Hawking, and publically announced in 2015, aims at searching for extraterrestrial intelligence. One can also think of NASA's James Webb Space Telescope to be launched in 2018, a multi-billion project which will not only provide more direct imaging of exoplanets (some are already available), but will also be able to detect the potential presence of atmospheres and identify chemical compositions favourable to life. Over the last decades, the multiverse, which implies the coexistence of parallel universes, has also become a stimulating field in cosmology. Thousands of exoplanets have been discovered and we will probably be the first generation to witness the confirmation of life elsewhere in the universe. Science has the means to discover non-human forms of life that it is looking for, for instance, by locating the presence of H<sub>2</sub>O, confirming the presence of exo-atmospheres or identifying a signal recognizable as not one of ours. Is science alone condemned to remain the prisoner of its own "human, all too human" representations while remaining unable to encounter a radically different form of life? In order to explore this question, we will first present a brief history of the plurality of inhabited worlds from the Epicureans to Kant. We will then turn to Deleuze's conception of "something wholly other than the Other," before finally challenging the scientific perspective with the help of Deleuze's (along with Guattari) notion of "encounter," which implies among other things a complex coupling between heterogeneous systems, forced movement of amplitude, difference in intensity, involuntary operation, contingency, metamorphoses, nomadism, a new image of thought, and chaosmos. We should then be able to determine if these conceptual tools favour better than science the experience of the encounter with non-human forms of life, thus determine if/how they can organize a microrevolution in the field of astrobiology.

### **Anders Bergstrom, Ethics, Value, and Perception in *Arrival* and "Story of Your Life"**

The rethinking of the status of human subjectivity—expressed in the concept of the posthuman—can be felt acutely in speculative discussion of extraterrestrial intelligence. Much of popular science fiction media simply

presents intelligent extraterrestrials as extensions of human subjectivity; more challenging and risky is the portrayal of an encounter with extraterrestrials as truly shaking anthropocentric foundations.

Denis Villeneuve's 2016 film, *Arrival*, based on Ted Chiang's novella "Story of Your Life" (1998), explores the question of how language might have a material effect on an understanding of the human. The story, in both the novella and film, chronicles the arrival of spacecraft of extraterrestrial origin and a linguist's attempts to learn the newcomers' language. Extrapolating from speculative linguistic theory (in part, based on the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis), the story's central character, Louise Banks (Amy Adams) finds herself changed by the extraterrestrial language as it transforms her perception of reality.

In considering how one is shaped by the tools one uses, both the film and novella suggest, as Stefan Herbrechter has noted, that "the argument about the posthuman is fought precisely at the level of representation, symbolic meaning and thus (amongst other 'media') in language" (5). Furthermore, *Arrival* and "Story of Your Life" posit a connection between perception of the world and the value and meaning one attributes to life itself, suggesting that free will and determinism might not be entirely divorced approaches to understanding one's experience of the world. In exploring questions of ethical agency and value, *Arrival* and "Story of Your Life" present a narrative marking an overlap between posthuman discourses and the reevaluations denoted by the term *postsecular*.

### **Nandita Biswas Mellamphy, Hacking the Data Body: A Political Physiology of the Posthuman World**

In the digital era, governmentality and virtuality are intertwined insofar as contemporary political technologies increasingly involve control and production of *not only* physical, fleshy bodies and power relations, but also of *data-bodies*, the virtual assemblages made up of the digital (and analog) information connected to an individual, group or network. The virtual quality of data-bodies allows rules and norms of a society to be circumvented, since most laws apply to the *physical* individual rather than *virtual* bodies. For example, while existing laws most often limit coercion or exploitation of the physical body, legislators worldwide are currently scrambling to develop adequate laws to govern activities in cyberspace. The Liberal definition of political power maintains that the individual holds a basic, inalienable right to be free from subjection to another's will; however, this definition assumes the central role of the physical body as the repository of universal rights. Virtual bodies are not subject to such political regulation and can be hacked, harvested, and manipulated more easily and covertly. Although the effects of power are

still experienced by flesh-and-bone subjects, data-bodies are rapidly becoming part of the basic structure of informationalized societies in which public deliberation and democratic processes are bypassed in favour of corporate, datalogical, and predictive instruments and rationales. For example, calls for digital democracy and e-governance, as well as the ‘smartification’ of entire urban environments, promise to enhance human living and solve human-centered problems like unemployment, mobility and urban growth/decay by replacing failing political arrangements with digital goods and services, thus incorporating the civilian/consumer into the growing fold of a nebulous process of data amplification. In this presentation (part of a current book project), I argue that data-bodies proliferate and metastabilize in posthuman schemas of informational feedback that seek to both exploit *human-centered* resources, as well as replace them with digitized (algorithmic), artificial-intelligence-driven technologies of the future that appear human-friendly, but that *ultimately seek to take humans out of primary decision-making loops* altogether. In an age driven by ‘data hegemony’, the fleshy is perpetually haunted by the furious mediality of ever-expanding data-bodies that act on and beyond the conceptual boundaries of the human and the organic.

### **Lukas Brasiskis, Eco-Cinema Beyond Point of View: Affective Images of Hyperobjects and Ontological Po(e/li)tics**

The proliferation of films focusing on environmental issues and nonhuman worlds over the last two decades ask that we revisit modes of audio-vision and their connections with anthropocentrism in the so-called epoch of the Anthropocene questioning what kinds of eco-critical spectatorship and eco-politics can they engender?

Many recent attempts to describe eco-critical cinema focus on films’ narratives and subject-positions they construct. These approaches—I will argue—often disregard the affective power of cinema. In this connection, I will discuss the possibility of perception of audio-visions of the “hyperobjects” (Morton, 2013), such as strata of the earth and global warming, thinking beyond subject-position film theories and discuss ethical and political implications that could follow it. Drawing attention to The Otolith Group’s *Medium Earth* (2013), Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel *Leviathan* (2012), Ursula Biemann’s *Subatlantic* (2015) and Emilija Skarnulyte’s *No Place Rising* (2016), I will show how some films attempt to expose us to the existence of the invisible geological forces. Approaching these films as expressive practices that take over where speculative philosophies and eco-theories leave off, I will “read” cinematic eco-affects that activate signs of vibrant presence of non-human worlds. This “reading” will emphasize not the position from which the showing takes place, but rather the construction of the shot itself, the manner of

the audio-visioning which can activate our eco-critical imagination and, as a result, instigate ontological po(e/li)tics.

Finally, I will attempt to reconcile expressive (Timothy Morton) and critical (TJ Demos) perspectives on “Anthropocene visuality”, arguing that some eco-films withdraw a binary image of nature and human rooted in the theories of subject-positioning in favor of an experience of the hybrid, impure, “interobjective”, “nonlocal”, temporally and spatially unstable hyperobjects.

### **William Brown, “Chthulucinema, or the Cine-Squid from Hell”**

In this paper, I shall discuss what novelist China Miéville has termed the *tentaculum novum* in relation to contemporary cinema. That is, tentacles, often attached to cephalopods and/or cephalopod-like creatures, have regularly appeared throughout the history of cinema, while also seeming to have an especial significance in and to the contemporary digital age. Drawing on thinkers like Donna J Haraway, Eugene Thacker, Nandita Biswas Mellamphy and Graham Harman, I shall in this presentation discuss the possible meanings of the tentacular nature of contemporary cinema, suggesting that we are, after Haraway, living in the chthulucenic era that follows the Anthropocene, and that as a result, we are also witnessing the rise of Chthulucinema.

### **Martin Boucher, Technology at the Intersection of Progress and Inclusion**

In this paper I will think through the general critique of progress common in critical theory, postmodernism, and posthumanism as it relates more specifically to the problem of inclusion for individuals with disabilities. Contextualizing the idea of progress from the perspective of inclusion will help develop a more nuanced perspective of the role that technology can have in the lives of people living with disabilities. As bodily technologies begin to blur the line between assistive and enhancing devices, their role in the lives of individuals with disabilities is also brought into question (as well as the designation of a “disabled” body itself). It is precisely this problem of inclusion and progress that makes the interpretation and use of these technologies so difficult. The perceived neutrality of scientific advancement and progress in the biotechnology sector is confronted with the actual wishes of individuals with disabilities and the way they envision their own lives. What are they ‘fixing’? Are they truly wanted? Whose politics or vision do they serve? Who gets to decide which ones are necessary or useful? Who has access to them?... The development of new technologies brings theoretical questions of impairment and normality,

participation and otherness, valuable and expendable lives, difference and sameness etc. into the immanent realm of daily life. The task for posthuman disability studies, then, is to get ahead of this increasingly common merger of body and technology in order to understand what a conscientious, just, and ethical relationship to technology might look like. These are important questions for posthumanism in general, but posing them from the perspective of disability is quite useful. As ‘structural Others of modernity’ (Braidotti 2006), with bodies that were historically the target of corrective technologies, an organically posthuman perspective on biotechnologies can emerge. In this paper I will problematize inclusion and progress to pave the way for an affirmative and posthuman ethics of technology.

### **Olga Cielemecka, “Thinking plants: Human-vegetal histories of coexistence and survival”**

I am interested in the possibilities of telling stories together with other, non-human agents, such as plants; in this presentation I’d like to explore possibilities of such posthuman plant-thinking. Plants re-open the questions of mobility, belonging, healing, life, agency, consciousness, sentience, communication, and relationality. Plant-human history is a history of domestication and colonisation as key factors in transformations of human societies, their structures, population growths and declines, technological innovations, family structure; they are intimately linked with the emergence of private property and nation-states. The plant-human relationship is one of a profound dependency on the vegetal life; humans depend on plants for food, medicines, birth-control, clothing, and shelter. Plants on their part use their humans as pollinators, as well as to colonise new territories. While vegetal life tends to be portrayed as a lower form of life, inferior to the human or rational life (see: Marder 2013), studies show that plants display enormous intelligence, dexterity, and creativity. Burgeoning new research on the vegetal helps to understand how plants cross-pollinate human histories. This plant-thinking (to use Michael Marder’s expression) recalibrates ways in which we can think about sexuality and queerness (Mortimer-Sandilands 2005), reproduction and (hetero)normativity (Hird 2004), intimacy (Kronemyer and Sinclair), state security (Foster 2016), colonialism and indigeneity (Tavares 2016), war and ethnic politics (Grzywnowicz), and knowledge production (Schiebinger 2017, Kremmerer 2013, Riddle 1997). Such scholarly and artistic projects link human-vegetal ecologies to social struggles for queer, minority, and indigenous rights.

Sprouting from these multiple sources this presentation takes up the question of “weeding out.” Weeding is a practice of removal and disposal of wild, unruly plants. “Weeding out” can also mean an institutionally

orchestrated removal of the unwanted populations, control and regulation of that which “grows” in an undisciplined way. Weeds are the unwanted, often non-native, invasive plant species. At the same time, weeds present incredible resilience and adaptability, taking over abandoned places, breaking through cracks in pavements, growing first in disturbed grounds. They are, to use Anna Tsing’s expressions, the “unruly edges” of empire. I would like to look into the process of “weeding”—taking it in a dual sense it may evoke: as removal and as resistance—and weave it into an environmental justice project that would account for both non-human, vegetal others, as well as humans.

### **David H. Fleming, *The Backwash of Becoming Chthulhu: Or, Alien Encounters With Tentacular Time and Temporality***

In the futural ‘biophilosophical’ project *Kinoteuthis Infernalis: Or, the rise of Cthulucinema*—which draws inspiration from a crop of outlandish thinkers, artists, and philosophers such as Vilèm Flusser, Donna Haraway, Patricia Pisters, Jussi Parikka, Timothy Morton, H. P. Lovecraft, Gilles Deleuze and Fèlix Guattari (amongst others)—William Brown and I make a number of connections between digital cinema and cephalopods, cephalopods and digital cinema. This paper, taken from this larger project, argues that the temporal signature of what we call contemporary ‘cthulhucinema’ forces viewers to confront, and try to make sense of, a counter-intuitive image of alien time and reality. Films such as *The Call of Chthulhu* (Andrew Leman, 2005), *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, 2016), and *Ms Peregrine’s Home For Peculiar Children* (Tim Burton, 2016) surface as emblematic examples, that not only share in depictions of the future as having a backwards, withdrawing, or backwashing, affect/effect upon the specious present (or past), but also share in a tendency to associate these temporal realities with strange betentacled creatures. *The Call of Chthulhu* makes for an interesting case in point, being a film based on H. P. Lovecraft’s eponymous tentacle encumbered monster from his 1920s short story, and an artwork that concretises its backwards temporal themes in its aesthetic form: That being of a faux 1920s silent Expressionistic horror movie. Through different means Villeneuve’s *Arrival* also prompts viewers to conceive of a strange image of backwashing time. There, in a science fiction narrative where humanity makes its first contact with Lovecraft-esque aliens, that ultimately herald in a novel, but ultimately paralyzing, inhuman perspective on the true nature of time and reality. On this outing, we demonstrate how a film such as *Arrival* prompts viewers to confront a counterintuitive model of time that at once recalls and reposes what Gilles Deleuze called a ‘third-synthesis’ of time, and what J. M. E. McTaggart named the a-temporal ‘C series’ of ‘unreal’ time. We finally suggest that the a-temporal conception of the future as having already happened can function as a key to understanding the fate of

humanity as a whole as we pass from the anthropocene, in which humans have dominated the planet, to the post-human ‘chthulucene’ (see Haraway, 2016), in which humans no longer exist on the planet at all.

### **Doug Halls, Singing the Vegetal in Aristotle’s EN I.13 and Plato’s Charmides**

In Nicomachean Ethics I.13, Aristotle makes a tripartite distinction between the irrational, rational, and desiderative parts of the soul. The irrational part has a ‘vegetative nature’ (*phytiko*), meaning roughly that it characterizes those processes of our organism of which we (usually) have no awareness and (arguably) no direct control over. The rational is marked by the capacity for thought in various forms (*noetic* insight and the discursive articulation of *logoi*). The desiderative stands in between them and can be influenced by both.

*In EN I.13, then: human desire is primordially open to the efficacy of both the vegetal (*phytiko*) and the intelligible.*

A few lines before Aristotle makes this distinction, he alludes to a dialogue of Plato’s – but not the one we might expect. For while the ‘mature’ Plato gives us two famous formulations of the tripartite soul in the Republic (Book IV) and Phaedrus (246a-254e), Aristotle instead chooses to nod in the direction of an earlier dialogue: the Charmides (156b-c). He does this by noting that the value of a theory of the soul is that it affords politicians with the means to cultivate good citizens, “just as also someone who is going to treat the eye must know the whole body as well” (1102a19-20). The remark is almost certainly a nod to Charmides 156ff., where Socrates tells his interlocutors about a general medical principle that in order to cure an ailing part, we must consider the whole person. Socrates proposes that the principle is then applied to Charmides – a young boy who elicits both carnal and noble desire in Socrates and his interlocutors – who has a headache. The remedy consists in applying a certain kind of leaf (*phyllon*) to Charmides’ head while ‘beautiful *logoi*’ are sung over him. Without the incantation, Socrates says, the leaf has no efficacy.

*In Charmides, then: human desire is framed in terms of its openness to both the leaf (*phyllon*) and to beautiful words.*

In this presentation I will discuss the status of the vegetal in Charmides 156ff. and EN I.13. Some guiding questions may include: What are we to take from the interdependent efficacy of the leaf and the incantation sung to Charmides? What does it say that the two components of the remedy are delivered through ‘animal’ senses of touch and hearing? What does it mean that the remedy is being applied to Charmides, who embodies both

carnal and noble aspects of human desire? Finally, might our responses to these questions enhance our view of Aristotle's tripartite distinction in EN I.13?

### **Caitlin Heppner, *Becoming Worthy: Cosmic Horror and Gilles Deleuze***

Hidden within Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* is an ethics of being. For Deleuze, we should be striving to become worthy of the sense event. He highlights several modes of being and becoming which allow a person access to an impersonal, surface level of being. What might be referred to as "Infrasense" he locates in anorexia, alcoholism, and schizophrenia. I want to suggest that a more apt concept which might induce the same experience is "cosmic horror."

Cosmic horror is found in H.P. Lovecraft's work. I am specifically interested in the experience of cosmic horror when confronted with his mythic creation, Cthulhu. The threat of apocalyptic destruction results in a pull from the self and through the literary confrontation with Cthulhu, one experiences an impersonal, Deleuzian self which is not self. I claim that Deleuze's impersonal, de-subjectivized self is similar to the psychoanalytic theory of abjection. This theory can be traced to what Rosi Braidotti has dubbed Deleuze's "nomadic ethics". I have come to understand this ethics as the ethics of being worthy of the sense event, in a Deleuzian sense, and the movement beyond individualistic, subjective humanism.

Along the same lines as Rosi Braidotti, I claim that through the disorganized and de-subjectivized self, we can become more ecological and ethical individuals: the type of being we need to become in the face of environmental destruction. Through the removal of the self, perhaps a kind of abjection, we can see insignificant beings as merely interconnected relations throughout the larger scope of the world. This is continued through cosmic horror and the acknowledgement of the myths of greater, older, and more chaotic beings.

### **Karen Houle, *Healing in the Anthropocene: Better Late than Never***

My current post-humanist wondering arises from having put 3 distinct observed or reported phenomena into proximity: 1) Anthropogenic light pollution by which we have managed to turn our sense of vision "against itself by continuously pitting overwhelming light" against the qualities and rhythm of the lights of the natural world resulting in a sensory "impoverishment through surplus"(Marder); 2) The "stupidification" of

plants, animals and human who, virtually overnight became ecological refugees due to a massive large-scale land-use change: the damming & flooding of the Nechako river for Hydro-electric dams in Northern B.C. (Larsen & Johnston); 3) The reduction or complete loss of psychotropic and pharmacological efficacy of indigenous medicine when healing plants such as “umhlonyane” in South Africa, are cultivated and domesticated (Laplante). In each of these very different cases, its anthropogenically altered states – impoverishment, stupidification, inefficacy – are described as a loss of “life.” Evidently, the “life” lost is not naming the end of actual existence: in each case, the people, animals, & plants are technically alive if bombarded by lightwaves, grazing on distant territories, or sprouting up in neat rows in a greenhouse. The common descriptive point being made is an existential one: under these different situations, the “livingness” of the living beings has been attenuated, compromised or even killed, reducing the once incalculable richness & quality of human-animal-plant life to “mute biomass.” It might be, but is no longer in a condition of, or relation to becoming.

Putting these 3 cases together allows us to escape altogether a monkey-trap that “environmental justice” discourse currently finds itself in: a) focusing on, and trying to prove, the origin, root or source of environmental change (anthropogenic or not?); or, b) focusing on, and trying to prove the beings most likely affected, how they are affected, regardless of the source cause of the change situation they find themselves in. Both these prongs of the current environmental justice discourse both involve identifying isolated agents and their properties, and then putting those agents onto a temporal or spatial grid or series in order to properly allot blame, concern or compensation. Instead, a new, much weirder question about relationality comes into being: How might we reconceptualize & thus better understand these observed or reported capacity changes in various human and non-human agents in a given situation brought about by changes that human agents clearly made to that situation?

This is an important & urgent enterprise because, if indeed these 3 and unrelated examples nevertheless express a complex pattern or diagram of becoming (or more appropriately, unbecoming) then spying & understanding the how of that anthropogenically-initiated pattern is crucial for forming a concomitant conceptual and strategic response route for “forging a greater solidarity with our natural environment and with all those forms, human and nonhuman, of what still remains of life.” (Michael Marder, 2016).

To start to move toward what this reframed question asks, I’m going to work with the ontological concept of becoming (from Deleuze-Guattari, and Timothy Morton), the normative concept of becoming-what-one-is (from Irigaray’s recent writings on “plant teachings”), and the ontological-

analytical categories of heterotopia and its correlate of a multiplicity of power set-ups from Michel Foucault. My suspicion, based on a number of years of working closely with the concept of becoming-plant, is that this multi-relational, trans-kingdom approach might reveal another kind of “action upon an action”: a vegetal rather than a disciplinary, sovereign or pastoral power set-up. Even though Foucault never wrote about ecological issues, let alone plants or the “post-human,” nothing in principle prevents us from using his methodological and analytical tools to “see” the way(s) we see, use and inhabit, ecological “regimes.” Indeed, the political power of Foucauldian critique is that it can force our thinking to become. As Michael Hardt rightly stated: “We need to think otherwise in order to act otherwise.”

**Russell J. A. Kilbourn, Posthuman Memory?—from *Austerlitz* to *Blade Runner 2049***

Memory studies has theorized the crucial role of material objects in the mediation of memory, especially at the individual level of affective response to past experience. Things become even more complicated with representations of such objects within fictional narratives in various media forms. I broach these questions through a comparison of two exemplary texts, one prose narrative—W.G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz* (2001)—and one film: Denis Villeneuve’s *Blade Runner 2049* (2016).

Rosi Braidotti remarks that: “It is not surprising...that one of the side effects of the decline of Humanism is the rise of the post-secular condition” (2013, 31). Characteristic of this postsecular moment, Villeneuve’s re-booted *Blade Runner* is a commercial/art film hybrid that exemplifies contemporary popular culture’s still deeply humanist foundations. Despite an innovative and spectacular audiovisual texture, *Blade Runner 2049*’s story is highly conventional in its representation of subjective memory in action. Officer K’s (Ryan Gosling) memories, mediated through a carved wooden toy, turn out to be shared with another. As an allegory of collective cultural memory today, this is the film’s most radical statement. Otherwise the central conceit of the replicant as “more human than human” bypasses the posthuman potential of these ‘posthumans’, reinscribing one of the oldest humanist messages.

The original *Blade Runner*’s mediation of subjective identity via fetishized photographs is echoed in Sebald’s *Austerlitz*, despite the radically different cultural and mediatic register. *Austerlitz*’s protagonist observes “the mysterious quality peculiar to...photographs [of deceased loved ones] when they surface from oblivion. One has the impression...of something stirring in them...as if the pictures had a memory of their own and remembered us, remembered the roles that we, the survivors, and those no longer among us

had played in our former lives” (A 182-83). It is as though the photograph were not simply “staring back”, but, in Sebald’s formulation, possessed the “gift of being remembered” (A 111). This is an ironic anticipation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century turn to a new materialism, in the form of object-oriented ontology as a significant manifestation of the broader, so-called ‘non-human’ turn in critical theory and artistic practice. What sets Sebald utterly apart from such post-millennial critical-cultural shifts, however, is his attention to such objects in the key of elegiac memory, an irreducibly ‘human’ register. After all, how do we become aware of or how is our attention drawn to the latter—nonhuman natural objects—other than through the mediating power of images?

### **Terrance H. McDonald, *Mystical Images: The Posthuman Cinematic Forms of Herzog and Kunuk***

This paper embraces Braidotti’s (2013) theoretical posthumanism to explore the capacity of cinema to generate new modes for understanding the world. Specifically, this exploration aims to induce a posthuman pollination of cinematic affect theory. By connecting Braidotti’s critique of Humanism with Brinkema’s (2014) radical formalism and rethinking of affect, I seek to analyze the moving images of Werner Herzog and Zacharias Kunuk as cinematic forms of mystical forces. Combining posthumanism with film philosophy, my close reading of these films challenges the dominance of science as a methodology for knowing the world by mapping ruptures and fractures in anthropocentric knowledges. To launch this analysis, I rely on two concepts that inform posthuman thinking: Deleuze’s (2004) virtual and Stengers’ (2010) unknowns. These two concepts, within a framework composed of critical insights from Braidotti and Brinkema, mobilize the potential to capture forces that always already exceed any human system of knowing. While the totality of mystical forces remains beyond our human grasp, this paper speculates that moving images are potential sites that increase our ability to read the impressions of these forces.

Where Deleuze’s time-image from *Cinema 2* (2005) proposes that the dispersion of a human centre propels an encounter with the virtual, my reading interrogates forms as affected by the virtual – the realm of the real that generates new potentialities. In particular, Herzog’s *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) and Kunuk’s *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001) each engage film form to illuminate virtual forces that affect being, compose environments, and flow through time. My analysis reveals how Herzog generates mystical images by using voiceover narration and camera movement to highlight what eludes a Cartesian worldview. Conversely, I demonstrate how the work of Kunuk creates mystical images by expressing spirits and forces as immanent visual and aural constituents of

the narrative. This is part of a larger project that undertakes an exploration of the capacity of moving images to theorize posthuman concepts. What is at stake in this paper are the powers of cinema to contribute to, and to even re-imagine, the world as posthuman – this involves a rejection of human privilege and the realization of life as auto-poietic. Consequently, reading the forms of mystical images functions to acknowledge the virtual forces that affect, compose, and transcend human experiences.

### **Anna Mirzayan, Towards Post-Human Embodiment and Labor**

I explore the production of the techno-body, its significance and its connection to feminist theory vis-a-vis a critical intervention into both contemporary life and philosophy. By techno-body, I mean the growing integration and relationship of necessity between the somatic body and virtual and technological platforms. The way in which the things we think of as ‘body’ (affects, physical labor to virtual labor etc.) has become a collection of ‘prostheses’; there is no longer just the purely discursive self (constructivist) or the purely ontological self (phenomenology). Now there is the techno-body which is a collection of analog and digital prostheses – including affective, datafied, cognitive etc. Drawing from Paul Preciado’s somatic fictions and technobiopower, and Donna Haraway’s notion of the cyborg, I will present an interpretation of the film *Under the Skin* to explore the relationship between the techno-body and alienation; in this film, an alien laborer whose body has itself been covered with another body in order to make her look human, patrols Scottish hills looking for hitchhikers, who she kidnaps and, through a vacuum-like evacuation of their flesh from their skin, and sends them to her home planet as a commodity to be consumed. This film reveals the techno-body as the posthuman body that is literally alien to itself and its surroundings, and re-inscribes the alienation produced by capitalist labor into the mechanism that turns us all into posthuman aliens by transforming our bodies into productive technologies.

### **Mickey Vallee and Marie-Josée Beaulieu, Intimacy in an Era of Ubiquitous Listening**

This talk will bring together both historical and contemporary challenges and concerns. Historically, it will locate the intimate encounters between human voices and their technical exteriorizations. Contemporarily, it will explore how new biomediations point towards an algorithmic governmentality of the auto-affective qualities of consciousness. Both parts of the talk will refer to the role of intimacy in scientific innovation as well as social regulation, and will foster an

interdisciplinary conversation between disciplines in the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the (post)humanities. By focusing on recent innovations in voice assistants, smart devices, and network speech interfaces, the talk will explore the relatively simple proposition that the voice intimates at a distance, but that this intimacy is a prescient locus of resistance and control.